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EXTRACTS FROM AND ABRIDGMENTS OF

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OF

Practical Divinity

WHICH HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED IN THE ENGLISH TONGUE.



IN THIRTY VOLUMES:

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BY THE REV JOHN WESLEY, A. M.,

SOMETIME FELLOW OF LINCOLN COLLEGE, OXFORD.

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E X T R A C T S

FROM THE

S E R M O N S

OF

DR. SOUTH.

S E R M O N I.

ON WISDOM.

PREACHED AT COURT, &c.

PROV. iii. 17.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness.

THE text relating to something going before, must carry our eye back to the thirteenth verse, where we shall find, that the thing, of which these words are affirmed, is Wisdom: A name by which the SPIRIT of GOD was here pleased to express to us religion, and thereby to tell the world, what before it was not aware of, and perhaps will not yet believe, that those two great things that so engross the desires and designs of both the nobler and ignobler sort of mankind, are to be found in religion; namely, wisdom and pleasure; and that the former is the direct way to the latter, as religion is to both.

That pleasure is man's chiefest good, (because, indeed, it is the perception of good that is properly pleasure,) is an assertion most certainly true, though under the common acceptance of it, not only false, but odious: For, according to this, pleasure and sensuality pass for terms equivalent; and, therefore, he that takes it in this sense, alters the subject of the discourse. Sensuality is, indeed, a part, or rather one kind of pleasure, such an one as it is: For pleasure in general is the consequent apprehension of a suitable object, suitably applied to a rightly disposed faculty; and so must be conversant both about the faculties of the body, and of the soul respectively, as being the result of the fruitions belonging to both.

Now, amongst those many arguments, used to press upon men the exercise of religion, I know none that are like to be so successful as those that answer and remove the prejudices that generally possess and bar up the hearts of men against it: Amongst which, there is none so prevalent in truth, though so little owned in pretence, as that it is an enemy to men's pleasures, that it bereaves them of all the sweets of converse, dooms them to an absurd and perpetual melancholy, designing to make the world nothing else but a great monastery. With which notion of religion, nature and reason seem to have great cause to be dissatisfied. For since GOD never created any faculty, either in soul or body, but withal prepared for it a suitable object, and that in order to its gratification; can we think that religion was designed only for a contradiction to nature? And with the greatest and most irrational tyranny in the world to tantalize and tie men up from enjoyment, in the midst of all the opportunities of enjoyment? To place men with the furious affections of hunger and thirst, in the very bosom of plenty, and then to tell them, that the envy of Providence has sealed up every thing that is suitable under the character of "unlawful?" For, certainly, first to frame appetites fit to receive pleasure, and then to interdict them with a "touch not, taste not," can be nothing else than only to give them occasion to devour and prey upon themselves, and so to keep men under the perpetual torment of an unsatisfied desire; a thing hugely contrary to the natural felicity of the creature, and consequently to the wisdom and goodness of the great Creator.

He, therefore, that would persuade men to religion, both with art and efficacy, must found the persuasion of it upon this, that it interferes not with any rational pleasure, that it bids nobody quit the enjoyment of any one thing that his reason can prove to him ought to be enjoyed. It is confessed, when through the cross circumstances of a man's temper or condition, the enjoyment of a pleasure would certainly expose him to a greater inconvenience, then religion bids him quit it; that is, it bids him prefer the

endurance of a lesser evil before a greater; and nature itself does no less. Religion, therefore, intrenches upon none of our privileges, invades none of our pleasures; it may, indeed, sometimes command us to *change*, but never totally to *abjure* them.

But it is easily foreseen, that this discourse will, in the beginning of it, be encountered by an argument from experience, and therefore not more obvious than strong; namely, that it cannot but be the greatest trouble in the world for a man thus (as it were) even to shake off himself, and to defy his nature, by a perpetual thwarting of his innate appetites and desires; which yet is absolutely necessary to a severe and impartial prosecution of a course of piety: Nay, and we have this asserted also, by the verdict of CHRIST himself, who still makes the disciplines of self-denial and the cross, those terrible blows to flesh and blood, the indispensable requisites to the being of his disciples. All which being so, would not he that should be so hardy as to attempt to persuade men to piety from the pleasures of it, be liable to that invective taunt from all mankind, that the Israelites gave to MOSES: “Wilt thou put out the eyes of this people?” Wilt thou persuade us out of our first notions? Wilt thou demonstrate, that there is any delight in a cross, any comfort in violent abridgments, and, which is the greatest paradox of all, that the highest pleasure is to abstain from it?

For answer to which, it must be confessed, that all arguments whatsoever against experience are fallacious; and therefore, in order to the clearing of the assertion laid down, I shall premise these two considerations:—

1. That pleasure is, in the nature of it, a relative thing, and so imports a peculiar relation and correspondence to the state and condition of the person to whom it is a pleasure. For as those who discourse of atoms, affirm, that there are atoms of all forms, some round, some triangular, some square, and the like; all which are continually in motion, and never settle till they fall into a fit circumscription, or place of the same figure: So there are the like

great diversities of minds and objects. Whence it is, that this object, striking upon a mind thus or thus disposed, flies off, and rebounds without making any impression; but the same luckily happening upon another of a disposition as it were framed for it, is presently caught at, and greedily clasped into the nearest unions and embraces.

2. The other thing to be considered is this: That the estate of all men by nature is more or less different from that estate, into which the same persons do, or may pass, by the exercise of that which the philosophers called *virtue*, and into which men are much more effectually and sublimely translated by that which we call *grace*; that is, by the supernatural over-powering operation of God's SPIRIT. The difference of which two estates consists in this; that in the former the sensitive appetites rule and domineer; in the latter the supreme faculty of the soul, called *reason*, sways the sceptre, and acts the whole man above the irregular demands of appetite and affection.

That the distinction between these two is not a mere figment, framed only to serve an hypothesis in divinity; and that there is no man but is really under one, before he is under the other, I shall prove, by showing a reason why it is so, or rather indeed why it cannot but be so. And it is this: Because every man, in the beginning of his life, for several years, is capable only of exercising his sensitive faculties and desires, the use of reason not showing itself till about the seventh year of his age; and then, at length, but (as it were) dawning in very imperfect essays and discoveries. Now it being undeniably evident, that every faculty and power grows stronger and stronger by exercise; is it any wonder at all, when a man, for the space of his first six years, and those the years of ductility and impression, has been wholly ruled by the propensions of sense, at that age very eager and impetuous; that then, after all, his reason, beginning to put forth itself, finds the man prepossessed, and under another power? So that it has much ado, by many little steps and gradual conquests, to recover its prerogative from the usurpations of

appetite, and so to subject the whole man to its dictates: The difficulty of which is not conquered by some men all their days. And this is one true ground of the difference of a state of nature, and a state of grace, which some are pleased to scoff at in divinity, who think that they confute all they laugh at, not knowing that it may be solidly evinced by mere reason and philosophy.

These two considerations being premised, namely, that pleasure implies a proportion and agreement to the respective states and conditions of men; and that the state of men by nature is vastly different from the estate into which grace or virtue transplants them; all that objection levelled against the foregoing assertion is very easily resolvable.

For there is no doubt, but a man, while he resigns himself up to the brutish guidance of sense and appetite, has no relish at all for the spiritual refined delights of a soul clarified by grace and virtue. The pleasures of an angel can never be the pleasures of a hog. But this is the thing that we contend for; that a man, having once advanced himself to a state of superiority over the controul of his inferior appetites, finds an infinitely more solid and sublime pleasure in the delights proper to his reason, than the same person had ever conveyed to him by the bare ministry of his senses. His taste is absolutely changed, and therefore that which pleased him formerly, becomes flat and insipid to his appetite, now grown more masculine and severe. For as age and maturity pass a real and a marvellous change upon the diet and the recreations of the same person, so that no man, at the years and vigour of thirty, is either fond of sugar-plumbs or rattles; in like manner, when reason, by the assistance of grace, has prevailed over and out-grown the encroachments of sense, the delights of sensuality are to such an one but as an hobby-horse would be to a counsellor of state; or as tasteless, as a bundle of hay to an hungry lion. Every alteration of a man's condition infallibly infers an alteration of his pleasures.

The Athenians laughed the physiognomist to scorn, who, pretending to read men's minds in their foreheads, described

SOCRATES for a crabbed, lustful, proud, ill-natured person ; they knowing how directly contrary he was to that dirty character. But SOCRATES bid them forbear laughing at the man, for that he had given them a most exact account of his nature ; but what they saw in him so contrary at the present, was from the conquest that he had got over his natural disposition by philosophy. And now let any one consider, whether that anger, that revenge, that wantonness and ambition, that were the proper pleasures of SOCRATES, under his natural temper of crabbed, lustful, and proud, could have at all affected or enamoured the mind of the same SOCRATES, made gentle, chaste, and humble, by philosophy ?

ARISTOTLE says, “ that were it possible to put a young man’s eye into an old man’s head, he would see as plainly and clearly as the other ;” so, could we infuse the inclinations and principles of a virtuous person into him that prosecutes his debauches with the greatest keenness of desire, and sense of delight, he would loathe and reject them, as heartily as he now pursues them. DIOGENES being asked at a feast, Why he did not continue eating as the rest did, answered him that asked him with another question, ‘ Pray, why do you eat ?’ ‘ Why,’ says he, ‘ for my pleasure.’ ‘ Why, so,’ says DIOGENES, ‘ do I abstain for my pleasure.’ And therefore the vain, the vicious, and luxurious person argues at an high rate of inconsequence, when he makes his particular desires the general measure of other men’s delights. But the case is so plain, that I shall not upbraid any man’s understanding, by endeavouring to give it any farther illustration.

But still, after all, I must not deny that the change and passage from a state of nature to a state of virtue is laborious, and consequently irksome and unpleasant : And to this it is, that all the fore-mentioned expressions of our SAVIOUR do allude. But surely the baseness of one condition, and the generous excellency of the other, is a sufficient argument to induce any one to a change. For as no man would think it a desirable thing, to preserve the itch

upon himself, only for the pleasure of scratching, that attends that loathsome distemper: So neither can any man, that would be faithful to his reason, yield his ear to be bored through by his domineering appetites, and so choose to serve them for ever, only for those poor, thin gratifications of sensuality that they are able to reward him with. The ascent up the hill is hard and tedious, but the serenity and fair prospect at the top is sufficient to incite the labour of undertaking it, and to reward it being undertook. But the difference of these two conditions of men, as the foundation of their different pleasures, being thus made out, to press men with arguments to pass from one to the other, is not directly in the way or design of this discourse.

Yet before I come to declare positively the pleasures that are to be found in the ways of religion, one of the grand duties of which is stated upon repentance; a thing expressed to us by the grim names of mortification, crucifixion, and the like: And that I may not proceed only upon absolute negations, without some concessions; we will see, whether this so harsh, dismal, and affrighting duty of repentance is so entirely gall, as to admit of no mixture, no allay of sweetness, to reconcile it to the apprehensions of reason and nature.

Now repentance consists properly of two things:—1. Sorrow for sin. 2. Change of life. A world briefly of them both.

1. And First, Of sorrow for sin. Usually the sting of sorrow is this, that it neither removes nor alters the thing we sorrow for; and so is but a kind of reproach to our reason, which will be sure to accost us with this dilemma. Either the thing we sorrow for, is to be remedied, or it is not: If it is, why then do we spend the time in mourning, which should be spent in an active applying of remedies? But if it is not, then is our sorrow vain and superfluous, as tending to no real effect. For no man can weep his father or his friend out of the grave, or mourn himself out of a bankrupt condition. But this spiritual sorrow is effectual to one of the greatest and highest purposes, that

mankind can be concerned in. It is a means to avert an impendent wrath, to disarm an offended omnipotence, and even to fetch a soul out of the very jaws of hell. So that the end and consequence of this sorrow, sweetens the sorrow itself: And, as SOLOMON says, “in the midst of laughter, the heart is sorrowful;” so in the midst of sorrow here, the heart may rejoice: For while it mourns, it reads, that “those that mourn shall be comforted;” and so while the penitent weeps with one eye, he views his deliverance with the other. But then for the external expressions, and vent of sorrow, we know that there is a certain pleasure in weeping; it is the discharge of a big and swelling grief, of a full and strangling discontent; and therefore, he that never had such a burden upon his heart, as to give him opportunity thus to ease it, has one pleasure in this world yet to come.

2. As for the other part of repentance, which is change of life; this indeed may be troublesome in the entrance, yet it is but the first bold onset, the first resolute violence and invasion upon a vicious habit, that is so sharp and afflicting. Every impression of the lancet cuts, but it is the first only that smart. Besides, it is an argument hugely unreasonable, to plead the pain of passing from a vicious estate, unless it were proved, that there was none in the continuance under it: But surely when we read of the “service,” the “bondage,” and the “captivity” of “sinners,” we are not entertained only with the air of words and metaphors; and instead of truth, put off with similitudes. Let him that says it is a trouble to refrain from a debauch, convince us, that it is not a greater to undergo one; and that the confessor did not impose a shrewd penance upon the drunken man, by bidding him go and be drunk again; and that lispings, raging, redness of eyes, and what is not fit to be named in such an audience, is not more toilsome, than to be clean, and quiet, and discreet, and respected for being so. All the trouble that is in it, is the trouble of being sound, being cured, and being recovered. But if there be great arguments for health, then certainly

there are the same for the obtaining of it ; and so keeping a due proportion between spirituals and temporals, we neither have nor pretend to greater arguments for repentance.

Having thus now cleared off all that by way of objection can lie against the truth asserted, by showing the proper qualification of the subject, to whom only “ the ways of wisdom ” can be “ ways of pleasantness ; ” for the farther prosecution of the matter in hand, I shall show what are those properties that so peculiarly set off and enhance the excellency of this pleasure.

1. The first is, that it is the proper pleasure of that part of man, which is the largest and most comprehensive of pleasure, and that is his mind : A substance of a boundless comprehension. The mind of man is an image, not only of God’s spirituality, but of his infinity. It is not like any of the senses, limited to this or that kind of object : As the sight intermeddles not with that which affects the smell ; but with an universal superintendance, it arbitrates upon, and takes in them all. It is (as I may so say) an ocean, into which all the little rivulets of sensation, both external and internal, discharge themselves. It is framed by God to receive all, and more than nature can afford it ; and so to be its own motive to seek for something above nature. Now this is that part of man, to which the pleasures of religion properly belong ; and that in a double respect.

(1.) In reference to speculation, as it sustains the name of understanding.

(2.) In reference to the practice, as it sustains the name of conscience.

(1.) And first for speculation : The pleasures of which have been sometimes so great, so intense, so engrossing of all the powers of the soul, that there has been no room left for any other pleasure. It has so called together all the spirits to that one work, that there has been no supply to carry on the inferior operations of nature. Contemplation feels no hunger, nor is sensible of any thirst, but of that after knowledge. How frequent and exalted a pleasure did DAVID find from his meditation in the Divine law ? “ All

the day long" it was the theme of his thoughts. The affairs of the state, the government of his kingdom, might indeed *employ*, but it was this only that *refreshed* his mind.

How short of this are the delights of the epicure ! How vastly disproportionate are the pleasures of the eating, and of the thinking man ! Indeed as different as the silence of an ARCHIMEDES in the study of a problem, and the stillness of a sow at her wash. Nothing is comparable to the pleasure of an active and prevailing thought : A thought prevailing over the difficulty and obscurity of the object, and refreshing the soul with new discoveries and images of things ; and thereby extending the bounds of apprehension, and (as it were) enlarging the territories of reason.

Now the pleasure of the speculation of divine things, is advanced upon a double account :

[1.] The greatness.

[2.] The newness of the object.

[1.] And first for the greatness of it. It is no less than the great God himself, and that both in his nature and his works. For the eye of reason, like that of an eagle, directs itself chiefly to the sun, to a glory that neither admits of a superior, nor any equal. Religion carries the soul to the study of every divine attribute.

It poses it with the amazing thoughts of Omnipotence ; of a power able to fetch up such a glorious fabric, as this of the world, out of the abyss of vanity and nothing, and able to throw it back into the same original nothing. It drowns us in the speculation of the Divine Omniscience ; that can maintain a steady infallible comprehension of all events in themselves contingent and accidental ; and certainly know that which does not certainly exist. It confounds the greatest subtleties of speculation with the riddles of God's Omnipresence ; that can spread a single individual substance through all spaces ; and yet without any commensuration of parts to any, or circumscription within any, though totally in every one. And then for his eternity ; which *non-plusses* the strongest and clearest conception, to comprehend how one single act of duration

should measure all periods and portions of time, without any of the distinguishing parts of succession. Likewise for his justice ; which shall prey upon the sinner for ever, satisfying itself by a perpetual miracle, rendering the creature immortal in the midst of flames ; always consuming but never consumed. With the like wonders we may entertain our speculations from his mercy ; his beloved, his triumphant attribute, if it were possible, something more than infinite ; for even his justice is so, and his mercy transcends that. Lastly, We may contemplate his supernatural, astonishing works ; particularly in the resurrection, and reparation of the same numerical body, by a re-union of all the scattered parts, to be at length disposed of into an estate of eternal woe or bliss ; as also the greatness and strangeness of the beatific vision ; how a created eye should be so fortified, as to bear all those glories that stream from the fountain of uncreated light, the meanest expression of which light is, that it is unexpressible. Now what great and high objects are these, for a rational contemplation to busy itself upon ! Heights that scorn the reach of our prospect ; and depths in which the tallest reason will never touch the bottom : Yet surely the pleasure arising from thence is great and noble ; forasmuch as they afford perpetual matter and employment to the inquisitiveness of human reason ; and so are large enough for it to take its full scope and range in : Which when it has sucked and drained the utmost of an object, naturally lays it aside, and neglects it as a dry and empty thing.

[2.] As the things belonging to religion entertain our speculation with great objects, so they entertain it also with new : And novelty we know is the great parent of pleasure ; upon which account it is that men are so much pleased with variety, and variety is nothing else but a continued novelty. The Athenians, who were the professed and most diligent improvers of their reason, made it their whole business “ to hear or tell some new thing :” For the truth is, newness, especially in great matters, was a worthy entertainment for a searching mind ; it was (as I may so

say) an high taste, fit for the relish of an Athenian reason. And thereupon, the mere unheard-of strangeness of JESUS and the resurrection, made them desirous to hear it discoursed of to them again. (*Acts xvii. 23.*) But how would it have employed their searching faculties, had the mystery of the Trinity, and the incarnation of the SON of GOD, and the whole economy of man's redemption, been explained to them! For how could it ever enter into the thoughts of reason, that a satisfaction could be paid to an infinite justice? Or, that two natures so inconceivably different, as the human and divine, could unite into one person? The knowledge of these things could derive from nothing else but pure revelation, and consequently must be purely *new* to the highest discourses of mere nature. Now that the newness of an object so exceedingly pleases and strikes the mind, appears from this one consideration; that every thing pleases more in expectation than fruition; and expectation supposes a thing as yet new, the hoped-for discovery of which is the pleasure that entertains the expecting and inquiring mind: Whereas actual discovery (as it were) rifles and deflowers the newness and freshness of the object, and so for the most part makes it cheap, familiar, and contemptible.

It is clear, therefore, that, if there be any pleasure to the mind from speculation, and if this pleasure of speculation be advanced by the greatness and newness of the things contemplated, all this is to be found in the ways of religion.

(2.) In the next place, religion is a pleasure to the mind, as it respects practice, and so sustains the name of conscience. And conscience undoubtedly is the great repository and magazine of all those pleasures that can afford any solid refreshment to the soul. For when this is calm and serene, then properly a man enjoys all things, and what is more, himself; for that he must do, before he can enjoy any thing else. But it is only a pious life, led exactly by the rules of religion, that can authorize a man's conscience to speak comfortably to him: It is this that

must word the sentence, before the conscience can pronounce it, and then it will do it with majesty and authority: It will not whisper, but proclaim a jubilee to the mind; it will not drop, but pour in oil upon the wounded heart. And is there any pleasure comparable to that which springs from hence? The pleasure of conscience is not only greater than all other pleasures, but may also serve instead of them: For they only please and affect the mind *in transitu*, in the pitiful narrow compass of actual fruition; whereas that of conscience entertains and feeds it a long time after with durable lasting reflections.

And thus much for the first ennobling property of the pleasure belonging to religion; namely, that it is the pleasure of the mind, and that both as it relates to speculation, and is called the understanding, and as it relates to practice, and is called the conscience.

2. The second ennobling property of it is, that it is such a pleasure as never satiates or wearies; for it properly affects the spirit, and a spirit feels no weariness, as being privileged from the causes of it. But can the Epicure say so of any of the pleasures that he so much doats upon? Do they not expire, while they satisfy? And after a few minutes' refreshment, determine in loathing and unquietness? How short is the interval between a pleasure and a burden! How undiscernible the transition from one to the other! Pleasure dwells no longer upon the appetite, than the necessities of nature, which are quickly and easily provided for; and then all that follows is a load and oppression. Every morsel to a satisfied hunger is only a new labour to a tired digestion. Every draught to him that has quenched his thirst, is but a farther quenching of nature, a provision for rheum and diseases, a drowning of the quickness and activity of the spirits.

He that prolongs his meals, and sacrifices his time, as well as his other conveniences, to his luxury, how quickly does he out-sit his pleasure! And then, how is all the following time bestowed upon ceremony and surfeit! till

at length, after a long fatigue of eating, and drinking, and babbling, he concludes the great work of dining genteelly, and so makes a shift to rise from table, that he may lie down upon his bed ; where, after he has slept himself into some use of himself, by much ado he staggers to his table again, and there acts over the same brutish scene : So that he passes his whole life in a dozed condition, between sleeping and waking, with a kind of drowsiness and confusion upon his senses ; which, what pleasure it can be, is hard to conceive ; all that is of it dwells upon the tip of his tongue, and within the compass of his palate : A worthy prize for a man to purchase with the loss of his time, his reason, and himself.

Nor is that man less deceived, that thinks to maintain a constant tenor of pleasure, by a continual pursuit of sports and recreations.

The most voluptuous and loose person breathing, were he but tied to follow his hawks, and his hounds, his dice, and his courtships every day, would find it the greatest torment and calamity that could befall him ; he would fly to the mines and the galleys for his recreation, and to the spade and the mattock for a diversion from the misery of a continual unintermitted pleasure.

But, on the contrary, the providence of God has so ordered the course of things, that there is no action, the usefulness of which has made it the matter of duty, and of a profession, but a man may bear the continual pursuit of it, without loathing and satiety. The same shop and trade that employ a man in his youth, employ him also in his age. Every morning he rises fresh to his hammer and his anvil ; he passes the day singing ; custom has naturalized his labour to him ; his shop is his element, and he cannot, with any enjoyment of himself, live out of it : Whereas no custom can make the painfulness of a debauch easy, or pleasing to a man ; since nothing can be pleasant that is unnatural. But now, if God has interwoven such a pleasure with the works of our ordinary calling, how

much superior and more refined must that be, that arises from the survey of a pious and well-governed life! Surely, as much as Christianity is nobler than a trade.

And then, for the constant freshness of it; it is such a pleasure as can never cloy or over-work the mind: For, surely no man was ever weary of *thinking*, much less that he had done well or virtuously, that he had conquered such and such a temptation, or offered violence to any of his exorbitant desires. This is a delight that grows and improves under thought and reflection: And while it exercises, does also endear itself to the mind; at the same time, employing and inflaming the meditations. All pleasures that affect the body must needs weary, because they transport; and all transportation is a violence, and no violence can be lasting, but determines upon the falling of the spirits, which are not able to keep up that height of motion that the pleasure of the senses raises them to: And therefore how inevitably does an immoderate laughter end in a sigh! which is only nature's recovering itself after a force done to it. But the religious pleasure of a well-disposed mind moves gently, and therefore constantly: It does not affect by rapture and ecstasy; but is like the pleasure of health, which is still and sober, yet greater and stronger than those that *call up* the senses and grosser and more affecting impressions. God has given no man a body as strong as his appetites; but has corrected the boundlessness of his voluptuous desires, by stinting his strength, and contracting his capacities.

But to look upon those pleasures also, that have an higher object than the body; as those that spring from honour and grandeur of condition; yet we shall find, that even these are not so fresh and constant, but the mind can nauseate them, and quickly feel the thinness of a popular breath. Those that are so fond of applause while they pursue it, how little do they taste it when they have it! Like lightning, it only flashes upon the face, and is gone, and it is well if it does not hurt the man. But for greatness of place, though it is fit and necessary, that some per-

sons in the world should be in love with a splendid servitude; yet, certainly, they must be much beholden to their own fancy, that they can be pleased at it: For he that rises up early, and goes to bed late, only to receive addresses, to read and answer petitions, is really as much tied and abridged in his freedom, as he that waits all that time to present one. And what pleasure can it be to be incumbered with dependencies, thronged and surrounded with petitioners? And those, perhaps, sometimes all suitors for the same thing; whereupon all but one will be sure to depart grumbling, because they miss of what they think their due; and even that *one* scarce thankful, because he thinks he has no more than his due. In a word, if it is a pleasure to be envied and shot at, to be maligned *standing*, and to be despised *falling*, to endeavour that which is impossible, which is to please all, and to suffer for not doing it; then is it a pleasure to be great, and to be able to dispose of men's fortunes and preferments.

But farther, to proceed from hence to yet an higher degree of pleasure, indeed, the highest on this side that of religion, which is the pleasure of friendship and conversation. Friendship must confessedly be allowed the top, the flower, and crown of all temporal enjoyments. Yet has not this also its flaws and its dark side? For is not my friend, a man; and is not friendship subject to the same mortality and change that men are? And in case a man loves, and is not loved again, does he not think that he has cause to hate as heartily, and ten times more eagerly, than ever he loved? And then *to be* an enemy, and once to *have been* a friend, does it not embitter the rupture, and aggravate the calamity? But admitting that my friend continues so to the end; yet, in the mean time, is he all perfection, all virtue, all discretion? Has he no humours to be endured, as well as kindnesses to be enjoyed? And am I sure to smell the rose, without sometimes feeling the thorn?

And then, Lastly, For company; though it may relieve a man from his melancholy, yet it cannot secure him from

his conscience, nor from sometimes being alone. And what is all that a man enjoys from a week's, a month's, or a year's converse, comparable to what he feels for one hour, when his conscience shall take him aside, and rate him by himself?

In short, run over the whole circle of all earthly pleasures, and I dare affirm, that had not God secured a man a solid pleasure from his own actions, after he had rolled from one to another, and enjoyed them all, he would be forced to complain, that either they were not indeed pleasures, or that pleasure was not satisfaction.

3. The third ennobling property of the pleasure that accrues to a man from religion, is, that it is such an one as is in nobody's power, but only in his that has it; so that he who has the property, may be also sure of the perpetuity. And tell me so of any outward enjoyment, that mortality is capable of. We are generally at the mercy of men's rapine, avarice, and violence, whether we shall be happy or no. For if I build my felicity upon my estate or reputation, I am happy as long as the tyrant or the railer will give me leave to be so. But when my concernment takes up no more room or compass than myself, then so long as I know where to breathe, and to exist, I know also where to be happy: For I know I may be so in my own breast, in the court of my own conscience; where, if I can but prevail with myself to be innocent, I need bribe neither judge nor officer to be pronounced so. The pleasure of the religious man, is an easy and portable pleasure, such an one as he carries about in his bosom, without alarming either the eye or envy of the world. A man putting all his pleasures into this one, is like a traveller's putting all his goods into one jewel; the value is the same, and the convenience greater.

There is nothing that can raise a man to that generous absoluteness of condition, as neither to cringe, to fawn, nor to depend meanly; but that which gives him that happiness within himself, for which men depend upon others. For surely I need salute no great man's threshold, sneak to none of his friends or servants to speak a good word for me to my conscience. It is a noble and a sure defiance of a great

malice, backed with a great interest ; which yet can have no advantage of a man, but from his own expectations of something that is without himself. But if I can make my duty my delight ; if I can feast, and please, and caress my mind with the pleasures of worthy speculations, or virtuous practices ; let greatness and malice vex and abridge me if they can : My pleasures are as free as my will ; no more to be controlled than my choice, or the unlimited range of my thoughts and my desires.

Nor is this kind of pleasure only out of the reach of any outward violence, but even those things also that make a much closer impression upon us, which are the irresistible decays of nature, have yet no influence at all upon this. For when age itself, which of all things in the world will not be baffled or defied, shall begin to arrest, seize, and remind us of our mortality, by pains, aches, deadness of limbs and dulness of senses ; yet then the pleasure of the mind shall be in its full youth, vigour, and freshness. A palsy may as well shake an oak, or a fever dry up a fountain, as either of them shake, dry up, or impair the delight of conscience. For it lies within, it centres in the heart, it grows into the very substance of the soul, so that it accompanies a man to his grave ; he never outlives it, and that for this cause only, because he cannot outlive himself.

And thus I have endeavoured to describe the excellency of that pleasure that is to be found in the ways of a religious wisdom, by those excellent properties that attend it ; which whether they reach the description that has been given them, or no, every man may convince himself, by the best of demonstrations, which is his own trial.

Now, from all this discourse, this I am sure is a most natural and direct consequence, that if the ways of religion are “ways of pleasantness,” then such as are not “ways of pleasantness,” are not truly and properly ways of religion. Upon which ground it is easy to see what judgment is to be passed upon all those affected, uncommanded, absurd austerities, so much prized and exercised by some of the Romish profession. Pilgrimages, going barefoot, hair shirts,

and whips, with other such gospel artillery, are their only helps to devotion: Things never enjoined, either by the Prophets under the Jewish, or by the Apostles under the Christian economy; who yet surely understood the proper and the most efficacious instruments of piety, as well as any Confessor or Friar of all the order of ST. FRANCIS, or any casuist whatsoever.

It seems, that, with them, a man sometimes cannot be a penitent, unless he also turns vagabond, and foots it to Jerusalem, or wanders over this or that part of the world to visit the shrine of such or such a pretended saint, though perhaps in his life ten times more ridiculous than themselves: Thus that which was CAIN'S curse is become their religion. He that thinks to expiate a sin by going barefoot, only makes one folly the atonement for another. PAUL indeed was scourged and beaten by the Jews, but we never read that he beat or scourged himself: And if they think that his "keeping under his body" imports so much, they must first prove that the body cannot be kept under by a virtuous mind, and that the mind cannot be made virtuous but by a scourge; and consequently, that thongs and whip-cord are means of grace and things necessary to salvation. The truth is, if men's religion lies no deeper than their skin, it is possible that they may scourge themselves into very great improvements.

But they will find that "bodily exercise" touches not the soul; and that neither pride, nor lust, nor covetousness, nor any other vice was ever mortified by corporal disciplines. It is not the back, but the heart, that must bleed for sin: And consequently, that in this whole course they are like men out of their way; let them lash on ever so fast, they are not at all the nearer to their journey's end: And howsoever they deceive themselves and others, they may as well expect to bring a cart, as a soul to heaven by such means. What arguments they have to beguile poor, simple, unstable souls with, I know not; but surely the practical, casuistical, that is, the principal part of their religion savours very little of spirituality.

And now upon the result of all, I suppose, that to exhort men to be religious, is only in other words to exhort them to take their pleasure. A pleasure high, rational, and angelic ; a pleasure embased with no appendent sting, no consequent loathing, no remorse or bitter farewells : But such an one, as being honey in the mouth, never turns to gall or gravel in the belly. A pleasure made for the soul, and the soul for that ; suitable to its spirituality, and equal to their capacities. Such an one as grows fresher upon enjoyment, and though continually fed upon, yet is never devoured. A pleasure that a man may call as properly his own, as his soul and his conscience ; neither liable to accident, nor exposed to injury. It is the foretaste of heaven, and the earnest of eternity. In a word, it is such an one, as being begun in grace, passes into glory, blessedness, and immortality, and those pleasures “ that neither eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man to conceive.”

SERMON II.

OF THE IMAGE OF GOD IN MAN.

GEN. i. 27.

*So GOD created man in his own image, in the image of
GOD created he him.*

How hard it is for natural reason to discover a creation before revealed, or being revealed to believe it, the strange opinions of the old philosophers, and the infidelity of modern atheists, are too sad a demonstration. To run the world back to its first original and infancy, and (as it were) to view nature in its cradle, and trace the out-goings of the Ancient of days in the first instance of his creative power, is a research too great for any mortal inquiry: And we might continue our scrutiny to the end of the world, before natural reason would be able to find out when it began.

EPICURUS his discourse concerning the original of the world is so ridiculous, that we may well judge the design of his philosophy to have been pleasure, and not instruction.

ARISTOTLE held that it streamed by natural result from GOD, the infinite and eternal mind, as the light issues from the sun; so that there was no instance of duration assignable of GOD's eternal existence, in which the world did not also co-exist.

Others held a fortuitous concourse of atoms; but all seem jointly to explode a creation; still beating upon this ground, that the producing something out of nothing is impossible and incomprehensible: Incomprehensible indeed I grant, but not therefore impossible. There is not the least transaction of sense and motion in the whole man, but philosophers are at a loss to comprehend, I am sure they are to explain it. Wherefore it is not always rational to

measure the truth of an assertion by the standard of our apprehension.

But to bring things even to the bare perceptions of reason, I appeal to any one, who shall impartially reflect upon the conceptions of his own mind, whether he doth not find it as easy and suitable to his natural notions, to conceive that an infinite Almighty power might produce a thing out of nothing, and make that to exist before ; as to conceive the world to have had no beginning, but to have existed from eternity : - Which, were it so proper for this place, I could easily demonstrate to be attended with no small train of absurdities.

In this chapter, we have GOD surveying the works of the creation, and leaving this general impress upon them, that they were exceeding good. What an Omnipotence wrought, we have an Omniscience to approve. But as it is reasonable to imagine that there is more of design, and consequently more perfection, in the last work, we have GOD here giving his last stroke, and summing up all into man, the universe into an individual : So that whereas in other creatures we have but the trace of his footsteps, in man we have the draught of his hand. In him were united all the scattered perfections of the creature, all the graces and ornaments ; all the airs and features of being were abridged into this small, yet full system of nature and divinity : As we might well imagine that the great Artificer would be more than ordinarily exact in drawing his own picture.

The work that I shall undertake from these words, shall be to show what this image of GOD in man is, and wherein it doth consist. Which I shall do these two ways :—

1. Negatively, by showing wherein it *doth not* consist.
2. Positively, by showing wherein it *does*.

1. For the first of these, we are to remove the erroneous opinion of the Socinians. They deny that the image of GOD consisted in any habitual perfections that adorned the soul of ADAM : But as to his understanding, bring him in void of all notion, a rude unwritten blank ; making him to be created as much an infant as others are born ; sent into the

world only to read and spell out a GOD in the works of creation, to learn by degrees, till at length his understanding grew up to the stature of his body. Also without any habits of virtue in his will ; thus divesting him of all, and stripping him to his bare essence : So that all the perfection they allowed his understanding was aptness and docility ; and all that they attributed to his will was a possibility to be virtuous.

But wherein then according to their opinion did this image of GOD consist ? Why, in that power and dominion that GOD gave ADAM over the creatures : In that he was vouched his immediate deputy upon earth, the Viceroy of the creation, and Lord-lieutenant of the world. But that this power and dominion is not adequately the image of GOD, but only a part of it, is clear from hence ; because then he that had most of this, would have most of GOD's image : And consequently NIMROD had more of it than NOAH, SAUL than SAMUEL, the persecutors than the martyrs, and CÆSAR than CHRIST himself, which to assert is a blasphemous paradox. And if the image of GOD, is only grandeur, power, and sovereignty, certainly we have been hitherto much mistaken in our duty : And hereafter are by all means to beware of making ourselves unlike GOD, by too much selfdenial and humility

2. We are in the next place to lay down positively what this image of GOD in man is. It is, in short, that universal rectitude of all the faculties of the soul, by which they stand apt and disposed to their respective offices and operations : Which will be more fully set forth, by taking a distinct survey of it, in the several faculties belonging to the soul. I. In the Understanding. II. In the Will. III. In the Passions or Affections.

I. And first for its noblest faculty, the Understanding : It was then sublime, clear, and aspiring, and, as it were, the soul's upper region, lofty and serene, free from the vapours and disturbances of the inferior affections. It was the leading, controlling faculty ; all the passions wore the colours of reason. Discourse was then almost as quick as

intuition; it was nimble in proposing, firm in concluding; it could sooner determine than now it can dispute. Like the sun it had both light and agility; it knew no rest, but in motion; no quiet, but in activity. It did not so properly apprehend, as irradiate the object; not so much find, as make things intelligible. It did arbitrate upon the several reports of sense, and all the varieties of imagination; not like a drowsy judge, only hearing, but also directing their verdict. In sum, it was vegete, quick, and lively; open as the day, untainted as the morning, full of the innocency and sprightliness of youth; it gave the soul a bright and a full view into all things; and was not only a window, but itself the prospect.

Now as there are two great functions of the soul, contemplation and practice, according to that general division of objects, some of which only entertain our speculation, others also employ our actions; so the understanding with relation to these, not because of any distinction in the faculty itself, is accordingly divided into speculative and practical; in both of which the image of God was then apparent.

1. For the Understanding Speculative. There are some general maxims in the mind of man, which are the rules of discourse, and the basis of all philosophy: As that the same thing cannot at the same time be, and not be: That the whole is bigger than a part.

Now it was ADAM's happiness in the state of innocence to have these clear and unsullied. He came into the world a philosopher, which sufficiently appeared by his writing the nature of things upon their names; he could view essences in themselves, and read forms without the comment of their respective properties: He could see consequents yet dormant in their principles, and effects yet unborn and in the womb of their causes; his understanding could almost pierce into future contingents; his conjectures improving even into prophesy, or the certainties of prediction; till his fall he was ignorant of nothing but of sin; or at least it rested in the notion, without the smart of the

experiment. Could any difficulty have been proposed, the resolution would have been as early as the proposal; it could not have had time to settle into doubt. The issue of all his inquiries was the offspring of his brain, without the sweat of his brow. Study was not then a duty, night-watchings were needless; the light of reason wanted not the assistance of a candle. This is the doom of fallen man, to labour in the fire, to seek *in profundo*, to exhaust his time and impair his health, and perhaps to spin out his days and himself into one pitiful controverted conclusion. There was then no poring, no struggling with memory, no straining for invention: His faculties were quick and expedite; they answered without knocking, they were ready upon the first summons, there was freedom and firmness in all their operations. I confess, it is as difficult for us, who date our ignorance from our first being, and were still bred up with the same infirmities about us, with which we were born, to raise our thoughts to those intellectual perfections that attend our nature in the time of innocence, as it is for a peasant, bred up in the obscurities of a cottage, to fancy in his mind the unseen splendours of a court. But we may collect the excellency of the understanding then, by the glorious remainders of it now, and guess at the stateliness of the building, by the magnificence of its ruins. All those arts, rarities, and inventions, which vulgar minds gaze at, the ingenious pursue, and all admire, are but the relics of an intellect defaced with sin and time. We admire it now, only as antiquaries do a piece of old coin, for the stamp it once bore, and not for those vanishing lineaments and disappearing draughts that remain upon it at present. And certainly, that must needs have been very glorious, the decays of which are so admirable. He that is comely, when old and decrepit, surely was very beautiful when he was young. An ARISTOTLE was but the rubbish of an ADAM, and Athens but the rudiments of Paradise.

2. The image of GOD was no less resplendent in that, which we call man's Practical Understanding; namely, that

store-house of the soul, in which are treasured up the rules of action, and the seeds of morality. Now of this sort are these maxims: That God is to be worshipped: That parents are to be honoured: That a man's word is to be kept, and the like; which, being of universal influence, as to the regulation of the behaviour and converse of mankind, are the ground of all virtue and civility, and the foundation of religion.

It was the privilege of ADAM innocent, to have these notions also firm and untainted, to carry his monitor in his bosom, his law in his heart, and to have such a conscience as might be its own casuist: And certainly those actions must needs be regular, where there is an identity between the rule and the faculty. His own mind taught him a due dependance upon God, and chalked out to him the just proportions and measures of behaviour to his fellow-creatures. He had no catechism but the creation, needed to study but reflection, read no book but the volume of the world, and that too, not for rules to work by, but for the objects to work upon. The decalogue of MOSES was but a transcript, not an original. All the laws of nations and wise decrees of states, the statutes of SOLON and the twelve tables, were but a paraphrase upon this standing rectitude of nature, this fruitful principle of justice, that was ready to run out and enlarge itself into suitable determinations, upon all emergent objects and occasions. Justice then was neither blind to discern, nor lame to execute. It was not subject to be imposed upon by a deluded fancy, nor yet to be bribed by a glosing appetite, to turn the balance to a false or dishonest sentence. In all its directions of the inferior faculties, it conveyed its suggestions with clearness, and enjoined them with power; it had the passions in perfect subjection; and though its command over them was but suasive, yet it had the force of absolute. It was not then as it is now, where the conscience has only power to disapprove, and to protest against the exorbitances of the passions; and rather to wish than make them otherwise. The voice of conscience now is low and weak, chastising

the passions, as old ELI did his domineering sons: "Not so, my sons, not so:" But the voice of conscience then, was not, This should, or this ought to be done; but, This must, this shall be done. It spoke like a Legislator; the thing spoken was a law, and the manner of speaking it, a new obligation. In short, there was as great a disparity between the practical dictates of the understanding then, and now, as there is between empire and advice, counsel and command, between a companion and a governor.

And thus much for the image of God as it shone in man's Understanding.

II. Let us in the next place take a view of it, as it was stamped upon the Will. And doubtless the will of man, in the state of innocence, had an entire freedom, a perfect equipendancy and indifference to either part of the contradiction, to stand or not to stand, to accept or not accept, the temptation. I will grant the will of man now to be as much a slave as any one will have it, and to be only free to sin; that is, instead of a liberty, to have only a licentiousness; yet certainly this is not nature. We are not made crooked; we learnt these windings and turnings of the serpent: And therefore it cannot but be a blasphemous piece of ingratitude to ascribe them to God, and to make the plague of our nature the condition of our creation.

The will was then ductile and pliant to all the motions of right reason; it met the dictates of a clarified understanding half way. And the active informations of the intellect, filling the passive reception of the will, like form closing with matter, grew into a third and distinct perfection of practice: The understanding and will never disagreed; for the proposals of the one never thwarted the inclinations of the other. Yet neither did the will servilely attend upon the understanding, but as a favourite does upon his Prince, where the service is privilege and preferment; or as SOLOMON's servants waited upon him, it admired its wisdom, and heard its prudent dictates and counsels, both the direction and the reward of its obedience. It is indeed the nature of this faculty to follow a superior guide, to be

drawn by the intellect ; but then it was drawn, as a triumphant chariot, which at the same time both follows and triumphs ; while it obeyed this, it commanded the other faculties. It was subordinate, not enslaved, to the understanding ; not as a servant to a master, but as a Queen to a King, who both acknowledges a superiority and yet retains a Majesty.

III. Pass we downward from man's Intellect and Will to the Passions. That these are not evil in themselves, appears hence, that our Saviour CHRIST, who took upon him all our natural infirmities, but none of our sinful, has been seen to weep, to be sorrowful, to pity, and to be angry : Which shows that there might be gall in a dove, passion without sin, fire without smoke, and motion without disturbance. For it is not bare agitation, but the sediment at the bottom, that troubles and defiles the water : And when we see it windy and dusty, the wind does not (as we use to say) make, but only raise a dust.

I shall consider only the principal passions, from whence we may take an estimate of the rest.

And First, For the grand leading affection, which is Love. This is the great instrument and engine of nature, the bond and cement of society, the spring and spirit of the universe. Love is such an affection, as cannot so properly be said to be in the soul, as the soul to be in that. It is the whole man wrapt up into one desire ; all the powers, vigour, and faculties of the soul abridged into one inclination. And it is of that active, restless nature, that it must of necessity exert itself ; and like the fire, to which it is so often compared, it is not a free agent, to choose whether it will heat or no, but it streams forth by natural results, and unavoidable emanations. So that it will fasten upon an inferior, unsuitable object, rather than none at all. The soul may sooner leave off to subsist, than to love ; and, like the vine, it withers and dies, if it has nothing to embrace. Now this affection in the state of innocence was happily pitched upon its right object ; it flamed up in direct fervours of devotion to God, and in collateral emissions of cha-

rity to its neighbour. It was not then only another and more cleanly name for lust. It had none of those impure heats, that both represent and deserve hell. It was a vestal and a virgin fire, and differed as much from that, which usually passes by this name now, as the vital heat from the burning of a fever.

Then, for the contrary passion of Hatred. This, we know, is the passion of defiance, and there is a kind of aversion and hostility included in its very essence. But then (if there could have been hatred in the world, when there was scarce any thing odious) it would have acted within the compass of its proper object: Like aloes, bitter indeed, but wholesome. There would have been no rancour, no hatred of our brother: An innocent nature could hate nothing that was innocent. In a word, so great is the commutation, that the soul then hated only that which now only it loves, that is, sin.

And if we may bring Anger under this head, as being, according to some, a transient hatred, or at least very like it: This also, as unruly as now it is, yet then vented itself by the measures of reason. There were no such things as the transports of malice, or the violences of revenge: No rendering evil for evil, when evil was truly a non-entity, and no where to be found. Anger then was like the sword of justice, keen, but innocent and righteous: It did not act like fury, then call itself zeal. It always espoused God's honour, and never kindled upon any thing but in order to a sacrifice. It sparkled like the coal upon the altar, with the fervours of piety, the heats of devotion, the sallies and vibrations of an harmless activity. In the next place, for the lightsome passion of Joy. It was not that, which now often usurps this name; that trivial, vanishing, superficial thing, that only gilds the apprehension, and plays upon the surface of the soul. It was not the mere crackling of thorns, a sudden blaze of the spirits, the exultation of a tickled fancy, or a pleased appetite. Joy was then a masculine and a severe thing; the recreation of the judgment, the jubilee of reason. It was the result of a real good suitably

applied. It commenced upon the solidities of truth, and the substance of fruition. It did not run out in voice, or indecent eruptions, but filled the soul, as God does the universe, silently and without noise. It was refreshing, but composed; like the pleasantness of youth tempered with the gravity of age; or the mirth of a festival managed with the silence of contemplation.

And, on the other side, for Sorrow. Had any loss or disaster made but room for grief, it would have moved according to the severe allowances of prudence, and the proportions of the provocation. It would not have sallied out into complaint or loudness, nor spread itself upon the face, and writ sad stories upon the forehead. No wringing of the hands, knocking the breast, or wishing one's self unborn; all which are but the ceremonies of sorrow, the pomp and ostentation of an effeminate grief: Which speak not so much the greatness of the misery, as the smallness of the mind. Tears may spoil the eyes, but not wash away the affliction. Sighs may exhaust the man, but not eject the burden. Sorrow then would have been as silent as thought, as severe as philosophy. It would have rested in inward senses, tacit dislikes: And the whole scene of it been transacted in sad and silent reflections.

Then again for Hope. Though indeed the fulness and affluence of man's enjoyments in the state of innocence, might seem to leave no place for hope, in respect of any farther addition, but only of the continuance of what already he possessed: Yet doubtless, God, who made no faculty, but also provided it with a proper object, did then exercise man's hopes with the expectations of a better paradise, or a more intimate admission to himself. For it is not imaginable, that ADAM could fix upon such poor, thin enjoyments, as riches, pleasure, and the gaieties of an animal life. Hope indeed was always the anchor of the soul, yet certainly it was not to catch or fasten upon such mud. And if, as the Apostle says, no man hopes for that which he sees, much less could ADAM then hope for such things as he saw through.

And Lastly, For the affection of Fear. It was then the instrument of caution, not of anxiety; a guard, and not a torment, to the breast that had it. It is now indeed an unhappiness, the disease of the soul: It flies from a shadow, and makes more dangers than it avoids: It weakens the judgment, and betrays the succours of reason: So hard is it to tremble, and not to err, and to hit the mark with a shaking hand. Then it fixed upon him who is only to be feared, GOD: And yet with a filial fear, which at the same time both fears and loves. It was awe without amazement, dread without distraction. There was then beauty even in this very paleness. It was the colour of devotion, giving a lustre to reverence, and a gloss to humanity.

Thus did the passions then act without any of their present jars, combats, or repugnances; all moving with the beauty of uniformity, and the stillness of composure. Like a well-governed army, not for fighting, but for rank and order. I confess the Scripture does not expressly attribute these several endowments to ADAM in his first estate. But all that I have said, and much more, may be drawn out of that short aphorism, "GOD made man upright." (*Eccles. vii. 29.*) And since the opposite weaknesses now infest the nature of man fallen, if we will be true to the rule of contraries, we must conclude, that those perfections were the lot of man innocent.

Now from this so exact and regular composure of the faculties, all moving in their due place, each striking in its proper time, there arose, by natural consequence, the crowning perfection of all, a good conscience. For, as in the body, when the principal parts, as the heart and liver, do their offices, and all the smaller vessels act orderly and duly, there arises a sweet enjoyment upon the whole, which we call health: So in the soul, when the supreme faculties of the will and understanding move regularly, the inferior passions and affections following, there arises a serenity and complacency upon the whole soul, infinitely beyond the greatest bodily pleasures, the highest quintessence of worldly delights. There is in this case a kind of fragrancy, and spi-

ritual perfume upon the conscience ; much like what ISAAC spoke of his son's garments : " That the scent of them was like the smell of a field which the LORD had blessed." Such a freshness and flavour is there upon the soul, when daily watered with the actions of a virtuous life. Whatsoever is pure, is also pleasant.

Having thus surveyed the image of GOD in the soul of man, we are not to omit now those characters of majesty that GOD imprinted upon the body. He drew some traces of his image upon this also ; as much as a spiritual substance could be pictured upon a corporeal. As for the sect of the Anthropomorphites, who from hence ascribe to GOD the figure of a man, eyes, hands, feet, and the like, they are too ridiculous to deserve a confutation. They would seem to draw this impiety from the letter of the Scripture sometimes speaking of GOD in this manner. Absurdly ; as if the mercy of Scripture expressions ought to warrant the blasphemy of our opinions : And not rather show us, that GOD condescends to us, only to draw us to himself ; and clothes himself in our likeness, only to win us to his own. The practice of the Papists is much of the same nature, in their absurd and impious picturing of GOD ALMIGHTY : But the wonder in them is the less, since the image of a Deity may be a proper object for that, which is but the image of a religion. But to the purpose : ADAM was then no less glorious in his externals ; he had a beautiful body, as well as an immortal soul. The whole compound was like a well-built temple, stately without, and sacred within. The elements were at perfect union and agreement in his body ; and their contrary qualities served not for the dissolution of the compound, but the variety of the composure. GALEN, who had no more divinity than what his physic taught him, barely upon the consideration of this so exact frame of the body, challenges any one, upon an hundred years' study, to find how any the least fibre, or most minute particle, might be more commodiously placed, either for use or comeliness. His stature erect, and tending upwards to his centre ; his countenance majestic and comely, with the lustre of a native

beauty, that scorned the poor assistance of art; his body of so much quickness and agility, that it did not only contain, but also represent the soul: For we might well suppose, that where God did deposit so rich a jewel, he would suitably adorn the case. It was a fit work-house for spritely vivid faculties to exercise and exert themselves in. A fit tabernacle for an immortal soul, not only to dwell in, but to contemplate upon: Where it might see the world without travel; it being a lesser scheme of the creation, nature contracted, a little cosmography or map of the universe. Neither was the body then subject to distempers, to die by piece-meal, and languish under coughs, catarrhs, or consumptions. ADAM knew no disease, so long as temperance from the forbidden fruit secured him. Nature was his physician; and innocence and abstinence would have kept him healthful to immortality.

Now, the use of this point might be various; but, at present, it shall be only this; to remind us of the irreparable loss that we sustained in our first parents, to show us of how fair a portion ADAM disinherited his whole posterity. Take the picture of a man in the vivacity of his youth, and in the declensions of his drooping years, and you will scarce know it to belong to the same person: There would be more art to discern, than at first to draw it. The same and greater is the difference between man innocent and fallen. He is, as it were, a new species; the plague of sin has even altered his nature, and eaten into his very essentials. The image of God is wiped out, the creatures have shook off his yoke, and revolted from his dominion. Diseases have shattered the excellent frame of his body; and, by a new dispensation, "immortality is swallowed up of mortality." The same disaster and decay also has invaded his spirituals: The passions rebel, every faculty would usurp and rule; and there are so many governors, that there can be no government. The light within us is become darkness; and the understanding, that should be eyes to the blind faculty of the will, is blind itself, and so brings all the inconveniences that attend a blind

follower under the conduct of a blind guide. He that would have a clear ocular demonstration of this, let him reflect upon that numerous litter of strange, senseless, absurd opinions that crawl about the world, to the disgrace of reason, and the unanswerable reproach of a broken intellect.

The two great perfections, that both adorn and exercise man's understanding, are philosophy and religion : For the first of these ; take it even amongst the professors of it, where it most flourished, and we shall find the very first notions of common sense debauched by them. For there have been such as have asserted, ' that there is no such thing in the world as motion : That contradictions may be true.' There has not been wanting one, that has denied snow to be white. Such a stupidity or wantonness had seized upon the most raised wits, that it might be doubted, whether the philosophers, or the owls of Athens, were the quicker sighted. But then for religion ; what prodigious, monstrous, mis-shapen births has the reason of fallen men produced ! It is now almost six thousand years, that far the greatest part of the world has had no other religion but idolatry : And idolatry certainly is the first-born of folly ; nay, the very abridgment and sum total of all absurdities. For is it not strange, that a rational man should worship an ox, nay, the image of an ox ? That he should fawn upon his dog, bow himself before a cat, adore leeks and garlick, and shed penitential tears at the smell of a deified onion ? Yet so did the Egyptians, once the famed masters of all arts and learning. And to go a little farther ; we have yet a strange instance in *Isa.* xlv. 14 : " A man hews him down a tree in the wood, and part of it he burns ;" in *ver.* 16, and in *ver.* 17, " with the residue thereof he maketh a god." With one part he furnishes his chimney, with the other his chapel. A strange thing, that the fire must first consume this part, and then burn incense to that. As if there was more divinity in one end of the stick than in the other ; or, as if it could be graved and painted omnipotent, or the nails and the hammer could give it an apo-

theosis. Briefly, so great is the change, so deplorable the degradation of our nature, that, whereas before we bore the image of God, we now retain only the image of men.

In the last place, we learn from hence the excellency of Christian religion, in that it is the great and only means that God has sanctified and designed to repair the breaches of humanity, to set fallen man upon his legs again, to clarify his reason, to rectify his will, and to compose and regulate his affections. The whole business of our redemption is, in short, only to rub over the defaced copy of the creation, to reprint God's image upon the soul, and (as it were) to set forth nature in a second and fairer edition.

The recovery of which lost image, as it is God's pleasure to command, and our duty to endeavour, so it is in his power only to effect.

To whom be rendered and ascribed, as is most due, all praise, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore. Amen.

SERMON III.

ON THE EXTENT OF THE DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

PREACHED AT WESTMINSTER-ABBEY, FEB. 22, 1684-5.

PROV. xvi. 33.

The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing of it is of the LORD.

I CANNOT think myself engaged from these words to discourse of lots, as to their nature, use, and allowableness; but I shall fix only upon the design of the words, which seems to be a declaration of a Divine perfection by a single instance; a proof of the exactness and universality of God's providence from its influence upon a thing, of all others the most casual and fortuitous, such as is the casting of lots.

A lot is properly a casual event, purposely applied to the determination of some doubtful thing.

Some there are who utterly proscribe the name of chance, as a word of impious and profane signification; and, indeed, if it be taken by us in that sense, in which it was used by the Heathen, so as to make any thing casual in respect of God himself, their exception ought justly to be admitted. But to say a thing is a chance, as it relates to second causes, is not profaneness, but a great truth; as signifying no more, than that there are some events, beside the knowledge, purpose, expectation, and power of second agents. And for this very reason, because they are so, it is the royal prerogative of God himself to have all these loose, uneven, fickle uncertainties under his disposal.

The subject, therefore, that from hence we are naturally carried to the consideration of, is, the admirable extent of

the divine providence in managing the most contingent passages of human affairs; which, that we may the better treat of, we will consider the result of a lot:—I. In reference to men.—II. In reference to GOD.

I. For the first of these, if we consider it as relating to men, who suspend the decision of some dubious case upon it, so we shall find that it naturally implies these two things:—1. Something future. 2. Something contingent.

From which two qualifications, these two things also follow:—(1.) That it is absolutely out of the reach of man's knowledge.—(2.) That it is equally out of his power.

This is most clear; for otherwise, why are men in such cases doubtful what the issue and result should be? For no man doubts of what he sees and knows, nor is solicitous about the event of that which he has in his power.

The light of man's understanding is but a short, diminutive, contracted light, and looks not beyond the present: He knows nothing future, but as it has some kind of presence in the constant manner of operation belonging to its cause; by virtue of which, we know, that if the fire continues for twenty years, it will certainly burn so long; and that there will be summer, winter, and harvest, in their respective seasons: But whether GOD will continue the world till to-morrow or no, we cannot know by any certain argument, either from the nature of GOD, or of the world.

But when we look upon such things as relate to their immediate causes, with a perfect indifference, so that, in respect of them, they equally may, or may not be; human reason can then, at the best, but conjecture what will be. And in some things, as here in the casting of lots, a man cannot, upon any ground of reason, bring the event of them so much as under conjecture.

The choice of man's will is indeed uncertain, because in many things free; but yet there are certain habits and principles in the soul, that have some kind of sway upon it, apt to bias it more one way than another; so that, upon the proposal of an agreeable object, it may rationally be

conjectured, that a man's choice will rather incline him to accept than to refuse it. But when lots are shuffled together in a lap, urn, or pitcher, or a man blindfold casts a die, what reason in the world can he have to presume that he shall draw a white stone rather than a black, or throw an ace rather than a six? Now, if these things are thus out of the compass of a man's knowledge, it will unavoidably follow, that they are also out of his power. For no man can govern or command that which he cannot possibly know; since to dispose of a thing, implies both a knowledge of a thing to be disposed of, and of the end that it is to be disposed of to.

And thus we have seen how a contingent event baffles man's knowledge, and evades his power:

II. Let us now consider the same in respect of God, and so we shall find that it falls under—1. A certain knowledge. And, 2. A determining Providence.

1. First of all, then, the most casual event of things, as it stands related to God, is comprehended by a certain knowledge. God, by reason of his eternal, infinite, and indivisible nature, is, by one single act of duration, present to all the successive portions of time, and consequently to all things successively existing in them: Which eternal indivisible act of his existence makes all futures actually present to him.

But I shall not insist upon these speculations; which, when they are most refined, serve only to show, how impossible it is for us to have a clear and explicit notion of that which is infinite. Let it suffice us in general, to acknowledge and adore the vast compass of God's omniscience, that it is a light shining into every dark corner, ripping up all secrets, and steadfastly grasping the greatest and most slippery uncertainties. As when we see the sun shine upon a river, though the waves of it move and roll this way and that way by the wind, yet, for all their unsettledness, the sun strikes them with a direct and certain beam. Look upon things of the most accidental and mutable nature, accidental in their production, and mutable in their con-

tinuance; yet God's prescience of them is as certain in him, as the memory of them is or can be in us. He knows which way the lot and the dye shall fall, as perfectly as if they were already cast. All futurities are naked before that all-seeing eye, the sight of which is no more hindered by distance of time, than the sight of an angel can be determined by distance of place.

2. As all contingencies are comprehended by a certain divine knowledge, so they are governed by as certain and steady a providence.

There is no wandering out of the reach of this, no slipping through the hands of Omnipotence. God's hand is as steady as his eye; and, certainly, thus to reduce contingency to method, instability and chance itself to an unfailing rule and order, argue such a mind as is fit to govern the world; and, I am sure, nothing less than such an one can.

Now, God may be said to bring the greatest casualties under his providence, upon a twofold account. (1.) That he directs them to a certain end. (2.) Often to very weighty and great ends.

(1.) And first of all, he directs them to a certain end. Providence never shoots at rovers. There is an arrow that flies by night as well as by day, and God is the person that shoots it, who can aim them as well as in the day. There is not the least thing that falls within the cognizance of man, but is directed by the counsel of God. "Not an hair can fall from our head, nor a sparrow to the ground, without the will of our heavenly FATHER." Such an universal superintendency has the eye and hand of Providence over all, even the most minute and inconsiderable things.

Nay, and sinful actions too are over-ruled to a certain issue; even that horrid villainy of the crucifixion of our SAVIOUR, was not a thing left to the disposal of chance and uncertainty; but in *Acts* ii. 23, it is said of him, that "he was delivered to the wicked hands of his murderers by the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God." For surely the SON OF GOD could not die by chance, nor the

greatest thing that ever came to pass in nature, be left to an undeterminate event.

In a word, if we allow **God** to be the **Governor** of the world, we cannot but grant, that he orders and disposes of all inferior events; and if we allow him to be a wise and a rational **Governor**, he cannot but direct them to a certain end.

(2.) In the next place, he directs all these appearing casualties, not only to certain, but also to very great ends. He that created something out of nothing, surely can raise great things out of small, and bring all the scattered and disordered passages of affairs into a great, beautiful, and exact frame. Now, this over-ruling, directing power of **God** may be considered, **First**, In reference to the societies or united bodies of men. **Secondly**, In reference to particular persons.

First. And first for societies. **God** and nature do not principally concern themselves in the preservation of particulars, but of kinds and companies. Accordingly, we must allow **Providence** to be more intent and solicitous about nations and governments, than about any private interest whatsoever. Upon which account, it must needs have a peculiar influence upon the erection, continuance, and dissolution of every society. Which great effects it is strange to consider, by what small inconsiderable means they are often brought about, and those so wholly undesign'd by such as are the immediate visible actors in them. Examples of this we have both in **Holy Writ**, and also in other stories.

And first for those of the former sort.

Let us reflect upon that strange and unparalleled story of **JOSEPH** and his brethren; a story that seems to be made up of nothing else but chances and little contingencies, all directed to mighty ends. For was it not a mere chance that his father **JACOB** should send him to visit his brethren, just at that time that the **Ishmaelites** were to pass by that way, and so his unnatural brethren take occasion to sell him to them, and they to carry him into **Egypt**?

And then that he should be cast into prison, and thereby brought at length to the knowledge of PHAROAH in that unlikely manner that he was? Yet by a joint connexion of every one of these casual events, Providence served itself in the preservation of a kingdom from famine, and of the church, then circumscribed within the family of JACOB. Likewise by their sojourning in Egypt, he made way for their bondage there, and their bondage for a glorious deliverance through those prodigious manifestations of the divine power, in the several plagues inflicted upon the Egyptians.

And then for examples out of other histories, to hint a few of them.

Perhaps, there is none more remarkable than that passage about ALEXANDER the Great, in his famed expedition against DARIUS.

When in his march towards him, chancing to bathe himself in the river Cydnus, through the excessive coldness of those waters, he fell sick, near unto death, for three days; during which short space, the Persian army had advanced into the strait passages of Cilicia; by which means ALEXANDER with his small army was able to equal them under those disadvantages, and to fight and conquer them. Whereas, had not this stop been given by that accidental sickness, his great courage would, beyond all doubt, have carried him directly forward to the enemy, till he had met him in the vast open plains of Persia, where his small numbers would have been contemptible, and the Persian multitudes formidable, and, in all likelihood of reason, victorious. So that this one little accident of that Prince's taking a fancy to bathe himself at that time, caused the interruption of his march, and that interruption gave occasion to that great victory that founded the third monarchy of the world. In like manner, how much of casualty was there in the preservation of ROMULUS, as soon as born exposed by his uncle, and taken up and nourished by a shepherd! (For the story of the she-wolf is a fable.) And

yet in that one accident was laid down the foundation of the fourth universal monarchy.

How doubtful a case was it, whether HANNIBAL, after the battle of Cannæ, should march directly to Rome or Campania! Certain it is, that there was more reason for the former; and he was a person that had sometimes the command of reason, as well as regiments: Yet his reason deserted his conduct at that time, and by not going to Rome, he gave occasion to those recruits of the Roman strength, that prevailed to the conquest of his country, and at length to the destruction of Carthage itself, one of the most puissant cities in the world.

And to descend to occurrences within our own nation. How many strange accidents concurred in the whole business of King HENRY the Eighth's divorce! Yet we see Providence directed it and them to an entire change of the affairs and state of the whole kingdom. And surely, there could not be a greater chance than that which brought to light the Powder-treason, when Providence (as it were) snatched a King and kingdom out of the jaws of death, only by the mistake of a word in the direction of a letter.

But of all cases, in which little casualties produce great and strange effects, the chief is in war, upon the issues of which hangs the fortune of states and kingdoms.

CÆSAR, I am sure; whose great sagacity and conduct put his success as much out of the power of chance, as human reason could well do; yet upon occasion of a notable experiment that had like to have lost him his whole army at Dyrrachium, tells us the power of it in the third book of his Commentaries, *De Bello Civili*: ‘*Fortuna quæ plurimum potest, cum in aliis rebus, tum præcipuè in bellis, in parvis momentis magnas rerum mutationes efficit.*’ Nay, and a greater than CÆSAR, even the SPIRIT of GOD himself, in *Eccles. vi. 11*, expressly declares, “that the battle is not always to the strong.” So that, upon this account, every warrior may, in some sense, be said to be a soldier of fortune; and the best commanders to have a kind of lottery

for their work, as, amongst us, they have for a reward. For how often have whole armies been routed by a little mistake, or a sudden fear raised in the soldiers' minds, upon some trivial ground or occasion !

Sometimes the misunderstanding of a word has scattered and destroyed those who have been even in possession of victory, and wholly turned the fortune of the day. A spark of fire, or an unexpected gust of wind, may ruin a navy. And sometimes a false senseless report has spread so far, and sunk so deep into the people's minds, as to cause a tumult, and that tumult a rebellion, and that rebellion has ended in the subversion of a government.

And in the late war between the King and some of his rebel-subjects, has it not sometimes been at an even cast, whether his army should march this way, or that way ? Whereas, had it taken that way, which actually it did not, things afterwards so fell out, that, in very high probability, it must have met with such success, as would have put an happy issue to that wretched war, and thereby have continued the crown upon that Prince's head, and his head upon his shoulders.

Many passages happen in the world, much like that "little cloud," (1 *Kings* xviii,) that appeared at first to ELIJAH'S servant, "no bigger than a man's hand," but presently after grew and spread, and blackened the face of the whole heaven, and then discharged itself in thunder and rain and a mighty tempest. So these accidents, when they first happen, seem but small and contemptible ; but by degrees they branch out, and widen themselves into such a numerous train of mischievous consequences, one drawing after it another, by a continued dependence and multiplication, that the plague becomes victorious and universal, and personal miscarriage determines in a national calamity.

For who, that should view the small despicable beginnings of some things and persons at first, could imagine or prognosticate those vast and stupendous increases of fortune, that have afterwards followed them !

Who, that has looked upon AGATHOCLES first handling the clay, and making pots under his father, and afterwards turning robber, could have thought, that from such a condition, he should come to be King of Sicily !

Who, that had seen MASIANELLO, a poor fisherman, with his red cap and his angle, could have reckoned it possible to see such a pitiful thing, within a week after, shining in his cloth of gold, and, with a word or a nod, absolutely commanding the whole city of Naples !

It is, as it were, the sport of the ALMIGHTY thus to baffle and confound the sons of men by such events, as both cross the methods of their actings, and surpass the measure of their expectations. For, according to both these, men still suppose a gradual natural progress of things ; as that from *great* things and persons should grow *greater*, till at length, by many steps and ascents, they come to be at the *greatest* ; not considering, that when Providence designs strange and mighty changes, it gives men wings instead of legs ; and instead of climbing leisurely, makes them at once fly to the top and height of greatness and power. So that the world about them, (looking up to those illustrious upstarts,) scarce knows *who* or *whence* they *were*, nor they themselves *where* they *are*.

It were infinite to insist upon particular instances ; histories are full of them, and experience seals the truth of history.

In the next place let us consider to what great purposes GOD directs these little casualties, with reference to particular persons ; and those either public or private.

1. And first for public persons, as Princes. Was it not a mere accident, that PHARAOH's daughter met with MOSES ? Yet it was a means to bring him up in the Egyptian court, then the school of all arts and policy, and so to fit him for that great and arduous employment that GOD designed him to. For see upon what little hinges that great affair turned ; for had either the child been cast out, or PHARAOH's daughter came down the river but an hour sooner or later ; or had that little vessel not been cast by

the parents, or carried by the water into that very place, where it was, in all likelihood the child must have undergone the common lot of other Hebrew children, and been either starved or drowned. That OCTAVIUS CÆSAR should shift his tent (which he had never used to do before) just that very night that it happened to be taken by the enemy, was a mere casualty; yet such an one as preserved a person who lived to establish a total alteration of government in the imperial city of the world.

But we need not go far for a Prince preserved by as strange a series of little contingencies, as ever were managed by the art of Providence to so great a purpose. There was but an hair's breadth between him and certain destruction, for the space of many days. For had the rebel-forces gone one way, rather than another, or come but a little sooner to his hiding-place, or but mistrusted something which they passed over, (all which things might very easily have happened,) we had not seen this face of things at this day

On the contrary, when Providence designs judgment, or destruction to a Prince, nobody knows by what little, unusual, unregarded means the fatal blow shall reach him. If AHAB be designed for death, though a soldier in the enemy's army draw a bow at a venture; yet the sure unerring directions of Providence shall carry it in a direct course to his heart, and there lodge the revenge of heaven.

An old woman shall cast down a stone from a wall, and GOD shall send it to the head of ABIMELECH, and so sacrifice a King in the very head of his army.

How many warnings had JULIUS CÆSAR of the fatal Ides of March! Whereupon sometimes he resolv'd not to go to the Senate, and sometimes again he would go; and when at length he did go, in his passage thither, one put into his hand a note of the whole conspiracy against him, together with the names of the conspirators, desiring him to read it forthwith. But continual salutes and addresses entertaining him all the way, kept him from saving so great a life, but with one glance of his eye upon the paper; till he came

to the fatal place where he was stabbed, and died with the very means of preventing death in his hand.

HENRY the Second of France, by a splinter, unhappily thrust into his eye at a solemn justing, was dispatched and sent out of the world, by a sad, but very accidental death.

In a word, GOD has many ways to reap down the Grandees of the earth; an arrow, a bullet, a tile, a stone from an house, is enough to do it: And beside all these ways, sometimes, when he intends to bereave the world of a Prince or an illustrious person, he may cast him upon a bold, self-opinioned Physician, worse than his distemper, who shall dose and bleed, and kill him *secundum artem*, and make a shift to cure him into his grave.

In the last place, we will consider this directing influence of GOD, with reference to private persons; and that as touching things of nearest concernment to them. As, 1. Their lives: 2. Their health: 3. Their reputation: 4. Their friendships: 5. And lastly, their employments, or preferments.

1. And first, for men's lives. Though these are things for which nature knows no price or ransom; yet I appeal to universal experience, whether they have not, in many men, hung often upon a very slender thread, and the distance between them and death been very nice, and the escape wonderful. There have been some who, upon a slight and perhaps groundless occasion, have gone out of a ship or house, and the ship has sunk, and the house has fallen immediately after their departure.

He that, in a great wind, suspecting the strength of his house, betook himself to his orchard, and walking there, was knocked upon the head by a tree, falling through the fury of a sudden gust, wanted but the advance of one or two steps, to have put him out of the way of that mortal blow.

He that, being subject to an apoplexy, used still to carry his remedy about him; but upon a time shifting his clothes, and not taking that with him, chanced, upon that very day, to be surprised in a fit, and to die in it, certainly

owed his death to a mere accident, to a little inadvertency and failure of memory. But not to recount too many particulars: May not every soldier, that comes alive out of the battle, pass for a living monument of a benign chance, and an happy Providence? For was he not in the nearest neighbourhood to death? And might not the bullet, that perhaps razed his cheek, have as easily gone into his head? And the sword that glanced upon his arm, with a little diversion have found the way to his heart? But the workings of Providence are marvellous, and the methods secret, and untraceable, by which it disposes of the lives of men.

2. In like manner for men's Health, it is no less wonderful to consider to what strange casualties many sick persons often owe their recovery. Perhaps an unusual draught, or morsel, or some accidental violence of motion, has removed that malady, that for many years has baffled the skill of all Physicians. So that, in effect, he is the best Physician, that has the best luck; he prescribes, but it is chance that cures.

That person that (being provoked by excessive pain) thrust his dagger into his body, and thereby, instead of reaching his vitals, opened an imposthume, the unknown cause of all his pain, and so stabbed himself into perfect health and ease, surely had great reason to acknowledge chance for his Surgeon, and Providence for the Guider of his hand.

3. And then also for men's Reputation; and that either in point of Wisdom, or of Wit. There is hardly any thing, which (for the most part) falls under a greater chance. If a man succeeds in any attempt, though undertaken with never so much folly and rashness, his success shall vouch him a politician: For give any one fortune, and he shall be thought a wise man, in spite of his heart; nay, and of his head too. On the contrary, be a design never so artificially laid, and spun in the finest thread of policy, if it chances to be defeated by some cross accident, the man is then run down by an universal vogue; his counsels are derided, his prudence questioned, and his person despised.

AHITOPHEL was as great an oracle, and gave as good counsel to ABSALOM, as ever he had given to DAVID; but not having the good luck to be believed, and thereupon losing his former repute, he thought it high time to hang himself. And on the other side, there have been some, who for several years have been fools with tolerable good reputation, and never discovered themselves to be so, till at length they attempted to be knaves also, but wanted art and dexterity.

And as the repute of Wisdom, so that of Wit also, is very casual. Sometimes a lucky saying, or a pertinent reply, has procured an esteem of wit, to persons otherwise very shallow, and no ways accustomed to utter such things by any standing ability of mind; so that if such an one should have the ill hap at any time to strike a man dead with a smart saying, it ought, in all reason and conscience, to be judged but a chance-medley; the poor man being no way guilty of any design of wit.

Nay, even where there is a large stock of wit, yet the wittiest sayings and sentences will be found in a great measure the issues of chance, and nothing else but so many lucky hits of a roving fancy.

Moreover, sometimes a man's reputation rises or falls, as his memory serves him in a performance; and yet there is nothing more fickle, slippery, and less under command, than this faculty. So that many having used their utmost diligence to secure a faithful retention of the things or words committed to it, yet after all cannot certainly know where it will trip, and fail them. Any sudden diversion of the spirits, or the justling in of a transient thought, is able to deface those little images of things, and so breaking the train that was laid in the mind, to leave a man in the lurch: And for the other part of memory, called reminiscence; which is the retrieving of a thing at present forgotten, or but confusedly remembered, by setting the mind to hunt over all its notions, and to ransack every little cell of the brain: While it is thus busied, how accidentally often does the thing sought for, offer itself to the mind! And by what small hints the mind does catch hold of, and recover a vanishing notion!

In short, though wit and learning are certain and habitual perfections of the mind, yet the declaration of them (which alone brings the repute) is subject to a thousand hazards. So that every wit runs something the same risk with the astrologer, who, if his predictions come to pass, is cried up to the stars from whence he pretends to draw them; but if not, the astrologer himself grows more out of date than his almanack.

4. And then in the fourth place, for the Friendships or Enmities that a man contracts in the world; than which surely there is nothing that has a more direct and potent influence upon the whole course of a man's life, whether as to happiness or misery; yet chance has the ruling stroke in them all.

A man by mere peradventure lights into company, possibly is driven into an house by a shower of rain for present shelter, and there begins an acquaintance with a person; which acquaintance and endearment grow and continue even when relations fail, and perhaps proves the support of his mind, and of his fortunes to his dying day.

And the like holds in Enmities, which come much more easily than the other. A word unadvisedly spoken on the one side, or misunderstood on the other; any the least surmise of neglect; sometimes a bare gesture; nay, the very unsuitableness of one man's aspect to another man's fancy, has raised such an aversion to him, as in time has produced a perfect hatred of him, and that so strong and so tenacious, that it has never left vexing and troubling him, till, perhaps at length it has worried him to his grave; yea, and after death too, has pursued him in his surviving shadow, exercising the same tyranny upon his very name and memory.

It is hard to please men of some tempers, who indeed hardly know what will please themselves; and yet if a man does not please them, which it is ten thousand to one if he does, if they can but have power equal to their malice, (as sometimes, to plague the world God, lets them have,) such an one must expect all the mischief that power and spite, lighting upon a base mind, can possibly do him.

5. In the last place. As for men's employments and preferments, every man that sets forth into the world, comes into a great lottery, and draws some one certain profession to act and live by, but knows not the fortune that will attend him in it.

One man perhaps proves miserable in the study of the law, which might have flourished in that of physic or divinity. Another proves a very dull and heavy philosopher, who possibly would have made a good mechanic, and have done well enough at the useful philosophy of the spade or the anvil.

Now, let this man reflect upon the time when all these several callings and professions were equally offered to his choice, and consider how indifferent it was once for him to have fixed upon any one of them, and what little accidents and considerations cast the balance of his choice, rather one way than the other; and he will find how easily chance may throw a man upon a profession, which all his diligence cannot make him fit for.

And then for the Preferments of the world, he that would reckon up all the accidents that they depend upon, may as well undertake to count the sands, or to sum up infinity; so that greatness, as well as an estate, may, upon this account, be properly called a man's fortune, forasmuch as no man can state either the acquisition or preservation of it upon any certain rules; every man, as well as the merchant, being here truly an adventurer. For the ways by which it is obtained, are various, and frequently contrary: One man, by sneaking and flattering, comes to riches and honour, (where it is in the power of fools to bestow them,) upon observation whereof, another presently thinks to arrive to the same greatness, by the very same means; but striving, like the ass, to court his master; just as the spaniel had done before him, instead of being stroked and made much of, he is only rated off and cudgelled for all his courtship.

The source of men's preferments is most commonly the will, humour and fancy of persons in power; whereupon, when a Prince or Grandee manifests a liking to such a thing,

such an art, or such a pleasure, men generally set about to make themselves considerable for such things, and thereby through his favour to advance themselves, and at length, when they have spent their whole time in them, and so are become fit for nothing else, that Prince or Grandee perhaps dies, and another succeeds him, quite of a different disposition, and inclining him to be pleased with quite different things. Whereupon these men's hopes, studies and expectations are wholly at an end. And besides, though the Grandee whom they build upon, should not die, or quit the stage, yet the same person does not always like the same things. For age may alter his constitution, humour, or appetite; or the circumstances of his affairs may put him upon different courses and counsels; every one of which accidents wholly alters the road to preferment. So that those who travel that road must be (like highwaymen) very dexterous in shifting the way upon every turn; and yet their very doing so sometimes proves the means of their being found out, understood, and abhorred; and for this very cause, that they are ready to do any thing, are justly thought fit to be preferred to nothing.

CÆSAR BORGIA (base son to Pope ALEXANDER VI.) used to boast to his friend MACHIAVEL, that he had contrived his affairs and greatness into such a posture of firmness, that whether his holy father lived or died, they could not but be secure. If he lived, there could be no doubt of them; and if he died, he laid his interest so, as to over-rule the next election, as he pleased. But all this while, the politician never thought, or considered, that he might in the mean time fall dangerously sick, and that sickness necessitate his removal from the court, and during that his absence, his father die, and so his interest decay, and his mortal enemy be chosen to the Papacy, as indeed it fell out. So that for all his exact plot, down was he cast from all his greatness, and forced to end his days in a mean condition: As it is pity but all such politic opiniators should.

So much has chance the casting voice in the disposal of

all the great things of the world. That which men call *merit*, is a mere *nothing*. For even when persons of the greatest worth and merit are preferred, it is not their merit, but their fortune that prefers them. And then, for that other so much admired thing called *policy*, it is but little better: For when men have busied themselves, and beat their brains never so much, the whole result both of their counsels, and their fortunes, is still at the mercy of an accident. And therefore, whosoever that man was, that said, that he had rather have a grain of fortune, than a pound of wisdom, as to the things of this life, he spoke nothing but the voice of wisdom and great experience.

I am far from affirming, that I have recounted all, or indeed the hundredth part of those casualties of human life, that may display the full compass of Divine Providence; but surely, I have reckoned up so many, as sufficiently enforce the necessity of our reliance upon it, and that in opposition to two extremes that men are usually apt to fall into.

1. Too much confidence and presumption, in a prosperous estate. DAVID, after his deliverances from SAUL, and his victories over all his enemies round about him, in *Psalms xxx. 7, 8*, confesses that his prosperity had raised him to such a pitch of confidence, as to make him say, "that he should never be moved, GOD of his favour had made his hill so strong:" But presently he adds, almost in the very same breath, "Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled."

The sun shines in his full brightness, but the very moment before he passes under a cloud. Who knows what a day what an hour, yea, what a minute may bring forth! He who builds upon the present, builds upon the narrow compass of a point; and where the foundation is so narrow, the superstructure cannot be high and strong too.

Is a man confident of his present health and strength? Why, an unwholesome blast of air, a cold, or a surfeit taken by chance, may shake in pieces his hardy fabric, and (in

spite of all his youth and vigour) send him, in the very flower of his years, pining and drooping to his long home. Nay, he cannot, with any assurance, so much as step out of his doors, but (unless God commissions his protecting angel to bear him up in his hands) he may dash his foot against a stone, and fall, and in that fall breathe his last.

Or is a man confident of his estate, wealth, and power? Why, let him read of those strange unexpected dissolutions of the great monarchies and governments of the world: Governments that once made such a noise, and looked so big in the eyes of mankind, as being founded upon the deepest counsels and the strongest force; and yet, by some slight miscarriage or cross accident, (which let in ruin and desolation upon them at first,) are now so utterly extinct, that nothing remains of them but a name, nor are there the least signs or traces of them to be found, but only in story. When (I say) he shall have well reflected upon this, let him see what security he can promise himself in his own little personal domestic concerns, which at the best have but the protection of the laws to guard and defend them, which are far from being able to defend themselves.

No man can rationally account himself secure, unless he could command all the chances of the world: But how should he command them, when he cannot so much as number them? Possibilities are as infinite as God's power, and whatsoever may come to pass, no man can certainly conclude shall not come to pass.

People forget how little it is that they know, and how much less it is that they can do, when they grow confident upon any present state of things.

There is no one enjoyment that a man pleases himself in, but is liable to be lost by ten thousand accidents wholly out of all mortal power, either to foresee or to prevent. Reason allows none to be confident, but him only who governs the world, who knows all things, and can do all things, and therefore can neither be surprised nor overpowered.

2. The other extreme, which these considerations should

arm the heart of man against, is, utter despondency of mind in a time of pressing adversity.

As he who presumes, steps into the throne of God ; so he that despairs, limits an infinite power to a finite apprehension, and measures providence by his own little, contracted model. But the contrivances of Heaven are as much above our politics, as beyond our arithmetic.

Of those many millions of casualties which we are not aware of, there is hardly one but God can make an instrument of our deliverance. And most men, who are at length delivered from any great distress indeed, find that they are so, by ways that they never thought of, ways above or beside their imagination.

And therefore let no man, who owns the belief of a Providence, grow desperate or forlorn under any calamity or strait whatsoever ; but compose the anguish of his thoughts, and rest his amazed spirits upon this one consideration, that he knows not which way the lot may fall, or what may happen to him ; he comprehends not those strange unaccountable methods, by which Providence may dispose of him.

In a word : To sum up all the foregoing discourse : Since the interest of governments and nations, of Princes and private persons, and that both as to life and health, reputation and honour, friendships and enmities, employments and preferments, (notwithstanding all the contrivance and power that human nature can exert above them,) remain so wholly contingent as to us ; surely all the reason of mankind cannot suggest any solid ground of satisfaction, but in making that God our Friend, who is the sole and absolute Disposer of all these things : And in carrying a conscience so clear towards him, as may encourage us with confidence to cast ourselves upon him ; and in all casualties still to promise ourselves the best events from his providence, to whom nothing is casual ; who constantly wills the truest happiness to those that trust in him, and works all things according to the counsel of that blessed will.

SERMON IV.

THE PRACTICE OF RELIGION ENFORCED BY REASON.

PREACHED AT WESTMINSTER-ABBAY, 1667.

PROV. X. 9.

He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely.

As IT were easy to evince, both from reason and experience, that there is a restless activity in the soul of man, continually disposing it to operate and exert its faculties; so the phrase of Scripture still expresses the life of man by “walking;” that is, it represents an active principle in an active posture. And, because the nature of man carries him thus out to action, it is no wonder if the same nature equally renders him solicitous about the event of his actions: For every one, by reflecting upon the way and method of his own workings, will find that he is still determined in them by a respect to the consequence of what he does, always proceeding upon this argumentation: If I do such a thing, such an advantage will follow from it, and therefore I will do it. And, If I do this, such a mischief will ensue thereupon, and therefore I will forbear. Every one, I say, is concluded by this practical discourse; and for a man to bring his actions to the event proposed and designed by him, is to “walk surely.” But since the event of an action usually follows the nature or quality of it, and the quality follows the rule directing it, it concerns a man, by all means, in the framing of his actions, not to be deceived in the rule which he proposes for the measure of them; which, without great caution, he may be these two ways:—1. By laying false and deceitful principles. 2. In case

he lays right principles, yet by mistaking in the consequences which he draws from them.

An error in either of which is equally dangerous ; for if a man is to draw a line, it is all one, whether he does it by a crooked rule, or by a straight one misapplied. He who fixes upon false principles, treads upon infirm ground and so sinks ; and he who fails in his deductions from right principles, stumbles upon firm ground, and so falls ; the disaster is not of the same kind, but of the same mischief in both.

It must be confessed, that it is sometimes very hard to judge of the truth or goodness of principles, considered barely in themselves, and abstracted from their consequences. But certainly he acts upon the surest grounds in the world, who, whether the principles which he acts upon prove true or false, yet secures an happy issue to his actions.

Now he who guides his actions by the rules of religion, lays these two principles as the great ground of all that he does : I. That there is an infinite, eternal, all-wise Mind governing the affairs of the world, and taking such an account of the actions of men, as, according to the quality of them, to punish or reward them. II. That there is an estate of happiness or misery, after this life, allotted to every man, according to the quality of his actions here. These, I say, are the principles which every religious man proposes to himself ; and the deduction which he makes from them, is this : That it is his grand interest so to behave in this world, as to secure himself from an estate of misery in the other. And thus to act, is, in the phrase of Scripture, “ to walk uprightly ;” and it is my business to prove, that he who acts in the strength of this conclusion, drawn from the two fore-mentioned principles, “ walks surely,” or secures an happy event to his actions, against all contingencies whatsoever.

And to demonstrate this, I shall consider the said principles under a threefold supposition ; 1. As certainly true ; 2. As probable ; and 3. As false.

And if the pious man brings actions to a happy end, whichsoever of these suppositions be right, then certainly there is none who “walks so securely” as he who is religious.

1. First therefore we will take these principles (as we may very well do) for *certainly true* ; where, though the method of the present discourse does not engage me to *prove them so*, but only to show what follows upon a supposal *that they are so* ; yet, to give the greater clearness to the subject, I shall briefly demonstrate them thus :

It is necessary, that there should be some first mover ; and, if so, a first being : And the first being must infer an infinite, unlimited perfection in the said being ; forasmuch as if it were finite or limited, that limitation must have been either from itself, or from something else. But not from itself, since it is contrary to reason and nature, that any being should limit its own perfection ; nor yet from something else, since then it should not have been the *first*, as supposing some other thing co-evous to it, which is against the present supposition. So that it being clear, that there must be a *first being*, and that infinitely perfect, it will follow, that all other perfection that is must be derived from it ; and so we infer the creation of the world : And then supposing the world created by God, (since it is no ways reconcilable to God’s wisdom, that he should not also govern it,) creation must needs infer Providence : And then, it being granted that God governs the world, it will also follow, that he does it by means suitable to the natures of the things he governs, and to the attainment of the proper ends of government. And moreover, man being by nature a free, moral agent, and so, capable of deviating from his duty, as well as performing it, it is necessary that he should be governed by laws : And since laws require that they be enforced with the sanction of rewards and punishments, sufficient to work upon the minds of such as are to be governed by them : And lastly, Since experience shows that rewards and punishments, terminated only within this life, are not sufficient for that purpose, it follows,

that the rewards and punishments, which God governs mankind by, do and must look beyond it.

And thus I have given a brief proof of the certainty of these principles; namely, that there is a supreme Governor of the world; and that there is a future estate of happiness or misery for men after this life: Which principles, while a man steers his course by, if he acts piously, soberly, and temperately, I suppose there needs no farther arguments to evince, that he acts prudently and safely: For he acts as under the eye of his Judge, who reaches to his creature a command with one hand, and a reward with the other: He spends as a person who knows that he must come to a reckoning: He sees an eternal happiness or misery suspended upon a few days' behaviour, and therefore he lives every hour as for eternity: His future condition has such a powerful influence upon his present practice, because he entertains a continual apprehension, and a firm persuasion of it. If a man walks over a narrow bridge when he is drunk, it is no wonder that he forgets his caution while he overlooks the danger. But he who is sober, and views that nice separation between himself and the devouring deep, so that if he should slip, he sees his grave gaping under him, surely must needs take every step with the utmost caution and solicitude.

But for a man to believe it as the most undoubted certainty in the world, that he shall be judged according to the quality of his actions here, and after judgment receive an eternal recompence, and yet to take his full swing in sin, is it not a greater frenzy than for a man to take a purse at Tyburn, while he is actually seeing another hanged for the same fact? It is really to dare and defy the justice of Heaven, to laugh at right-aiming thunderbolts, to puff at damnation; and, in a word, to bid Omnipotence do its worst. He, indeed, who thus walks, "walks surely," but it is because he is *sure* to be damned.

I confess, it is hard to reconcile such a stupid course to the natural way of the soul's acting; according to which, the will moves according to the proposals of good and evil,

made by the understanding: And therefore, for a man to run headlong into the bottomless pit, while conscience assures him that it is bottomless and open, and all return from it desperate and impossible, while his ruin stares him in the face, and the sword of vengeance points at his heart, still to press on to the embraces of his sin, is a problem unresolvable upon any other ground, but that sin infatuates before it destroys. For JUDAS to receive and swallow the sop, when his Master gave it him seasoned with those terrible words, "It had been good for that man that he had never been born:" Surely, this argued a furious appetite and a strong stomach, that could thus catch at a morsel, with the fire and brimstone all flaming about it, and (as it were) digest death itself, and make a meal upon perdition.

I could wish that every bold sinner, when he is about to engage in the commission of any known sin, would arrest his confidence, and for a while stop the execution of his purpose, with this short question: 'Do I believe it is really true, that God has denounced death to such a practice, or do I not?' If he does not, let him renounce his Christianity, and surrender back his baptism, the water of which might better serve him to cool his tongue in hell, than only to consign him over to the capacity of so black an apostasy. But if he does believe, how will he acquit himself upon the accounts of bare reason? For, does he think, that if he pursues the means of death, they will not bring him to that fatal end? Or, does he think that he can grapple with divine vengeance, and endure the "everlasting burnings," or arm himself against the bites of the never-dying worm? No, surely, these are things not to be imagined; and, therefore, I cannot conceive what security the presuming sinner can promise himself, but upon these two following accounts:—

(1.) That God is merciful, and will not be so severe as his word; and that his threatenings of eternal torments are not so absolute, but that there is a very comfortable latitude left in them for men of skill to creep out at. And

here it must indeed be confessed, that ORIGEN, and some others, not long since, who have been so officious as to furnish up and reprint his old errors, hold, that the sufferings of the damned are not to be, in a strict sense, eternal; but that, after a certain period of time, there shall be a general gaol-delivery of the souls in prison, and that not for a farther execution, but a final release.

But supposing that a few sinners relieve themselves with such groundless trifling considerations as these, yet may they not, however, fasten a rational hope upon the boundless mercy of GOD, that this may induce him to spare his poor creature, though by sin become obnoxious to his wrath? I answer, the divine mercy is indeed large, and far surpassing all created measures; yet, nevertheless, it has its proper time; and after this life it is the time of justice; and to hope for the favours of mercy then, is to expect an harvest in the dead of winter. GOD has cast all his works into a certain inviolable order; according to which, “there is a time to pardon, and a time to punish;” and the time of the one is not the time of the other. When corn has once felt the sickle, it has no more benefit from the sunshine. But,

(2.) If the conscience be too apprehensive to venture the final issue of things, upon a fond persuasion, that the great Judge of the world will not execute the sentence pronounced by him; as if he had threatened men with hell, rather to fright them from sin, than with an intent to punish them for it; I say, if the conscience cannot find any satisfaction or support from such reasonings as these, yet may it not at least relieve itself with the purposes of a future repentance, notwithstanding its present violations of the law? I answer, that this certainly is a confidence, of all others, the most ungrounded and irrational: For upon what ground can a man promise himself a future repentance, who cannot promise himself a futurity? Whose life depends upon his breath, and is so restrained to the present, that it cannot secure to itself the reversion of the very next minute? Have not many died with the guilt of

impenitence, and the designs of repentance together? If a man die to-day, by the prevalence of some ill humours, will it avail him that he intended to have bled and purged to-morrow?

But how dares sinful dust and ashes invade the prerogative of Providence, and carve out to himself the seasons and issues of life and death, which the FATHER keeps wholly within his own power? How does that man who thinks he sins securely, under the shelter of some remote purposes of amendment, know, but that the decree above may be already passed against him, and his allowance of mercy spent; so that the "bow in the clouds" is now drawn, and the arrow levelled at his head; and not many days like to pass, but perhaps an apoplexy, or an imposthume, or some sudden disaster may stop his breath, and reap him down as a sinner ripe for destruction?

I conclude therefore, that, upon supposition of the certain truth of the principles of religion, he who "walks not uprightly," has neither from the presumption of God's mercy reversing the decree of his justice, nor from his own purposes of a future repentance, any sure ground to set his foot upon; but in this whole course acts as directly in contradiction to nature, as he does in defiance of grace. In a word, he is besotted, and has lost his reason; and what then can there be for religion to take hold of him by?

2. Come we now to the Second supposition; under which we show, that the principles of religion, laid down by us, might be considered; and that is, as *only probable*. Where we must observe, that *probability* does not properly make any alteration, either in the *truth or falsity* of things; but only imports a different degree of their clearness, or appearance to the understanding. So that *that* is to be accounted *probable*, which has more or better arguments producible for it, than can be brought against it; and surely such a thing, at least, is religion. For certain it is, that religion is universal; I mean, the first rudiments and general notions of religion, called natural religion, and consisting in the acknowledgment of a Deity, and of the common

principles of morality, and a future estate of souls after death. This notion of religion has diffused itself in some degree or other, as far as human nature extends: So that there is no nation in the world, though plunged into never so gross idolatry, but has some awful sense of a Deity, and a persuasion of a state of retribution to men after this life.

But now, if there are really no such things, but all is a mere lie and a fable, contrived only to chain up the liberty of man's nature from a freer enjoyment of those things, which otherwise it would have as full a right to enjoy as to breathe: I demand whence this persuasion could thus come to be universal? For was it ever known, in any other instance, that the whole world was brought to conspire in the belief of a lie? Nay, and of such a lie, as should lay upon men such unpleasing abridgments, tying them up from a full gratification of those lusts and appetites, which they so impatiently desire to satisfy, and consequently, by all means, to remove those impediments that might any way obstruct their satisfaction? Since, therefore, it cannot be made out, upon any principle of reason, how all the nations in the world, otherwise so distant in situation, manners, interests, and inclination, should, by design or combination, meet in one persuasion; and withal, that men, who so mortally hate to be deceived and imposed upon, should yet suffer themselves to be deceived by such a persuasion as is false; and not only false, but also cross and contrary to their strongest desires; so that if it were false, they would set the utmost force of their reason on work to discover that falsity, and thereby disenthral themselves: And farther, since there is nothing false, but what may be proved to be so: And yet, Lastly, Since all the power and industry of man's mind, has not been hitherto able to prove a falsity in the principles of religion, it irrefragably follows that religion is, at least, a very high probability.

And this is that which I here contend for, that it is not necessary to the obliging men to believe religion to be true, that this truth be made out to their reason, by arguments

demonstratively certain ; but that it is sufficient to render their unbelief unexcusable, even upon the account of bare reason, if the truth of religion carry in it a much greater probability than any of those reasonings that pretend the contrary : And this I prove in the strength of these two considerations :—

(1.) That no man, in matters of this life, requires an assurance either of the good which he designs, or of the evil which he avoids, from arguments demonstratively certain ; but judges himself to have sufficient ground to act upon, from a probable persuasion of the event of things. No man, who first trafficks into a foreign country, has any scientific evidence, that there is such a country, but by report, which can produce no more than a moral certainty ; that is, a very high probability, and such as there can be no reason to except against. He who has a probable belief, that he shall meet with thieves in such a road, thinks himself to have reason enough to decline it, albeit he is sure to sustain some inconvenience by his so doing. But, perhaps, it may be replied, (and it is all that can be replied,) that a greater assurance and evidence is required of the things of the other world, than of the interests of this. To which I answer, that assurance and evidence have no place here, as being contrary to our present supposition ; according to which, we are now treating of the practical principles of religion only as *probable*. And for this, I affirm, that where the case is about the hazarding an eternal or a temporal concern, there a less degree of probability ought to engage our caution against the loss of the former, than is necessary to engage it about preventing the loss of the latter. Forasmuch, as where things are least to be put to the venture, as the eternal interests of the other world ought to be ; there every, even the least probability of danger should be provided against ; but where the loss can be but temporal, every small probability of it need not put us so anxiously to prevent it, since, though it should happen, the loss might be repaired ; or, if not, could not,

however, destroy us, by reaching us in our highest concern, which no temporal thing whatsoever is or can be.

(2.) And this directly introduces the Second consideration or argument, viz. That bare reason, discoursing upon a principle of self-preservation, (the fundamental principle which nature proceeds by,) will oblige a man voluntarily to undergo any less evil, to secure himself but from the probability of an evil incomparably greater, and that also, such an one, as, if that probability passes into a certain event, admits of no reparation by any after-remedy.

Now, that religion, teaching a future estate of souls, is a probability, and that its contrary cannot with equal probability be proved, we have already evinced. This, therefore, being supposed, we will suppose yet farther, that for a man to abridge himself in the full satisfaction of his appetites and inclinations, is an evil, because a present pain and trouble: But then it must likewise be granted, that nature must needs abhor a state of eternal pain and misery much more; and that if a man does not undergo the former less evil, it is highly probable that such an eternal estate of misery will be his portion: And if so, I would know whether that man takes a rational course to preserve himself, who refuses the endurance of these lesser troubles, to secure himself from a condition inconceivably more miserable.

But since probability, in the nature of it, supposes that a thing *may*, or *may not* be so, for any thing that yet appears or is certainly determined on either side; we will here consider both sides of this probability: As,

1. That it is possible, there may be no such thing as future happiness or misery, for those who have lived well or ill here; and then he, who, upon the strength of a contrary belief, abridged himself in the gratification of his appetites, sustains only this evil, viz. that he did not please his senses and unbounded desires so much as otherwise he might, and would have done, had he not lived under the check of such a belief. This is the utmost which he suffers:

But whether this be a real evil or no, (whatsoever vulgar minds may think,) shall be discoursed of afterwards.

2. But then again, on the other side, it is probable there will be such a future estate; and then, how miserable is the voluptuous sensual unbeliever! For there can be no retreat for him then, no mending of his choice in the other world, no after-game to be played in hell. It fares with men in reference to their future estate, and the condition upon which they must pass to it, much as it does with a merchant, having a vessel richly fraught at sea in a storm: The storm grows higher and higher, and threatens the utter loss of the ship; but there is one, and but one certain way to save it, which is, by throwing its rich lading overboard; yet still, for all this, the man knows not but *possibly* the storm may cease, and so all be preserved; however, in the mean time, there is little or no probability that it will do so; and it case it should not, he is then assured, that he must lay his life, as well as his rich commodities, in the cruel deep. Now, in this case, would this man think we act rationally, should he, upon the slender *possibility* of escaping otherwise, neglect the sure infallible preservation of his life, by casting away his rich goods? No, certainly, it would be so far from it, that should the storm, by a strange hap, cease immediately after he has thus thrown away his riches; yet the throwing them away was infinitely more rational and eligible, than the retaining them could have been.

For a man, while he lives here, to doubt whether there be any hell or no, and thereupon to live so, as if absolutely there were none; but when he dies, to find himself confuted in the flames; this, surely, must be the height of woe and disappointment, and a bitter conviction of an irrational venture, and an absurd choice. In doubtful cases, reason still determines for the safer side; especially if the case be not only doubtful, but also highly concerning, and the venture be of a soul, and an eternity.

He who sat at a table, richly and deliciously furnished, but with a sword hanging over his head by one single

thread, surely had enough to check his appetite, even against all the raging of hunger and temptations of sensuality. The only argument that could any way encourage his appetite was, that possibly the sword might not fall: but when his reason should encounter it with another question, What if it should fall? And moreover, that pitiful stay by which it hung should oppose the likelihood that it would, to a mere possibility of that it might not: what could the man enjoy or taste of his rich banquet, with all this doubt and horror working in his mind?

Though a man's condition should be really in itself never so safe, yet an apprehension and surmise that it is not safe, is enough to make a quick and a tender reason sufficiently miserable. Let the most acute and learned unbeliever demonstrate that there is no hell; and if he can, he sins so much the more rationally, otherwise if he cannot, the case remains doubtful at least: But he who sins obstinately, does not act as if it were so much as doubtful; for if it were certain and evident to sense, he could do no more; but for a man to found a confident practice upon a disputable principle, is brutishly to out-run his reason, and to build ten times wider than his foundation. In a word, I look upon this one short consideration, (were there no more,) as a sufficient ground for any rational man to take up his religion upon, and which I defy the subtlest Atheist in the world solidly to answer or confute; namely, that it is good to be sure.

3. And so I proceed to the Third and last supposition; under which the principles of religion may, for argument's sake, be considered; and that is, as false; which surely must reach the thoughts of any Atheist whatsoever. Nevertheless, even upon this account also, I doubt not but to evince, that he who walks uprightly walks much more surely than the wicked and profane liver; and that with reference to the most valued temporal enjoyments, such as are, reputation, quietness, health, and the like, which are the greatest which this life affords, or is desirable for. And,

1. For reputation or credit. Is any one had in greater esteem than the just person, who has given the world an assurance, by the constant tenor of his practice, that he makes a conscience of his ways; that he scorns to do an unworthy or a base thing, to lie, to defraud, to undermine another's interest by sinister arts? And is there any thing which reflects a greater lustre upon a man's person, than a severe temperance and a restraint of himself from vicious and unlawful pleasures? Does any thing shine so bright as virtue, and that even in the eyes of those who are void of it? For hardly shall you find any one so bad, but he desires the credit of *being thought* what his vice will not let him *be*? So great a pleasure and convenience is it, to live with honour and a fair acceptance amongst those whom we converse with: And a being without it, is not *life*, but rather the *skeleton*, or *caput mortuum* of *life*; like time without day, or day itself without the shining of the sun to enliven it.

On the other side, Is there any thing that more embitters the enjoyments of this life, than just shame and reproach? Yet this is generally the lot of the impious and irreligious, and of some of them more especially.

For how infamous, in the first place, is the false, fraudulent, and unconscionable person! And how quickly is his character known! For hardly ever did any man of no conscience continue a man of any credit long. Likewise, how odious, as well as infamous, is such an one! especially if he be arrived at that consummate degree of falsehood, to play in and out, and show tricks with oaths, the sacredest bonds which the conscience of man can be bound with. So that let never so much honour be placed upon him, it cleaves not to him, but forthwith ceases to be honour, by being so placed; no preferment can sweeten him, but the higher he stands, the farther and wider he stinks.

To go over all the several kinds of vice and wickedness, should we set aside the considerations of the glories of a better world, and allow this life for the only place and scene of man's happiness; yet surely CATO will be always

more honourable than **CLODIUS**, and **CICERO** than **CATALINE**. Fidelity, justice, and temperance, will always draw their own reward after them, or rather carry it with them, in those marks of honour which they fix upon the persons who practise and pursue them. It is said of **DAVID**, in *1 Chron.* xxix. 28, “ that he died full of days, riches, and honour ;” and there was no need of an heaven to render him, in all respects, a much happier man than **SAUL**.

But, in the Second place, the religious person walks upon surer grounds than the vicious and irreligious, in respect of the ease, peace, and quietness, which he enjoys in this world ; and which, certainly, make no small part of human felicity. For anxiety and labour are great ingredients of that curse which sin has entailed upon fallen man. Care and toil came into the world with sin, and remain ever since inseparable from it, both as to its punishment and effect.

The service of sin is perfectly slavery ; and he who will pay obedience to the commands of it, shall find it an unreasonable task-master and an unmeasurable exactor.

And to represent the case of some particulars. The ambitious person must rise early, and sit up late, and pursue his design with a constant indefatigable attendance ; he must be infinitely patient and servile, and obnoxious to all the cross humours of those whom he expects to rise by. He must endure and digest all sorts of affronts, adore the foot that kicks him, and kiss the hand that strikes him ; while, in the mean time, the humble and contented man is virtuous at a much easier rate : His virtue bids him sleep, and take his rest, while the other’s restless sin bids him sit up and watch : He pleases himself innocently and easily, while the ambitious man attempts to please others sinfully and difficultly, and perhaps, in the issue, unsuccessfully too.

The robber and the man of rapine must run, and ride, and use all the dangerous, and even desperate, ways of escape ; and probably, after all, his sin betrays him to a gaol, and from thence advances him to the gibbet : But let

him carry off his booty with as much safety and success as he can wish, yet the innocent person, with never so little of his own, envies him not; and, if he has nothing, fears him not.

Likewise the cheat, and fraudulent person, is put to a thousand shifts to palliate his fraud, and to be thought an honest man: But surely, there can be no greater labour, than to be always dissembling, and forced to maintain a constant disguise, there being so many ways by which a smothered truth is apt to blaze and break out; the very nature of things making it not more natural for them *to be*, than to *appear as they be*. But he who will be really honest, just, and sincere in his dealings, needs take no pains to be thought so, no more than the sun need take any pains to shine, or, when he is up, to convince the world that it is day.

And here again, to bring in the man of luxury and intemperance for his share in the pain and trouble, as well as in the fore-mentioned shame and infamy of his vice. Can any toil or day-labour equal the fatigue or drudgery which such an one undergoes, while he is continually pouring in draught after draught, and cramming in morsel after morsel, and that in spite of appetite and nature, till he becomes a burden to the very earth that bears him; though not so great an one to that, but that (if possible) he is yet a greater to himself?

In the Third and last place, the religious person *walks upon surer grounds* than the irreligious, in respect of the very *health of his body*. Virtue is a friend, and an help to nature, but vice and luxury destroy it, and the diseases of intemperance are the natural product of the sins of intemperance. Whereas, on the other side, a temperate, innocent use of the creature never casts any one into a fever or a surfeit. Chastity makes no work for a Surgeon, nor ever ends in "rottenness of bones." Sin is the fruitful parent of distempers, and ill lives occasion good Physicians. Seldom shall one see in cities, courts, and rich families,

(where men live plentifully, and eat and drink freely,) that perfect health, that athletic soundness and vigour of constitution, which is commonly seen in the country, in poor houses and cottages, where nature is their cook, and necessity their caterer, and where they have no other Doctor, but the sun and the fresh air, and that such an one as never sends them to the Apothecary. It has been observed in the earlier ages of the church, that none lived such healthful and long lives as Monks and Hermits, who had sequestered themselves from the pleasures and plenties of the world to a constant course of the severest abstinence and devotion.

Nor is excess the only thing by which sin breaks men in their health, and the comfortable enjoyment of themselves thereby, but many are also brought to a very ill and languishing habit of body, by mere idleness; and idleness is both itself a great sin, and the cause of many more. The husbandman returns from the field, and from manuring his ground, strong and healthy, because innocent and laborious; you will find no diet-drinks, no boxes of pills, nor galley-pots, amongst his provisions; no, he neither speaks nor lives French, he is not so much a gentleman forsooth. His meals are coarse and short, his employment warrantable, his sleep certain and refreshing, neither interrupted with the lashes of a guilty mind, nor the aches of a crazy body: And when old age comes upon him, it comes alone, bringing no other evil with it but itself: But when it comes to wait upon a great and worshipful sinner, (who for many years together has had the reputation of *eating well* and *doing ill*,) it comes, (as it ought to do, to a person of such quality,) attended with a long train and retinue of rheums, coughs, catarrhs, and dropsics, together with many painful girds and achings, which are, at last, called the gout. How does such an one go about, or is carried rather, with his body bending inward, his head shaking, and his eyes always watering, (instead of *weeping*,) for the sins of his ill-spent youth! In a word, old age seizes upon such a

person, like fire upon a rotten house ; it was rotten before, and must have fallen of itself ; so that it is but one ruin preventing another.

And thus I have shown the fruits and effects of sin upon men in this world. But peradventure it will be replied, that there are many sinners who escape all these calamities, and neither labour under any shame or disrepute, any inquietness of condition, or more than ordinary distemper of body, but pass their days with as great a portion of honour, ease, and health, as any other men whatsoever. But to this I answer,

First, That those sinners, who are in such a temporally happy condition, owe it not to their sins, but wholly to a benign chance that they are so. Providence often disposes of things by a method beside and above the discourses of man's reason.

Secondly, That the number of those sinners who, by their sins, have been directly plunged into all the fore-mentioned evils, is incomparably greater than the number of those who, by the singular favour of Providence, have escaped them. And,

Lastly, That, notwithstanding all this, sin has in itself a natural tendency to bring men under these evils; and, if persisted in, will infallibly end in them, unless hindered by some unusual accident, which no man, acting rationally, can build upon. It is not impossible, but a man may practise a sin secretly to his dying-day ; but it is ten thousand to one if the practice be constant, but that, some time or other, it will be discovered ; and then the effect of sin discovered, must be shame and confusion to the sinner. It is possible also that a man may be an old healthful Epicure ; but I affirm also that it is next to a miracle, and the like is to be said of the several instances of sin, hitherto produced by us. In short, nothing can step between them and misery in this world, but a very great, strange, and unusual chance, which none will presume of who “ walk surely.”

And so, I suppose, that religion cannot possibly be

enforced, (even in the judgment of its best friends and most professed enemies,) by any farther arguments than what have been produced. For I have shown, that whether the principles of it be certain, or but probable, nay, though supposed absolutely false; yet a man is sure of that happiness in the practice, which he cannot be in the neglect of it; and consequently, that though he were really a speculative Atheist, yet if he would but proceed rationally, that is, if (according to his own measures of reason) he would but *love himself*, he could not, however, be a practical Atheist; nor live “without God in this world,” whether or no he expected to be rewarded by him in another.

And now, to make some application of the foregoing discourse, we may, by an easy but sure deduction, gather from it these two things:—

1. That *that* profane, atheistical, epicurean rabble whom the whole nation so rings of, and who have lived so much to the defiance of God, the dishonour of mankind, and the disgrace of the age which they are cast upon, are not, (what they are pleased to think and vote themselves,) the *wisest men in the world*; for in matters of choice, no man can be *wise* in any course or practice in which he is not *safe* too. But can these high assumers and pretenders to reason prove themselves so, amidst all those liberties and latitudes of practice which they take? Can they make it out against the common sense of all mankind, that there is no such thing as a future estate of misery for such as have lived ill here? Or, can they persuade themselves, that their own particular reason denying, or doubting of it, ought to be relied upon, as a surer argument of truth, than the universal reason of all the world besides affirming it? Every fool may believe, and pronounce confidently; but wise men will, in matters of *discourse*, *conclude firmly*, and, in matters of *practice*, *act surely*: And, if these will do so too in the case now before us, they must prove it not only *probable*, (which yet they can never do,) but also *certain*, and past all doubt, that there is no hell, nor place of tor-

ment for the wicked ; or, at least, that they themselves, notwithstanding all their licentious practices, are not to be reckoned of that number.

In the mean time, it cannot but be matter of just indignation to all knowing and good men, to see a company of lewd, shallow-brained huffs making contempt of religion the sole badge and character of wit, gallantry, and true discretion ; and then, over their pots and pipes, elaiming and engrossing all these to themselves ; magisterially censuring the wisdom of all antiquity, scoffing at all piety, and (as it were) new modelling the whole world. When yet, such as have had opportunity to sound these braggers thoroughly, by having sometimes endured the penance of their company, have found them in converse so empty and insipid, in discourse so trifling and contemptible, that it is impossible but that they should give a credit and an honour to whatsoever and whomsoever they speak against : They are, indeed, such as seem wholly incapable of entertaining any design above the present gratification of their palates, and whose very soul and thoughts rise no higher than their throats ; but yet withal, of such a clamorous and provoking impiety, that they are enough to make the nation like Sodom and Gomorrah in their punishment, as they have already made it too like them in their sins. Certain it is, that blasphemy and irreligion have grown to that daring height here of late years, that had men in any sober, civilized Heathen nation, spoken or done half so much in contempt of their false Gods and religion, as some in our days and nation, wearing the name of Christians, have spoken and done against GOD and CHRIST, they would have been infallibly burnt at a stake, as monsters and public enemies of society.

But, for all this, let Atheists and sensualists satisfy themselves as they are able. The former of which will find, that as long as reason keeps her ground, religion neither can, nor will lose hers. And for the sensual epicure, he also will find, that there is a certain *living spark* within him, which all the drink he can pour in, will never be able

to *quench*; nor will his rotten abused body have it in its power to convey any putrefying, consuming, rotting quality to the soul: No, there is no *drinking* or *swearing*, or *ranting* or *fluxing* a soul out of its *immortality*. But that must and will survive and abide, in spite of death and the grave; and live for ever, to convince such wretches, to their eternal woe, that the so much repeated ornament of their former speeches, (GOD damn 'em,) was commonly the truest word they spoke, though least believed by them, while they spoke it.

2. The other thing deducible from the foregoing particulars, shall be to inform us of the way of attaining to that excellent privilege, so justly valued by those who have it, and so much talked of by those who have it not; which is, *assurance*. *Assurance* is properly that persuasion or confidence, which a man takes up of the pardon of his sins, and his interest in GOD's favour, upon such grounds and terms, as the Scripture lays down. But now since the Scripture promises eternal happiness and pardon of sin, upon the sole condition of faith, producing sincere obedience, it is evident, that he only can plead a title to this who performs the required condition.

Obedience and "upright walking" are such substantial, vital parts of religion, as, if they be wanting, can never be made up, or commuted for by any formalities of fantastic looks or language. And the great question, when we come hereafter to be judged, will not be, How demurely have you looked? With what length have you prayed? and, With what loudness and vehemence have you preached? but, How holily have you lived? and, How uprightly have you walked? For this, and this only (through the merits of CHRIST's righteousness) will come into account, before that great Judge, who will pass sentence upon every man "according to what he has done here in the flesh, whether it be good, or whether it be evil; and there is no respect of persons with him."

S E R M O N V.

OF FRIENDSHIP.

PREACHED BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY, AT CHRIST-CHURCH,
OXFORD, 1664.

JOHN XV. 15.

Henceforth I call you not servants ; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth : But I have called you friends ; for all things that I have heard of my FATHER, have I made known unto you.

WE HAVE here an account of CHRIST's friendship to his disciples ; that is, we have the best of things represented in the greatest of examples. In other men we see the excellency, but in CHRIST the divinity of friendship. By our baptism and church communion, we are made one body with CHRIST ; but by this we become one soul.

Love is the greatest of human affections, and friendship is the noblest and most refined improvement of love ; a quality of the largest compass. And here it is admirable to observe the ascending gradation of the love which CHRIST bore to his disciples. The strange and superlative greatness of which will appear from those several degrees of kindness that it has manifested to man, in the several periods of his condition. As,

1. If we consider him antecedently to his creation, while he yet lay in the barren womb of nothing, and consequently could have nothing to recommend him to CHRIST's affection, nor show any thing lovely but what he should afterwards receive from the stamp of a preventing love. Yet even then did the love of CHRIST begin to work, and to

commence in the first emanations and purposes of goodness towards men ; designing to provide matter for itself to work upon, to create its own object, and like the sun, in the production of some animals, first to give a being, and then to shine upon it.

2. Let us take the love of CHRIST as directing itself to man actually created, and brought into the world ; and so all those glorious endowments of human nature, in its original state and innocence, were so many demonstrations of the munificent goodness of Him, “ by whom God first made,” as well as afterwards “ redeemed the world.” There was a consultation of the whole Trinity for the making of man, that so he might shine as a master-piece, not only of the art, but also of the kindness of his Creator ; with a noble and a clear understanding, a rightly disposed will, and a train of affections regular and obsequious, and perfectly conformable to the dictates of that high and divine principle, *right reason*. So that, upon the whole matter, he stepped forth, not only the work of God’s hands, but also the copy of his perfections ; a kind of image, or representation, of the Deity in small ; infinitely contracted into flesh and blood ; and (as I may so speak) the prelude and first essay towards the incarnation of the divine nature. But,

3. And lastly, Let us look upon man, not only as created, and brought into the world, with all these great advantages superadded to his being ; but also, as deprived and fallen from them, as an outlaw, and a rebel, and one that could plead a title to nothing, but to the highest severities of a sin-revenging justice : Yet in this estate also, the boundless love of CHRIST began to have warm thoughts and actions towards so wretched a creature, at this time not only not amiable, but highly odious.

While indeed man was yet uncreated and unborn, though he had no positive perfection to present, and set him off to CHRIST’S view, yet he was at least negatively clear : And, like unwritten paper, though it has no draughts to entertain, yet neither has it any blots to offend the eye, but is white, and innocent, and fair for an after-inscription. But

man, once fallen, was nothing but a great blur, nothing but a total universal pollution, and not to be reformed by any thing under a new creation.

Yet see here the ascent and progress of CHRIST's love: For first, if we consider man in such a loathsome and provoking condition, was it not love enough that he was spared and permitted to enjoy a being? Since, not to put a traitor to death is a singular mercy. But then, not only to continue his being, but to adorn it with privilege, and from the number of subjects to take him into the retinue of servants, this was yet a greater love. For every one that may be fit to be tolerated in a Prince's dominions, is not therefore fit to be admitted into his family; nor is any Prince's court to be commensurate to his kingdom. But then farther, to advance him from a servant to a friend, from only living in his house to lying in his bosom, this is an instance of favour above the rate of a created goodness, an act for none but the SON of GOD, who came to do every thing in miracle, to love supernaturally, and to pardon infinitely, and even to lay down the Sovereign, while he assumed the Saviour.

The text speaks the winning behaviour, and gracious condescension of CHRIST to his disciples, in owning them for his friends, who were more than sufficiently honoured by being his servants. For still these words of his must be understood, not according to the bare rigour of the letter, but according to the allowances of expression: Not as if the relation of friends had actually discharged them from that of servants; but that of the two relations, CHRIST was pleased to overlook the meaner, and without any mention of that, to entitle and denominate them solely from the more honourable.

For the farther illustration of which, we must premise this, as a certain and fundamental truth, that so far as service imports duty and subjection, all created beings, whether men or angels, bear the necessary and essential relation of servants to GOD, and consequently to CHRIST, who is "GOD blessed for ever:" And this relation is so

necessary, that GOD himself cannot dispense with it, nor discharge a rational creature from it; for although consequentially indeed he may do so, by the annihilation of such a creature, and the taking away his being; yet, supposing the continuance of his being, GOD cannot effect, that a creature which has his being from, and his dependance upon him, should not stand obliged to do him the utmost service that his nature enables him to do. For, to suppose the contrary, would be opposite to the law of nature, which, consisting in a fixed unalterable relation of one nature to another, is, upon that account, even by GOD himself, indispensable: Forasmuch as having once made a creature, he cannot cause that that creature should not owe a natural relation to his Maker, both of subjection and dependance, (the very essence of a creature importing so much,) to which relation if he behaves himself unsuitably, he goes contrary to his nature, and the laws of it; which GOD, the Author of nature, cannot warrant without being contrary to himself. From all which it follows, that even in our highest estate of sanctity and privilege, we yet retain the unavoidable obligation of CHRIST's servants, though still with an advantage as great as the obligation, where the "service is perfect freedom." So that with reference to such a LORD, to serve, and to be free, are terms not consistent only, but absolutely equivalent.

Nevertheless, since the name of servants has of old been reckoned to imply a certain meanness of mind, as well as lowness of condition, and the ill qualities of many who served, have rendered the condition itself not very creditable; especially in those ages and places of the world, in which the condition of servants was extremely different from what it is now amongst us; they being generally slaves, and such as were bought and sold for money, and consequently reckoned but amongst the other goods and chattels of their lord or master: It was for this reason that CHRIST thought fit to waive the appellation of servant here, as, according to the common use of it amongst the Jews, (and, that time, most nations besides,) importing these three qualifications,

which, being directly contrary to the spirit of Christianity, were by no means to be allowed in any of CHRIST'S disciples.

1. The first whereof is that here mentioned in the text, viz, an utter unacquaintance with his master's designs; "The servant knows not what his Lord doeth." For seldom does any man of sense make his servant his counsellor, for fear of making him his governor too. A master for the most part keeps his choicest goods locked up from his servant, but much more his mind. A servant is to know nothing but his master's commands; and in these also not to know the reason of them.

Neither is he to stand aloof from his counsels only, but sometimes from his presence also; and so far as decency is duty, it is sometimes his duty to avoid him. But the voice of CHRIST in his Gospel is, "Come to me, all ye that are heavy laden." The condition of servant staves him off to a distance; but the Gospel speaks nothing but allurements, attractives and invitation. The magisterial Law bids the person under it, "Go, and he must go:" But the Gospel says to every believer, "Come, and he cometh." A servant dwells remote from all knowledge of his Lord's purposes; he lives as a kind of foreigner under the same roof; a domestic, and yet a stranger too.

2. The name of servant imports a slavish awe of mind; as it is in *Rom.* viii. 5. "God has not given us the spirit of bondage again to fear." He who serves has still the low and ignoble restraints of dread upon his spirit; which in business, and even in the midst of action, cramps and ties up his activity. He fears his master's anger, but designs not his favour. "Quicken me (says DAVID) with thy free SPIRIT." It is the freedom of the spirit that gives worth and life to the performance. But a servant is commonly less free in mind than in condition; his very will seems to be in bonds and shackles, and desire itself under a kind of durance and captivity. In all that a servant does he is scarce a voluntaty agent, but when he serves him-

self: All his services otherwise not flowing naturally from inclination, but being drawn and forced from him. In any work he is put to, let the master withdraw his eye, and he will quickly take off his hand.

3. The appellation of a servant imports a mercenary temper, and denotes such an one as makes his reward both the motive and measure of his obedience. He neither loves the thing commanded, nor the person who commands it, but is wholly intent upon his own emolument. All that is given him over and above what is strictly just and his due, makes him rather worse than better. A servant rarely ascribes what he receives to the mere liberality of the donor, but to his own worth and merit, and to the need which he supposes there is of him; which opinion alone will be sure to make any one of a mean servile spirit insolent and intolerable.

And thus I have shown what the qualities of a servant usually are, (or at least were in that country where our SAVIOUR lived and conversed when he spake these words,) which, no doubt, were the cause why he would not treat his Disciples (whom he designed to be of a quite contrary disposition) with this appellation.

Come we therefore now in the next place to show, what is included in that great character and privilege which he was pleased to vouchsafe both to them and to all believers, in calling and accounting them his friends. It includes in it (I conceive) these following things:—

1. Freedom of access. House and heart, and all are open for the reception of a friend. The entrance is not beset with solemn excuses and lingering delays; but the passage is easy and free from all obstruction, and not only admits, but even invites the comer. How different, for the most part, is the same man from himself, as he sustains the person of a magistrate, and as he sustains that of a friend! As a magistrate or great officer, he locks himself up from all approaches by the multiplied formalities of attendance, by the distance of ceremony and grandeur; so many hun-

gry officers to be passed through, so many thresholds to be saluted, so many days to be spent in waiting for an opportunity of, perhaps, but half an hour's converse.

But when he is to be entertained, whose friendship, not whose business, demands an entrance, those formalities presently disappear, all impediments vanish, and the rigours of the magistrate submit to the endearments of a friend. He opens and yields himself to the man of business with difficulty and reluctance, but offers himself to the visits of a friend with facility. The reception of one is as different from the admission of the other, as when the earth falls open under the incisions of the plough, and when it gapes and greedily opens itself to drink in the dew of heaven, or the refreshments of a shower: Or there is as much difference between them, as when a man reaches out his arms to take up a burden, and when he reaches them out to embrace.

It is confessed, that the vast distance that sin had put between the offending creature, and the offended Creator, required the help of some great umpire and intercessor, to open him a new way of access to GOD; and this CHRIST did for us as a Mediator. But we read of no mediator to bring us to CHRIST; for though, being GOD by nature, he dwells in the height of Majesty, and the inaccessible glories of a Deity, yet to keep off all strangeness between himself and the sons of men, he has condescended to a cognation and consanguinity with us, he has clothed himself with flesh and blood, that so he might subdue his glories to a possibility of human converse. And therefore, he that denies himself an immediate access to CHRIST, affronts him in the great relation of a friend, and as opening himself both to our persons and to our wants, with the greatest tenderness, and the freest invitation. There is none who acts a friend by a deputy, or can be familiar by proxy.

2. The second privilege of friendship is a favourable construction of all passages between friends, that are not of so high and so malign a nature as to dissolve the relation.

“Love covers a multitude of sins,” says the Apostle. (1 *Pet.* iv. 8.) When a scar cannot be taken away, the next kind office is to hide it. Love is never so blind as when it is to spy faults. It is like the painter, who being to draw the picture of a friend having a blemish in one eye, would picture only the other side of his face. It is a noble, and a great thing to cover the blemishes, and to excuse the failings of a friend; to draw a curtain before his stains, and to display his perfections; to bury his weaknesses in silence, but to proclaim his virtues upon the house-top. It is an imitation of the charities of heaven, which, when the creature lies prostrate in the weakness of sleep and weariness, spreads the covering of night and darkness over it, to conceal it in that condition: But as soon as our spirits are refreshed, and nature returns to its morning vigour, God then bids the sun rise, and the day shine upon us, both to advance and to show that activity.

It is the ennobling office of the understanding, to correct the fallacious and mistaken reports of sense, and to assure us that the staff in the water is straight, though our eye would tell us it is crooked. So it is the excellency of friendship to rectify the malignity of those surmises, that would misrepresent a friend, and traduce him in our thoughts. Am I told that my friend has done me an injury, or that he has committed any indecent action? Why, the first debt that I both owe to his friendship, and that he may challenge from mine, is rather to question the truth of the report, than presently to believe my friend unworthy. Or, if matter of fact breaks out and blazes with too great an evidence to be denied, or so much as doubted of; why, still there are other lenitives that friendship will apply, before it will be brought to the rigours of a condemning sentence. A friend will be sure to act the part of an advocate, before he will assume that of a judge. And there are few actions so ill (unless they are of a very black tincture indeed) but will admit of some extenuation, at least from those common topics of human frailty; such as are ignorance, inadvertency, passion or surprise, com-

pany or solicitation ; with many other such things, which may go a great way towards excusing the agent, though they cannot absolutely justify the action. All which apologies for, and alleviations of faults, though they are the heights of humanity, yet they are not the favours, but the duties of friendship. Charity itself commands us, where we know no ill, to think well of all: But friendship, that always goes a pitch higher, gives a man a peculiar right and claim to the good opinion of his friend. And, if we justly look upon a proneness to find faults, as a very ill thing, we are to remember, that a proneness to believe them is next to it.

We have seen here the demeanour of friendship between man and man: But how is it, think we now, between CHRIST and the soul that depends upon him? Is he any ways short in these offices of tenderness and mitigation? No, assuredly; but by infinite degrees superior. For where our heart docs but relent, his melts; where our eye pities, his bowels yearn. How many frowardnesses of ours does he smother, how many indignities does he pass by, and how many affronts does he put up with at our hands, because his love is invincible, and his friendship unchangeable! He rates every action, every sinful infirmity, with the allowances of mercy; and never weighs the sin, but together with it he weighs the force of the inducement; how much of it is to be attributed to choice, how much to the violence of the temptation, to the stratagem of the occasion, and the yielding frailties of weak nature!

Should we try men at that rate that we try CHRIST, we should quickly find that the largest stock of human friendship would be too little for us to spend long upon. But his compassion follows us with an infinite supply. He is GOD in his friendship as well as in his nature, and therefore we sinful creatures are not taken upon advantages, nor consumed in our provocations.

See this exemplified in his behaviour to his disciples, while he was yet upon earth: How ready was he to excuse and cover their infirmities! At the last and bitterest scene

of his life, when he was so full of agony and horror, and so had most need of the refreshments of society, and the friendly assistance of his disciples; and when also he desired no more of them, but only for a while to sit up and pray with him: Yet they, like persons wholly untouched with his agonies, and unmoved with his passionate entreaties, forget both his and their own cares, and securely sleep away all concern for him, or themselves either. Now what a fierce reprehension may we imagine this would have drawn from the friendships of the world; and yet what a gentle one did it receive from CHRIST! (*Matt.* xxvi. 40.) No more than, "What! could you not watch with me one hour?" And when from this admonition they took only occasion to redouble their fault, and to sleep again, so that upon a second and third admonition they had nothing to plead for their unseasonable drowsiness, yet then CHRIST, who was the only person concerned to have resented and aggravated this their unkindness, finds an extenuation for it, when they themselves could not: "The spirit is willing, (says he,) but the flesh is weak." As if he had said, 'I know your hearts, and am satisfied of your affection, and therefore accept your will, and compassionate your weakness.' So benign, so gracious is the friendship of CHRIST, so answerable to our wants, so suitable to our frailties. Happy that man who has a friend to point out to him the perfection of duty, and yet to pardon him in the lapses of his infirmity.

3. The Third privilege of friendship is a sympathy in joy and grief. When a man shall have diffused his life, his self, and his whole concernments so far, that he can weep his sorrows with another's eyes; when he has another heart beside his own, both to share and to support his griefs; and when, if his joy overflow, he can treasure up the overplus in another breast; so that he can (as it were) shake off the solitude of a single nature, by dwelling in two bodies at once, and living by another's breath, this surely is the height, the very spirit and perfection of all human felicities.

It is a true and happy observation of that great philosopher, the LORD VERULAM, that this is the benefit of communication of our minds to others, ‘that sorrows by being communicated grow less, and joys greater.’ And indeed, sorrow, like a stream, loses itself in many channels; and joy, like a ray of the sun, reflects with greater ardour when it rebounds upon a man from the breast of his friend.

Now friendship is the only scene upon which the glorious truth of this great proposition can be fully acted and drawn forth. Which indeed is a summary description of the sweets of friendship; and the whole life of a friend, in the several parts and instances of it, is only a more diffusive comment upon, and a plainer explication of, this divine aphorism. Friendship never restrains a pleasure to a single fruition: But such is the royal nature of this quality, that it still expresses itself in the style of Kings, as, *We* do this or that; and, This is *our* happiness; and, Such or such a thing belongs to *us*; when the immediate possession of it is vested only in one. Nothing certainly in nature can so peculiarly gratify the noble dispositions of humanity, as for one man to see another so much himself as to sigh his griefs, and groan his pains, to sing his joys, and (as it were) to do and feel every thing by sympathy and secret inexpressible communications. Thus it is upon an human account.

Let us now see, how CHRIST sustains and makes good this generous quality of a friend, and this we shall find fully set forth to us in *Heb.* iv. 15, where he is said to be “a merciful High Priest, touched with the feeling of our infirmities;” and that “in all our afflictions he is afflicted.” (*Isa.* lxiii. 9.) And no doubt, with the same bowels and meltings of affections, with which any tender mother hears and bemoans the groanings of her sick child, does CHRIST hear and sympathize with the spiritual agonies of a soul under desertion, or the pressure of some stinging affliction. It is enough that he understands the exact measures of our

strengths and weaknesses; that he “knows our frame,” as it is in *Psalms* ciii. 14: And that he does not only know, but emphatically that he “remembers also that we are but dust.” Observe that signal passage of his loving commiseration; as soon as he had risen from the dead, and met MARY MAGDALENE, in *Mark* xvi. 7, he sends this message of his resurrection by her: “Go tell my disciples and PETER that I am risen.” What! was not PETER one of his disciples? Why then is he mentioned particularly, as if he were exempted out of their number? Why, we know into what a plunge he had newly cast himself by denying his Master; upon occasion of which he was now struggling with all the perplexities and horrors of mind imaginable, lest CHRIST might in like manner deny and disown him before his FATHER, and so repay one denial with another. Hereupon CHRIST particularly applies the comforts of his resurrection to him, as if he had said, ‘Tell all my disciples, but be sure especially to tell poor PETER, that I am risen from the dead; and that, notwithstanding his denial of me, the benefits of my resurrection belong to him, as much as to any of the rest. This is the privilege of the saints, to have a companion and supporter in all their miseries, in all the doubtful turnings and doleful passages of their lives. In sum, this happiness does CHRIST vouchsafe to all his, that as a Saviour he once suffered for them, and that as a Friend he always “suffers with them.”’

4. The Fourth privilege of friendship is that which is here specified in the text, a communication of secrets. A bosom-secret and a bosom-friend are usually put together. And this from CHRIST to the soul is not only kindness, but also honour and advancement; it is for him to vouch it one of his privy-council. Nothing under a jewel is taken into the cabinet. A secret is the apple of our eye; it will bear no touch, nor approach; we use to cover nothing but what we account a rarity. And therefore to communicate a secret to any one, is to exalt him to one of the royalties of heaven: For none knows the secrets of a man’s mind, but his God,

his conscience, and his friend. Neither would any prudent man let such a thing go out of his own heart, had he not another heart beside his own to receive it.

Now it was of old a privilege with which GOD was pleased to honour such as served him at the rate of an extraordinary obedience, thus to admit them to a knowledge of many of his great counsels locked up from the rest of the world. When GOD had designed the destruction of Sodom, the Scripture represents him as unable to conceal that great purpose from ABRAHAM, whom he always treated as his friend and acquaintance; that is, not only with love, but also with intimacy and familiarity, in *Gen. xviii. 17*, “And the LORD said, Shall I hide from ABRAHAM the thing that I go about to do?” He thought it a violation of the rights of friendship to reserve his design wholly to himself. And ST. JAMES tells us, in *James ii. 23*, “that ABRAHAM was called the friend of GOD:” And therefore had a kind of claim to the knowledge of his secrets, and the participation of his counsels. Also in *Exodus xxxiii. 11*, it is said of GOD, “that he spoke to MOSES as a man speaketh to his friend.” And that, not only for the familiarity and facility of address, but also for the peculiar communications of his mind. MOSES was with him in the retirements of the mount, received there his dictates, and his private instructions, as his deputy and Viceroy; and when the multitude and congregation of Israel were thundered away, and kept off from an approach to it, he was honoured with an intimate and immediate admission. The Priests indeed were taken into a near attendance upon GOD; but still there was a degree of a nearer converse, and the interest of a friend was above the privilege of the highest servant. In *Exodus xix. 24*, “Thou shalt come up, (says GOD), thou and AARON with thee; but let not the Priests and the people break through to come up unto the LORD, lest the LORD break forth upon them.” And if we proceed further, we shall still find a continuation of the same privilege: “The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him.” (*Psalms xxv. 14.*)

Nothing is to be concealed from the other self. To be a friend, and to be conscious, are terms equivalent.

Now, if GOD maintained such intimacies with those whom he loved, under the Law, (which was a dispensation of greater distance,) we may be sure that under the Gospel, (the very nature of which imports condescension and compli-
ance,) there must be the same with much greater advantage. And therefore, when GOD “had manifested himself in the flesh,” how sacredly did he preserve this privilege! How freely did CHRIST unbosom himself to his disciples! In *Luke* viii. 10, “Unto you,” says he, “it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of GOD; but unto others in parables:” Such shall be permitted to cast an eye into the ark, and to look into the very “holy of holies.” And again in *Matt.* xiii. 17: “Many Prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.” Neither did he treat them with these peculiarities of favour in the extraordinary discoveries of the Gospel only, but all of those revelations of the divine love, in reference to their own personal interest in it. In *Rev.* ii. 17: “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it.” Assurance is a rarity covered from the inspection of the world: A secret that none can know but GOD, and the person that is blessed with it. It is writ in a private character, not to be read, nor understood, but by the conscience, to which the SPIRIT of GOD has vouchsafed to decypher it. Every believer lives upon an inward provision of comfort, that the world is a stranger to.

5. The fifth advantage of friendship is counsel and advice. A man will sometimes need not only another heart, but also another head besides his own. In solitude, there is not only discomfort, but weakness also. And that saying of the wise man, (*Eccles.* iv. 10,) “Woe to him

that is alone," is verified upon none so much as upon the friendless person: When a man shall be perplexed with knots and problems of business and contrary affairs; where the determination is dubious, and both parts of the contrariety seem equally weighty, so that which way soever the choice determines, a man is sure to venture a great concern; how happy then is it to fetch in aid from another person, whose judgment may be greater than my own, and whose concernment is sure not to be less! There are some passages of a man's affairs that would quite break a single understanding: So many intricacies, so many labyrinths, are there in them, that the succours of reason fail, the very force of it being lost in an actual intention scattered upon several clashing objects at once; in which case, the interposal of a friend is like the supply of a fresh party to a besieged, yielding city.

Now, CHRIST is not failing in this office of a friend also. For in that illustrious prediction of *Isa. ix. 6*, amongst the rest of his great titles, he is called "mighty Counsellor." And his counsel is not only sure, but also free. It is not under the Gospel of CHRIST, as under some laws of men, where you must be forced to buy your counsel, and often pay dear for bad advice. No, "He is a light to those that sit in darkness." And no man sees the sun, no man purchases the light, nor errs if he walks by it. The only price that CHRIST sets upon his counsel is, that we follow it; and that we do that which is best for us to do. He is not only light for us to see with. He is "understanding to the ignorant, and eyes to the blind:" And whosoever has both a faithful and discreet friend, to guide him in the dark, slippery, and dangerous passage of this life, may carry his eyes in another man's head, and yet see never the worse. In *1 Cor. i. 30*, the Apostle tells us, that CHRIST is made to us, not only "sanctification and redemption," but "wisdom" too: We are his members, and it is but natural, that all the members of the body should be guided by the wisdom of the head.

And, therefore, let every believer comfort himself in this high privilege, that, in the great things that concern his eternal peace, he is not left to stand or fall by the uncertain directions of his own judgment. No, sad were his condition if he should be so, when he is to encounter an enemy made up of wiles and stratagems, an old serpent, and a long-experienced deceiver, and successful at the trade for some thousands of years.

The inequality of the match, between such an one and the subtlest of enemies, would quickly appear by a fatal circumvention: There must be a wisdom from above to over-reach and master this hellish wisdom from beneath. And this every sanctified person is sure of in his great Friend, "in whom all the treasures of wisdom dwell:" Treasures that flow out, and are imparted freely, both in direction and assistance, to all that belong to him. He never leaves any of his perplexed, amazed, or bewildered, where the welfare of their souls requires a better judgment than their own, either to guide them in their duty, or to disentangle them from a temptation. Whosoever has CHRIST for his friend, shall be sure of counsel; and whosoever is his own friend, will be sure to obey it.

6. The last and crowning privilege, or rather property of friendship, is constancy. He only is a friend whose friendship lives as long as himself; who ceases to love and to breathe at the same instant. Not that I yet state constancy in such an absurd, senseless, irrational continuance in friendship, as no injuries, or provocations whatsoever, can break off. For there are some injuries that extinguish the very relation between friends. In which case, a man ceases to be a friend, not from any inconstancy in his friendship, but from defect of an object for his friendship to exert itself upon. It is one thing for a father to cease to be a father, by casting off his son; and another for him to cease to be so, by the death of his son. So in friendship, there are some passages of that high and hostile nature, that they constitute and denominate the person guilty of them, an enemy; and if so, how can the other person pos-

sibly continue a friend, since friendship essentially requires that it be between two at least ; and there can be no friendship where there are not two friends ?

Nobody is bound to look upon his backbiter or his underminer, his betrayer or his oppressor, as his friend. Nor, indeed, is it possible that he should do so, unless he could alter the constitution and order of things, and establish a new nature and a new morality in the world. For to remain insensible of such provocations, is not constancy but apathy : And therefore they discharge the person so treated from the proper obligations of a friend, though Christianity, I confess, binds him to the duties of a neighbour.

But to give you the true nature and measures of constancy ; it is such a stability and firmness of friendship, as overlooks and passes by all those lesser failures of kindness and respect, that partly through passion, partly through indiscretion, and such other frailties incident to human nature, a man may be sometimes guilty of, and yet still retain the same habitual good-will, and prevailing propensity of mind to his friend, that he had before. And whose friendship soever is of that strength and duration, as to stand its ground against, and remain unshaken by, such assaults, (which yet are strong enough to shake down and annihilate the friendship of little puny minds,) such an one, I say, has reached all true measures of constancy : His friendship is of a noble make, and a lasting consistency ; it resembles marble, and deserves to be written upon it.

But how few tempers in the world are of that magnanimous frame, as to reach the heights of so great a virtue ! Many offer at the effects of friendship, but they do not last ; they are promising in the beginning, but they fail and jade, and tire in the prosecution, For most people in the world are acted by levity and humour, and by strange and irrational changes. And how often may we meet with those who are one while courteous, civil, and obliging, but, within a small time after, are so supercilious, sharp, fierce, and exceptionous, that they are not only short of the true

character of friendship, but become the very burdens of society ! Such low dispositions, how easily are they discovered, how justly are they despised ! But now that we may pass from one contrary to another, CHRIST, who is “ the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever,” in his being, is so also in his affection. He is not of the number or nature of those mean pretenders to friendship, who perhaps will love and smile upon you one day, and not so much as know you the next : Many of which sort there are in the world, who are not so much courted outwardly, but that inwardly they are detested much more.

Friendship is a kind of covenant ; and most covenants run upon mutual terms and conditions. And therefore, so long as we fulfil the condition on our parts, we may be sure that CHRIST will not fail to fulfil every thing on his. The favour of relations, patrons, and Princes, is uncertain and variable ; and the friendship which they take up, upon the accounts of judgment and merit, they most times lay down out of humour. But the friendship of CHRIST has none of those weaknesses, no such hollowness or unsoundness in it. “ For neither principalities nor powers, things present nor things to come,” no, nor all the rage and malice of hell, shall be able to pluck the meanest of CHRIST’s friends out of his bosom.

Now, from the particulars hitherto discoursed of, we may learn these two things :—

(1.) The excellency and value of friendship. CHRIST, the SON of the most high GOD, the second person in the glorious Trinity, took upon him our nature, that he might give a great instance and example of this virtue ; and condescended to be a man, only that he might be a friend. Our Creator, our LORD, and King, he was before ; but he would needs come down from all this, and in a sort become our equal, that he might partake of that noble quality that is properly between equals. CHRIST took not upon him flesh and blood, that he might conquer and rule nations, lead armies, or possess palaces ; but that he might have the relenting, the tenderness, and the compassion of

human nature, which render it properly capable of friendship; and, in a word, that he might have our heart, and we have his. God himself sets friendship above all considerations of kindred, as the greatest ground and argument of mutual endearment, in *Deut.* xv. 6: "If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee to go and serve other gods, thou shalt not consent unto him." The emphasis of the expression is very remarkable, it being a gradation or ascent, by several degrees of dearness, to that which is the highest of all. Neither wife nor brother, son nor daughter, though the nearest in cognation, are allowed to stand in competition with a friend; who, if he fully answers the duties of that great relation, is indeed better and more valuable than all of them put together, and may serve instead of them; so that he who has a firm, a worthy, and sincere friend, may want all the rest without missing them. That which lies in a man's bosom, should be dear to him; but that which lies within his heart, ought to be much dearer.

(2.) In the next place, we learn from hence the high advantage of being truly religious. When we have said and done all, it is only the true Christian who is, or can be, sure of a friend; sure of obtaining, sure of keeping him. But as for the friendship of the world, when a man shall have done all he can do to make any one his friend, employed the utmost of his wit and labour, beaten his brains, and emptied his purse, to create an endearment between him and the person whose friendship he desires, he may, in the end, upon all these endeavours and attempts, be forced to write vanity and frustration: For, by them all, he may at last be no more able to get into the other's heart, than he is to thrust his hand into a pillar of brass. The man's affection, amidst all these kindnesses done him, remaining wholly unconcerned and impregnable; just like a rock, which, being plied continually by the waves, still throws them back into the bosom of the sea that sent them, but is not at all moved by any of them.

People at first, while they are young, and raw, and soft-natured, are apt to think it an easy thing to gain love, and reckon their own friendship a sure price of another man's: But when experience shall have once opened their eyes, and showed them the hardness of most hearts, the hollowness of others, and the baseness and ingratitude of almost all, they will then find, that a friend is the gift of GOD; and that he only, who made hearts, can unite them. For it is he who creates those sympathies, and suitablenesses of nature, that are the foundation of all true friendship, and then, by his providence, brings persons so affected together.

It is an expression frequent in Scripture, but infinitely more significant than at first it is usually observed to be; namely, that GOD gave such or such a person grace or favour in another's eyes. As for instance, in *Gen. xxxix. 21*, it is said of JOSEPH, "that the LORD was with him, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison." Still it is an invisible hand from heaven, that ties this knot, and mingles hearts and souls, by strange, secret and unaccountable conjunctions.

That heart shall surrender itself and its friendship to one man, at first view, which another has, in vain, been laying siege to for many years, by all the repeated acts of kindnesses imaginable.

Nay, so far is friendship from being of any human production, that, unless nature be pre-disposed to it by its own propensity or inclination, no arts of obligation shall be able to abate the secret dislike of some persons towards others. No friendly offices, no address, no benefits whatsoever, shall ever alter or allay that diabolical rancour, that frets and ferments in some hellish breasts, but that, upon all occasions, it will foam out at its foul mouth in slander and invective, and sometimes bite too in a shrewd turn or a secret blow. This is true and undeniable upon frequent experience; and happy those who can learn it at the cost of other men.

But now, on the contrary, he who will give up his name to CHRIST in faith unfeigned, and a sincere obedience to

all his righteous laws, shall be sure to find love for love, and friendship for friendship. The success is certain and infallible, and none ever yet miscarried in the attempt. For CHRIST freely offers his friendship to all, and sets no other rate upon so vast a purchase, but only that we would suffer him to be our friend. Thou, perhaps, spendest thy precious time in waiting upon some great one, and thy estate in presenting him; and probably, after all, hast no other reward, but sometimes to be smiled upon, and always to be smiled at; and when thy greatest occasions shall call for succour and relief, then to be deserted, and cast off, and not known.

Turn the stream of thy endeavours another way, and bestow but half that hearty attendance upon thy SAVIOUR, in the duties of prayer and mortification; study as much to please him who died for thee, as thou dost to court and humour thy great patron, who cares not for thee, and thou shalt make him thy friend for ever; a friend who shall own thee in thy lowest condition, speak comfort to thee in all thy sorrows, counsel thee in all thy doubts, answer all thy wants, and, in a word, never leave thee nor forsake thee. But when all the hopes that thou hast raised upon the promises, or supposed kindnesses of the great ones of the world shall fail, and upbraid thee to thy face, he shall then take thee into his bosom, embrace, cherish, and support thee; and, as the Psalmist expresses it, “he shall guide thee with his counsel here, and afterwards receive thee into glory.”

SERMON VI.

PREVENTION OF SIN, AN INVALUABLE MERCY.

PREACHED AT CHRIST-CHURCH, OXFORD, NOV. 10, 1673.

1 SAM. XXV. 32, 33.

And DAVID said to ABIGAIL, Blessed be the LORD GOD of Israel, who sent thee this day to meet me. And blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, who hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with my own hand.

THESE words are DAVID's retraction, or laying down a bloody and revengeful resolution ; which, for a while, his heart had swelled with, and carried him on with the highest transport of rage to prosecute : A resolution taken up from the sense of a gross indignity passed upon him, in recompence of a signal favour. During his flight before SAUL, there happening a great and solemn festivity, such as the sheep-shearings used to be in those Eastern countries, he condescends, by an honourable message, to beg of a rich and great man some small supply for himself and his poor harrassed companions : And, as if the greatness of the asker, and the smallness of the thing asked, had not been sufficient to enforce his request, he adds a commemoration of his own generous and noble usage of the person whom he thus addressed to ; showing how he had been a wall and a bulwark to all that belonged to him, a safeguard to his estate, and a keeper of his flocks ; and that both from the violence of robbers, and the licence of his own soldiers ; who could much more easily have carved themselves their own provisions, than so great a spirit stoop so low as to ask them.

But in answer to this, (as nothing is so rude and insolent as a wealthy rustic,) all this his kindness is overlooked, his request rejected, and his person most unworthily railed at. Such being the nature of some base minds, that they can never do ill turns, but they must double them with ill words. And thus DAVID's messengers are sent back to him, like so many sharks and runagates, only for endeavouring to compliment an ill nature out of itself, and seeking that by petition, which they might have commanded by their sword.

And now, who would not but think, that such ungrateful usage, heightened with such reproachful language, might warrant the justice of revenge; even of such a revenge as now began to boil in the breast of this great warrior? For, surely, if any thing can legalize revenge, it should be injuries from an extremely obliged person. But for all this, revenge, we see, is so much the prerogative of the ALMIGHTY, that no consideration can empower men to assume the execution of it in their own case. And therefore, DAVID, by a happy and seasonable pacification, being taken off from acting that bloody tragedy which he was just now entering upon, and so turning his eyes from the baseness of him who had stirred up his revenge, to the goodness of that GOD who had prevented it; he breaks forth into these triumphant praises, expressed in the text: "Blessed be the LORD GOD of Israel, who has kept me this day from shedding blood, and from avenging myself with my own hand."

Which words, together with those going before in the same verse, naturally afford us this doctrinal proposition, that prevention of sin is one of the greatest mercies that GOD can vouchsafe a man in this world.

The prosecution of which shall lie in these two things:—
I. To prove the proposition. II. To apply it.

I. And, First, For the proof of it: That transcendant greatness of this sin-preventing mercy is demonstrable from these four following considerations:—1. Of the condition which the sinner is in, when this mercy is vouchsafed him.—

2. Of the principle or fountain from whence this *prevention* of sin does proceed.—3. Of the hazard a man runs, if the commission of sin be not *prevented*, whether ever it will come to be *pardoned*.—4. And Lastly, Of the advantages accruing to the soul from the *prevention* of sin, above what can be had from the bare *pardon* of it, in case it comes to be *pardoned*.

Of these in their order. And, 1. We are to take an estimate of the greatness of this mercy, from the condition it finds the sinner in, when God is pleased to vouchsafe it to him. It finds him in the direct way to death and destruction; and, which is worse, wholly unable to help himself. For he is actually under the power of a temptation, and the sway of an impetuous lust; both hurrying him on to satisfy the cravings of it, by some wicked action. He is possessed and acted by a passion, which, for the present, absolutely over-rules him; and so can no more recover himself, than a bowl, rolling down an hill, stop itself in the midst of its career.

It is a maxim in philosophy, “That whatsoever is once in actual motion, will move for ever, if it be not hindered:” So a man, being under the drift of any passion, will still follow the impulse of it, till something interpose, and by a stronger impulse turn him another way: But in this case we can find no principle within him strong enough to counteract that principle. For, if it be any, it must be either, First, The judgment of his reason; or, Secondly, The free choice of his will.

But from the first of these there can be no help for him in his present condition. For, while a man is engaged in any sinful purpose, through the prevalence of any passion, during the continuance of that passion, he fully approves of whatsoever he is carried on to do in the strength of it; and judges it, under his present circumstances, the best and most rational course that he can take. Thus we see, when JONAS was under the passion of anger, and God asked him, “Whether he did well to be angry?” He answered, “I do well to be angry even unto death.” (*Jonas* iv. 9.)

And when SAUL was under his persecuting fit, what he did appeared to him good and necessary: "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of JESUS." (*Acts* xxvi. 9.) But to go no farther than the text: Do we not think, that while DAVID's heart was full of his revengeful design, it had blinded and perverted his reason so far, that it struck in wholly with his passion, and told him, that the bloody purpose he was going to execute was just, and becoming such a person, and so dealt with as he was? This being so, how is it possible for a man under a passion to receive any succour from his reason, which is made a party in the whole action, and influenced to a present approbation of all the ill things which his passion can suggest? This is most certain; and every man may find it by experience, (if he will but impartially reflect upon the motions of his own mind,) that while he is under any passion, he thinks and judges quite otherwise of the objects of that passion, from what he does when he is out of it. Take a man under the transports of a vehement rage or revenge, and he passes a very different judgment upon murder and bloodshed, from what he does when his revenge is over, and the flame of his fury spent. Take a man possessed with a strong and immoderate desire of any thing, and you shall find that the worth and excellency of that thing appears much greater, and more dazzling to the eye of his mind, than it does when that desire is extinguished. So that while passion is upon the wing, and the man fully engaged in the prosecution of some unlawful object, no remedy is to be expected from his reason, which is wholly gained over to judge in favour of it. The fumes of his passion do as really intoxicate and confound his discerning faculty, as the fumes of drink discompose and stupify the brain of a man over-charged with it. When his drink indeed is over, he sees the folly and absurdity, the madness and vileness of those things, which before he acted with full complacency and approbation. Passion is the drunkenness of the mind, and therefore, in its present workings, not controllable by reason; forasmuch as the

proper effect of it is, for the time, to supersede the workings of reason.

This principle, therefore, being able to do nothing to the stopping of a man in the eager pursuit of his sin; there remains no other, that can be supposed able to do any thing upon the soul, but that second mentioned, to wit, the choice of his will. But this also is as much disabled from recovering a man fully intent upon the prosecution of any of his lusts, as the former. For all the time that a man is so, he absolutely wills, and is fully pleased with what he is going about. And whatsoever perfectly pleases his will, overpowers it; for it fixes the inclination of it to that one thing which is set before it, and so there is no room for choice. He who is under the power of melancholy, is pleased with his being so: He who is angry, delights in nothing so much as in the venting of his rage; and he who is lustful, places his greatest satisfaction in a slavish following the dictates of his lust. And so long as the will and the affections are pleased, and gratified in any course of acting, it is impossible for a man, (so far as he is at his own disposal,) not to continue in it; or, by any principle within him, to be diverted or taken off from it.

From all which we see, that when a man has taken up a full purpose of sinning, he is hurried on to it in the strength of all those principles which nature has given him to act by: For sin having depraved his judgment, and got possession of his will, there is no other principle left him, by which he can make head against it.

Nor is this all; but to these internal dispositions to sin, add the external opportunities concurring with them, and removing all lets and rubs out of the way, and (as it were) making the path of destruction plain before the sinner's face; so that he may run his course freely, and without interruption. Nay, when opportunities shall lie so fair, as not only to permit, but even to invite and further a progress in sin; so that the sinner shall set forth, like a ship launched into the wide sea, not only well built and rigged, but also carried on with full wind and tide, to the port or place it is bound

for : Surely in this case, nothing under heaven can be imagined able to stop or countermand a sinner amidst all these circumstances promoting and pushing on his sinful design. For all that can give force to motion both from within and from without, jointly meet to bear him forward in his present attempt. He presses on, like “ a horse rushing into the battle,” all that should withstand him giving way before him.

Now under this deplorable necessity of ruin and destruction does God’s preventing grace find every sinner, when it “ snatches him like a brand out of the fire,” and steps in between the purpose and the commission of his sin. It finds him going on resolutely in the high and broad way to perdition ; which yet his perverted reason tells him is right, and his will pleasant : And therefore he has no power of himself to leave or turn out of it ; but he is ruined jocosely and pleasantly, and damned according to his heart’s desire. And can there be a more wretched spectacle of misery, than a man in such a condition ? A man pleasing and destroying himself together ; a man (as it were) doing violence to damnation, and taking hell by force ? So that when the preventing goodness of God reaches out its arm, and pulls him out of this fatal path, it does by main force even wrest him from himself, and save him as it were against his will.

But neither is this his total inability to recover or relieve himself the worst of his condition ; but, which is yet much worse, it puts him into a state of actual hostility against, and defiance of that almighty God, from whom alone, in this helpless and forlorn condition, he is capable of receiving help. For surely, while a man is going on in a full purpose of sin, he is trampling upon the law, spitting in the face of Heaven, and provoking his Maker in the highest manner ; so that none is or can be so much concerned as God himself, to destroy and cut off such an one, and to vindicate the honour of his great name, by striking him dead in his rebellion.

2. And this brings us to the Second thing proposed, which

was to show, What is the fountain or impulsive cause of this prevention of sin. It is perfectly free grace. A man at best, upon all principles of divinity, and sound philosophy, is incapable of meriting any thing from God. But surely, while he is under the dominion of sin, and engaged in a full design and purpose to commit it, it is not imaginable what can be found in him to oblige the divine grace in his behalf. For he is in high and actual rebellion against the only Giver of such grace. And therefore it must needs flow from a redundant, unaccountable fulness of compassion; showing mercy, because it will show mercy; from a compassion, which is and must be its own reason, and can have no argument for its exercise, but itself. No man in the strength of the first grace, can merit the second, (as some fondly speak,) unless a beggar, by receiving one alms, can be said to merit another. It is not from what a man is, or what he has done; from any virtue or excellency, any preceding worth or desert in him, that God is induced thus to interpose between him and ruin, and so stop him in his full career to damnation. No, says God, in *Ezek. xvi. 6*, “When I passed by, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee, Live; yea, I said unto thee, when thou wast in thy blood, Live.” The SPIRIT of GOD speaks this great truth to the hearts of men with emphasis and repetition, knowing what an aptness there is in them to oppose it. God sees a man wallowing in his native filth and impurity, delivered over as an absolute captive to sin, polluted with its guilt, and enslaved by its power; and in this most loathsome condition fixes upon him as an object of his distinguishing mercy. And to show yet farther, that the actings of this mercy, in the work of prevention, are entirely free; do we not sometimes see, in persons of equal guilt and demerit, and so equal progress and advance in the ways of sin; some of them maturely diverted, and taken off, and others permitted to go on without check or control, till they finish a sinful course in final perdition? So true is it, that if things were cast upon this issue, that God should never prevent sin till something in man deserved it, the best

of men would fall into sin, continue in sin, and sin on for ever.

And thus much for the Second thing proposed, which was to show, What was the principle, or fountain, from whence this prevention of sin does proceed.

3. Come we now to the Third proof of the greatness of this preventing mercy, taken from the hazard a man runs, if the commission of sin be not prevented, whether ever it will come to be pardoned.

In order to the clearing of which, I shall lay down these two considerations:—

(1.) That if sin be not thus prevented, it will certainly be committed; and the reason is, because, on the sinner's part, there will be always a strong inclination to sin. So that, if other things concur, and providence cuts not off the opportunity, the act of sin must needs follow. For an active principle, seconded with the opportunities of action, will infallibly exert itself.

(2.) The other consideration is, that in every sin deliberately committed, there are (generally speaking) many more degrees of probability, that that sin will never come to be pardoned, than that it will.

And this shall be made appear upon these three following accounts:

[1.] Because every commission of sin introduces into the soul a certain degree of hardness, and an aptness to continue in that sin. It is a known maxim, that it is much more difficult to throw out, than not to let in. Every degree of entrance, is a degree of possession; sin taken into the soul, is like a liquor poured into a vessel; so much of it as it fills, it also seasons. The touch and tincture go together. So that although the body of the liquor should be poured out again, yet still it leaves that tang behind it, which makes the vessel fitter for that, than for any other. In like manner, every act of sin strangely transforms and works over the soul to its own likeness. Sin in this being to the soul, like fire to combustible matter; it assimilates, before it destroys it.

[2.] A Second reason is, because every commission of sin imprints upon the soul a further disposition and proneness to sin : As the second, third, and fourth degrees of heat are more easily introduced, than the first. Every one is both a preparative and a step to the next. Drinking both quenches the present thirst, and provokes it for the future. When the soul is beaten from its first station, and the mounds and outworks of virtue are once broken down, it becomes quite another thing from what it was before. In one single eating of the forbidden fruit, when the act is over, yet the relish remains ; and the remembrance of the first repast, is an easy allurements to the second. One visit is enough to begin an acquaintance ; and this point is gained by it, that when the visitant comes again, he is no more a stranger.

[3.] The Third and grand reason is, because the only thing that can lead the sinner to pardon, which is repentance, is not in the sinner's power. And he who goes about the work, will find it so. It is the gift of God ; and though God has certainly promised forgiveness of sin to every one who truly repents, yet he has not promised to any one to give him grace to repent. This is the sinner's hard lot ; that the same thing which makes him need repentance, makes him also in danger of not obtaining it. For it provokes and offends that HOLY SPIRIT, which alone can bestow his grace. As the same treason which puts a traitor in need of his Prince's mercy, is a great and just provocation to his Prince to deny him.

Now, let these three things be put together : [1.] That every commission of sin, in some degree, hardens the soul in that sin : [2.] That every commission of sin disposes the soul to proceed further in sin : And, [3.] That to repent, and turn from sin, (without which pardon is impossible,) is not in the sinner's power ; and then, I suppose, there cannot but appear a greater likelihood, that a sin, once committed, will, in the issue, not be pardoned, than that it will. To all which, add the confirmation of general experience, and the real event of things, that where one man

ever comes to repent, a hundred, I might say a thousand, end their days in final impenitence.

All which considered, surely there cannot need a more pregnant argument of the greatness of this preventing mercy ; if it did no more than this, that his grand, immortal concern, more valuable to him than ten thousand worlds, is not thrown upon a critical point ; that he is not brought to his last stake ; that he is rescued from the first descents into hell, and the high probabilities of damnation.

For, whatsoever the issue proves, it is certainly a miserable thing to be forced to cast lots for one's life ; yet in every sin a man does the same for eternity. And therefore, let the boldest sinner take this one consideration along with him, when he is going to sin, that whether the sin he is about to act ever comes to be pardoned or no ; yet, as soon as it is acted, it quite turns the balance, puts his salvation upon the venture, leaves him but one cast for all ; and, which is yet more dreadful, makes it ten to one odds against him.

But, let us now alter the state of the matter so as to leave no doubt in the case : But suppose that the sin, which upon non-prevention comes to be committed, comes also to be repented of, and consequently to be pardoned.

4. Yet in the Fourth and last place, the greatness of this preventing mercy is eminently proved from those advantages accruing to the soul, from the prevention of sin, above what can be had from the bare pardon of it.

If innocence be preferable to repentance, and to be clean be more desirable than to be cleansed ; then surely prevention of sin ought to have the precedence of its pardon. For, so much of prevention, so much of innocence. There are indeed various degrees of it ; and GOD in his infinite wisdom does not deal forth the same measure of his *preventing mercy* to all. Sometimes he may suffer the soul but just to begin the sinful production, in reflecting upon a sin suggested by the imagination, with some complacency and delight ; which, in the Apostle's phrase, is to conceive

sin ; and then, in these early, imperfect beginnings, God perhaps may presently dash and extinguish it. Or, possibly, he may permit the sinful conception to receive life and form, by passing into a purpose of committing it ; and then he may make it prove abortive, by stifling it before ever it comes to the birth. Or, perhaps, God may think fit to let it come even to the birth, by some strong endeavours to commit it ; and yet then deny it strength to bring forth ; so that it never comes into actual commission. Or, Lastly, God may suffer it to be born, and see the world, by permitting the endeavour of sin to pass into the commission of it. And this is the last fatal step but one ; which is by frequent repetition of the sinful act, to continue and persist in it, till at length it settles into a fixed, confirmed habit of sin, which being properly that which the Apostle calls “ the finishing of sin,” ends certainly in death ; death, not only as to merit, but also as to actual infliction.

Now peradventure in this whole progress, preventing grace may sometimes come in to the poor sinner’s help but at the “ last hour of the day ;” and having suffered him to run all the former risk and maze of sin, and to descend so many steps downwards to the black regions of death, as, first, from the bare thought and imagination of sin, to look upon it with some beginnings of appetite and delight ; from thence to purpose and intend it ; and from intending to endeavour it ; and from endeavouring actually to commit it ; and having committed it, perhaps for some time to continue in it. And then (I say) after all this, God may turn the fatal stream, and by a mighty grace interrupt its course, and keep it from passing into a settled habit, and so hinder the absolute completion of sin in final obduracy.

Certain it is, that wheresoever it pleases God to stop the sinner on this side hell, how far soever he has been advanced in his way towards it, it is a vast, ineffable mercy ; a mercy as great as life from the dead, and salvation to a man tottering with horror upon the very edge and brink of destruction. But if, more than all this, God shall be pleased by an early grace to prevent sin so soon, as to keep

the soul in the virginity of its first innocence, not tainted with the desires, and much less deflowered with the formed purpose of any thing vile and sinful: What an infinite goodness is this! It is not a converting, but a crowning grace; such an one as irradiates, and puts a circle of glory about the head of him upon whom it descends: It is the HOLY GHOST coming down upon him "in the form of a dove;" and setting him triumphant above the necessity of tears and sorrow, mourning and repentance, the sad after-games of a lost innocence.

And thus much for the advantageous effects of preventing, above those of pardoning grace; which was the fourth and last argument brought for the proof of the proposition.

II. Pass we now to the next general thing proposed for the prosecution of it; namely, Secondly, Its application: Which, from the foregoing discourse, may afford us several deductions, but chiefly by way of information, in these three particulars.

1. This may convince us, how vastly greater a pleasure is consequent upon the forbearance of sin, than can possibly accompany the commission of it; and, how much higher a satisfaction is to be found from a conquered, than from a conquering passion. For the proof of which, we need look no farther than the great example here before us. Revenge is certainly the most luscious morsel that the Devil can put into the sinner's mouth. But, do we think that DAVID could have found half that pleasure in the execution of his revenge, that he expresses here upon the disappointment of it? Possibly it might have pleased him in the present heat and hurry of his rage, but must have displeased him infinitely more in the cool, sedate reflections of his mind. For, sin can please no longer, than for that pitiful space of time while it is committing; and surely the present pleasure of a sinful act, is a poor countervail for the bitterness of the review, which begins where the action ends, and lasts for ever. There is no ill thing which a man does in his passion, but his memory will be revenged on him for it afterwards.

All pleasure springing from a gratified passion, as most of the pleasure of sin does, must needs determine with that passion: It is short, violent, and fallacious; and as soon as the imagination is disabused, will certainly be at an end. And therefore DES CARTES prescribes excellently well for the regulation of the passions, viz. That a man should fix and fore-arm his mind with this settled persuasion, that, during that commotion of his blood and spirits, in which passion properly consists, whatsoever is offered to his imagination in favour of it, tends only to deceive his reason: It is a real trepan upon it; feeding it with colours and appearances, instead of arguments; and driving the very same bargain which JACOB did with ESAU, "a mess of pottage for a birthright," a present repast for a perpetuity.

2. We have here a sure unfailing criterion, by which every man may discover and find out the gracious or ungracious disposition of his own heart. The temper of every man is to be judged of from the thing he most esteems, and the object of his esteem may be measured by the prime object of his thanks. What is it, that opens thy mouth in praises, that fills thy heart, and lifts up thy hands in grateful acknowledgments to thy great Creator and Preserver? Is it, that thy bags and thy barns are full, that thou hast escaped this sickness or that danger? Alas, GOD may have done all this for thee in anger! All this fair sunshine may have been only to harden thee in thy sins. He may have given thee riches and honour, health and power, with a curse; and, if so, it will be found but a poor comfort, to have had never so great a share of GOD's bounty without his blessing.

But has he at any time kept thee from thy sin? Stopped thee in the prosecution of thy lust? Defeated the malicious arts and stratagems of thy mortal enemy, the tempter? And does not the sense of this move and affect thy heart more than all the former instances of temporal prosperity, which are but (as it were) the promiscuous scatterings of his common providence, while these are the distinguishing kindnesses of his special grace?

A truly pious mind has certainly another kind of relish and taste of these things; and, if it receives a temporal blessing with gratitude, it receives a spiritual one with ecstasy and transport. DAVID, an heroic instance of such a temper, overlooks the rich and seasonable present of ABIGAIL, though pressed with hunger and travel; but her advice, which disarmed his rage, and calmed his revenge, draws forth those high and affectionate gratulations from him: "Blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, who hast kept me this day from shedding blood, and avenging myself with my own hand." These were his joyful and glorious trophies; not that he triumphed over his enemy, but that he insulted over his revenge; that he escaped from himself, and was delivered from his own fury. And whosoever has any thing of DAVID's piety, will be perpetually plying the throne of grace with such like acknowledgments, as, "Blessed be that Providence, which delivered me from such a lewd company, and such a vicious acquaintance, which was the bane of such and such a person. And, blessed be that God, who cast rubs, and stops, and hindrances in my way, when I was attempting the commission of such or such a sin; who took me out of such a course of life, such a place, or such an employment, which was a continual snare and temptation to me. And, blessed be such a Preacher, and such a friend, whom God made use of to speak a word in season to my wicked heart, and so turned me out of the paths of death and destruction, and saved me in spite of the world, the Devil and myself."

These are such things as a man shall remember with joy upon his death-bed; such as shall cheer and warm his heart even in that last and bitter agony, when many from the very bottom of their souls shall wish that they had never been rich, or great, or powerful; and reflect with anguish and remorse upon those splendid occasions of sin, which served them for little, but to heighten their guilt, and at best to enflame their accounts, at that great tribunal which they are going to appear before.

3. In the Third and last place, we learn from hence the

great reasonableness of not only a *contented*, but also a *thankful* acquiescence in any condition, and under the severest passages of Providence, which can possibly befall us: Since there is none of all these but may be the instrument of preventing grace in the hands of a merciful God, to keep us from those courses which would otherwise assuredly end in our confusion. This is most certain, that there is no enjoyment which the nature of man is either desirous or capable of, but may be to him a direct inducement to sin, and consequently is big with mischief, and carries death in the bowels of it. But to make the assertion more particular, and thereby more convincing, let us take an account of it with reference to the three most valued enjoyments of this life:—(1.) Health. (2.) Reputation: And, (3.) Wealth.

(1.) And First, For Health. Has God made a breach upon that? Perhaps he is building up thy soul upon the ruins of thy body. Has he bereaved thee of the use and vigour of thy limbs? Possibly he saw that otherwise they would have been the instruments of thy lusts, and the active ministers of thy debaucheries. Perhaps thy languishing upon thy bed, has kept thee from rotting in a gaol, or in a worse place. God saw it necessary by such mortifications to quench the boilings of a furious, overflowing appetite, and the boundless rage of an insatiable intemperance; to make the weakness of the *flesh* the physic and restorative of the *spirit*; and, in a word, rather to save thee, diseased, sickly and deformed, than to let strength, health, and beauty drive thee headlong (as they have done many thousands) into eternal destruction.

(2.) Has God in his providence thought fit to drop a blot upon thy name, and to blast thy reputation? He saw perhaps that the breath of popular air was grown infectious, and would have derived a contagion upon thy better part. Pride and vain-glory had mounted thee too high, and therefore it was necessary for mercy to take thee down, to prevent a greater fall. “A good name is,” indeed, “better than life;” but a sound mind is better than both.

Praise and applause had swelled thee to a proportion ready to burst; it had vitiated all thy spiritual appetites, and brought thee to feed upon the air, and to surfeit upon the wind, and, in a word, to starve thy soul only to pamper thy imagination.

And now, if GOD makes use of some poignant disgrace, to prick this enormous bladder, and to let out the poisonous vapour, is not the mercy greater than the severity of the cure? "Cover them with shame," says the Psalmist, "that they may seek thy name." Fame and glory transport a man out himself; and, like a violent wind, though it may bear him up for a while, yet it will be sure to let him fall at last: It makes the mind loose and garish, scatters the spirits, and leaves a kind of dissolution upon all the faculties: Whereas shame, on the contrary, (as all grief does,) naturally contracts and unites, and thereby fortifies the spirits, and fixes the ramblings of fancy, and so reduces and gathers the man into himself. This is the sovereign effect of a bitter potion, administered by a wise and merciful hand: And what hurt can there be in all the slanders, obloquies and disgraces of this world, if they are but the arts and methods of Providence to shame us into the glories of the next? But then,

3. And Lastly, Has GOD thought fit to cast thy lot amongst the poor of this world, and that either by denying thee any share of the plenties of this life, (which is something grievous,) or by taking them away, which is much more so? Yet still all this may be but the effect of *preventing* mercy. For so much mischief as riches have done, and may do to the souls of men, so much mercy may there be in taking them away. For, does not the wisest of men, next our SAVIOUR, tell us of "riches kept to the hurt of the owners of them?" (*Eccles. v. 13.*) And does not our SAVIOUR himself speak of the intolerable difficulty, which they cause in men's passage to heaven? Do they not make "the narrow way" much narrower; and contract "the gate which leads to life" to the straitness of "a needle's eye?"

And now, if God will fit thee for this passage, by taking off thy load, and emptying thy bags, and so suit the narrowness of thy fortune to the narrowness of the way thou art to pass, is there any thing but mercy in all this? Nay, are not the riches of his mercy conspicuous in the poverty of thy condition?

Thou who repinest at the plenty and splendour of thy neighbour, at the greatness of his incomes, and magnificence of his retinue; consider what are frequently the dismal consequences of all this, and thou wilt have little cause to envy this gaudy great one, or to wish thyself in his room.

For do we not often hear of this or that young heir newly come to his father's vast estate? A happy man, no doubt! But does not the town presently ring of his debaucheries? Are not his riches and his lewdnesses talked of together? And the odiousness of the one, heightened and set off by the greatness of the other? Are not his oaths, his riots, and other villanies, reckoned by as many thousands as his estate?

Now consider, had this grand debaucher, this glistening monster, been born to thy poverty, he could not have contracted such a clamorous guilt, he could not have been so bad: Nor, perhaps, had thy birth instated thee in the same wealth and greatness, wouldest thou have been at all better.

This God foresaw and knew in the ordering both of his and thy condition: And which of the two, can we think, is the greatest debtor to his preventing mercy? Lordly sins require lordly estates to support them: And where Providence denies the latter, it cuts off all temptation to the former.

And thus I have shown by particular instances, what cause men to have acquiesce in, and submit to the harshest dispensations that Providence can measure out to them in this life; and with what satisfaction, or rather gratitude, that ought to be endured, by which the greatest of mischiefs is prevented. The great Physician of souls, some-

times, cannot cure, without cutting us. Sin has festered inwardly, and he must lance the imposthume, to let out death with the suppuration. He who ties a madman's hands, or takes away his sword, loves his person, while he disarms his frenzy. And whether by health or sickness, honour or disgrace, wealth or poverty, life or death, mercy is still contriving, acting, and carrying on the spiritual good of all those who love God, and are loved by him.

SERMON VII.

OF SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS.

PREACHED AT CHRIST-CHURCH, OXFORD, BEFORE THE
UNIVERSITY, OCTOBER 21, 1693.

LUKE xi. 35.

*Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not
darkness.*

AS LIGHT is certainly one of the most glorious and useful creatures that ever issued from the wisdom and power of the great Creator of the world, so were the eye of the soul as little weakened by the fall, as the eye of the body, no doubt the light within us would appear as much more glorious than the light without us, as the spiritual, intellectual part of the creation exceeds the glories of the sensible and corporeal.

I shall indifferently express this light by the name of conscience, (as a term equivalent to it,) in the following particulars; but still this shall be, with respect to its informing, rather than to its obliging office. Forasmuch as it is the former of these only which is the proper effect of light, and not the latter. For though conscience be both a light, and, (as it commands under GOD,) a law too; yet as it is a light, it is not formally a law. For if it were, then whatsoever it discovered to us, it would also oblige us to. But this is not so; since it both may, and does discover to us the different nature of many things and actions without obliging us either to the practice or forbearance of them; which one consideration alone is sufficient to set the

difference, between the enlightening and the obliging office of conscience, clear beyond all objection.

Now this light, as it is certainly the great and sovereign gift of God to mankind for the guidance and government of their actions, in all that concerns them, with reference to this life, or a better; so it is also as certain, that it is capable of being turned into darkness, and thereby made wholly useless for so noble a purpose.

For so much the words of the text import; nor do they import only a bare possibility, that it may be so, but also a very high probability, that, without an extraordinary prevention, it will be so. For as much as all warning, in the very reason of the thing, and according to the natural force of such expression, implies in it these two things:—1. Some very considerable evil, or mischief warned against; and, 2. An equal danger of falling into it: Without which all warning would be not only superfluous, but ridiculous.

Now, both these, in the present case, are very great; as will appear by a distinct consideration of each of them. And,

1. For the evil which we are warned or cautioned against; to wit, the turning of this light within us into darkness: An evil so inconceivably great and comprehensive, that, to give an account of the utmost extent of it, would pose our thoughts, as well as nonplus our expressions. But yet to help our apprehensions of it the best we can, let us but consider with ourselves those intolerable evils which bodily blindness, deafness, stupefaction, and an utter deprivation of all sense, must unavoidably subject the outward man to. For what is one, in such a condition, able to do? And what is he not liable to suffer? And yet doing and suffering, upon the matter, comprehend all that concerns a man in this world. If such an one's enemy seeks his life, in this forlorn case, he can neither see, nor hear, nor perceive his approach, till he finds himself actually in his murdering hands. He can neither encounter, nor escape him; neither in his own defence give nor ward off a blow: For whatsoever blinds a man, *ipso facto* disarms him; so

that being bereft both of his sight and of all his senses besides, what such an one can be fit for, unless it be to set up for prophecy, or believe transubstantiation, I cannot imagine.

These, I say, are some of those fatal mischiefs, which corporal blindness and insensibility expose the body to; and are not those of a spiritual blindness unexpressibly greater? For must not a man, labouring under this, be utterly at a loss, how to distinguish between the two grand governing concerns of life, good and evil? And may not the ignorance of these cost us as dear as the knowledge of them did our first parents? Life and death, vice and virtue, come alike to such an one; as all things are of the same colour to him who cannot see, his whole soul is nothing but night and confusion, darkness and indistinction. He cannot see the way to happiness, and how then should he avoid it? For where there is no sense of things, there can be no distinction; and where there is no distinction, there can be no choice.

A man, destitute of this directing and distinguishing light within him, is and must be at the mercy of every thing in nature, that would impose or serve a turn upon him. So that whatsoever the Devil will have him do, that he must do. Whithersoever any exorbitant desire or design hurries him, thither he must go. Whatsoever any base interest shall prescribe, that he must set his hand to, whether his heart goes along with it or no. If he be a statesman, he must be as willing to sell, as the enemy of his country can be to buy. If a churchman, he must be ready to surrender, and give up the church, and make a sacrifice of the altar itself, though he live by it; and, (in a word,) take that for a full discharge from all his obligations to do as he is bid. Which being the case of such as steer by a false light, certainly no slave in the galleys is or can be in such a wretched condition of slavery as a man thus abandoned by conscience, and bereft of all inward principles, that should either guide or controul him in the course of his conversation. So that we see here the trans-

endant greatness of the evil which we stand cautioned against. But then,

2. If it were an evil that seldom happened, that very rarely befel a man, this might, in a great measure, supersede the strictness of the caution; but on the contrary, we shall find, that as great as the evil is, which we are to fence against, (and that is as great as the capacities of an immortal soul,) the greatness of the danger is still commensurate: For it is a case that usually happens; it is a mischief as frequent in the event, as it is fatal in the effect. It is, as in a common plague, in which the infection is as hard to be escaped, as the distemper to be cured: For that which brings this darkness upon the soul is sin. And as the state of nature now is, the soul is not so close united to the body, as sin is to the soul; indeed, so close is the union between them, that one would even think the soul itself (as much a spirit as it is) were the matter, and sin the form, in our present constitution. In a word, there is a set combination of all without a man, and all within him, of all above ground, and all under it, (if hell be so,) first to put out his eyes, and then to draw or drive him headlong into perdition. From all which I suppose, we must needs see reason more than sufficient for this admonition of our SAVIOUR, "Take heed that the light which is in thee be not darkness:" An admonition founded upon no less a concern, than all that a man can save, and all that he can lose to eternity. And thus having shown both the vastness of the evil itself, and the extreme danger we are in of it: Since no man can be at all the wiser, or the safer, for barely knowing his danger, without a vigorous application to prevent it; and since the surest preventive of it, is to know by what arts and methods, our enemy will encounter us, and by which he is most likely to prevail over us, we will inquire into, and consider those ways and means by which he commonly attempts, and too frequently effects this so dismal a change upon us, as to strip us even of the poor remains of our fallen nature, by turning the

last surviving spark of it, this light within us, into darkness.

For this must be acknowledged, that no man living, in respect of conscience, is born blind, but makes himself so. None can strike out the eye of his conscience but himself: For nothing can put it out, but that which sins it out. And upon this account, it must be confessed, that a man may love his sin so enormously, as by a very ill application of the Apostle's expression, even to "pluck out his own eyes, and give them to it;" as, indeed, every obstinate sinner in the world does.

Our present business, therefore, shall be to show how, and by what courses, this divine light, this candle of the LORD, comes first to burn faint and dim, and so by a gradual decay fainter and fainter, till at length, by a total extinction, it quite sinks to nothing, and so dies away. And this I shall do, I. In general; and, II. In particular.

I. And First in general, I shall lay down these two observations:—

I. That whatsoever defiles the conscience, in the same degree also darkens it.

As to the philosophy of which, how and by what way this is done, it is hard to conceive, and much harder to explain. Our great unacquaintance with the nature of spiritual, immaterial beings leaving us wholly in the dark as to any explicit knowledge, either how they work, or how they are worked upon. So that in discoursing of these things we are forced to take up with analogy and allusion, instead of evidence and demonstration. Nevertheless, the thing itself is certain, be the manner of effecting it never so unaccountable.

Yet thus much we find, that there is something in sin analogous to blackness, as innocence is frequently, in Scripture, expressed and set forth to us by whiteness. All guilt blackens (or does something equivalent to the blackening of) the soul; as where pitch cleaves to any thing, it is sure to leave upon it both its foulness and its black-

ness together: And then we know that blackness and darkness are inseparable.

Some even of the old Heathens (not without countenance from ARISTOTLE himself) hold, that besides the native inherent light of the intellect, (which is essential to it, as it is a faculty made to apprehend its object,) there is also another light, in the nature of a medium, beaming in upon it by a continual efflux and emanation from the great Fountain of light, and irradiating this intellectual faculty, together with the representations of things imprinted thereupon. According to which doctrine, it seems with great reason to follow, that whatsoever interposes between the mind and irradiations from GOD, (as all sin, more or less, certainly does,) must needs hinder the entrance and admission of them into the mind; and then darkness must, by necessary consequence, ensue, as being nothing else but the absence or privation of light.

For the further illustration of which notion, we may observe, that the understanding, the mind, or conscience of man, (which we shall here take for the same thing,) seem to bear much the same respect to GOD, which glass or crystal does to the light or sun; which appears, indeed, to the eye a bright and a shining thing; nevertheless this shining is not so much from any essential light or brightness existing in the glass itself, (supposing that there be any such in it,) as it is from the porousness of its body, rendering it transparent, and thereby fit to receive and transmit those rays of light, which falling upon it, and passing through it, represent it to common view as a luminous body. But now, let any thing of dirt or foulness sully this glass, and so much of the shine or brightness of it is presently gone, because so much of the light is thereby hindered from entering into it, and making its way through it. But if, beside all this, you should also draw some black colour, or deep die upon it, either by paint or otherwise, then no brightness could be seen in it at all; but the light being hereby utterly shut out, the glass or crystal would shine or glister no more than a piece of wood, or a clod of earth.

In like manner, every act of sin, every degree of guilt, does, in its proportion, cast a kind of soil or foulness upon the intellectual part of the soul, and thereby intercepts those blessed irradiations, which the divine nature is continually darting in upon it. Nor is this all, but there are also some certain sorts and degrees of guilt, so very black and foul, that they fall like an huge thick blot upon this faculty; and so sinking into it, and settling within it, utterly exclude all those illuminations, which would otherwise flow into it, and rest upon it, from the great Father of lights; and this not from any failure, or defect in the illumination itself, but from the indisposition of the object, which, being thus blackened, can neither let in, nor transmit the beams that are cast upon it.

I will not affirm this to be a perfect exemplification of the case before us, but I am sure it is a lively illustration of it, and may be of no small use to such as shall thoroughly consider it. But however, (as I showed before,) the thing itself is certain and unquestionable, guilt and darkness being always so united, that you shall never find darkness mentioned in Scripture in a moral sense, but you shall also find it derived from sin, as its direct cause, and joined with it as its constant companion: For, by a mutual production, sin both causes darkness, and is caused by it. Let this, therefore, be our first general observation, that whatsoever pollutes or fouls the conscience, in the same degree also darkens it.

2. Our other general observation shall be this, that whatsoever puts a bias upon the conscience, weakens and by consequence darkens the light of it. A clear and a right-judging conscience must be always impartial; and that it may be so, it must be perfectly indifferent: That is, it must be free and disencumbered from every thing which may, in the least, sway or incline it one way, rather than another, beyond what the sole and mere evidence of things would naturally lead it to. In a word, it must judge all by evidence, and nothing by inclination.

And this our blessed SAVIOUR, with admirable emphasis

and significance of expression, calls the singleness of the eye. "If the eye," says he, "be single, thy whole body shall be full of light:" That is, nothing extraneous must cleave to, or join with the eye in the act of seeing, but it must be left solely and entirely to itself, and its bare object, as naked as truth; as pure, simple, and unmixed as sincerity. Otherwise the whole operation of it unavoidably passes into cheat, fallacy, and delusion. As, to make the case yet more particular; if you put a muffler before the eye, it cannot see; if any mote or dust falls into it, it can hardly see; and if there be any soreness or pain in it, it shuns the light, and will not see. And all this by a very easy, but yet certain and true analogy, is applicable to the eye of the soul, the conscience; and the instance is verifiable upon it, in every one of the alleged particulars.

In short, whatsoever bends, or puts a bias upon the conscience, represents things to it by a false light; and whatsoever does so, causes in it a false and erroneous judgment of things. And all error or falsehood is, in the very nature of a real intellectual darkness; and consequently must diffuse a darkness upon the mind, so far as it is affected and possessed with it. And thus much for our second general observation.

From whence we shall now pass to particulars. In the assigning and stating of which, as I showed before, that sin in general was the general cause of this darkness, so the particular causes of it must be fetched from the particular kinds and degrees of sin.

Now sin may be considered three ways. (1.) In the act. (2.) In the habit of custom. (3.) In the affection, or productive principles of it. In all which we shall show what a darkening and malign influence sin has upon the conscience or mind of man; and consequently with what extreme care and severe vigilance the conscience ought to be guarded and watched over in all these respects. And,

(1.) For sin considered in the single act. Every particular commission of any great sin, such as are, for instance, the sin of perjury, of uncleanness, of drunkenness, of

theft ; and, above all, undutifulness to parents, (which being a thing so much against nature, nothing in nature can be said for it :) These I say, and the like capital, soul-wasting sins, even in any one single act, have a strangely efficacious power to darken the conscience.

Yea, every single gross act of sin, is much the same thing to the conscience, that a great blow or fall is to the head ; it stuns and bereaves it of all use of its senses for a time : Thus those sins of DAVID, so mazed and even stupefied his conscience, that it lay as it were in a swoon, and void of all spiritual sense for almost a whole year. For we do not find, that he came to himself or to any true sight or sense of his horrid guilt, till NATHAN the Prophet came and roused him up with a message from GOD ; nor did NATHAN come to him, till after the child, begotten in that adultery, was born. Such a terrible deadness and stupefaction did those two sins bring upon his soul for so many months together, during which time whatsoever notion of murder and adultery DAVID might have in general ; yet no doubt, he had but very slight and superficial thoughts of the heinousness of his own in particular. And what was the reason of this ? Why, his conscience was cast into a dead sleep, and could not so much as open its eyes, so as to be able to look either upwards or inwards. This was his sad and forlorn estate, notwithstanding that long course of piety and converse with GOD, which he was now grown old in. For he had been an early practiser, and an eminent proficient in the ways of GOD, and was now past the fiftieth year of his age ; and yet, we see, that one or two such gross sins dulled and deadened the spiritual principle within him to such a degree, that they left him for a long time (as it were) dozed and benumbed, blind and insensible ; and no doubt, had not a peculiar grace from GOD raised him up and recovered him, he had continued so to his life's end.

For this is most certain, and worth our best observation ; that whatsoever carries a man off from GOD, will in the natural course, and tendency of it, carry him still further and fur-

ther ; till at length it leaves him neither will nor power to return. For repentance is neither the design, nor work of mere nature, which immediately after the commission of sin never puts a man upon disowning or bewailing it ; but upon studying how to palliate and extenuate, and rather than fail, how to plead for and defend it. This was the course which ADAM took upon the first sin : And the same course in the same case will be taken by all the sons of ADAM (if left to themselves) as long as the world stands.

(2.) The frequent and repeated practice of sin has also a mighty power in it to obscure and darken the natural light of conscience. Nothing being more certainly true, nor more universally acknowledged, than that custom of sinning takes away the sense of sin ; and, we may add, the sight of it too. For though the darkness consequent upon any one gross act of sin, be (as we have showed) very great, yet that which is caused by custom of sinning, is much greater and more hardly curable. Particular acts of sin do (as it were) cast a mist before the eye of conscience, but customary sinning brings a kind of film upon it, and it is not an ordinary skill which can take off that. The former only closes the eye, but this latter puts it out ; as leaving upon the soul a wretched impotence, either to judge, or to do well ; much like the spots of the leopard not to be changed, or the blackness of an Ethiopian not to be washed off. For by these very things the SPIRIT of GOD, in *Jer.* viii. 23, expresses the iron invincible force of a wicked custom.

Now the reason, I conceive, that such a custom brings such a darkness upon the mind or conscience, is this, that a man naturally designs to please himself in all that he does ; and that it is impossible for him to find any action really pleasurable, while he judges it absolutely unlawful ; since the sting of this must needs take off the relish of the other, and it would be an intolerable torment to any man's mind, to be always doing, and always condemning himself for what he does. And for this cause a man shuts his eyes, and stops his ears against all that his reason would tell him

of the sinfulness of that practice, which long custom, and frequency, has endeared to him. So that he becomes studiously and affectedly ignorant of the illness of the course he takes, that he may the more sensibly taste the pleasure of it. And thus, when an inveterate, imperious custom has so overruled all a man's faculties, as neither to suffer his eyes to see, nor his ears to hear, nor his mind to think of the evil of what he does; that is, when all the instruments of knowledge are forbid to do their office, ignorance and obscurity must needs be upon the whole soul, For when the windows are stopped up, no wonder if the whole room be dark.

The truth is, such an habitual frequency of sinning, does (as it were) bar and bolt up the conscience against the sharpest reproofs, and the most convincing instructions; so that when GOD, by the thunder of his judgments, and the voice of his ministers, has been ringing hell and vengeance into the ears of such a sinner, perhaps, like FELIX, he may tremble a little for the present, and seem to yield, and fall down before the over-powering evidence of the conviction; but after a while, custom overcoming conscience, the man goes his way, and though he is convinced, and satisfied what he ought to do, yet he actually does what he uses to do: And all this, because through the darkness of his intellect he judges the present pleasure of such a sinful course, an over-balance to the evil of it.

And what a darkness and delusion must conscience needs be under, while it makes a man judge that really best for him, which directly tends to, and generally ends in, his utter ruin and damnation! Custom is said to be a second nature, and if by the first we are already so bad, by the second (to be sure) we shall be much worse.

(3.) Every corrupt passion, or affection of the mind, will certainly pervert the judging, and obscure and darken the discerning power of conscience. The affections which the Greeks call *Παθη*, and the Latins *affectus animi*, are of much the same use to the soul, which the members are of to the body; serving as the proper instruments of most

of its actions; and are always attended with a certain motion of the blood and spirits peculiar to each passion, or affection. And as for the seat or fountain of them, philosophers both place them in and derive them from the heart. But not to insist upon mere speculations: The passions or affections are (as I may so call them) the mighty flights and sallings out of the soul upon such objects as come before it; and are generally accompanied with such vehemence, that the Stoics reckoned them, in their very nature and essence, as so many irregularities, and deviations from right reason, and by no means incident to a wise or good man.

But though better philosophy has long since exploded this opinion, and Christianity, which is the greatest and the best, has taught us, that that godly sorrow is neither a paradox nor a contradiction, (2 *Cor.* vii. 10,) and consequently, that in every passion or affection there is something purely natural, which may both be distinguished and divided too from what is sinful and irregular; yet notwithstanding all this, it must be confessed, that the passions are extremely apt to pass into excess, and that when they do so, nothing in the world is a greater hinderance to the mind or reason of man, from making a true, clear, and exact judgment of things, than the passions thus wrought up to any thing of ferment or agitation. It being as impossible to keep the judging faculty steady in such a case, as it would be to view a thing distinctly and perfectly through a perspective glass held by a shaking, paralytic hand.

When the affections are once engaged, the judgment is always partial. There is a strong bent, or bias upon it; it is possessed and gained over, and as it were feed and retained in their cause, and thereby made utterly unable to carry such an equal regard to the object, as to consider truth nakedly, and as such to make it the rigid inflexible rule, which it is to judge by; especially where duty is the thing to be judged of. For a man will hardly be brought to judge right, and true, when by such a judgment he is sure to condemn himself.

But this being a point of such high importance, I will be yet more particular about it, and show severally, in several vicious affections, how impossible it is for a man to keep his conscience rightly informed, and fit to guide and direct him in all the arduous perplexing cases of sin and duty, while he is actually under the power of any of them. This I know men, generally, are not apt to believe, or to think that the failures of their morals can at all affect their intellectuals. But I doubt not but to make it not only credible, but undeniable.

Now the vicious affections which I shall single out of those vast numbers, which the heart of man, that great storehouse of the Devil, abounds with, as some of the principal, which thus darken and debauch the conscience, shall be these three:—1. Sensuality. 2. Covetousness. 3. Ambition. Of each of which I shall speak particularly.

1. And First for Sensuality, or a vehement delight in, and pursuit of bodily pleasures. We may truly say of the body, with reference to the soul, what was said by the poet of an ill neighbour, *Nemo tam propè tam proculque*: None so nearly joined in point of vicinity, and yet so widely distant in point of interest and inclinations.

The ancient philosophers generally holding the soul of man to be a spiritual immaterial substance, could give no account of the several defects in the operations of it, (which they were sufficiently sensible of,) but from immersion into, and intimate conjunction with matter. And accordingly all their complaints and accusations were still levelled at this, as the only cause of all that they found amiss in the whole frame and constitution of man's nature. In a word, whatsoever was observed by them, either irregular or defective in the workings of the mind, was all charged upon the body, as its great clog and impediment. As the skilfullest artist in the world would make but sorry work of it should he be forced to make use of tools no way fit for his purpose.

But whether the fault be in the spiritual or corporeal part of our nature, or rather in both, certain it is, that no

two things in the world do more rise and grow upon the fall of each other, than the flesh and the spirit: They being like a kind of balance in the hand of nature, so that as one mounts up, the other still sinks down; and the high estate of the body seldom or never fails to be the low, declining estate of the soul. Which great contrariety and discord between them, the Apostle describes, as well as words can do: "The flesh (says he) lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit lusteth against the flesh, and these two are contrary;" (*Gal. v. 7*;) like two mighty Princes, whose territories join, they are always encroaching, and warring upon one another. And, as it most commonly falls out, that the worse cause has the best success; so when the flesh and the spirit come to a battle, it is seldom but the flesh comes off victorious. And therefore the same great Apostle, who so "constantly exercised himself to keep a conscience void of offence," did as constantly and severely exercise himself "to keep under his body, and bring it into subjection." (*1 Cor. ix. 27*.) And the same, in all ages, has been the judgment and practice of all such as have had any experience in the ways of GOD. For bodily pleasure dulls and weakens the operations of the mind, even upon a natural account, and much more upon a spiritual. Now the pleasures which chiefly affect, or rather bewitch the body, and by so doing become the pest, and poison, of the nobler and intellectual part of man, are those false and fallacious pleasures of Lust and Intemperance: Of each of which severally.

(1.) And, First, For Lust. Nothing does, or can darken the mind, or conscience of man more: Nay, it has a peculiar efficacy this way, and for that cause may justly be ranked amongst the very powers of darkness: It being that which, (as naturalists observe,) strikes at the proper seat of the understanding, the brain. Something of that "blackness of darkness" mentioned in *verse 13* of ST. JUDE, seeming to be of the very nature, as well as punishment of this vice.

Nor does only the reason of the thing itself, but also the
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examples of such as have been possessed with it, demonstrate as much. For had not SAMSON (think we) an intolerable darkness and confusion upon his understanding, while he ran roving after every strumpet in that brutish manner that he did? Was it not the eye of his conscience which DELILAH first put out? And when the two angels (as we read in *Gen. xix*) struck those monsters, the men of SODOM, with blindness, had not their own detestable lusts first stricken them with a greater? Or could HEROD have ever thought himself obliged by the religion of an oath, to have murdered the Baptist, had not his lust and his HERODIAS imprisoned and murdered his conscience first? For, surely, the common light of nature could not but teach him, that no oath or vow whatsoever could warrant the greatest Prince upon earth to take away the life of an innocent person. But it seems, his besotted conscience having broken through the seventh commandment, the sixth stood too near to it to be safe long: And therefore his two great casuists, the Devil and HERODIAS, having allowed him to lie and wallow in adultery so long, easily persuaded him that the same salvo might be found out for murder also. So that it was his lust obstinately continued in, which thus darkened and deluded his conscience; and the same will, no doubt, darken and delude, and, in the end, extinguish the conscience of any man breathing, who shall surrender himself up to it. The light within him shall grow every day less and less, and at length totally and finally go out. So hard, or rather utterly unfeasible it is for men to be zealous votaries of the blind god without losing their eyes in his service.

From all which it appears, what a folly it is for any one under the dominion of his lust, to think to have a right judgment in things relating to the state of his soul.

(2.) And the same, in the Second place, holds equally in that other branch of sensuality, Intemperance; whereupon we find them both joined together by the Prophet, "Whoredom," says he, "and wine taketh away the heart;" (*Hosea iv. 11*;) that is, according to the language of Holy Writ, a man's judging and discerning abilities. And there-

fore, whosoever would preserve these faculties (especially as to their discernment of spiritual objects) quick and vigorous, must be sure to keep the upper region of his soul clear and serene; which the fumes of meat and drink, luxuriously taken in, will never suffer it to be. We know the method, which that high and exact pattern of spiritual prudence, ST. PAUL, took to keep the great sentinel of his soul, his conscience, always vigilant and circumspect. It was by a constant and severe temperance, heightened with frequent watchings and fastings, as he himself tells us, "In watchings often, in fastings often." (*2 Cor. xi. 27.*) This was the discipline which kept his senses exercised to a sure and exquisite discrimination of good and evil, and made the lamp within him shine always with a bright and triumphant flame.

But gluttony, and all excess, either in eating or drinking, strangely clouds and dulls the intellectual powers; and then, it is not to be expected that the conscience should bear up, when the understanding is drunk down. An epicure's practice naturally disposes a man to an epicure's principles; that is, to an equal looseness in both: And he who makes his belly his business, will quickly come to have a conscience of as large a swallow as his throat, of which there want not several deplorable instances. Loads of meat and drink are fit for none but a beast of burden to bear; and he is much the greater beast of the two, who carries his burden in his belly, than he who carries it upon his back. On the contrary, nothing is so great a friend to the mind of man, as abstinence; it strengthens the memory, clears the apprehension, and sharpens the judgment, and in a word, gives reason its full scope of acting; and when reason has that, it is always a diligent and faithful handmaid to conscience. And therefore, where men look no further than mere nature, (as many do not,) let no man expect to keep his gluttony and his parts, his drunkenness and his wit, his revellings and his judgment, and much less conscience together. For neither grace, nor nature will have it so. It is an utter contradiction to the methods

of both : “ Who hath woe ? who hath sorrow ? who hath contentions ? who hath babbling ? who hath wounds without cause ? who hath redness of eyes ? ” says SOLOMON. (*Prov.* xxiii. 29.) Which question he himself presently answers in the next verse, “ They who tarry long at the wine, they who seek after mixed wine.” So say I, Who has a stupid intellect, a broken memory, and a blasted wit, and (which is worse than all) a blind and benighted conscience, but the intemperate and luxurious, the epicure and the smell-feast ? So impossible is it for a man to turn sot, without making himself a blockhead too. I know this is not always the present effect of these courses, but, at a long run, it will infallibly be so ; and time and luxury together will certainly change the inside, as it does the outside of the best heads whatsoever ; and much more of such heads as are strong for nothing but to beardrink. And thus much for the first great darkener of man’s mind, Sensuality, and that in both the branches of it, Lust and Intemperance.

2. Another vicious affection, which clouds and darkens the conscience, is Covetousness. Concerning which it may truly be affirmed, that of all the vices incident to human nature, none so powerfully and peculiarly carries the soul downwards as covetousness does. It makes it all earth and dirt, burying that noble thing which can never die. So that while the body is above ground, the soul is under it ; and therefore must needs be in a state of darkness, while it converses in the regions of it.

How mightily this vice darkens and debases the mind, Scripture instances abundantly show. When MOSES would assign the proper qualifications of a Judge, (which office certainly calls for the quickest apprehension and the solidest judgment,) “ Thou shalt not (says he) take a gift.” (*Deut.* xvi. 9.) But why ? He presently adds the reason : “ Because a gift (says he) blinds the eyes of the wise.” And no wonder, for it perverts their will ; and then, who so blind as the man who resolves not to see ? Gold, it seems, being but a very bad help and cure of the eyes in such cases In like manner, when SAMUEL would set the

credit of his integrity above all the aspersions of envy and calumny itself, "Of whose hands," says he, "have I received a bribe to blind my eyes therewith?" (1 *Sam.* xii. 3.) Implying thereby, that for a man to be gripe-handed and clear-sighted too was impossible. And again, "A gift," says the wise man, "destroyeth the heart:" (*Eccles.* vii. 7:) That is, (as we have shown already,) the judging and discerning powers of the soul. By all which we see, that in the judgment of some of the wisest and greatest men that ever lived, such as MOSES, SAMUEL, SOLOMON, covetousness baffles and befools the mind, blinds and confounds the reasoning faculty, and that not only in ordinary persons, but even in the ablest, the wisest, and most sagacious. And to give you one proof, above all, of the peculiar blinding power of this vice, there is not the most covetous wretch breathing, who does so much as see or perceive that he is covetous.

For the truth is, preach to the conscience of a covetous person (if he may be said to have any) with the "tongue of men and angels," and tell him of "the vanity of the world," of "treasure in heaven," and of the necessity of being "rich towards GOD," and liberal to his poor brother; and it is all but flat, insipid, and ridiculous stuff to him, who neither sees, nor feels, nor suffers any thing to pass into his heart but through his hands. You must preach to such a one of bargain and sale, profits and perquisites, principal and interest, use upon use; and if you can persuade him that godliness is gain in his own sense, perhaps you may do something with him; otherwise, though you edge every word you speak with reason and religion, evidence and demonstration, you shall never affect, nor touch, nor so much as reach his conscience; for it is kept sealed up in a bag under lock and key, and you cannot come at it.

And thus much for the Second base affection that blinds the mind of man, which is Covetousness: A thing directly contrary to the very spirit of Christianity, which is a free, a large, and an open spirit; a spirit open to GOD and man,

and always carrying charity in one hand and generosity in the other.

3. The Third and last vile affection which I shall mention (as having the same darkening effect upon the mind or conscience) is Ambition. For as covetousness dulls the mind by pressing it down too much below itself, so ambition dazzles it by lifting it up as much above itself; but both of them are sure to darken the light of it. For if you either look too intently down a deep precipice upon a thing at an extreme distance below you, or with the same earnestness fix your eye upon something at too great an height above you, in both cases you will find a vertigo or giddiness. And where there is a giddiness in the head, there will be always a mist before the eyes.

Pride, we know, (which is always cousin-german to ambition,) is commonly reckoned the fore-runner of a fall. It was the Devil's sin, and the Devil's ruin, and has been ever since the Devil's stratagem, who like an experienced wrestler, usually gives a man a lift, before he gives him a throw. But how does he do this? Why, by first blinding him with ambition; and when a man either cannot or will not mind the ground he stands upon, he is easily jostled down and thrust headlong into the next ditch. The truth is, in this case men seem to ascend to an high station, just as they use to leap down a great steep: In both cases they shut their eyes first, for in both the danger is very dreadful, and the way to venture upon it is not to see it.

Yea, so fatally does this towering, aspiring humour intoxicate and impose upon men's minds, that when the Devil stands bobbing and tantalizing their gaping hopes with some preferment in church or state, they shall do the basest, the vilest, and most odious things imaginable; and that, not only in defiance of conscience, but, which is yet more impudent and intolerable, shall even allege conscience itself as the very reason for the doing of them: And when they have done, shall wipe their mouths, and with as bold a front look the world in the face, as if they expected thanks

for such villanies, as a modest malefactor would scarce presume to expect a pardon for.

Let this therefore be fixed upon as a certain maxim, that ambition first blinds the conscience, and then leads the man whither it will, and that is in the direct course of it, to the Devil.

I know there are many more irregular and corrupt affections belonging to the mind of man, and all of them in their degree apt to darken and obscure the light of conscience. Such as are wrath and revenge, envy and malice, fear and despair, with many such others, even too many a great deal, to be crowded into one discourse. But the three fore-mentioned (which we have been treating of) are, doubtless, the most predominant, the most potent in their influence, and most pernicious in their effect, as answering to those three principal objects, which, of all others, do most absolutely command and domineer over the desires of men; - to wit, the pleasures of the world working upon their sensuality; the profits of the world upon their covetousness; and lastly, the honours of it upon their ambition. Which three powerful incentives, meeting with these three violent affections, are (as it were) the great trident in the tempter's hand, by which he strikes through the very hearts and souls of men; or as a mighty "three-fold cord," by which he first hampers and then draws the whole world after him, and that with such a rapid swing, such an irresistible fascination upon the understandings as well as appetites of men, that as GOD said heretofore, "Let there be light, and there was light," so this proud rival of his Creator, and overturner of the creation, is still saying in defiance of him, 'Let there be darkness,' and accordingly there is darkness; darkness upon the mind and reason, darkness upon the judgment and conscience of all mankind.

So that hell itself seems to be nothing else, but the Devil's finishing this his great work, and the consummation of that darkness in another world which he had so fatally begun in this.

And now, to sum up briefly the foregoing particulars,

you have heard of what vast and infinite moment it is to have a clear, impartial, and right-judging conscience; such an one as a man may reckon himself safe in the directions of, as of a guide that will always tell him truth, and truth with authority; and that the eye of conscience may be always thus quick and lively, let constant use be sure to keep it constantly open; and thereby ready and prepared to let in those heavenly beams, which are always streaming forth from GOD upon minds fitted to receive them.

And to this purpose let a man fly from every thing which may leave either a foulness or a bias upon it; for the first will blacken, and the other will distort it, and both be sure to darken it. Particularly let him dread every gross act of sin; for one great stab may as certainly and speedily destroy life as forty lesser wounds. Let him also carry a jealous eye over every growing habit of sin; for custom is an over-match to nature, and seldom conquered by grace; and, above all, let him keep aloof from all fellowship with any vicious and base affection; especially from all sensuality, which is not only the dirt, but the black dirt, which the Devil throws upon the souls of men: Accordingly, let him keep himself untouched with the hellish, unhallowed heats of lust, and the noisome steams and exhalations of intemperance, which never fail to leave a brutish dulness and infatuation behind them. Likewise, let him bear himself above that sordid and low thing, that utter contradiction to all greatness of mind, covetousness; let him disenslave himself from the pelf of the world, from that *amor sceleratus habendi*; for all love has something of blindness attending it, but the love of money especially. And lastly, let him learn so to look upon the honours, the pomp, and greatness of the world, as to look through them too. Fools, indeed, are apt to be blown up by them, and to sacrifice all for them; sometimes venturing their very heads, only to get a feather in their caps. But wise men, instead of looking above them, choose rather to look about them and within them, and by so doing, keep their eyes always in their heads, and maintain a noble clearness in one,

and steadiness in the other. These, I say, are some of those ways and methods by which this great and internal light, the judging faculty of conscience, may be preserved in its vigour and quickness. And to complete the foregoing directions by the addition of one word more; that we may the more surely prevent our affections from working too much upon our judgment, let us wisely beware of all such things as may work too strongly upon our affections.

“If the light that is in thee be darkness,” says our SAVIOUR, “how great must that darkness needs be!” That is, how fatal, how destructive! And therefore, I shall close up all with those other words of our SAVIOUR: “While you have the light, walk in the light;” so that the way to have it, (we see,) “is to walk in it.” (*John* xii.) That is, by the actions of a pious, innocent, well-governed life, to cherish, heighten, and improve it; for still so much innocence, so much light: And on the other side, to abhor and loathe whatsoever may any ways discourage and eclipse it; as every degree of vice assuredly will. And thus by continual feeding and trimming our lamps, we shall find that this blessed light within us will grow every day stronger and stronger, and flame out brighter and brighter, till at length, having led us through this vale of darkness and mortality, it shall bring us to those happy mansions where there is light and life for evermore.

SERMON VIII.

ON THE PROSPERITY OF THE WICKED.

PROVERBS i. 32.

The prosperity of fools shall destroy them.

IT IS a thing partly worth our wonder, partly our compassion, that what the greatest part of men are most passionately desirous of, that they are generally most unfit for: For they look upon things absolutely in themselves, without examining the suitableness of them to their own conditions; and so, at a distance, court that as an enjoyment, which, upon experience, they find a great calamity. And this peculiar ill property has folly, that it widens and enlarges men's desires, while it lessens their capacities: Like a dropsy, which still calls for drink, but not affording strength to digest it, puts an end to the drinker, but not the thirst.

As for the explication of the text, to tell you, that in the dialect of Scripture, but especially of this book of Proverbs, wicked men are called fools, and wickedness folly, as, on the contrary, that piety is still graced with the name of wisdom, would be as superfluous, as to attempt the proof of a self-evident principle, or to light a candle to the sun. By fools, therefore, are here represented all wicked and vicious persons: Such as turn their backs upon reason and religion, and wholly devoting themselves to sensuality, follow the sway and career of their corrupt affections.

The misery of which persons is from hence most manifest, that when God gives them what they most love, they perish in the embraces of it, are crushed to death under the heaps of gold, stifled with an overcoming plenty; like a

ship fetching rich commodities from a far country, but sinking by the weight of them in its return. Since, therefore, wicked men are so strangely out in the calculating of their own interest, and account nothing happiness, but what brings up death and destruction in the rear of it; and since prosperity is yet, in itself, a real blessing, though to them it becomes a mischief, and determines in a curse; it concerns us to look into the reason of this strange event, and to examine how it comes to pass, that “the prosperity of fools destroys them.”

The reasons of it, I conceive, may be these three:—I. Because every foolish or vicious person is either ignorant or regardless of the proper ends and uses, for which God designs prosperity.—II. Because prosperity (as the nature of man now stands) has a peculiar force and fitness to abate men’s virtues, and to heighten their corruptions.—III. And Lastly, Because it directly indisposes them to the proper means of amendment and recovery.

I, And First, One reason why vicious persons miscarry by prosperity, is, because every such person is either ignorant or regardless of the proper ends and uses for which God ordains and designs it. Which ends are these:—

1. To try and discover what is in a man. All trial is properly inquiry, and inquiry is an endeavour after the knowledge of a thing, as yet unknown; and consequently, in strictness of speech, God who knows all things, and can be ignorant of nothing, cannot be said *to try*, any more than he can be said *to inquire*. But God, while he speaks to men, is often pleased to speak after the manner of men; and the reason of this is not only his condescension to our capacities, but because, in many actions, God behaves himself with some analogy to the actings of men. And therefore, because God sometimes sets those things before men, that have in them a fitness to draw forth and discover what is in their heart, as inquisitive persons do, who have a mind to pry into the thoughts and actions of their neighbour. He is, upon this account, said *to try* or *to inquire*, though,

in truth, by so doing, God designs not to inform himself, but the person whom he *tries*, and give both him and the world a view of his temper and disposition.

For the world is ignorant of men, till occasion gives them power to turn their insides outward, and to show themselves. So that what is said of an office, may be also said of prosperity and a fortune, that it does *indicare virum*, discover what the man is, and what metal his heart is made of. We see a slave, perhaps, cringe, and sneak, and humble himself; but do we therefore presently think that we see his nature in his behaviour? No, we may find ourselves much mistaken; for nobody knows, in case Providence should think fit to smile upon such an one, and (as it were) to launch him forth into a deep and a wide fortune, how quickly he would be another man, assume another spirit, and grow insolent, imperious, and insufferable.

Nor is this a mystery hid only from the eyes of the world round about a man, but sometimes also even from himself; for he seldom knows his own heart so perfectly, as to be able to give a certain account of the future disposition and inclination of it, when placed under different states and conditions of life. He that has been bred poor, and grown up in a cottage, knows not how his spirits would move, and his blood rise, should he come to handle full bags, to see splendid attendances, and to eat, drink, and sleep in state. Yet, no doubt, but by such great unlikely changes, as also by lower degrees of affluence, Providence designs to sift, and search, and give the world some experience of the make and bent of men's minds.

But now the vicious person flies only upon the bulk and matter of the gift, and considers not that the giver has a design upon him; the consideration of which would naturally make men cautious and circumspect in their behaviour: For surely it is not an ordinary degree of intemperance, that would prompt a man to drink intemperately before those, who he knows gave him his freedom, only to try whether he would use it to excess or no. God gave SAUL a rich booty upon the conquest of AMALEK, to try

whether he would prefer real obedience before pretended sacrifice, and the performing of a command before flying upon the spoil: But his ignorance of the use to which GOD designed that prosperous event, made him let loose the reins of his folly and his covetousness, even to the blasting of his crown, and the taking the sceptre from his family: "Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD," said SAMUEL to him, "he hath also rejected thee from being King:" (1 Sam. xv. 23.) So that this was the effect of his misunderstood success, he conquered AMALEK, but destroyed himself.

2. The Second end and design of GOD in giving prosperity, and of which all wicked persons are either ignorant or regardless, is to encourage them in a constant, humble expression of their gratitude to the bounty of their Maker, who deals such rich and plentiful provisions to his undeserving creatures. GOD would have every temporal blessing raise that question in the heart, "LORD, what is man, that thou visitest him? or the son of man, that thou so regardest him?" He never sends the pleasures of the spring, nor the plenties of the harvest, to surfeit, but to oblige the sons of men; and the very fruits of the earth are intended as arguments to carry their thoughts to heaven.

But the wicked and sensual part of the world are only concerned to find scope and room enough to wallow in; if they can but have it, whence they have it troubles not their thoughts; saying grace is no part of their meal; they feed and grovel like swine under an oak, filling themselves with the mast, but never so much as looking up, either to the boughs that bore, or the hands that shook it down. This is their temper and deportment in the midst of all their enjoyments. But it is far from reaching the purposes of the great Governor of the world, who makes it not his care to gratify the brutishness and stupidity of evil persons. He will not be their Purveyor only, but their Instructor also, and see them *taught*, as well as *fed* by his liberality.

3. The Third end that GOD gives men prosperity for,

and of which wicked persons take no notice, is to make them helpful to society. No man holds the abundance of wealth, power, and honour, that Heaven has blessed him with, as a proprietor, but as a steward, as the trustee of Providence, to use and dispense it for the good of those whom he converses with. For does any one think, that the Divine Providence concerns itself to lift him up to a station of power, only to insult and domineer over those who are round about him ; and to show the world how able he is to do a mischief or a shrewd turn ? No, GOD deposits (and he does but deposit) a power in his hand, to encourage virtue, and to relieve oppressed innocence ; and, in a word, to act as his deputy, and as GOD himself would do, should he be pleased to act immediately in affairs here below.

God bids a great and rich person rise and shine, as he bids the sun ; that is, not for himself, but for the necessities of the world. And none is so honourable in his own person, as he who is helpful to others. When GOD makes a man wealthy and potent, he passes a double obligation upon him ; one, that he gives him riches ; the other, that he gives him an opportunity of exercising a great virtue : For surely, if GOD shall be pleased to make me his almoner, and the conduit by which his goodness may descend upon my distressed neighbour ; though the charity be personally mine, yet both of us have cause to thank GOD for it, I that I can be virtuous, and he that he is relieved.

But the wicked worldly person looks no farther than himself ; his charity *ends* at home, where it should only *begin*. He thinks that Providence fills his purse and his barns, only to pamper his own carcase, to invite him to take his ease and his fill, that is, to serve his base appetites with all the occasions of sin. It is not his business to do good, but only to enjoy it, and to enjoy it so as to lessen it by monopolizing and confining it. Whereupon, being ignorant of the purpose, it is no wonder if he also abuses the bounty of Providence, and so perverts it to “ his own destruction.”

II. The Second general reason, why “ the prosperity

of fools proves destructive to them," is, Because prosperity (as the nature of man now stands) has a peculiar force and fitness to abate men's virtues, and to heighten their corruptions.

1. And, First, For its abating their virtues. Virtue, of any sort whatsoever, is a plant that grows upon no ground, but such an one as is frequently tilled and cultivated with the severest labour. But what a stranger is toil and labour to a great fortune! Persons possessed of this judge themselves to have actually all that for which labour can be rational: For men usually labour to be rich, great, and eminent. And these are born to all this, as to an inheritance. They are at the top of the hill already; so that while others are climbing and panting to get up, they have nothing else to do, but to lie down and sun themselves, and at their own ease be spectators of other men's labours.

But it is poverty and hardship that has made the most famed commanders, the fittest persons for business, the most expert statesmen and the greatest philosophers. For that has first pushed them on upon the account of necessity, which being satisfied they have aimed a step higher at convenience; and so being at length inured to a course of virtuous and generous sedulity, pleasure has continued that which necessity first began; till their endeavours have been crowned with eminence, mastership, and perfection in the way they have been engaged in.

But would the young effeminate gallant, that never knew what it was to want his will, that every day clothes himself with the riches, and swims in the delights of the world; would he, I say, choose to rise out of his soft bed at midnight, to begin an hard and a long march, to engage in a crabbed study, or to follow some tedious perplexed business? No, he will have his servants, and the sun itself rise before him; when his breakfast is ready, he will make himself ready too, unless perhaps sometimes his hounds and his huntsmen break his sleep, and so make him early in order to his being idle.

Hence we observe so many great families to decay and

moulder away through the debauchery and sottishness of the heir: The reason of which is, that the possession of an estate does not prompt men to those severe and virtuous practices, by which it was first acquired. The grand-child perhaps games, and drinks, and whores himself out of those fair lands, manors, and mansions, which his glorious ancestors had fought or studied themselves into, which they had got by preserving their country against an invasion, by facing an enemy in the field, hungry and thirsty, early and late, by preferring a brave action before a sound sleep, though nature might never so much require it.

When the success and courage of the Romans had made them masters of the wealth and pleasures of all the conquered nations round about them, we see how quickly the edge of their valour was dulled, and the rigorous honesty of their morals dissolved and melted away with those delights which too easily circumvent and overcome the hearts of men: So that instead of the CAMILLI, the FABRICII, the SCIPIOS, and such like propagators of the growing greatness of the Roman empire, as soon as the bulk of it grew vast and unlimited upon the reign of AUGUSTUS CÆSAR, we find a degenerate race of CALIGULAS, NEROS, and VITELLIUSES, and of other inferior sycophants and flatterers, who neither knew nor affected any other way of making themselves considerable, but by a servile adoring of the vices and follies of great ones above them, and a base, treacherous informing against virtuous and brave persons about them.

The whole business that was carried on with such noise and eagerness in that great city, then the Empress of the Western World, was nothing else but to build magnificently, to feed luxuriously, to frequent sports and theatres, and, in a word, to flatter and be flattered; the effects of too full and unwieldy prosperity. But surely they could not have had leisure to think upon their mullets, their Lucrinian oysters, their phœnecoptors, and the like; they could not have made a rendezvous of all the elements at their table every day, in such a prodigious variety of meats

and drinks; they could not, I say, have thus intended these things, had the Gauls been besieging their Capitol, or HANNIBAL at the head of his Carthaginian army ‘rapping at their doors.’ This would quickly have turned their spits into swords, and whet their teeth too against their enemies. But when peace, ease and plenty took away these whetstones of courage, they insensibly slid into the Asiatic softness, and were intent upon nothing but their cooks, and their ragouts, their fine attendants and unusual habits; so that the Roman genius was (as the English seems to be now) even lost and stifled, and the conquerors themselves transformed into the guise and garb of the conquered, till by degrees the empire shrivelled and pined away; and from such a surfeit of immoderate prosperity, passed at length into a final consumption.

Nor is this strange, if we consider man’s nature, and reflect upon the great impotence and difficulty that it finds in advancing into the ways of virtue merely by itself, without some collateral aids and assistances, and such helps as shall smooth the way before it, by removing all hinderances and impediments. For virtue, as it first lies in the heart of man, is but as a little spark, which may indeed be blown into a flame; it has that innate force in it, that being cherished and furthered in its course, the least particle falling from a candle may climb the top of palaces, waste a city, and consume a neighbourhood. But then the suitability of the fuel, and the wind and the air, must conspire with its endeavours: This is the breath that must enliven and fan, and bear it up, till it becomes mighty and victorious. Otherwise, do we think that that little thing, that falling upon thatch, or a stack of corn, prevails so marvellously, could exert its strength and its flames, its terror and its rage falling into the dew or the dust? There it is presently checked, and left to its own little bulk to preserve itself; which, meeting with no catching matter, presently expires and dies, and becomes weak and insignificant.

In like manner, let us suppose a man, according to his natural frame and temper, addicted to modesty and temper-

rance, to virtuous and sober courses. Here is indeed something improvable into a bright and a noble perfection; God has kindled the spark, sown the seed, and we see the first lineaments of a JOSEPH or a FABRICIUS: But now has this little embryo strength enough to thrust itself into the world? To hold up its head, and to maintain its course to a perfect maturity, against all the assaults and batteries of intemperance; all the snares and trepans that common life lays in its way to extinguish and suppress it? Can it abstain in the midst of all the importunities and opportunities of sensuality, without being confirmed and disciplined by long hardships, severe abridgments, and the rules of virtue frequently inculcated and carefully pressed? No; we shall quickly find those hopeful beginnings dashed and swallowed by such ruining delights. Prosperity is but a bad nurse to virtue; a nurse which is like to starve it in its infancy, and to spoil it in growth.

III. I come now in the next place to show, that as it has such an aptness to lessen and abate virtue, so it has a peculiar force also to heighten and inflame men's corruptions.

Nothing shall more effectually betray the heart into a love of sin, and a loathing of holiness, than an ill-managed prosperity. It is like some meats, the more luscious so much the more dangerous. Prosperity and ease upon an unsanctified, impure heart, is like the sunbeams upon a dunghill; it raises many filthy, noisome exhalations. The same soldiers, who in hard service, and in the battle, are in perfect subjection to their leaders, in peace and luxury are apt to mutiny and rebel. That corrupt affection which has lain, as it were, dead and frozen in the midst of distracting businesses, or under adversity, when the sun of prosperity has shined upon it, then, like a snake, presently recovers its former strength and venom. Vice must be caressed and smiled upon, that it may thrive and sting. It is starved by poverty: It droops under the frowns of fortune, and pines away upon bread and water. But when the channels of plenty run high, and every appetite is plied with abundance and variety, then the inbred corruption of the heart

shows itself pampered and insolent, too unruly for discipline and too big for correction.

Which will appear the better by considering those vices, which more particularly receive improvement by prosperity.

1. And the First is Pride. Who almost is there, whose heart does not swell with his bag? And whose thoughts do not follow the proportions of his condition? What difference has been seen in the same man poor and preferred? His mind, like a mushroom, has shot up in a night. His business is first to forget himself, and then his friends. When the sun shines, then the peacock displays his train.

We know when HEZEKIAH'S treasuries were full, his armories replenished, and the pomp of his court rich and splendid, how his heart was lifted up, and what vaunts he made of all to the Babylonish Ambassadors. (*Isa.* xxix. 2.) Though in the end, as most proud fools do, he smarted for his ostentation. See NEBUCHADNEZZAR also strutting himself upon the survey of that mass of riches and settled grandeur that Providence had blessed his court with. It swelled his heart, till it broke out at his mouth in that rhodomontade, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the glory of my majesty?" (*Dan.* iv. 30.) Now, that prosperity, by fomenting a man's pride, lays a certain train for his ruin, will easily be acknowledged by him who either from Scripture or experience shall learn what a spite Providence constantly owes the proud person. He is the very eye-sore of Heaven; and GOD even looks upon his own supremacy as concerned to abase him.

2. Another sin that is apt to receive increase and growth from prosperity, is Luxury and Uncleaness. Sodom "was a place watered like the garden of God." (*Gen.* xiii. 10.) "There was in it fulness of bread," (*Ezek.* xvi. 49,) and a redundant fruition of all things. This was the condition of Sodom; and what the sin of it was, and the dismal consequence of that sin, is too well known. The Israelites committing fornication with the daughters of Moab, which

reaped down so many thousands of them at once, was introduced with feasting and dancing, and all the gaieties and festivities of a prosperous, triumphing people. We read of nothing like adultery in a persecuted DAVID in the wilderness; he fled here and there like a chased roe upon the mountains: But when the delicacies of the court softened and ungirded his spirit, when he drowsed upon his couch, and surined himself upon the leads of his palace; then it was that this great hero fell by a glance, and buried his glories in his neighbour's bed; gaining to his name a lasting slur, and to his conscience a fearful wound.

As SOLOMON says of a man surprised with surfeit and intemperance, we may say of every foolish man immersed in prosperity, "That his eyes shall look upon strange women, and his heart shall utter perverse things." It is a tempting thing for the fool to be gadding abroad in a fair day. DINAH knows not, but the snare may be laid for her, and she return with a rape upon her honour, baffled, and deflowered, and robbed of the crown of her virginity. LOT's daughters revelled and banqueted their father into incest.

The unclean Devil haunts the families of the rich, the gallant, and the high livers; and there is nothing but the wisdom from above which descends upon strict, humble, and praying persons, that can preserve the soul pure and sound in the killing neighbourhood of such a contagion.

3. A Third sin that prosperity inclines the corrupt heart of man to, is Neglect of GOD in the duties of religion. Those who lie soft and warm in a rich estate, seldom come to heat themselves at the altar. It is a poor fervour that arises from devotion, in comparison of that which sparkles from the generous draughts, and the festival fare which attend the tables of the wealthy and the great. Such men are (as they think) so happy, that they have no leisure to be holy. They look upon prayer as the work of the poor and the solitary, and such as have nothing to spend but their time and themselves. If JESHURUN wax fat, it is ten to one but he will kick against him who made himso.

And now, I suppose, a reflection upon the premises cannot but press every serious person with a consideration of the ticklish estate he stands in, while the favours of Providence are pleased to breathe upon him in those gentle gales. No man is wholly out of the danger which we have been discoursing of: For every man has so much of folly in him, as he has of sin; and therefore he must know, that his foot is not so steady, but it may slip and slide in the oily paths of prosperity.

The treachery and weakness of his own heart may betray and insensibly bewitch him into the love and liking of a fawning vice. What the Prophet says of wine and music, may be also said of prosperity, whose intoxications are not at all less, that it “steals away the heart.” The man shall find that his heart is gone, though he perceives not when it goes.

All the reason of this is, because it is natural for the soul in time of prosperity to be more careless and unbent; and consequently, not keeping so narrow a watch over itself, is more exposed to the invasions and arts of its industrious enemy. Upon which account, the wise and the cautious will look upon the most promising season of prosperity with a doubtful and a suspicious eye; as bewareing, lest while it offers a kiss to the lips, it brings a javelin for the side; many hearts have been thus melted, that could never have been broken. This also may be a full, though a sad argument to allay the foolish envy, with which some are apt to look upon men of great and flourishing estates at a distance: For how do they know, that what they make the object of their envy, is not a fitter object for their pity? And that this glistening person, so much admired by them, is not now preparing for his ruin, and fattening for the slaughters of eternity? That he does not eat his bane, and carouse his poison? The poor man perhaps is cursed into all his greatness and prosperity. Providence has put it as a sword into his hand, for the wounding and destroying of his own soul: For he knows not how to use any of these things; and so has only this advantage, that he is

damned in state, and goes to hell with more ease, more flourish, and magnificence than other men.

And thus much for the Second general reason, why the prosperity of fools proves fatal and destructive to them. I come now to the Third and last, which is, because prosperity directly indisposes men to the proper means of their amendment and recovery.

1. As First, It renders them utterly averse from receiving counsel and admonition: "I spake to thee in thy prosperity, and thou saidst, I will not hear." (*Jer.* xxii. 21.) The ear is wanton, and ungoverned, and the heart insolent and obdurate, till one is pierced, and the other made tender by affliction. Prosperity leaves a kind of dulness and lethargy upon the spirit; so that the still voice of God will not awaken a man, but he must thunder and lighten about his ears, before he will be brought to take notice that God speaks to him. All the divine threatenings and reprehensions beat upon such an one, but as stubble upon a brass wall; the man and his vice stand firm, unshaken, and unconcerned; he presumes that the course of his affairs will proceed always as it does, smoothly, and without interruption: "That to-morrow will be as to day, and much more abundant." It is natural for men in a prosperous condition neither to love nor suspect a change.

But besides, prosperity does not only shut the earth against counsel, by reason of the dulness that it leaves upon the senses, but also upon the account of that arrogance and untutored haughtiness that it brings upon the mind; which of all other qualities chiefly stops the entrance of advice, by making a man look upon himself as too great and too wise, to admit of the assistances of another's wisdom. The richest man will still think himself the wisest man: And where there is fortune, there needs no advice.

2. Much prosperity utterly unfits such persons for the sharp trials of adversity: Which yet God uses as the most proper and sovereign means to correct and reduce a soul grown vain and extravagant, by a long uninterrupted felicity. But an unsanctified, unregenerate person, passing

into so great an alteration of estate, is like a man in a sweat entering into a river, or throwing himself into the snow; he is presently struck to the heart, he languishes, and meets with certain death in the change. His heart is too effeminate and weak to contest with want and hardship, and the killing misery of having been happy heretofore. For in this condition, he certainly misbehaves himself one of these two ways :

(1.) He either faints and desponds, and parts with his hope together with his possessions: He has neither confidence in Providence, nor substance in himself, to bear him out, and buoy up his sinking spirit, when storms and showers of an adverse fortune shall descend, and beat upon him, and shake in pieces the pitiful fabric of his earthly comforts. The earth he treads upon is his sole joy and inheritance; and that which supports his feet, must support his heart also; otherwise he cannot, like *JOB*, rest upon that Providence that places him upon a dunghill.

(2.) Such a person, if he does not faint and sink in adversity, then on the contrary he will murmur and tumultuate, and blaspheme the *GOD* that afflicts him. A bold and a stubborn spirit naturally throws out its malignity this way. It will make a man die cursing and raving, and even breathe his last in a blasphemy. No man knows how high the corruption of some natures will work and foam, being provoked and exasperated by affliction.

Having thus shown the reason why prosperity becomes destructive to some persons; surely it is now but rational, in some brief directions, to show how it may become otherwise; and that is, in one word, by altering the quality of the subject. Prosperity, I showed, was destructive to fools; and therefore the only way for a man not to find it destructive, is for him not to be a fool; and this he may avoid by a pious observance of these following rules: As,

1. Let him seriously consider upon what weak hinges his prosperity and felicity hangs. Perhaps the cross-falling of a little accident, the omission of a ceremony, or the misplacing of a circumstance, may determine all his fortunes

for ever : Or perhaps his whole interest, his possessions, and his hopes too, may live by the breath of another who may breathe his last to-morrow. And shall a man forget God and eternity for that which cannot secure him the reversion of a day's happiness? Can any favourite bear himself high and insolent upon the stock of the largest fortune imaginable, who has read the story of WOLSEY or SEJANUS? Not only the death, but the honour of his Prince or patron may divest him of all his glories, and send him stripped and naked to his long rest. How quickly is the sun overcast, and how often does he set in a cloud, and that cloud break in a storm! He that well considers this, will account it a surer livelihood to depend upon the sweat of his own brow, than the favour of another man's. And even while it is his fortune to enjoy it, he will be far from confidence; confidence, which is the downfall of a man's happiness, and a traitor to him in all his concerns; for still it is the confident person who is deceived.

2. Let a man consider, how little he is bettered by prosperity as to those perfections which are chiefly valuable. All the wealth of both the Indies cannot add one cubit to the stature either of his body or his mind. It can neither better his health, advance his intellectuals, nor refine his morals. We see those languish and die, who command the physic and physicians of a whole kingdom. And some are dunces in the midst of libraries, dull and sottish in the very bosom of Athens; and far from wisdom, though they lord it over the wise.

For does he, who was once both poor and ignorant, find his notions or his manners any thing improved, because perhaps his friend or father died and left him rich? Did his ignorance expire with the other's life? Or does he understand one proposition in philosophy, one mystery in his profession at all the more, for his keeping a bailiff or a steward? As great and as good a landlord as he is, may he not for all this have an empty room yet to let? And that such an one as is like to continue empty upon his hands (or

rather head) for ever? If so, surely then none has cause to value himself upon that which is equally incident to the worst and weakest of men.

And Lastly, Let a man correct the gaieties and wanderings of his spirit, by the severe duties of mortification. “ Let him (as DAVID says) mingle his drink with weeping,” and dash his wine with such water. Let him effect that upon himself by fasting and abstinence, which GOD would bring others to by penury and want. And by so doing, he shall disenslave and redeem his soul from a captivity to the things he enjoys, and so make himself lord, as well as possessor of what he has. For repentance supplies the disciplines of adversity; and abstinence makes affliction needless, by really compassing the design of it upon the nobler account of choice: The scarceness of some meals will sanctify the plenty of others.

The wisest persons in the world have often abridged themselves in the midst of their greatest affluence, and given bounds to their appetites, while they felt none in their fortunes. And that Prince who wore sackcloth under his purple, wore the livery of virtue, as well as the badge of sovereignty; and was resolved to be good, in spite of all his greatness.

Many other considerations may be added, and these farther improved. But to sum up all in short; since folly is so bound up in the heart of man, and since the fool in his best, that is in his most prosperous condition, stands tottering upon the very brink of destruction, surely the great use of the whole foregoing discourse should be to remind us in all our prayers, not so much to solicit GOD for any temporal enjoyment, as for an heart that may fit us for it; and that GOD would be the Chooser, as well as the Giver of our portion in this world; who alone is able to suit and sanctify our condition to us, and us to our condition.

SERMON IX.

ON THE RESTORATION OF KING CHARLES II.

PREACHED AT WESTMINSTER-ABBEY, ON THE 29TH OF
MAY, 1672.

ROMANS ii. 33, latter part.

*How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past
finding out!*

THAT which first brought a present guilt, and entailed a future curse upon mankind, was an inordinate desire of knowledge. And from the fall of ADAM to this very day, this fatal itch has stuck so close to our nature, that every one of his succeeding race is infinitely eager, inquisitive, and desirous to know and judge, where he is called only to adore, and to obey. By which we see, that it was this restless appetite of knowing, which made the earliest and boldest encroachment upon the divine prerogative; setting man up not only as a rebel, but also as a rival to his Maker; and from behaving himself as his creature, encouraging him to become his competitor. And could there be an higher and more direct defiance of the ALMIGHTY, under the peculiar character of LORD and Governor of the universe, than a pitiful, short-sighted creature, prying into the reserves of heaven; and one who was but dust in his constitution, and of a day's standing at most, aspiring to an equality with his Creator in one of his divinest perfections? All know, that even in human governments, there is hardly any one of them, but has its *Arcana imperii*, its hidden rules and maxims, which the subjects of it must by no means be acquainted with, but

yield to their force, without examining their contrivance. And if so, how much a more unpardonable absurdity, as well as insolence, must it needs be for those, who commonly stand at so great a distance, even from the little mysteries of human policies, to say, like their grand exemplar and counsellor Lucifer, "I will ascend and look into the secrets of the most High," rip up and unravel all the designs and arts of Providence in the government of the world; as if (forsooth) they were of the cabinet to the ALMIGHTY, were privy to all his decrees, and, in a word, held intelligence with his omniscience. For no less than all this was or could be implied in our first parents' affecting to be as Gods; the main thing, which, by advice of the serpent, they were then so set upon, and so furiously desirous of.

Whereas, on the contrary, that great repository of all truth and wisdom, the Scripture, is in nothing more full and frequent, than in representing the infinite transcendency of GOD's ways and actings above all created intellectuals. "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me," says DAVID. (*Psal.* cxxxviii. 6.) "And thy judgments are a great deep." (*Psal.* xxxvi. 6.) And GOD "has put darkness under his feet." (*Psal.* xviii. 9.) And "his ways are in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known." (*Psal.* lxxvii. 19.) In all which passages could any thing be expressed with more life and emphasis? For he who treads upon the waters leaves no impression; and he who walks in the dark falls under no inspection. There is still a cloud, a thick cloud, about GOD's greatest and most important works; and a cloud (we know) is both high and dark, it surpasses our reach, and determines our sight; we may look upon it, but it is impossible for us to look through it. In a word, if we consult either the reports of Scripture, or of our own experience, about the wonderful, amazing events of Providence, especially in the setting up, or pulling down of Kings and kingdoms, transplanting churches, destroying nations, and the like; we shall find the result of our closest reasonings, and most

exact inquiries, concluding in an humble non-plus, and silent submission to the over-powering truth of this exclamation of our Apostle, “ How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out.”

The glorious subject of this day’s commemoration, is an eminent instance of the methods of Providence surpassing all human apprehension : And as it is a very great one itself, so was it brought forth by a numerous train of other providential passages altogether as great, whether we respect the quality of the actions themselves, or the strangeness of the effects. My business, therefore, shall be, from so notable a theme, to read men a lecture of humility ; and that in a case, in which they seldom do (and yet have all the reason in the world to) show it ; to wit, in taking a due estimate of the proceedings of Almighty God, especially in his winding and turning about the great affairs of states and nations ; and therein to demonstrate, what weak, purblind expositors we are of what is above us ; how unfit to arraign and pass sentence upon that Providence, that overrules us in all our concerns ; and, in a word, to turn interpreters, where we understand not the original. It is, no doubt, an easy matter to gaze upon the surface and outside of things. But few, who see the hand of the clock or dial, can give a reason of its motion ; nor can the case of the watch, (though never so finely wrought,) be any rule to judge of the artificial composure, and exact order of the work within.

Now, he who would pass a clear, firm, and thorough judgment upon any action, must be able to give an account of these two things belonging to it, viz. 1. From what cause or reason it proceeds. 2. To what event or issue it tends. In both which respects I shall demonstrate, that the sublimest wisdom of man is an incompetent judge of the ways of God.

1. And, First, For the reason or cause of them. Men are so far from judging rightly of the passages of Providence, that the causes they assign of them are for the most part false, but always imperfect.

(1.) And, First, For the false ones; these (or some of them at least) are such as follow:—

[1.] That the prosperous in this life are the proper objects of God's love, and the calamitous of his hatred: A blessed doctrine doubtless, and exactly according to that of MAHOMET, even the very marrow and spirit of the Alcoran, and the prime article, or rather sum total of the Ottoman Divinity. But such, we see, is the natural aptness of men to bring down God to their own measures, and to ascribe only those methods to him, which they first transcribe and copy from themselves. For they know well enough, how they treat one another, and that all the hostility of a man's actions pre-supposes and results from a much greater in his affections; so that the hand is never lifted up to strike, but as it is commanded by the heart that hates. And accordingly, let any notable calamity befall any one, (and especially if maligned by us,) and then how naturally do there start up, in the minds of such Mahometan Christians, such reasonings as these: Can so beneficent a being as God be imagined to torment in love? To kill with kindness? Or, does the noise of his blows, and the sounding of his bowels, speak the same thing? No, by no means; and therefore, when any one chances to be cut off by the stroke of some severe Providence, no sooner has God done execution, but the malice of men presently passes sentence, and, by a preposterous proceeding, the man is first executed, and afterwards condemned; and so dies not for being a criminal, but passes for a criminal for being put to death.

Many remarkable instances of which have been in the late times of confusion, in direct contradiction to the SPIRIT of God himself, who positively, in *Eccles.* ix. 1, assures us, that “no man knows either love or hatred, by all that is before him;” nor consequently can conclude himself in favour, or out of favour with Almighty God, by any thing befalling him in this life; indeed, no more than he can read the future estate of his soul in the line of his face, or the constitution of his body in the colour of his clothes.

For should the quality of a man's condition here determine the happiness or misery of it hereafter, no doubt LAZARUS would have been in the flames, and the rich man in ABRAHAM's bosom. But the next life will open us a very different scene from what we see in this; and show us quite another face of things and persons from that which dazzles and deludes men's eyes at present; it being the signal and peculiar glory of the day of judgment, that it be the great day of distinction, as well as retribution. But in the mean time, does not common experience undeniably convince us, that GOD sometimes curses men, even with prosperity, confounds them in the very answer of their prayers, and (as it were) choaks them with their own petitions? Does he not, as he did formerly to the Israelites, at the same time put flesh into their craving mouths, and send leanness withal into their souls? And is there any thing more usually practised in the world, than for men to feast their mortal enemies? Persons, whom they equally hate, and are hated by? While on the other side, as a father chides, frowns upon and lashes the child whom he dearly loves, (his bowels all the time yearning, while his hand is striking,) so how common is it in the methods of divine love, for GOD to cast his JOBS upon dunghills, to banish into wildernesses, and to sell his most beloved JOSEPHS into slavery; and, in a word, to discipline and fit him for himself, by all that is harsh and terrible to human nature! and still there is nothing but love and designs of mercy at the bottom of all this. "Thy rod and thy staff," says DAVID, "comfort me;" (*Psal.* xxxiii. 4;) that is with his staff he corrects, but still with both he comforts.

Now though I think it sufficiently manifest to the impartial and judicious, that neither the suffering of our Prince, nor his loyal subjects, were any arguments of GOD's hatred of them; yet, I hope, his restoration was an effect of GOD's love to those poor harassed kingdoms; I say, I hope so: For our great ingratitude, sensuality, and raging impiety, ever since our deliverance, makes me far from being confident, that what was in itself incomparably the greatest of

earthly blessings, may not be made the fatal means to sink us lower, and damn us deeper, than any sins committed by us under the rod of the usurpers could have done. This is certain, that GOD may outwardly deliver us: He may turn our very table into a snare. And I know no certain mark whereby we may infallibly conclude, that GOD did the glorious work, which we celebrate this day, out of love to us, but only, that we become holier and better by it than before. But if it should prove otherwise, will it not rank us with the hardened and incorrigible, whose infidelity such miracles could not melt down? And having, upon both accounts, done so much for us to so little purpose, resolve never to do more? And thus much for the first false cause, commonly assigned of the dealings of GOD's providence, namely, GOD's love or hatred of the persons upon whom they pass.

[2.] But another false cause, from which men derive the different proceedings of Providence, is the different merit of the persons so differently treated by it: And from hence still supposing, that the good only must prosper, and the bad suffer; they accordingly, from men's prosperity, conclude their innocence, as from their sufferings their guilt. And from this topic it was, that JOB's friends argued; and that with such assurance, that one would have thought, they took all they said for demonstration; but how falsely and rashly they did so, appears from the verdict passed by GOD himself upon the whole matter, both rejecting their persons, and condemning their reasonings, by a severe remark upon the presumption of the one, and the inconsequence of the other. For where the rule is crooked, how can the line drawn by it be straight? It is most true, that there is no man, (our blessed SAVIOUR only excepted,) who either does, or ever did suffer, but was more or less a sinner, before he was a sufferer: And consequently, that there is ground enough in every man, to make GOD's infliction of the greatest evil upon him just; and yet I affirm, that a man's sin is not always the reason of his sufferings, though sinfulness be still the qualification of his person: But the reason of

those must be fetched from some other cause. For the better understanding of which, we must observe, that GOD may, and sometimes actually does, deal with men under a double capacity or relation ; viz. 1. As an absolute LORD ; and 2. As a Judge or a Governor. The rule, which he proceeds by as an absolute LORD, is his sovereign will and pleasure ; and the rule which he acts by as Judge, is his justice and his law. Now, though under the former notion GOD does not properly exercise or exert his justice, yet he cannot therefore be said to do any thing unjustly ; it being one thing for GOD barely not to exercise an attribute in such or such a particular action, and another to oppose, or do any thing contrary to the said attribute. The former of which is usual, and fairly agreeable with the economy of his attributes, but the latter is impossible.

Yet in the various dispensations befalling the sons of men, we find, how prone the world has been all along, to state the different usages of men's persons upon the difference of their deserts. As when PILATE mingled the Galileans' blood with their sacrifices, there were enough ready to conclude those poor Galileans sinners above all other Galileans, for their suffering such things ; but our SAVIOUR quickly reverses the sentence, and assures them, that the consequence was by no means good. (*Luke* xiii. 1, 2.) And on the other hand, the Israelites, from the many miraculous works done for them, and blessings heaped upon them by the Divine bounty, concluded themselves holier and more righteous than all the nations about them ; but we find both MOSES in *Deut.* ix., and the Psalmist in *Psalms* lxxviii., roundly telling them, that there was no such thing, but that they were a " rebellious, ungrateful, stiff-necked people" from the very first : And for aught appears from history to the contrary, they have continued so ever since. And to proceed farther, did not the righteous Providence of GOD bring down most of the potentates of the Eastern World under the feet of that monster of tyranny and idolatry, NEBUCHADNEZZAR ; and that while he was actually reigning in his sins, with as high an hand, as he did or

could do over any of those poor kingdoms, who had been conquered or enslaved by him? In like manner, did not the same Providence make most of the crowns and sceptres of the earth bend to the Roman yoke? the greatness of which empire was certainly founded upon as much injustice, rapine, and violence, as could well be practised by men; though still couched and carried on under the highest pretence of justice and honour, (set off with the greatest show of gravity besides,) even while the said pretences in the sight of the whole world were impudently outfaced by the quite contrary practices; as appears in particular from that scandalous case of the Mamertines, and the assistance they gave those thieves and murderers, against all the laws of nations and humanity itself, only to serve a present interest against the Carthaginians. And lastly, what a torrent of success attended the Turks, till they had overrun most of the earth, and the whole Greek Church and empire? And yet the notorious governing qualities, which these barbarians acted, and grew up by, both in war and peace, were the height of cruelty and treachery; qualities of all other the most abhorred by God and man, and such as we may be sure could never induce God to abandon so great a part of Christendom (which yet in his judgment he has actually done) to so base a people, and so false a religion. And now, notwithstanding such flagrant examples of thriving impiety, carrying all before it, we see how apt the world is still to make Providence steer by man's merit. And as we have instances of this in nations, so we want not the like in particular persons.

But should Providence at any time strip a man of his estate, his honour, or high place, must this presently stamp him a castaway; or rather teach us, that God who perfectly knew the temper and circumstances of the man, knew also that a mean and a low condition would place him nearer to heaven (as much a paradox as it may seem) than the highest and most magnificent? Another man perhaps is snatched away by a sudden, or untimely, a disastrous, or ignominious death; but must I therefore pass sentence upon him

out of DANIEL, or the *Revelations*, or charge him with some secret guilt, as the cause of it; as if the fever or an apoplexy were not sufficient, without the concurring plague and poison of a malicious tongue, to send a man packing out of this world; or, as if any death could be so violent, or distemper so mortal and malign, but that it may, and does carry some into a better world, as well as others into a worse? But be the course of Providence never so unaccountable, and contrary to my notions, ought I to descant upon any act of it, while I am wholly ignorant of the purpose which directed it? Or shall I confess the ways of God to be “unsearchable, and past finding out,” and at the same time attempt to give a reason of them, and so to the arrogance join the contradictions? Such methods certainly are equally senseless and irreligious.

Histories inform us of many worthy and brave persons brought to unworthy ends; any one of which were enough to rebuke the proneness of the world to judge of the causes of God’s dealing with men from any qualifications in the persons so dealt with.

(2.) And thus as we have given proof more than enough of men’s utter unfitness to sound the depths of God’s providential dealings with them upon this account, that they usually ascribe them to false causes: So, in the Second place, The same will appear yet farther from this; that they always resolve them into imperfect causes. Who would assign an adequate reason of any thing which God does, must see as far into it, as God sees. And there is scarce any extraordinary passage of Providence, which does not point at least a thousand years forward, and stretch itself more than a thousand miles about; so that a man must be able to take into his mind all that long train and wide compass of purposes, to which it may subserve, and all those influences which it may cast upon things vastly remote in place, and distant many ages in time; which it is impossible for any created intellect to have a clear prospect into, or comprehension of. There is no action of God, but here a combination of impulsive causes con-

cerned in it; one or two of which possibly the wit of man may sometimes light upon, but the shortness or weakness of his discerning powers keeps him inevitably a stranger to far the greater part of them. GOD, by one and the same numerical lot of Providence, may intend to punish one nation, and to advance another; to plant the Gospel in a third, and to let in trade into a fourth; likewise to make way for the happiness of one man's posterity, and for the extinction and razing out of another's; to reward the virtues of a sober and industrious people, and to revenge the crimes * of a slothful and a vicious, a perjured and rebellious, with innumerable other designs, which GOD may actually propose to himself in every single passage of his transactions with men; and which we are no more fit or able to search into, or arbitrate upon, that we are to govern the world.

2. And thus much for the First general argument proving the insufficiency of any human wisdom to interpret the actions of Providence, taken from its inability, truly and throughly to pierce into the reasons of them; which, as it must always make one considerable ingredient in passing a right judgment upon any action, so I show, that there was another also required, namely, a certain prospect into the utmost issue or event of the same. Upon which account also man's unfitness to judge of the proceedings of Providence shall be now made out to us, by considering those false rules and grounds by which men generally fore-judge of the issue and event of actions: As,

(1.) Men usually prognosticate the event of any thing or action, according to the measure of the prudence, wisdom and policy of second agents, immediately engaged in it. And it must be confessed, that it is the best and likeliest rule that they have to judge by, were it not controlled by two better and likelier, and from which there can lie no appeal, viz. Scripture and Experience. The former of which brings in GOD "laughing at

* No nation certainly, at this time, farther in debt to GOD's justice, than the English.

the wisdom of the wise ;” taking and “ circumventing the crafty in their own wiles ;” (*Job* v. 12, 13. ;) baffling the subtle and shrewd advice of BALAAM and AHITHOPHEL, and so stifling both counsel and counsellor in a noose of his own making. And for the latter, history so abounds with instances of the most refined counsels, and artificially spun contrivances, dashed in pieces by some sudden and unforeseen accidents, that to ascertain the event of the most promising undertaking, if we trust but our own eyes, we shall have little cause to trust to another’s wisdom.

(2.) Men usually prognosticate the success of any project or design, from success formerly gained under the same, or less probable circumstances. And the argument seems to proceed *a majore ad minus*, that if a man could conquer and break through a great difficulty, much more may he presume that he shall be able to master and go through a less. And perhaps the ratiocination, according to the bare natural consequences of things, is true and good. Nevertheless it is manifest, that men frequently miscarry in the application of it ; and several reasons may be given for their doing so : As, [1.] It is hard, and perhaps scarce possible, (whatsoever less observing minds may imagine to the contrary,) to repeat and exemplify any action, under perfectly the same circumstances. [2.] That in most actions there are still some circumstances not observed or taken notice of, which may have a surer and more immediate influence upon the event of those actions, than those circumstances, which, coming more into view, are more depended upon. But, [3.] And chiefly because the success of every action depends more upon the secret hand of GOD, than upon any causes or instruments visibly engaged in it. Take an instance or two of this.

It was easy and natural enough to conclude, that HANNIBAL having so worsted the Roman armies, while they were in their fresh strength and full number, should have been much abler to crush the same enemy under all those disadvantages which such great and frequent defeats must needs have brought upon them. And yet we find FABIVS

and MARCELLUS, after some time, wonderfully turning the stream of his conquests, and SCIPIO, at length, totally subduing him. In like manner, if a nation under an usurped government, disunited in itself, and in continual danger of commotions at home, as well as of enemies from abroad, was yet an over-match to its neighbour nation in a war against it; it seems rational and probable enough to infer from thence, that the same nation, settled under an unquestionably legal government, and free from any disturbances within itself, should be much more likely (especially under the same conduct) to cope with, and subdue the same enemy. And yet we find, that the premises taking up from our naval successes in the years 1652 and 1653, produced but a poor conclusion in our contest with the same adversary in the years 1666 and 1667; when we were so shamefully insulted upon our coasts, and our noblest ships fired in our harbours. And the cause of this seems not so much derivable from any failure either of the English courage or conduct at sea, as from the secret judgments of God, (much the greater deep of the two :) So that it is clear, this rule also of gathering the future success of actions, is weak and fallacious: And that in some sorts of events, after things have been contrived and put together with the utmost exactness, a link or two of the chain happening to break, the coherence of the whole is hereby dissolved; and then how fairly soever the antecedent may have promised us, we shall yet in the close of all find ourselves lurch'd of the consequent.

(3.) Men generally measure the issue and success of any enterprise, according to the preparations made for it, and the power employed in it; it being a rule of judging, which the world cannot be beaten off from; that ten thousand must needs chase a thousand, and a thousand put an hundred to flight. Victory, on much the stronger side, seems still to be foreseen and foretold as certainly, as a necessary effect in the bowels of its cause. And yet we shall find, that it is not always the bigger weight, but sometimes the artificial hand holding and managing the balance, which

turns the scale. And in like manner, when we have raised armies, and manned our fleets, are we not still in the hand of Providence? in that hand, which sometimes sets the crown of victory upon the weak and the few, and disappoints the hopes, and breaks the force of the confident and numerous? Could any take up surer and better grounded presages of victory, from a survey of his own stupendous power, than XERXES might, when he came to fetter the Hellespont, and to swallow up the (comparatively) despicable strength of the Athenians? Or could any thing look more invincible, than the Spanish Armada sent against the English Navy? But for all this, we find that there is no commanding the sea, without being able to command the winds too; and he who cannot do this, let him not pretend to the other.

What a poor thing is preparation to be trusted to, in opposition to accident? And what a pitiful defence is multitude on the one side, where omnipotence takes the other! If we read and believe Scripture, we shall find GIDEON with his three hundred men, armed with lamps and pitchers, routing and destroying the vast and innumerable host of the Midianites: And can any rational man be confident of the greatest forces which human power can raise, if he believes that the same GOD who did that, is still in being, and still as able to do the same things as ever? Nay, should we take an exact survey of all passages in history to this purpose; such a pleasure does Providence seem to take in defeating the counsels of confident and presuming men, that perhaps, in the greatest battles which were ever fought, we shall find as many victories obtained by a less number over a greater, as by a greater over a less: And what then must become of the commonly received rules?

But, to keep nearer home, and to the day too, if human force and preparation could have determined the event of things, and Providence had proceeded by the same measures which men judge, the business of this day, I am sure, had been desperate. For were not the usurpers, just before the King's restoration, as strong as ever? Did they

not sit lording it in the head of victorious fleets and armies, with their feet upon the neck of three conquered kingdoms; and striking such awe and terror into all about them, that the boldest of their adversaries durst not so much as stir or open their mouths either against their persons or proceedings? And now, in this state of things, who would have imagined, that any one could have entered into “the strong man’s house, and have bound him, but one who had been much stronger?” Or that any thing could have recovered the lost sceptre, but a triumphant sword? Or that the crown being once fought off from the royal owner’s head, could have ever returned to it, but by being fought on again? These, and no other methods of restoring the King, did either his friends or his enemies think of; but so infinitely unlikely and unfeasible were they, that his enemies feared them as little, as his friends had grounds to hope for them.

When, behold! on a sudden, and in the height of all their pride, policy, and power, Providence gives them a turn, and they see the whole web which, with so much pains, cost, and cunning, they had been so long a-weaving, unravelled before their eyes in a moment, and themselves clear off the stage, without having settled any one of those innovations, either in church or state, which they had been plundering and fighting for near twenty years together; but instead thereof, the ancient government was restored, and happily set upon its former bottom; and all this (to phrase it in the words of the late Historian, DR. PETER HEYLIN) so easily, and with so little noise, that the wresting of that usurped power out of their hands cost not so much as a broken head or a bloody nose; for the getting of which they had wasted so many millions of treasure, and more than one hundred thousand lives, not to mention the loss of souls; by such unlikely and unforeseeable ways does Providence sometimes bring about its great designs, in opposition to the shrewdest conjectures and contrivances of men.

And thus much for the other general argument, proving the inability of any human wisdom, to comprehend the de-

signs of Providence, taken from those false rates and grounds, by which men generally fore-judge of the issue or event of actions.

And now, for the use and improvement of what has been discoursed, we may, from the foregoing particulars, infer these three things :—

1. The extreme folly and vanity of making the future event or presumed success of any enterprise, the rule of our present actings about the same. A rule should be a thing both certain in itself, and certainly known to be so. But there is no future contingent which we promise ourselves, though under the greatest probability of event imaginable, but is still a thing in itself uncertain; and consequently, being capable of failing us in the issue, can be no certain rule to guide us for the present. And moreover, as a rule in any human action whatsoever ought to be (as we have here shown) both certain and certainly known to be such, upon the stock of bare prudence and reason; so ought it likewise to be lawful, or morally good upon the accounts of conscience and religion; and therefore nothing contrary to the same ought to be admitted as a rule for men to act by, whether in a private or a public capacity. In a word, conscience duly steering by principles of religion, is the sole assured director of all human actions or designs. So that when any political consideration would draw men off from a present confessed duty, upon supposal of some future advantage, (to ensue thereby for the service of some great interest civil and religious,) still that advantage is but supposed, and so not always sure to follow the illegal actions; but the guilt of it always does.

2. We gather also, from the foregoing discourse, The absolute necessity of an entire, total, unreserved dependence upon Providence, in the most hopeful and promising condition of our affairs. The natural cause or ground of all dependence is men's consciousness to themselves of their own ignorance or weakness, compared with the sufficiency of others, whereby they expect their relief from others, which they find they cannot have from themselves.

This I conceive is the true account of this matter. And we have already sufficiently demonstrated man's utter inability, either to understand the reasons, or to control the issues of Providence; so that in all the passages of it, an implicit faith in God's wisdom is man's greatest knowledge, and a dependence upon his power his surest strength. For when all the faculties of man's body and mind have done their utmost, still the success of all is at the mercy of Providence; the ways of which are intricate and various; the grounds upon which it proceeds, unintelligible; and the ends it drives at, unsearchable. But, in a word, to make our reliance upon Providence both pious and rational, we should, in every great enterprise we take in hand, prepare all things with that care, diligence, and activity, as if there were no such thing as Providence for us to depend upon: And again, when we have done all this, we should depend upon it, as if we had made no such preparations at all. And this is a rule of practice, which will never fail or shame any, who shall venture all they have or are upon it: For, as a man, by exerting his utmost force in any action or business, has all that human strength can do for him therein; so, by quitting his confidence in the same, and placing it only in God, he is sure also of all that Omnipotence can do in his behalf. It is enough, that God has put a man's actions into his own power; but the success of them, I am sure, he has not. And therefore all trust in man, about things not within the power of man, (according to the account of Heaven,) is virtually a distrust of God: For let but our trust in him be measured out by our "whole heart, soul, and strength," (the only measure of it which the Scripture knows,) and we shall find but a poor overplus to bestow upon any thing besides. But,

3. And, Lastly, As we have from the premised particulars evinced the necessity of a dependence upon Providence, so from the same we may learn the impossibility of a rational dependence upon it, with any comfort, but in the way of lawful, honest, and religious courses. This is certain, that in all our undertakings God will be either our friend or

our enemy : For Providence never stands neuter ; and if so, is it not a sad thing for a man to make a mighty Potentate his enemy, and then to put himself under his protection ? And yet this is directly the case of every presuming sinner, and these the terms upon which he stands with Almighty God. But can that man with any confidence rest himself upon God's power, whose conscience shall in the mean time proclaim him a traitor to his laws ? Or can any people, nation, or government whatsoever, in the doubtful engagements of war, cast itself upon God's mercy, while by its crying sins of profaneness, atheism, and irreligion, it knows itself so deeply in arrears to his justice ? No man persisting in any known wicked course, can rationally hope, that God should succeed or prosper him in any thing that he goes about ; and if success should chance to accompany him in it, it is a thousand to one, but it is intended only as a curse, as the very greatest of curses, and the readiest way, by hardening him in his sin, to ascertain his destruction. He who will venture his life in a duel, should not choose to have his mortal enemy for his second.

On the contrary, the same innocence which makes all quiet within a man, makes all peaceable and serene above him. And that person cannot but have a certain boldness, and a kind of claim to the favours of Providence, whose heart is continually telling him, that he does as he should do ; and his conscience, having been all along his director, cannot, in the issue, prove his accuser. But all things, whether he looks forwards or backwards, upon what is past or what is to come, shall concur in assuring him, that his great Judge has no other sentence to pass upon him, but to set a crown of glory upon his head, and receive him with a " Well done ! Enter thou into the joy of thy LORD." And if, being thus inspired with such supporting expectations, he should yet chance utterly to sink, as to all his concerns and interests here below, yet having thus broken through them all to discharge his duty, the very sense of his having done so shall strengthen his heart, and bear up his spirits, though the whole world were in arms against him, or in a

flame about him ; so that he shall be able, from his own experience, to seal the truth of that seeming paradox of the Apostle, in *Rom.* viii. 36, 37, that persons, thus assisted from above, even in “tribulations, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness,” (the known badges of primitive Christianity,) nay, in their “being killed all the day long, and accounted as sheep for the slaughter,” shall yet, under those very massacres, “become more than conquerors,” through that God who makes those who fight under his banners triumph more gloriously in losing their blood for him, than their mightiest enemies do or can in their shedding of it. For if a man falls a sacrifice to God, his conscience, or his country, it is not material by what hand he falls : God accepts the martyr, whosoever is the executioner. And so long as there is another world to reward and punish, no man’s doom can be certainly pronounced from any thing that befalls him in this.

And now, at length, to come to a close, we have shown the darkness and intricacy of the ways of Providence ; and we have shown also, what incompetent judges, and yet what confident interpreters men are generally of them : From all which, what can so naturally be inferred, as the several reprimands of the blindness and boldness (qualities seldom found asunder) of the saucy descants of the world concerning these matters ? For what do they else, but, in effect, arraign even Providence itself ? Summon Omniscience before the bar of ignorance ? And, in a word, put a pitiful mortal to sit in judgment upon his Maker ? The text, I am sure, positively declares, that the works of God are “past finding out ;” and if so, is it not the height of absurdity, as well as arrogance, to assign, either from divinity or philosophy, any other reason of the works themselves, but the sole will of the agent ? Or to pretend to give an account of that which we ourselves own to be unaccountable ? Common sense certainly must needs see and explode the grossness of the contradiction, and convince us that in things so transcendantly above our highest speculations, the only rational and safe rule for us to proceed by,

will be to make them rather matter of admiration than of argument, still remembering, that, next to a direct violation of God's revealed will, is a bold intrusion into his secret.

Now to the infinitely wise Governor of all things, adorable in his counsels, and stupendous in his works, but essentially just and holy in both, be rendered and ascribed (as is most due) all praise, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore. Amen.

AN EXTRACT

FROM

THE WORKS

OF

MR. E. YOUNG,

FELLOW OF WINCHESTER-COLLEGE, AND LATE DEAN
OF SARUM.

SERMON I.

THE WISDOM OF FEARING GOD.

JOB xxviii. 28.

And unto man he said, Behold the fear of the LORD, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.

“THE fear of the LORD, that is wisdom,” is a sentence we meet with in several places of Scripture, and delivered by several of the holy writers; so that it seems to have been in proverbial use amongst the ancients; and it is a probable conjecture, that they derived this proverb by tradition from GOD himself, and that ADAM was the man in the text to whom it was first spoken: For when ADAM had eaten the forbidden fruit, which he was induced to do from the hopes of being made wise by it, it was then (as some have thought) that GOD thus admonished him, “The fear of the LORD, that is wisdom;” this admonition properly serving to set before him the grossness of his mistake, when he thought that any thing which made him sin, could possibly make him wise.

If this were spoken to our first parent, we cannot doubt, but that the truth of it entered into his soul with a full conviction: The shame and terror which he felt within himself, for having departed from the fear of GOD in one instance, thoroughly convinced him, that there was nothing so wise as to fear him always.

And there are certain seasons, wherein every son of ADAM, even the most loose and careless, does readily deliver himself up to the same conviction: Scarce any one in the world, when lying under the sense of guilt, or the fear of punishment, or the destitution of worldly comforts, or the

apprehension of approaching death, but will soon acknowledge, that the fear of GOD is the true wisdom, and that all other attainments are but folly in comparison of it. What therefore all men at some time or other confess for a truth, and most men with regret, that they have no more considered it, *that* it is the prudent man's part to consider at all times, and to set it before him for a governing principle of his life.

We may observe by the way, that if the fear of GOD be wisdom, it is a happy step towards the duty, that nature has planted in us a common ambition to be wise.

To be wise, is the thing we long for above all other ; as, on the contrary, to be accounted fools, is the most hated of all reproaches. And this is an appetite as universal as hunger itself : So that the difference betwixt wise men and fools, lies not so much in the difference of their affections towards wisdom, but only in the controversy, What wisdom is, and wherein it consists. Which controversy my text comes to determine, and I shall deliver the full sense of it in these two propositions:—I. That the fear of the LORD is Wisdom ; and, II. That it is the only Wisdom ; for so much the emphasis of the relative imports, “ The fear of the LORD, *that* is wisdom ;” as much as to say, There is no wisdom without it.

I. I begin with the First, “ The fear of the LORD is wisdom.”—To fear GOD (if we will state the nature of it) consists in the having such a due sense of the Majesty, and Holiness, and Justice, and Goodness of GOD, as shall make us thoroughly fearful to offend him ; for each of these attributes of GOD is proper to raise a suitable fear in every considering mind : His Majesty, a fear lest we affront it by being irreverent ; his Holiness, a fear lest we offend it by being carnal ; his Justice, a fear lest we provoke it by being presumptuous ; and his Goodness, a fear lest we lose it by being unthankful. But through all, the ceasing to offend GOD is necessary, for otherwise we cannot be said to fear him : And therefore in the Holy Scripture we have the fear of GOD defined by departing from evil ; as if its very

essence consisted in this necessary effect. So SOLOMON tells us, "The fear of GOD is to depart from evil:" And the same definition is implied in the text, where the fear of the LORD, and to depart from evil, are used only as two different expressions to signify the same thing.

And from this observation it follows, that wicked men can never be said to fear GOD, though they do certainly fear his punishment; but where the punishment only is feared, there the person is properly hated. I confess, that to hate GOD carries a horror in the very sound of it, and implies a guilt of such a dye as few sinners will own.

But when we consider that a man cannot continue in deliberate sin, but that his heart must needs wish there were no GOD to punish him; and that such a wish is formal hatred; all we can conclude upon it is this: That our sins are seldom stinted by our own intention, but when we give guilt leave to go so far, it will go farther without our leave; and so those ill habits will lead us insensibly on to pure enmity with GOD, in which, at first, we intended no more than the bare pleasing of our passions.

Now, the wisdom of fearing God will be manifested, 1. By considering the reasonableness, and, 2. The advantages of it.

1. I shall consider the reasonableness of the duty. GOD Almighty gave us the passion of fear on purpose to make us wise; and its subserviency to wisdom is visible in the whole course of human affairs: For, set aside fear, and there is no providence in management, no weight in counsel, no prudence in election, no discretion in acting; all runs into rashness and folly, and ends in exposing us to all manner of evils.

As therefore in a town alarmed by an enemy, a sentinel is set to watch their approaches, and to prevent a surprise; so, in regard of those many evils to which we are obnoxious in this life, GOD has set fear in our soul for a sentinel, to watch when and which way they come, and to give us caution that we may avoid them. But the same GOD that has given us fear for a caution against evils in general, has given

us notice, that his displeasure is the greatest of all evils: And therefore as we account it a point of wisdom to be watchful against other evils, so it is necessarily the chief point of wisdom to be watchful against this.

The fear of GOD is of so great importance to us, that GOD seems to have intended a gracious intimation of it in every motion of our natural fears. Our natural fears (we know) are either sudden or deliberate; the sudden are such as come upon us without deliberation, and of these we may observe, that they are very often immoderate, boundless, and ungovernable; and as they prevent our deliberation in their coming, so they often baffle it being come, and are not to be controlled by any power of reasoning.

How wonderfully will a man sometimes be affected at the hearing of a sudden noise in the night! His blood runs back, his spirits sink, his soul melts within him, and a horror passes through every part of his body.

Now such a fear as this seems absolutely unreasonable; a wise and good man would not fear any accident in life, nor death itself, at such a rate; and yet a wise and good man cannot sometimes hinder such a fear from rising upon a mere bugbear occasion. But how unreasonable soever this fear seems to be, it carries a most reasonable admonition along with it. And as the sentinel, when set, has a word given him, whereby to distinguish his proper officer; so GOD, when he set this fear in us, seems to have given it his own word, a word which it whispers to us upon each of its surprising motions; namely, "Thus it is that a man ought to fear GOD;" thus it is that a man ought to fear GOD, because "even as a man feareth, so is his displeasure:" Even as a man feareth, when he feareth most boundlessly, most extravagantly, so is his displeasure; his displeasure bears proportion to such a fear as this, though nothing in nature does so beside it.

Thus GOD has made nothing in vain, if we will give ourselves leisure to reflect, we may learn so important a lesson.

Our deliberate and just fears are as just to the same inti-

mation ; and each of their motions points out GOD to the first glance of our reasoning : For, if it be reasonable to fear want, how much more reasonable it is to fear him, whose bounty is the fountain of all our supplies ! If it be reasonable to fear disappointments, how much more to fear him whose Providence disposes the issue of all we project ! If it be reasonable to fear disgrace, how much more to fear him, whose intimation imports more towards it than that of all the world besides ! If it be reasonable to fear pain, and other inconveniences in life, how much more to fear him, whose pleasure determines both all our ease, and all our sufferings ! In a word, if it be reasonable to “fear them that kill the body, how much more him who, after he hath killed, can cast into hell !” This then is the moral, and this is the lesson of all our fears, “Fear GOD :” And if it be not wisdom to do so, it is not folly to kick against the prick, to run under a falling tower, into the mouth of a lion, into the bottomless pit.

2. Thus much for the reasonableness of the duty ; Secondly, Consider its advantages. And to give my thoughts a track in this wide field, I shall confine them to this particular ; namely, That the fear of GOD is the cure of all other fears ; and when I have said this, I have implied a mighty advantage, because fear (when loose from GOD) is undoubtedly the greatest burden and the greatest snare that human life is acquainted with.

I call fear the greatest burden of life, because of its torturing power ; and I call it the greatest snare of life, because of its corrupting power. Let us reflect a little upon them both.

(1.) Fear carries with it such a torturing power, that could we but estimate the conditions of all men together, we should find that the world is at all times more miserable from what it fears, than from what it feels. Nay, fear is such a tyrant, that let us feel never so much, it will still heap on weight, and make that which *may be* worse than that which *is*. As the author of the *Book of Wisdom* tells us concerning the Egyptians, that, when they lay under

their grievous plague of darkness, "their fear was more grievous than their darkness."

(2.) But, Secondly, Beside this torturing power, fear has in it a corrupting power ; for fear is the main rock upon which most men split their faith, their honour, their integrity ; all are sacrificed to some sort of cowardly compliances, and men become vicious, perhaps less from the love of being so, than from want of courage of being otherwise. And this is a sufficient reason why, (*Rev.* xxi. 8,) the fearful are set in the list of those that go to perdition.

So that though fear was given us on purpose to make us wise, yet it never effects that purpose, till such time as it is fixed upon GOD, and receives virtue from that supreme object, to govern its motions, in reference to all the rest ; for the fear of GOD, like a wise monarch set up in a disturbed state, composes all the tumults of vulgar fears, and keeping them subordinate to itself, renders them both harmless and useful to their proper ends.

It is a sad mistaken project (though yet it be a common one) to cast off the fear of GOD in order to be free ; for, in so doing, men only pass from one fear which is without torment, to a multitude that are without relief ; as CAIN, when he had departed from the presence of GOD, became terrified with the presence of every thing he met. And though all men in CAIN's case are not so fearful as CAIN was, yet they make the mischief equal by being more stupid than he.

How galling must the fears about the things of this life be to one who carries an eye to the blessings of a future ! They make the world look like a shaft thrust into a man's body, which grieves and tortures while it stays in, and when it is drawn out, draws away life with it ; but he that fears GOD has a preservative against the fear of all worldly evils ; for he fears them not before they come, because he is secure of the good providence of GOD on his side, and when they come, he has wherewithal to break their blow, because he has assurance of recompence at least, if not relief.

But especially, how amazing must the fear of death be

to him that fears not **God!** Death! that like a dark passage to a comfortless prison, puts an end to all he would have, and a beginning to all he would not.

I confess indeed, that sin, even while it is drawing on such formidable consequences as these, has likewise arts to fence off their affrightment; for, as there is sometimes an excess of fear, that betrays all the succours of reason, so there is sometimes on the other hand such a hardiness, and want of fear, as stifles all the actings of reason. And hence it comes to pass, that some men, who are altogether careless how they live, do yet seem as indifferent about the concern of dying.

The Scripture gives us the emblem of such hardy spirits, in a horse rushing to the battle, and an ox going to the slaughter; creatures that are not frightened with consequences, because they are not capable of thinking; which may likewise serve for an intimation to us, that when a man fears not **God**, and at the same time fears not death, it is not courage in him, but brutality; for, it is impossible there should be any guard against the fear of dying, to those who are reasonable, and aware of the issues of dying, but only the fear of **God**, which secures against all other fears. And as to this in particular, it makes death resemble a viper, when its poison is taken out; its very form may bring some horror to our nature, but reason tells us in the mean time, that it is so far from doing harm, that it is altogether medicinal and restorative.

By the way, it is remarkable, that this passion of fear will not suffer itself to be slighted by any of the children of pride, and therefore it takes a mocking revenge upon those that seem to slight it most; for we may observe concerning such as fear not **God**, and pretend likewise not to fear death, that yet they extremely fear the vain breath of the vainest men, which they falsely set up to be the standard of honour. This breath (as despicable as it is) they fear as much as any others can fear death, and will run themselves into greater mischiefs to escape it. Whereas, in truth, nothing is honourable neither, but only the fear of **God**, and

such offices as are consequential to it, if GOD himself may pass for the standard, who says, “Them that honour me, I will honour.” And, therefore, whatsoever is acted contrary to this principle, and whatsoever men dare contrary to the rules of piety, it can be no other than dishonourable and weak.

As for the corrupting power of fear, it is deplorable what multitudes it brings under captivity to sin. The fear of being laughed at, of being reproached, of being frowned upon, the fear of contempt, of hardships, of poverty, of shame, of death, are each of them cords that draw men daily from their integrity; and, though they are all of different strengths, yet by means of opportunity they all equally serve the ends of the tempter; insomuch, that as many are debauched by the fear of being laughed at, as by the fear of being undone.

But the fear of GOD is armour of proof against all these temptations; it fortifies the mind, and works it to firmness; such a firmness as was glorious in the three Israelites in Babylon, who, when the question was put, Whether they would worship the image, or be cast into the furnace, replied with all composedness, “Oh NEBUCHADNEZZAR, we are not solicitous to answer thee about this matter.” As much as to say, The question which thou, Oh King, takest to be so puzzling to us, by reason of its terror, is not worthy the shortest of our deliberations; we can resolve in an instant what to do in this case, because we were resolved long ago to suffer any thing rather than GOD’s displeasure.

II. I have thus far shown the reasonableness and the present advantages of the fear of GOD, in order to evidence the wisdom of it; but I must carry the argument a little further. For, although all men did not only desire to be wise (as certainly they do) but would allow us this point too, that “the fear of GOD is wisdom;” yet this would not convince them, that they must necessarily fear GOD, in order to be wise, unless it appear likewise that they cannot be wise in any other way. For, as when there are several meats of several tastes, one man’s choosing what he likes

best does not tax the discretion of a second for choosing another kind; so, supposing there are several kinds of wisdom, ungodly men may acquit their pretences to wisdom, by pretending to be wise after their own palate, and in their own way. I shall show therefore, in the next place, that no such choice is to be had; but that the fear of God is so essential to wisdom, that there is no wisdom without it.

It is the design of holy JOB, in the chapter of my text, to put us in mind, that there is a mighty difference betwixt to know and to be wise. He tells us, that "man findeth out the veins of silver, and the ore of gold, and the beds of sapphires." That "he cutteth out rivers among the rocks, and his eye seeth every precious thing." That "He bindeth the flood from overflowing, and the thing that is hid he bringeth forth to light." But amidst all this, "Where (says he) shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Man knoweth not the price thereof, neither is it to be found in the land of the living." In which passage the holy man intimates, that wisdom is the pure gift of God, and that it cannot be found by the most curious inquiries into nature. And, we may add, that neither can it be found by the most curious inquiries into truth itself, whether moral or divine, till such time as grace accompanies the inquiry. For a man may know all the offices and bounds of virtue, and all the precepts and ends of religion, and yet not be wise; because wisdom is not the speculation of these things, but the love and practice of them. Wisdom is not only light, but strength to the understanding, whereby it is enabled to govern the passions, and make the life regular; whereas, a bare knowledge leaves the understanding as weak in government, and the life as irregular as before; and, indeed, serves to nothing so much as the more inexcusable conviction of our folly.

In ancient Rome, when the empire was come to its height, and learning and arts were grown into reputation among them, it was the fashion for such as aimed at the credit of being accomplished gentlemen, to frequent conferences, and entertain the company with discourses of philosophy, and

all other specimens of study and wit. In consequence of this, it happened that others, who had neither parts nor industry to accomplish themselves in this manner, and yet were ambitious to have a share in every thing that made men look great, made it their practice to buy some learned slaves out of Greece, and to carry those about with them into company, and there whatsoever wit or learning the slaves could produce, *that* their masters looked upon as their own, and took the glory of it unto themselves.

How ridiculous soever this practice may seem, it is but too just an emblem of the generality of mankind, priding themselves in the attainment of mistaken wisdom. For, while we please ourselves with the knowledge of arts, and laws, and policies, and business, nay of virtue and religion too; yet, in the mean time, our understanding, the faculty where this treasure of knowledge lies, is very often no other than a slave, held in servitude to our lusts and passions. These rule and command, like the Roman gallant, and that only serves, like the poor Greek, to furnish matter for our vanity; insomuch, that we are not really the wiser for all the wisdom we carry about us. And thus it must be; nor can it ever be otherwise, till the fear of God presides over what we know, and directs it to the purposes of a holy life.

As to the opinion of the world in this present matter, which confers the character of wisdom upon several human endowments, however found separate from the fear of God; well may it pass for a courtesy, but its passing for a due we have this consideration to hinder, viz. that not any of those endowments, no, nor all of them together, can prevent a man from being a fool.

And this is a truth I shall choose to prove by example; example being a good remembrancer: And this being a matter which we are not so like to doubt of, as to forget.

I shall begin with the example of the rich man, mentioned, (*Luke xii.*) who, according to the vulgar standard, must certainly pass for a wise man; for, he understood business, and improvements, and managery, as we may guess by the increasing of his estate, and the enlarging of

his barns. And another piece of reputed wisdom he was master of too, that is, he was resolved to enjoy what he had: And yet how emphatically is this man called "fool," in his peremptory summons from GOD! "Thou fool! this night shall thy soul be required of thee; and then whose shall those things be that thou hast provided?"

The next I shall mention is **AHITHOPHEL**, a man of such sagacity and insight into affairs, that (as the sacred story tells us) his counsel upon all occasions was, "as if a man had inquired at the oracle of GOD;" and yet this great man, for all his mighty talent of wisdom, had so little as to make a violent end of himself upon a small affront, and so at one act to cut himself off both from all the enjoyments of this life, and all the hopes of a future: Too great a proof of being a fool!

I shall end with the example of **SOLOMON**, whose character for universal wisdom is this: "That there never was the like before him, nor ever shall be after him;" and yet so soon as he turned his back upon the fear of GOD, see whither he sunk; "his heart clave unto strange women; he had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines: And forasmuch as most of them were Idolaters, he complied with them all, in worshipping their several idols. And now say how the weakest man in the world could have showed himself a greater fool than **SOLOMON** did in these extravagancies. Well might he take it for his motto, as he does in the *Book of Ecclesiastes*, (which he is supposed to have written after his recovery out of this infatuation,) "All is vanity,—but the fear of GOD."

And though, perhaps, few of those that fear not GOD, run to the extravagancies of **SOLOMON**, and fewer to the desperateness of **AHITHOPHEL**; yet none of them can escape the folly of the first instance; that is, to have their soul stripped of all its enjoyments together, without the provision of any to succeed.

And therefore, we may conclude, that whatever commendable things human wisdom may do by the bye, yet it certainly fails of its main pretence; that is, of making a

man wise. For it is not some actions, done with the semblance of discretion, in matters of smaller moment, but the discretion a man shows in actions of chief concern, that must give him his character. And what then must be the character of those that always want discretion in the main?

And now I shall leave the whole matter upon your thoughts, under the illustration of this sensible image, viz. Human wisdom (in the prospect of its whole management) looks like a man showing great skill in the choice of curious paintings and hangings, and other rarities, wherewith to furnish his house, when all the while an enemy is burning the town. For thus it is that human wisdom provides noble furniture for the soul, but never reflects that the soul itself lies perishing at the same instant. Knowledge, and art, and reasoning, and experience, and dexterity, are excellent furniture, and these human wisdom brings in. But, in the mean time, what need of all this sail to run against a rock? What needs the pomp of all these excellent qualities to be undone, when a man may be undone less reproachfully without them? For it is certain, that all these qualities do not in the least prevent a man's being undone; it is only the fear of GOD that can do that; and therefore, we may most confidently determine, that "the fear of GOD is the only wisdom."

This is wisdom, not in semblance, but in deed; not parcel-wisdom, but wisdom entire; not wisdom for the bye, but wisdom for the main; not wisdom for a day, but wisdom for ever.

To GOD that is the only Giver of this wisdom, and of every perfect gift, be all glory, &c. Amen.

S E R M O N I I.

THE PRACTICAL CONSIDERATION OF GOD'S OMNISCIENCE.

HEB. iv. 13.

*But all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with
whom we have to do.*

AFTER the law has provided against ungodliness and wrong never so wisely, and the Magistrate attended on its execution never so diligently; yet still human justice will find, from the bare want of evidence, facts will be obscure, and circumstances doubtful, and allegations presumptive, and testimonies inconsistent; so that the probably guilty must often go unpunished, lest the possibly innocent should suffer, which would be the greater evil of the two.

But my text points at a tribunal set above the reach of this obstruction: A tribunal where all the matters of cognizance are thoroughly known, and the proofs all ready for conviction, and the evidence as unexceptionable as the justice.

And this is the very scope of the words: Wherein we have,

1. God set forth as the Judge, *προς ον ημιν ο λογος*, with whom we have to do, so runs our translation; but it is somewhat short of the original; which signifies more fully, *To whom we are to give an account*: For *λογος*, when it is applied to matters in charge, signifies an account; as when it is said to the "unjust steward," (*Luke xvi. 2.*) *Αποδος τον λογον της οικονομιας σου*, we render it, "Give an account of thy stewardship." So then, we are to give an account

unto GOD: This is the first intimation of the text. But then,

2. To intimate that this account shall be clearly taken, and the judgment upon it liable to no exceptions for want of evidence; it tells us, that “To the eyes of our Judge, all things are naked and open,” *γυμνα και τετραχηλισμενα*. *Γυμνον* signifies that which has *no outward covering*, and *τετραχηλισμενον* signifies that *whose inside may be looked into*: For it signifies primarily a beast opened down the chine; as it was the manner of the Priests to chine the sacrifice, and open it so that the state and soundness of every entrail might appear. And thus all things we do are so manifest unto GOD, that they are not capable of any covering; either from without by secrecy or collusion, or from within by palliation or denial.

The words, therefore, are an argument for a circumspect and upright conversation, drawn both from the omniscience and justice of GOD; because GOD knows all things, and because he will judge all things.

But I shall not now meddle with the second part of the argument, GOD's justice; I shall confine myself to the consideration of his omniscience: And in treating of this, I shall not take the whole extent of the attribute, (whereby GOD knows the nature, state, quality, defects, and powers, of all things, that either are, or can be,) but I shall speak only to those things for which we stand accountable, as the scope of my text prescribes me.

Now, the things for which we stand accountable are of three kinds, viz. actions, words, and thoughts; for each of these are capable of moral good and evil, and so make up the matter of account. My business, therefore, shall be, I. To show that GOD does know each of these things: And then, II. To make some reflections upon the doctrine, that may further conduce to practice.

I. That GOD knows all our actions, words, and thoughts, the Scripture is every where express. And, I. As to our actions. “Thou art about my path, and about my bed, and spiest out all my ways,” says the Psalmist. (*Psalms*

cxxxix. 3.) And lest we should interpret that this inspection of GOD was peculiar upon the actions of that particular man; SOLOMON tells us, that the same inspection is of universal extent; “for the eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good:” Whence it is evident, that GOD not only can know, if he will, but likewise that he actually wills to know all that we do. It is profane to imagine, that the Divine Nature is incurious or regardless: And accordingly it is observable, that as holy DAVID calls it brutishness to think in any case that GOD does not know what we do; “Understand, O ye brutish among the people, he that formed the eye, shall he not see?” So he calls it blasphemy to think that GOD does not regard what we do: “How long shall the wicked blaspheme GOD, saying, Thou, GOD, carest not for it?”

2. As to our words. “There is not a word in my tongue, but thou knowest it altogether,” says the Psalmist. (*Psalm* cxxxix. 4.) And to bring this home to every one’s case, the author of *the Book of Wisdom*, (*ch.* i. 10,) tells us, “that GOD’S ear is the ear of jealousy;” that is, an ear not only quick of hearing, but likewise always intent to hear; so that when we sometimes speak that which either shame or fear will not suffer us to speak aloud, yet the caution of whispering will not conceal it from GOD: For (as that author goes on) “The ear of jealousy heareth all things, and the noise of whispering is not hid; and there is no word so secret that it shall pass for nought.”

3. As to our thoughts, our deliberations, judgments, choices, wishes, and desires, the “Searcher of hearts” is acquainted with them all. So says holy JOB, (*lxii.* 2,) “I know that no thought can be withholden from thee.” But the Psalmist speaks yet higher to the point, and cries, “Thou knowest my thoughts long before.” (*Psalm* cxxxix. 1.) Thou knowest my thoughts long before, even before they are conceived. Nor does this expression give any ground to argue, that because GOD fore-knows our thoughts, (as likewise he does our actions,) that therefore he does predetermine and ordain them; this would be clearly to

acquit ourselves, and to charge GOD with the fault of our miscarriages: And I doubt not but many would fain have the charge run so, and therefore are fond of this opinion: But, on the contrary, as GOD “tempts no man,” so much less does he force or predetermine any one to sin: No, he leaves us to our liberty to think either better or worse, and yet this notwithstanding he foreknows our thoughts; because, having an intimate knowledge of the state of our souls, of all the affections, passions, springs, and weights wherewith they are moved, he knows infallibly how every possible object that presents itself, will determine them all. As the man that sees the setting of the chimes, can tell several hours before what tune they will play, without any powerful influence either upon their setting, or their playing.

Thus the Scriptures represent the omniscience of GOD. And farther, they offer us two considerations, whereby this notion may be better cleared, and the conviction of it made to sit firmer upon our minds. The First consideration is that of GOD’s presence. The Second is that of his power.

(1.) GOD’s presence is that which we call omnipresence, that is, an universal presence, in all places, and with all persons: And this the author of *the Book of Wisdom* makes his argument for GOD’s omniscience, (i. 7,) “GOD,” says he, “is witness of the reins, and a true beholder of the heart, and a hearer of the tongue; for” (this is the proof of it) “the SPIRIT of the LORD filleth the world:” That is, GOD knows every thing, because he is every where. And the Psalmist asserting the omniscience of GOD at large confirms his argument, and inculcates the belief of the doctrine with this reflection, “Whither shall I go from thy SPIRIT? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I climb up to heaven, thou art there; and if I go down to hell, thou art there also.”

Now this consideration of the omnipresence of GOD is proper to prevent those mistakes, which we are wont to take up by thinking of him weakly, i. e., with resemblance to ourselves. For so, in our first thoughts, we are apt to

confine GOD to a place, and to limit him to a distance in the perception of things; because we ourselves are so limited and confined.

And so we are apt to imagine that a constant inspection and observation of all men, and all their actions, would beget either trouble or weariness, or distraction in GOD; because any great application does so in us.

Most of the great men among the Heathens were overtaken with these prejudices: Whereas, on the contrary, the notion of GOD's being every where, leads our understanding to apprehend that it is as easy for him to observe every man, as one man; and every action, as one single action of our lives. Remember, therefore, that GOD is as near to our mouth, when we speak, as that man is that leans his ear to our whispers: He is as near to our actions, when we act in secret, as they are whom we admit in our confederacy: He is as near to our thoughts, when we purpose, wish, or design any thing, as is our own soul that conceives them; and in consequence, he is as familiarly acquainted with them.

(2.) The Second consideration which the Scripture offers to inculcate the belief of GOD's omniscience, is that of his power, viz. that operative power, whereby he is the Fountain and Author of all our beings: From which topic the Psalmist thus argues: "He that planted the ear, shall not he hear? He that formed the eye, shall not he see? He that teacheth men knowledge, shall not he know?" (*Psalm lxiv. 9, 10.*) The argument (you see) reaches each particular of my matter, words, deeds, and thoughts; and to show the strength of it, I shall consider it somewhat more exactly.

If we resolve it into a general form of reasoning, it may run thus: All our faculties of knowledge, all our organs and instruments of information we have from GOD, and can we think then that GOD wants any for his own use? All of us are his creatures, and can we think he has made any creature of such capacity as to act any thing beside his privity, or beyond his comprehension? This would be a

weak, and (as the Psalmist calls it) a “brutish” imagination.

But to come to the particular instances.

God “hath planted the ear, and formed the eye:” And yet when all is done, it is neither our ear that hears, nor our eye that sees; but it is our spirit that hears and sees through these, as its proper instruments.

It is our spirit, therefore, only that has the power of hearing and seeing; and though our spirits are limited to the use of such instruments, we must not, therefore, imagine but that spirits of a superior order can perform all their perceptions without them. To think otherwise would be as absurd, as if a man of weak eyes should argue that it is impossible for any eye to see without a glass. When therefore God or angels are said to have ears or eyes, it is only in accommodation to our mode of thinking; for when we come to reason upon the subject, we must acknowledge that it is a part of their perfection to need no such helps.

[1.] Whereas therefore, we account that the sense of hearing is limited to a respective distance; and this thought makes us bold to whisper that which we dare not speak aloud: However we account of our own hearing, we ought not to esteem that of others to be so limited. Nay, when we find by experience, that the softest whisper, when conveyed by a smooth or hollow surface, will reach our ear distinctly, though at a greater distance from the speaker; we have no little reason to doubt whether God hears our whispers, that we may be sure (on the other hand) he can command a small ring of air to carry our whispers to the end of the earth, and make them be heard by whoever else he pleases. And by this very means, the Prophet ELISHA might hear what was spoken in the King of Assyria’s bed-chamber, (*2 Kings* vi. 12,) as well as by the intercourse or ministry of an angel.

[2.] Though our act of seeing be confined to the assistance of our outward light, we must not conclude that of others is so: “If I say, Peradventure darkness shall cover me, then shall my night be turned into day.” Nay,

we may learn from the most contemptible creatures, that outward light is not necessary to seeing ; for the bat and the owl can see without it : And perhaps, Providence designed these contemptible creatures to teach us the lesson, “ that darkness is no covering ; ” and to provoke us unto jealousy and apprehension, that many thousands may see our retired actions whom we see not, and therefore foolishly are not aware of them : Good spirits can see us and lament, and evil spirits can see us, and rejoice at our sin and folly.

[3.] “ It is GOD that teacheth man knowledge, shall he not know ? ” We allow that GOD gives us the whole faculty and power of knowing : And if so, to think that we can know any thing in ourselves, which GOD does not know, is a contradiction, for it implies that we have power to know something without God.

The most awful faculty that GOD has given us, and that which lies most under our present consideration, is, that of knowing or remembering what we have done, together with the consciousness of that good or evil that is in it.

Now, let us consider how this faculty performs its office : How came we to know at any time what we have spoken, done, or thought, after once those acts of speaking, doing, or thinking, are past ? Is it not by seeing the images or impressions which those several acts produce within us ? Do we not by seeking find such images of things, which we have spoken, done, or thought of, several years before ? Nay, do not those images frequently present themselves without our seeking, and make us see them whether we will or no ? Which is a proof that they have a real being and lasting subsistence within us, and are wholly independent on our will ; for we cannot extinguish or erase any of them at our pleasure ; we cannot do it, would we never so fain.

We may conclude, therefore, that whatsoever we either speak or do, purpose, wish, or design, so far as these acts are of a moral concern, and bear relation to virtue or vice, they leave the notices of themselves upon our consciences, imprinted there in characters fair and intelligible, nay,

I may add indelible too: For though it must be allowed that we forget many things which we have been conscious of; yet, in that case, the notices of such things are not erased or extinguished, they are only covered over. There is no forgetfulness in a spirit; its forgetfulness is only accidental, and occasioned by the impediments of the flesh: As we observe that sometimes a man of a faithful memory will, by the disorder of a sickness, grow delirious, and forget all that ever he knew: And yet, upon the removal of his disease, all his former notices* will appear fresh again.

And how reasonable is it to believe that our souls, whether in the state of separation from the body, or of re-union to the body, when defecated and made free from obstructions; (so far as all bodies, even of the unjust, shall be at the resurrection;) I say, how reasonable is it to believe, that our souls shall then have a clear view and perfect remembrance of all that we have done; though now most of those notices lie in us, like the inscriptions of a marble covered over with dust and rubbish.

Now, if conscience be thus written like a book, and faithful register of our behaviour, there is no room to doubt but God can read that book, as well as we: Nay, he can read through all those impediments that shade it, which we cannot: Nay, he can, when he pleases, make this book legible to all others, as much as it is to ourselves. For he can so far elevate the understandings of all men, or open their eyes, (in that sense that he is said to have opened the eyes of ELISHA's servant, "that he might see the host of angels:" 2 *Kings* vi. 14,) I say, God can open the eyes of all men to such a spiritual intuition, as that all shall be able, at a short glance, to read each other's history (imprinted on their consciences in intelligible signatures) as familiarly as if it were graven on their foreheads, or printed in a book.

And thus we may probably conceive, that those books mentioned by the Prophet DANIEL, (vii. 10,) and by ST. JOHN in his *Revelation*, (xx. 12,) books that are to be opened in order to the universal judgment, are no othe

than that volume of things, recorded in every man's conscience, which, being opened and exposed to view, shall make (as it were) a tally or counterpart to that memorial which God himself keeps of all we do.

II. Having said thus much for the explication of God's omniscience, I proceed to make some reflections upon the doctrine, that may farther conduce to practice.

GOD ALMIGHTY has planted two passions in our souls, whose proper use is to deter us from sin; and they are shame and fear: The object of fear is punishment, and the object of shame is discovery: And his omniscience does import both these consequences of sin, viz. that it shall be discovered, and that it shall be punished: For God's omniscience does not terminate in bare knowing: He sees and knows in order to farther acts of justice; so he tells us, "I, the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to the fruit of his doing." (*Jer.* xvii. 19.)

I shall not now extend my reflections so far as the punishment of sin; (though that be of the most moving importance;) I shall insist only upon the discovery of it; and to show what shame is threatened to it from God's omniscience.

1. In order hereto, my first inference from the doctrine shall be this, viz. that no sin can be secret; absolutely speaking, no sin can be so.

Now, did this notion sit so close upon our minds as it ought to do, it would be of great advantage to the cause of virtue; because nothing gives more occasion to sin in the world, than the contrary expectation and hopes of secrecy. For even after a man has divested his soul of probity, he cannot so easily divest it of shame; and therefore, when he has never so strong an inclination to sin, yet still he will start at the apprehension of being discovered; and be still willing to retain that reputation, which is the shadow of virtue, though he has been so hardy as to shake hands with the substance.

How many calumnies, dissimulations, frauds, and false-

hoods; how many of all kinds of sinful acts (wherein there is an acknowledged baseness) would be absolutely prevented; if the actors, when they began to meditate the doing of these things, were thoroughly persuaded that they would come to light, and so expose them to public reproach? Now, is not that sin sufficiently known, of which we acknowledge that God does know it? And is not the knowledge of God sufficiently awful, since he is most of all affronted by our guilt? And how comes it to pass then that our shame is so jealous and quick in regard of men, but so remiss and languishing in regard of God? How come we to blush at the apprehension of a man seeing us; when yet the consideration that God sees us, that the most Just sees our iniquities, that the most Holy sees our filthiness, that the most Loving sees our unthankfulness,—when this consideration is not able to move a passion, or provoke a blush? For we must acknowledge, that this is the state of that passion in us; so partial and unreasonable is our shame. It acts as if men alone had the custody of our credit, and God's estimation were of no importance to it.

The best reason that can be given for such an unreasonable behaviour, can be no other than a bad one; but I take the best to be this, viz. :—

We presume all men to be subject, in some measure, to such passions as would tempt them (should they be acquainted with our sins) to be severe upon us, to insult over us, and to publish our reproach; and therefore, we dare not trust our secret, and consequently our reputation, with men: But, on the other hand, we look upon God as purely merciful; and, at the same time, we look upon it as an office of mercy to cover sins: So that although God knows our sins, yet we imagine he alone shall know them; for, by some method of repentance which we propose to ourselves, we hope to atone God's displeasure; and so to have our sins both forgiven and covered, and ourselves secured both from punishment and scandal too.

2. But, for the correction of this mistake, I shall draw my inference one step farther, and argue from the omni-

science of GOD; Secondly, That all sin shall be brought to an universal and public discovery; so that it is but desperate hope for any man to think he shall escape the shame that is due to guilt.

That GOD's omniscience carries in it the power of such a discovery is no dispute; the question is, Whether He will actually make such a discovery. And let us fairly consult Scripture and reason, what we ought to believe concerning this.

The Apostle tells us, that, "In that day God shall judge the secrets of all men." (*Rom. ii. 16.*) And to signify that the judging of secrets implies the revealing of secrets, he tells us again, that, in order to judgment, "He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart." (*1 Cor. iv. 5.*) Again he tells us, that of the actions of men, (both good and evil,) "Some are manifest in this life, and what are otherwise cannot be hid." (*1 Tim. v. 25.*) And what can be more express than that of our Saviour, "Nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known, and come abroad." (*Luke viii. 17.*) Which words (as they are not capable of adequate completion till the day of judgment, so) the ancients interpret them purely to respect the process of that day.

Now the importance of all these texts is clearly this; that God will make a discovery of all human actions, in order to this judicial sentence, whether of absolution or condemnation.

All that reason can have to allege against this, must (as I have intimated already) be founded on this supposition, That it is an office of mercy to cover sins; as indeed the Scripture frequently expresses it to be. And so undoubtedly it is, during this life; where, if all sins were discovered, many men would be hindered in their repentance, and many cut off from the opportunity of repenting. And, besides, the world would be only so much the worse for the example; for sin would only grow more insolent and shameless, by reason of the more apparent number of its party. But

hereafter the case will be quite otherwise; there repentance will have no opportunity to lose, nor ill example be able to do harm any longer. And when God passes sentence upon the lives of men, his mercy shall be as much exalted by the discovery of those sins He shall pardon, as his justice will be cleared by the discovery of those He shall punish.

I know the main strength of the mentioned objection must be borrowed from those places of Scripture, where the terms of blotting out, and covering sins, are applied to GOD as a proper act of his mercy. It is holy DAVID's prayer, "LORD, *blot out mine iniquities.*" And so he pronounces them blessed, "*whose sins are covered.*" And GOD himself says in the Prophet, "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." (*Isa. xliii. 25.*)

But now, to know the proper meaning of these expressions, let us begin with the *last* of them, wherein GOD says, "I will not remember thy sins." Now it is certain that this phrase of GOD's not remembering cannot be taken literally, because it is impossible for GOD to forget; but the meaning is, that He will not remember so as to punish. And so, in like manner, by blotting out and covering, is not meant literally the concealing of sins, but only the abolishing of their condemning power. And this we may evidently confirm from the instance of DAVID himself, in that very place where he uses these expressions: It is *Psalm li. 9*, where he cries, "Hide thy face from my sins, O LORD, and blot out all my misdeeds." But here his petition is so far from meaning the concealment of his sins from the knowledge of the world, that he was then actually proclaiming them, and registering them in a form of confession, which he intended not only for the exercise of his own repentance, but likewise for the conduct of all others. So that we cannot interpret him to have deprecated the notoriety of his sins, but merely the wrath of GOD, whereby he might justly have been condemned for them.

We may therefore look upon it as one certain consequence of the omniscience of GOD, that all human actions

shall be exposed to public view and censure; that a light shall be struck into all the works of darkness, through all the recesses of subtlety, through all the disguises of hypocrisy. That then the mask shall be pulled off from all dissembled virtues, and every vice shall appear in its proper colour, and every secret injury shall proclaim its author. That there shall be no summary absolutions; no pardons in gross without inquiry into the retail, as the slight repentances of men seem to require; but that repentances shall be weighed as well as sins, and mercy dispensed upon rational terms, and the pardon of sins justified by the measures of their contrition.

If this reflection can work in us more abundant shame for what we have done amiss, it has its proper and wholesome effect upon us. It is the shame of being undiscovered that makes the sinner walk haughtily; and, on the contrary, the belief of a discovery ought in all reason to render us more abject and vile in our own eyes, which is the first step to true repentance. Shame thus taken upon ourselves, is the only expedient the sinner has to prevent the future; penitential shame will avoid the judicial, and break that blow which will otherwise strike us with unknown confusion. For, be assured, that shame for sin is a natural debt, and it must be paid at one time or other; and we can escape it no more than we can escape death.

Indeed, there are some men who seem to be proof against the influence of this reflection; I mean such as are arrived to sin boldly and openly; who, as they seek no covering, so they seem to fear no discovery, but bid defiance to shame.

In respect of such, I shall add one reflection more, viz. That, although the knowledge of men may not have the power of working shame in a hardy sinner, yet the omniscience of God, when it comes to manifest itself, shall bring even the shameless to shame; and make it appear, that, as shame for sin can be escaped no more than death, so it can be defied no more than hell.

To open the truth of this assertion, let us but consider, how

it comes to pass that when sin is naturally shameful; (as being a baffle to man's reason, as well as a blow to his conscience;) I say, since sin is naturally shameful, how comes it pass that men can sin, and yet not be ashamed?

Now this effect may follow from three causes:—1. From corrupt notions. 2. From common guilt. And, 3. From impudence of temper.

1. Shamelessness in sin may proceed from corrupt notions. For so it is, the world has passed its verdict; and Christians, to their scandal, are led by the imagination, that there are some sins that have nothing shameful in them. It is allowed, perhaps, that fraud, and lying, and ingratitude, and perfidiousness, and the like, are of a nature marked with infamy; but then, to be a wicked scoffer, to be a brisk revenger, to be stout in intemperance, and the like, are no other than fashionable commendations. And why then should any be ashamed for these? Now this is a dream that may hold till the world be better awakened; but when all actions shall be brought to their true standard, as it will then appear, that to serve God is man's greatest honour, so it will appear, that there is a shame in every thing whereby we offend him. And that those sins, which men boast of in the doing, are as inglorious as those which they acknowledge are not fit to bear the light.

2. Common guilt may make men sin without shame. For, even in those sins which the world owns for shameful, partnership will be able to carry off the shame. Thus a thief will not be ashamed to be surprised by a thief, nor an adulterer by an adulterer; though a man of an awful character would produce a blush from such a one at the surprize. And therefore we may observe, that they who give themselves up to any vice, do generally withal give themselves up to calumniating; that is, they take pleasure to represent, or to suppose all others as bad as themselves. And all is for this very purpose, that they may beat down the reverence that is due to any good example, and so contemn the censures of all men alike. But this is a method that cannot take place when God comes to make

the discovery; for as his honour is beyond the reach of calumny, as none shall be able to say of **GOD**, that he is either unrighteous, or a friend to those that are so, so his awful censure will not fail to reduce every guilty mind to its proper acknowledgments. But,

3. That which consummates the evil is impudence of temper. Such as the Prophet **JEREMY** laments in the people of Israel, after that affluence and luxury had brought them to a great height of wickedness. "Were they ashamed, when they had committed abomination? Nay, they were not ashamed at all, neither could they blush." (*Jer.* vi. 15.)

Now this impudence is a temper contracted by industrious iniquity, and raised upon the ruins of reason. It can be no otherwise; because shame for sin is so connatural to reason, that it cannot be extinguished but with reason itself. Which we may contemplate in the instance of fools and madmen; the only cause why they are not ashamed being this, that they want reason to reflect upon the turpitude of what they do.

And it is certain that whosoever grows impudent, he so far keeps reason a prisoner, suffers it not to act, holds it in servitude to his lusts, and so he sets his soul in the nearest approach unto brutality.

But this is a state that will not always last: For when **GOD** comes to do right to his creatures, reason shall be asserted to its liberty of acting; and then shame shall be let loose to demand all its arrears: It shall be let loose like an armed man; and undoubtedly it shall act then with the same force upon all bold transgressors, that it does now sometimes upon those unhappy souls that make themselves away to avoid its lashes: For as these flee from life, (though the greatest blessing they have,) so they then shall flee from **GOD** with the same confusion; and being not able to bear the terror of his Majesty, shall voluntarily betake themselves to any place that is abandoned by him, and that is simply hell.

So that the impudent sinner seems not to need any compulsion to settle him in the place of torment, but that of

his own shame : That will be his *ιδιος τόπος*, his proper, his natural place ; to which (we know) all things move of their own accord. And no less is intimated concerning JUDAS, according to our common version of that passage, (*Acts* i. 25,) where it is said that “ JUDAS by transgression fell from his part in the apostleship, that he might go to his own place ;” *εις ιδιον τόπον*, his own, his proper place : Implying that JUDAS’S shame sunk him down to hell, as naturally as weight sinks a stone down towards the centre.

These reflections upon GOD’S omniscience are such as seem proper to make the consideration of it useful to us. And as for the conduct of our particular practice, the best of all rules may be borrowed from holy DAVID’S example, (*Psa.* xvi. 9,) where he says, “ I have set GOD always before me :” So let us. GOD is always by us, let us set him always before us ; his eyes are always upon us, let ours be likewise proportionably upon him : Let us keep our minds in a lively sense of the venerableness of his presence, and the awfulness of his inspection ; and this is the best method to guard us from treating that inspection irreverently, and to keep us tender of doing any thing unsuitable to such a presence.

“ Come, see the man that told me whatever I did,” cries the woman of Samaria, after her conversation with our SAVIOUR at JACOB’S well : Think a little upon that conversation, or upon such a possible one with thyself.

Think what commotions, what struggling of several passions started up in that woman’s breast, so soon as she found one whom she looked upon as a pure stranger to her, to break in upon all her secrets.

The same shall one day be every one’s case : The same JESUS (though in more awful circumstances) shall tell every one of us “ all that ever we did :” And say, then, where lies our wisdom but in a constant endeavour to do that that will bear the telling ? Happy are they that pursue this endeavour ! Almighty GOD assist us all to do so by his merciful grace !

To whom be glory and thanksgiving for ever and ever †
Amen.

SERMON III.

ON THE WISDOM OF BELIEVING.

ROM. i. 22.

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.

WHATEVER value we set upon being wise, or whatever affectation we have of being so accounted, yet there is no greater argument of human weakness than this, That we rarely know what we mean by wisdom; nor are our notions any where more confused than upon this question, What it is to be wise?

To extricate our thoughts in some measure out of this confusion, we may distinguish wisdom into three kinds; namely, I. The wisdom of Grace, II. The wisdom of Nature, and, III. The wisdom of Imagination.

I. The wisdom of Grace is called in Scripture, “the wisdom from above;” because thence it cometh, and we cannot attain it without the influence of GOD.

Now the use of this wisdom is to secure our eternal interest, by a thorough conformity to the divine will: And because this is our main concern, and the rest is but loss, and shame, and misery without it, the style of the HOLY SPIRIT allows nothing to be wisdom but purely this, “the fear of God, that is wisdom:” And our Apostle, who had large talents of other knowledge, styles all “foolishness,” none worth the owning, “but to know CHRIST JESUS, and the power of his resurrection.” He that has this wisdom, has sufficient; and without it, the greater our pretences are to wisdom, the more conspicuous is our folly.

II. The Second kind of wisdom is that of Nature; that

is, such as men may have of themselves, through the power of their native faculties, and the improvements of industry. And from this fountain have flowed many commendable fruits in all ages; all rules and arts for the conduct, employment, and accommodation of life.

But as this wisdom is often separate from that of grace, it as often turns to subtlety and artifice, to doubling and insincerity, to deceiving and being deceived. This is that great wisdom whereby, our SAVIOUR says, “The children of the world are wiser in their generation than the children of light:” “Wiser in their generation;” that is, wiser to serve themselves in reference to present advantages. Not that worldly men have better understandings: It were, in a manner, blasphemous to think that godliness did ever occasion stupidity.

The good man knows as many methods of management; but the worldly man is bolder to make use of all he knows. The good man walks on simply in the road of Providence, believing God’s blessing to be his portion; but the worldly man turns into every crooked way, as if it were to make himself amends for the want of that Providence and blessing he has no mind to trust upon. The good man looks upon the world as his inn, and therefore is not so solicitous for his accommodations here, as he is for his arrival at his journey’s end; but the worldly man looks upon it as his home, and therefore employs all his care to make it as easy and entertaining to him as he can. For example:—

In the first ages of the world, CAIN is said to “have gone forth from the presence of God,” that is, to have cast off all care of religion; and this personal inclination of his remained in all his posterity. On the other side, SETH “walked with God,” and instituted his posterity to the same pious care of being religious. •

In the mean time we may observe, that the chief inventions which serve both to the use and divertisement of the present life, as the forming of societies, building of cities, and finding out curious arts and manufactures, are all attri-

buted to the profane line: But it would be very rash, for all this, to conclude, that these were men of better parts and capacities than the other.

The children of **SETH** accounted it sufficient to have what was needful, and to pursue the favour of **God** as the consummation of their enjoyments, which is undoubtedly the supreme wisdom. Whereas the other, being destitute of hopes from **God**, made it all their study to procure such enjoyments, as might be had without him.

But let us observe a little further, and see what the world itself was the better for all these issues of its wisdom: In the power of it men brought in many agreeable advantages; but through the corruption of it they likewise brought in the flood; wherein all were destroyed but those few that had escaped the common depravation. And what then is “the wisdom of the world” but (as our Apostle calls it) “foolishness with **God**.”

III. The Third kind is what I call the wisdom of Imagination, that is, a wisdom that has its being in opinion; and by which men come to think well of themselves. Now this kind of wisdom is a mere shadow; for even they that are fools pretend to it, as well as they that are of greater talents; but neither are at all the wiser in truth, for this opinion of their being so: And as it is in itself a shadow, so it chiefly aims and catches at a shadow, that is, at the admiration of others.

Now we may observe of this kind of wisdom, that it is always attended with one mischievous companion, and that is the affectation of singularity: They that are wise in their own conceit, always found their conceit upon the knowledge of somewhat that is odd and out of the way: They value not themselves for knowing what is vulgarly known; but esteem it their excellency to start novelties, and to be the originals of their own opinions. From which it follows that this kind of wisdom is always a direct adversary to faith: For faith is a simple thing, and delivered purely with the design that all should receive it uniformly. In which case the man that affects singularity is never pleased

till he can form some new conception of the matter revealed, whereby he may import that the reach of his understanding is above the common measure.

So that the main characteristic of this wisdom is to be ever opposing, or scrupling, or refining upon faith, and pretending to lead that revealed light, which we all ought to follow. From this itch of pretended wise men, to unsettle religion, and to vend their own imaginations in place of divine oracles, it was that the Prophet, (*Isa. v. 21.*) denounces: “Woe against them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight.” And my text is no less a warning against this kind of wisdom from the exemplary mischiefs that it has formerly brought upon others, “who, professing themselves to be wise, became fools.” The truth that is pointed at in these words, I shall farther evince, and apply in these two propositions:—1. That human wisdom is a dangerous guide in matters of religion. And, 2. That GOD has vouchsafed faith as a necessary expedient in order both to make and keep men wise.

1. The First proposition, (*viz.* That human wisdom is a dangerous guide in matters in religion,) I shall evidence by showing, that the greatest mischiefs relating to religion, that ever happened to mankind, have owed their original to this pretended wisdom. And I need no more to prove this than the following instances, *viz.* (1.) That wisdom first extinguished the common worship of GOD, and brought idolatry into the world. (2.) That wisdom first wasted man’s conscience, and brought sin into the world. (3.) That this wisdom first corrupted faith and brought all heresies into the world.

(1.) As to the first instance, *viz.* That wisdom first extinguished the common worship of GOD, and brought idolatry into the world; it is the express intimation of the text; for the Apostle is here treating concerning the idolatry of the Gentiles; to what extravagance it proceeded, and from what cause it sprung; a subject which cannot be duly considered without matter of wonder.

NOAH the preacher of righteousness, who had warned the

old world and called them to repentance in vain, had at least this advantage by it, that he came with greater awe to teach and instruct the new : And he taught them in such a manner, both what they ought to believe and to do ; that the Apostle says of them, (ver. 21,) “ They all knew both GOD and his worship ;” though it was a knowledge they liked not to retain ; but instead of that, (ver. 23,) “ They changed the glory of the incorruptible GOD, into the image of corruptible man, and birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.” And the corruption of faith and worship together came on so fast, that the same NOAH, who had seen the funerals of the old world, for their *no* religion, saw likewise in his own days the new world overspread with false religion, more absurd and irrational than *none*.

Now the text tells us expressly that this state of things, as strange and gross as it was, was introduced under the pretences of wisdom, “ Professing to be wise they became fools :” And then, as an instance of this it is added, “ They changed the glory of the incorruptible GOD, into the image of corruptible man, and birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things :” From which it appears that their bringing in of idolatry, although it was the proof of their folly, yet it was the project of their wisdom.

It was the wise amongst them that formed the design, and addressed to the multitude with a grave appearance, and prevailed (as we may conceive) by some such form of arguing as this : ‘ We are all aware, ye sons of NOAH, that religion is our chief concern, and therefore it well becomes us to improve and advance that as much as possible : And although we have received appointments from GOD for the worship that he requires, yet if these appointments may be altered for his greater glory, who doubts but it will be commendable so to alter them ? Now our father NOAH has instituted us in a religion, which in truth is too simple, and too unassuming : It directs us to worship GOD abstractedly from all sense, and under a confused notion ; as having power, goodness, justice, wisdom, eternity, and the like ; an idea which we neither sufficiently reach, nor does that

sufficiently reach our affections: Whereas in all, reason we ought to worship GOD more pompously, and more extensively too, than his own essence. We ought not only to adore his personal attributes, but likewise all the emanations of them and all those creatures by whom they are eminently represented; this will stir up and quicken and direct our devotion. Nor let any say that this method will derogate from the honour of the Creator; certainly it is most expressive of his honour, when we acknowledge, that not only himself, but even his creatures are adorable. We ought therefore (if we will be wise) to worship the host of heaven; or rather to worship GOD through them, because they are eminent representations of his glory and eternity: We ought to worship the elements, because they represent his benign and sustaining presence: We ought to worship the ox and the sheep, and whatever creatures are most beneficial, because they are the symbols of his goodness: And with no less reason, the serpent, the crocodile and other noxious animals, because they are symbols of his awful anger. Thus it is that we shall worship him more intensely, and be affected with our worship.'

Now to men desirous to be wise in religion above what was prescribed, there is no doubt but such arguments as these would seem weighty enough to enforce their design. But there was another part of idolatry which obtained first, and spread farthest, that wisdom had yet more moving pretences to establish. The first fruits of idolatry were offered up to men; as we learn in this chapter from the verse following, and more at large from *Wisdom* xiv, where we are told that Princes were worshipped; whether present, in their persons; or distant, by their statues and pictures: And then men, (inferior to Princes, but eminent in their generation for any beneficent qualities,) after their death.

As for the worship of Princes, we have no reason to doubt but it was as early as NIMROD himself: BELUS and JUPITER, names by which he was known in other regions, import no less than his deification: So that though he failed in building his tower to heaven; which was a haughty

attempt, that God thought fit to repress; yet he failed not to build up himself to heaven in the estimation of his admirers; which was a judgment that God thought fit to permit upon those that so boldly sought it.

As for the deifying of Princes, wisdom suggested that they were the representatives of God's power upon earth; to which character worship was only due: And not only so, but because such an adoration would best conduce to the good government of the world, forasmuch as it added a new obligation to peace and submission; and made it of religious, as well as civil importance.

As for the worshipping of those among the dead, who had been famous in their generation, (such as former ages vulgarly called heroes, and modern the beatified, or the saints,) wisdom had abundance to allege for this establishment. As, [1.] That such an honour bestowed on the virtuous, was a proper incitement to others to imitate the same virtue. [2.] That to honour those that were eminent in such a manner, was chiefly to honour God, who made them so. [3.] That to address to such as mediators, was a more modest address to God, than if we applied immediately to himself. [4.] That by applying to those who had been so nearly touched with our infirmities, and our sins themselves not expected, we were sure to find the more compassionate and tender advocates.

I doubt not but men in that age were qualified to argue for their humours as well as they can now, and we know that wisdom has carried this point in the Church of Rome, even at this day of Gospel-light.

Thus wisdom brought idolatry into the world.

(2.) The Second instance whereby I proposed to evince it a dangerous guide in matters of religion, was this: That wisdom, (or let me indifferently call it reason, a name more in vogue in reference of the subject,) it was wisdom or reason that first wasted man's conscience, and brought sin into the world.

There has been a time when human wisdom or reason had a fairer pretence to conduct than ever it will have again.

In Paradise where it was without the opposition of appetite, without the bias of prejudice, without the cloud of perturbations, who can think but it had then more power and freedom to conduct wisely, than ever it could pretend to since? Therefore if it failed then in point of conduct; this must needs pass for an argument to abate some of that veneration, which many are willing should be ascribed to it, under this state of so unhappy a change: Let us then consider the scene of things as it lay at that time.

God charged our first parents not to eat of the tree in the midst of the garden; binding his charge with this sanction, that they should die when they did it. Now at that time, there was not any *Φρονημα σαρκος*, No "law of the members warring against the law of the mind;" no rebellion of appetite against the dictates of understanding. To suppose there was, would be to suppose our first parents fallen even before the fall, and to have been made under the same disorder, that their posterity now complain of.

And accordingly we find in Holy Scripture, that the sin of our first parents in that case is distinguished from those of all their offspring. For whereas other men's sins are generally called *επιθυμια*, lusts, we may observe, that their sin is always called *απατη*, deception. The Apostle calls it no less than thrice, *απατη*, that is, a deception or imposture that they suffered to pass upon their understanding. Whereof we may take an illustration from a scriptural passage, (1 *Kings* xiii,) where we find a young Prophet of Judah sent to denounce God's judgments against JEROBOAM in Bethel; who withal received a command that he "should neither eat nor drink in that place."

Now it no way appears that the violence of this young Prophet's appetite did raise in him any desire to disobey this command; on the contrary, he was upon his return resolvedly and contentedly, without either eating or drinking; so that it is plain his appetite did not constrain him to transgress. But an old Prophet of the place, moved probably with envy that the honour of this message had been conferred on a Prophet of Judah, and not on himself, ad-

dresses, to him with an imposture; telling him that God did reverse his former order, and did now give him liberty to eat and drink in Bethel. As consequently he did, and thereupon received the reward that is due to him who disobeys a certain command, for the sake of an uncertain suggestion. With the like imposture and fiction it was that the old serpent addressed himself to our first parents; implying by the tendency of all his discourse, that God had either dissembled his real will in his former order, or at least that he had now reversed it; so that now they should not die, but on the contrary receive great advantage from the eating of the fruit. And hereupon they proceeded to eat it, being drawn aside to do so, not from the violence of appetite, but from the temerity of reason; which suffered them to believe an uncertain suggestion, in opposition to a certain command. From which I observe that it was reason, not appetite, that made the first false step in nature, and withal opened an inlet to the succeeding violence of the passions.

And how little cause have we then to lay such a stress upon that faculty, or be so fond of its guidance: For if reason betrayed in the most perfect state, how much more easily will it do so now, if ever it be permitted to argue against the obvious sense of what has been revealed?

And if wisdom were thus originally the parent of sin, we may less wonder that in after ages it has become so indulgent a nurse to it; as we may prove it to have been by one instance I shall offer; from which it will appear that this pretension to wisdom or reason has given a greater blow to virtue, and settled the empire of sin upon a firmer establishment in the Christian world, than either ignorance or natural pravity was ever able to do in the Heathen. For example:—

When a general idolatry (but now mentioned) had brought men to desert God, and God in justice to desert them to the mischief of their option; when, in consequence of this affected blindness, men in most cases came to doubt what it was to do well, and what advantage it would be to

do so ; one would have thought that sin then, if ever, was like to get the field ; and that the kingdom of SATAN had been settled without reluctancy. And yet it was not so ; the Heathens still found an invincible check from the bodings of their consciences, and the apprehensions thereupon that there was to be a future reckoning.

And by this very bridle, many amongst them lived under great restraint, and were men of virtue ; and they that were otherwise could not escape remorse or affrightment for their guilt.

The wisdom of the world, to arm itself against these fears, did, first from the palpable mistake concerning the gods then in worship, start the opinion, that there was no GOD at all. But the notion of Atheism did seem so monstrous and irrational, that few would receive it ; and they who professed it were looked upon as not believing themselves, but as speaking rather what they wished than what they thought.

Others (proposing to offer less violence to the conceptions of mankind) taught, That indeed there were Gods ; but that they were regardless of human affairs ; and that such a state of incuriousness in them was necessary to their own happiness and quiet. But neither could this notion work far ; because it seemed to the generality, as absurd and affronting to the Divine nature, to believe that GOD was indifferent and regardless, as to believe there was no GOD at all.

A Third, and that the strongest barrier against all such ill bodings, was drawn from the philosophy of our constitution, whereby the soul was represented as mortal as the body, and thereupon secure against all future accounts.

And yet all these arguments had not power to shelter the Heathen world from frightful apprehensions concerning the future ill consequences of sin. They still doubted that forasmuch as their souls had a notion of eternity, they had likewise an essential relation to eternity ; and therefore they thought their own inward hopes and fears spoke better sense about the issues of such a duration, than they could

meet with from the reasonings of them that pretended to be wiser.

And here the Heathens were forced to stop ; and though their wit and will were heartily joined to serve the cause of vice as far as they could, yet they could never remove this awful barrier. Whereas, in a more illuminated time, (as we must allow that of the Gospel to be,) the most illuminated of that time (as they would have us allow the Socinians to be) have, with great ostentation, and as great applause of their wisdom, done the cause of vice more effectual service, than ever could be done it before.

Abating the outrage they have done the Scripture, (about which they are not very solicitous,) they have made this hypothesis plausible as well as grateful. They speak respectfully of GOD ; and not disrespectfully of the soul. They determine not how, or of what it is made ; but they determine that, as it is a creature of GOD's, so it is either mortal or immortal at his discretion. And thereupon, to reward the pious with eternal happiness, is what well suits with GOD's goodness. But it would not do so to punish the sinful with eternal torments : That could neither suit with goodness nor justice itself ; because between temporal guilt and eternal punishment, there is no proportion. And therefore all that the sinful soul may fear from GOD, is a declaration of its incapacity for heaven, and a sentence of its extinction and loss of being.

Never was such an amulet as this offered to quiet all the bodings of conscience. Never did sin sleep upon so soft a pillow as is made up of this hypothesis, which carries careless souls, beyond all former hope, even in the lap of their own wish ; which is, Never to be acquainted with eternity, so they may undisturbedly enjoy their present inclinations.

JUVENAL the poet, speaking of that notion that the Heathens had formed of a future state, that there was a boat, and a ferryman, and a black lake, which careless souls were to pass over to a miserable abode, cries out, *Quis puer hoc credat ?* That is, in its circumstantial dress, ' It were foolish to believe this ; but adds, *At tu vera puta ;*

Do thou, whoever thou art, believe this, at least something like this, to be true.

And who can say but JUVENAL was a wise man in this reflection? But then, is it not suprisingly strange that a more elevated wisdom should set itself to prove that nothing like this ought to be believed? And that all fears of futurity are groundless, except that of being made insensible? It was wisdom to believe hell torments, in those that neither knew GOD nor his revelation: And can it be wisdom too for any not to believe hell torments, who are sure that GOD has revealed them? And is it not further suprisingly strange, that those men who pretend their zeal for morality is above that of all others, should open such a sluice to the flood of immorality? Alas, what a contradictory thing is professed wisdom, when once it affects to lead in matters of faith! It is much more absurd and mischievous than confessed folly.

(3.) Thus much for the second charge of wisdom, namely, That it brought sin into the world. The last I proposed, to warn us against fondness for its guidance, is this, namely, That it first corrupted faith, and brought all heresies into the Church. Suitably to this, it is commonly observed of that sect of men, who in the earliest days of Christianity invented so many corruptions of faith, that they hardly left room for the invention of subsequent ages to find out any new; that they affected for a distinguishing name to be called, *Gnostici*, that is, the *Knowers*, or such as understood more than their neighbours. And we cannot doubt but our Apostle had an eye to some of these, and their wild opinions, as well as the principle that occasioned them, (1 *Tim.* vi. 20,) where charging TIMOTHY to stand firm in the faith, and to keep that *Depositum*, that is, that scheme of Christian doctrine which had been delivered, he prescribes to him this means as necessary to his purpose, namely, That he should avoid the “oppositions της γνωσης of science (or wisdom) falsely so called; which some professing have erred concerning the faith.” We know the Scripture meddles not with the impeachment of any science,

or with calling it false, but barely as it intrenches upon faith, and opposes that which it ought to follow; and therefore this science is here specified by its opposition, that is, its inclination to oppose the faith commonly received; accounting it a restraint (as I have intimated already) to think or believe with the vulgar.

And to evidence that this kind of science did make men err concerning faith, as the text allegeth, let us but consider those heresies that are mentioned in Scripture as first obtaining in the church, and we shall soon see how they took their rise, at least, their pretence, from this very principle.

Some there were (we know) who erred concerning the resurrection, saying it was already past; and no doubt but it was a start of wisdom, and affectation of extraordinary reach, that first formed this into a heresy. For example:—

Some of the Heathen philosophers, who were grown to dress up their doctrines for ostentation, and not so much to instruct, as to make themselves admired, had pronounced of virtue, that it was a sufficient reward of itself; and that a good man was happy enough in being good, and leading a life according to reason, although there were no expectations of a future recompence.

Whereupon, some Christian proselytes, pleasing themselves with this notion, adopted it into Christianity, and held that it was a poor and mercenary thing to practise godliness for the expectation of another world: And that therefore, although God had, in the Gospel, declared a resurrection, yet this resurrection was to be understood in a figurative sense, that is, to import no more than a rising from the state of sin to the state of righteousness: And that Christian virtue would then be more glorious, and more worthy of God, when it shall appear that he obeys for God's sake, rather than for his own.

Thus these were pleased, by dint of wisdom, to void the promises of heaven; which wild conclusion we may wonder at the less, since the wise Socinians have at this day, with

no less contradiction to Scripture, been pleased to void the threatnings of hell.

We are told of another sect in that age, who erred concerning the condition of the Gospel-covenant, resting upon a naked faith as the entire qualification; and thereby voiding the law, vilifying obedience, and turning the grace of GOD into wantonness.

One would not think, indeed, that wisdom could have much pretence towards this project, and yet it had: The Antinomians alleged, that whereas it was the peculiar glory of GOD to be infinitely merciful, and the glory of CHRIST's satisfaction to be infinitely valuable: The more guilt men had, the more abundant opportunities they gave to GOD to discover the riches of his pardon; and the more men were in debt, the greater appeared to be both the value of their ransom, and the credit of their REDEEMER.

No doubt but this arguing seemed wise to them that used it: And at least we have this to allege for the support of its pretence, that the Antinomians were not more extravagant in asserting that CHRIST's satisfaction was sufficient to save without the care of good living, than the Socinians are in asserting that the care of good living is sufficient to save without the satisfaction of CHRIST: For so their scheme runs:—

That CHRIST neither made nor intended any satisfaction at all; and yet every impartial man may convince himself, that it is not more evident in Scripture, that GOD requires us to be holy, than that CHRIST shed his blood for our redemption; redemption I say, not in the exemplary, but in the expiatory sense.

We have another mass of heretical corruption spoken of by our Apostle, (*2 Thess. ii.*) not indeed as then reigning, but rather foretold as that it should reign, through occasion of a "certain man of sin sitting as God in the temple of God." Even the Papists allowing that the scene of this grand corruption of faith is Rome; and we may without prejudice affirm it to be Popery itself.

Now to see how wisdom has contributed to bring this

mass of abuses into that church, let us but consider this single one ; which we may look upon as the most characteristic ; viz.

The setting up of a human infallible guide ; whereby every Bishop of that See would be held for a Holy Ghost incarnate ; And what can come nearer to “ one sitting as GOD in the temple of GOD ? ”

What hand wisdom had in hatching this conceit, we may learn from the wisest of that communion, when they allege that the belief of this is the sure and only method to end all controversies, and establish that peace and union which all good Christians desire.

And as for the means made use of to bring this conceit into credit, they have carried in them the most pompous semblance of wisdom imaginable ; while its particular champions, the Jesuits, (the artificial PETAVIUS and others,) have contrived, with elaborate pains and study, to weaken the authority of the Scriptures, as being of uncertain interpretation, and of uncertain reception ; and to puzzle the sense of all the distinguishing articles of Christianity, by alleging the opposition of heretics, and by raking up all the dissonancies of expressions that are to be met with in the writings of the ancients.

As, indeed, how can the same truth be delivered without dissonancies of expression, supposing it to be delivered upon different occasions, and for different respects ? Let the expressions of ST. PAUL and ST. JAMES upon the article of justification pass for an instance of appeal.

In the mean time, the wisdom of the Church of Rome thought fit to do all this insidiously, and with purpose to deceive, so they might serve this important end ; viz.,

To make Christians believe that they must needs be bewildered while they were under such an unstable conduct as that of the Scriptures, Councils, and Fathers ; and therefore conclude themselves obliged to repair to the standing infallible guide.

Ask the Socinians themselves whether there were not admirable wisdom in this contrivance : For even they

themselves make use of the same means, and borrow their boasted arms from the Jesuits' shop; not indeed to the same end, in form; but to the same, in mischief: Not to establish the Pope for an infallible guide, but to establish reason for an infallible guide; which in effect is to set up as many Popes in the world, as there are men of assuming imagination.

What I have said hitherto has been in order to evince the truth of my first proposition, viz. that wisdom is a dangerous guide in matters of religion.

I offered a second, viz. that GOD had vouchsafed faith as a necessary expedient both to make and to keep men wise: Which I reserve for the subject of another discourse.

SERMON IV.

ON THE SAME SUBJECT.

ROM. i. 22.

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.

FROM these words considered together with their occasion, I have before inferred these two heads of discourse:—

I. That human wisdom (or reason) is a dangerous guide in matters of religion. And this I have proved already, by showing how strangely wisdom has failed in all her conduct about such matters.

II. The Second is, That GOD has ordained faith as a necessary expedient, both to make and to keep men wise. The proof whereof I am now to pursue.

I suppose there is no man in the world, but will grant, that what GOD vouchsafes to reveal must be abler to make us wise, than what we can conceive of ourselves: Nor (in consequence) will any deny, that faith to what is revealed is a due which we owe not only to GOD for the honour of his truth; but likewise to ourselves, for the sake of our safe conduct: And therefore there is like to be no dispute whether faith (in general) can make men wise: The dispute is only upon this point, What kind of faith (in particular) it must be that makes men wise: And we shall find that the judgment of mankind lies under a common prejudice against what is true in reference to this point.

For we may observe it to obtain in the world, that the faith adapted to make a wise man, must be a cautious and reserved faith, because all forwardness in believing exposes men to be deceived: And yet in Holy Scripture we are

taught clean contrary, that GOD is only pleased with an humble and ready faith, and every abatement of forwardness is a diminution of its value.

Our SAVIOUR in his walk to Emmaus calls his disciples fools, because they were slow of heart to believe. And soon after he tells THOMAS, that the tardiness of his faith had robbed it of its blessing, for “blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”

And because I am fallen upon the mention of this Apostle, I will choose to insist a little upon his character, which may serve both for an example and an illustration of the matter I am upon.

THOMAS (as far as we may learn by all the mentions made of him in Holy Writ) was a man bold in reasoning, and extremely nice in believing; which is a character that by the standard of the present age has licence to pass for an indication of wisdom.

In *John* xiv. 2—4, we have a passage of discourse wherein this Apostle was wholly concerned: There our SAVIOUR says very obligingly to those about him, “In my FATHER’S house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. And whither I go you know, and the way you know.” To this obliging declaration THOMAS answers very peremptorily, “LORD, we know not whither thou goest, and how should we know the way?” We see the answer is directly contradicting that which our SAVIOUR alleged; and yet no doubt but the Apostle thought himself to have reason on his side for making such an answer. Let us imagine what that reason might be: It is possible he might form his arguing on this manner:—‘LORD, thou sayest, thou art going to thy FATHER’S house to provide mansions for us: Now we know thy father’s house, according to natural generation, is that of JOSEPH and MARY, in which many mansions are not to be had; but if thou meanest a father by any other kind of generation, or any other inheritance which thou hast a title to recommend us to; this is what we do not understand, and what we do not understand, it is impossible for us to believe: And therefore say to us some-

thing that we may believe; or in the mean time permit us to be incredulous and to say, We know not whither thou goest.'

If I have in this form argued any thing contrary to the sentiments of the Apostle, I have whereof to retract in reverence to his subsequent better understanding: But I fear I have said nothing that the present age will require me to apologize for: Because they who set up for a leading genius, please themselves to argue in the very same method to justify a like incredulity. Thus runs the common argument, 'We cannot believe what we please; we must comprehend both the matter and its credibility, or else it were rash and foolish to believe it.'

In *John* xi. we have another passage wherein THOMAS was wholly concerned: There our SAVIOUR says to his disciples, "Our friend LAZARUS is dead, and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent you may believe:" (*Ver.* 14:) This we see our SAVIOUR urged expressly for an encouragement of their faith; and yet THOMAS'S reasoning turned it immediately into an argument of distrust: As is apparent from what he said to his fellow disciples upon this occasion, "Let us also go, that we may die with him:" (*Ver.* 16:) The key of his meaning in this sentence we may take from the narration in the beginning of the chapter, where it is said, that our SAVIOUR, being then in Galilee, upon the news of LAZARUS'S sickness, proposed to go into Judea to visit him: Whereupon the disciples answered, "Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee, and goest thou thither again?" (*Ver.* 8.)

Now this thought made a deep impression upon the wary imagination of THOMAS; and therefore, when he saw his Master resolved to go, he wound up all into this sort of reasoning despair:—'LAZARUS is dead, and all his pains and fears are over; and better it were for us, if ours were so too: The Jews' malice is bent upon the destruction of us all; and if our Master could not save his principal friend from death, what hopes are there of his saving us? Let us go then, and meet our doom as patiently as we can.'—

This is the natural paraphrase of what THOMAS meant by that sentence, “ Let us also go, that we may die with him :” And although nothing could be more contrary to the faith he owed his Master, or more affronting to the importance of what he had then said ; yet still he looked upon this as sound reasoning : And indeed it was as sound as any other man’s is ; and brought forth as good fruits as any other man’s does, when it once takes licence to scruple what it ought to believe.

The last mention of this Apostle is in the instance of the resurrection. He had been told that our SAVIOUR was risen from the dead, and the truth of it had been attested to him by evidences beyond exception : Several companies who had seen him, and conversed with him several times ; to whom he had exposed the sight and feeling of his wounds ; to whom he had expounded the Scriptures concerning himself ; with whom he had broken the sacramental bread, and conferred on them the operative benediction of, “ Receive ye the HOLY GHOST :” All these, with all these convincing tokens, had told THOMAS that CHRIST was risen : But yet THOMAS (in pure wisdom) would not believe. And no doubt but he conceived reason to be on his side for all this behaviour : Reason suggested that a wise man ought to be cautious to the utmost, lest he be imposed upon : Reason suggested that when he had his choice of several matters to believe, he ought to choose that which was in itself most credible : Now it was more credible that such a number of witnesses might be deceived, or (as honest as they once were) might be drawn into confederacy to deceive, than that “ one should rise from the dead ;” because this was naturally impossible ; it could not be done without a miracle ; and wise men will never have recourse to miracles, so long as nature may solve the appearance.

Now suppose that THOMAS proceeded thus far with reason on his side, and acted like a wise, that is, a cautious man ; (as, for aught I see, the standard of many men’s judgments at this day will allow him to have acted ;) yet let me observe one thing more from his example, and that is

this : Namely, that human reason is very subject to be partially blind ; for while it is hunting after those arguments that make for its present purpose, it never takes notice of those that make more strongly against it.

As for instance : When THOMAS refused to admit conviction from the sense and attestation of so many credible witnesses, yet at the same time he declared it fit to be determined by the verdict of his own sense ; where he never considered what a haughty piece of injustice it was to imply, that his own single sense was less fallible, than the joint experience of such a number. Again, while he imagined it possible that so many good men should conspire to deceive him ; he never considered how many arguments there were to prove, that this censure of his was absurd as well as uncharitable : For had he not conversed now three years under the conviction of all sorts of miracles, and could he not extend his faith to believe that one more might be done ? After he had seen his LORD raise more than one from the dead, could he not think it possible that he himself might be raised by the same power ? Nay, (what was yet more culpable than all the rest,) after he had heard his LORD publicly averring beforehand, that “ thus it must be, and that he should rise again the third day ;” he never considered that to distrust the event, after such a prediction of such a person, as had sufficiently proved himself able to do whatever he thought fit to be done, was a distrust absolutely irreligious and profane. And yet thus it was. Thus the wise pretences of incredulity could betray THOMAS to be irreverent, uncharitable, absurd, and irreligious, and all under the colour of being reasonable. These extravagant effects niceness in believing could produce in him ; and who can question but that they are likely to produce the same in any one else ?

This single example serves to inform us, into what a labyrinth reason will lead men, when once it declines the conduct of an humble and ready faith ; and upon this my assertion is founded, that such a faith is our only guide unto

wisdom. But I shall proceed to evidence the same by a black cloud of instances.

I doubt not but they who scruple, or oppose, or depart from the common faith at this day, will readily allow, that in whatever they except against the received form, they do it from this same principle of wisdom and caution, viz. Lest they should be imposed upon by the mistakes of others; and therefore they resolve to adhere to some sense of their own, which they look upon as more rational and less obnoxious to absurdity or deceiving. And there are two parties of men who have made themselves very notorious for this pretence. 1. The First is of those who will not allow any Revelation, i. e., nor any Scripture dictated from GOD. 2. And the Second is of those who will not admit the received interpretation of that Scripture, which they allow to have been revealed.

Now it may be made appear from the instances of these very parties, that no man ever departed from the common faith upon pretence of avoiding any absurdities therein supposed, but that he ran himself upon the necessity of believing greater absurdities, than any he pretended to avoid.

1. The first party consists of those who deny all revelation; who profess a religion of nature's teaching, but none that GOD has taught: Who distinguish themselves by the name of Deists, because they own a GOD, but barely a GOD; and not those dispensations which are most suitable to the goodness of the GOD they own: Of which revelation is the chief.

Now however the wisdom of such men may please itself with this cautious infidelity, which they pretend to take up as a guard against imposture; yet would it not be wiser for every man to suspect his particular reason when he does, or may, observe it to clash with the common reason of mankind? And certainly to deny Revelation is a conceit that clashes with the universal reason and persuasion of mankind in all ages of the world. For there is nothing wherein

men have consented more freely (next to the Being of a God) than in this belief, that it is suitable to the goodness of God to hold a correspondence and commerce with men, and to exert himself in a Providence that extends as well to the conduct of actions, as to the disposal of events; that is, a Providence for man's better part, as well as for his worse.

So long as men continued in the worship of the true God, they had this notion riveted upon their minds by the vouchsafement of frequent messages, and of such oracular directions, as demonstrated themselves to come from God: And when men departed from the true worship, yet they could not depart from this rooted expectation: Inasmuch that the Devil could not maintain the reputation of his worship among them without a pretence to the same commerce. And this was the original of all the Heathen oracles: Which although they were delusory, yet they afford an evidence that there were others true and divine, and that mankind always hoped for such from the God they worshipped.

The Deist will submit his faith to a Heathen evidence, though he will not to a Christian; and therefore he will not deny these oracles to have been, and to have been frequent amongst the Gentiles: He readily grants that SOCRATES (whom he is willing to prefer above CHRIST and his Apostles) got his reputation of the wisest man of his country, from the response of an oracle: In which response, by the way, we must presume either that God over-ruled the voice of the evil spirit, (as he did in BALAAM'S case,) and so forced him to speak on virtue's side; or else that the Devil found himself necessitated sometimes to do so, in reverence to men's consciences; over whom he was not always able to maintain his awe without some semblance of approving virtue. Now if such oracles were; let any one likewise tell us how they came to cease all together, as it is owned they did, at the time of the revelation by our LORD JESUS: How came they thus to cease on a sudden, if it were not from the design of Providence to make that event give testimony both to JESUS, and his

revelation: To JESUS, that he was one who had power over the Devil; and to his revelation, that it was plenary and consummate, so that for the future men needed not seek any farther to learn what is the full and acceptable and perfect will of GOD.

When the Deist confirms his prejudice against the Christian revelation from this argument, that all religions pretend to the same original, that is, to come from GOD: I allow that reason has here a proper province; let it therefore be called in: Let reason inquire, and then judge, and say whether there is any other religion so worthy of GOD as the Christian is? Whether there is any whose doctrines are so convincing: And whose miracles are so demonstrative: Nay, whether ever there was any thing of human faith, that came so attested as our religion does, and failed of belief in the world: And what singular perverseness is it then that this should not be believed? Let any one say especially, how the gospel truth, that asserted itself so effectually in its beginning, at that time when any possibility of fraud could best have been discovered, after it had asserted itself against all the malice of SATAN, and the opposition of all worldly powers; can after 1600 years be given up as a fiction, or be affected with any such discredit, from the perfidiousness of a company of bold, and loose, and weak deserters; let any one reflect upon these considerations, and he shall find that Deists' opinion runs them upon a multitude of absurdities; besides all the fatal mischief of its consequences.

The several religions received among the Gentiles, were so full of gross superstitions, and palpable errors, that many particular men amongst those Gentiles, of sounder judgments and better spirits than the common, were scandalized at their religions, and had them in contempt: So that, although for decency's sake, they gave occasional countenance to the vulgar rites of worship; yet their private religion consisted in forming to themselves a more rational notion of GOD, abstracted from all the received idols; and the worship they deemed most suitable to such a GOD,

was placed in following reason, and reverencing their consciences, and cultivating their minds in the study of knowledge and practice of virtue: And these were such as among the Greeks they first called philosophers. They whom we modernly call Deists, are the apes of those philosophers; and that they may be thought like them, set up to treat Christian religion with the same contempt as those did the vulgar Heathen.

For the philosophers were such as in the night of Gentile darkness, set up their candle, (so SOLOMON calls "the spirit of man, the candle of the LORD,") they strictly attended to the improvement of their minds, and so set up their candle, and walked commendably by the light of it: Now these men were truly wise, none under their circumstances could possibly be wiser.

But on the contrary the Deists are such, as at noon-day shut up their windows, and keep out the sun; and then set up their candle, and say, that is the most agreeable light, and the best guide to their household business. Now what can be alleged for the wisdom of these? There have been some carried away with this fantastical admiration of the philosophers' religion in former times of Christianity; but they were rare as monsters, and so accounted of: But they never grew numerous and in heart, till of late, since they took their growth and apology from the conduct of the Socinians; the second party I propose to instance in.

2. The conduct of the Socinians was this; they owned the Scriptures to be the word of God, but would not abide by the received interpretation of that word; nor admit that explication of the principal doctrines therein contained, which had been delivered down by the universal church; but instead of this, usurped a liberty of interpreting all anew at their own discretion, and to make them speak their own prejudicated sense. In conformity to this design, SOCRINUS, after he had formed his new scheme of divinity, to make it pass upon the world with all the advantage he could, introduces his exposition upon ST. JOHN, with this sentence, *Multa sunt profecto in quibus Christianus orbis ad-*

huc cæcutit, et fortasse plura quam quis vel credere, vel etiam cogitare possit, that is, ‘There are undoubtedly many truths, and perhaps more than any one can either believe or imagine, in respect of which the whole Christian world has been hitherto quite blind and ignorant.’ Which sentence (and several such like accompanying it) makes it appear, that never any man more filled up each member of that character which our SAVIOUR gives of the Pharisees, viz. Of thinking well of himself and despising others, than SOCINUS did. For it implies that although the Scriptures were the oracles of GOD, yet they resembled those of the Gentiles in this; that they were dark and of a doubtful sense, and that hitherto they had been quite mistaken, till such time as this new illumination had been vouchsafed to himself. Now since this imagination passed upon SOCINUS from his caution of being imposed upon by the former interpreters of Scripture: Let us consider how palpably he must have imposed upon himself before this imagination could take place.

If he believed it himself, can any one else in reason believe, that the whole Christian world had been blind down to his days, and ignorant in the most important truths, which it was reserved for his honour to reveal; so that the Light of the world had not yet enlightened mankind, till his comments had dispelled the cloud that lay upon it? Can any one believe with reason, that all the assertors of our religion in the primitive ages, men holy, studious, learned, distinguished with all the gifts of GOD, both gracious and miraculous, had yet none of that ‘knowledge of the mind of GOD,’ which might now be learned at the feet of SOCINUS? Can it appear agreeable to the providence of GOD, and his good will for human salvation, after he had required faith to please him as well as obedience; and that faith in doctrines as well as in promises; yet to let fifteen centuries pass without making it commonly known what it was he required men to believe? Can it appear consistent with GOD’s promise to his church, that his SPIRIT should lead them into all truth, and yet for such a tract of time the

whole multitude of Christians should account it impious to believe that which now the Polish Catechism says, ‘ It is damnable not to believe, when it is proposed :’ So that, if Christians were saved before that time in the common faith, it was from the apology of their ignorance ; as their ignorance was, because they had not a SOCINUS to instruct them ?

Say, rather, why the Deists may not as colourably reject the Scriptures, as the Socinians own them, with so many contradictions to GOD’S truth and goodness. In due reverence to both these attributes of GOD we are obliged to affirm, that the sense as well as the letter of Scripture, in all matters necessary either to be done or believed, hath been the depositum of the church, and faithfully preserved under its keeping : That the whole faith, which (as the Apostle says) was *απαξ*, “ at once delivered to the saints,” had at the same time its meaning delivered ; which from them has been derived by indubitable testimony, as the matter of our uniform belief : That the different opinions, sects and factions in the world, are no argument against this ; because as ST. PETER has warned us, they who diversify the common faith, do not interpret but “ wrst the Scriptures,” and (as ST. PAUL has observed) divisions and heresies spring not from ignorance, but from carnality ; not from want of light, but want of love : Pride and envy, and contention and vanity, have in all ages, not been at a loss for truth, but have been contriving and setting up somewhat they liked better. And let us see, in the next place, what it was that the particular affections of SOCINUS liked better than the received interpretations.

He and his party are pleased to take offence that there are any mysteries in religion ; they will have nothing for the object of our faith, but what is plain to our understanding, and easy to our apprehension ; and although they will not affirm that reason has the measure of what is or what may be, yet they resolve reason to have the measure of what ought to be believed : Which I think is absurdity sufficient.

They conclude thereupon that the doctrine of the incarnation, that is, of "God taking our flesh and dwelling among us," must not be believed, because it is irrational : And as for the doctrine of the Trinity, it would be offensive to pious ears to repeat those expressions of reproach with which they load it. They say that these doctrines justly scandalize Jews and Turks, and hinder them from coming in to our religion. But as it is no office of civility to compliment away our faith ; so neither is it any office of charity in the Socinians to go off from the foundation to meet Jews and Turks, and to turn half-Infidels that they may turn half-Christians. But after all, when by the grossest wresting of words, and abuse of plain sense, they have showed themselves as much friends to fancy, as they are enemies to faith ; after they have interpreted all mysteries out of religion, and so made their new hypothesis familiar and inoffensive, and therefore credible, as they would have us imagine ; we must pronounce upon it, what MINUTIUS sometimes did in the like case, *In incredibili verum, in credibili mendacium* ; truth still lies on the incredible, and falsehood on the credible side.

And to justify this censurè, let us consider, that the mystery of any thing, or (what is all one) the abstruse or incomprehensible nature of any thing, is no argument against our believing it.

This is a rule, I am sure, that holds true in nature, and then with what face can we deny it to hold true in religion ? We surrender our faith to the state of all visible things, without comprehending them ; and what obstinacy is it then to refuse our faith to the things of GOD under the same condition ? It would be an affront and calumny to nature, to affirm that those things which are before us, those works of GOD which lie every moment under our senses, are simply credible ; that is, such as our reason would persuade us *could* be, if we had not *seen* them to be : How short is our plummet from fathoming the essence, mode, powers, operations, productions of the most common beings ? Undoubtedly, had we the knowledge of this world we live in only

from a book, we should be tempted to treat that book with as little reverence, as the Socinians or Deists have done the Holy Scriptures; and conclude that most of the things that are in it were as incomprehensible, impossible, and therefore incredible, as they fancy any thing to be that God has revealed concerning himself.

Let me produce an instance or two, and those out of the Holy Scriptures, to inculcate by the way, that the philosophical truths we meet with *there*, are venerable, as well as the divine.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” says the Sacred History; where the word “created” is interpreted by all to mean, that God made the world without any pre-existent matter to make it of. Now this production of the world we believe from the authority of the report; and likewise because of the absurdities that necessarily follow from the supposal of the contrary; and yet human reason could never form any idea whereby to conceive the possibility of such a production: And let any one say whether it be harder to believe, That the Divine Essence did from everlasting flow into three co-eternal subsistences, than to believe, that in the beginning of time all things were made out of nothing: Or whether reason has more arguments to plead for the one, than for the other.

Holy JOB, to exemplify the power of God, pitches upon this instance, (*Ch.* xxvi. 7,) “He hangeth the earth upon nothing;” or, (as the expression points elsewhere,) “He maketh it stand firm without a foundation.” Now when we find it impossible for the utmost art of man to make a small clod of earth hang in the air, it is naturally impossible for man to conceive how the whole mass should hang in the air. It is true, when we see how things are, we pride ourselves in assigning of reasons why they must be so; but all fall short of solving the difficulty: Centre, or magnetism, or whatever notions have been espoused, will not solve it in the present instance: No cause could make the earth hang upon nothing, but the omnipotence of that will that ordered it to be so: Nor could we ever believe it, but from a

submission of our faith to that omnipotence ; or from a submission to our senses, even while they controul and muzzle the reluctancy of our reason.

For another instance of the incomprehensible works of God, the sea is alleged in the same book, (*Chap. xxxviii.*) of which it is said, “ That God has established its place by his decree, and set bars and doors before it, and said to it, Hitherto shall thy proud waves come, and no farther.” Which observation is founded upon the convexity or roundness of the surface of those waters ; in respect of which, (as the Psalmist naturally expresses it,) “ they stand upon a heap :” A heap as miraculous, were it not more common, as that the Israelites passed through in the Red Sea : For in this heap the waters are bound up, that (as the Psalmist expresses it) “ they turn not again to cover the earth ;” which by the common laws of motion, they otherwise must necessarily do, and pour in upon every shore a deluge instead of a tide. Reason, uninformed by experience of this state of things, could not possibly believe it ; and yet how wild would the man be thought that should not believe it !

Once more,—The Psalmist for an instance of the same kind, takes it from the frame of our own being, “ I am fearfully and wonderfully made :” To consider the curiousness of our frame is amazing, and to reflect upon the power that orders it to be so, is no less tremendous. Let me instance but in one particular, whereof I will borrow the hint from SOLOMON in his description of old age, “ Or ever the wheel be broken at the cistern :” (*Eccles. xii. 6.*) Which expression cannot be interpreted so genuinely of any thing, as of that spring and pulse in the heart, which begins the circular motion of our blood : Let us consider, in this instance, how our blood, a ponderous body, (contrary to the law of common nature,) ascends without reluctancy, and descends without precipitation ; is of so many different colours, under so many forms of digestion, moves so many years without any influence of our thoughts or reflection, and when it ceases takes life away with itself. Let any weigh these circumstances, and he will cry out with the same holy writer,

“ Such knowledge is too great and excellent for me, I cannot attain unto it.” And yet none of this mystery is an argument against believing it.

I need instance no farther. Nature is full of mysteries and incomprehensible things ; and may we think then that the nature or subsistence of GOD can be revealed to us, and not admit a mystery ? We account those Israelites were very gross logicians who thus argued, “ He smote the stony rock indeed, that the waters gushed forth ; but can he give bread also, and provide flesh for his people ? ” (*Psalms* xxviii.) That is, although we acknowledge that GOD has done this miracle, we will not believe he can do another. But it is yet more gross arguing for any one to say, I believe the works of GOD, although they are incomprehensible ; but I will not believe any thing of GOD himself, unless I comprehend it.

It is true, we believe these incredible things in nature, because we see them ; but then, may not our ears bring in as good evidence as our eyes ? Certainly we are less obnoxious to deception in hearing what GOD speaks, than we are in seeing what nature exhibits.

But this still is the question which the Socinians will not suffer to be begged. They affirm, that GOD has not spoken any mysteries concerning either himself, or the methods of our redemption. They say, our interpreters have coined these mysteries ; whereas their interpretation has made them all plain.

And here (I confess again) reason has a proper province to act in ; for, although reason is not to prescribe the matter of our belief, revelation is to do that ; yet reason is a proper judge whether such or such a matter is revealed or no. For this consists only in apprehending the sense of plain words, which every man’s understanding has an equal right to pretend to.

Whereas therefore SOCINUS says, he had a favourable regard to Jews and Turks in his interpretation of the Scripture ; let them fairly be called in, and interpret for themselves. ‘ They are scandalized at the belief of a Trinity ; ’ be it so : But when they see in the Scriptures, that there

are three to whom we are devoted in our baptismal covenant: Three in whom we must believe, to whom we must pray, by whom we must bless, to whom we must give worship and glory; undoubtedly they will believe a Trinity, as soon as they will believe that the Scriptures do not teach one.

‘They are averse from believing that JESUS was GOD;’ be it so: But when they see it express in Scripture, that He, who in time was JESUS, “was GOD from everlasting;” that when he took our flesh upon him, “He thought it no robbery to be equal with the Father;” that He it is, “who in the beginning laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the works of his hands;” undoubtedly they will as soon believe that JESUS is truly GOD, as they will believe that the Scriptures do not say he is.

Let them see how, when our blessed LORD was charged with blasphemy for making himself “equal with GOD,” he denied not the matter, but only absolved it from the crime; how at his most solemn devotion, when about to leave the world, he prayed on this manner, “And now, O Father, glorify me with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” Undoubtedly they will conclude, that if what the Socinians say be true, namely, that he was not GOD, neither was he a good man. For all this deportment can imply no less than that he *affected to be accounted* GOD, and so he was ambitious (even sacrilegiously ambitious) of that honour to which he had no title; and this no good man could be.

In fine. Let Jews and Turks be admitted of the jury, and they will undoubtedly give verdict, That if we are deceived in our common faith, that SPIRIT that dictated the Scriptures could design no less than that we should be deceived. Let those who have given occasion to such reflections as these, find out a reply whereby to stave off their reproach.

In the mean time I may observe, that the Socinians have been unlucky in the execution of their main design. For they have not purged mystery out of the Scripture, they have only changed its place; they have taken mystery out

of the doctrine of the Scripture, where it was venerable and worthy the Majesty of God, and they have placed it in the *phrase* of the Scripture, where it is opprobrious and repugnant to God's sincerity. For example: Expounding *John* i. 1, they say, that, "In the beginning was the Word," signifies no more than that CHRIST was, when he was born; that, "The Word was with God," signifies nothing else, but that CHRIST was taken up into heaven to receive instructions for his subsequent errand; that, "The Word was God," signifies no more than, that he was God's messenger; that, "All things were made by him, and without him nothing was made that was made," signifies only, that he was to preach the Gospel, by virtue whereof men were to be made new creatures. What mystery and riddle do they make of these expressions! And how remote is that meaning from the reach of a rational conjecture!

Amidst this romantic pains of interpreting, they met with a text in the general Epistle of ST. JOHN, namely, "There are three that bear witness in heaven, the FATHER, the WORD, and the HOLY GHOST, and these three are one;" which so baffled their invention, that they despaired of ever accommodating it to their scheme. Whereupon the brethren of Transylvania thought it their wisest way to vote this Epistle out of the Canon; but being instructed that there were some copies of the Bible wherein this text was not found, they concluded it for their advantage to let the Epistle pass for canonical, but the text for spurious and forged: And hereupon there grew a great triumph over the Trinitarian cause; but a triumph without any possible victory; for the cause does not want even the text, much less a forgery of it, to support itself withal.

It is alleged, that this text was not read in those copies that were in vulgar use at the time of the Council of Nice; because otherwise it would certainly have been cited against the Arians. However this be, it is as certain that this text was read in those copies that were in use before the Council of Nice; for ST. CYPRIAN asserting the unity of the Church, notwithstanding it consisted of several congrega-

tions, argues it from the unity of the Godhead, although consisting of several persons, and cites this text for his proof.

And TERTULLIAN asserting this to be the Christian doctrine, that the FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST, were each of them GOD, and yet the Godhead not divided, proves it from this text, *Hi tres unum sunt*. And then he remarks from the gender, that they were not *Unus*, but *Unum*, that is, not one in person, but one in essence.

Thus it was before the Council of Nice, and within half an age after that Council, DAMASUS, Bishop of Rome (perceiving from common complaints, that many differences were crept into the several copies of the Scripture) employed ST. JEROME, the most expert man in biblical learning that was in the world, to bestow his pains in rectifying those errors. And he having copies sent to him from all parts of the world, (as himself expresses it,) and conferring them together, among many other emendations from the authority of those copies that were most ancient and authentic, restored this text, with a brand of unfaithfulness upon those who first omitted it: So that all the fault concerning this text can lie only on those who first left it out; and what side of the controversy that fault can affect, let any one judge.

I mention this by the by, and only to give some caution against the artifice of the present Socinian factors, who insinuate, with hands lifted up, that the Trinitarian cause must needs be desperate, when it could be reduced to such mean shifts as forging a text for its support: Which as it is a calumny that may indeed shock the surprised; so all that are at leisure to open their eyes, may see it has no foundation.

Upon the whole, we find that the Trinitarian cause asserted itself sufficiently against ARIUS, although his opposition was more formidable than any others can be; because his hypothesis came by little and little to be so finely spun that many good men professed they could

hardly see that the difference of the controversy lay more than in words.

But as for the Socinians, their hypothesis is grosser and looser, more absurd and more precarious; and therefore neither their arts nor arguments can ever be so formidable. God avert the judgment of removing the candlestick from an unworthy age! For under that determination the weakest means will be sufficient to undo us.

I insisted upon THOMAS, at the beginning of this discourse, as a pattern of the Socinians' incredulity: But THOMAS, being vouchsafed an irresistible conviction, made what amends he was able by crying out, "My LORD, and my GOD!" Which the Christian world has hitherto looked upon as the orthodox confession of our faith in CHRIST. But the Socinians, to avoid this part of his example, are pleased to expound his confession in this mysterious manner: They say, that the first compellation, "My LORD!" was directed to CHRIST, implying that THOMAS acknowledged him to be his very Lord and Master; but the second compellation, "My GOD!" was only an effect of admiration, and was directed to GOD in heaven, and meant no more than men ordinarily do, when admiring they cry, 'O GOD! what a wonderful thing is this!'

Alas! that these men would let reason and modesty work on them so far as to restore mystery to its proper place in the Book of God! To let it be in things, where it is adorable, and to remove it from words, where it is ridiculous! That they would not give covert to their obstinacy under this deluding axiom, We cannot believe what we will, we must have reason for what we believe! Since it is the highest act of reason to submit our assent to that testimony that cannot deceive us: And since it is the next act of reason to receive that testimony in the most natural sense of the words wherein it is delivered.

But farther to evince the deceit of that axiom, 'We cannot believe what we will, we must have reason on our side;' experience will make it appear that will has frequently more

influence upon our belief than reason has. It is an old rule, built upon just observation, that ‘what we would willingly have, we easily believe.’ And let any one assign a cause why most men should think so particularly concerning themselves, concerning their own talents, properties and opinions, so that no indifferent by-stander is able to think the same, if it be not this, that fondness can carry it above reason; and where affection takes place, their judgment becomes partial and blind and pronely seducible. And as will has such an influence upon our belief, so be sure it has the same upon our not believing: There is no cause assignable for our not believing many things, so eminent as this, that we are not *willing* to believe them: We refuse our assent as often for want of inclination, as we do for want of argument: And looking into the bottom of motives and pretences, we shall find a truth well worth our observing, viz. That what men at first call reason, and afterwards conscience, is often no other than affection, and prejudice, and wilfulness.

I have neither time nor need to insist any farther for the proof of that thing I purposed. From the considerations already offered, I think we may safely conclude, that an humble and ready faith, “casting down imaginations, and every thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of CHRIST,” is the only expedient both to make and to keep men wise.

To the Author and Finisher of our faith, God blessed for ever, be all glory and thanksgiving world without end.

SERMON V.

THE HEAVENLY PATTERN.

MATT. vi. 10.

Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.

SUCH is the corruption of our nature, and so is that corruption improved by custom, that there is almost a constant standing opposition between God's will and our own: God's will is the straight rule, requiring such things as are honest, pure, holy, and of good report; our own will is the crooked rule, requiring such things as please ourselves, our sense, our humour, lusts: So long therefore as sin and sensuality have hold of us, this is the controversy we lay debating, Whether we shall follow the crooked rule or the straight? Whether we shall please God or ourselves? And our souls hang wavering and distracted under this foolish, unreasonable doubt.

It passes with us into a proverb, that let children have their wills, and they will undo themselves, because they want understanding to choose what is good for themselves: But it is as true, that let men have their wills, and they will undo themselves much more; because they that are sinful are much more foolish in their choices, than they that are children; and they that want grace have less understanding, than they that want years.

Whither does the issue of our own wills lead us but to intricacies, and mazes, and grief, and shame, and repentance; or else to consequences that are much more unhappy than these? Whereas, on the other hand, to do the will of

God is our wisdom and our welfare, our security and our freedom, our peace and our salvation.

And this is the ground of that petition in the text, wherein we must interpret ourselves to pray unto God that he would restrain us by his grace from doing our own will, till such time as his will becomes ours; and that he would assist us to do his will and obey it to all well-pleasing, even as it is done in heaven.

But it is not my purpose to speak more at present concerning either the reason, or rule, or nature of our obedience; I shall rather choose to confine myself to the pattern of it, proposed in the text, and that is the holy angels; for it is they are meant to do the will of God in heaven in such a manner as we desire and endeavour to do it on earth.

Had our SAVIOUR taught us to pray in positive words,—Thy will be done on earth cheerfully, constantly, perfectly; this certainly had been equivalent to “Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven;” for as they do no less in heaven, so neither can they do more than obey God cheerfully, constantly, perfectly: And yet the expression of our SAVIOUR, though it be but the same sense, is much more instructive by reason of the comparison; for by teaching us to pray, “Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven,” He hath suggested this instruction, viz., That it is always of advantage to us to have a good pattern in our eye: And the reason is, because a pattern begets emulation; a passion of mighty influence upon human practice.

With the moralist’s leave, I call emulation, (which in its own nature is no other than a propension to imitate,) I call it a passion; and it is a very different passion from all that the moralists are wont to enumerate: For all other passions (they say) are terminated either in good or evil; *ex gr.*, love, joy, hope, are terminated in good; grief, hatred, and fear are terminated in evil; but emulation is terminated in pure action or imitation, without respect whether the matter imitated be good or evil.

That such a kind of emulation as this is natural to mankind, and that it has a great influence upon practice, we may learn from children; whom we may observe to be prone with eagerness to do any thing which they see another do before them; though they have neither thought nor power to discern either the rectitude or convenience of what they do: But we may learn it more from them that are of mature age; who though they have power to discern the rectitude and convenience of what they do, yet we find that emulation is able to hurry them on to do things without the exercise of this their power: For we may observe in the world, that many vanities and many vices are supported in daily practice by the pure force of emulation: Even after all their intrinsic temptations are over; when men have no apprehension of any, either pleasure or advantage to arise from them, yet this is a sufficient reason to continue them in practice, even this,—That they may imitate and vie with those others that do the same.—I esteem therefore that emulation is a passion naturally planted in us, and designed by Providence (as all other passions are) for excellent uses; though the success of this, as well as of all the rest, depends wholly upon man's wisdom in applying them; for as I have intimated already that emulation is of mighty force to lead us to ill, so (let us but change the pattern and) it will be of equal force to lead us to good: And if for the example of our imitation, we will but entertain the idea of an obeying angel in our mind, it will be spurs and wings to our endeavours to arrive at the perfection of angelical obedience.

My next business therefore shall be to exhibit the pattern itself. In order to which it will be expedient, 1. To take a view of the nature of angels; so far forth as to inform us how they are furnished and instructed to do the will of God. 2. To take a view of their law; or that will of God which he hath appointed them to do. And, 3. To show their manner of doing this will, and obeying this law; to which the text requires our obedience should be conformed.

In this age (so fruitful in wild opinions) many have

made it their business to run down the belief of angels and spirits, the more easily to introduce the belief that there is no GOD; or at least (so far as the Sadducees carried the argument) that there is no future state. Others have advanced the doctrine of angels into such a superstitious abuse, as to make them the object of their adoration; and in prejudice taken from this abuse, others have run into an indiscreet extreme, that is, to neglect and lay aside the knowledge of what the Scripture has delivered concerning angels, although of great importance to Christian edification.

1. I have made this reflection, as my apology for meddling with a subject which many may be prone to censure, either as superstitious, or useless, or unseasonable; and now begin with what I proposed, viz., To take a view of the nature of angels, so far as to inform us how they are furnished and instructed to do the will of GOD. On which subject I shall not engage in any speculation that is either precarious or simply curious; but I shall follow the light of Scripture into such notices of them there delivered, as best serve my present design.

Of angels we may assert, (1.) That they are the supreme order of created beings; “the chief of the ways of GOD:” For so some of the ancients interpret that expression of JOB, (accounting the whole passage allegorical,) “the angels are the chief of the ways of GOD,” that is, the most excellent of his works: Their abode is nearest the throne of his presence; they partake most amply of the image of his perfections; they are best fitted for his ministry, and endowed with such accomplishments as are most proper for the knowing and executing of his will. Their understandings are piercing and comprehensive; the Tekoite’s compliment implies so much, when she says, “My LORD is wise according to the wisdom of an angel of GOD, to know all things that are in the earth.” ST. PETER alleges it for the magnifying of a mystery, that “the angels could not see through it;” and our SAVIOUR alleges it for the magnifying of a secret, that “the angels were ignorant of it.”

As for the substance of their nature, the Apostle tells us, (*Heb. i.*) that “they are spirits,” that is, such beings as are free from the cloud and impediment of gross matter : And hence it is that they are strong, agile, quick, penetrating, as the wind, as the flame of fire, as the lightning ; by which metaphors, therefore, they are sometimes expressed in Holy Writ. The Prophet ISAIAH, to express the weakness of the Egyptian army, says, “ Their horses are flesh, and not spirit ;” implying that spirits among beings are the most powerful, vigorous, and strong ; and accordingly the angels are called “ powers and strengths, and such as excel in strength.” No resistance of material bodies can hinder their passage or motion ; no darkness or covert can hinder their sight or intuition.

The angel saw SARAH laugh, though she conceived it impossible, because she was in another tent ; and that other (*Acts xii.*) could indifferently pass through the prison-doors to visit PETER, and burst them open to make room for him to pass. The first-born slain in every house throughout the land of Egypt, and above 180,000 of SENNACHERIB’S army slain in the space of a small part of a night, and both by the hand of a single angel, sufficiently evince both their force and their expedition.

Though they have no bodies, yet they can act upon all bodies ; accordingly they can in an instant form and assume bodies unto themselves ; which is demonstrated from their frequent appearances in Holy Writ, and from their converse in human shape.

They can restrain and suspend the natural agency of bodies ; as we are told, an angel withheld the fire from burning the three Israelites in the furnace of Babylon. They can collect and manage to their uses all meteors and exhalations : Witness those thunders, and lightnings, and earthquakes, at the delivery of the Law on Mount Sinai ; all which we are told was done by the ministry of angels.

And by this power of theirs they are qualified to be the

instruments of GOD's pleasure in disposing the temperature of the air, ordering the influences of the elements, and administering the several issues either of public blessings or calamities.

In like manner they can act also upon the bodies of men, and produce in them different effects, either hurtful or salutary; whether by disposing our humours, or affecting our spirits, or forming objects in our imagination: By altering the crasis of our bodies, that is, either by disturbing or composing them, they can influence our state of health: So the plague that was inflicted upon Israel for DAVID's numbering the people, is said expressly to have been from the operation of an angel; which angel of GOD opened the eyes of DAVID that he might see him about his work, as we are told; (*1 Chron. xxi*;) so that the death of those 70,000 taken away in that plague, did not proceed from any transient contagion, propagated from man to man, but from the influence of the angel, working each man's blood and humour into a poisonous inflammation: And so we are expressly told of HEROD's death, (*Acts xiii*;) whose bowels putrefied into worms, that it was the stroke of an angel; that is, that it was an angel that disposed the humours of his body to such a putrefaction.

In like manner they can affect us variously by working upon our animal spirits, by either fixing or dilating them, and so procuring either vigour or dejection, joy or sadness. Thus we see DANIEL, (*chap. x*;) after the awful touch of one angel had quite enervated him, repressed his spirits, and brought him to a swoon; another touch of the same hand strengthened him again; that is, restored his spirits to their former motion and vigour. And this was the case of SAUL and other demoniacs, that the evil angels (let it suffice to mention no more of the cause at present) did at certain times disturb their animal spirits, and run them into desperate melancholies; as we find intimated, *1 Chron. xvi*.

Nor have we any countenance from reason or piety to

doubt, but that the good angels have always been, and still are, as ready and successful in exhilarating the spirits of good men, and so supporting them in their religious labours, and strengthening them in their sufferings, and sometimes even in suspending their sense of pain in the midst of their tortures; whereof we meet with some instances in the history of the primitive Martyrs.

And yet farther, the angels can make a nearer approach to our souls, and act upon them by the mediation of our fancies; in which they have power to form such images and fantasies, or (as some love to phrase it) to excite such motions as may become the immediate object of thought, and produce affections suitable to the several appearances.

And by this manner of operation were all dreams, revelations, visions of the night, and prophetic discoveries, communicated to men heretofore. Thus it is said of JACOB, of BALAAM, of ST. PAUL, of JOSEPH the husband of the blessed Virgin,—That “the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a dream;” which words we cannot so interpret as if they dreamed they saw an angel: For if so, whence came the dream? It were absurd to say that GOD immediately gave the dream, and made them dream that an angel gave it: But the meaning is this, that they had such dreams, that made such strong impressions upon their minds, as convinced them that they had been wrought by the operation of an angel.

And what I have said of dreams and visions of the night, is the same in reference to suggestions of the day, or to men when awake: For by forming of such species, or giving such touches to the brain, as they, who fully understand the mechanism of our sensation, know are proper to produce such and such notices; they are able to inform or warn, to encourage or dehort our souls in any manner as GOD’S commission or their own charity shall direct them. And to this head we must refer that complaint of holy JOB, (vii. 14,) “Thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me with visions:” Where the analogy of the history will

not suffer us to interpret that GOD himself did inject those affrighting dreams ; but that the evil angel (unto whose temptations GOD had submitted the holy man for the perfecting of his patience) did frame such terrifying objects in his imagination, thereby to urge him to melancholy and despair.

And, indeed, we need look no farther than the single instance of that one man to demonstrate all that power that I have hitherto ascribed to angels: For the Sabeans and Chaldeans animated to pillage his substance ; the fire kindled to destroy his houses ; the wind raised to overwhelm his children ; the blains pustulated to afflict his body ; and his imagination disturbed to terrify his conscience, are all the declared effects of SATAN'S procuring: And if an evil angel can do so, there is no room for doubting an equal power in the good.

Those powers and faculties of angels already mentioned, will afford a Christian at any time an useful contemplation to consider how the good are qualified to protect and assist ; and it will afford as well a very awful contemplation to consider how the evil are equally qualified to tempt, seduce, and captivate all those who, through resisting GOD'S grace, are submitted to their assaults. But each of these contemplations will receive new matter from what I am to add upon the next head, and that is to take a view of the law of angels, or of that will of GOD which he has appointed them to obey.

2. And this general law of angels I shall reduce to these four particulars, viz., The First law of angels is to serve GOD'S glory. The Second is to serve his providence. The Third is to serve his church. And the Fourth is to serve the particular members of his church.

The First is to serve GOD'S glory : Which certainly is the first and supreme law of angels, as it is indeed of all other creatures ; as SOLOMON intimates, (*Prov. xvi. 4,*) when he says, that "GOD made all things for himself," that is, for his own service and glory. Or if we should say

that the first motive of GOD's making any creature, was his benignity and pleasure to communicate of his goodness to that creature, the result is the same; for thence it becomes the supreme obligation of every creature to return unto GOD of that his goodness. How the angels discharge this obligation we have an account given us in an express form of their heavenly service, recorded *Rev.* vii. 11, 12: "And all the angels stood about the throne, fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped GOD, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our GOD for ever and ever. Amen." This is the angels' employment about the throne of GOD's presence; nor is it simply their employment, but it is their happiness too: For as the wind that fans the flowers returns from them with the tincture of their sweetness; so all the breath that the heavenly host spends in the praise of GOD returns to themselves accumulated with joy and blessing: GOD having appointed (as his holiness requires) that there shall be an inseparable connexion betwixt duty and beatitude; betwixt a zeal for his glory and the participation of his glory.

The Second law of angels is to serve GOD's providence; that is, by working and procuring the several issues of it in the world. For it is a doctrine received as well by Jews heretofore, as now by Christians, that GOD does work all outward events whether of judgment or mercy, not immediately by himself, but by the delegation and ministry of angels. And so that text, (*2 Chron.* xvi. 9,) where it is said, that "the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him," the Jews interpreted of the angels. And indeed the interpretation is confirmed, (*Rev.* v. 6,) where the spirits that are said to be "sent forth from GOD into the whole earth," are called by the name of "eyes." By these eyes, therefore, (as the former text tells us,) "GOD shows himself strong;" that is, he does not only see and visit the state of men, but likewise executes his will and the issues of his Providence upon

them by his angels : And of this kind the Scripture abounds in numberless instances.

The Third law of angels is to serve GOD'S Church, their most peculiar and principal charge. Therefore the Apostle, (*Heb. i. ult.*.) gives us a definition of angels that only bears respect to their office, namely, they are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation."

And as we are told particularly concerning MICHAEL the archangel, (*Dan. x.*.) that he was the Prince or tutelar angel of the Jewish church and people ; so from *Rev. xii.*, &c., we have reason to infer that he and the heavenly host under his command, are related in the same capacity to the Christian Church, to watch over it, and to administer its affairs, and to guard it from the violence of its avowed enemy the Devil.

That every particular church of CHRIST has the presidency and guardianship of an angel, we may collect from the beginning of ST. JOHN'S *Revelation*, where the several messages and monitions, sent from CHRIST our LORD, are directed to the angels of the several churches. For although by angels there are most probably meant the Bishops of those respective churches ; yet the very reason of the metaphor implies thus much, that there were angels appointed by GOD to preside over churches, as well as Bishops ; and this is it that grounds their analogy betwixt Bishops and angels. And that text of ST PAUL, (*1 Cor. xi. 18.*) where the Apostle urges the necessity of a decent behaviour in the Church, "because of the angels," appears to set it out of controversy, that all Christian assemblies are attended with their presence and inspection.

To what ends, and to what purposes of piety, I shall speak more under the next head :

The Fourth law of angels ; which is to serve the particular members of the church.

It were too nice to say that every distinct man has his distinct guardian-angel : It may be true sometimes that many have but one ; and it may be true at other times that

one has many; as we find JACOB had at Mahanaim, and ELIAS at Dothan. But this we may safely affirm, that no Christian is without an angel to inspect his behaviour, and to solicit his well-doing.

To this the Psalmist gives express testimony when he says, "The angel of the LORD standeth round about those that fear him:" And that passage which the Devil applies to our SAVIOUR, "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways," is delivered by the Psalmist as true of every servant of CHRIST as well as of CHRIST himself. And this doctrine receives undeniable confirmation from our SAVIOUR'S own mouth, (*Matt.* xviii. 10,) where he gives us an illustrious proof of the great regard that GOD has to all mankind, by assuring us, that those very angels that always behold the face of GOD, that is, enjoy the beatific vision, and in consequence are as happy as it is possible for creatures to be, do yet (as by order they are appointed) take care of those that we look upon as the most inconsiderable part of mankind, that is, little children.

But to impress the concern of this doctrine a little closer upon our minds, I shall show in a word more, what are the particular ends of this ministry of angels: And these I shall comprise under these three offices, viz., To guard, to guide, and to be witnesses of our conversation.

The first end of the ministry of angels, is to guard: Where by guarding I mean largely both offices, either of assisting to good or protecting from evil, *juvandi* or *averuncandi*, as the Gentiles styled them, and attributed them to their demons; borrowing their notion undoubtedly either from Holy Writ, or from the Jews with whom they had conversation. Thus says TOBIT of his son travelling into Media, "The good angel will keep him company, and his journey will be prosperous;" which is but the same that ABRAHAM says of his servant travelling to NAHOR, "The LORD will send his angel with thee, and prosper thy way." And as we may observe that each of these mentioned travellers were attended with remarkable circumstances of felicity in their journey; so we must conclude (unless we will

charge the Patriarch himself with ignorance and superstition) that those circumstances were mediately brought about by the assistance of angels.

In reference to the office of protecting, JACOB tells us of the “angel that redeemed him from all evil,” (*Gen.* xlvi. 16,) and wishes the same protection from him to his children.

Now this protection of JACOB from evil by his angel we may apply to several passages of his life; particularly, when he returned from Mesopotamia, through his brother ESAU’s territory; for while he lay under a terrible apprehension of his brother’s displeasure, it is said, “the angels met him.” (*Gen.* xxxii. 1.) “They met him,” that is, they showed themselves to him to assure him of their custody; and by and by we see what followed: His brother ESAU, contrary to his natural roughness, and his avowed revenge, comes and treats him in the most friendly manner.

But doubtless the most important part of the custody of angels is, to guard men from the insults of SATAN and evil spirits: For when we consider both the malice and power of those evil spirits, we must conclude that our safety from perpetual mischiefs can depend upon nothing, but their restraint; which restraint though it issue primarily from the good will of GOD, yet we have reason to believe is executed by the vigilance and protection of angels.

And this is the meaning of that “war in heaven,” (that is, the Church,) waged betwixt MICHAEL and the Dragon, (*Rev.* xii.) the one always contending to destroy men, and the other to save them.

The Second end of the ministry of angels is to guide. By guiding I mean whatsoever is opposite to seducing and tempting, the office of the Devil. For as he goeth about seeking to seduce us from good; so the holy angels on the contrary solicit and guide us to good; and by all those methods of their acting upon us, (which I have already mentioned,) especially by suggesting good thoughts, warming holy purposes, and refreshing men in pious undertakings; they assist and promote the work of our sanctification.

But because it were impious to eclipse or any way derogate from the gracious undertaking of the DIVINE SPIRIT, the HOLY GHOST, the sole original Author of our sanctification ; it is fit to observe that this doctrine of the guidance of angels is clear from any such guilt : For it admits that all the means and methods of our sanctification do originally flow from the HOLY GHOST ; and that even when angels assist, the grace is his ; and therefore his the glory ; because they act only by his delegation.

But farther, (which we ought chiefly to observe,) this doctrine does not assert that the assistance of the HOLY GHOST, and the assistance of angels is alike, or so much as of the same kind. For there is a mighty disparity between the operation of the HOLY GHOST, and the operation of angels upon our souls. And I find ST BERNARD thus distinguishing upon the matter : *Angelus* (says he) *adest animæ, non inest ; suggerit bona, non ingerit ; hortatur ad bonum, non bonum creat* : Which in effect is this : ‘The angel comes to the soul ; the HOLY GHOST comes into the soul ; the angel suggests and recommends good to us ; but the HOLY GHOST does by a powerful energy create and plant it in us.’

In a word, the angels cannot act upon our souls but mechanically, and by the mediation of our body ; but the HOLY GHOST acts directly upon it, that is, immediately, and upon its very essence.

It seems therefore most worthy the majesty of God, and most suitable to our own distance, to believe that whatsoever of God’s pleasure can be done for our souls mechanically, the angels are the instruments of doing it. Say, what else could be the reason, why our SAVIOUR CHRIST himself, (as we are remarkably told,) was refreshed when hungry, and strengthened when agonizing, by angels ; although, at the same time, he had the HOLY GHOST dwelling bodily, that is, essentially in him.

But on the other side, to work immediately upon the soul, so as to change, and sanctify it effectually, this (I say) is only the work of GOD that made it.

The Third end of the ministry of angels is to be witnesses of our conversation, and upon occasion to evidence and make report of the actions of men. This is an office of angels, not so expressly delivered in Scripture; but it is strongly implied there. For we know angels are referred to as inspectors of human actions. (*Eccl.* v. 6; *1 Cor.* xi. 10, &c.) And why do they inspect, if not to testify? We know ST. PAUL obtests and charges TIMOTHY “before the angels.” (*1 Tim.* v. 2.) And why before the angels, if they were not to be witnesses of the manner of his discharge? And when our SAVIOUR says, “There is joy in heaven over a sinner that repenteth:” How can this be, unless the repentance be some way testified and reported in heaven? And surely whatever notice they above can have of our affairs, this way of communicating by the intercourse of angels deserves more credit than that strained invention of the *Speculum Trinitatis*.

There is likewise another matter to which this office may justly be extended: We know that SATAN is styled the “accuser of the brethren;” which style implies, that as he now tempts men, so he will afterwards (whether at death or judgment) charge, and exaggerate, and clamour for justice upon those whom he has tempted: Now to balance this malice of SATAN, (who nevertheless shall not want a hearing,) it is reasonable to believe that the holy angels shall appear as compurgators of the accused, and produce their knowledge to vindicate God’s mercy towards them, and to stop the mouth of the calumniator.

Nor will this seem a precarious conjecture to any who shall consider that the Holy Scripture tells us the same thing in a matter of fact: For, *Zech.* iii, we have the representation of a particular judgment; JOSHUA the High-Priest is brought in, and insulted over by SATAN, as a vile and unpardonable sinner; but in the mean time, a good angel appears, sustains the High-Priest, alleges that what he had done was accepted to the remission of his sins; and thereupon silences the Devil with the menace of God’s rebuke.

I shall close this office of angels with the judgment of venerable ORIGEN; who, in his Commentary upon *Job* i. 6, speaking of the angels offering up the prayers of the saints unto GOD, says, *Offerunt sancti angeli Deo, non quasi nesciat is qui omnia novit, antequam fiant; sed ut testes efficiantur sanctitatis atque pietatis justorum*, that is, ‘They do these offices, not to carry the knowledge of these things to GOD, who knows all before, even before they are done; but it is to act and discharge themselves as witnesses of the piety of good men.’

And now what I have said concerning the nature and offices of angels may serve, (1.) To recommend that part of devotion, wherein pious Christians in all ages have been wont to implore of GOD their succour and protection. For when we consider of what importance it is to have the succour and defence of angels, it must appear either to be great ignorance of the matters of religion, or great neglect of our own welfare, that shall hinder us to pray for so important a blessing. It may serve, (2.) To mind us of the wonderful vouchsafements of GOD unto mankind, how contemptible soever it may appear to be in other respects, yet it is honoured with the attendance and service of such excellent creatures: So that whosoever shall take care to live in the fear of GOD, though his outward fortunes be not above those of LAZARUS, he shall have his angels to wait on the advantages of his soul while in the body, as well as translate it out of the body to a blessed eternity.

It may serve, (3.) To dispose our minds to a proper reverence of the holy angels; that is, to think on them as those who are constant witnesses of our behaviour, and to bear an awful regard to their presence and inspection; and to take care that they who wait on us for our good, be not frightened or grieved from their station by our unworthy deportment.

But then, all I have said does not serve in the least to countenance the worshipping of angels, being a practice so contrary both to the precepts, and warnings, and instances

of Holy Writ, that nothing less than a strong delusion could ever give it birth in the Christian church.

When ST. JOHN had the presence of an angel made visible to him, (*Rev.* xxii. 9,) and that angel was employed to conduct him to the knowledge of many ravishing mysteries, it is true, indeed, that the Apostle, (as one overcome with the transport of what he saw and heard, and so reduced to a sudden lapse of mind,) made offer to give the angel worship; but we see how the angel rebukes the offer by crying hastily, “ See thou do it not ; I am thy fellow-servant ; worship GOD :” Which is a passage sufficient to make us admire the gross infatuation which that pretended infallible church fell under when she established the worship of angels ; after that GOD had not only forbidden it, but likewise the angels themselves had declared their express abhorrence of such a worship.

“ Worship GOD,” and we may be secure of the good offices of his angels : But worship angels, and we may be sure to displease both them and him that sends them.

3. And now I come to the Last thing proposed, that is, to show the manner how the angels do the will of GOD ; in which particular the text proposes them for our pattern. And we are sure they do it perfectly : All the representations we have of them in Scripture serve to typify the perfection of their obedience. They are represented to us as standing about the heavenly throne ; a posture that signifies their readiness and preparation for their employment : They are represented as full of eyes ; a circumstance that signifies their ambition to know every instance of the Divine will : They are represented as furnished with many wings ; a symbol that signifies their speed and cheerfulness in executing their charge : And finally their assiduity and perseverance in this course is represented to us when we are told that they “ cease not day nor night,” they are ever praising, ever serving ; to do the will of GOD is their meat and drink, their great refreshment, their eternal feast.

Thus the will of GOD is done in heaven ; but alas ! how

shall it be done so on earth? Or to what possible measures of conformity can weak and foolish man ever work his obedience? Why this is the matter that requires our industry; this is our work; and it is not an impracticable one: We do not pray vainly, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;" and if it be not our own fault, we shall not pray so in vain.

Is it hard to convince ourselves that the will of God is our best interest? Or that the doing of it is our greatest good? Or is it hard for our best interest to engage our obedience? Or for our greatest good to command our affections? Now to obey God with affection is all our work; and when we do this, we do his will even as it is done in heaven.

For as in the casting into the treasury, (*Luke* xxi,) when the rich "cast in their abundance," and the widow "but her mite;" though their gifts were different, yet the charity was the same: So the performances of men and angels cannot but differ in measures; yet if they proceed from the same principle, the obedience is the same; the same in kind, the same in acceptance. And therefore, though we cannot do the will of God so worthily, accurately, indefinitely; yet we may do it with a free heart, and with all our power; and so we may do it as do the angels.

But still the difficulty is behind: Remove the impediments, and the way is easy; but how shall these be removed? How shall man be able to walk affectionately with God, whose soul has naturally another bias? How shall he be able to act always of the same side, who naturally is not the same man? He that has a heart and a heart, a lust and a lust, a law and a law, and these contrary the one to the other; how shall such a one be able to act freely, and readily, and undistractedly as the angels do?

Why, even in this, our pattern may instruct us; for the angels, though they were made such excellent creatures, yet we may observe that the bare excellency of their

nature did not carry them to that pitch of obedience, which they now perform unto GOD: For we find from the instance of those that fell, that they were made obnoxious to passions, and temptations, and falling, as well as we: And the reason they now stand so firm to their obedience is, that which our SAVIOUR has mentioned, viz., Because “they continually behold the face of GOD.” (*Matt.* xviii. 10.) They continually look unto GOD, and in him they see so much amiableness, as gives an eternal poise to their affections, whereby they are bent and fixed inseparably to the love of GOD. If then we be like to the angels, (as our SAVIOUR tells us all good men some time shall be,) we must begin our imitation of them at this point: Faith must be to us instead of vision, contemplation instead of seeing: We must contemplate GOD frequently, diligently; we must always behold that gracious representation he has made of himself in the Scripture; and there we shall discover such riches of his goodness and benignity as cannot but excite our love towards him. And if the love of GOD once take root in our hearts, it will exhaust all our loose affections, and will suspend all our sinful desires; it will make the Divine will pass into our own; and then we shall do it as we do our own, without reluctancy, without sloth, without weariness. So it is they do in heaven; and so may we do it on earth! By the assistance of that grace which GOD will give through JESUS CHRIST our LORD.

To whom, &c.

SERMON VI

THE PREPARATION OF THE HEART TO WAIT
UPON GOD.

PSALM ii. 11.

Rejoice unto him with trembling.

ST. JOHN relating his vision of heaven, (*Rev. iv.*) tells us of some angels he saw attending about the throne of God, that “they were full of wings and of eyes:” A good man, in the humble distance of his station, is not unlike one of those angels: His affections are the wings of his soul; and a sanctified understanding is his eyes to guide those wings: His love, hope, and joy, mount him up to God, and keep him attending on holy contemplations; and his hatred, grief, and fear, keep him in a due aversion and distance from evil:—

But on the other side, while we lie under the dominion of sin, we are like creatures that have wings, but no eyes; our affections are always flying, but without wisdom or discernment: They often fly to those things that are most hurtful; and they as often fly from those things that are most friendly to us: They weary and waste us with vain hurrying, and often dash us in pieces by the mere precipitancy of their flight.

Would we then get eyes to our wings, we must hearken to the advice of the Holy Scripture which calls all our affections to God; as my text in particular does two of them, viz. our joy and our fear, in the present words. “Rejoice unto him with trembling,” or with fear. Our joy is commonly employed in waiting upon our vanities; our fear is commonly employed in waiting upon our phantasms and apprehensions; and there both of them do us mischief:

But let us bring them both together to wait upon God in the offices of religion, and there they will do our souls their proper service.

I do not purpose (at this time) to speak of the difference betwixt a good and an evil joy ; or between a carnal and a heavenly fear ; I only purpose to speak of the uses of these two affections in the service of God and religion ; according to the direct scope of the text ; where, lest any should look upon the service of God as a burden, the Psalmist bids us perform it with joy ; and, on the other hand, lest our joy should prove to be rash, he bids us temper it with fear.

Joy therefore and fear are two qualifications which the text recommends to us as equally necessary to dispose our minds to the offices of religion. And my business shall be to speak of them severally, with regard to the several influences they bear on the due discharge of those performances : And, First, Of joy, in our addresses to God :—

Joy towards God, (or, as the text expresses it,) “ rejoicing unto him,” signifies no other than the taking a rational pleasure in the acts of his worship and the offices of his service. And the needfulness and use of such a joy will appear from these following considerations :—

1. Because without such a joy we can never make it appear that we are sensible of, or thankful for God’s goodness towards us.

When the Law was delivered upon Mount Sinai, by which law all presumptuous sins were punished with death, death without mercy, because no atonement was allowed for them, (as we see *Num.* xv. 30,) this law was ushered in with thunderings, and earthquakes, and fire, and smoke, and all the motives of terror : Signifying, that if God should proceed with man according to the rules of rigorous justice ; there would be no reasonable place left for joy among mankind, but every soul must pine away with terror and the apprehensions of wrath to come.

But when our SAVIOUR came to deliver the law of grace, his coming was ushered in with quite contrary circum-

stances : With the music of angels, and with a soft voice proclaiming, “ Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy :” Joy, that there is a general atonement allowed for all manner of sin ; joy, that God is propitiated and made favourable to mankind by the undertaking of a Mediator ; that there are overtures of mercy, boundless compassion, bowels yearning to seek those that are lost, and opened to receive those that return ; joy, that men may be delivered from the bondage of fear into the liberty and love of sons ; into access and acceptance with God, and the precious hope of a blessed immortality. All this matter of joy hath God published to the world, and that for this very end, that he might thereby prepare to himself a willing people, with free hearts, and cheerful services, and joyful obedience.

From which consideration it must follow that all slackness and lukewarmness of affections, all servile and involuntary performances of duty towards God must needs be unworthy his acceptance, as being so far short of, and unsuitable to, the encouragements that he has given us.

2. A Second argument I allege for joy or cheerfulness in the service of God, is this : Because without such a religious joy, a man shall always lie open and unguarded to the assaults of sensual joy.

For joy is almost the same to the soul, as breathing is to the body ; it is necessary to life, and the want of it is pure suffocation. As therefore when a man goes out of a good air, he must yet necessarily breathe, though he be sure to breathe infection ; so the soul, if it seeks not its joy in good, must necessarily take up with that that offers itself in evil, though in the end it prove mischievous and undoing. He, therefore, that is so wise as to inure himself to wait upon God till his soul takes pleasure in being religious, till such time as he “ tastes and sees how good the Lord is,” till he feel the practice of his duty bring a constant refreshment to the soul ; such a man has always something to answer to the temptations of worldly joy when they assault him ; that is, he has no need of them ;

his soul is already at ease ; so that he has leisure to examine the nature and consequences of all other joys, before he entertains them : Whereas he that finds no joy in religion, can never restrain his soul from seeking it elsewhere : And hence it comes to pass that men usually close with every appearance of worldly pleasure, though at the expence of their virtue, and hazard of eternal life, only because they will not be so happily curious as to try and inform themselves what rest, satisfaction, and comfort, there is to be found in being truly religious.

3. Without this religious joy, a man has no inward principle that can dispose him to the several offices of his duty. There is a face of religion in the world, but this is the general complaint that it is but a face ; it wants the life : And the reason is, because men's religion does generally grow from principles that are weak and not able to support it. For,

(1.) Custom, and fashion, and compliance with human laws, and regard to credit, and respect to worldly advantages, are common principles that set men a work in the outward offices of religion ; but these principles, as they are not intrinsically religious in themselves, so neither can they produce or support religion, but only in form and show. But,

(2.) There are other principles which are intrinsically religious, as the fear of God's justice, and sorrow for sin ; and these may set men a work upon their duty : But yet these principles, though they are good, are defective, and not sufficient for the work ; they are proper to begin a good life, but not to carry it on through all its offices : They are purging, but they are likewise weakening : Fear and sorrow have each of them torment in them, and oppress the soul in such a measure, that if it be not relieved by some more cordial affections, it will not long be able to endure their yoke. Fear, therefore, though it be always good, because it restrains from evil, yet it never rightly advances religion till it becomes filial, that is, mixed and sweetened with love : And sorrow, though it cleanses, yet

it does not sanctify as is requisite, till such time as looking through the cloud of God's anger, and apprehending his goodness, it twines itself and lessens into joy.

When joy is once introduced into the soul, when a man is once come to take delight in the service of God, he has then got a lasting and vigorous principle that will carry him through all the offices of his duty; that will dispose him to blessing, and praise, and thanksgiving; which are the most high and excellent acts of religious worship; and yet the soul is never rightly disposed to perform them, till such time as it is raised to some degrees of spiritual joy.

(4.) Without this religious joy a man has no proper indication that the spiritual life is formed in him. For we may observe, that wherever there is a life, there are peculiar actions that naturally flow from that vital power, and in those actions does consist the proper pleasure of that life. *Ex. gr.* The sensitive life exerts itself in tasting, smelling, hearing, and the other acts of sensation, and in the exercise of these acts does properly consist the pleasure of the sensitive life: So the rational life exerts itself in the acts of invention, arguing, and discourse, and in these acts does consist the proper pleasure of the rational life: And in like manner all the notion we can have of the spiritual life must be this, that it is a vital power derived from the SPIRIT of God, whose peculiar acts respect the offices of religion, and therefore its proper pleasure lies in the exercise of those acts. So that where the acts of religion are performed without any pleasure, joy, or complacency taken in them, we may infer that they are only forced acts from a false principle; that that vital principle of the new creature, that regeneration whereby a believer is different from the rest of the world, is not yet introduced into the soul. I do not say but that this principle of the new life may sometimes be obstructed for a season in the complacency of its acts, even when it is in the soul: The spiritual power may have its drowsinesses, as well as the sensitive and rational powers have theirs; because this power may be affected with the infirmities of the body as well as they:

But this I say, that for a man to be long hungerless towards the acts of religion, and long joyless in the performance of them, is a sign that the power is not barely obstructed, but wholly absent; it is a sign that the soul is unsanctified and dead in sin.

Thus much I have said to recommend the First necessary qualification to make our addresses acceptable to God, that is Joy: I proceed to the Second, which is Fear.

It is observed in nature that men of a complexional fear, that is, they who have the passion of fear too much abounding in their temper, are not fit for action, because their spirits are always clogged with coldness, and misgiving, and irresolution: And likewise, on the contrary, men of a complexional joy, that is, they whose spirits are always simmering and leaping into gaiety, are not wise in action; because they are apt to act rashly and disorderly: And therefore the truly wise and useful complexion is that where these two passions are properly mixed; where there is a due proportion of joy to set us a work, and a due proportion of fear to bound us within the limits of discretion.

And the same observation holds true in reference to religion: Where fear without joy must necessarily hinder us from serving so willingly as our duty requires, and joy without fear must necessarily hinder us from serving so wisely as our safety requires: And this is the reason why my text enjoins us to mix these affections, and “rejoice unto God with trembling.”

I intend not (upon this head) to speak of the general use of fear in religion; but only of its peculiar use in conducting and tempering our joy, when we act in respect to God: And this I shall show, according to my former method, in these following considerations:—

1. Because religion offers no matter to our joy, but that in the same prospect it offers an equal concern to our fear. *Ex gr.*, It is a proper matter of joy, for me to reflect that I am a Christian; that I live among the outward ordinances and means of salvation; that I am a member of a covenant established upon glorious privileges, excellent benefits, pre-

scious promises: But it is equally a proper matter of fear to reflect that he is not a Christian who is "one outwardly," that "in CHRIST JESUS nothing availeth but a new creature;" that the privileges of Christianity are annexed to the duty; the benefits to the life; the promises to the conditions: So that the name of a Christian is but like the waters of jealousy, which as they gave reputation to the innocent, so they rotted the guilty. And in like manner the living in the outward profession of religion does bring most happy advantages to those that walk in sincerity; but to those that retain that profession in unrighteousness, it will serve no more than as an aggravation both of guilt and punishment.

It is a proper matter of joy to contemplate the merits of CHRIST, and what a competent satisfaction his obedience has wrought out for the sins of the whole world: But it is equally matter of fear to contemplate that all the obedience of CHRIST is designed for example as well as merit: And therefore it is observable that there is no act of CHRIST's obedience upon which our joy is reasonably grounded, such as are his birth, life, death, and resurrection; but there is some duty required of us, which the HOLY GHOST in Scripture is pleased to call by the very same name: Thus there is a Christian birth, life, death, and resurrection, all different from natural, which we are required to pass through: And the design of the HOLY GHOST, in calling the several parts of our duty by the same names that he calls those of CHRIST's satisfaction, seems to be this; namely, That the very names should always serve to put us in remembrance, that we stand indispensably obliged to a studious imitation of CHRIST; and unless his example reach us, his merit never will.

It is a proper matter of joy to contemplate the happy state of the world to come; the franchises of the New Jerusalem; the fellowship of saints and angels; the vision and enjoyment of GOD, where there are pleasures for evermore: But it is equally matter of fear to consider, that the New Jerusalem is called the holy city where nothing unclean

can enter ; and therefore it is impossible for ourselves to enter there, unless we are capacitated by laying aside and stripping ourselves of the habit, and power, and desire of every known sin.

Once more : It is a proper matter of joy, and the application of all the rest, to be able to contemplate a good state of things within us, to see that we live under restraint, and perform holy offices to GOD, and good works to men : But then in this prospect it is equally matter of fear to consider what careless intervals, what sinful mixtures, what over-valuing pride, may sully all our performances, and render them unacceptable to GOD. From which follows another consideration to evidence the needfulness and use of fear ; namely, That without fear our religious joy may be altogether absurd and groundless.

We read in Scripture of the “ hypocrite’s hope,” and the “ hypocrite’s joy ;” implying (as we must interpret it) that the hypocrite though he put on religion only as a vizard to deceive withal, yet he may sometimes ground a religious hope and joy upon it : For doubtless men taking up an outward form of godliness to deceive others, do very often effectually deceive themselves ; and pretending to be holy when they are not, in process of time come to think themselves holy, though they are not ; and so their mischief becomes so much the more desperate.

The word Hypocrisy (we know) is originally borrowed from the stage, and it signifies the acting of a part ; and we have heard of a stage-player (PHÆDRUS in his fable tells us of one) who acted a part so long, that he believed himself to be the very person he acted. And so I take it to be no extraordinary thing for the religious hypocrite to be given up to the same delusion, to believe his own lie ; and, having put on religion at first for a formality, to believe at length that that formality is religion ; to believe that a little wariness in sinning is the power of godliness ; and a Pharisical zeal is the spirit of saintship ; and a partial obedience (such as may best suit with his complexion) is such an obedience as GOD will accept of.

And that this in fact does often come to pass, we may learn from several instances of the Jews in ISAIAH'S time, of whom GOD says, "They seek me daily, and delight to know my ways; they ask of me the ordinances of justice, and take delight in approaching unto me;" (*Chap. lviii. 2;*) when yet they were at that time so degenerate and loose in manners, that GOD even loathed their service; he declares himself to have hated their feasts and sabbaths, and sacrifices, and looked on their solemn meetings as no other than iniquity. From this instance we may learn, that men may sometimes take delight in the service of GOD, when yet GOD takes no delight in the services they do him.

We may learn from the instance of the Laodiceans, that men may please themselves with the opinion of being "rich, and increased with goods, and wanting nothing;" and yet at the same time, be "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." (*Rev. iii.*)

We may learn from the instance of those in the parable, (*Matt. vii. 22,*) that men may make confident and cheerful applications to CHRIST; professing that he is their LORD, and they have wrought, and laboured by him, and for him, when yet CHRIST shall say unto them, "I know you not."

Now these are all instances of a joy that is purely rash, and absurd, and groundless; and such may the joy of all men be, if they take not in fear to examine the reasons of it.

But yet farther,—Supposing our joy to be well and reasonably grounded; supposing it to be the testimony of a well examined conscience, "that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have our conversation in the world;" yet still fear is needful, and without its conduct, even such a joy will be obnoxious to several abuses. As,

1. Joy without fear may betray us to Pride; it may make us bold with GOD, and forget our distance, and value ourselves; though it is certain that the best man has nothing valuable in him in the sight of GOD, when once he has quitted his humility. Now so easily does joy betray men to pride, that (we see) GOD would not trust ST. PAUL

himself with his visions without an allay, without sending a “messenger of SATAN to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure.” And therefore the same Apostle advises those that are well grounded in religion, that they “be not high-minded, but fear:” To be high-minded is the direct way to fall; and the only way not to be high-minded is to fear.

2. Joy without fear may betray us to Security. We know our Christian life is compared in Scripture to a warfare; and though we are not always in actual conflict with our enemies, we are always in danger of them: Outward temptations or inward lusts, and the suggestions of the Devil, always lay round and begirt us; and we can never vanquish them so far, but that they will have power left to make a new assault.

Thus every Christian is like a town infested by potent neighbours, and fear is the only watch or sentinel of the town: So that if once we discharge fear, we give our enemies their desired advantage that they may take us by surprise.

3. Joy without fear may betray us to Slackness; which always breeds danger. For morality and religion (which is but morality well directed) are progressive states; and not to go forward in them is certainly to lose ground. Because our progress towards good being partly violent, and as it were up a great steep; as soon as that violence which is necessary to the motion ceases, our natures will run back to ill, of their own accord.

Now joy does often make men slacken their diligence, and so lose ground, by amusing them with the pleasures it brings with it; as a traveller is apt to loiter upon a diverting road: But fear, like rough weather at sea, though it be more displeasing, yet it always rids most way, and makes the quickest voyages.

To conclude this part: We may observe of natural joy, that although it be a passion so pleasing and cherishing to the soul of man; yet if it be suffered to run to excess, it sometimes proves deadly, and directly kills.

So GELLIUS (among other examples to the same purpose) tells of a Roman matron, who seeing her son return from the battle of Cannæ, where she apprehended he had been slain; immediately fell down dead, being overcome with the excess of joy, which she conceived at the sight.

And thus as natural joy, though it be the very life of our life, may, if ungoverned, be the occasion of natural mischiefs; so religious joy, though it be the very life of religion, may, if let loose from the discipline of fear, become the occasion of many spiritual mischiefs.

Indeed joy without fear is only proper for the state of heaven; and for those blessed souls who are confirmed in grace, and can sin no more: But for frailer mortals who are always either under the power of sin, or at least under the assaults of it; for such to rejoice without the restraint of fear, is pure ignorance of our state, as well as an occasion to betray us unto worse.

I have now showed both of these affections, how needful they are to qualify us in the discharge of our offices to God and religion. No disposition but joy is fit to express our sense of the Divine Goodness; and keep us affectionately devout: No disposition but fear is fit to express our sense of human frailty, and keep us solicitously humble. Both of them joined, consummate the temper of a good man's heart; which I will leave you to contemplate farther under this familiar emblem,—A good man's heart is like the flame of a candle; its joy makes it mount continually towards heaven; and its fear makes it lessen and tremble as it mounts.

The mention of a candle puts me in mind of an ancient and pious custom among Christians, as often as a candle was brought into the room, each person in the company, either by an audible voice, or at least by some mien of reverence, expressed a mutual wish, that God would send them light everlasting.

We live indeed in an age wherein all forms of grace, and usages of piety, are run out of countenance: But let not piety quit the stage for fear of being derided; let not

the scorner's chair come into such authority as to be able to prescribe profaneness. An honest Heathen advises us, *Noli virtute relictâ invidiam pacare*: Let us not leave off doing what is fit, to appease the envy of such as would have no such thing done.

And therefore as I have brought in the candle by way of symbol, so I will likewise bring in the wish, and beseech Almighty God, that he would make us all partakers of everlasting light, through JESUS CHRIST our LORD.

SERMON VII.

THE NATURE AND USE OF SELF-DENIAL.

MATT. xvi. 24.

Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

THE occasion of these words we meet with three verses before, where it is said, that “from that time forth began JESUS to show unto his disciples that he must go up to Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the Elders, and Chief Priests, and Scribes, and be killed.” Upon the hearing of this, PETER, who was always particularly zealous for his Master’s welfare, presumes to expostulate with him, and (as the text expresses it) to “rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, LORD, this shall not be unto thee.” Let us unfold this argument, and it runs thus:—

‘LORD, thou sayest, that going up to Jerusalem, thou must suffer many things, and be killed; but why then must thou needs go up? If thou foreseest that the Jews have malice enough to form such a design against thee, why shouldst thou not rather prevent their malice? *Ιλεως σοι, κυριε*, which (to render the phrase literally) is, *Propitius esto tibi, Domine*, LORD, favour thyself, or be kind to thyself, LORD, and suffer not these evils to come upon thee.’

Thus argued PETER; being possessed with this natural sentiment, that whatsoever is grievous to be borne, in all right and discretion ought to be avoided.

But we may observe, that while he made this argument for his Master’s favouring himself, he made no provisional exception for the glory of GOD, nor any reserve for those

obligations, that the cause of righteousness might lay on him to the contrary; and this was the reason why he met with so severe a reprehension: "Get thee behind me, SATAN, thou art an offence unto me; for thou savourest not the things that be of GOD, but those that be of men. Get thee, behind me, SATAN."

We must allow that PETER had discovered too much of the man in his advice, it savoured of flesh and blood: But I do not apprehend that there was much of SATAN in it, not much either of that pride, or dissembling, or malice of intention, that the Devil is wont to use in his addresses: This agrees not with the usual character of that disciple; and therefore I persuade myself, that our SAVIOUR called him SATAN for no other reason than this, viz. that he had imprudently run upon the same advice that SATAN uses the most successfully of all others to undo men by, and that is the advice of self-indulgence: 'Favour thyself.'

'Favour thyself' is the most artful of all suggestions of the Devil; because being made specious with the pretences of reason and justice, and sweetened by its agreeableness to that self-love with which all men naturally abound, it seldom fails of being swallowed, though poison and death lurk under it.

Now it was expressly against the deceit of this indulgent advice, that our SAVIOUR levels the doctrine of the text, where he runs his own case into a general one; and as he implies what himself would do, so he declares what all others must do that will be his disciples,—"Whosoever will come after me," &c.

After our SAVIOUR had proposed heaven for a reward to his followers, he needed not his divine prescience to foresee, that a world of hypocrites would come into his train: For whether men bring their hearts to his service or not, they cannot withhold their affections from his wages; and hence it must needs come to pass, that many would pretend to "come after" him, though in the mean while they walked not in his, but in their own way; and many would

take up his name, as it were, for a passport to glory, though in the mean while they resolved to coast and avoid all the roughness and difficulties of the road.

These, indeed, are vain thoughts; but the Psalmist tells us, “that the thoughts of men are but vain:” Vain even in worldly projects, where they deliberate most; and therefore no wonder if more vain in religious, where they are so much less considerate.

But to give a check to all such deluding thoughts, our SAVIOUR forewarns us here, that if we will “come after him,” that is, in the place and profession of disciples, we must “follow him” with the hearts and sincerity of disciples; and if we will arrive at that happy place whither he is gone before, we must follow him; not in the by-paths of our own projecting, but *εν τοις ιχνησι αυτου*, (as ST. PETER expresses it,) “in his very steps,” and particularly in these of self-denial, and taking up our cross.

To “deny ourselves,” and to “take up our cross,” are two expressions which each of them import the Christian’s obligation to suffer: For a man may suffer two ways, viz. either by his own act, when he inflicts any thing uneasy upon himself; or by another’s act, when any such thing is inflicted on him from without; so these two expressions have a direct regard to these two kinds of suffering: Self-denial, which is a man’s own act, requires no less than that a man should suffer from himself by voluntary inflictions; and “taking up our cross,” which is the submitting to another’s act, (for it was part of the condemned man’s sentence to bear his cross to the place of execution,) requires a submissive and patient bearing of involuntary evils, or such as GOD’s providence ordains to come upon us, from other hands; and both these are essential parts of the Christian’s duty, both necessary to the ends of virtue, and both obliging all those that will follow our LORD in the way that leadeth to life.

It shall be my present business to speak to the former, the duty of self-denial.

To deny, in our common notion of the word, is to refuse

when asked ; and if we will retain that notion in this place, to “ deny ourselves,” is to deny our desires ; when they ask and solicit, we must refuse and controul them : And this is the plain and the whole of the duty.

One may possibly suppose that all our desires are not to be so treated : For it is to be hoped there are in us some desires that are truly spiritual, and conformable to the will of God ; and we know it is the main business of religion, to nourish and improve such desires : But then we may observe likewise concerning such desires, that they are not properly ours ; when they are *in* us, they are not *of* us, nor can they be derived from the principles of our own nature, wherein are so many rooted oppositions to the Divine will ; but they are derived from the influences of grace, and when we relish them, and are led by them, and maintain them against the insults of our inferior desires, it is a proof that we are advanced to a pitch above our natural state : All good desires are *from* God in their fountain, as well as *to* him in their streams : And therefore those notwithstanding, the rule still holds that all *our* desires have need of this discipline of denial.

Let us then (in the next place) see those desires that are properly our own : See them, did I say ? Alas, what a spectacle would they make ! Were our breasts but for a while that “ sea of glass, clear as crystal ” to one another ; (as ST. JOHN in his Revelation tells us, they are always unto God ;) were our breasts so laid open for a while, that each could see the natural propensions of another’s heart, in the same form that they now commonly stand ; how should we be glad to run away from ourselves, and be ashamed to own our own appearances ! For the desires of man are but of two kinds ; the first are actually evil, and the second incline to be so ; that is, they certainly will be evil, unless a careful discipline prevent them.

Of those desires that are actually evil, some become so from the unlawfulness of their object ; which therefore the Apostle calls the “ desires of evil things,” that is, of such things as are forbidden and sinful in their own nature :

Others become evil, not from the nature of their object, but from their own excess; and of such desires we may interpret ST. PETER, where he speaks of “men walking after their own desires.” (2 *Eph.* iii. 3.)

“Walking,”—The expression imports desires grown so strong and masterly, that the man cannot govern his desires, but the desires govern the man; who is therefore said to “walk after them,” as a slave walks after his chain. Now in such an excess, the desire of any indifferent thing becomes evil, because it gives up the heart to the thing desired, and so robs GOD of his proper worship.

Concerning these desires that are thus actually evil, the duty is plain enough; there can be no controversy but they must be denied: These are the enemies “that war against the soul;” and not to deny them, is to be confederates to our own undoing. And yet these desires are dear unto us, and we look upon them as a part of ourselves; in them when accomplished, we count ourselves happy; in them when crossed, we account ourselves disappointed; in them when unheard, we account ourselves affronted; nay, we sometimes look upon them as our most intimate self, and they are more dear to us than our very soul. But it would be worth our while to reflect, that (*Psalms* lxxxii. 13) it is mentioned as the severest judgment GOD could inflict on the stubborn Israelites, on this side excision, that he “gave them up to their own hearts’ desire:” He had cut them short, and distressed them, and sorely punished them before; but in all this he had a mixture of mercy, for he intended to reclaim them; but at last being incorrigible, he “gave them up to their own hearts’ desires” in pure vengeance.

Thus we see men may pursue those things as gratifications, which yet GOD cannot permit them to enjoy, but as a curse. Indeed, it is wonders of mischief that sin can work in us; it can set up self against self, and make one part of our being destroy a better with pleasure and with joy; it can put out our eyes, and be welcome; it can waste our judgments, and make stupefaction please us, as it cer-

tainly does when we account ourselves happy in those sinful issues, which at the same time we cannot but allow make all men miserable.

To deny all desires that are in their consequences so pernicious, as it cannot but be our duty, so it is a duty well reducible to the intention of my text; but yet I think that in strict interpretation it is not directly intended there: For, indeed, to deny such desires is too mild a term to express the discipline that is due to them: That which the Scripture requires in respect of these, is to “hate and crucify them,” to “cut them” off, and “cast them” away: Whereas to deny, signifies properly no more than to restrain the effect, not to root out the principle; and therefore it is not so accurately applied to things that are simply evil, as to those that are indifferent.

And desires we have of this kind too, that is, such as in themselves are morally indifferent. Desires that were in our nature before sin was there; and consequently our SAVIOUR took them upon himself with our nature, though he never partook of any thing that was sinful: Of this kind are the desires of ease or indolence, of proper refreshments and honest pleasures, and of avoiding those things that are noxious and afflicting: These are the orderly requests of our nature, and such as it seems innocent, just, and rational to enjoy; such as a well-meaning PETER might advise his master to indulge himself in; and yet these are they that are to be denied. It is true, it is severity to deny them; but the only inference that can be drawn thence is this, that a Christian is a person that lies under the obligation of being severe to himself. And this is the strict and genuine doctrine of the words; and this our SAVIOUR expressly meant, opposing his advice to PETER's, which gave the occasion,—‘LORD, be kind to thyself,’ says the disciple. ‘No,’ says CHRIST, ‘but rather be hard and severe to thyself, if thou wilt follow me.’

This then shall be the point to be insisted upon, viz. that there are voluntary severities, consisting in the sub-

mission of ourselves to many unpleasing things, though otherwise avoidable; and in the restraint of ourselves from many pleasing things, though otherwise lawful; and these severities are to be engaged in upon their respective occasions, as absolutely necessary to make a good Christian.

And certainly that Christian is much too delicate, (as ST. JEROME calls one upon a like account,) that would excuse himself from this discipline in the school of CHRIST; since we may find that in every Heathen school they required no less to make a philosopher, that is, (in the sense of their sober style,) an honest and good man.

I confess it was a grateful scheme of doctrine that EPICURUS presented to the world, when he pretended to satisfy the aims both of sense and morality together; inviting men to virtue, and at the same time to pleasure, and speciously telling them, that the life that was both virtuous and pleasurable, was purely like the life of the Gods; and therefore such a life as every wise man ought to aim at.

This was a grateful scheme, and the very instance of the comparison gave it a deceiving colour; but in the mean time it was very weakly grounded; and all the other sects showed themselves much better acquainted with both the corruption of human nature, and likewise with the means of reforming that corruption; in which two points the whole pretence of moral philosophy consists. They all saw that to live pleurably, and at the same time to live virtuously, was so much like the life of the Gods, that it was no way imitable by impotent and foolish men: And therefore they all remonstrate against this new Doctor, as one who, by hanging out the flag of pleasure, had covered all that was true, and laid aside all that was great in philosophy. They all teach (on the contrary) that whoever proposes to be a virtuous man, must by no means propose his life to be a scene of pleasure: They teach us that wisdom and felicity have built their palaces together upon the top of a craggy rock, whither it is not a little difficult to ascend. The same instruction it is that we have from the symbol of PYTHAGORAS's Letter: And the same we

have from CEBES'S Commentary upon his emblematical picture ; where he tells us of the *θυρα μικρα*, and *οδος δυσανοδοσ*, terms expressly the same with our SAVIOUR'S "strait gate" and "narrow way." They represented their HERCULES as always engaging in labours, always seeking conflicts, always severe to himself ; and his character they set before their scholars, as the common guide to proficiency in good living, The school of PLATO reduced all morality to two governing virtues, and they were *εγκρασια* and *καρτερια* : as the school of ZENO did to their *ανεχειν και απεχειν* : Both agree in sense ; and both their words are properly rendered in our language by *bearing* and *forbearing*. Bearing and forbearing were their cardinal virtues, accounted by them the hinges and foundation of all the rest : And be pleased to observe that these two words exactly answer the signification of the two expressions in the text, "denying ourselves," and "taking up our cross."

I mention not all this with a purpose to enforce the precepts of our LORD from the authority of philosophers ; I mention it to hinder lest any one's indulgence should persuade him that he can be a good Christian without the offices of self-denial ; when it appears that the Heathens did not think it possible that any one could be a commonly good man without them. I mention it to convince us, that our LORD, who has 'opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers,' ought not by any means to be accounted a hard master, when he imposes no other terms than the Heathens thought fit to engage in upon the mere spur of their private consciences and public shame. I mention it likewise to stick upon us for an admonition, how speechless great part of the Christian world must needs stand in the day of inquiry ; when it shall appear that PYTHAGORAS, and PLATO, and ZENO, could have disciples run through such a discipline as necessary to virtue, when many that profess CHRIST esteem that discipline needless, only because it is displeasing.

And now I shall proceed to show farther the necessity of

this discipline, by arguments drawn from the nature of our religion.

The First step of the Christian life, (or rather the First step towards it,) is, To forsake sin; the Second is, To prevent sin, and to guard ourselves against it; the Third and finishing step is, To gain those holy affections that are preparative to future glory. Now our religion instructs us, that none of these can be done without being severe to ourselves.

1. There is no forsaking sin without it. I know a man may possibly forsake a sin, as a surfeited stomach forsakes its meat; but then as in this case there is nothing of temperance, so in the other there is nothing of repentance: For the Apostle (2 *Cor.* vii. 11) makes the chief office of repentance to consist in revenge; so that a man cannot be said to repent, in the sense of the Scripture, without bringing himself under severities, and executing acts of displeasure upon himself, such as are mourning, and abstinence, and vigilance, and restraint of delights, and labour in the works of charity, and whatsoever else may conduce to the humbling of our nature, and taking revenge upon those passions whereby we have offended God. It was to inculcate the necessity of these acts, that the ancients were wont to style them by the name of satisfactions; not meaning, (as latter ages would have them interpreted,) that they are of value to satisfy the Divine justice; (nothing but the blood of JESUS can do so;) but meaning that they satisfy those conditions which the Gospel requires of penitents, as necessary both for their present correction and future caution. But this is a matter, that however it be corrupted in practice, yet it is not much contestable in judgment; and therefore I shall pass from it to the Second use of voluntary severities, and that is, To prevent sin.

2. It is in respect of this office, that the Christian state is called a warfare, that is, the necessary and continual engagement of our rational desires against our sensual, in order to bring them under, and keep them in obedience. And this is a warfare from whence there must be no dis-

mission; there must be no league, no truce, no laying down of arms in it; for our enemies are perfidious, and will never keep the peace, and therefore we are never out of danger, but while we are actually fighting. We find ST. PAUL, a man of miracles and visions, and a sanctity of life more glorious than either; even while he was daily fought against from without by the malice of SATAN and evil men, yet as if this were not mortification enough, we find him moreover "fighting" against himself, "casting down" his mind, (as he calls it,) and "beating down" his body, and "bodily" affections. Now can we incline to think that ST. PAUL did this, either from the affectation of singularity, or from a principle of vain-glory, or from a pretence to supererogation, or by a simple mistake of judgment? No, he tells us himself, that he did it for no less 'reason than this, viz. lest for want of this discipline, he 'might possibly be a cast-away:" And if he were fain to maintain this fight for fear of being a cast-away, who among Christians can lay down his arms and be safe?

This fighting with our appetites and desires, is the same thing with "denying ourselves," in the text; and the practice of it consists in restraining them, and not giving them leave to satiate themselves on their particular objects: For he that gives his appetites their loose or their fill, I mean even of those enjoyments that are otherwise lawful, he ceases to fight with them or to deny them, and from that moment brings himself in danger of being worsted by them.

And this is a truth that the Heathen sages insinuated in the passage of their HERCULES fighting with ANTÆUS: Whilst HERCULES grasped his adversary, and held him up in his arms, he could manage and master him with ease; but no sooner did he let ANTÆUS come to touch the earth, but he got strength again, and was able to renew the combat. ANTÆUS touching the earth is morally no other than an earthly affection permitted to its element, that is, suffered to have its fill; at which time it always gets strength and grows masterly, and becomes less manageable than before.

Grapple with thy desires, hold them off from the reach of their quarry, and restrain them even from the lawful measures of enjoyment: For so they will grow weak, and thy government firm over them: But if thou permit them to the utmost of what is lawful, thou art certainly a baffled man; for, besides that the precise limits of lawful and unlawful are very often undistinguishable, thy appetites will grow so strong by what thou dost allow them, that they will take the rest in spite of thy approbation.

3. It is necessary to be strict and severe upon ourselves, in order to gain those holy affections that are preparative to future glory.

The Apostle tells us, (*Col.* i. 12,) that there is an *ικανότης* a certain meetness or fitness, which is required to be in all those that shall be “partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” They that hope rationally to have that glorious change pass upon them, must make advances towards it by heavenly sentiments and heavenly desires, and a proper hunger and relish of those enjoyments that are in heaven; which are much different from those wherewith our appetites are naturally affected: But the question is, how this shall be done, and how such perfective dispositions shall be brought into the soul?

We are told concerning our SAVIOUR CHRIST himself, that “he was made perfect through sufferings: For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” (*Heb.* ii. 10.) The words indeed do not absolutely imply, that those sufferings were necessary for the *personal* perfection of our SAVIOUR; he might have passed to glory an easier way, because he wanted no virtue to qualify him for that state; but the words imply, that his sufferings were necessary for his *exemplary* perfection; that is, as he was to be an example to us, and the Captain and President of our salvation; as he was to lead the way by which many adopted “sons of God” might likewise pass into glory; so it was necessary he should “be made perfect through sufferings,” because

no adopted son, no Christian can ever be perfected without those means. Accordingly, sufferings are mentioned in the Christian covenant, as an express condition of future glory: "If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him." And—"We are heirs with CHRIST, if so be we suffer with him." As we likewise find the same Apostle teaching his converts at Antioch, that we must "through much tribulation [the word is *δία πολλων θλιψεων*, through many wrestlings and contendings] enter into the kingdom of God."

Now if the SPIRIT of GOD gives us warning, that sufferings are of so necessary importance to our future welfare, and yet at the same time does not lay upon us any outward necessity to suffer; it is a proof that in this case the necessity lies upon ourselves to take care that we suffer from our own voluntary discipline. For I do not think any one will argue, that sufferings take any of their virtue from being involuntary; or that when our SAVIOUR says, "Blessed are ye that hunger," and "Blessed are ye that mourn," he means it only of those that hunger and mourn, because they cannot help it; or that those restraints which a man imposes upon himself, will not conduce as much to the perfecting of his nature, and the making him humble and sober, as those that are forced upon him by outward violence: To argue this would be against all the rules of moral reasoning. No, certainly,—there is an inward discipline, which is altogether as *perfective*, nay much more, than any outward persecution; there is a mortification, and continual watching over ourselves, (which the Father calls *Juge Martyrium*, the Daily Martyrdom,) as acceptable to God, as is the shedding of our blood: And who can doubt but that ST PAUL, when from a thorough experiment made of his own patience and resignation, he could say, "I am crucified with CHRIST," was as glorious a Christian, as when he held forth his neck to the sword at his execution?

When all this is said we must observe, that it is not the sufferings themselves, but the effect of them that makes a Christian. And therefore sufferings are good no longer than they produce good, that is, gracious dispositions in

the soul that bears them. And this is to be laid down for a rule, whereby every man ought to govern himself in all the offices of self-denial: For by observing this, he may prevent pride and vanity, and confidence in the outward work, and all other consequences whereby those offices may otherwise either become unprofitable, or degenerate into ill.

But then, forasmuch as a man may (on the other side) elude the obligation of these offices, by alleging, that he does not find what good they are like to do him; fancying himself in a possibility of being as good a Christian *without* them,—I shall show (in the last place) the necessity of this discipline from the relation it bears to some particular duties.

The duties I shall choose to instance in are these: Humility, Compassion, and Devotion.

Humility is the right posture of our souls towards themselves; Compassion is the right posture of our souls towards others; and Devotion is the right posture of our souls towards God; so that these three seem to make up the absolute perfection of the Christian state. And yet I think it as possible for a man to be a good Christian without these dispositions, as it is to obtain these dispositions without voluntary severities.

1. Humility is little else than the true knowledge of ourselves; how corrupt, how impotent, how vain we are; how we depend absolutely upon God's pleasure every moment, and yet every moment merit his displeasure, at least till such time as we are truly humble. Now though every man may speculate and discourse upon this notion of himself; yet no man can *know* it, (in the Scripture sense of knowing,) that is, feel it intimately, and be properly affected with it, till such time as he takes himself into discipline. For when a man is pinched, or straitened, or languishing; when he is in pain, or in a set conflict with any passion, and therewithal reflects, how every little thing is able to make him miserable; then he proves and learns effectually, how little a thing himself must needs be; and till then he never conceives a notion of himself mean enough to size his own unworthiness.

But farther, while a man holds himself under discipline, there follows another gracious effect, and that is this, The less he enjoys, the less he thinks himself to deserve ; which is true humility : Whereas, on the other side, the more a man allows himself of the pleasurable things of this life, the more he thinks he deserves ; or at least, (to speak the most candidly the case can bear,) the more he allows himself of the pleasurable things of this life, the less he thinks of his not deserving them ; and the less he thinks of his not deserving them, the more he allows himself : And so pride and indulgence mutually nurse each other.

2. I come to the instance of Compassion. Compassion is the enlarging of our spirits to a tender concern for the calamities and sufferings of others. But forasmuch as sense is our common schoolmaster, and we have but weak notices of those things we do not feel, and those notices we have quickly pass away, it cannot be that we should maintain a proper compassion for what others either do or may suffer, unless we in some measure or resemblance suffer the same ourselves : Our sense must be both our instructor and remembrancer of the duty. And so we find, that even our SAVIOUR himself went to this school of experience ; for “ he learnt by suffering,” says the Apostle ; and the thing he learned was compassion : For therefore “ he is a merciful High Priest,” therefore “ he is touched with our infirmities,” and therefore he is ready to “ succour us when tempted ;” because he was made obnoxious unto both, “ even like unto us :” As the Apostle argues, chapter two of his Epistle to the Hebrews. On the other hand, the Prophet denounceth “ a woe to them that are at ease ;” and the reason he gives for it is, because “ they are not grieved at the afflictions of JOSEPH ;” wanting nothing themselves, they are never duly sensible of what others want or endure. And from this same root springs the reason of that political observation, namely, that luxury has always been so fatal to states and kingdoms ; the reason is chiefly this,—Because when men come to indulge themselves, they set up self for the idol, and this insensibly shrinks away the public

spirit and extinguishes all just concern for the common good.

3. I come to the Last instance, which is that of Devotion. Devotion is the lifting up our soul unto God, which never rises so kindly, as when it restrains and weans itself from sensual enjoyments; for they bring a clear contrary bias and propension upon the mind. “*In his vita spiritus,*” says good HEZEKIAH, speaking of religious mortification and mourning, “the spirit of man lives in these things:” It lives and asserts itself by them, and gets freedom from the body, command over the affections, and ardour in desires, and power with God. Never came a truth more Christianlike out of the mouth of a Heathen, than that of HORACE:—

*Quanto quisque sibi plura negaverit
A Diis plura feret :*

The more a man denies himself, the more prevalent he shall be with God. Where we have the very duty in the expression of the text, and recommended to us upon this consideration, that it will procure us the divine favour and bounty.

But I am aware, that while I say, the Christian stands obliged to deny himself, for the ends of virtue and devotion; others may possibly say, they do not deny themselves, and that for the very same ends, namely, because they find that they are never so towardly disposed to the offices of virtue and devotion, as when they are in gaiety of spirit, and nature in them is entirely at ease.—Now were it thus, yet it were well to consider, what a miserable piety that is that depends upon a good humour; and what must become of that humour in the day of visitation; and how we shall be able to maintain it under the circumstances of affliction, sickness, agonies, or any other forced restraints, or whether those are circumstances that must be provided for, only just when they come to seize us. Indeed a good humour is a gay promiser, but always deceitful in performance; it is, like EPHRAIM, “glorying in harness and bow, but turning back in the day of battle.” And though it may seem to

make us more prompt in the discharge of some offices; it makes us more presumptuous in the neglect of others. Nay, we may farther observe, that when it is the height of our animal spirits that founds a good humour, the same spirits do at the same time produce a good opinion, and make us apt to take up such a sanguine conceit of ourselves, as a sober judgment can by no means maintain or allow; the consequences of which mistake cannot be otherwise than extremely dangerous. Whoever therefore will secure either his virtue or devotion, he must try what they will bear, and confirm them by bearing, and he must ply his discipline till such time as piety comes (not to wait upon, but) to command his good humour, without which it is impossible that it can ever have any firmness of root. If we will be “perfect and entire,” says ST. JAMES, (nor does he mean any supererogating perfection, but only that soundness that is necessary to make every Christian accepted,) if we will be “perfect and entire,” we must “let patience have her perfect work.” And, in the mean time, we may assure ourselves, that the most empty breathings of an humble spirit are a more acceptable sacrifice than all the forward conceptions and promising overtures of a fancy kept pregnant by the warmth of indulgence.

I have thus far shown the general nature and necessity of self-denial: As for its particular measures, because they are variable according to particular circumstances, I must leave it to private discretion to determine them; only with this caution,—*μη ελεως σοι*, Favour not thyself; be just and impartial in thy censures.—To avoid partiality in our transacting with others, it is a safe rule to suppose other men to be ourselves; and it may be indifferently safe in transacting with ourselves, to suppose ourselves to be other men. Let every one therefore divest himself as much as possible of all selfish fondness, and determine, and do that which his conscience tells him this precept of self-denial obliges another man to do.

SERMON VIII.

THE CHRISTIAN SACRIFICE.

ROM. xii. 1.

I beseech you brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable ; which is your reasonable service.

PASSING by the prefatory clause of the words, wherein our Apostle applies himself to the Jews at Rome, with the most endearing compellation, (my brethren,) with the most respectful address, (“I beseech you,”) and with the most obliging argument, (“by the mercies of God,”) giving us a specimen through all of the proper sweetness of a Christian application, and the most hopeful method of edifying those with whom we have to do ; I say, passing by this prefatory clause, the rest of the words present these two matters to our consideration, viz. 1. The nature, and, 2. The commendation of the Christian sacrifice : The nature of it is implied in these words, “That you present yourselves a living sacrifice ;” and its commendation in the following, where the Apostle says of this sacrifice, that it is, “holy and acceptable unto GOD,” and our “reasonable service.”

1. I begin with the consideration of the nature of the Christian sacrifice : Concerning which the several expressions offer these three things, namely, its Matter, its Form, and its Quality. Its matter is said to be “our bodies ;” its form, “that they be presented unto GOD ;” and its quality, that it must be “a living sacrifice.”

(1.) The word Sacrifice, in its most simple sense, signifies no more than the offering of something to GOD ; whence it follows, that wherever there is a religion, there must be a

sacrifice ; because there can be no religious worship without offering of something to God. Now it was instituted under the Law, that men should offer sacrifices of the fruit of their cattle and of their ground ; but such sacrifices could extend to no more than a very defective service ; they came very short of the great ends of religion, and very short of what was fit for a rational creature to give, and for an infinite Being to accept : And therefore our Apostle forms his description of the Christian sacrifice (in the text) with opposition to those sacrifices of the Law, and implicitly argues thus much by it, namely, That if we will make a worthy offering, “ holy and acceptable unto God,” and such a one as may amount to the estimation of a “ reasonable service,” we must offer something better than fruits and beasts ; something more suitable to the Majesty of God, and more expressive of our honour of him ; and the only thing we have of this kind to offer is ourselves.

For although the matter of our sacrifice be expressed in the text by “ our bodies,” yet that must be interpreted of our whole selves : For our bodies alone will not answer the duty, because they are but a part of us ; and we may learn from the analogy of the legal institution, that whatsoever is offered to God must be entire : Thus, for example, when the Jew was to offer a lamb, and could not reach the charge of a lamb, in such a case he might offer two turtles or two pigeons ; but half a lamb, (though of greater price,) would not have served the turn ; because to divide the sacrifice had been to profane it.

But that this sacrifice of ourselves must be entire, there is yet a greater argument than can be drawn from the analogy of that service : For had the Jew divided his lamb, his sacrifice had only been defective, it had not therefore been unclean : But in the offering of ourselves by parcel unto God, the part reserved will defile the part offered, and render it absolutely unclean. Thus the malice or pride of the soul will poison all the services of the body, in like manners as the filthiness of the flesh will unhallow all the offices of the soul : Thus again, it is in vain that the hand be

liberal, if in the mean time the eye be lustful; it is in vain that the appetite be temperate, if in the mean time the hand be griping or unjust: Every ill that we allow, will canker and spoil every good that we do; and no man can be clean to GOD, that is not clean throughout. And from hence it is evident, that our bodies (in the text) must be taken figuratively, to signify entire persons. And so we have a proper paraphrase of the text in the Communion-office, where it is said,—“ And here we offer and present unto thee, O LORD, ourselves, our souls, and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee.”

(2.) This being the matter of our sacrifice, we are next to see the form of it, or the manner in which this sacrifice is to be made: And the text tells us, it is by “ presenting ourselves unto GOD;” that is, by dedicating and devoting ourselves to his service.

It is true, indeed, that we are so devoted already; for we all in our baptism made this vow, and entered into this solemn engagement, that we would cleave unto GOD, and renounce all that might keep us at a distance from him: But the text puts us in mind of a farther duty; for the word *παρασησαι*, (which we translate to *present*,) signifies properly to *bring*, or to *render that which was promised before*. Thus (for example) when HANNAH the mother of SAMUEL begged a son of GOD, and on that condition *vowed* him to his service, when afterwards she brought her son to the tabernacle, and entered him into his attendance there, she may properly be said *παρασησασθαι*, to have *rendered* her son, and so absolved her vow.

Baptism is the HANNAH that has promised us all to GOD, but has left it to ourselves to make that promise good; and this is that the text calls upon us to do.

Remember then that we hold it for a rule of truth in all instances of promise, “ Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay:” But when the instance comes to be so high as the condition of a covenant for eternity, no man can too much consider the importance of that rule.

In the last chapter of *Joshua*, there is a remarkable passage betwixt that good man and the people of Israel: After having recounted GOD's power and goodness, which they were well conscious of, he, in fine, bids them choose, and profess openly, whether they would serve GOD or no. Hereupon the people instantly make an engagement, "that they would serve the Lord:" JOSHUA seeing how forward they were to promise, checks their indeliberation, and argues against them on this manner: "But you cannot serve the LORD, for he is a holy GOD, he is a jealous GOD; he will not forgive your transgressions, nor your sins: If you forsake the LORD, he will turn against you, and consume you." This caution notwithstanding, the people adhere to their promise, and cry again, "Nay, but we will serve the LORD:" Upon which JOSHUA, instead of commending their zeal, seems rather to cool it again with this reply, "Therefore," says he, "you are witnesses against yourselves, that you have chosen the LORD to serve him: And they said, We are witnesses."

In the whole passage we may observe, that JOSHUA is arguing expressly for the service of GOD, and yet arguing against the promise to serve him, unless it be very deliberately and seriously made: To put us in mind that the making of a promise to GOD is a very awful thing; and that if it be not kept, it will certainly bring these two mischiefs upon the promisers, (1.) That GOD will punish the sins of such more severely than of any others, because he is more immediately concerned in the sins of such men: And (2.) That such men become witnesses against themselves, viz., witnesses that they thought fit to choose that which they do not think fit to stand to; and so being made witnesses against themselves, they are cut off from all pleading for themselves in the day of account.

If we will submit to the force of JOSHUA's argument, we must lay to heart our Christian promises; we must look upon ourselves as set apart, and consecrated to the service of GOD, therefore separate from what is sinful; and we must take care that our daily practice repeat and confirm the engagements of our baptism: And this is actually to

make our sacrifice ; whereas to have made the promise of our sacrifice, carries nothing in it but the articles of higher guilt and conviction.

But, forasmuch as the matter of our Christian oblation consists of several parts, viz., of as many parts as we ourselves are composed of,—understanding, will, passions, affections, senses, and members ; and each of these requiring a several conduct, I shall add one word of particular direction to each of them.

First, Then in order,—We must dedicate our understanding “ to know JESUS CHRIST, and him crucified ;” that is, to learn the patience and love of JESUS : And for a motive let us consider, that without this nothing else can possibly make us wise.

We must dedicate our will to that holy rule of resignation, “ Not as I will, but as thou wilt :” And for a motive let us consider, that what GOD wills for us is always safe ; but what we will for ourselves, we are never sure it will be safe for us to attain it.

We must dedicate our passions, (I mean our anger, fear, grief, and hatred,) to the discipline of sin, to be spent and exhausted in that affair ; and for a motive let us consider, that there is hardly any other business in the world, that these passions can wisely and innocently be employed upon.

We must dedicate our affections (I mean our love, hope, joy, and desire) to the pursuit of things above : And for a motive let us consider, that all things below debase our affections at least, if they do not defile them.

We must dedicate our senses to the *γυμνασια*, (as the Apostle directs, *Heb.* v. 14,) to have them exercised and trained, and under restraint : And for a motive let us consider, that if they are let loose, they will so impose upon our understanding, (as the Apostle intimates in the same verse,) that “ we shall not be able to discern between good and evil.”

Finally, we must dedicate our members “ to be the instruments of righteousness unto holiness :” And for a

motive let us consider, how it is that these members ought to be employed, which are the members of CHRIST, as well as ours.

Thus it is our sacrifice is to be made: In respect of which every man is a Priest unto himself: For, indeed, who but ourselves can offer us unto GOD? Others may beseech or advise; but none has any command over the motions of our heart but our own will; and therefore that will must be the Priest. And it is for this reason that the whole people of Christianity are styled in Scripture, “a holy priesthood,” and “a royal priesthood.” The latter epithet denoting the great honour conferred on us, in that we have not only leave, but right and authority to make a present of ourselves to GOD, with assurance to be accepted in CHRIST JESUS.

(3.) The Third thing I am to observe of this sacrifice is its quality; it must be a living one.

The word “living” marks a notorious difference between the legal sacrifices, and this of ours: For as in the legal sacrifice, the beast was first to be killed, and then spent in an act of GOD’s worship; so, on the contrary, in the Christian sacrifice, the man is to dedicate his life, and spend that in the worship of GOD.

And this difference is pointed out by the first notion of the word “living,” as it is opposed to natural death. But the same word has other moral significations in Scripture, which are more particularly instructive to our present duty. We may observe, that in Scripture the word “living” signifies secondarily three things:—[1.] It signifies pure, in opposition to sin, which is a kind of death. [2.] It signifies active, in opposition to sloth, which is another kind of death. And, [3.] It signifies vigorous, in opposition to impotence, which is another kind of death.

[1.] It signifies pure, in opposition to sin. Thus the father in the parable says concerning his son, when returned from his vicious courses, “This my son is alive again.” For we must take notice, that in the account of GOD, (as he has manifested in his word,) the life of man (as man)

is not indicated by sense and motion, but by virtue, and the quickening of the SPIRIT: Nor is the crisis of our health to be taken from the temperament of heat and moisture in our bodies, but from the temper of our hearts.

In the eye of the world that man seems to live most advantageously who lives in pleasure; but the Apostle tells us of such a one, "that he is dead whilst he liveth." When an ill man attends a funeral, he comforts himself to think what a happy difference there is between himself and the corpse; for he can live and enjoy himself, while the other can only stink and putrefy: Whereas the Scripture tells us, there is no difference betwixt these two; because the ill man answers the true ends of life no more than does the dead; nay, he putrefies and stinks as much to a wise understanding, as the carcass does to our common sense. And this is no more than what our SAVIOUR intimates in that reply to his disciple, "Follow thou me, and let the dead bury their dead." (*Matt. viii. 22.*)

So that "living" imports one quickened by grace, and raised up to a pure intention of soul; one fixed with strong purposes and fervent desires to perfect holiness in the fear of God: And such a one presenting himself to God, under such a state, becomes properly a living sacrifice: For a pure and sincere intention is the first point from which we may be said to be spiritually alive.

[2.] The word "living" signifies active, in opposition to sloth.

Thus running waters are in the holy style called "living waters:" And (on the contrary) the Apostle (*Eph. v. 14*) reckons the slothful among the dead.

And this signification of the word puts us in mind, that, in order to an acceptable sacrifice, we must be diligent in the execution, as well as pure in the intention of our duty. A pure intention, without activeness in the discharge, is properly represented by the foolish virgins in the parable; they purposed as well as any, and their style of virgins imports no less; but they were foolish, because

they were slothful; for therefore they wanted oil in their lamps, and therefore were excluded at the coming of the bridegroom.

Slackness in the business of religion is fatal upon a double account, because it makes us fail in compassing our task; and not only so, but it is an express affront to God, who employs us with the encouragement of so great a reward.

The very beasts therefore, when laid upon God's altar, (give me leave to say,) were not to be dead there; they must, as it were, be alive again, and be actuated anew by fire. And that same fire was, both in its use and in its original, a designed emblem of that warmth of affection, which is required to quicken all the offices of our sacrifice. A warmth that is to be derived from heaven, from the influences of God's HOLY SPIRIT; and therefore it is that those influences are called in Scripture, "the baptism of fire." Water is not sufficient for us, although it cleanse us, because it is a sluggish element; there must be fire likewise to actuate, and inflame, and mount us upwards. The truth whereof, if you will take it in plainer terms, is this, that innocence itself, if alone, (supposing it possible it should be alone,) would not render us accepted of God; because he requires further, that we should be diligent, and active towards acquiring goodness. And indeed, without this qualification, how is it possible we should acquit ourselves in any proportion touching those general charges of the Gospel, viz., of watchfulness in prayer, of labouring in charity, of pursuing peace, of perfecting patience, of "redeeming the time, of using all diligence, of walking worthy of the LORD to all well pleasing, being fruitful in all good works;" and, in a word, of "striving to enter in at the strait gate;" which imports a strong endeavour, and that enforced with this caution, that "many shall seek to enter, and shall not be able:" Where it is implied, that bare seeking cannot succeed, because it is too supine, because it is not sufficiently active.

[3.] The third signification of the word "living" is

vigorous, in opposition to impotence; and thus the word *ζωσα* signifies in all those texts, where our translation renders it, lively; as, “who hath begotten us to a lively hope;” and, “mine enemies are lively and strong,” that is, vigorous and strong. And this signification of the word minds us particularly of the proper season of our sacrifice.

For as active denotes the exercise, so vigorous denotes the power of acting; whence we may observe, that all seasons will not serve us wherein we may be active: For though the will should not be wanting, yet at some time the very power will fail.

If a man that is to run a race should inconsiderately lie in the cold, and benumb his limbs, it is in vain to exhort such a one to make speed, for though he would, he cannot. It is requisite therefore that our sacrifice be presented in the season of such a vigour as may render it capable of being active towards God and goodness. And this lesson was pointed out by the state of all the sacrifices that were appointed in the law,—they were all to be offered in the prime and vigour of their age.

In respect of this qualification my address becomes more particular,—“To you, O young men, because you are strong,” (as ST JOHN words it,) or, what imports the same, because you are vigorous; that is, you are now in such a state both of body and soul, and affections, as is most subservient to piety: For in those years it is, that our understandings are capable of the firmest impressions; *then* our wills are most ductile and pliable; *then* our affections most patient of discipline; *then* our bodies most useful to our minds; *then* our whole soul is most quick and governable, and most successfully applied to the offices of duty.

Lose not therefore your irrecoverable advantage; but answer now when God calls with most affection; answer now when nature itself is readiest to answer; offer yourselves while you are most worth the offering, and while the odour of innocence may best perfume your oblation. Govern therefore your appetites “before the evil day comes:”

“Now you may gird them, and carry them whither you will ;” but if you neglect the season, “they will hereafter gird you, and carry you whither you would not.”

An early virtue is a most worthy and valuable offering, honoured, and blessed with the kindest acceptance of God : But when a man shall look into himself, and find his parts and faculties depraved, vitiated, weakened ; stained with the pollution, stiff with the custom, wearied with the service, sick with the disappointments, and darkened with the impostures of sin ; what a melancholy task must such a one have to prepare an acceptable sacrifice to God out of so vile a herd ! It is certain that old age, and the infirmities that creep upon us through the bare influence of time, bring with them a great debility towards several offices of virtue ; but (what is of more concern) it is certain that old, ill habits, and the stiffness that is contracted by accustoming to vice, bring a deplorable impotence towards them all.

Having thus far viewed the nature of our sacrifice, I pass to its commendation, which the text makes to consist of three members, namely, that it is “holy,” that it is “acceptable,” and that it is “our reasonable service.” All which particulars I shall show are so peculiar to this spiritual sacrifice of ourselves, that they never could be duly ascribed to any other sacrifice, or manner of worship.

1. Then this sacrifice of ours is “holy.”

We must not say but that the ritual sacrifices of the Law, for as much as they were instituted by God as a part of his worship, were in some sense holy ; but, such was their nature, they were holy because they were instituted, not instituted because they were holy ; and therefore God says of them expressly, that “they were ordinances not good :” And it is in opposition to these that the Prophet MICAH says, “The LORD hath showed thee, O man, what is good ; and what is that, but to do justice, and love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God ?” Which are the pure offices of our Christian, our spiritual sacrifice.

To see into the ground of this truth, we must observe,—That nothing is capable of real holiness, but an intelligent

being, or mind (or at least that which is actuated by a mind, as our bodies in the state of union are,) whence it follows, that where there is no mind, there no thing, or action, can be really holy. And therefore it was purely from the mind of the sacrificer, that the sacrifices of the Law (notwithstanding their institution) took their form and value: And so the good man's lamb sent up a savour of a sweet smell unto God; while the ill man's lamb was but "like the cutting off a dog's neck." And whereas it was expressly commanded, "that salt was to be used in all their sacrifices;" (*Levit. ii. 13*;) we may reasonably suppose that salt was designed for the symbol of the soul; for so the ancients accounted it: And so as the beast, though upon the altar, was profane without the salt; so both salt, and beast, and the whole action was unhallowed, unless the soul of the offerer were made part of the oblation.

2. The Second member of its commendation makes it "acceptable." Whether any sacrifice can possibly be acceptable to God, beside this of ourselves, we may judge from the first instance of divine worship that is mentioned in Holy Writ, I mean the sacrifice of CAIN: "He brought of the fruits of the ground an offering to God, (says the text,) but God had not respect unto it." The reason whereof, I do not suppose to be that expressed in the old Monkish verse, *Sacrificabo macrum, nec dabo pingue sacrum*; as if CAIN had brought some mean refuse fruits, and that had been the reason of his non-acceptance: It had been as hard for CAIN to have met with bad fruit, (considering the state of the ground at that time,) as it had been absurd for him to grudge that which was good, in such an unrivalled plenty: But the reason was plainly that which God himself alleges in those words, "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? But if thou doest ill, sin lieth at the door:" Sin lies in the way, and hinders thy acceptance. This was the reason why CAIN was not accepted; he was a man of a loose and alienated mind, and though he brought his fruits for formality's sake, yet he brought not his heart unto God;

and this would have barred acceptance, though he had brought his fruits from Eden itself.

But (what is yet of a closer concern to us) we know there are other sacrifices more nearly related to holiness than the ritual could be; sacrifices of a moral nature, perpetually obliging; and therefore a part of our Christian service; which yet are not acceptable to God, unless ourselves are first offered to him.

By these moral sacrifices I mean, (1.) Prayers and praises, which are called “the calves of our lips,” because offered to God as those beasts were by the Law; but of a much more holy nature than they; and therefore, where God rejects “the blood of bulls and of goats,” (*Psalm* l. 13,) he requires thanksgiving as a proper and lasting service: And yet (for all this) prayers and praises borrow all their value from the mind of the offerer; so that if that be unsanctified, both of them are turned into sin: We are told no less in the sixteenth verse of the same Psalm.

(2.) There is another moral sacrifice, that of Charity, a “sacrifice wherewith God is well pleased,” says the Apostle: And this sacrifice is in some sense better than the former, because it always leaves some good effect behind it, that is, the receiver has benefit by the gift, whatever the mind of the giver be; (which is more than can be said of prayers and praises;) and yet while our souls are at a distance from God, charity is but a lost expense: And accordingly the Apostle tells us of a possible case, wherein “we may give all our goods to feed the poor, and yet it shall profit us nothing.”

Nay, there is yet a nobler sacrifice than all these, I mean Martyrdom, when man offers up his life for the seal of his religion: And what can bear a nearer affinity to holiness than this? And yet the Apostle tells us of a possibility of “giving our bodies to be burned, and yet it shall profit us nothing.” So that it is not the blood, nor yet the cause, but purely the mind that makes the martyr: The sincere love of God must recommend what we do, or else it cannot

be acceptable ; and this love is the soul of that sacrifice my text requires.

3. The Last commendation of our Christian sacrifice is, that it is “ a reasonable service,” that is, a service worthy a reasonable creature’s offering to GOD. Let us see how far any other sacrifice might be so accounted.

It is a commendation to the sacrifices under the Law, that they were in use before the Law : For it is evident, that many constitutions under the Law were purely arbitrary, and seem, partly at least, to have been grounded upon the reason of amusing the thoughts, and taking up the time of a busy, fanciful, and carnal people : Whereas the worship that was before the law, and that in universal practice, cannot seem to have been less than consentaneous to the common reason of mankind. We read of this practice of sacrificing as high as CAIN and ABEL ; and who can doubt but that they received it from their Father ? And that he used it before them, and perhaps in Paradise itself ? Nor can any argue it of absurdity to believe, that those skins wherewith our first parents are said to have been clothed, were the skins of such beasts as they had offered in sacrifice ; there being reasons for the rite of sacrificing that comport with the state of innocence, as well as that of the fall. And yet those very reasons upon which this practice was founded may serve to evidence, that it was not in itself a reasonable service. (*Ex. gr*)

The First reason for the rite of sacrificing seems to have been the acknowledgment of GOD’s supreme dominion ; the acknowledgment that as all these beneficial creatures proceed from his bounty ; so of right they were all his : And this we find respected in many old forms of the Jewish consecration. And yet it is certain. that he who will reasonably acknowledge GOD’s dominion, must do it out of his heart, and not out of his herd : And SAMUEL intimated thus much to SAUL, when he told him that, “ To obey was better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.”

A Second reason for sacrificing was the profession of

thankfulness to GOD; men intimating thereby, that they were ready to part with the most precious of what they had for his sake : And this made it necessary for every one to offer out of his own stock, and at his own expense ; and this DAVID seems to have respected when he replied to ARAUNAH, “ that he would not offer to GOD of that which cost him nought :” And yet it is certain, that he who will reasonably express his thankfulness to GOD, must do it by charity, that is, by parting with what he has for GOD’s sake, to those that want it, which GOD does not : And thus DAVID makes charity the moral of sacrificing : “ My soul, thou hast said unto the LORD, my goods are nothing unto thee, but to the saints upon the earth, in whom is my delight.” (*Psalm* xvi. 3.)

A Third reason for sacrificing was in regard of sin, to acknowledge by a symbol, that “ the wages of sin is death ;” and, that as the beast was slain, so (in justice) the sacrificer should be too : And yet it is certain, that he who will reasonably express the demerits of sin, must do it, not by the penance of his beast, but by his own repentance, and mortification : And thus again the Psalmist makes repentance a sacrifice, “ Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it thee, but thou delightest not in burnt-offerings ; the sacrifices of GOD are a troubled spirit ; a broken, and contrite heart, O LORD, thou wilt not despise.” (*Psalm* li. 16.)

A Fourth reason for sacrificing was to signify the great propitiation, the death of CHRIST, and to prefigure that blood which was able to atone, and cleanse, though the blood of bulls and goats could not. And yet reason tells us, that though the propitiating blood of CHRIST might be shadowed forth by a slain lamb, yet it could not be applied to the remission of sins, but only by an humble faith ; upon which account it is said, that by “ faith ABEL offered a more excellent sacrifice than CAIN.” (*Heb.* xi.)

From all which it appears, that the rite of sacrificing, did never in itself amount to a reasonable service : All it

amounted to was no more than a reasonable sign, or symbol ; but the reasonable service itself consisted purely in the moral duties, that were signified, and pointed out by those symbols, namely, obedience, love, repentance, and faith : All which are the essentials of our Christian sacrifice, when we offer up ourselves to God. It is evident therefore, that the offering “ of ourselves unto God, is the only reasonable service ;” and that alone wherewith God is pleased, or hath been pleased at any time since the beginning of the world. And therefore the Jew, that was a Jew in the spirit, that is, who advanced to these spiritual duties that were pointed out by his sacrificing, was “ holy,” and “ acceptable to God ;” whereas he who was a Jew in the letter only, never arrived to an acceptable worship.

And yet I cannot but observe, that a Jew in the bare letter, might seem a saint in comparison to a formal Christian, or a Christian in the letter. For such a Jew submitted to the burden of many troublesome ceremonies, purgations and restraints ; to the great expense of many sacrifices, both stated and occasional ; to the labour of many journeys, to the temple at Jerusalem ; for there all his vows were to be performed ; and all this bore a fair face of fearing and honouring God ; though in the mean time his heart were not right with God. But when a Christian to whom all these burdensome duties are remitted, shall likewise fail in the offices of his moral oblation : When he shall pray at his leisure, and work at his ease, and give at his discretion, as if all religious duties were submitted to his convenience and good liking : When he shall not defraud himself of the pleasures of sin, and in the mean time look upon CHRIST as his righteousness, and faith as his buckler of defence ; such a one makes Christianity to be the most empty, worthless, unreasonable service, that ever was in the world.

But on the contrary, he that shall serve God as a Spirit, in spirit and in truth ; he that shall serve God as holy, with probity of manners ; as omniscient, with reverence of

thoughts ; as every where present, with composure of actions ; as bountiful, with willingness of heart ; as merciful, with imitating that mercy we hope for ; such a one shows what Christianity is, and that it is the only standard of a reasonable service : Such a one offers a sacrifice worthy himself ; and (as it is graciously interpreted) worthy of God ; and (as the Prophet MICAH has rated it) more worthy than thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil.



AN EXTRACT

FROM

THOUGHTS

UPON

RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHICAL SUBJECTS

BY THE LATE

HON. MR. HOWE.



TO THE READER.

THE following Work was only intended for the private use of the Author, as appears from his first meditation ; and during his life-time, nobody saw it. After his death, being in the possession of his grand-daughter, a gentleman, nearly related to her by marriage, read it, and being greatly pleased with it himself, obtained a copy of it, and her permission to publish it, judging that it might be of good use in an age wherein serious things are too much neglected by all ranks of men.

The Author himself, who attained to the age of eighty-four years, was born in Gloucestershire in the year 1661, and during the latter end of the reign of King CHARLES II. was much at Court. About the year 1686, he took an opportunity of going abroad with a near relation, who was sent by King JAMES II. Ambassador to a foreign Court. The Ambassador died, and our Author, by powers given him to that effect, finished the business of the embassy. He had the offer of being appointed successor to his friend in his public character ; but disliking the measures that were then carried on at Court, he declined it, and returned to England, where he soon after married a lady of rank and fortune ; who, dying in a few years, left behind her an only daughter. After his lady's death, he lived for the most part in the country ; where he spent many of his latter years in a close retirement, consecrated to religious meditations and exercises. He was a man of good understanding, of an exemplary life, and cheerful conversation.

DEVOUT MEDITATIONS.

I DO here purpose, by the grace of my good God, (which I most humbly beg that he will be pleased always plentifully to afford me,) to write down some meditation or reflection, as often as I can conveniently, from this time forward; and for these two reasons:

First, To oblige myself frequently to enter into a serious contemplation of God, and of the most proper means to render myself acceptable to him.

And next, That, by help of these meditations and reflections, I may be able to make a judgment of the state and condition of my mind for the time past, and to compare it with that of the present, in order to make my life as uniform as is possible in all virtue; for which I most humbly beg the assistance of my gracious God.

There is one picture a man should be drawing all the days of his life; which is that of God upon his soul; and though the resemblance must needs be extremely faint and imperfect; yet, by a constant application and meditation upon the beauties of the original, he cannot fail to make an admirable piece.

Prayer, unaccompanied with a fervent love of God, is like a lamp unlighted; the words of the one without love being as unprofitable, as the oil and cotton of the other without flame.

Faith is as necessary to the soul, as the sun is to the world: Were it not for these bright prolific lights, both the one and the other must remain dark and fruitless.

My adorable God, I humbly beseech thee to accept the sacrifice I here, in all humility, (and I trust sincerity,) desire to make thee, of the remainder of my life, to be entirely employed to serve and adore thee with the utmost vigour, both of my soul and body. And I humbly

implore thee to bestow upon me every grace, and every virtue, that may render me acceptable to thee.

Pardon, I beseech thee, all the heinous sins and offences of my life past, for the sake of thy blessed SON my SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST; and be pleased to bestow upon me a steadfast faith, an ardent love, an humble and perfect obedience, and a will capable of no other inclination than what it shall continually receive from the absolute guidance of thy Divine will; to which I beg it may be ever perfectly subservient with all readiness and cheerfulness. And if any action of my life, or thought of my soul, should ever in the least be contradictory to it, I heartily renounce both that and myself.

My good GOD! as I could not have taken this resolution without thy particular mercy, so I know I shall never be able to maintain it without thy continual assistance: Give me therefore, out of thy great goodness, entirely to overcome all my passions, and to contract and draw all my affections into one constant and overflowing stream of love to thee. Let neither the world, nor life itself, be ever able to withdraw the least part of them from that channel: But as all my thoughts and actions are continually before thee; so I humbly beseech thee, that they may never be unworthy of thy Divine presence, for JESUS CHRIST his sake, thy blessed SON, my merciful Redeemer.

This is an admirable expression in the first Collect in the Morning Prayer, ‘Thy service is perfect freedom.’ And a noble freedom it is indeed, to have the soul released from the insupportable slavery of ignorance and vice, and set at liberty to range in the spacious and delicious plains of wisdom and virtue; to have it delivered from the harsh and turbulent tyranny of insulting passions, and established under the gentle and delightful government of right reason.

O my good GOD! grant my soul this happy freedom, and set my heart at liberty, that I may cheerfully run the ways of thy blessed commandments, and suffer no impediment to obstruct my course.

Nothing can be truly valuable that will not be valuable an hundred years together.

To demonstrate this to our understanding, we have but to consider the millions of years that have preceded this hundred years, and the vast eternity that preceded them; the millions of years that must succeed these hundred years, and the boundless eternity that will succeed them: And after a serious and just comparison between the one and the other, we shall find a hundred years the most contemptible portion of time.

After the same manner we have but to consider riches, honour, reputation, and even life itself, (which must all have an end as to any particular person within a much shorter compass than that of a hundred years,) and upon such a consideration we shall be forced to acknowledge, that our contempt would be, (with much more reason and justice,) bestowed upon them, than that high esteem and veneration which most men think their due. And it is indeed much more worthy of a wise man to labour to despise them, than to procure them, and seek his felicity rather in the contempt than in the enjoyment of them.

The great uncertainty and inconstancy so generally observed in mankind, is doubtless from this cause, that all their fancies and imaginations spring from their passions, (not from the truth and reality of things,) which being so changeable and irregular, can never produce regular ideas, any more than a crooked rule can be the measure of a straight line.

A mind surrounded with passions is in as miserable a condition as a country (too weak to defend itself) seated in the midst of many powerful Princes, continually contending for the possession of it; sometimes it is surprised by one, sometimes by another; but it is never long under the government of the same master; nor can it have the benefit to be governed by settled and regular laws, which will always be altered by every new intruder.

In this deplorable state is the mind surrounded with powerful passions; sometimes subdued by one, and sometimes by another, but always a slave; ever variable and changing, but never for the better.

Now that this is the true cause of man's inconstancy, does evidently appear from this consideration ; what different ideas arise in the mind from the two passions of prodigality and avarice! How unlike are the images drawn upon it by the passion of love, from those that are drawn by malice and revenge! Nay, at different times, how unlike will the same passion make a man to himself! How strange and ridiculous a change does pride make in a man ; when one hour it shall humble him to act the part of a base mean flatterer, making servile courtship to some powerful favourite, and the next hour shall make him look with contempt and disdain upon all those he thinks his inferiors! When a man is thus governed by his passions, it is impossible to know any thing of him certainly, but his name: For, like a *PROTEUS*, he is continually transforming, by his passions, into some new monster ; and this changeableness in himself will make his judgment uncertain and variable ; at one time approving what he dislikes another ; the same things becoming alternately the objects of his pleasure and displeasure, eagerly pursued one day, and rejected the next ; things continually change their shapes and appearances, according as his deceitful passions shall think fit to represent them to him.

Now it is easy to imagine how the mind must labour with anxiety under these false representations of things made by the passions, and what a comfort and support it would be to it, to be enabled to steer a steady course ; to be able truly to distinguish good from evil, to choose the one and refuse the other ; and having made a right choice of its pleasure, and of things profitable, to be sure to have them constant, and as such to be always approved and embraced by it.

Now these two representations of things to the mind, can only be made by illuminated reason ; and we may be sure that such images as she draws of them there, will have a true likeness ; and if she were to copy them over again ten thousand times, she would draw them exactly with the same lineaments and features ; for where the things themselves do not alter, we may be sure her pencil will not vary.

In order to pass a right and just judgment in any case whatsoever, it is necessary to have unbiassed affections: How then can a man, captivated and inflamed with the love of sensual pleasures, be capable of giving an impartial judgment between God and the world? Or how is a man with affections enslaved by vice, fit to judge between that and virtue? And yet men thus incapacitated to be judges in these cases, are often very confidently passing sentence; and, what is worse, too many seemingly unconcerned spectators are apt to be persuaded by them, that their judgment is equitable.

Meditation is the life of virtue, as virtue is the life of the soul. It is the conduit by which a happy communication is maintained between God and the soul; through which the graces and blessings of God descend to the soul, and through which the praises and adoration of the soul ascend to God.

It is the exercise of the soul which preserves it vigorous and healthful; without which it would soon become heavy and languid, void of pleasure, and weary of its own being; and this uneasiness would oblige it to seek its satisfaction in vain and trifling entertainments, and debase it at last even to folly and vice.

I suppose these words, "pray without ceasing," may very well be interpreted according to the literal meaning of them: For if the soul can once get an absolute dominion over its passions, keeping continually a strict guard over them; if it be always duly prepared, and have all the requisites of prayer, which are faith, love, humiliation, obedience, thankfulness, resignation, and sincerity, though the man be not always upon his knees, yet his conversation will be in such a manner in heaven, his soul will be so abstracted from the world, as to be almost continually exercising itself in some act either of praise, petition, or adoration of God; which, no doubt, his infinite goodness will accept as an incessant prayer, though it be not accompanied with all the outward circumstances of it; which to be sure will not be neglected

neither, by such a one, at proper seasons : And, in reality, a formal and customary kneeling, a lifting up the hands and eyes to heaven, without the heart ; a cold and careless uttering of words, is but the dead carcass of prayer : The life of it consists in a combination of the forementioned qualifications, without which it can neither be satisfactory to a wise man, nor (it is to be feared) acceptable to the Almighty God ; whom I humbly beg, to instruct and enable me both how and what to pray, that none of my addresses to him may be unworthy of so great and glorious a Being.

Had men but the same curiosity in their inquiries relating to God, and their own souls, as they have in other philosophical matters, it would carry them earnestly to implore his assistance, (which is absolutely necessary,) in order to make the experiments requisite in such sublime discoveries ; by the help of which a mighty progress would soon be made in those profitable sciences of wisdom and virtue.

Now the experiment I would have every one make, is this :

First, (having made a serious application to God,) to betake themselves heartily to the subduing all their passions, which are so many clouds and fatal impediments to the mind's advancement in this most excellent knowledge ; to purify the soul as much as possible from all impure affections and inclinations ; and, after these things are done, no body knows what infinitely profitable (and consequently delightful) discoveries she would be capable to make of her own nature, and in how extraordinary a manner the good God would be pleased to reveal himself to her, but those happy few, who have thus made the experiment ; none but they can know what evidences and assurances of their own immortality, are conveyed by that Divine Being to souls thus disposed to receive them ; what glances of his eternal brightness and glory he is pleased to dart upon them for their comfort and encouragement ; and what extraordinary measures of faith (how nearly approaching

to certainty) he may vouchsafe to afford them, by the intimate communication and operation of his blessed SPIRIT, to complete their felicity.

It is of great use to reflect, that the riches, honours, and pleasures which we are apt so eagerly to pursue, when past, leave no advantage behind them : So that it is equal when a man comes to die, whether he spent all his time in pleasures and delights, lying at his ease on beds of down ; or whether he had lain all his life-time tormented upon a rack ; whether he had lived a king or a beggar : So great are the vanities of the one condition ; so short the miseries of the other.

For a man not to find in his heart to betake himself to the solemn comforts of a virtuous life, for fear of interrupting or spoiling the gay diversions and pleasures of the world, is just as reasonable as for a man to be so much delighted with the neatness of his garden, and charmed with the variety of plants and flowers, that he could not find in his heart to deface it, though he were sure to discover a mine of gold by digging it up.

What we improperly call life is no more than that which a child has in the womb, who cannot properly be said to enter into life till it is born, and the midwife is thought to do it no unkind office in bringing it into the world ; why then should we think death our enemy, for doing the same frindly office to the soul, which cannot truly be said to enter into life till it enters into eternity, since that only is worthy to be called life, which is eternal, and to which it can only attain by the kind assistance of death ? Then those glimmering sparks of life it had here below, will be kindled into a glorious unextinguishable flame : Instead of those faint rays of pleasure which it pleased the great and good GOD to make to shine here upon it, by the means of faith and virtue, eternal streams of joy and brightness shall then flow in upon it, from the incomprehensible glories of his divine presence.

Faith is the brightness of the great GOD shining upon the soul ; and virtue (which is nothing else but a combina-

tion of love and obedience to him) is a light proceeding from faith : So that they both ebb and flow together ; and when faith rushes in plentifully, and rises high in the soul, virtue will maintain a proportionable height ; but as that retires and grows low, this will retreat and sink also.

Now our passions are the black thick clouds that cause so frequent and tedious eclipses of this light of faith ; and, by their interposing, deprive the soul of its only comfort : They are those fierce and strong winds that keep back this tide from flowing in upon the soul, both to refresh and enrich it.

How long is the soul kept and nourished in ignorance of itself, and of its original, like a child of noble extraction, by some misfortune, obliged to be concealed (and educated as their own) by poor peasants ; who, believing himself to be of no higher birth, entertains no other than mean and low thoughts and designs suitable to such a condition : But so soon as his true parents are made known to him, he quickly banishes from his mind all that is base and ignoble, and, animated by the knowledge of his true condition, conceives such thoughts as are answerable to it.

It is faith which makes this discovery to the soul, and no sooner acquaints it, that it has the great **GOD** for its parent, but it discards all base ungenerous designs, and renounces its former trifling pleasures and mean affections, disdaining the low objects of its love and desire ; it is immediately filled with noble and aspiring thoughts ; all its aims and designs from thenceforth become great and elevated, and worthy of its divine birth.

Pride (by great mistake) is commonly taken for greatness of soul, as if the soul were to be ennobled by vice : For that pride is one of the most enormous of vices, I think no reasonable man will dispute ; it is the base offspring of weakness, imperfection, and ignorance ; since, were we not weak and imperfect creatures, we should not be destitute of the knowledge of ourselves ; and had we that knowledge, it were impossible we should be proud. But, on the

contrary, true humility is the certain mark of a right reason and elevated soul.

When we come to have our minds cleared by reason from those thick mists that our disorderly passions cast about them ; when we come to discern more perfectly, and consider more nearly, the immense power and goodness, the infinite glory and duration of God ; and to make a comparison between these perfections of his, and our own frailty and weakness, and the shortness and uncertainty of our beings, we should humble ourselves even to the dust before him.

Custom has made a wide difference indeed between man and man ; but it is a difference purely fanciful, and not real ; for it must be some intrinsic worth in any creature, that must give it the preference to another. Title, riches, and fine houses, signify no more to the making of one man better than another, than the finer saddle to the making the better horse.

I take the affections of the soul to be the life and vigour of it ; by whose warmth and activity all the springs of it receive their power of moving and acting, and without which the soul could no more subsist than the body without the soul : It is by the help of the affections that it moves to good or evil, that it acts virtuously or viciously.

The affections may be said to be the fire of the soul, which, wisely managed, is ready to serve it for all sorts of beneficial purposes ; but if carelessly neglected, or foolishly employed, is capable of breaking into unruly flames, to its utter ruin and destruction. So long as this fire is under the management of reason, it is both useful and necessary, and still retains the name of affection : But when it becomes disorderly, and breaks loose from her government, then it becomes pernicious and vicious, and deservedly assumes the name of passion, which signifies the disorder and anguish of the soul : So that when at any time I speak of the necessity of eradicating or extinguishing the passions, I do not mean to eradicate or extinguish the affections of the soul, without which it cannot subsist ; but to eradicate or extin-

guish the disorders and anguish of it, with which it cannot subsist comfortably.

Human reason of itself has not force or power to lead and conduct a man to wisdom and virtue, which are of that noble and sublime nature, that nothing but the divine influence can produce them in the soul of man.

Man is both born and nourished in error: He does not only suck his nurse's milk, but imbibes her errors: He does not only receive his being from his parents, but together with it, their errors also: He is not only diverted with the conversation of his companions, but infected with their mistakes.

Thus error takes the earliest possession of the soul, and never quits her hold, till obliged to it either by the grace of God, or stroke of death. Nor is it any wonder (in these circumstances) that man should be ignorant of the right ends of life, and of his true business in the world. It is to be feared, that too many have no other notion, than that they are placed in the world like beasts in a pasture, to devour the product of it; and that their great work is to endeavour to excel each other in large possessions, rich clothes, stately houses, costly furniture, splendid equipage, delicate tables, and such other trinkets of pride and luxury, and incitements to violence and injustice.

And this is the noble ambition that kind parents strive to kindle in their beloved children. Great God! that men's understandings and ambition should be so short-sighted, as neither to see, nor aim at any thing beyond the poor extent of these impertinent vanities! And that any man can think that thou hast given him a being to be wholly employed in these pursuits! That thou hast bestowed reason upon him only that he may sully it with his passions, as if the use of it were not to give him the pre-eminence over beasts, but to render him inferior to them; for doubtless a rational brute is the worst of brutes, as having larger capacities for mischief.

It is strange that a man can think that he receives blessings from God not to make him more mindful of him, or

to excite his addresses to him, but to make him neglect and forget him ! That his gifts are bestowed upon him, to rob the great Benefactor of his satisfaction ! And that the faint and forced adorations of his last breath were the only tribute due to God, as it is too often the only one that falls to his share !

All men have some chief aim superior to all others ; the compassing of which is the great employment of their thoughts, and labour of their soul : Other designs being carried on only leisurely and accidentally, without any great concern ; the soul being bent upon the success of that which it has made choice of, as its grand business and satisfaction. That of the ambitious man, is power and honour ; that of the luxurious man, is sensual pleasure ; that of the covetous man, is the increase of his wealth ; but that of the wise man, is the increase of his virtue : He looks upon the world as the stage, where he is placed by the great Creator to act his part, and upon life as the time allowed him to act it in : He is diligently careful of all his actions and behaviour : He values not the hissings or applauses of the inconstant, ignorant multitude ; but is most industriously solicitous to obtain the approbation of the almighty Spectator. Man is the only creature in the world, whose happiness is imperfect, and who is sensible that it is so ; who has something in him that disdains the imperfection of his being, and languishes after a condition more perfect. Were he composed only, like other animals, of flesh and blood, he would find no more faults with his being than they do with theirs ; since the matter of which his body and theirs is made, is not capable of such reflections ; but these are the secret repinings of the soul, by which she plainly discovers herself ; and our attentive observations of her will soon turn into demonstrations that we have such a principle existent in us. And since it is natural for all beings to seek and thirst after happiness, it is necessary to know where the seat of it is fixed ; it being the want of that knowledge that makes us waste so much time in vain pursuits and unprofitable attempts, in endea-

vouring to confine happiness to the body, which is a prison too weak to hold it; and the senses that conduct it thither, are too feeble long to guard and detain it: It is always attempting to make its escape; and what is worse, it never misses of its aim. Besides, if it has no other existence than the body, it must be very short-lived, and in a contemptible portion of time perish with it.

A man that is of that opinion must be sure to keep his thoughts always steadily confined within the compass of this life and world: For if they happen to wander beyond it, they will enter into dark uncomfortable regions, that will afford them nothing but black and dismal prospects, which too many gay unthinking people find by sad experience.

Now virtue (which I may define to be the science of happiness) will give us true notions of it, and teach us, that the true seat of it is in the soul; which is of a capacity large enough to contain it, and of a duration lasting enough to preserve it to eternity: There it may rise to unmeasurable heights without restraint; it can never overburden or over-power the soul. It is the poor feeble body only that is not able to support it, that is too weak to bear the rapid motions of the soul, when it is filled and agitated with an excessive joy. The heart is capable of bearing but a small insignificant measure of joy; it may easily be overcharged with it, (like a gun with powder,) and be rent and destroyed with the irresistible efforts of it; according to the several degrees of which, it is evident it often occasions ecstasies, swoonings, and death. The heart can no more support immoderate joy than immoderate grief; the one is destructive by too much dilating it, the other by too great a depression; and it is equal, whether the vessel be crushed by too strong a pressure without, or torn in pieces by too violent an extension from within; whichever of them happens, the frail cask is broken and life spilt.

It is a preposterous resolution that some people take, of deferring to be virtuous till they grow old, imagining, that wisdom is the natural consequence of old age; as if

that which is the greatest imperfection of human nature, were most proper to confer upon us the highest perfection of it. Long observation, indeed, gives experience; but that is a thing very different from wisdom, though it is the utmost advantage old age can pretend to bestow upon us. Now it is to be considered, that virtue is to be forcibly introduced into the soul, in opposition to vice, which has gotten a long and undisturbed possession of it, and must be dislodged with great difficulty. This is like to be an achievement that will not only require the vigour of youth, but more time also than old age has to bestow upon it.

So wonderful a change as this, it is possible for him, (who can do all things,) though not for age, to make; but it is such a one as no man can reasonably expect. Can we think, when the purest and sprightliest part of life has been drawn out to vice, that the dregs are an offering fit for God? Can we think it then only fit to please him, when we are not able to offend him longer? This is no better than a being cast upon God Almighty by age and infirmity against our will; like mariners who are forced by storms and tempests upon a coast they never intended to come near.

A wise man must not only take care to govern his own passions, but that he may not be governed by those of other men: For if we must be subject to passion, it is equal whether it be our own or other people's. When the right way is lost, it is no matter to which hand we wander: Now it may happen in many cases, that when a man hath withstood his own passions, and acted in conformity to reason, yet other men (guided by passion, not by reason) finding fault with his actions, will be apt to give him a dislike of his own proceedings, unless he be very well fixed and confirmed in his principles and reason.

This is a matter that very well deserves our utmost attention; since upon it depends not only the peace and tranquillity of our lives, but even our virtue also, which will be in danger to be shaken, if the mind be not steady, and proof against the reproaches of the world.

Most men are ready enough to reckon up the income of

their estates, and compute how it will answer their several expenses ; but few employ their arithmetic to calculate the value and income of their life and time, to consider how they may be expended to the best advantage. In these the beggar has as large a revenue as the King, though this is justly accounted the most valuable treasure. The gracious God has equal portions of these to all degrees and conditions of men, though not to every particular man the same proportion ; and the sum total of this is three-score and ten years, all beyond that being labour and sorrow ; and many years also on this side of it.

Now we have to consider how much of this is likely to be spent in happiness and enjoyment, and how much will be employed to less pleasing purposes ; which may be thus easily computed : Twenty years may be deducted for education, which is a time of discipline and restraint, and young people are never easy till they are got over it ; and the last ten years of the seventy may be deducted for sickness and infirmities, which very often is the portion of those years : So that these thirty taken out of life, there remains but forty ; out of which a third part, (being at least eight hours in the four and twenty,) which amounts to about fourteen years more, must be deducted for sleep, that sister and image of death ; and there remains but twenty-six ; out of which when the requisite allowances are taken for the time we are made uneasy with our own passions, and tormented with other people's ; for what passes in sickness, pain, loss, and affliction, what we consume in anxiety for things that must inevitably happen, and what in anguish for accidents irrecoverably past ; what passes in stupid and insipid amusements, or brown studies, without either trouble or pleasure ; and when this is summed up, the poor inconsiderate remainder, I doubt, we shall not account much better for ; it being generally unprofitably wasted in vice and vanity.

I suppose men's passions do not only make them miserable in this world, but are no inconsiderable part of their torment in hell : For the body limits and restrains the soul ;

so that the flame either of virtue or vice cannot blaze in this life to an excessive degree: But when it is freed from that confinement, the passions become ten thousand times more furious and raging, being let loose by Divine vengeance to torment and rack the vicious soul: As on the other hand, every virtue is heightened and increased unmeasurably, to the infinite joy of the soul that is virtuous.

For it is to be supposed, that the inclinations which the soul has either to virtue or vice at its departure out of the body are not changed after its separation, but exceedingly augmented and strengthened; so that it is highly necessary that it be endued with an habitual virtue, before it passes into eternity, where habits are not altered, but improved.

The soul, agitated with passions, fares like a weak bird in a stormy day; she is not able to make a straight flight, but is tossed from the tract she would pursue, being lost and carred in the air at the pleasure of the winds. In this condition is the soul, till it has obtained a strong and vigorous faith to ballast and strengthen it, and enable it to maintain the straight and steady course of virtue.

It is a contradiction to imagine, that reputation or praise is a suitable recompence for virtue; since it is a reward that nothing but vanity can make acceptable: It declares a man both foolish and vicious, that can be pleased and satisfied with it; and that his merit is only owing to his pride. True virtue, as it has no other aims than the service and honour of the great God; so the least and only recompence it aspires to, is his approbation and favour.

It gives a greatness of soul, truly noble, to a virtuous man, to consider how honourable he is made, by his being the servant of so glorious a Master. With what generous thought, what firm and graceful confidence does the assurance of his favour and love inspire him! How much does he disdain to increase the gaudy slavish crowd, that so assiduously attend the levees of poor frail Princes, whose beings are no better than his own! With how much indignation does he despise a fawning courtship, and attendance upon insolent and vicious favourites! How contempti-

ble do the vain interests and pursuits, hopes and fears, desires and aversions, that so much busy and disturb the world, appear to him who has his soul enlightened and enlarged with the love of its great Creator and merciful Redeemer !

It is wonderful to consider how vast a progress the ancient philosophers made in virtue, apparently by the help of reason only ; though many of them were not ignorant of the inability of human reason to make men virtuous ; but were conscious of the necessity of Divine assistance, in order to so great a performance. And I make no question but many of them had that assistance.

It is astonishing to reflect upon the strength of their faith, both as to the existence of a Deity, and the immortality of the soul ; and what surprising effects it had upon them, in rendering their lives highly virtuous, in begetting in them the utmost contempt of the world, and the most profound reverence and adoration of God. With how much bravery and courage, in those cloudy times, (without the help and direction of the compass of revelation which we enjoy,) did those bold and generous navigators sail in the wide and vast sea of virtue ! What great and useful discoveries did they there make ! What rich mines did they lay open to the world, if men had had industry enough to have wrought in them, and wisdom sufficient to have exhausted their treasures !

But, O merciful God, how much greater and plainer discoveries hast thou, in thy infinite goodness, been pleased to reveal to mankind, by the example and doctrine of the blessed JESUS ! who has brought life and immortality out of thick clouds and darkness, not only into a clearer and brighter, (that were to say too little,) but into an open and manifest light ! Whose Gospel is a system of so refined a philosophy, so exalted a wisdom, and the divine characters that shine in it are so conspicuously legible, that nothing but the darkest ignorance and blackest corruption can hinder us from reading them ; both which I beseech thee, O blessed SAVIOUR, to deliver me from ; and that thou wilt

be pleased to endue me with the same blessed Spirit of eternal truth, by whom thy holy word was dictated to thy disciples, that, by its assistance in reading, I may understand it, and by understanding I may evermore delight in it, and conform my life entirely to it.

Most great and glorious GOD! who hast appointed the rivers to hasten with a rapid motion to the sea, be graciously pleased (I most humbly beseech thee) to make the stream of my will perpetually to flow with a cheerful and impetuous course, bearing down pleasure, interest, afflictions, death, and all other obstacles and impediments whatsoever before it, till it plunge itself joyfully into the unfathomable ocean of thy Divine will, for the sake of thy beloved SON, my SAVIOUR, JESUS CHRIST. Amen.

This may be laid down as a general maxim, that whatsoever is not sincere to man, can never be sincere to GOD; nor can he that is unsincere to GOD, be ever sincere to man: For without sincerity there can be no virtue, either moral or divine.

My most gracious GOD, who hast been so infinitely merciful to me, and my dear child, not only the year past, but all the years of our life, be pleased to accept my unfeigned thanks for thy innumerable blessings to us; graciously pardoning the manifold sins and infirmities of my life past, and bountifully bestowing, both upon my dear child and myself, all those graces and virtues that may render us acceptable to thee.

And every year thou shalt be pleased to add to our lives, add also, (I most humbly implore thee,) more strength to our faith, more ardour to our love, and a greater perfection to our obedience; and grant, that in an humble sincerity and constant perseverance, we may serve thee most faithfully the remainder of our lives, for JESUS CHRIST'S sake, thy blessed SON, our merciful Redeemer. Amen.

How happy is the soul to whom virtue and vice are the only objects of its desires and aversions! Which loves nothing but what it is sure to obtain, and dreads nothing but what it is certain to avoid; which rests upon a rock

whose foundation is immoveable, and leans upon a support that can never deceive it; which securely reposes itself upon the great and gracious God; and unloading itself of all its cares, lays them upon him who so tenderly cares for us, and loves us with a dearer and much better love than we are able to love ourselves.

I am convinced that the pleasure of virtue has been, and ever will be, a riddle in the world, as long as it lasts; the meaning of which has never, nor ever can be known or conceived, but by those to whom it shall please God, out of his infinite goodness, to expound it.

Faith is that blessed tree which produces the noble and divine fruits of wisdom, virtue, and true felicity; but withal it is of so fine and delicate a nature, that it will not grow and thrive in the cold and barren soil of man's heart, without his incessant care and industry, and the enlivening influence of the Divine SPIRIT.

O gracious God, so cherish and increase, I most humbly beseech thee, that small grain of it which thou hast been pleased to plant in my heart, that it may spread and flourish, and take such firm root there, as to be able to defend itself, and protect me under the secure shelter of its branches, from all storms and tempests that shall ever assault either the one or the other.

My most good and bountiful God! what numberless praises have I to give thee, and pardons to beg of thee, both arising from the employment I have been for some months past about! What thanks have I to return thee for the ease, the conveniences, and comforts of life, which thou hast so abundantly bestowed upon me!

But, O my gracious LORD! what fervent addresses ought I to make to thy infinite mercy, to forgive my ingratitude and weakness, in suffering my thoughts to wander from thee, and my affections to grow languid towards thee! How much time have I been impertinently consuming in building a house, which I ought to have employed in endeavouring to form my mind to a perfect obedience to thee!

Pardon, great GOD ! I beseech thee, for JESUS CHRIST'S sake, all my omissions and neglects, and my too often cold and distracted addresses to thee ; and grant, that I may pass the rest of my life in an uninterrupted endeavour to please thee, and in a continual return of thanks for this and all those innumerable blessings which thou art never ceasing to bestow upon so undeserving a wretch.

Assurance of eternal happiness ! that sublimest degree, that finishing stroke of human felicity in this life, is that which every soul (that makes any serious reflections in matters of religion) pants after : It is, therefore, necessary to know upon what foundation this blessed state is built, and from what principles it arises ; and those, I think, it is plainly evident, are faith, love, and obedience ; since no man can have assurance that does not feel in himself the principle of obedience, nor can he have obedience without the principle of love, nor love without the principle of faith : For it is a notorious contradiction to imagine, that any one can be assured of GOD ALMIGHTY'S pardon, without obeying him ; of his favour, without loving him ; or of the eternal enjoyment of him, without a firm and steadfast belief in him.

But I am persuaded, that the word 'faith' is too frequently misunderstood, and taken for a bare assent to any truth ; which notion of it is not only deceitful and false, but pernicious and destructive.

This therefore is what I mean by belief, when the judgment, reason, understanding, and all the faculties of the soul, are overpowered with an irresistible conviction of the Divine Being ; which also represents him to the mind infinite in glory, in power, in wisdom, in goodness, and in all perfection ; with such charms, such beauty, such loveliness, as to captivate and ravish the affections of the soul, and smite it with a divine love ; such a love as may possess it with an ardent and languishing desire after the enjoyment of him, with diligent and laborious endeavours to please him, and with incessant strivings to resemble him.

Such a love as may reign triumphantly in the soul,

engrossing all its affections, divesting all other objects of their charms, nay, making them appear vile and contemptible; and delivering the absolute and entire dominion of the soul to the great and glorious Creator of it. Accept, great God! of such an entire dominion over my soul, and be pleased to maintain it against all opposition and temptation whatsoever by thy infinite power evermore.

The next thing necessary to be seriously and impartially considered relating to faith, is what measures and degrees we have of it; for since our eternal happiness depends upon our being possessed of this virtue, we cannot make too nice and diligent inquiries, what proportion of it we feel in ourselves. And to that end, we are to consider whether there be any thing we love more than God, or fear more than him; whether his favour be the centre to which all our aims, designs, and desires tend; and whether his displeasure is the evil we most carefully and solicitously strive to avoid; whether our chief study be to know his divine will, and our constant labour (or rather delight) to perform it; whether any temptation, either of pleasure or gain, be capable of moving us to do any ill action; or whether the fear of any loss or mischief, either to our persons or estates, be capable to deter us from persevering in good ones: For if we value estate, reputation, or life, more than we hate sin and vice, and the loss of those things more than God; and therefore, if we find ourselves allured, either by pleasure or profit, to do a vicious action, it is as plain, that we love those things more than him; and therefore that we have not faith.

It is impossible that a languid soul can ever be a happy one, any more than one that is doubtfully wavering between virtue and vice. I am but too sensible how ill an effect idle and impertinent cares and amusements, (though very innocent ones,) by some continuance and frequent repetitions, have upon the mind.

I had hopes, when I began to build my house, that I was pretty well prepared against this danger; being very well aware of it, and (as carefully as I could) endeavouring

to prevent it ; but I found, to my great dissatisfaction, that those necessary cares and contrivances I was obliged to fill my head with, were so great a prejudice and incumbrance to my mind, that I had neither liberty nor power, whatever efforts I made, to penetrate so far into those thoughts and reasonings which I earnestly laboured often after, and passionately desired ; and would rather be continually master of, than of all the kingdoms upon earth.

My soul was clogged and grown too heavy to soar above the reach of low insipid conceptions ; the springs of it seemed relaxed, and incapable of pushing it to vigorous imaginations ; all its bright ideas were clouded, and it grieved and languished to think from whence it was fallen, and dreaded the misery of sinking lower. It mourned and was ashamed to stoop to those fairy delusions, shadows of pleasures, which the world affords, and which it could not forbear to despise ; though it had not force to reach its wonted joys, by bearing itself up to lively meditations, full of love and adoration to its great Creator.

By this, my ever gracious GOD ! thou hast taught me, that thou being the only Fountain of true joy and felicity, every step I advance towards thee, the nearer I approach my happiness ; and every degree I depart from thee, I hasten towards my misery.

O be thou mercifully pleased to guard and protect my faith, that neither the open force of the most violent temptations may be able to shake it, nor the insinuating allurements of innocent diversions (by gentle unsuspected impressions) to undermine it ; but keep me perpetually and firmly adhering to thee, constantly persevering to the last moment of my life in all those things that are pleasing and acceptable in thy sight, for JESUS CHRIST'S sake, my ever-blessed Redeemer.

The first two things to be sought after, in order to a settled calmness and undisturbed pleasure of mind, are a constant love of the adorable GOD, and a real and entire contempt of the world. These I look upon as the neces-

sary foundation upon which alone may be built that noble, beautiful, and desirable structure of an intrepid, virtuous, and peaceful mind, the only valuable treasure upon earth, and that alone of which we may be innocently covetous. A dominion more glorious than all the empires of the world, in the pursuit after which alone ambition is justifiable !

O my GOD ! strike my soul with an ardent love of thee, that may flame to such an height above all other affections in me, as nothing may ever come in competition with it ; such a love as may subdue all other affections : A love that may create in my soul a perpetual pleasure in the contemplation of thee, and a continual thirst after thee, never to be quenched, but by the blessed enjoyment of thee : A love that may ravish my soul with thy perfections, and paint there such lively images of thy glorious Majesty, that none of the trifling pleasures and temptations of this world may be able to make any impression on it. And as, my gracious LORD ! “ thou hast given me much,” and “ forgiven me much,” so raise my love to a degree proportionable to thy bounty and mercy.

A true believer must needs behold death with a wishing eye : It will appear no otherwise than as that which opens the door to his liberty and happiness, and lets him into those ravishing joys he so much longed for : He must behold death approaching with the same pleasure that a man, cast upon a desert island, would see a ship sailing to his relief ; he would run eagerly to the shore, and embark with delight.

Ignorance and mistake are fatal in the choice of good and evil : Wherefore, it no less behoves every man to be able to discern between the one and the other, than it does a Physician to distinguish wholesome herbs from poisonous plants ; lest where he designs a remedy, he administers destruction.

If men are ignorant, what are the ingredients that enter into the composition of happiness and misery, or be mis-

taken in the choice of them, they will be wretched enough to choose the contrary of what they seek after.

Is it reasonable to imagine, that care and skill are necessary for the acquisition of every trifle we ignorantly set a value upon, as riches and honour, and of all those sciences by the means of which we hope to attain to either of these; and yet that true and substantial happiness (which is the perfection of our being) comes by chance, without being sought after? Can man be vain enough to imagine, that the mind can be furnished with just and true notions, without ever taking the pains to think; with lofty and generous conceptions, without giving itself the trouble to meditate and reflect? That it can (to the utmost of its power) fathom the depths of the knowledge of God and itself, without an unwearied diligence and constant application? And, finally, that having by such means ascended to a high degree of felicity, it can be able to maintain its station without industry and assiduity?

We are not only miserable enough to be governed by our passions, but foolish enough to repine and murmur, that GOD ALMIGHTY will not submit to be governed by them too; which is the cause of our so frequent quarrels at his pleasure, in ordering and disposing the affairs of the world, and of our uneasiness in vainly contending with his unchangeable decrees, which are therefore only unchangeable, because they are the result of his unerring wisdom; all whose determinations, as they are best in themselves, so doubtless are they the most beneficial to his poor creatures, if we had but confidence enough to rely entirely on his mercy, which is the only thing that will never disappoint us.

How many irretrievable inconveniences do men fall into, purely from the fickleness and mutability of their humours! It were good therefore thoroughly to understand ourselves, to prevent the miseries accruing from this cause.

We think perhaps this instant, that such a thing would please us, and make us happy, whereupon we apply our utmost diligence, sparing no pains to procure it; and it is

ten to one, by that time we have it, our humour is altered, our labour lost, and all our expectations of happiness frustrated. And then our inconstant fancy pitches upon some other thing, persuading us it is that must give us content; which also obtained, from the same cause, disappoints us as much as the former; and not pleasing us, the consequence is, we grow weary of it, disgusted at it; and it is well if we have it in our power conveniently to get quit of it when we think fit: For a thousand instances may be given of cases where a mistake in the satisfaction we propose to give ourselves, proves the misery of our whole lives.

How frequently are young people ruined, and elder ones unfortunate upon this very score! Imagining, that the warmth of the present temper will continue, and procure them satisfaction in despite of all the inconveniences that may attend the gratification of it; but that eagerness unexpectedly relaxing, leaves them defrauded of their happiness, and loaded with vexation.

Thus unhappy man turns restlessly from one thing to another, hoping by change to find relief, and never reflects that the desire of change is his disease; that his disquiets will never cease till he has unalterably fixed upon the objects of his pleasure; and having brought his mind to like and love only what is fit and reasonable, keeps it firm and constant in the approbation of these things. And when the vagrancy of humour and fancy is settled, a man has but to choose (for once) his pleasures, and (as far as the nature of things will permit) he is assured to have them permanent.

I myself was in great danger of making a scurvy experiment of what I have been saying; and had not my mind, by my ever-good God's assistance, taken a pretty strong bent beforehand towards the satisfaction I had fixed upon for it, it would have run the hazard of declining from it; for the ideas it had conceived began so far to wear off for want of renewing the impressions, by intent meditation, (which I was in a great measure hindered from by an incessant hurry of trivial employments for six or seven months together, in conversing with workmen, and con-

triving for building,) that I found it no easy matter to bring it up to its former station, it having considerably lost ground; notwithstanding my continual endeavours to keep it immoveable in those principles I had resolved to preserve to my life's end: For though (thank God) I found no inclination to be vicious, yet the ardour of my virtue was extremely abated, and consequently the pleasure I received from it.

And though I still retained an abhorrence to vice, yet my indignation at it was much slackened: So that the one did not seem to have altogether so charming, nor the other so deformed an aspect as they used to appear with: And the passions, which I hoped had been pretty well overcome, began to strive for mastery again; and had they prevailed, the house I was building for a comfortable retreat from the world, where I designed to spend my days in the service and adoration of my most merciful God, and in studying to cultivate my mind, and to improve it in all virtue, would have seemed to me a melancholy habitation; and after all my charge and pains in building it, I should have grown weary of a solitary life, (for solitariness without virtue, is an insupportable burden,) and have left it, to have played the fool somewhere else. But, blessed be my gracious God! who has, and, I trust in his infinite mercy, ever will avert so fatal a mischief from me! O let me never stray from thee, nor shrink in the least from my resolutions of an entire obedience to thee! "Hold thou me up, that I may never fall;" and "in thy glorious light let me evermore see light." Leave me not to my own vain imaginations, the greatest curse that can befall wretched man.

As a reasonable well-grounded faith is the highest perfection, and the supreme felicity of human nature in this imperfect state, so an unreasonable and obstinate belief is of most destructive consequence to salvation. He is as sure to miss the mark he aims at, that over-shoots it, as he who shoots below it; and perhaps he is not less likely to fail of salvation that over-believes, than he that believes too little, or does not believe at all: For though it is absolutely neces-

sary to believe, that **JESUS CHRIST** came into the world to be the **SAVIOUR** of mankind, and that it is through his merits, propitiation, and intercession alone, that we can hope to be saved ; yet if we think, that he has so absolutely purchased salvation for us, as to disengage us from the obligation of our utmost obedience, and to release us from labouring and striving diligently (according to the farthest extent of our power) to serve and please the great **GOD**, to imitate his perfection, to exterminate all sin and impurity out of our souls ; he that has such an unreasonable preposterous faith, I doubt, will find himself as much wide of the mark in the affair of his salvation, as he that believes nothing relating to it. Such an unlimited mercy were rather to render us libertines, than make us free ; it were to suppose, that **GOD** infinitely pure had purchased and given a liberty to those he was pleased to love and favour, to be as impure and vicious as they thought fit ; which is the most notorious contradiction imaginable ; since no reasonable man can conceive, that a being of an essence perfectly pure, can delight in perverse polluted creatures, of a nature entirely opposite to his own : Yet, after all, we must not pretend a title to the favour of **GOD**, from any virtue or purity we are capable of ; but having to the utmost we are able performed our duty, we must cast ourselves wholly upon his mercy, through the merits and intercession of **JESUS CHRIST** our **SAVIOUR** ; for it were a rash presumption to think that such a creature as man is were capable of doing or being any thing that could merit from the Deity, who bestows all things upon his indigent creatures, but neither needs, nor can receive any thing from them, but most imperfect praises and adorations ; and those too not flowing from ourselves, but from the influence and inspiration of his blessed **SPIRIT** in us, who is the Author of all our virtue, and by whose power alone it is that we are able to forego any vice. How then can frail man merit of his Creator, who has nothing of his own to bestow upon him ? If the seed sown produces a plentiful harvest, it is to the sower the praise belongs : And whatsoever virtues spring up in the soul

from the divine influence, to the bountiful God alone the honour is due.

This day (Childermas-day) puts me in mind of the great perplexity and uneasiness I have perceived in many people, occasioned by the superstitious impressions made upon their minds by the tales of weak and ignorant people in their infancy ; a time when the tender mind is most apt to receive the impressions of error and vice, as well as those of truth and virtue ; and having once received either the one or the other, is likely to retain them as long as it subsists in the body. How charitable a care is it therefore, and how much the duty of every parent (whom it has pleased God to bless with a right understanding) to endeavour to transmit it (with what improvement he can) to his children ; and to have at least as much care of them as a gardener has of a nice delicate plant that he values, who diligently shelters it from the assaults of storms and tempests, and blasting winds, till a milder season and a warmer sun put it out of danger ! With no less industry ought a kind parent to guard the tender mind of his child from the no less hurtful notions and superstitious conceits of foolish, ignorant people, who, by senseless, impertinent tales, begin to plant errors and vice in the soul, even from the cradle ; for it is in the nursery, where ignorantly deluded and deluding wretches first sow those devilish tares in the child, which it is ten to one whether the grown up man is afterwards ever able to root out. There every simple creature (if not prevented) will be blotting the soul, and sullying it with false lines and foul characters, besmearing of it (after their awkward manner) with horrid images of frightful sprites and hobgoblins, and painting upon it a thousand monstrous and terrifying shapes of death, to make their future life miserably wretched.

Amongst other mischiefs that have here their beginning, are those very grievous ones, of a timorous and superstitious spirit, apt to give credit to the luckiness or unluckiness of certain days, and to a thousand ominous whimsies and conceits ; which, as they are the unhappy offspring of weak-

ness and ignorance, so are they the never-enough-to-be-detested parents of grief and misery to those who are weak and wretched enough to be deluded by them.

All these deplorable follies proceed from wrong and unworthy apprehensions of God's providence, in his care of man and government of the world ; for no reasonable creature can ever imagine, that the all-wise God should inspire owls and ravens to hoot out the elegies of dying men ; that he should have ordained a fatality in number, inflict punishment without an offence ; and that being one amongst the fatal number at a table, should be a crime (though contrary to no command) not to be expiated but by death ! That even spiders and candles should have a foreknowledge of man's destiny ; that certain days are unlucky, as if the good and virtuous were not, at all times, in all places, and in all numbers too, assured of the protection of the infinitely merciful God.

The affections of the soul of man being encumbered with as many distractions as there are objects to excite and engage them, what measure of proportion (O most gracious God !) can the gratitude of so frail and imperfect a creature bear to the obligations ever flowing upon him from thy unlimited bounty ? If every moment of time comes from thee loaded with blessings, what an unaccountable sum must the year produce ! And if the blessings of a year surpass our account, how must we be confounded and lost in the reckoning of our whole lives ! And should we by the same method, most merciful God ! strive to number our sins and offences, we should find it a task equally impossible with that of numbering thy mercies : Accept therefore, I most humbly beseech thee, the imperfect thanks and adoration of my soul, and continually augment its power and capacity, more perfectly to render thee both the one and the other. Accept likewise of its unfeigned sorrow for all my sins and offences, and continually diminish in it the force of corruption, and all tendency and inclination in it to vice and disobedience. And as thou renewest thy blessings with the year to me and my dear child, so I beg thou wilt be pleased to make us

both clean hearts, and to renew also right spirits within us ; that we may most gratefully, obediently, and acceptably serve thee all the days of our lives, for JESUS CHRIST'S sake, our gracious LORD and SAVIOUR.

Man's excessive love of the world, and want of love to his Creator, is (I may affirm) the cause of nine parts in ten of the vexations and uneasinesses of this life: Nor must he depend upon the force of his reason for a remedy. That is too weak to subdue those fierce and obstinate passions it has to encounter ; which, though they suffer a small defeat, can immediately levy new recruits, and return to the attack with fresh vigour ; whereas reason, having no such supplies, must needs at length be overcome. Those ever-multiplying hydra's heads are not to be lopped off by so weak an arm ; and it were but inconsiderate rashness to attempt the labour of a HERCULES without a HERCULES'S strength : Nor can so difficult a work be successfully undertaken, otherwise than by the help of that divine power, which is communicated to man by faith, which is sufficient to make him " more than conqueror." O my gracious GOD ! grant me that inestimable treasure, out of which my life may be furnished with all virtues that may render it pleasing in thy sight, for JESUS CHRIST'S sake.

People are as much deceived themselves as they deceive others, who think to use religion as they do their best clothes ; only wear it to church on a Sunday to make a show, and with them (as soon as they come home again) lay it aside, for fear of wearing it out : But religion is good for nothing that is made of so light a stuff, as will not endure wearing, which ought to be as constant a covering to the soul, as the skin is to the body, not to be divided from it ; division being the ruin of both. Nor must it be thought that religion consists only in the bending of the knees, (which is a fitting posture of humility,) but in the fervent and humble adoration of the soul ; nor in the lifting up of the hands and eyes, but in the warmth of the affection.

It is likewise to be considered, that the fervency of prayer

gives it acceptance, not the length of it; that one prayer rightly addressed to God, from a well-disposed mind, is more efficacious than ten sermons carelessly heard and more carelessly practised. But hearing being an easier duty than praying, (because it can often change into sleeping,) is therefore so much preferred to it by a great many people: But if in the end their profound ignorance will not excuse them, I am sure their stupid obstinacy never will. There are so many virtues required, in order to praying rightly, that people think it would take up too much pains to acquire them: And they are much in the right, if they think their prayers will be insignificant without them, and that an ill man can never pray well; for the stream will always partake of the fountain: And if the mind (which is the fountain of all our addresses to God) be vicious and impure, the prayers which proceed from it, must needs be sullied with the same pollutions. On the contrary, if the mind be once made virtuous, all that proceeds from it will be accepted.

The peace of God being what we so often pray for, and earnestly desire, ought (as far as possible) to be understood, in order to be more earnestly coveted, and surely possessed. That which we are capable of feeling, we are certainly in some measure capable of understanding; and indeed there is no understanding it, but by feeling it. But though we may comprehend enough of its value to make it infinitely desirable, yet the utmost extent of it as far surpasses our understanding, as the blessings which precede and follow it; which are the favour of God, and the inconceivable bliss that accompanies the eternal enjoyment of him: Therefore I will never cease my endeavours to know as much, nor my petitions to thee, my gracious God, to make me feel as much of this blessed peace of thine, a peace which all the power, wealth, and vain-glory of this world can never give, as thou of thy infinitely tender mercy shalt think fit to bestow upon me. It is natural that the word *peace* should put us in mind of its contrary, *war*; since peace arises from the conclusion of war, and from the ces-

sation of strife and combat: And that there is a contest between reason and passion, wisdom and folly, virtue and vice in the soul of man, is too evident to need a proof. And it is as plain, that there is trouble and disorder where-soever there is strife and contention: So that the agitated mind must needs be perplexed and restless as long as this intestine war continues, and till there be a complete victory gained on one side or other.

If vice or passion absolutely prevail, the contest indeed will be at an end, but it will be a wretched one; and such a peace will only ensue as will suffer those outrageous enemies to tyrannize without opposition or controul; a peace fatal to the soul, that debars it from any future hopes of liberty or happiness. But if it pleases the all-merciful, as well as the all-powerful God, to succour man engaged in this doubtful and dangerous conflict, and so to illuminate and strengthen him, as to give him an entire victory; then he crowns the soul with his divine peace, the joy and comfort of which as much surpass all expression, as the infinite blessing of it surpasses all understanding; which peace, most gracious God! grant evermore, I beseech thee, to thy poor unworthy servant, for JESUS CHRIST'S sake. Amen.

The world is a prodigious heap of imperfection, if it could be conceived to bear no relation to any thing but itself; and man the most unfinished and imperfect of all its animals; who seems to have a capacity only of aiming at and pretending to power and wisdom, without any ability of attaining to either; whose greatest advantage is from his own insufficiency and imperfection, to raise to himself a most convincing argument of the union of all those virtues and perfections in the Deity, of which he possesses himself little more than faint conceptions: And thus from his own clouds and darkness he gains an assurance of the existence of that blessed and unclouded light.

Since man therefore finds in himself such a deficiency of power and wisdom, he must needs perceive how unfit and unable he is to be his own governor; being assaulted without by unhappy accidents, which he cannot prevent,

and within by vexations, which he is not able to redress ; and, by consequence, that his corrupted will and depraved affections have much less any title to be his rulers. Why then does he not consider what is the will and pleasure of that transcendent Being, whom superior power and excellence, by an unquestionable right, have constituted his LORD and Governor, bending the utmost of his endeavours, and dedicating his whole life to the performance of them ? As by thy grace and mercy, most holy GOD ! (which I in all humility implore of thee,) I fully design to do.

Could prayer have an end, the pleasure of the soul must end with it ; since the smothering of strong affections causes as great an uneasiness in the mind, as the venting of them gives relief, and consequently delight : Wherefore, so long as there is love in the soul, it will be taking pleasure in declaring it ; and so long as there is any gratitude, it will delight in expressing it ; and whilst it continues virtuous and happy, it must have these affections : Therefore prayer must be as eternal as itself.

All virtue is copying and imitation ; every wise man knowing full well, that his own virtue is no original, but a faint and imperfect copy of the divine perfections. It is plain that whosoever would gain the affections of others, must form his humour to the model of theirs ; since likeness and agreeableness of humours is that which creates mutual affection. The same method must be observed towards GOD, whose image must be drawn upon the soul. And I know not whether this will not be the main question at the day of judgment, “ Whose image and superscription does he bear ? ” (*Luke* xx. 24.) Which will be the mark that will discover to whom every soul belongs, whether to GOD or to the Devil ; according to which they will be disposed of.

Every body that wishes me well, seeing I have built a convenient and pleasant house, to show their kindness, are apt to wish that I may live long to enjoy it ; which I take very kindly of them, since I know their wishes are correspondent to their own natural desires ; though at the same

time I perceive, that their notions of life and happiness, and mine, are very different ; for I cannot think this life worth desiring, barely upon the account of pleasure ; and should be ashamed to put up so unworthy a petition to the all-wise God, as to prolong my life for no other end than for the short insignificant enjoyments that attend it ; as if there were no expectation of a more perfect happiness than what we enjoy in this world ; and as if the flesh and blood our souls are invested with, were the only vehicles of pleasure ; and by consequence the Almighty Creator had made creatures to be more happy than himself, and those innumerable companies of blessed spirits that rejoice in the beams of his glory.

God is infinitely gracious to man, in indulging him the innocent gratifications of his appetites, and in supplying his wants whilst he continues him in this world ; but that is a very wrong reason why a man should desire that he may never go out of it. He ought to consider that his conveniences are suited to the necessities of this life, and are no longer useful than that lasts ; and it were unreasonable to expect that this life should be lengthened and proportioned to his conveniences.

As long as we live in this world a house is necessary ; but it is not necessary to live because we have a house : So long as cold weather lasts, a cloak is necessary ; but no body would wish the continuance of ill weather, because he had a cloak. Alas ! this life we are so fond of, is but the dawning to life ; and we must be conducted through that gloomy, but short passage of death, into the bright and perfect day of it, that shall be enlightened by the amazing splendour of the divine glories in heaven. It is immortality that makes life a ravishing and desirable blessing ; without which it would be but an unprofitable and burdensome trifle, preserved with anxiety, and quitted with terror.

How great a weakness of faith must we discover, when we are capable of preferring a bawble of a house before the eternal enjoyment of the Almighty God ; who will first

enlarge all the capacities of the soul to love, desire, resemble, and adore him ; and then abundantly replenish it with suitable gratifications. There the soul, languishing and thirsting after wisdom and truth, will have free access to the blessed and eternal fountain of them, to satiate itself with boundless draughts of delight : There it may ever gratify, ever satisfy its unmeasurable desires, without ever extinguishing them.

In the natural hunger and thirst of the body, it is pain and want that create the desire ; and pleasure proceeds only from the ceasing of the pain, and relieving of the want ; which makes it differ extremely from this case, where the want of enjoyment is continually relieving, and the present supplies which God affords to the eager desire at once gratify and inflame it.

There are but two things that (were they not both limited by my entire resignation to the will of my God) would make me desirous of life ; the one for my own advantage, the other for my dear child's. And I most humbly implore of thee, my ever gracious LORD ! to grant me for myself, to live till thou hast so far perfected my faith, love, obedience, and sorrow for having ever offended thee, that I may be received into thy everlasting favour ; which I have confidence, through thy infinite mercy, and through the mediation of thy blessed SON JESUS CHRIST, that thou wilt grant me, and not suffer thy poor servant to perish for ever. And for my dear child, I humbly commit both her and myself to thy protection ; and beg that thou wilt graciously be pleased to bless her with a continued innocence and purity of life, bestowing upon her plentifully of thy grace and wisdom, and making her thy accepted servant, to trust in thee, to love thee, and to obey thee faithfully all the days of her life, that thou mayest give her eternal bliss in thy heavenly kingdom. And for her instruction in virtue, my tenderness inclines me to wish to live to see her confirmed in it. But I most humbly resign both her and myself to the determination of thy will ; which I beg may always be done ; and that thou wilt ever make

mine joyfully conformable to it ; in full confidence that thou wilt answer my humble petition (to make my dear child a virtuous woman, zealously mindful ever to perform her duty to thee) by such ways and methods as thou in thy infinite wisdom and mercy shalt think fit.

Where there is not a strong faith, there can be no love ; where there is no love, there can be no desire ; where there is no desire, there is no notion or conception of beauty ; and where there is no notion or conception of beauty, there can be no delight : And, by consequence, there is no beauty in that holiness which is not supported by faith, and pursued with delight. O grant me, my most adorable GOD ! evermore to serve thee “ in the beauty of holiness,” (*Psalm* xcvi. 9,) and give me all those graces and virtues that are necessary for so glorious, so sublime a performance.

So teach me, great GOD ! “ to number my days, that I may apply my heart unto wisdom.” (*Psalm* xc. 12.) This is an arithmetic truly worth learning ; most of our errors being committed for want of a right calculation of time and eternity : For want of computing how much you have to do in the one, and how long to continue in the other, how unspeakable the concern ! how short and uncertain the preparation ! Display, good LORD ! I beseech thee, to my understanding the inestimable treasures of thy truth, which are those alone of which I am ambitious ; the knowledge of thy truth being that invaluable pearl which I am desirous to purchase at any rate. Instruct me in all my addresses to thee, and dictate all my petitions ; grant that they may always be for those things that please thee, and not for such as may please myself : And for an accumulation of blessing, so influence my soul with thy SPIRIT, that thy will may ever be my pleasure.

How faint are the impressions that truth usually makes upon the mind of man ! Not for want of force in the one, but through the obdurateness of the other. What an unhappy skill have vice and folly, in forging of such

wretchedly hardened armour for the soul, that will not suffer it to be penetrated by truth, though never so sharp and piercing ! A miserable defence against an instrument that is never employed to wound but to cure ; but a treacherous shield that never opposes those cruel weapons, which give not only wounds, but death.

If men's passions make their lives uncomfortable, and are hardly to be endured for so short a space, how can they be borne with when they shall become eternal ? For I take it for granted, that one mighty torment of damnation, will be an excessive heightening and enlarging of all the passions, with an utter depriving them of any prospect of gratification. But on the other side, if the love of wisdom and virtue be so delightful to the soul in this its imperfect state, what torrents of joy will be poured in upon it, when all its affections shall be boundlessly and eternally enlarged for their reception ! As doubtless they will be, to the inconceivable bliss of those happy souls who shall be received into the everlasting favour of the Almighty. And that I and my dear child may be of that blessed number, grant, my most merciful GOD, I most humbly beseech thee, for the sake of thy dear SON JESUS CHRIST our SAVIOUR.

As honesty deserves diligently to be sought after, so it is most difficult to be acquired, being (as I may say) an elixir extracted from all the virtues, and is never right when any one of them is wanting in its composition. So far is an honest man from doing a dishonest action, that his soul abhors a dishonest thought. He is immoveable and unshaken ; neither deterred by fear, nor allured by advantage, but proof against all temptations ; valuing his sincerity equal to the favour of GOD, believing that he shall undoubtedly forfeit the one, whenever he foregoes the other.

Wisdom, which is sometimes called "holiness," sometimes "righteousness," is that vital principle whose separation is as fatal to the soul, as the separation of that is to the body. It is that lamp of faith which enlightens it, and introduces into it those astonishing beauties, and amazing glories of

the divine perfections, which irresistibly inflame it with love and desire. A love whose pure fire purges the soul from dross and impurity! A love that utters peace and pardon to it! that vanquishes sin, and triumphs over temptation. Great GOD! I beseech thee, cleanse and enlarge all the clogged and narrow passages of my soul, that thy glories may rush in, and perpetually feed it with this divine flame, constantly to ascend with an uncontrollable motion in praises and adorations to thy heavenly throne.

I make no doubt but many people would be apt to judge, by my way of living, and by what I write, that my thoughts and life were the effects of a dismal melancholy; which is a great mistake: For (I thank GOD!) they are both of them the effect of his infinite goodness, as they are the cause of a far more serene and pleasant life than ever I led under the conduct of folly and passion. My vicious inclinations made me but too well acquainted with the pleasures that most men are so fond of; nor did I naturally want pride and ambition sufficient to have pushed me to the utmost extravagance of endeavouring to procure riches and honour: But, my gracious GOD, whom I can never enough love and adore for his invaluable mercies to me, has clearly discovered to my reason, the wretched folly of such pursuits, and has so far strengthened it, as not to suffer it to be over-powered and dazzled with such childish and gaudy vanities: So that my contempt of the world, and its advantages, is not for want of knowing the value of them, but it is that very knowledge which makes me despise them.

It is natural amongst men that are ignorant of what it is that governs their own thoughts, and those of others, to wonder at any body whose judgment differs from their own; not considering that the same diversity of judgment causes the same astonishment on the other side: But that wonder ceases when a man, by reflection, is led to an insight of that common nature, wherein he shares with the rest of mankind; for then he readily discovers the sources and causes of all their several different opinions, and the various

conceptions arising from each passion, as far as the windings of such an intricate labyrinth are capable of being traced. No wise man therefore will wonder even at the folly of another; because the wisest of men have found difficulty enough to overcome their own, and to restrain their still natural propensity to it; which will incline them not only to be thankful to that infinite Wisdom which has so graciously communicated itself to them, but to be very compassionate of the weaknesses and follies of other men, and heartily to wish and pray for their relief: Whereas a presumptuous inconsiderate fool has no mercy for those that have different sentiments from his own; which is the cause of so much blind zeal, and so many barbarous persecutions as have been in the world.

It would seem strange perhaps should I say, that it is a sin to be miserable, and that it is a sin not to be happy; but yet, when narrowly examined, I believe it will appear to be no more strange than true: For the effect must needs partake of the cause, and misery must therefore be undoubtedly sinful; because it is acknowledged to be the offspring of sin. But there are two sorts of miseries incident to mankind, the one not to be avoided, and therefore to be pitied; the other to be remedied, and therefore inexcusable. The former sort are such as are occasioned by bodily indispositions; the latter are the diseases of a vicious mind. To the miseries of a distempered body we are enslaved by nature; to those of a distempered mind we voluntarily submit. In the first case, we want power to break our chain; but in the latter, we want will to obtain our freedom.

It cannot be denied, that it is a sin to be miserable through the vice of the mind: Those miseries proceed either from desiring things vicious or impossible, or from dreading things natural or unavoidable; in all which we are guilty of disobeying or repining at the will of God, to which we ought cheerfully to submit: For by desiring things vicious, we discover our disobedience; by desiring things impossible, we demonstrate our impiety; and by dreading things natural

and unavoidable, we betray our infidelity. Thus it being proved that it is a sin to be miserable, it will follow that it is a sin not to be happy.

It is evident that true happiness consists in such a peaceful tranquillity of mind, as is neither to be ruffled by fear, nor discomposed by desire. And it is as certain, that such a blessed temper can never be obtained without faith, love, obedience, and submission to God. Now happiness resulting from the union of these virtues, and the want of any one of them being sinful, it must be granted, that it is a sin not to be happy.

Whosoever thinks himself wise enough, or virtuous enough, is in a fair way never to be either. He that engages in those difficult paths, must keep in perpetual motion; there is no stopping without losing ground. He must consider, that if his undertaking be glorious, it is also laborious; that he has a strong tide to stem; which, if he does not keep still resolutely advancing, will inevitably bear him down the stream. The current of passion is fierce and rapid, not to be resisted by feeble reason, and wavering resolution. But if the difficulties to be overcome be great, the prize to be obtained exceeds all value: He therefore whose noble ambition pushes him to wisdom and virtue, must not be discouraged at their amazing height; nor must he think to rest upon the steep ascent of those aspiring mountains, which hide their lofty tops in heaven; whither we must climb before we can reach them, securely to sit down and enjoy eternal happiness.

It fares with a feeble mind, too weak to resist the powerful assaults made upon it by the cares and necessities of life, as it does with the poor bee in a windy day, who, spying the flowers which afford honey, makes eager attempts to settle upon them; but the impetuous storm drives it away, and often obliges it to rest upon some tasteless plant, from whence it can extract nothing that is useful, nothing that is sweet. And in the same manner the unconstant mind, not sufficiently upheld by wisdom and virtue, is apt to be hurried from the objects of its happiness, and forced

to fix upon such, as (not only) yield it neither, but envenom it with anxiety and disquiet.

No! By the grace of God, justice and equity shall be the pillars I will make use of to support my fortune in the world, and not favour and interest; and when those are too weak to uphold it, let it take its chance: I hope I should be able to take the same course, if my life were under the same circumstances: For I had much rather lose my right or my life by another man's injustice, than obtain the one, or preserve the other, by any base pursuit of my own: Nor shall I ever value or seek for any favour, but that of my God, to whom he that has grace enough to commit himself, may with security enough commit his fortune; and whom I humbly beg to dispose both of me and of mine, perfectly according to his own pleasure; and that he will always vouchsafe to support my faith, whatever else he shall permit to fail me.

Faith, that fruitful parent of all other graces, can never be too carefully cultivated and improved. It is the source of pleasure, the lamp of wisdom, and soul of virtue! It is that mysterious ladder by which the soul ascends to heaven, and heaven descends to it; by which a joyful correspondence is continually held between it and its Creator.

Faith is that celestial flame that purifies the soul from dross and pollution, and opens in it a new and glorious scene, gilded with the ineffable brightness of the Deity, adorned with the unconceivable delights of blissful eternity, and enriched with ravishing hopes, pure desires, love divine, and joy unutterable.

No man can truly be termed an honest man, who is moved by any temptation whatsoever to be dishonest: For though there were but one temptation in the world that had power to work that effect, yet he still lies under a possibility of being an ill man; and the best that can be said of him is, that he is honester than thousands of others; and has but that one unhappy exception to his being an upright man. A citadel may be called strong, in comparison of a weaker, because it can hold out a longer siege; but if any

force be able to make it surrender, it cannot be called impregnable; neither can the soul of man be positively termed virtuous, till it is so fortified as to become impregnable against all manner of vice.

Virtue and vice are words better known in the world by their sound, than by their true meaning; men taking the liberty to give such an interpretation to them, as is most suitable to their own fancy and inclination. But he that thinks it necessary to lead a virtuous life, and designs to apply himself heartily to the doing of it, must come to a better understanding of what the things are that are really meant by those words.

Virtue consists in acting conformably to the divine attributes; and vice, in acting in contradiction to those perfections, which is very properly called "sinning against God;" as not only offending against his commands, but against his very essence. For as acting falsely and deceitfully, oppressively and unjustly, cruelly and maliciously, covetously or impurely, is acting viciously, because plainly against the attributes of truth, justice, mercy, bounty, and purity in God; so acting faithfully and sincerely, generously and justly, kindly and mercifully, charitably and temperately, is acting virtuously, because in conformity to those several divine attributes. And as every reasonable man must conceive the Deity to be the exact model of perfection, so he must necessarily contemplate him as the model for his most exact imitation.

The next inquiry must be, where is perfection lodged? It is evident, not in the insensible, nor yet in the brutish part of the creation; nor yet in man, to whom his little portion of reason must clearly evince that it is not in him! Where then shall we seek it, or expect to find it, but in thee, O infinitely perfect, all-wise, all-mighty, all-glorious, and all-bountiful God? Whom my soul most humbly adores, and begs of thee this inestimable blessing, that thou wilt enable it most fervently, sincerely, uninterruptedly, and acceptably, to love, serve, and adore thee, from this moment to all eternity, for JESUS CHRIST'S sake, thy

blessed SON, my most merciful Redeemer; to whom with thee, and the HOLY SPIRIT, the one great GOD, be evermore attributed all honour, power, praise, majesty, and perfection!

We can assign an end for the creation of all beasts, fowls, fishes, trees and plants, and even of the sun, moon, and stars; namely, for the use, support, and convenience of man.

And can it be imagined, that man was made for no other end than to consume and devour the rest of the creation? And that he himself is a useless, worthless, insignificant thing, though Lord and Master of the whole earth? Great GOD! that thou whose power, wisdom, and glory, shine so bright in all thy works, shouldst yet remain almost undiscovered by thy creature man; on whom thou hast bestowed a rational soul, on purpose to enable him to arrive at the felicity of knowing, obeying, and adoring thee; which grant that I may perform accordingly, and account those duties the highest excellences and advantages of my being, and enjoy the blessings of them to all eternity.

Upon whatsoever foundation happiness is built, when that foundation fails, happiness must be destroyed; for which reason it is wisdom to choose such a foundation for it, as is not liable to destructive accidents.

If happiness be founded upon riches, it lies at the mercy of theft, deceit, oppression, war, and tyranny; if upon fine houses and costly furniture, one spark of fire is able to consume it; if upon wife, children, friends, health, or life, a thousand diseases, and ten thousand fatal accidents, have power to destroy it: But if it be founded upon the infinite goodness of GOD, its foundation is unmoveable, and its duration eternal.

Could I ever sufficiently value the worth and benefit of that noble virtue faith, I might be induced to think I had already mentioned it often enough; but every advancement in the knowledge of it, discovers such infinite beauties and excellences, that were I to live a thousand years, and were able to employ my whole time in meditating upon this

incomparable virtue alone, I must of necessity leave much more unthought and unadmired concerning it, than my mind (by such slow progresses as it is now capable of making towards wisdom and knowledge) could in that space of time comprehend of it.

This to many people might seem a stupid encomium, rather than an urgent truth : But, alas ! I do not desire to amuse myself with such trifling conceits : Truth is the thing I labour after ; and I hope that great Being who is environed with the bright glories of it, will vouchsafe to shed of its pure enlightening rays upon my soul, darkened and clouded with sin and ignorance ; I may say (if this expression will be allowed) that there is as great a variety of climates in the mind of man, as there is in the globe of the earth. The one occasioned by the nearness or distance of faith, as the other is by the vicinity or remoteness of the sun ; the first shedding the same happy influences upon the soul, as the latter does upon the world.

They who by a near approach bask in the beams of that illustrious virtue, like the happy inhabitants of Spain and Italy, enjoy the serenity and delights of so fortunate a situation, ever gratified with rich and delicious fruits, which are the natural product of it ; while those who by an unhappy separation are divided from it, and have but rarely the benefit even of its short, remote, and imperfect glances, may be compared to the wretched natives of Lapland and Norway, doomed to uncomfortable regions, abounding only in ice and storms, barrenness and obscurity.

This day I have lived forty-two years. And I humbly thank my most gracious God, for having given me life, and that he did not destroy it whilst it was miserably clogged with sin and folly. I humbly adore thy glorious Majesty for having given me a capacity of loving, obeying, and contemplating thee ; and consequently of happiness eternal in the adoration of thee. Give me, I implore thee, a power to exercise that capacity in the most perfect manner ; and grant, that the remainder of my life may be

spent in the exactest performance of every part of my duty to thee, for JESUS CHRIST'S sake.

He that has pleasure in himself, is pleased with every thing; and he that wants that pleasure, is pleased with nothing.

The body has not at all times power to communicate its pleasure to the soul, (no! not even to the soul of the most vicious fool,) which makes its pleasures very imperfect; since they extend but to one-half of the man: But the pleasures of the soul never fail to communicate themselves to the body, and by that communication are rendered as perfect as our being is capable of; because they become the pleasures of the whole man.

To give an instance of this: When envy, anger, grief, or any other passion, disturbs the mind, all the gratifications that can enter by the senses of the body are not able to give it pleasure, nor is the man (under these disturbances of mind) capable of being happy. But when the mind is freed from all perplexing and disquieting passions, such a happy disposition of the soul necessarily diffuses and communicates itself to the body, and gives pleasure to the whole man; and under this pleasing temper of mind, whatsoever portion of pleasure the body is capable of contributing, will considerably increase the stock of happiness, which before was great enough not to stand in need of any addition; so that our main care must be, not to abandon bodily pleasures that are innocent, and consistent with wisdom and virtue, since they are capable of contributing to our happiness, but to avoid laying in too lavishly such stores of them as may oppress and stifle that supreme pleasure of the mind, (that flame kindled by wisdom, and maintained by virtue,) without which it is impossible to enjoy any tolerable or lasting measure of happiness.

We must take care not to think we are out of the way, because we walk out of the road of the generality of the world; on the contrary we may rest assured, that the narrowest path is the right way, where we find the least company.

The two chief heads to which all human griefs and discontents may be reduced, (bodily pains and indispositions excepted,) are these; either we desire to have what we cannot possess, or else we desire to be freed from what we cannot get quit of.

And it appears plainly, that both these sorts of desires are founded upon weakness and ignorance; being founded upon impossibilities which it must be either weakness or ignorance to languish after: For if the things we desire are in our power, there is no cause of grief; and if they are not, it is vain and unreasonable to grieve. Sometimes, indeed, we make ourselves miserable, by desiring things possible; but then they are such as are hurtful and inconvenient: So that in this case, though our desires are grounded upon possibility, they are yet grounded upon inconsistency, (which is altogether as bad,) since the gratification of such desires is incompatible with our happiness.

Thus generally our discontents are owing to our folly and impiety; to our folly, because they are vain and fruitless; and to our impiety, because we cannot, as we ought, submit to the divine will, and cheerfully acquiesce in divine determinations, which is a proof that either we think ourselves wise enough to contrive our own happiness, or that we mistrust lest the infinite bounty of GOD should fall short in the distribution of it to us.

O great GOD! increase my faith. Increase the faith of all mankind that have it, and bestow it upon those who want it, out of thy infinite compassion. And let the defects of our faith be supplied by thy mercy, through JESUS CHRIST, our SAVIOUR.

I would examine whether grief be an effect of infidelity; and if it appears to be so, I am sure we ought to endeavour by all means (as far as possible) to banish it out of our souls. Our SAVIOUR tells us, that a sparrow does not fall to the ground without the knowledge and will of GOD, and that "the very hairs of our head are numbered;" by which he would forcibly inculcate, that nothing befalls man

without His knowledge and appointment: Since therefore whatsoever happens to man in this world, is either by the will, or by the permission of God, what ground has grief to stand upon but human weakness? All opposition to the will of God is wrestling with his power; all reluctance to his will, and repining at it, is contending, as far as man is able to contend, with almighty Power, by condemning and disapproving the exercise of it, and avowing that he would oppose and contradict it if he were able; and which is the most insolently foolish impiety imaginable.

And for things that befall us, through the bare permission of God, where he does not exert his own immediate power to bring them to pass; though in this case it were not impiety to grieve, yet it would be unreasonable; since where there is a power sufficient, and a propensity in any means to effect a thing, unless it should please God to supersede that power, which he does not think fit to do, but permits it to act according to its own propensity; I say, in this case, the not interposing of the almighty Power, leaves an absolute force in that means to produce that effect; so that the accident it occasions is as inevitable, as if it had been actually performed by almighty Power; and therefore it would be unreasonable to lament it. Nay, in truth I think myself obliged, upon farther consideration, to retract my saying, that in such cases it would be no impiety to grieve; because, though this were not to repine at Providence, for doing of something which we would have undone; yet it is evidently repining at it, for not putting a stop to the power of second causes, and, by consequence, for not doing of something which we would have it to have done; which is the same thing in effect.

It is as impossible for a vicious man (under the habit and power of vice) to conceive what is the pleasure of one that is virtuous, as it is for a beast to conceive his: For a beast is not endued with such a spirit as is capable of receiving the ideas of vice; neither is a vicious man endued with such a purity and elevation of soul, as to enable him to

apprehend the form of virtue; and consequently he is as great a stranger to the manner of a virtuous man's thinking, as a beast is to his.

Amongst great numbers of men who are accounted rich, there are but few that really are so. I take him to be the only rich man that lives upon what he has, owes nothing, and is contented. For there is no determinate sum of money, nor quantity of estate that can denote a man rich; since no man is truly rich that has not so much as perfectly satiates his desire of having more. For the desire of more is want, and want is poverty.

A fine gentleman may as well think to go abroad in a blustering day without disordering his peruke, as a wise man may fancy that he can abandon his mind to the trifling business and hurry of the world, without disordering his thoughts.

Thought is undoubtedly in a great measure governed by the affections; which shows the necessity of subduing the affections to right reason, otherwise our thoughts can never be reasonable, and all human actions are, or ought to be governed by thought: So that such as the thoughts are, such must be the actions, equally partaking of wisdom or folly. And I doubt the latter (by the natural consequence of this argument) has the greatest share in the government of the world, in the same manner as THEMISTOCLES said his little boy governed Athens: "For this child," said he, "governs his mother, his mother me, and I the Athenians."

Since every man almost, in these parts of the world, thinks his salvation and happiness depend upon his being a Christian, it is highly necessary to know the true meaning of the word Christian. After many philosophers had introduced several opinions to instruct men how to arrive at their supreme happiness, JESUS CHRIST was born into the world, who, unacquainted with learning and the professors of it, taught a doctrine much more clear, reasonable, and excellent than any that ever was known before; and the embracers of this doctrine were called Christians.

But though the bare profession of this admirable doc-

trine is sufficient to give a man the name, yet something else is requisite to make him a real Christian ; and that is thoroughly to contemplate both the life and doctrine of our SAVIOUR ; to obtain as far as possible the same spirit ; to enter into the same temper of mind ; to be moved by the same influences, governed by the same principles ; and, in short, to form his life as exactly as possible after his model ; that is, to think as he thought, and act as he acted : And this is that alone which can truly confer upon a man the name of a Christian ; though perhaps it may reduce the number of Christians within a narrow compass. For I fear there are as many that bear that title, who are not Christians indeed, as there were Israelites that were not Israelites indeed.

He therefore that aspires to be a Christian, must never slacken his endeavours till he really feels himself one ; and that is very possible, for the soul is as capable of the perception of things within itself, as the body is of heat or cold ; hunger or thirst, ease or pain : And a man may as reasonably conclude, that he is a good Christian without feeling himself such, as he may fancy he is cold or hungry, or in pain, without feeling that he is either of them. It is evident, that a man may feel within himself whether he is, or is not, endued with the qualities belonging to a Christian ; and therefore ought not to rest satisfied of his being perfectly such, till he feels those qualities within him ; till he finds himself (in relation to his God) firm in faith, fervent in love, humble, sincere, constant in obedience, and cheerful in resignation. Whilst he is labouring after these several graces, he is endeavouring to be a Christian ; and when he has obtained them, he is such indeed.

Every sincerely virtuous man, fixed in the principles of virtue, and entirely influenced by reason, must needs be in a fair way to be a good Christian : Nor do I doubt but if PYTHAGORAS, SOCRATES, PLATO, with many other virtuous Heathens, had been happy enough to have lived contemporary with our SAVIOUR, or to have been acquainted with his life and precepts, they would readily have embraced the

Christian doctrine, and been eminent in the first rank of its professors.

It were worth a man's while to consider whether his present temper of mind be such as he would be willing to continue in as long as he lives; and if, upon reflection, he finds his soul overspread with malice, pride, envy, avarice, injustice, or any other vice, let him consider whether that be the state he desires it should be in, when it leaves his body; if it be, let him acknowledge himself an Atheist; if it be not, let him own himself a fool, and endeavour to grow wiser as soon as he can.

How wretchedly disposed is the heart of man toward God! In prosperity it is apt to be full of neglect, in adversity of repining; and as for love and obedience, they may crowd in, when the other two think fit to make room for them.

I find the business I have resolved upon, and am employed in, is to oppose most of my natural inclinations: So that if nature be in the right, I am to blame to contradict her; but if not, (which is the infallible truth,) I doubt the greatest part of mankind are filthily in the wrong.

The scheme and manner of our thinking are formed and altered, either by the impressions of outward objects on the mind, by the inward disposition of the body affecting it, or by divine impulse: So that every new temper of mind displays a new scene of thought. But notwithstanding that numberless variety of schemes of thinking that roll with an incessant vicissitude in the mind, there is but one that is right, one that is reasonable; unity being the inseparable property of truth. And the first great difficulty is to light on it; the next is to fix upon it: For it is this alone that proceeds from the divine impulse, and is continually combated by those others that arise from other causes; which makes it impossible for us firmly to retain it in our minds, without a force derived and continued to them from the divine bounty and power; which we must labour to procure, and act, as if we were able to deserve; which force, O my great and good God! bestow, I beseech thee, upon thy

most unworthy creature, for his sake who enjoyed it most amply and perfectly, leading a life in this world spotless of sin, and triumphant over all temptations.

Having lately observed so many new authors that pretend to give an account of the nature of GOD, and of the human soul, who are usually men of no very virtuous principles, I would willingly consider how such men came to be qualified for such a performance, and how "the secret of GOD" comes to be entrusted with them; which DAVID observes, (*Psalm xxv. 14,*) was always used to be committed to another sort of men.

Now it plainly appears to me, that a vicious man can have no true notion of GOD; because the knowledge of a thing is necessary to the forming a notion of it. And no man can have the knowledge of GOD, but he on whom GOD himself shall be pleased to bestow it: For faith is not naturally implanted in the mind of man; it being solely the gift of GOD, conferred upon men at such time as he thinks fit.

If happiness be necessary to man, religion is necessary in order to attain it. For religion is properly nothing else than a right-guided pursuit after happiness. We must not imagine, that when we perform any duty towards GOD, or put up any addresses to him, we literally do him either honour or service; but that we are doing the most reasonable thing in the world, and the most beneficial to ourselves, by which we aspire after our nearest felicity, from the bountiful acceptance of GOD, to whom they are utterly unprofitable, and to whose complete and perfect sufficiency all the united beings of the creation would not be able to make the most inconsiderable addition: We must therefore by no means entertain such notions as to fancy, that in our religious duties we are doing service to GOD, when we are actually doing the greatest honour and service to ourselves that can be conceived, whilst he is pleased to permit us to enter into any communication with him, upon which he shall vouchsafe (through his own pure bounty) to confer his favour. And indeed our performing any duty as we ought

to God, is the consequence of his favour, as well as the means of increasing it ; since it is by his favour only that we are induced and enabled to make any right applications to him.

We are not to imagine, that we do honour to JESUS CHRIST by believing in him ; for our faith is a tribute due to excellence : And we do ourselves honour in manifesting (by our faith in him) that discerning wisdom, by which we are led to discover the infinitely superior excellence which was in him above all the men that have ever lived in the world ; which superiority is evident in various instances, and particularly in that wonderful and intimate knowledge he had both of the divine and human nature.

Our own experience compared attentively with his discourses and reasonings upon that subject, will sufficiently demonstrate to us, that no man ever had so clear an inspection into all the powers and weaknesses, motions and mutations, vices and virtues of the mind of man as he had ; nor did ever any man understand the perfections and imperfections, the miseries and happiness incident to human nature, in any degree equal to him ; neither was any man ever able to prescribe such just rules and methods of attaining the one, and avoiding the other, as he (to the infinite benefit of mankind) has been pleas'd to do. And since we have so sensible a demonstration, (by our own inward feeling of what passes in ourselves, and by our continual observations of what passes in others,) that JESUS CHRIST has made so lively, just, and true a description of human nature, no reasonable man ought to doubt either of his knowledge or sincerity in what he has discovered to us of the divine : For his truth in the one is a justification of the truth in the other, and his knowledge of the one a justification of his knowledge of the other.

JESUS, my LORD, have mercy on me : I believe thee, I know thee, to be the SON of the everlasting GOD ; not more from the miracles which thou hast wrought, than from those thou hast spoken. Thy words are no less a demonstration of infinite wisdom, than thy works of infinite

power; and I most humbly implore thy favour and mercy, both as my Saviour and my God.

Thou great and adorable GOD! the complete knowledge of whom is perfect felicity, and even the imperfect knowledge of thee the most desirable blessing of human creatures; enlarge and purify my soul for the contemplation of thee, that when I consider thy incomprehensible glories, I may adore thee in a measure proportionable to my conceptions of thee. Make my knowledge and adoration of thee to increase, every moment of my life; and if it please thee, raise them still higher in the last moments of it, that by a lively faith, humble obedience, fixed hopes, and ardent love here, I may ascend to the eternal fruition of thee in thy everlasting kingdom of glory, through JESUS CHRIST my Saviour. Amen.



MODERATION IS VIRTUE.

THE word Moderation has of late been so much in every body's mouth, that it gave me the curiosity to examine the nature of the thing represented by that word.

There is doubtless one true original idea belonging to every single significant word, though custom may have applied several other significations to it, different from its first and proper meaning: And it is in the labyrinth of this various acceptation of words, or rather misunderstanding of ideas, that contending parties are apt to lose themselves in endless disputes. My design therefore is to consider in as few words as possible, the nature of moderation, (abstracted from party and passion,) what it really is, and wherein it consists.

It is granted on all hands, that moderation is a virtue; but I think that is to say but little of it, since it is the indivisible point in which all virtue centres. For all excess is vicious, and that spot only which is free and unpossessed by excess, is the point of moderation, and the very centre of

virtue and truth, surrounded with extremes, without partaking of them.

The virtue of Prudence is moderation in judgment ; the virtue of Temperance is moderation in appetite ; the virtue of Justice is moderation in the mutual dealings and intercourse amongst men ; and the virtue of Fortitude is moderation, setting just bounds and limits to fear and desire, and equally balancing the mind between timidity and rashness.

I might as easily trace moderation in all inferior subordinate virtues, as I have done in these principal and original ones ; but this suffices to show, that moderation is the point in which all virtue resides, and that there can be no separation between them. So that, when it is required that “ our moderation should be known unto all men ; ” nothing less is meant than that we should give to the world undeniable evidences of our virtue, truth, and sincerity ; which are all comprehended in that one word, Moderation.

But if any body imagines, that in contest concerning important truths, to yield up the point and depart from that truth, is moderation, they are infinitely mistaken ; for it is so very far from it, that it is a vicious and (by consequence) immoderate compliance. To comply in indifferent matters, is charity and civility ; but to comply where justice and truth are concerned, is a manifest renunciation both of the one and the other ; and men must have a care that they do not permit their virtue to be over-powered, either by their good-nature or good-breeding.

Where there is a contest between two persons, the one is apt to desire the other to be more moderate, that is, to yield up the point in dispute : And the other, if he has more right on his side, may more reasonably make that demand to him ; since it is most certain, that the adhering to justice and truth, is moderation ; and he who does that, is a moderate or virtuous man : And, on the contrary, he who either opposes justice and truth, or departs from them, is an immoderate or vicious one.

Should a Jew press a Christian to renounce his religion,

and finding him firm to his principles, desire him to be more moderate, no man can imagine that it would be a virtuous moderation in the other to renounce Christianity and turn Jew. But in short, here lies the fallacy and mistake, both vice and virtue are (for want of a true distinction) indifferently attributed to moderation, which is vulgarly taken for yielding and complying; (no matter whether reasonably or unreasonably;) and he who cannot oblige another to comply with his interest or passion, will always be apt to accuse him of want of moderation. But I do not wonder that moderation is more talked of than understood, since most men's virtue lies more in their tongues, than their affections and understanding; and he who does not feel the influences of virtue and moderation in himself, must needs talk as ignorantly and imperfectly of it, as a blind man does of colours. But were there more moderation in men's minds, there would be more in their manners; more justice and integrity, more charity and generosity; and when the world is more possessed with virtue, it will be better known, better practised, and less talked of: It will then be attended with those natural effects of unity, peace, and kindness, which it would never fail to produce, were it more real and universal.

In the mean time, I take the liberty to advise all contending parties, to examine very impartially, whether at the same time that they upbraid their adversaries for having the mote of immoderation in their minds, they have not a beam of it lying across their own, and if they have, to remove it as soon as they can; for having experimentally learnt to work that cure in themselves, they may more justly reprove, and more skilfully advise and assist their neighbours.

As for my own particular, I profess to be of no other party than that of moderation; which is the party of right reason and truth: Yet, at the same time, I clearly foresee, that it will be my fate, (though I shall never think it my misfortune,) to be always on the weakest side, since power and superiority never fail to get the better of moderation; which is ever successively abandoned by all prevailing

parties, and left as a poor neglected portion for those few, who value it enough to content themselves with it, even nakedly divested of power and advantage.



REPUTATION NO TRUE RULE OF ACTION.

ONE reason why men usually have such wrong notions of things, is, because they receive general rules; (which yet have many exceptions;) or rather, it is because they receive those rules for general ones, which are not general. For want of knowledge and judgment they do not make right distinctions between that part of a rule which must always be the same, and other parts which are liable to variation.

It is a great mistake amongst many people, that reputation is to be the rule of action; which is as much as to affirm, that an uncertain and variable thing is to be a certain and fixed direction; that a heap of sand, which will be scattered by the first wind, is a sufficient land-mark for travellers for ever to know their way by; that a thing which is capable of as many forms and sudden changes, as the clouds in the air, is a constant rule of behaviour and action. In short, if we have no other rule of action but reputation, I must affirm, that we have none at all.

But I think we have another, which we may securely follow and depend upon; such a one as will keep us always in the right way, if we can but be happy enough to keep our eyes ever fixed upon it: Which rule is the united principles of right reason and religion, or rather of true Christianity, which is right reason.

Here we have a substantial rule; there we have only the wavering shadow of one: Here we have something that will last as long as right reason lasts; there we have something that will change as often as the stream of men's fancies and opinions changes, which is as often as the

weather-cock ; and those who resolve to be directed by it must be as unconstant as the wind.

Were a man always to be governed by reputation, he must change the fashion of his virtues as often as the fashion of his clothes ; otherwise he will run the hazard to be laughed at for an old-fashioned virtue, as well as for an old-fashioned coat. A foundation that is unfix'd, is a foundation upon sand, fit only for fools to build on. Wise men therefore will find another, and choose a foundation, that has itself a foundation to rest upon ; and then they know they may rest securely.

To come to a clearer state of this matter, without which there can be no avoiding of confusion, it is necessary to distinguish between the different notions of virtue and different motives to it ; by which we may judge of the difference there is in men's notions of reputation. I will confine myself to two, viz. the Heathen notion of virtue, and the Christian notion of it ; for we must not confound the one with the other : But when we speak of virtue, we must know what virtue we mean, or else when men speak of reputation, we shall never know what reputation they mean.

The notion of most of the celebrated Heathens was, that glory was the only object fit for the pursuit of great and generous souls ; and that such designs only were to be formed and prosecuted by them, as would procure them the most lasting and (as they vainly enough imagined) immortal glory ; that is, the praise and applause of their actions while they lived, and the perpetuating their fame in after ages ; so that future generations might bestow that commendation upon their names and memories which the present did upon their living persons.

This present and future glory was the idol of the more generous Heathens, as it was the ultimate good they proposed to themselves in this life, and the only felicity they hoped for after death ; so that the only motive of all their actions, the only incitement to their ambition, was glory ; a thin diet for a rational mind to feed upon ; all the

pleasure and immortality of which was only to be enjoyed in the short space of this present life, by the help of an over-heated imagination.

The notion of Christian virtue is this, that the principal thing towards which a wise man ought to bend his thoughts, designs and actions, is the approbation and favour of God ; the eternal enjoyment of whom is the true immortal glory he ought ambitiously to aspire after.

This is no vain imaginary pleasure, but a real felicity to be felt, tasted, and enjoyed for ever. It will not fail and vanish when the heat of imagination is extinguished, like the pleasure of commendation and praise ; but it will be so inseparably united to our very souls and beings, that the one must last as long as the other. This is the true virtue, the true principle of action, as well as the true rule by which it is to be regulated.

When our actions are formed and finished by this rule, they deserve praise and commendation ; he who has the approbation of a well instructed, well regulated conscience, needs no other ; if that acquits him, it is a divine acquittal, nor need he care who condemns him.

Those who walk altogether by reputation, travel in a labyrinth ; amongst such a multiplicity of ways they never find the right one, but weary themselves in fruitless and endless labour. Among good fellows it is a reputation to drink, amongst the debauched to be lewd, amongst the Atheists to blaspheme, amongst the pick-pockets to cheat and steal, amongst politicians to deceive and circumvent, and amongst heroes to plunder and oppress. In short, every one commends what he likes best himself ; and where there is such a variety of different directors, a man who has no other knowledge of his road will be very apt to miss it.

Amongst the clamours of so many false reputations, the low voice of a true one is hardly to be credited, against so strong an opposition. There are so few who value either men or actions, because they are good, that he who only considers reputation, will be apt to choose one that makes

a louder noise. Men generally love to have their praises proclaimed, not whispered. There are not many who can have the patience to stay till the day of judgment, to receive the approbation and applause of their actions.

If a man is scorched with the thirst of praise, he will strive to quench it, though it be in the first puddle; he will not take the pains to search far for a clear fountain, if muddy water be near at hand. But it may be objected, that certainly reputation is a valuable thing, since it has been accounted so by the wisest of men: Neither will I deny that a just reputation is a desirable thing; but I deny that it is desirable only as it is praise and commendation, (since ill actions among many people may procure those as well as good ones,) but it is desirable as it is the effect of a desirable cause; it is desirable because true merit (which can only give a true reputation) confers it; and true merit is what every body ought to aspire after, and to be thankful to God for giving it to them when they have it.

Men ought to be truly virtuous, because true virtue is in itself a desirable thing, loved by that adorable Wisdom, which is the fountain of all wisdom as well as of all virtue; and whether it is its fortune to be commended or neglected, esteemed or despised, it will not, or at least ought not, to appear less amiable to those who admire, covet, and possess it, because they are assured it will make them approved and accepted, where approbation and acceptance is a more valuable, lasting, and substantial blessing, than that immortal fame and glory, which is so generally and foolishly preferred before it.

There is an obstinacy in error, which nothing but truth can overcome: As for instance, a man who has neither faith nor virtue, is apt to think he has both; and never knows he had neither, till he comes to have both. And so it happens in all other things; he that is in the wrong, believes himself in the right, and never knows he was in the wrong, till he comes to be in the right: Wherefore we ought to be most nicely inquisitive into the truth of our notions and opinions, before we adhere too obstinately to them, lest

they prove to be false, and we bring our minds to cleave immoveably to error.

The furious quarrels about the Church of England are like the contention of plundering soldiers about a rich garment ; the strife is not who shall preserve it whole, but who shall have the biggest piece out of it. The same is true of the state and government of England, as well as of the church : All the contending parties have their eyes upon the richest pieces of embroidery, and are ready to lay their hands on them as soon as they can ; and many of them that are at a distance, cry out very zealously for the preservation of the coat ; that is, they are very desirous it should be kept whole, till they are able to crowd in to get a share of it.

No set of words or expressions, whether they be extemporary or premeditate, can properly be said to be a prayer. But when the ideas formed in the mind from such words or expressions, excite its affections to put them forth in petitions and addresses to God, then they become truly and properly a prayer. So that though another composes the words, yet it belongs to every particular person that utters them, to convert them into a prayer.

SPIRITUAL LETTERS,

WRITTEN IN SPANISH,

BY

DON JUAN D'AVILA.

SPIRITUAL LETTERS.

LETTER I.

*To a Friend. Showing how great Blindness it is to lose
eternal Bliss for temporal.*

THE peace of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, be ever with you. I received a letter of yours some days past, written at Seville; whereof though I were very glad, yet I should have rejoiced much more to be there to enjoy your conversation, which I have so long desired. I beseech CHRIST that we may see one another in heaven, where all our desires will be at an end; possessing him who is the true fulfilling of them all.

Sir, I would extremely desire, that the smoke of these temporal things did not blind our hearts, and hinder us from the sight of such as are eternal. Woe be to that man who hath more care of his goods than of his conscience; and who puts the soul in hazard, to secure the life of his body. Not so, O men! not so, but rather, as JOSEPH did, who to secure his chastity, left his upper garment in the hands of her who would have robbed him of that treasure. It is the sentence of CHRIST our LORD, that if our right eye be an occasion to us of sin, we must pluck it out and cast it from us. The right eye is the love which we carry towards goods, or honour, or life; which, if it be an occasion of sin, we are to estrange ourselves from, and cut it off, lest we be estranged from GOD.

We must love nothing so well that we may not tread it under foot, if it hinder us from being well with GOD. There is no holding friendship with that sovereign King, but by such a man as will confess that heaven is had very cheap, though it cost him his life. They who think to

comply both with their own affections, and with the love of our LORD, are mightily deceived: For these men love not GOD, but as they love many other things; whereas GOD will be loved above them all.

O error of the sons of men! Who hath thus deceived them, and who shall be able to unbeguile them? Who hath plucked out their eyes to lead them blind-fold? Men are content to be without virtue, so they may not be without money: And thus put they light in the place of darkness, and darkness in that of light. O that our LORD would open the eyes of these men! and how bitterly would they weep, seeing how bad exchangers they had been! Is not the friendship of GOD of more value than all things which can be wished? Are not "the commandments of GOD more worthy to be desired than thousands of gold and silver?" Where shall we find true scales to weigh every thing out, for just as much as it is, that we may not thus for ever live in lies.

The day will come, infallibly it will come, when GOD "will destroy them all that work iniquity;" and for what then will that serve, which they have so earnestly sought for? O day of giving account for all the days of our lives, how little art thou considered, and therefore how little art thou feared! And men, in the mean time, run, with the bridle loose, and in their teeth, for the gathering of this little miserable flower which so quickly fades, and they see with their very eyes, that it is even slipping from between their fingers; and yet there is never want of somebody who hath a mind to hold fast this world, whilst still it is flying from him.

Sir, our kingdom is not to be had in this world. What is this life, but a way from our own houses reaching to the place where thieves desire to cut our throats; since every day we walk on, and it is no whither else but towards death. Now who would be so absurdly inconsiderate, that when he was conducting to execution, he would fall into great affliction, because he were not sumptuously clad; or would busy himself about hearing some relation of the lives of

others, or delight himself with looking upon some public entertainment; or be angry that men put not off their hats to him? And yet how many do we see, who (going, as we all do, to their graves, yea, and running faster thither than an arrow out of a bow) yet detain themselves foolishly, some upon fine clothes, others upon paltry smoke of honour, and others who grow angry, because just that they desire is not done: And yet the things they desire, are neither such as help them to obtain true felicity, nor hinder them from falling into eternal misery.

What in the name of GOD is this which hath so blinded us, that we should make time of eternity, and eternity of time? For so have men despised that eternal bliss, which GOD hath prepared for them in heaven, as if it were but temporal; and so have they fixed their love upon this transitory world, as if this were the thing which is eternal.

How few are there upon earth who pass through it like strangers; and who fasten their hearts upon the future, as upon their city, and true place of rest! Let the tongue say what it will, but our works proclaim us to be citizens of this world, since we extremely desire to be accommodated and exalted here, and take no care though we should be but as strangers in the next world. Perhaps we are of opinion, that the kingdom of heaven may be obtained without any great labour or care. But the truth is, that even they who take most pains, will find that they still have enough to do. And what then will become of the careless person? He will be sure to lose it!

We are running a race, and the prize is no less than the kingdom of heaven. Yet not all they who run are to have the prize, but they only who run best. What a madman were he, who should shackle his feet, and then think to carry the prize?

GOD commands that to him who shall strike thee upon one of thy cheeks, thou shouldest turn the other; that not only thou must not revenge thyself, but that thou art to keep thy heart prepared to endure more; and still if another blow be offered, to "turn the other cheek;" that is,

to prepare thyself for enduring more and more, in such sort, that the other may be sooner weary of doing ill, than thou of suffering it. But how shall he be able to make a speedy course in this way, who is fettered in the chains of worldly honour, which requires that we revenge the injuries which are done us. Indeed, no man feels the weight of dishonour, but he who loves honour. And if this love be not laid aside, how shall we be ever able to run ?

Envy is a chain, anger is a chain, and the love of ourselves is a chain and root of all the rest. What a sottish thing is it therefore, for a man to think, that he who affects those things which his own will suggests, is able to run that career, wherein the servants of GOD must run ; and who, because he contents himself, thinks that GOD will also be contented with it ; and who, living after his own fashion, will yet conceive that he may live so with GOD !

Away, away, let us awake at least, for the love of GOD let us awake before hell-fire awake us ; and let us know, that the “ kingdom of GOD is a hidden treasure ; ” and that he who finds it must bestow all that he hath upon the purchase, esteeming himself more happy and rich in this alone than in all things else.

A man that has a mind to gain this kingdom, is not bound to be a beggar ; but that which he needs is, that for the love of this kingdom, he cut off the love of riches and honour, and a delicate life, and in fine, of his own will.

CHRIST our LORD will have us all naked, that so we may run a-pace to him who died for us. That man is naked who holds his life and his honour in subjection to the will of CHRIST, doing what CHRIST wills, and not that which is suggested by pleasure or honour ; and who makes as light of these things, as if he had them not ; and is ready to cast them all into a light fire, rather than commit one sin. And though a man may attend to the improvement of his estate, it must not be out of love to it, but because GOD commands it. If he live, it must not be because he loves life, as making that the end of his care, but he must keep it for the service of GOD ; and sooner throw it away than

offend him. If he apparel himself, he must not take counsel with vanity how he may be esteemed for his clothes; but with the word of God which commands that we use them not with superfluity, but for the supply of just necessity. And this man doth not hold himself to be his own, but one who belongs wholly to God. He cares not for what himself desires, but for that which God commands. He lays all things, and himself withal, to be trodden under foot; so he may hold God above his head. God commands and he obeys; God directs and he submits; and as the shadow follows the body, so he follows the will of God.

“This is the generation of them who seek our Lord, and they shall find him.” (*Psalm* xiii.) Let us therefore go and run this race. For happy are those labours, which are endured for the obtaining of this crown. And they shall soon pass away, but their reward is to last for ever. Let us lay up our treasure there. It will be enough for us to possess God; and let us not lose our time, for it was not given us to be lost. But let us live that we may ever live; and so we shall pass from reproach to glory, from poverty to plenty, from banishment to our own country; which we shall possess through all eternity. *Amen.*



LETTER II.

*To a religious Person, encouraging him to the perfect
Love of God.*

REVEREND FATHER,

SINCE OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST is not pleased that, at this time, I should be where I might enjoy your company, as I had wished, let his name be blessed for all, and in the mean time I must endure it with patience. Wherein yet I shall not be performing a small penance, for it is a hard thing to be divided from the persons we love. And in truth I did never so much desire to be assisted by you in

some things as now; for I conceive, that it might have proved greatly to the service of our LORD. But yet since by one that loves, all things are well taken, I will speak a little to you in absence, till our LORD ordain that we may be present.

Sir, I much desire that we may seek GOD who is our total good, and that not after any ordinary manner, but like one who seeks a great treasure, and for love whereof he sells all that he is worth; accounting himself rich in possessing that alone, instead of many other things, which he had before.

O GOD, O LORD, O thou true Repose of our souls, when shall we begin to love thee? When, I say, shall we conceive a desire of thee, such as may be worthy of thee? When shall truth be able to prevail more with us than vanity? Beauty than deformity? Repose than restless care? The Creator who is so richly full and all-sufficient before the creature, which is so empty and poor? LORD, who will open our eyes, that we may know there is nothing out of thee, which is able to give any true contentment to us? Who will make some discovery of thee to us; that, being all enamoured of thee, we may go, may run, may fly, and may remain eternally with thee?

Woe be to us, for we are far from GOD, and yet in so little pain for that distance, that we can scarce be said to feel it. What is become of the tender sighs of those poor souls, which had tasted once of GOD, and were afterwards estranged a little from him? What is become of that holy affection, wherewith DAVID said, "If I shall give sleep to mine eyes, or slumbering to mine eye-lids; till I have found a house wherein the LORD may dwell." (*Psalms xxxi.*) And this house we are when we destroy not ourselves, by scattering our hearts upon variety of things, but recollect them to one desire and one love. Then it is that we find ourselves, and are indeed the "houses of GOD."

For my part, I believe, that he said true who affirmed the cause of our lukewarmness to be this, that he who hath not tasted of GOD, doth not know what it is either to have hunger or true satisfaction. And so we are neither hungry

after God, nor satisfied by creatures ; but we remain as frozen, being neither here nor there, full of dulness, and fit to cause a vomit in his stomach, who loves not servants who are lukewarm, but desires to have them inflamed with the fire of love. This fire himself brought into the world, and desires nothing but that it may burn ; and that it may do so, himself did burn, and was consumed upon the cross. And this he did that we might warm ourselves, and correspond with so great a lover by some love of ours ; considering how just it is, that we should be wounded by the sweet dart of love ; since we see him not wounded, but killed by it.

Let us now resist him no longer, but yield ourselves conquered by his love, that we may ever live with him. He desires to burn us up, that so the "old man" being consumed, the "new man" may rise again by love. He desires to melt our hardness, that as upon metal which is made liquid by heat, that form is imprinted which is desired by the workman ; so we (being softened by that love, which makes us melt by hearing our Beloved speak to us) may be ready without all resistance, that CHRIST our LORD may imprint upon us what figure shall be most pleasing to him.

Now that figure which he desires to imprint, is no other than that of love. For CHRIST our LORD is very love itself ; and he commanded that we should love one another, as he loved us. (*John xv.*) And ST. PAUL tells us, (*Gal. ii.*) that we must so love CHRIST our LORD as he loved us, and gave himself for us. So that unless we love, we are unlike him ; our countenance hath no resemblance to his ; but we are poor, naked, blind, deaf, and dumb, and dead. For love alone is that which quickens all things ; and love is that which is the spiritual cure of our souls. For the soul without love is just as the body is without the soul.

Let us therefore love and we shall live ; let us love and we shall grow like God ; nay, we shall wound him who is to be wounded by love alone. Let us love, and all things shall be ours, since they are all to serve us. What have

we of ourselves? Let us hedge ourselves in GOD, and make no account of any thing else. Let not our own losses trouble us, but the losses of GOD, which are the souls who depart from him. Let us groan to GOD, from the very bottom of our hearts; for our tears even wound Almighty GOD, though they be so weak and soft, and though he be omnipotent.

But above all, let us make our habitation in the wounds of CHRIST our LORD, and particularly in his sacred side. For who can remain in fire and not grow warm, at least to some proportion? O that we could dwell there, and how happy should we be therein!

If some little spark of fire be kindled in our hearts, let us take great care that the wind blow it not out. And we must "daily add some wood to it," (*Lev. vi.*) as GOD commanded his Priests to do. That signifies to us the doing good works, and the not losing any time. And above all things, we must approach to the true fire which may kindle and inflame us; and this is JESUS CHRIST our LORD.

Let us open the mouth of our soul, which is our desire, and go to the Fountain of living water.

Let us run after GOD, for we may be sure he will not fly from us. He is nailed upon the cross, and infallibly we shall find him there. Let us convey him into our hearts, and then shut the door, that he retire not thence. Let us die to all visible things, since there will come a time when we must leave them per-force.

Let us be growing in the knowledge and love of CHRIST our LORD, who is the sovereign good. And all this is to be obtained by humble prayer and persevering endeavour. Therefore let us remove all impediments, and compose our hearts, expecting CHRIST our LORD there, who enters when the doors are shut, to visit and comfort his disciples; and so without doubt he will come to us. And since CHRIST our LORD is he who must work this in us, we have no reason to distrust, but taking courage in such a conductor, let us begin to run that course with fervour, which ends not but in the obtaining of GOD.

But then, on the other side, his express pleasure is, that we have confidence in him even in the greatest temptations ; yea, though our little barks should be upon the very point to sink.

Let us not therefore be disturbed or dismayed. Let us not put others to pain, for the trouble which this continual war gives us. Let us utterly distrust ourselves and confide in GOD ; and let us begin in the name and power of the Omnipotent. And this beginning of ours shall be humility, and our end shall be love.

So at the day of judgment we shall be received among the angels and saints, where we shall ever study the book of life, which is GOD himself, who will for ever stand open before our eyes that we may know him, and love him, and for ever be in possession of him. OUR LORD JESUS remain ever with you.



LETTER III.

To one who had some Desire to serve GOD, but not the Courage to begin.

I MUCH rejoice at the desires you have to please our LORD, but I am in pain to consider your backwardness in executing the same. For I hold it strange that one should presume to remain in the vanity of this life, and not presume to make a new match with GOD, confiding in the same GOD. For what man was there ever, who hoping in GOD, and desiring to live according to his command, was forsaken by him ? Who ever invoked him with an entire and persevering heart, and was not heard by him ? Nay, he goes seeking us, and inviting us to serve him. What possibility therefore is there, but that, since he is good, he must come forth to meet and cast his arms about our necks, when we make towards him ? He will, infallibly he will, and that far more completely than we know how to think.

Begin, thou servant of GOD, cast yourself upon him,

and confide that he who gave you the desire, will give you strength to work and courage to make an end. For he calls not upon such as sleep to awake them, but that he may do them many favours when they are awake. Begin with diligence and fervour, yea, and with a kind of strife; for there is not a worse thing than a faint beginner, who still takes care to regale himself and content the world. Shut your eyes against both human praises and dispraises, for you shall quickly see both the praiser and the praised turned into dust. And we shall all stand before the tribunal of our LORD, where “the mouth of wickedness shall be stopped,” and virtue shall be highly exalted. In the mean time, lay fast hold on the cross, and follow him who was dishonoured, and lost his life for you. And hide yourself in those wounds, that when our LORD comes for you, he may find you there; and may beautify you with his graces, and may give himself to you as your reward for having left all things, and yourself with them, for his sake.

But O how little doth he leave who leaves all! Since he leaves but that which he must quickly leave whether he will or no; yea and even the enjoying of it is a misery; since all that is not God, is but weight and sorrow to the soul.

God only is sufficient for you; open therefore your heart and enjoy him; you shall find him more sweet, and much more full of love, than you could have thought.

Sometimes I wonder how one can or doth wish ill to another, since CHRIST our LORD is in the midst between them both. How can he be disgusted with the body who loves the head? Do you not know that we cannot do, yea or even desire to hurt any body, but that it must first pass through him?

Conceive that your neighbours are a certain thing which nearly concerns CHRIST our LORD; that they are his images, and the creatures for which he gave his blood. And therefore say, ‘How shall I wish ill to him whom my LORD loves? How shall I desire death to him, to whom my LORD will give life? My LORD died for those persons, and would yet again die for them if it were needful; and

shall I then fail to love that man, who is so much beloved by him? What doth it import me, if they do me ill offices? For I love them not for what they are, nor for any thing which they do to me; I love them for CHRIST'S sake; and what then have their ill deeds to do towards the making me take that love from them, which I earried to them for CHRIST'S sake? I beseech GOD they may be great in his presenee, and that they may enjoy him, and he them: That so there may be more temples wherein my LORD may dwell, more souls which may praise and serve him, and more hearts which may love him; for he deserves them all.' And whensoever you see them, say, 'O LORD, do thou possess those souls, and let them be only thine. O LORD let them enjoy thee, for thou hast a mind to communieate thyself to all. O LORD, they are so many images of thee, make them like thee more and more, and both to them and me, and to all, give pardon, grace, and glory.'

The scruples you mention, are a temptation wherewith the Devil torments you, and deprives you of the sweetness of your soul, and leaves you without life in the things of GOD. For he who is serupulous, is not fit either to love GOD, or to confide in him; nor doth he like the way which GOD holds with him, and then he goes to look other ways, which may please himself better. And himself is in fault, for he raises the storm where there was a calm; and he found it in his own way, and not in the way of GOD, which is very smooth and plain.

Shall I be plain with you? Make haste, make haste to love, and the seruples will fall away, which rise but from a fearful heart. For "perfect love easts out fear." Pray to our LORD and say, "My GOD, enlighten my darkness." And confide in his mercy, that serving him he will be good to you; and will be daily giving you to understand your faults, that you may mend them.

As to the temptation of vain glory, say to it, 'Neither will I do it, nor leave to do it for thee. O LORD, to thee it is that I offer whatsoever I can do, or say, or think.' Aud

when vain glory comes again, say to it thus, ‘Thou comest too late, for it is already given to God.’

For conclusion, I recommend to you, that you cast all out of your heart which is not God ; and that in this world you love tears, solitude, humility, and repentance ; and let your eyes be ever turned to our LORD, “that your feet may be delivered from the snare.” Put the law of God in practice, and you shall see he will sweeten your way, and will cast your enemies under your feet. And by working you shall grow to understand that which you know not how to conceive, either by speaking or hearing. For in the way of God, these lukewarm talking people learn little ; but they who are diligent in putting the hand to work learn much. Our LORD JESUS CHRIST goes before you ; follow him here with your cross ; and one day you shall be with him in heaven.



LETTER IV.

To a Friend whom he animates to serve GOD in earnest.

MY SOUL is filled with comfort by your letter ; for the words contained therein, give me a hope of somewhat which hath reason to make me glad, and which, if it might once take full effect, would breed a joy in me so great, as would be equalled by few others.

My good Sir, I desire to see that soul of yours unbecomingly and discharged from the many vanities, which are allowed in this world ; and that you would believe your true repose consists not in any other, than in Him who created all things, and that you would go up and down full of care, in search after this good, and be so wounded, with the love of him, that all this world, with the beauty thereof, might seem but a smoke to you which vanishes as a shadow, which is indeed a mere device, to make men fools, making such as love it enemies of God.

Was there ever seen any mischief so great as this? Where are those eyes, which see not this? And that heart which hath no feeling of this? And yet so great is our frailty, that if CHRIST our LORD did not awake us, and make us understand this truth, it would be no more possible for us to be delivered from error, than it is possible in nature for a blind man to see, or a dead man to live. O thou miserable man, who art worthy to be lamented with a flood of tears! who art so vehemently inclined to that which hurts thee most, and yet conceivest withal that it is good for thee! Thou thinkest that all hath gone well, and that thou art grown happy, when thou art accommodated with the things of this life, and thou hast hardly any feeling, nor dost thou think it worth the lamenting, to be in enmity with Almighty GOD. Thou knowest how to value the honour of this world, which passes away at full speed, yea, and even whilst it lasts, makes not the owner thereof one hair's breadth the better in the high presence of GOD; and thou hast no care whether thou be honoured or dishonoured in the court of that Divine Majesty. Thou fearest some little affront, which here threatens thee; but thou seekest for no remedy against the high affront which is threatened at the latter day, to all such as shall not have done honour to our LORD, with a lively faith and true obedience. Thou makest much account of thyself, and little of Almighty GOD; for thou fulfillest thine own will, in despite of his. And any trifle which concerns thyself, offends thee much; and the while thou hast no care of that which highly concerns the honour of GOD.

The torment which is provided for sin will, one day, open the eyes of such persons, when there will be no remedy. The eyes which sin shuts, pain opens. And therefore, Sir, if you love your soul, if you fear Almighty GOD, if your heart be not of flint, look carefully upon the shortness of this life, and how many you have known, who, being well accommodated here, GOD hath commanded to go hence, complaining that the world had deceived them, and that for love thereof they had neglected the service of our LORD.

That which they were, we are, and where they be arrived, we shall arrive, and the same earth must receive us all.

For what therefore do we stay? By what are we detained? What is that which deceives us, and makes us so profoundly careless of a business which so highly imports us? What makes us think that it concerns us little, notwithstanding nothing imports us at all, in comparison of this? And if we confess it to be highly important, why do we labour so little for it? Why do we spend so few hours about it?

Is it reason that any little time, which we employ about this, should seem so great a matter, whereas we never think much and are never weary, how much soever time we spend upon the business of this world?

The day will come, and that quickly, when those worldly persons will find themselves strangely disappointed, and having lost all their labours, and leaving the fruits hereof behind them, shall be presented naked and poor, and in the extremity of confusion, before Him, who sent them hither; not to go fooling after vanities, but that they might pass through these temporal things, without staying or setting their hearts upon them, and that having their bodies here upon earth, their souls might be aspiring to heaven. And that though they live in flesh; yet they should not live according to the desires thereof, but like children who imitate their father, be pure, and true, and pious, and humble, and meek, and seek after the glory of God and the good of their neighbours.

What will he be able to do at that day, who shall not have performed the thing for which he was sent into the world? Who, forgetting the purity and perfection of a Christian life, whereby he was to imitate Almighty God, hath defiled himself in the mud of earth, and hath proceeded like some foolish boy, who, being sent about business, would stay to pass his time and play with other boys; or loiter, seeing of some vain show, neither did that which he was commanded, nor so much as remembered where he went, till returning home at night, without any answer con-

cerning his business, he is received with reproofs and stripes by him who sent him.

Let us awake whilst we have time and have an eye to that which imports us most, and which is to last for ever. And let us leave vanity to vain persons ; for both it and they shall perish. Let us raise our eyes towards him who gave us life and being, and afterwards gave his own life that we might not lose ours. And with great labour he taught us the way, whereby we were to walk ; and by a death which was full of torments, did he encourage and strengthen us to virtue ; and obtained grace for us, whereby we might be able to serve and please Almighty God.

If our LORD have begun to visit your soul, you will understand what I say, and profit by it. If not, (which God forbid,) it will be but the hearing of a story which is instantly forgotten.



LETTER V

To an afflicted Lady whose Sickness hindered certain Devotions which she had been wont to use.

THE best comfort in those afflictions which come upon us against our will, is, not to have committed any fault ; which might occasion their coming. For a conscience which stands right, will easily bear any weight which you can lay upon it ; but to a conscience which is impure, any little burden is intolerable. If men knew the means of true repose, they would not remain with the sole desire thereof. It is the express law of GOD, that they who have desires of any other thing than him, shall be subject to torment, whether the thing be obtained or not obtained. For supposing it be had, they cannot completely enjoy it ; and if it cannot be had, they are pained by the disappointment.

The pure desire of GOD is very contrary to this. For if DAVID says, “ Let the heart of them rejoice, who seek the LORD,” what kind of thing will it be to find him ? If the hunger give them joy, what will being satisfied do ? He

therefore who desires to find true repose, must resolve to forego his own appetites, and boldly and faithfully lodge himself in the will of our LORD; and so he shall neither be tumbled up and down in the dark, nor be afflicted by the arrival of strange events.

But who will procure that the sons of men may attend to that which GOD exacts at their hands? "How long will ye love vanity, and seek after lies?" Who shall free them from their blindness, seeking peace and finding war? Yea, and by the same way wherein they seek it, they lose it. Let the whole world understand, that as there is no more than one GOD, so is there no more that one true repose. And as, without the true GOD, there is no GOD; so out of his repose, there is no repose. This say they who, after they are wearied upon the experience of their own vain desires, know, at length, both what GOD is, and what he is to them who seek him.

He who will lift his eyes up to him, and depend upon his hand; he who will be a beggar at his gate; he who will desire him and grow even faint through hunger after him, shall be refreshed by the abundance of him, which doth as far exceed the satisfaction which creatures give, as GOD himself exceeds them. But out of GOD, let no man presume to desire any thing. For, as ST. AUGUSTINE saith, 'Wheresoever flesh and blood shall expect to find a fulness amongst the creatures, it will find itself deceived.' So that a man may understand by experience what difference there is between the Creator and the creatures, and so being untied from them, (since in them he found not what he sought,) may go at last with an entire heart to him, who alone is able to impart more to the soul, than it is able to receive.

Your Ladyship must not therefore be carried away, by that great error which is embraced by many great ones of this world, who think that they are to abound as much more than others in desires, as they are more eminent in rank; but for my part I see not what they gather from hence, but greater torments: For according to the desire, is the pain; and, as ST. BERNARD saith, 'Let our own will cease, and there will be no more hell.' And so we may say, Let this self-will cease, and there will not be in the world either any

sin or any sorrow. For that which comes to us, is not, in itself, the thing which gives us pain, but the coming of it when we would not have it come. And therefore doth God require our hearts of us, that so he may free them from many miseries, and may give us in exchange his own, which is peaceable, reposed, and joyful in tribulation. And a gross fool is he who had rather live in his own straitness than in the latitude of Almighty God.

Much better it is for a sinner, that he should grow into pain by occasion of his sin, than into peace and rest. For, as ST. AUGUSTINE saith, ‘There is not a more woeful thing than the temporal felicity of a sinner.’ And as for us, let us learn hereafter to give all our desires to God; as a stone falls downward, and fire flies upward, and every thing makes towards its proper place; so let our hearts fly at full speed towards the centre thereof, which is God.

Let us not commit such a treason against such a LORD, as that hereafter any other desire enter into our hearts, but of him or for the love of him. And so will the sad clouds of these unprofitable melancholies, and these vain hopes and vain fears, fly from our hearts, and in their place a new morning will rise.

It will be fit that your Ladyship do not think, to use the like exercises of mind, now you are subject to an unlike disposition of body. Many have ignorantly afflicted themselves, for not having been able to weigh what their strength and state would permit. It is clear that with this condition of body, you must not think of keeping the same method you held before, nor doth our LORD ask any such things at your hands, since his will is very wise, and tempered also with great mercy, and demands nothing of us, but that for which he gives us means. You must not then be comforted for that which you are not able to perform, for you might as well put yourself to pain, because you have no wings wherewith to fly. Do not place the joy of your heart upon making long prayer, but upon the accomplishment of the will of our LORD. And since his pleasure is, that the time which before you spent in praying shall now

be spent in vomiting, let it be so in the name of **God** ; and let us more esteem that he be pleased, than we would to possess heaven and earth. And if we think such a punishment came to us for our having committed such a sin, what have we more to do than to cast ourselves at his feet, desiring both correction and pardon. And our **Lord** will either give them both, or else the pardon without the correction, but never the correction without the pardon, if the fault be not our own. We must therefore take any tribulation, as an introduction to peace ; and provided there may be peace between **God** and us, let any thing come which he will send.

One only thing we have to fear in this case, which is, lest we should indulge negligence under the pretence, I can do no more. We must here look upon ourselves with many eyes ; for this **Eve**, which lives within us, is so desirous to be cherished, that she wants not a thousand inventions to make reason believe, she demands nothing superfluous, but of mere necessity.

There is need here of two things ; the one that when we are able to perform our spiritual exercises, we do not omit them by any means. Be not faint in labouring for the love of our **Lord**, since true love knows not, what it is to be remiss, and as you are to be pious towards your beloved, so are you to be severe towards yourself. Your **Ladyship** shall do well to call to mind what heroical acts the love of **Christ** hath wrought in this world, in those hearts where it hath dwelt. It hath made them endure prisons, torments, dishonours, and that with much joy, whilst the great worth of the beloved hath been placed before their eyes : And since it hath wrought so great effects in others, let it not be weak in you, as that it cannot enable you to pass through a little affliction, for the pleasing of so high a **Lord** ; by whom you shall be so much the better accepted, as you shall come to him with more affliction. Yet our **Lord** is not desirous of pain, but only of our love ; but the truth of love is hardly known, unless in somewhat which puts us to pain. For the friend who stands fast in time of

tribulation, he is the friend indeed. And though God do well know what we are, without making any particular experiment, yet he loves to try us, that we may know it too; that so we may have comfort in finding ourselves faithful to him, and so may live in hope, that we shall enjoy our beloved.

So that this must be your method, when you are free from your pains, you may exercise your mind in spiritual things; and beseech our LORD to give you to know when it is the flattery of flesh and blood, and when it is just necessity which hinders: For he who uses the knowledge well which he hath, shall obtain light for that which he knows not: But as for others, with what face can they ask new light, since it may be answered them thus, Why desirest thou to know further what my will is, since in that which thou knowest already thou compliest not?

And when you have any ease, though it be not much, let your mind also be in some exercise of spiritual things, recording your desires, and presenting yourself before our LORD.

The woman of Samaria asked where she was to pray; and our LORD answered her, that it was every where to be done, and that in spirit. And so is the Christian to do, who in all his works is to pray to the LORD; not in the mountain or in the temple alone, but in eating, drinking, and sleeping, in health and in sickness, referring all to God, and joying in all things because he receives them from that holy hand.

Your Ladyship is to have great care, that you straiten not the goodness of God. Do not think that you are to seek him, and to find him, only in such a place, or such a work. He is every where, and if you seek him every where, you shall every where be sure to find him. "I rejoiced," saith the wise man, "in all things, because this wisdom went before me."

And so doth he also rejoice, who in all things beholds God, performing that which he commands, and ever keeping the heart in attention to him; and from the contrary flow

sadness, and disgust, and dejection, which is to be avoided with much diligence: For it brings much hurt both to our body and to our soul, and to our neighbour; whereas joy and comfort give strength, cherish the SPIRIT of GOD, which dwells in such as are his servants; for his SPIRIT is cheerful.

And since the lodging which he takes up is in the heart, you are not to be in pain that your body is no better: For though there may be some impediment why we cannot *labour*, yet there can be none why we may not *love*. So much the more must we love our LORD, who is desirous to give strength to that heart which seeks to love him; for this tends to the accomplishment of that very thing which he likes best of all others both in heaven and earth, and that is *love*. Wherewith I desire that your Ladyship may so abound on earth, that you may be lodged near our LORD in heaven. Amen.

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LETTER VI.

To the same Lady.

MY SOUL loves yours because GOD loves it, and because I am to have no little part in your happiness. ST. PAUL saith, "that they to whom he preached, were his joy, his honour, and his crown;" in that, receiving the word of GOD from his mouth, they had begun to walk in the way of GOD. For, besides, that he rejoiced in their good, he also hoped to receive a reward at the last day, for having been that instrument, by means whereof, GOD had gained those souls, and therefore did he call them "his crown." Because, as a crown doth beautify and honour the head of such as put it on; so they who are saved by means of any man's preaching, will be a means of honouring and joying that man, as some beautiful crown of rich stones might do.

Now this being so, I confess you owe me not many thanks, for my wishing well to your soul; because the good thereof is mine, in regard that GOD hath done me the favour to

bestow you upon me, for my spiritual child, and will impart you to me as one of the precious stones of that crown, which one day he will vouchsafe me, if I continue faithful in that vocation, by which he hath called me. And now because you are a *stone*, which he will set in a *crown*, it is the pleasure of our LORD to work, and polish you well. For it is no way fit, to put such *stones* in a *crown*, as are either rough or of no worth; such as these will be thrown into hell, since they received not their being wrought and enamelled by the SPIRIT of our LORD. But those living *stones*, whereof the celestial Jerusalem is built, are wrought here with so many blows, that it seems as if our LORD would break them; and he gives them new blows, even before the pain of the former be gone. But yet, he hath no intention to break them, but to polish them; not to destroy them, but to beautify them, and to make them such that the more they seemed to be ill handled here, the more brightly they may shine at the latter day.

O happy strokes, which are to end in such repose! O happy labour, which shall be paid by the embraces of GOD himself! Wound us here, O LORD, as much as thou wilt, so that thou cherish us there. Here make us weep, that there thou mayest wipe away our tears. Discomfort us here in all things, so that we may enjoy thee, who art *all things*; and be rigorous to us here, so that there thou have mercy for us. In this world, we are like banished men, and crowded up into a corner. Heaven is our country and our liberty; therefore, howsoever things happen, we will make a shift to pass it here, to the end that "when the glory of GOD shall appear, we also may appear in glory."

Madam, you must give thanks to our LORD, for he treats you as he hath treated, and as he means to treat, his best friends. And as for that "only-begotten SON" of his, who is the principal *stone* of all *stones*, do but see what blows they gave him. For they wrought, and beat upon him, from head to feet. And so according to the place which every one is to have there, he must be wrought and polished

here. Now if this be necessary, even for just persons, what shall become of us sinners, but only that we must bow down the head, and say, O LORD, thou punishest me little in comparison of the punishment I deserve. All that I can suffer is little, though I alone should suffer all the afflictions of the whole world. For to him who deserves hell, what temporal pain can seem great?

Let us know, that GOD is full of pity towards us, even then, when he seems most rigorous; since whomsoever he punishes here, he will not punish, but comfort there. All which we endure, we deserve; but yet GOD is so very full of pity, that the stripes which he sends us, he accounts as a piece of service from us. Therefore, he who knows CHRIST, hath no compassion of himself in this world, because he knows himself to be more fit for GOD, the more afflictions he endures for his sake. So saith IGNATIUS, ‘ Fire, cross, fury of beasts, cutting, quartering, breaking, and destroying of every part of my whole body, and the scourges of the Devil himself: Let all these things come upon me, and let me only enjoy CHRIST our LORD. There is nothing in this world, which can do me good; not even a kingdom. It is more happiness for me to die for CHRIST our Lord, than to exercise dominion over the earth, from one end thereof to the other.’

In this manner, I desire that you would encourage yourself to suffer the remedy of your sins; yea, and though you had not committed sin, you should yet apply yourself to endure affliction, for the love of JESUS; who endured so great things for you, without having given the least cause himself. And I would have you say to him, that however you are bound to suffer what he will send, yet out of a free heart, you would gladly suffer, for the love of him, though you were not bound to it. And thus according to the intention of your heart, our LORD will accept it at your hands, as a token which you carry for his love. In the loves of this world, men use to make other tokens; but in the love of GOD, the token is suffering affliction. And he who is not of a strong heart to suffer much, let him

never tell me that he loves much. For in this world there is no love without grief. I hope in God, that as here he gives you grief and trouble; so he hath provided a place of rest and joy for you in the other world. Though indeed the very suffering for such a LORD is reward enough; and as there is nothing so much to be desired in the other world, as to enjoy that kingdom with CHRIST our LORD, so neither is there any thing in this which may be compared to the excellency of suffering with him and for him. Suffer therefore with a good will, since you are to be crowned for the same. For the afflictions which you endure come to you but as a means, whereby you may obtain that crown.

LETTER VII.

To his Friend, grown cold in the Way of Virtue.

HE, WHO in time hath seen his soul a proficient in virtue, and at the present finds it to be in decay, hath much cause to be in pain, and to procure remedy, by all the means he may. For if a man be able to feel the diminution of his temporal goods; how much more ought we the decay of the goods of our soul?

But although this mischief be great, even for the present, yet it is greater by much, for the future loss, which may be feared. For a little fall in relation to a great one, lies as close as the eve doth to the holy-day; and as near as he is to be vomited out, who leads a life of lukewarmness.

God, for his precious passion, keep every mortal man from that misery, which is so great as to make ST. PETER say, "that such men had better not have known our LORD, than, after they had known him, to have forsaken him." And that was not without great mystery, which our LORD said to the man who had been sick eight-and-thirty years: "Now thou art whole, sin no more, lest a worse thing happen to thee." These words are to be weighed, for they

contain a rigorous threat, and are delivered by the mouth of truth itself, and are wont many times to be executed upon such as fear not, nor take a course to prevent their falling into them.

There happens a worse thing to them, because the sins into which they fall afterward are more highly aggravated, and more deeply rooted, than the sins committed in former times. As there is difference between a man who hath wit, and yet doth the works of a fool, and another who hath no wit at all; or between a man who owes his life to another, and another who had received no such honours.

A great favour it is which GOD doth to them, to whom he gives both the knowledge of their sins, and of his love. But yet withal he obliges them to much thereby, since according to the gift the account must be made: And if it be ill done, not to pay good with good; what will it be to render evil for good, and to answer with offences instead of services?

There happens a worse thing to them, since they are wont to sin more, and with more faulty circumstances than before; and they come by little and little, to dry themselves up, so that they do not the good which they did before GOD called them to his service. Then do they sigh to obtain a little spiritual good again, and they find it not: They find heaven is to them of brass, and the earth of iron; for there is not a drop of water to be found, which may soften their souls, or yield them any fruit, whereby they may be sustained. And they who in former times, were visited and watered, with many good inspirations, now desire one and cannot compass it.

And it is not many miles from this hardness of heart to hell itself, the journey's end of those wicked sons, who, after they were received for sons, "forgot their LORD who possessed them, who made them, and who created them." He who trembles not at this, doth already give testimony that he is hard-hearted, and hath reason to fear so much the more, as he fears the less.

And therefore, Sir, let us consider these things, as signs of that which is like to follow. When we see the foundations of a wall fall away, it is time to apply some remedy.

Let us greatly fear the going backward in spirit only one day, and let us not suffer a defect, though it may seem small, to pass without punishment. I say, though it seem small, for in very deed none is so, for the very least of them doth us much hurt.

This mischief proceeds from one of these two causes; either not being thankful for the good received, or being negligent in preserving it: The cause why God imparting great benefits to many, without asking, doth yet deny them other inferior benefits which they asked afterwards, is, because they were ungrateful for those greater benefits; and thereby made themselves unworthy of the less. So that we must thank God for the benefits which we have received; and employ them well, lest we lose them all, and ourselves with them. Let us be remiss in other business, so we be attentive to this, with all our power. And he who hath received blessings from heaven may content himself with growing rich in them, though he be not so prosperous in this world. The world is so full of malignity, and our forces are so weak, that we are like a candle, in the midst of many winds, and if we fail to be very diligent to keep it in, they will blow it out.

Account this your chief estate, your honour, your safety, your life; place your right eye upon this, and your left upon other things: If somewhat must be lost, let it be that which one day will be lost, whether we will or no. And let that remain, which if we do not lose, we shall be saved for ever.

It is better to have a good conscience than temporal riches; and to have credit with God, than with man: Let us then begin to lead a new life, with fresh courage, being much offended with ourselves, for having been so ungrateful to our great Benefactor, and so negligent in that which concerned us most. Give not over prayer, the reading of spiritual books, the sacraments, though you perform them

but drily. But above all, let there be no want of humble prayer and of a wounded heart. For our merciful LORD who stands, expecting that we should go towards him, to do us good, will come out upon the way to meet us, and will cover us with the mantle of his goodness. I beseech his divine Majesty, that he may so proceed with you, for the eternal glory of his goodness.



LETTER VIII.

To a great Lord, wherein he treats of the Knowledge of God, and of one's self.

THE peace of our LORD JESUS CHRIST be ever remaining with your Lordship. ST. AUGUSTINE desired two things of our LORD: 'Grant that I may know thee, and that I may know myself:' These are things which we must all desire, and no man is found without them, unless he be found without salvation.

This so high thing, the knowledge of GOD, is not to be obtained without the knowledge of one's self. It is certain, no man ever saw GOD, unless first he saw himself. Nor is it safe for any man to fly high, unless he have the counterpoise of knowing himself.

When a man forgets himself, he becomes wanton, and not seeing his own faults and frailties, loses all holy fear and proves light and giddy, like a ship without ballast.

I never saw any soul remain in safety, but by the knowledge of itself. No building can be sure without a deep foundation; and that time is well employed, which is spent upon the reproof of a man's own soul. It is full of profit towards the amendment of our faults, if we will examine them. What kind of thing is a man who examines not and knows not himself? These are they who take such pains to understand the lives of others, and having shut their eyes to their own defects, have yet more than a hundred eyes open to watch over the error of other folks.

These are they who observe and aggravate the errors of their neighbours, and neglect their own.

I never yet saw a man, who was curious in the consideration of himself, who would not also easily pass over the fault of another; and whatsoever man is severe against another when he falls, gives strong evidence, that he considers not his own defects. So that if we desire to fly from this dangerous kind of blindness, we must be sure to view and review what ourselves are, that so, when we find how miserable we be, we may cry out for remedy to our LORD JESUS: Because, indeed, he is JESUS, that is to say a Saviour; but yet of no other, than such as know and bewail their own miseries.

Who is he that hath not erred, in those things wherein he thought himself most sure? Who hath not desired and searched after things as good for him, which yet afterward he found to be for his hurt? Who will presume to know any thing, since he hath been deceived innumerable times? What is more blind than a man who knows not so much as what he is to ask of GOD, as ST. PAUL tells us? And this comes to pass, because we know not so much as is good for ourselves, as it happened even to the same ST. PAUL, who, begging of GOD that he would free him from a particular temptation, conceived that he had asked aright, but it was given him to be understood, that indeed he knew nor what he asked, nor so much as what was good for him. And now who will put confidence in his ability, to know even so much as what he should judge, and desire concerning himself, since he, whom the HOLY GHOST so inhabited, did ask that which was not good for him? Certainly, our ignorance must be very great, since we err so often in those things, wherein it imports us so much not to err.

But now though sometimes our LORD should teach us to know what is good, yet who doth not see how very great our weakness is, and how we fall flat upon our faces, in those things wherein it concerned us to stand upright? To whom hath it not occurred many times, to propound the doing of some good thing, and yet find himself overthrown, and overcome by that wherein he took himself to

be invincible? To-day we lament our sins with tears, and purpose to refrain them afterward, and yet, even whilst the same tears are wet upon our cheeks, some new occasion is offered, and we commit that very thing, for which we have cause to weep again. What is so weak and light, which changes so often upon the turning of all winds, as we? Sometimes merry, and sometimes sad; now devout, and then distracted; now full of desire to heaven, and then dropping down to hell; now we abhor a thing, and instantly we love that which we abhorred.

What thing can there be, with such variety of colours in it as a man? What image can they paint with so many faces, and so many tongues? How truly said JOB, "Man never remains in one state:" And the reason hereof is, because he is ashes or dust, and his life a wind. Now who would seek for any rest between dust and wind? To how many several dispositions is one man subject, in one only day! His whole life is a very mass of mutability and frailty; and that which the Scripture saith, agrees well to him: "The fool is changeable as the moon."

But now what remedy shall we find? Certainly we can have none better than to know ourselves lunatics. And, as in former times, they carried the lunatics to our LORD JESUS CHRIST, so let us go for cure to him.

O danger of hell, which is so mightily to be feared! And who is he, that will not watch with a thousand eyes, that he may not be put to welter in that profound lake; where he shall eternally bewail the temporal delight, which he hath unlawfully enjoyed? Who will not take care of his way, lest he be found wandering from all happiness? Where are the eyes of that man, who sees not this? Where are his ears, who hears it not? Our sins are innumerable, our frailties are great, our enemies are stout, crafty, and many. That whereof we are in question, is either the gaining or losing God, for all eternity. How comes it then to pass, that in the midst of so many dangers, we can esteem ourselves secure; and under the weight of so many wounds, do not feel the pain thereof? Why seek we not for some remedy, before the night steal upon us,

and before the gates of all succour be shut against us, when these foolish virgins shall cry out, and it shall be answered, "I know you not?"

Let us therefore know ourselves, and we shall be known by God. Let us judge ourselves, and so we shall be absolved by God. Let us place our eyes upon our own faults, and so there will be mercy for us. Let us consider our own miseries, and we shall have pity upon those of others. If I see myself fall, I shall think it may happen so to my neighbour; and as I shall be glad to have my fault pitied, so will I have pity upon other men. If I be sad, I desire comfort; and my neighbour's case is the same. I am troubled at an ill word which was spoken to me, and say, 'I am made of flesh, and not of iron;' my neighbour also is made of flesh, and feels the like affliction, upon the like occasion. And there is no better rule by which I may live with my neighbour, than to mark attentively, that which passes within myself, since you and I are one.

Let us consider well, if we be deaf to the miseries of others, so will God be to ours. Let no man think that CHRIST will measure to us with any other measure, than we measure to others: Let no man think that he shall obtain pardon, if he afford not pardon. The untoward man shall meet with untowardness; the troublesome man, with troubles; the offensive man with injuries, and the charitable man with mercy: For to sow thorns with a man's neighbour, and to gather figs at the hands of God, is impossible.

Let us therefore know ourselves, and let us be towards others, as we desire they should be towards us, and so let us pass on to the knowledge of God: And let us lift up our eyes to our LORD, who was placed upon the cross for our salvation, and in him we shall discern both more and greater blessings, than we discovered miseries in ourselves: And if by thinking what we are, we grow sad, through the consideration of our grievous sins past, and through the dangers which are at hand; we shall be refreshed by looking up to him, when we consider, both how truly, and how super-abundantly he paid that which we owe, and pur-

chased that strength for us, whereby we may subdue our enemies.

And what, O LORD, shall he fear who follows thee? At what shall he tremble, who loves thee? Who shall be able to set upon that man, who takes thee for his defence? How shall the Devil be able to carry him away, who is incorporated in thee? How shall the eternal FATHER forbear to love that creature, whom he perceives to be in his SON, as the branch is in the vine? Or, how shall the SON fail to love that man, whom he perceives to love him? Or, how shall the HOLY GHOST forsake that creature, who is the temple which himself inhabits? We possess greater benefits in CHRIST our LORD, than miseries in ourselves. Nor is there any comfort for such a one as is discomforted in himself, but to look up to JESUS upon the cross, whom God hath ordained for the remedy of all such as should be wounded by the spiritual serpent. For as anciently God commaunded that they should erect a serpent of brass; that all such as should behold it might be cured, so he who shall behold CHRIST our LORD, with faith and love, shall live, and he who beholds him not, shall die.

He took the place of the accursed, in being tormented upon the cross, which was due to us, and we are admitted to the friendship of God, to be his sons, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven, with a thousand other benedictions, which came from our blessed LORD, in whom they remain for ever.

O wonderful exchange! that life should die, to the end that death may live. The sound man is wounded, that the wounded may be cured. The SON is treated as a slave, that the slave may be adopted for a son. They cruelly handle him who deserves all pity; and all the favour falls upon that person, who deserved hell. What shall we say? Innocency is condemned, and the wicked man is justified: What did CHRIST our LORD choose for himself? Our afflictions and miseries. What shall we say to such love as this; but praise and bless this LORD, day and night, who hath wrought our redemption by a way which put him to so much cost?

O thou honour of men and angels! be thou blessed without end. For all the honour, which all the race of mankind possesses, comes through thee: Thou gavest it by the conjunction of thyself to them, making thyself man, dying for men and exalting them to an equality with angels, if themselves will; and ordaining, that the sons of sinful ADAM may become the sons of GOD, and the heirs of thy FATHER, and co-heirs with thee, as being thy brethren. Thou didst abase thyself, O LORD, to exalt us, thou didst abase thyself below all men, that thou mightest raise us above the angels.

What shall we render to thee, O LORD, for so great favours? If we have any thing, if we be fit for any thing, and if we be any way acceptable to GOD, it is wholly by thee; we must yield thee all praise, for that thou, being what thou art, wouldest vouchsafe to offer thyself to so great afflictions, for such wretched things as we are. They cursed thee, O LORD, and thou blessedst us. Thy death gives us life, and thy affliction ease; since thou wert contented to be judged, it is reason that thou also be our Judge. Let us therefore rejoice, since he who loves us so much is to be our Judge; and we will go confidently to judgment, since the Judge is of our own flesh and blood.

If we be changeable and weak, let us look upon this Author of our faith, and see how he is nailed to that cross, both hand and foot; and that immoveably, that by his grace we may be constant in well-doing. He who will go to CHRIST for the cure of his inconstancy, shall obtain perseverance. He who dwells in CHRIST, doth not wander hither and thither, but stands fast in goodness. For he who is in CHRIST, participates of CHRIST: And so as CHRIST is just, is he also just.

All they who are in CHRIST, live by his SPIRIT, as thy members live by the head. And he who possesses this SPIRIT, is like CHRIST our LORD. And he who hath not the SPIRIT of CHRIST, let him hearken to ST. PAUL, who saith, "If any man hath not the SPIRIT of CHRIST, he is none of his."

Let a man therefore view himself, to see if he find a con-

formity of his soul with CHRIST ; if he have it, it will be easy for him to keep the commandments of CHRIST. And if not, let him go to CHRIST, and beg his SPIRIT of him : For it will profit me little, that CHRIST came into the world, if he come not into my heart. CHRIST brought down righteousness, peace, and joy in the HOLY GHOST, with many other blessings ; yet if I live in wickedness, CHRIST dwells not in my soul. And it is in effect, as if he had not come into the world at all, saving that it will turn to my greater misery ; for I shall be punished so much the more, because I would not admit of that salvation which was offered me.

This, my Lord, seemed sufficient to me, for the address of a person who hath a mind to draw near to GOD : But because in your Lordship, there is the capacity of two persons, your Lordship will have need of two rules. That which is said, may suffice for your own particular person ; but in respect you have a great charge over many others, it will be necessary for you to have more.

And methinks there is no better glass, wherein a man who is a Lord over others ought to look, than upon that LORD of men and angels, whose person he represents. He who sits in the place of another, should have the properties of him whose place he holds. A Lord of vassals is a lieutenant of GOD, who ordains that some shall govern and others obey.

Therefore let a man consider, what offices GOD exercises towards a man ; and so he shall know how he is to carry himself towards his people. GOD chastises such as err, without any acceptance of persons, and in this he is so strict, that he hath not any who is so great a favourite but that he shall pay for it, if he give just cause : Nay, he pardoned not his own SON, though he owed nothing for himself, but only because he obliged himself to pay for the sins of others. So there is nothing which should have power to make him who governs forbear the doing his duty, but he is to stand like the beam of a balance, which leans not either to the one scale or to the other.

There is nothing to which great Lords ought to attend so much, as truly and cordially (like men who live in the presence of God) to remain ever faithful and firm to him, without leaning either to this way or that: And this will be easily performed by that great man, who attentively considers that he is but the minister of God, as one who but merely executes, and must not exceed the commission which is given him. God places not great Lords in the world to do what they list, but to execute the laws of his holy will; and though they are Lords, yet are they still under the LORD of all, in comparison of whom they are more truly vassals than their vassals are theirs, and their power is as truly limited as their vassals' power is. He then is to be more favoured, who hath most right on his side, and he is to be punished who deserves it most. And thus may any Lord resemble the true LORD of all, if without acceptance of persons he give to every one according to his works, yea, and if sometimes he punish most, such as are most favoured by him, because reason would require, that they should offend him least.

I beseech your Lordship, that as you are a particular man, you will look into yourself with a hundred eyes, and that you will look into yourself with a hundred thousand, as you are a person upon whom many look and many follow. And take care to manage both your person and your house, as the law of CHRIST requires, that he who shall imitate your Lordship, may also imitate CHRIST therein, and may meet with nothing to stumble at. And let this be the conclusion, That the more attentively a man shall consider and imitate JESUS CHRIST, so much the better man, and so much the better Lord he shall be.

LETTER IX.

To a Lady whom he persuades to receive CHRIST, and to love him with fervent Love.

How busy will your Ladyship be, in this holy time, preparing a lodging for that guest who is coming to you! Methinks, I see you as earnest as MARTHA, and yet as quiet as MARY, that so by your endeavours, both exterior and interior, you may do him service, who is drawing near, since he is so worthy both of the one and of the other. O blessed time wherein is represented to us the coming of GOD in flesh to dwell amongst us, "to illuminate our darkness, and to guide our feet into the way of peace," to adopt us for his brethren, and to design us for the same inheritance with himself!

It is not without cause, that you desire his coming, and that you prepare your heart for his habitation: For this LORD was desired long before he came, and the Prophet called him "the desire of all nations:" And indeed he gives himself to none, but such as desire him. GOD "hears the desire of the poor," for his ears are laid close to the sighing of our hearts, and he cares for nothing else in us but that. To such a heart he comes, and cannot deny himself.

O celestial Bread, which descendest out of the bosom of thy FATHER, and art inviting as many as will, to come and enjoy thee, and feed upon thee! Who can withhold himself from going to thee, and from receiving thee, since thou givest thyself, upon no harder condition, than only that we hunger after thee? For dost thou ask more of us, than only that a soul sigh for thee, and confessing her sins, receive and love thee?

Great is the misery of those, who, when bread comes to them in their own houses, choose rather to die of hunger, than to stoop to take it up. O sloth, what a deal of mischief thou doest! O blindness, what a deal of blessing dost thou lose! O sleepiness, what a deal of advantage dost

thou steal away ! Since considering the promise, “that whosoever seeks shall find, and to him who knocks it shall be opened ;” it is clear, if we prove not well, the fault is ours.

But what ! shall things pass still after this manner ? Though GOD himself is come to cure us, shall we continue sick ? He being at the gate of our heart, crying out, “Open to me, my friend, my spouse ;” shall we, wrapt up in vanities, suffer him to stand calling there, and not open the gate ?

O my soul, come hither, and tell me (for I ask thee on the part of GOD) what is it that detains thee from going, with all thy forces, after GOD ? What dost thou love, if thou do not love this Spouse of thine ? Why dost thou not love Him, who did so mightily love thee ? He had no business on earth, but to attend to the love of thee, and to seek thy profit, with his own loss. And what hast thou to do in this world, but to exercise thyself, all, in love of this King of heaven ? Dost thou not see, how all that thou seest, must have an end, as also all that thou hearest, which thou touchest, which thou tastest, and wherewith thou dost converse ? Dost thou not see, that all this is but cobwebs, which cannot clothe thee, and keep thee warm ? Where art thou, if not in JESUS CHRIST ? What art thou thinking, what account art thou making, what dost thou seek, out of that only, one, complete GOD ?

Let us rouse up ourselves at last, and break off this bad sleep ; let us awake, for it is broad day, since JESUS CHRIST, who is the light, is come : Let us do the works of light, since there is a time wherein we did the works of darkness. O that the memory of that time, wherein we knew not GOD, might make us run greedily after him ! O that we could run, O that we could fly, O that we might burn, and be transformed into him ! What must a creature do, when he sees his Creator made man, and all for love of him alone ? Who ever heard of such a love as this, that one loving another, should by love be converted into that other ? It is true, that GOD loved us, when he made us

after his image ; but a far greater work it was to make himself after our image. He abases himself to us, that he may exalt us to him : He makes himself a man, that he may make us Gods : He descends from heaven, that he may carry us thither : In fine, he died, that he might give us life. And shall I lie sleeping, and without any sense of gratitude for so great love ? O LORD, illuminate mine eyes, that they may not sleep in such a death as this. And thou who hast done us this great favour, give us also a right feeling of it. Otherwise, the greater the benefit is, the more hurt it will do us in the end.

O LORD, open mine eyes, that they may consider thee, descending out of the bosom of thy FATHER. Make me able to humble myself for thee : Make me able to consider thee lying in a manger ; and let me learn thereby to cast all delicacy far from me : Let thy tears and sighs show and sound themselves in mine ears, that they may mollify my heart, and it may deliver itself over, as wax, to every inclination of thy will. And do not thou permit, that God should weep and man have no feeling of it.

Seal up, O LORD, thy words in my soul, that I may never sin against thee. Let the blood which thou didst shed for me, be gathered up into my heart, and be thou my only love, that so thou mayest not repent of all these great afflictions which thou enduredst for me. It is I whom thou soughtest, and whom thou seekest still ; and for me thou hast undergone all that cost. Let me never see myself belonging to any other than thee, since thou hast deserved me so well.

Come, Madam, let that heart of yours now prepare itself ; for GOD is upon the point of being born : And see that you tend and treat him well, for he is the son of a great high King, and he is the son also of a virgin, and he takes much pleasure to lodge himself in the hearts of virgins : And because he hath a great deal of poor people amongst his kindred, whom yet he loves dearly well, you must be also sure to love them, for they are the brethren of our Creator. As soon as he is born in your heart, you

must take care to nurse him : And I beseech him to keep and save you, for his mercies' sake. Amen.

LETTER X.

To some who were afflicted by a Persecution which was raised against them : He animates them to a love of the cross, and the imitation of CHRIST.

“ BLESSED BE GOD, the FATHER of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, the FATHER of mercies, and the GOD of all consolation, who comforts us in all our tribulation ; so that we also are enabled to comfort them who are in any kind of affliction. And this we do in virtue of that consolation wherewith GOD comforts us ; for as the tribulations of CHRIST abound in us ; so through CHRIST our consolation also aboundeth.”

These are the words of the Apostle ST. PAUL. Three times he was scourged with rods, five times with whips, and once he was stoned in such sort as that he was left for dead, and persecuted by all the generations of mankind, and tormented with all sorts of afflictions and troubles : And in all these tribulations, he doth not only not murmur, nor complain as weak persons are wont to do ; but he praises our LORD in them, and gives thanks for them, as for an extraordinary blessing, esteeming himself happy, to suffer for the honour of him, who suffered so great dishonours, that he might draw us out of that true dishonour wherein we were, being slaves to the baseness of sin ; and he beautified and honoured us “ with his SPIRIT, and with the adoption of the sons of GOD,” and gave us an earnest, and a pledge, that we should enjoy the kingdom of heaven.

O my brethren, consider how great favour he doeth us, by that which the world thinks to be disfavour ; and how high honour is reserved to us, for that abasement wherein now we are, and how delightful and dear arms our LORD

extends towards us, to receive such as are wounded in the war for his sake : And if we have any true understanding, we shall conceive a vehement desire of these embraces.

Know you for certain, that if you desire to enjoy heaven, there is no way more secure to it than that of suffering. This is that path whereby CHRIST our LORD, and all his servants, are gone before us. It is against all reason, that the SON of GOD, having gone by the way of dishonour, the sons of men should go by the way of honour, “ since the disciple is not greater than his master, nor the servant than his LORD.” And GOD forbid, that our soul should rest in any other thing, or should desire any other life, in this world, but only to suffer under the cross of CHRIST our LORD. Though yet I know not if I have said well, in calling that affliction which is suffered under that cross. For to my seeming, it is as the delight of a soft bed, full of roses.

O thou JESUS of Nazareth, how sweet is that odour of thee, which awakes in us those insatiable desires of eternity, and makes us forget the afflictions which we suffer here, whilst we consider for whom they are endured, and with what reward they shall be paid ! And who is he that can love thee at all, and yet doth not love thee crucified ? In that cross thou didst seek me, thou didst cure me, thou didst deliver me, thou didst free me, thou didst love me, giving thy life and blood for me, by the hands of base and eruel wretches : And therefore in the cross will I seek thee, and upon that I find thee ; and finding thee, thou helpest me, and thou deliverest me from myself, who am the creature which contradicts thy love, wherein mine own salvation doth consist.

But woe is me, what shame covers my faee, and what sorrow seizes upon my heart, who, having been so much beloved by thee, yet loves thee so little, as may be seen by the little which I endure for thee. I easily confess, that all men deserve not so great happiness, as to be marked out for thine with the mark of the cross ; but yet consider

what a sad thing it is for me to desire and not to obtain, to ask and not to receive : How much more, when I beg not delight and ease, but affliction for love of thee !

Tell me, since thou wilt have me to be both thy herald, and thy ensign, who am to carry the flying colours of thy Gospel, why thou dost not apparel me, from head to foot, with thine own livery ? O how ill doth the name of thy servant belong to me, who find myself naked of that garment wherewith thou wast continually apparelled ? Tell us, O beloved JESUS, was there any one day when thou didst put off that robe of suffering, to clothe thyself with repose and ease ? O no ; thou wert far from resting, because thou wert far from leaving to love, and this love made thee always suffer.

And when they stripped thee of thy clothes, to nail thee upon the cross, there was no part of thee which was not dyed with thy most precious blood : The head crowned with thorns, the face loaden with buffets, the hand pierced with two nails, and the feet with one ; a bitter one to thee, but dear to us ; and all the rest of thy body embroidered over with so many stripes, that it was no easy thing to number them.

He who, beholding thee, shall love himself and not thee, shall do thee an extreme wrong. He who, seeing thee in such a plight, shall fly from that which may make him like thee, doth not know thee with perfect love.

For my part, I am resolved to hold thee fast, though all other things be wanting, rather than I will remain of any other colour than thou art, though otherwise the world wherein I live might be all mine. For all those things, which are not thyself, are rather affliction and burden, than true happiness ; but in thy being ours, and our being thine, consists our true joy and riches ; for thou alone art all our true good.

I had forgotten myself, my dear brethren, in that whereof I began to speak ; and to beseech and admonish you, in the name of CHRIST our LORD, that you be not troubled

at those persecutions, or rather the shadows thereof, which are come upon us. For this is the lesson which we have been learning continually, saying, ‘ We must suffer, we must suffer for the love of CHRIST.’ Behold we are now at the very gates: Let us not be troubled like children, who are not willing to repeat their lesson; but comfort yourselves in the LORD, and in the strength of his power, who loves you and will defend you.

Let not the menaces of them that threaten you, breed you any trouble. I, for my part, value not all their threats at the weight of one single hair: For I am in the hand of CHRIST, and I have great compassion of their blindness: For the Gospel of CHRIST our LORD, which I have preached in that town, is hid from their eyes. But I desire much, and I beg of our LORD, that he will have mercy on them, and heap benedictions upon them in lieu of the curses which they cast on me, and glory for the dishonour which they do me, or (to speak more truly) which they desire to do me: For I am fixed in this, there is no honour for a man upon earth, but to be dishonoured for CHRIST our LORD.

Do you also, my dear friends, after the same manner, consider in all your neighbours, that they are the creatures of GOD, and that GOD desires their salvation; and then you will take heed of wishing ill to that man, to whom GOD desires so much good. Remember how often you have heard from my mouth, that “ we must love our enemies,” and that with great repose of mind, and without speaking ill of any. Settle this truth in your hearts, that he whom you have followed is the LORD of heaven and earth, and of life and death; and that, though all the world should say nay, his truth must prevail. Labour you to follow that truth, and whilst you are doing so, fear not men, yea fear not devils, no nor even angels, if it were possible for them to be against you. Be very careful to be silent amongst men; but be sure that your hearts speak much in prayer to GOD: And if you suffer any thing by the

tongues of evil men, take it as a particular favour from God, who will make you clean by the tongues of those evil men.

But in the mean time, esteem not yourselves better than they. You know not how long yourselves may continue in doing well, nor they in doing ill. “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;” and so hope that yourselves shall go to heaven, as not to judge that your neighbour is not to go thither; so value the favours which God hath done you, that you touch not upon the imperfections of your neighbour. For you know what happened between the Pharisee and the Publican, by which example we must be warned.

There is no sanctity assured, but in the holy fear of God, wherein I would have you grow old. We must not only fear God, when first we come to his service, but even to the end. This fear is no sad or irksome thing, but full of comfort; it takes away all levity of heart, and it makes a man not hasty to approve his own actions; but he leaves the judgment, both of himself, and of all the world, to Almighty God: As ST. PAUL said, “I judge not myself, but he who judges me is our LORD.” This is he whom you must fear, if you will persevere in well-doing, and if you will not have your building fall, but stand safe till it rise and reach to the most high God. But now this must be done by love, which I beseech our LORD JESUS CHRIST to give you. Amen. Pray for me cordially, as I believe you do: For I hope in God that he will hear you, and that he will give me to you, for your service, as in former times.



LETTER XI.

To a Widow. He comforts her on the Death of her Husband, and animates her to bear her Afflictions with Patience.

I HAVE deferred to write to you, out of a belief that my letter would be of little power, towards the mitigating your

sorrow: And I thought I should take a better course to utter myself to our LORD, who is the LORD of all comfort, and to recommend you to him, than to be speaking to you by my letters. But yet because they have been desired, and because our LORD hath power to work even by dead letters, I would not fail to do as I was commanded, beseeching our LORD to breed that comfort in your heart which I desire.

Our LORD hath so disposed, as to have you taste affliction; let his name be blessed, and his will obeyed, since that which the creature owes to his Creator is all reverence and subjection, not only in those things which are delightful, but in those also which are most painful. Now to make trial of this obedience, GOD is wont to teach us, in that which lies next our hearts: To the end that we may understand, that for so great a LORD we must be content both to do and suffer great things.

ABRAHAM bore a tender love to his son ISAAC, and GOD was pleased to try him in that. A great love it was which JOB carried to his seven sons, and yet GOD took them all away in one day. After this manner he is wont to proceed with such as he loves: For by this means both they are capable of testifying their love to him, and he takes occasion to do them great favours. I know well, that flesh and blood have no understanding of this language, and that they only employ themselves in feeling the grief and loss which they sustain, without caring for other things: But if GOD be in us, we must restrain our sense, and make it obedient to reason, and to the will of the LORD. And though it trouble us much, yet must we not let this flesh of ours overcome, but remembering the anguish of our LORD, which made him sweat drops of blood, and say, "FATHER, not my will, but thy will be done," we are to say the same, if we mean to be known for his disciples; since he will know none for his companion in heaven, but the man who carries the cross, and who will follow him as the sheep his shepherd, though it should cost him his life.

Should not adopted sons be content to endure that which the natural son endured? Who was more beloved by GOD.

than his first-begotten SON? And who was more loaden with variety of pains than he? “He was the man of sorrow, and he knew by experience what belonged to affliction.” And if you be able to count the drops of the sea, you may also count his sorrows. Will it then seem reason to you, that the SON of GOD, being all wounded with grief, even to the death, we should pass our lives without drinking once of the “vinegar and gall?” What! should we let him suffer alone, and yet pretend to reign with him in heaven?

Let all creatures at last know, that if the King of heaven entered into his kingdom by tribulations, we also must enter in by the same way. There is no other way but “Christ crucified;” and whosoever seeks any other, will not find it; and whosoever walks in any other, will lose himself. What is all this present prosperity, but a smoke which by little and little will be dispersed, so that we shall see nothing of it? And what are all the years of our life, but a short sleep out of which when we awake, we find how we were abused?

Our LORD hath visited you, that you may make more account of him, the more you see yourself in want; otherwise, do not conceive that GOD takes pleasure in your pain; but because he is merciful, he hath a tender feeling of your tears. Only he will put this wormwood into your cup, that so, being stripped of human comfort, you may have your leaning place upon him alone. GOD hath taken one comfort from you, but it is to give you another. He hath made you a widow, but it is that he may make himself your Father, since “Father of the forsaken” is his name. Many afflictions will not fail to offer themselves to you, in this widowhood; and in many things you will find the want of him, who was wont to remedy them. And in many of your friends, you shall find little help, and little fidelity, and less gratitude; but in all these things GOD will have you fly to him, and confer with him about the troubles you are in, and ease your heart with him. And if you trust yourself in his hands, infallibly you shall meet with a sure refuge in all your difficulties, and a perfect guide in all your ways:

And many times without your knowing by whose means, or how it comes to pass, you shall find your business done to your hand, much better than you could have imagined; and you shall then understand by experience, how great a Friend God is to the afflicted, and how truly he dwells with them, and himself solicits their causes.

And if at any time he doth not give you that which you desire, it will be to give you that which is fit: For so doth this celestial Physician proceed with them who go to him for their recovery, and who have a greater desire to be cured than that their taste be pleased. Depart not you from his hands, though it should put you to much pain: Desire him not to do what you will, but what he will: Let your weapons be your prayers and your tears, and they not lost tears for that which our LORD hath taken from you, but living tears, that our LORD may be pleased to save you.

But for what doth that superfluous pain serve which they tell me you give yourself, but only for the adding of sin to pain? You know, as we have no liberty to laugh idly, so neither have we any to weep superfluously; but both in the one and in the other, we must be obedient to the holy will of our LORD. Why do you complain? Either you are a sinner, and then you must be brought to repentance by this affliction; or else you are a just person, and then you must be tried, that you may be crowned: Whether it be the one or the other, you must give thanks to our LORD with your whole heart, and resolve to love the end and reason of this correction, though the thing itself be displeasing.

Let not your time pass away in glutting your eyes with tears, but send your heart up to God, and so prepare yourself for that passage whereby you see others march before. It is enough that you have already made so large a feast to flesh and blood. Dry your eyes at last, and let not that time pass in bewailing death, which was granted you for the gaining life.

You served our LORD with alacrity in the state of matrimony; serve him now in the state of widowhood, and in

the trouble of that state, with patience: So if then you gained thirty-fold, you may now gain sixty.

But for the obtaining of this, you must demand grace of our LORD with prayers and tears, reading devout books, and receiving the most blessed sacrament; and so lift up your heart, and walk on. The jewel you expect is of so inestimable a value, (it being GOD himself,) that how much soever it cost, it can never be dear. And since you are one day to possess it, you are now to rejoice in the hope thereof. And complain not of your afflictions, but say, 'So great is the good for which I hope, that I feel not the misery which I have.' Let JESUS CHRIST our LORD accomplish all this in you, as I desire and beg of him. Amen.



LETTER XII.

To a holy Woman, about a Book which she was desired to publish: He declares also how she is to carry herself in spiritual Things.

THE grace and peace of JESUS CHRIST our LORD be ever with you. When I consented to read that book of yours, which was sent me; it was not so much out of any opinion, that I was able to judge of the things contained therein, as because I thought that myself might profit by them. And I thank CHRIST, that I was comforted thereby, and may also be benefited otherwise, if the fault be not mine own. And now both the matter itself, and the person who commends it to me, require me to say what I think thereof.

The book is not fit to come into the hands of many: Some things may be profitable to your spirit, which would not be so, if they should be followed by others. For the particular ways whereby GOD guides some, are not fit for all.

The doctrine of your prayer, for the most part, is good; and you may very safely believe it, and practise it: In your ecstasies, I find the signs which true ecstasies have.

To discern that they proceed not from our own spirit is easy ; but to find whether they come from a good spirit, or from a bad, is more hard. Men give many rules, whereby to know if they be of our LORD ; and one of them is, if they be spoken in some time of great spiritual necessity ; or if a man profit much by them, whether it be by way of comforting him when he is in temptation, or for the preventing of any danger : For if even a wise good man will not speak a word which is not of much weight, much less will Almighty GOD. Considering both this, and that the words must be agreeable to Holy Scripture, I am of opinion that these words which are mentioned in your book, or the greatest part of them, are of GOD.

That whereof there is more doubt, are the visions whereof you speak. These must in no case be desired. Yet if the soul reap profit by them ; and if the sight thereof induce it not to vanity, but to increase humility ; if that which they say be agreeable to Scripture ; I see no cause why we should fly them any longer. Though yet nobody is to trust his own private opinion herein ; but he must instantly communicate the matter to some person who is able to give him light. This is the general course which must be taken in all these things ; and we may well hope that whoever hath humility to submit himself to the judgment of others, GOD will not suffer him to be deceived.

No man should easily condemn those things, only because the persons to whom they are vouchsafed are not perfect. For it is no new thing for our LORD to draw men even out of sins, (and great ones,) by giving them very sweet consolations. And who shall limit the goodness of our LORD ? Though these things are vouchsafed sometimes to such as are most weak : For as they do not necessarily make a man more a saint, than he was ; so neither are they always given to the greatest saints.

But yet they have no reason, who discredit such things as these, because they are very high ; and for that it seems to them incredible, that so infinite a Majesty should abase itself to such communication with a poor creature. It is

written, "God is love;" and if he be love, he must be infinite love, and infinite goodness. And from the hand of such love, and such goodness, it is no marvel if some souls receive such excesses of love, as may trouble others, who understand them not. And though men may understand, that there are such things in the world, yet the particular experience of this proceeding, which God holds with whom he will: This, unless it be possessed, a man cannot understand to what degree or point it arrives. I have seen many scandalized at the vast love of God towards his creatures: And because themselves are far from receiving those favours, they cannot think that God will do that to others, which they find him not to do towards them. And though it were reason, that even because it is such love as casts us into admiration, it should be a sign to think it were of God, (since he is wonderful in all his works, and much more in those of his mercy,) yet from thence they fetch reasons why they should not believe them, provided always that there be a concurrence of other circumstances, which show that the thing in itself is good.

For your part, by what I can perceive in your book, you have resisted such things as these, even more than you should. They have profited your soul; they have made you know your faults, and enabled you to mend them; I find they have lasted long, and that they have always been with spiritual profit; they incite you to the love of God, and to the contempt of yourself. I see no reason why I should condemn them, but I incline to think they are right. But yet ever with this condition, that you use great caution, and that you go not with entire confidence, especially if that which happens be not usual with you, or when it requires you to do any particular thing which is subject to some question. In all these cases, you must suspend your belief, and instantly ask counsel.

I also think good to let you know, that, though these things be of God, yet the enemy may mingle somewhat with them; and therefore you must never be without care and fear in such things. Know farther, that though they

be of **GOD**, you must not reflect upon them with too much estimation; because sanctity consists not in these things, but “in the humble love of **GOD** and your neighbour.” As for the others, they are to be feared, even when they are right; and you must pass from the thought thereof, to the procuring of humility, and other virtues, with the love of our **LORD**. You must also be sure not to adore any of those visions, but only adore **CHRIST** our **LORD**. And if it be a vision of any saint, you must lift up your heart to heaven.

I must also tell you, that these things happen to many in those times; and this, with great certainty, that they are from **GOD**; “whose hand is not shortened,” to do that now, which he did in former ages; and this in the weaker sort of vessels, that so he may be glorified the more.

Go you on in your way; but so as that you be ever in fear of thieves, and that still you be asking, if the way be right. And give thanks to our **LORD**, for that he hath bestowed upon you the love of him, and the knowledge of yourself, and a love of the cross. As for those other things, make no high account thereof; though yet on the other side, you must not despise them, because there are signs which show, that many of them are sent by our **LORD**; and even they which are not, cannot hurt you, if you ask counsel.

I beseech you, even for the love of our **LORD JESUS CHRIST**, to lay it as a charge upon yourself to pray for me. I ask it, as being urged by great necessities; and I think this alone will suffice for the obliging you to do it. **JESUS** be glorified by all, and in all. Amen.

LETTER XIII.

To some of his spiritual Children at Ezija.

THE PEACE of our **LORD JESUS CHRIST** be ever with you. Amen. Since I parted from you I have ever had

you all with me in my memory, for the love I bear you permits me not to do otherwise. Give yourselves still to God, since you once gave yourselves to him, and I was a witness thereof, nor repent the having offered yourselves to him, since he offered himself to death for you. You shall be sure to have battles, and those sharp enough; for our enemies are in great multitude and full of rage. Be not therefore negligent; for if you be, you are undone. If they who watch best, have enough to do, to defend themselves; what do you think will become of careless persons, but that they will entirely be overcome?

Remember that the pleasure which sin presents is small and short, and the sorrow it leaves behind is very great, and the misery which grows to us thereby is incomparably greater. What sorrow, how great soever it be, can equal our loss of ALMIGHTY GOD? O misery, which should make us tremble, even in hearing it named! For if we delight in sin, we shall have no part in GOD. Let us therefore consider how we live; for we shall shortly be led before the throne of GOD, to give account of ourselves. Let not the uncleanness of the flesh, nor the vanity of the world, nor the subtlety of the Devil, deceive us: But let us behold CHRIST our LORD.

Who ever looked after CHRIST, and was deceived? Infallibly there was never any. Let us therefore never take our eyes off from him. He died for this, that we, by looking to him, might die to our sins. Let us approach his wounds; for by his, ours shall be cured. And if we think it a heavy thing to part from our sins, it was much more hard and heavy for his soul to part from his body, when he died that we might live.

Let us therefore go on a-pace after such a Captain as this, who leads us the way not only in *doing*, but in *suffering*. Let us crucify our flesh with him, that we may no longer live according to the desires of the *flesh* but of the *spirit*. If the world persecute us, let us hide ourselves in him; and we shall find those injuries as delightful to our hearts, as music is to the ear. So rude stones will be to us

as precious jewels, and prisons will be palaces, and death itself will be converted into life. O JESUS CHRIST, how strong is that love of thine! And how truly doth it convert all things to our good! Infallibly that man shall never die of hunger, who is fed by this love of thine; he shall feel no nakedness; he shall never find want of any thing which this world can give: For, possessing GOD by love, no good thing can be wanting to him.

Let us therefore, my beloved brethren, go and see this "vision of the bush which burns, and yet is not consumed;" that is, how they who love GOD, suffer injuries, and yet feel them not; how, in the midst of hunger, they are full fed; how they are cast off by the world, and yet not afflicted thereby; how they are assaulted by the fire of fleshly appetites, and yet not scorched by it; they are trodden under foot, and yet stand fast upright; they seem poor, and they are rich; they seem strangers, but they are citizens; they are not known to men, but they are to Almighty GOD. All this, and more, is brought to pass by the love of our LORD JESUS CHRIST in the heart where it is lodged. But no man can arrive unto this, unless "he put off his shoes," that is to say, his unmortified affections, which spring up out of self-love: For this is the root of death, as the love of GOD is the cause of life. He who loves CHRIST our LORD, must abhor himself.

Let us therefore give our all, that which we are, (which GOD knows is but a *little all*,) for that other *great all*, which is Almighty GOD. Let us give over following our own will, and with diligence follow the will of GOD. Let us esteem "all things as dung," so we may possess that "precious pearl," which is CHRIST our LORD. And to the end that we may see him in his beauty and glory, let us here be content to embrace dishonour and labour.

He shall never find himself deceived, who makes such an exchange as this. But when GOD shall come with his saints, to reward every one according to his works, then will that appear to have been folly, which now is held in so great account; and then it will be their turn to lament, who shall have spent their mortal lives in delight: And he only

will be avowed by CHRIST our LORD, who shall have lived according to his holy will. O how great shall the joy of good men be at that day, when receiving high honour at the hands of GOD, they shall be seated upon those thrones which were prepared for them from all eternity; and when in society of all the choirs of angels, they shall sing the praises of their LORD and their GOD! O how great will their joy be, “who shall behold the King in his beauty!” In comparison of this, all beauty is deformity, and the very brightness of the sun is darkness.

O eternal God, thou who art all things, and yet who art none of these things, when shall that day arrive wherein we may see thee? When shall these chains be broken, which hinder us from flying up to thee, who art the true Repose? Let us not, my brethren, look any other way, but only on Almighty GOD. Let us call upon him in our hearts, that he may never part from us; for woe be to us, wretched things, what shall we be able to do without him, but to turn again into nothing? Let us now at last cast this world behind, and at last try how sweet our LORD is. Let us run after him, who came from heaven itself that he might carry us thither. Let us go to him who calls us, and who doeth it with so much love, from the top of that cross, with his flesh all torn. O that we might feed thereon! O that we might even be consumed thereby! O that we were all transformed! O that we could grow to be one spirit with God!

Who is he that detaineth us, who is he that hinders us, who is he that deceives us so, that we cannot persuade ourselves to draw near to GOD? If it be our goods, let us cast them away, if they be in our power; if they be not, let us keep them, though only as so much dung: If it be our wives, ST. PAUL lets us know, “that we must have wives, as if we had them not:” If it be our children, let us love them, but for the love of GOD. Let the tears of grief wash us, and the fire of love consume us; and so we shall grow to be those holy creatures which were offered up to GOD with fire.

O eternal GOD, who consumest our coldness, how sweetly dost thou burn, and how dearly dost thou inflame, and how delightfully dost thou consume us! O that we all might altogether burn with thee! Then would all our powers cry out, and say, "O LORD, who is like to thee?" For "whosoever he be that saith he knows thee, and yet loves thee not, is a liar." Let us therefore love thee, and let us also know thee, since love grows from that knowledge: And let us possess thee; and possessing thee, let us be possessed by thee, and so let us employ ourselves, in praising thee, "since all the powers of the heavens confess and praise thee," GOD Three and One, the infinite King, wise, powerful, good, and beautiful, the Pardoner of them who believe in thee, and the Upholder of them who approach to thee, and the Glorifier of them who serve thee; that GOD, of whose perfection there is no end: For thou surpassest all tongues, and all understanding; and thou art only known in perfection by thyself. To thee be glory, through the eternity of all eternities. Amen.



LETTER XIV

To a Lady who was in great Affliction.

AS SOON as I received your letter, I offered thanks to our LORD for having given you a sign, that your vocation came from his hand, and this sign is, that you have suffered tribulation. You must not be a little glad of this, since our LORD loves you. Nor yet must you be slack, since you are in the midst of many dangers; but carry your eyes towards him, who hath called you with so great love. You must also have a strong heart, for he called you not with intention to give you over in the midst of your journey; but to guide you under his own wings, till he have conducted you to heaven, where you shall see his face. Let not the faith of CHRIST our LORD, nor the love you owe him, sleep in you; for he never sleeps when there is a time of doing you any good.

These are tokens which he uses to send to whom he loves, to try if they also love him in their afflictions, and if they confide in him in their dangers.

It is enough for you, my good sister, to have known already by experience, how loving our LORD hath been to you; by his having drawn you to the knowledge of himself.

And you must love our LORD, though he correct you; you must confide in him, though you feel no comfort from him. Seek him though he hide himself; suffer him not to rest, till you have waked him, and till he confess that thou art faithful in his absence. And thus you shall find him return to you, with so much advantage, that when you enjoy him again, you will esteem your former affections well employed.

Pray for courage to suffer; for after the rate of your sorrows, shall your comforts be. Be not a lover of yourself, but a lover of GOD; lose yourself, and so you shall be sure to find yourself. And if once you would but trust GOD, and offer yourself to him with true love, there could nothing happen which would fright you. Our LORD said, "Let not your hearts be troubled, and do not fear. You believe in GOD, believe also in me." So that faith and love are the cause of peace and quietness to the heart.

There is nothing so necessary for you, that you may arrive at the end of that work, wherein GOD hath placed you, as to confide in him with love. Our LORD hath many proofs to make of you, and many tribulations shall grow where you look least for them; but if you stand armed with faith and love, you shall overcome them all.

Our LORD hath pleasure in such as fear him, and hope in his mercy. It is he who drew you out of the captivity of Egypt, when he inspired your heart with a desire of being his: And he leads you still through this desert, where sometimes you want the bread of doctrine; other times you want company which may speak of spiritual things, that so your way might be made the shorter. Now temptations rise against you from within, and then from without; now

from strangers, and then from domestics. But attend you only to your business; for he who did that for you, which was more, can never fail to do that for you which is less. He who made you a friend of an enemy, will keep you now when you are his friend. He who did not abandon you, when you fled from him, will much less fly from you, when you follow him.

Who is he that can say with any truth, that God did not help him if he were desired? Have no fear, O servant of CHRIST, of any thing which may happen to you; but confide in him, who loved you so well as to die for you. It is true, that you have but one who protects you, but that one is of more power, than all who contradict you. Do not think how great the giants, and how strong the cities, with which you must encounter, for it is not you who must fight; "but hold your peace, and our LORD will fight for you." Do not fly from the war, nor abandon yourself, as one overcome; "and so you shall see the favour of our LORD towards you." For in this war, he only loses the battle who quits the field. It is true that you are weak, but in that weakness of yours God will show his strength. It is true that you know not much, but God himself will be your guide: By your miseries, God will make his mercies appear: Who are you, that you should be able to pass through such difficulties? But yet say, with DAVID, "In the strength of my God I will leap over a wall." Who are you, that you should be able to fight? But yet say with him again, "Though thousands should rise against me, yet my heart shall not fear." Believe, my good sister, that how much the harder this business is for you, so much the easier is it for Almighty God. Therefore you must have great distrust of your own weakness, but great confidence in God's strength. Infallibly he will crown you, if you continue in his love, and if you confide, that by his grace you shall obtain that crown.

Forget not this promise of CHRIST our LORD, "Him who confesses me before men, will I confess before my FATHER, who is in heaven; but him who denies me before men, will

I also deny before my Father who is in heaven." Can you think, that one is to esteem that for affliction, which he endures for the confession of CHRIST our LORD, since it is to have so high a reward, as that he shall be avowed by him, at the day of judgment, before his Father? Happy is that suffering, that dishonour, and poverty, to which so high an honour doth succeed.

What kind of joy will it be for you, to hear these words from the mouth of CHRIST, and that in presence of the whole world: "Come, you blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom which is prepared for you!" What will it be, when the angels shall sing to her who hath been a faithful servant of that celestial King, 'Come, O spouse of CHRIST, receive the crown which our LORD hath prepared for thee!' What will the spouses of our LORD conceive, when having passed through the sea of this life, and their enemies who disturbed us remaining drowned therein, they shall sing thus with great joy, for having run through this dangerous world, without being overwhelmed by the vices thereof: "The snare is broken, and we are delivered: Our help is in the name of our LORD."

Happy are you, if you be found faithful to the Spouse who chose you. Happy, if you have the courage to cast away that which is present, for that which is future. Be confident in taking his word, for you are not the first to whom he hath passed it, and fulfilled it; neither shall you be she with whom that word shall want effect. He gave his word to innumerable others, and tell me now how completely he hath performed it. They had the courage to despise the poor present world, and now they reign with God. They lived here in trouble, and they are now in the eternity of repose. Through how many combats did they pass, and they now enjoy the everlasting crowns of their conquest. They despised the earth, and they brought the King of heaven to be in love with them.

If they had followed the trace of this world, their delight had been passed, and their memories forgotten; but they loved that which was eternal, therefore their felicities shall

not die, and their memory shall not decay. They were written in the book of GOD, and therefore neither water, nor wind, nor fire, nor time, can make them waste; for that book is incorruptible, and so is the name which is written in it.

Therefore have strong confidence towards GOD, who is your salvation, and do not think that he sells heaven dear, for you have not yet shed your blood for him. Our LORD treats you like a weak creature, and you should be ashamed to have given him such cause. If you had more faith, and more love to suffer for him, he would have procured you more afflictions, that you might have purchased richer crowns. Do not content yourself with suffering little, considering how great your reward shall be; and how much CHRIST our LORD suffered for you. He gave his life for you, and he was deeply tormented.

How then come you thus to complain of the touch of a fly? Do but love, and you will desire to suffer. Let your love be doubled, and you will suffer sorrows which are doubled. The love of our LORD makes such as possess it, more greedy of suffering, than the love of one's self, of reposing. It makes that any burden weighs light, for love is stronger than death. He who loves not, groans under the burden; but he who loves, runs and flies, and it suffers him not to feel the weight even of his own body, nor of whatsoever else they can lay upon it.

It is not, my good sister, that the afflictions we suffer are greater, but that our love is little. The weight of a pound is no great weight; but yet lay it upon some little child, and he will say, 'O how heavy it weighs!' Whereas if a man took it up, he would scarce feel it. And so take you it for a sign, that if you love little, your afflictions will weigh upon you; but if you love much, you will scarce allow them to be afflictions.

Do but love, and you shall not be subject to afflictions, but you shall be superior to them, and praise him who delivers you from them. If they threaten you with death, you will bid it welcome, that so you may enjoy true life!

If with banishment, you will say, ‘That you esteem yourself banished wheresoever you are, till you arrive to see the face of GOD ; and that it imports you little, whether you go to heaven from this or that part of the earth ; and that if you have GOD in your company, wheresoever you are, you shall be happy ; and if not, your own country will give you misery enough.’ If you see yourself contemned, say, ‘CHRIST, our LORD, is my honour, and he honours me ; let the world despise me, so he value me.’

Do not afflict yourself about the necessity which you may sustain of other things ; for of yourself you must despise them, through the desire which you have to live in conformity with CHRIST our LORD, who made himself poor for you.

What is there in the world which ought to fright you ? If the love of CHRIST our LORD hath wounded you, you will tread the Devil under foot ; if you despise his threats, you will pass with courage through all your enemies.

Put your trust in him, who loves his lovers. There is nothing which you will not be able to do in him. Go and buy whatsoever you want of him, though he ask you all this world for it ; and see that you be not found without the love of him, though it should cost you your life. “ He is a hidden treasure, but he who finds him sells all to buy him.” For in him alone he finds himself more rich, than in the multitude of all other things.

See you love our LORD, and take no rest till he have granted you this gift. Love him with reverence ; for that is the kind of love which he likes. Esteem not him the less, because he communicates himself to you ; but wonder, how so great a Majesty as his, can stoop to such a worm as you.

Bad servants value their masters less for vouchsafing to become familiar with them. But they who live in the true light, esteem their LORD so much the more, as he doth more vouchsafe to diminish himself.

The true love of CHRIST carries this badge with it, as it highly esteems the goodness of GOD, so it also profoundly

disesteems the wickedness of man. Therefore love, adore, and serve our LORD with joy, but yet rejoice with trembling. Not a trembling as of a slave, in the midst of torments, but as of a true and tender-hearted child, who highly fears to give any disgust to her father, how little soever it may be.

Of yourself you can do none of these things; but if you humble yourself in the acknowledgment of your own miseries, if you present yourself often in prayer, before CHRIST our LORD, if you receive him spiritually by the communion, if you hear him speak to you in his word, and in fine, if you will but give him leave to help you, have confidence, that he will heal your soul, notwithstanding all the harsh encounters that may occur.

Do not start out of his hands, though the cure put you to pain, for he will work the cure at the fittest time. And for the afflictions which he sends you, he will give you his own most plentiful delight; and you shall be in full joy for all eternity, without the want of any good, and without the fear of losing what you have. You shall there find yourself to be highly well content and paid; and more felicity shall be imparted to you, than yourself could tell how to desire. Which felicity is not a creature, but the Creator himself of all things, that true God who lives and reigns for eternity. Amen.

A N E X T R A C T

FROM THE

COUNTRY PARSON'S ADVICE

TO HIS

PARISHIONERS.

IN TWO PARTS.

CONTAINING

- I. A SERIOUS EXHORTATION TO A RELIGIOUS LIFE.
 - II. DIRECTIONS HOW TO LIVE ACCORDINGLY.
-

A

SERIOUS EXHORTATION

TO A

RELIGIOUS LIFE.

INTRODUCTION.

I DESIGN, dear brother, through GOD's grace, to give thee the best assistance I can in a religious life; to direct thee how to live to GOD's glory, and to attain that happy estate, which GOD hath made thee capable of, and which thy SAVIOUR desires to bring thee to, by that holy religion which thou dost profess. But before thou dost accept of my assistance, it may be thou wilt desire to know, whether there be any reason why thou shouldest apply thyself to live such a life, and whether thou mayest not as prudently let it alone, and live as the most of thy neighbours do; and therefore I desire, that thou wouldest seriously consider the following things.

CHAPTER I.

Containing the first Argument to a holy Life, viz. that being GOD's Creatures we ought to be subject to GOD, as all other Creatures are.

FORASMUCH as thou knowest that thou art GOD's creature, and didst receive thy being and life from him, and subsistest altogether in him, thou must necessarily acknowledge that thou art, and oughtest to be at his disposal, and to live and act according to the end for which thou wast made. As thou art GOD's creature, and hast no other being than what thou hast received from him, so thou canst have no end, but what he who gave thee thy being, giveth

and prescribeth to thee. This is a law which all the creatures of GOD are and must be subject to, and thou seest that all the inferior creatures do act according to it: They do employ themselves according to the capacity of their being, in that for which GOD created them, and tend directly to the end for which they were created and ordained; and therefore, thou canst not but know, that thou oughtest to do so likewise, and that, for whatever end thou wast created, thou art constantly to pursue the same. Couldst thou thyself give life and being to any thing, thou wouldest and mightest justly expect the same from it. And therefore, I must beseech thee to consider for what end GOD gave thee thy being.

Now thou art sensible, that thou hast an excellent being, and that the other creatures which thou beholdest in the world, are much inferior to thee. Thou hast an understanding, and by that the knowledge of things, which they have not, and cannot have, namely, of things spiritual: Thou hast a will free to choose, or refuse, to do or not to do, according to the direction of thy understanding: Thou hast desires implanted in thy soul after things which they have no apprehension of; and art capable of enjoyments, which they are altogether incapable of: To what end then hadst thou this excellent being bestowed upon thee, and what is it that thou art to aim at, to desire, and endeavour whilst thou art in the world? Canst thou think, when thou considerest thy own faculties and capacities, that thou wast made merely to get a little money, by carking and caring, by toiling and sweating, by plotting and contriving? A poor business surely for such an excellent creature to be employed about! and thou debasest thyself extremely, and reproachest thy Maker, if thou dost imagine it.

But, brother, thou knowest that money is not a thing desirable for itself, but for use, as it procures necessaries for the body, and things pleasing to sensual appetites and desires; and therefore thou must inquire further, whether thou wast made only to eat and drink, and having made

provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof: And I beseech thee, brother, tell me, whether this will not sink thee down into the condition of the beasts; for certainly, they are as capable of such gratifications as thou art, notwithstanding thy excellent spirit and better capacities: They can feast as gustfully upon those provisions that God hath made for them, as thou canst do, and sing as merrily. Thou dost not clothe thy servant in purple and fine linen, to send him to the plough; nor bring up thy child in all the polite learning of the world, on purpose to employ him in feeding of hogs: And if thou shouldst see thy neighbour act so foolishly, thou wouldest not fail to deride him for it. And wilt thou dare to impute the like folly to the wise Creator and Governor of the world, and believe that he hath given thee an immortal spirit, to be employed only about the objects of sense, to the end that thou mayest live like the beasts that perish? Far be it from thee. Thou art made certainly for a much nobler end than they; and the consideration of the powers and passions of thy soul, would lead thee to the knowledge of it, though God had given thee no other means of knowing it.

Thou art capable of knowing thy Creator, of contemplating his infinite perfections, of admiring, and praising, and loving what thou knowest. Though thou livest in the world, yet thou canst have thy mind in heaven, and dwell with God by desire and love; and whilst thou dost feed thy senses on these perishing things, thou canst feast thy spirit much more upon the never-failing wisdom and goodness of the Maker of all things. Thou knowest him to be the Supreme Good, and that every thing is good and happy only so far as it partakes of his goodness and felicity; and thou knowest that there can be no nearer, no other way to perfect happiness, than to give up thyself wholly to him, to submit to his government and conduct, to do whatever he will have thee to do, to suffer all that he will lay upon thee, to have thine eye always upon him, to delight thyself in

him, to desire and hope more fully and perfectly to know him and enjoy him.

These things thou knowest, or mayest know, and thou art capable of acting according to thy knowledge; thou canst give thyself to God, thou canst submit thyself to him, thou canst serve him and obey him with a cheerful and active service, thou canst praise, and magnify him, and rely altogether upon him, and hope and long for a true enjoyment of him.

Behold then, what thou wast made to do, and observe how thou art to employ thyself in the world. Here is thy end, and this is thy work, a work worthy of so excellent a creature; it is called, in one word, to serve God; and whatsoever thou doest, or endeavourest to do, or bestowest thy time in, that tends not to this end, is but vanity and folly, mere lost labour, and will bring forth no fruit but grief and sorrow, shame and confusion; for that it is not the work that we came into the world to do. We were made men, that is, in the image of God, not to live like beasts, no, nor to please ourselves in any way; but to serve, and please, and glorify God here, and enjoy him for ever hereafter.

Judge then, good brother, whether thou hast not reason to serve God with all thy might in a holy and virtuous life.

CHAPTER II.

Containing a second Argument to a holy Life, from those Obligations which our Profession of Christianity lays on us.

FORASMUCH as thou dost profess thyself a Christian, I must desire thee to consider seriously, what that Christianity is which thou dost profess, and what the profession of it doth oblige thee to. To this purpose, I do beseech thee

to reflect upon thy baptism, and to call to mind what was then transacted between **GOD** and thy soul.

Now in it thou wast dedicated to **GOD** the **FATHER**, **SON**, and **HOLY GHOST** ; and, renouncing the world, the flesh, and the **Devil**, didst promise and vow obedience to all his commandments ; and **GOD** did mercifully accept of thee, and did take thee into his house and family, that family which **CHRIST** did purchase with his blood, and which he governs by his **SPIRIT**, and for which he hath prepared everlasting bliss and glory. Thou wast taken off that corrupt stock of the first **ADAM**, which brings forth fruit only to death and destruction, and grafted into the living stock of the Second **ADAM**, which bears fruit to everlasting glory.

Thou didst renounce that principle of sin and death, which thou didst derive from thy first parents, and whatever is grateful and pleasant to it ; and giving up thyself to **GOD**, thou wast received by him, and given to his **SON JESUS CHRIST**, who took possession of thee by the **SPIRIT**.

Our Church doth teach us this, both in the Office of Baptism, and the Catechism ; telling us, in baptism, ‘ we are regenerated,’ and ‘ made members of **CHRIST**, and inheritors of [that is, we have a right thereby to inherit] the kingdom of heaven.’ Thou seest then, dear brother, what thou art, as thou art a Christian, and what thou professest thyself to be. Thou art separated from the world, dedicated and consecrated to **GOD**, united to **CHRIST JESUS**, and in him, and by him, a child of **GOD**, and an heir of everlasting life. Thou art not thy own, therefore, but **GOD**’s ; and thou art his, not only by creation, but by redemption and purchase, by thy own act and voluntary resignation of thyself to him, by covenant and promise, by a real incorporation into the body of **CHRIST**. This is an honourable and a happy estate, and it was a wonderful grace, that such a worthless, rebellious creature should ever be admitted into it.

And need I now tell thee, brother, what kind of life

such a man as thou art, and in such an estate, ought to live ?

Since the estate of a Christian is an holy and divine estate, it is necessary that thy life and actions be holy and divine as thy state is. Art thou a member of CHRIST, ingrafted into his body, and quickened by his SPIRIT ? And oughtest thou not to be conformable to CHRIST, and live the life of CHRIST ? Art thou a child of GOD, and oughtest thou not “to be led by the SPIRIT of GOD,” (*Rom.* viii. 14,) and to “be a follower of GOD” (as the Apostle saith, *Eph.* v. 1) in love and purity ? Art thou an heir of heaven ? (for all the children of GOD are heirs, *Rom.* viii. 17;) and ought not “thy conversation to be in heaven ?” Ought not thy thoughts and desires to be upon thine inheritance ; and thy heart and life to be such as may render thee meet to be a partaker of it ? (*Col.* i. 12.) Wouldest not thou wonder to see the vine degenerate into a thistle, and the fruitful olive into an unprofitable bramble ? And what dost thou less, if being a Christian thou dost live like a Heathen ? Was it not a most dreadful curse that drove the great King NEBUCHADNEZZAR out of his stately palace into the fields, amongst the beasts to eat grass like the oxen ? (*Dan.* iv.) And dost not thou make his curse to be thine own choice, when being a child of GOD, an heir of the kingdom of heaven, which is more than to be Emperor of the whole earth, thou dost set thy heart upon this dunghill-world ? If with profane ESAU thou sellest thy birth-right for a mess of pottage, and despising the eternal inheritance, desirest to have thy portion only in this life ? Thou must confess, that thou art obliged to perform thy promises, and to pay thy vows unto the Most High ; and that, since thou hast given up thyself to GOD, thou hast not the least power over thyself, but oughtest to live altogether to him. If thou hast an ill opinion of thy neighbour, and that justly, when he is not as good as his word to thee, how canst thou but condemn thyself, when thou breakest thy vows unto the LORD ? And if, when any thing has been offered to GOD,

and consecrated by prayer, and serves to holy and divine administrations, thou esteemest it as separated from common use, and callest it a sacrilege to employ it in common ways; art not thou thyself guilty of the highest sacrilege, when, being dedicated and consecrated to God by baptism, thou dost withdraw thyself from him, and never employest thyself for him? The Apostle tells us, that “we are not our own, because we are bought with a price,” that is, the blood of the SON OF GOD. (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.) And I add to it, because we have likewise given up ourselves to him that bought us; and therefore there is the greatest reason that we should “glorify him in our bodies, and our spirits, which are God’s.” It was the saying of a devout man, many years ago, ‘that it had been better for us never to have been, than to dwell in ourselves and to ourselves;’ and we shall find it too true one day, if, forgetting our state and profession, and obligation as we are Christians, we do live to ourselves, and not to God. But this leads to a third consideration.

CHAPTER III.

*Containing a third argument to a holy Life, from the
Consideration of a future Judgment.*

CONSIDER, that there will a time come, when thou must give an exact account of thy life and actions; and it shall be known to all the world, how thou hast demeaned thyself, both as a man, and Christian. Dear brother, believest thou the Scriptures? I know thou dost, and thou hast the greatest reason in the world to do so. Observe therefore what they tell thee concerning that account which thou art to make; and then consider whether there be not reason enough why thou shouldest be careful to lead a holy life. It is a mighty encouragement indeed to us in well-doing, that our SAVIOUR is to be our Judge; but lest any of us should be so unwise as to make this an argument for a licen-

tious and careless way of living, he hath told us frequently, that he purposes to proceed severely with us, and to show no favour but what may consist with the exactest justice. And it well deserves our observation, that though he was the mildest and mercifullest person alive, and expressed the greatest tenderness and love to sinful men that ever was, in-somuch that his enemies cast it as a reproach upon him, "that he was a friend to publicans and sinners;" yet he never speaks of the day of judgment, but with great severity; nor of himself, as the Judge of the world, but in such words as altogether exclude that fond partiality which wicked men expect from him at that day. He hath let us know in plain words, that he will judge our works, nay, our very words also, and require an account, not only of our filthy and ungodly speeches, "but of our idle, our vain and unprofitable discourses likewise." (*Matt. xii. 36.*) Nay further, he hath told us, that the "very thoughts and purposes of our hearts shall be brought into judgment; the offending eye, the lustful, adulterous eye may cause the whole body to be cast into hell; and that a causeless anger entertained against our brethren," though it show itself neither by words, nor deeds, "will bring us into condemnation." (*Matt. v. 22, 23.*) Thou wilt think these hard sayings, it may be; and yet there is somewhat more to be considered, which may make thee think them much harder. Might our judgment be in private, and our accounts be made between God and ourselves only, we might, perhaps, notwithstanding all that which hath been said, look upon it as tolerable. But, alas! we are told, that it must be public, (without any regard to our modesty,) and before all the world; that "the very secrets of our hearts shall be disclosed before men and angels; that the hidden things of darkness shall be brought to light; (as one tells us who well knew the mind of CHRIST, *1 Cor. iv. 5;*) and all our counsels be made manifest." And further, that this shall be at "a time when (perhaps) we did not look for it, at midnight, or at cock-crowing;" that we may be hurried away to CHRIST'S judgment-seat, before we can trim our

lamps, or make ready our accounts, or think what course to take to approve ourselves to our Judge and LORD. We may be eating and drinking, or buying and selling, or planting and building, (as the people were in the old world when the flood came and swept them all away,) and the SON of man shall be revealed from heaven, and we shall be taken as in a snare; we shall not be able to flee away from him, nor to stand before him, because we are not prepared for him. (See *Luke* xviii. 26, 27, 28.) Nay yet further, his coming, we are told, will be with so much majesty and glory, there shall so many dreadful things go before it, and so much terror accompany it, that we shall be utterly confounded, and not able to lift up our heads, if we have not clear and good consciences. "The heaven shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth, and all the works that are therein shall be burnt up," (2 *Pet.* iii. 10,) and then "shall the LORD JESUS descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the arch-angel, and the trump of GOD;" (1 *Thess.* iv. 16;) and all "the nations and kindreds of the earth, and those that are in their graves shall hear his voice," (*John* v. 28,) and behold his glory, the "glory of the King of kings, and LORD of lords, who treadeth the wine-press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty GOD." (*Rev.* xix. 15, 16.) O dear brother, what wilt thou do in that day? And what shall I do who now ask thee the question? How shall we be able to bear the sight of so great majesty and glory? How shall we have the courage to appear before it? What dread, what horror will possess our souls? What confusion will cover our faces? How shall we tremble, when we think of our trial before that impartial and dreadful bar? And how will our hearts sink within us, when we are called to answer for ourselves? O brother, what will a good conscience, thinkest thou, be worth at that day? What wouldest thou then give for a pure and unspotted life, to present before the just Judge of heaven and earth, for as great a number of good works, as thou hast of sins, and rebellions, and pro-

vocations? Whatever thou thinkest of a good life now, believe it, thou wilt then think well of it; and happy, thrice happy shalt thou be, if thy own heart condemn thee not. Whether it will do so or not, I am not able to tell thee; but this I can assure thee, that no tongue is able to express the amazement, the consternation, the horror and anguish, the perplexity that shall possess and overwhelm thee, if it do condemn thee. Thou wilt not know what course to take, which way to look, nor whither to betake thyself; to avoid the judgment will be impossible, and to bear it thou wilt not be able. If thou callest for mercy, thou shalt find none; if thou desirest death, thy desire will not be granted; if thou callest to the hills to cover thee, they shall be deaf unto thee: All hope, all comfort shall utterly forsake thee, and thou must stand at the dreadful tribunal as a separate and helpless wretch, till thou hearest that dreadful and irrevocable sentence, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels." And now, brother, tell me, I beseech thee, what thoughts thou hast of a holy life? Is there any reason why thou shouldest be careful to lead such a life, or not? Dost thou think that thou canst avoid this dreadful account we have spoken of? Or dost thou hope, that an account made according to that careless way of living which we see most men live, will pass at that just tribunal? Canst thou have the face to make before God and all the world, such a declaration as this? "God gave me an excellent being, I acknowledge, and appointed me an excellent end; but I neither considered the one, nor thought upon the other: God made me capable to know him, to love him, and worship and serve him; and I was frequently told, that the business of my life was to do thus; but this I never intended or designed; or if I did, it was but by the bye, and when I had nothing else to do. I cannot deny but I was capable of bringing my Maker glory, by the improvement of those excellent faculties he bestowed upon me; but the lusts and appetites of the flesh, and the pleasures of providing for, and satisfying them, made me forget myself,

and the honour of him that made me. I must needs acknowledge likewise, that it was not ordinary grace which called me to the knowledge of CHRIST; but whether my Christianity laid any other obligations upon me than the bearing the name of a Christian, I could never find time to consider; I thought better of myself indeed than of other men, for my being a Christian; but that I have lived better than they, that I have been more mindful of God, and more profitable to men, I am not able to say: I have talked of heaven, but I ever loved the world; and though I professed love to CHRIST, yet my main business has always been to please myself.' I know thou wilt cry out upon this, and conclude it impossible such a person should find mercy at that great day, and yet I defy all our common careless Christians, to make any better plea for themselves. Hast thou a son or servant, whom thou hast bestowed great cost upon, to fit him for doing thee some important service? And hast thou committed it to his care and charge, giving him a competent time, and furnished him with all necessaries for the doing it; and that son or servant, after his time expired, returns to give thee such an account as this? 'So much of my time I spent in eating and drinking, in revelling and rioting, in singing and dancing, in courting and sporting, about which all my thoughts and my care were taken up; and as for the great business thou commandedst me to do, I never thought on it, or not till it was too late.' Would not such a son or servant vex thee to the heart? And wouldest not thou think him worthy of the greatest shame and punishment? Remember, brother, that it will be thy own case, if, neglecting the end of thy life and being, thou canst only reckon at the great day thy getting of money, or thy spending it to the satisfaction of thy lusts and appetites. But this shall lead me to another consideration, namely,

CHAPTER IV

Containing a fourth Argument to a holy Life, the Consideration of the future Punishments of wicked Men.

CONSIDER the punishments which Almighty GOD hath prepared for those unfaithful men, who will not be able to stand in that judgment, but must fall under the dreadful sentence of condemnation. And that thou mayest know how great those punishments will be, thou wilt do well to call to mind what punishments GOD hath often inflicted upon wicked men in this world.

These are great demonstrations of GOD's hatred against sin, and from these we do learn, that those punishments which are appointed for wicked men in another world, must needs be very grievous, and such as will make them extremely miserable. For, as the Scriptures tell us, "This is the time of GOD's patience, and forbearance, and goodness towards sinners." (*Rom. ii. 4.*) And if in this time he shows so much severity, how severe may we believe he will be, when this time of his goodness is ended, and when the day of his wrath, as the Scripture calls it, is come; that day of justice without mercy, of vengeance without pity, of execution without further patience and forbearance: When all the wrath that wicked men have deserved, and have treasured up against themselves, shall fall upon their guilty souls, and GOD shall as designedly magnify his impartial justice in their misery, as he will magnify his mercy and goodness in the glory of his faithful servants? But we have yet a better way of learning how great the punishments of the damned shall be, and that is, by considering what the Scriptures have told us in plain words concerning them: They are such punishments; our blessed SAVIOUR tells us, as are "prepared for the Devil and his angels;" (*Matt. xxv. 41;*) that is, for the very worst of beings, for the greatest rebels against heaven, and the most irreconcilable adversaries to all manner of goodness: And therefore, we may be sure that they are as great as we can imagine them to be,

not to say that they are as great as an Almighty God can make them. They are punishments by fire, as he also tells us, which is the most raging, the most devouring and tormenting thing we know in the world: And that fire is represented to be such as our nature does most abhor, and which must needs be most insufferable, namely, “a fire with brimstone;” the stench of which is as intolerable as the heat, and which suffocates as well as consumes. (*Rev.* xxi. 8.) Of this fire, we are told likewise, There is a bottomless lake or pit, (*Rev.* xx. 3,) into which there shall never enter the least light, “the very blackness of darkness,” as ST. JUDE’S expressions are, (*ver.* 17,) lying upon it for ever. In this lake, we are told, the damned shall be close prisoners, “bound hand and foot;” (*Matt.* xxii. 13;) without possibility of escaping, or so much as removing from one place to another for the gaining of the least ease; and in this prison, we are told, the torments will be such as will cause “weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth;” nay, yellings, and howlings, and shriekings, like the shrieking of the children frying in the fire in the valley of Hinnom. (*2 Kings* xxiii. 10.) Which the word used by our blessed SAVIOUR for hell (*Matt.* v. 29, 30) doth imply; and these torments, and wailings, and heart-breaking cries shall continue, not for a month, or a year, or an age, but for ever and ever. “The fire shall never be quenched:” (*Mark.* ix. 44:) “The smoke of their torment is ever to ascend:” (*Rev.* xiv. 10, 11:) “And they shall find no rest night nor day.” This is a little, and but a little of what the Scriptures tell us of the punishments of the damned; but in this little there are so many dreadful things implied, that he must be bold and hardened even to a wonder, that is not affrighted with them. For,

1. It is plain, that the punishments are such as will torment the whole man, body and soul, with all their faculties and powers, and that in the extremest manner. There shall not be a member of the body, nor any faculty in the soul, but shall have its torment in one and the same instant, and that torment shall be so great that no words can ex

press it, nor heart can conceive it. How can it be otherwise, dost thou think, in a lake of fire and brimstone? What member of the body will not be scorched? What sense will not be afflicted? What faculty will not be tormented? The lascivious eyes will be plagued with darkness, and the fearful sight of devils and damned spirits: The nice smell, with the loathsome stench of brimstone, and all the most abominable filthiness: The delicate ears, with the shrieks and howlings of tormenting and tormented wretches: The dainty taste, with the most ravenous hunger and thirst; and all the sensible parts, with burning and devouring fire: The imagination will have its torment, by the apprehension of present pains, and of those that are to come: The memory, by its remembrance of pleasures past, and gone, and never to return again: The understanding, by the consideration of the happiness lost, and the misery now come on. And if there be any other part which can be tormented, it shall have its torment with no more favour than the rest. O, dear Christian brother, what dreadful things are these! And how unspeakably miserable must those be who must endure them! And yet this is not all; for it is certain in the Second place,

2. That these torments shall always continue without any the least intermission or decrease, and those that suffer them shall never find the least ease, nor help, nor comfort; no, not for one minute: This is no more than is implied in the places of Scripture before-mentioned; the fire will be always burning, the smoke ever ascending, so that there shall be no rest day nor night, and those that are bound hand and foot will not be able to escape or to resist or strive against the torments, but must lie still, and suffer all. Thus it was with the rich man, of whom our blessed SAVIOUR tells us, (*Luke xvi.*) that being in hell, tormented with the fire which shall not be quenched, he made this request to ABRAHAM, "Father ABRAHAM, have mercy on me, and send LAZARUS, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." (*Ver. 24.*) What smaller request could he possibly

make? He desired not a cup of water, no, nor as much as LAZARUS might have held in the palm of his hand, nor yet so much as might have stuck to his whole finger: He only desired a drop from the very tip of it, or not so much, only that he “would touch his tongue with the tip of his finger,” a little moistened and cooled with water; and yet this small request would not be granted him; that little, that very little ease, which so small a favour would have given him, was denied him. Which sad story plainly shows us, that the torments of the wicked have no intermission, nor decrease; and that those who suffer them, shall never attain the least help or ease, though they want it most extremely, and seek for it with the greatest earnestness and importunity. They shall be like to a man, that shall be almost drowned in the midst of the sea, who, not finding any firm ground whereon to set his feet, stretches out his hand every way, and grasps at something with all his might, but still in vain, because there is nothing but water round about him: Thus will it be with those wretches in hell; they are drowning in a bottomless gulph of unspeakable miseries, and they look every way for help, and strive for a little ease; but alas! to no purpose, for there is nothing but sorrow, and misery, and pain, and horror, round about them. And thus it shall be with them, not for a little time, for a month, or a year, but for ever and ever, which is a Third thing I desire to observe.

3. Their pains and torments will be endless as well as easeless; and when they have endured them without intermission, or decrease, as many years, nay ages, as there are stars in the firmament, or sands upon the sea-shore, they shall still be to endure them, in the very same manner, as many more: As many more did I say? Yea, ten thousand times more; they shall endure them as long as there is a just and holy God to punish them, that is, to eternal ages. This is but what God himself hath told us in plain words; for thus shall the sad sentence run at the great day, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire;” and the execution will be accordingly. “The wicked shall go

into everlasting punishment;" into punishment that shall be as lasting as the rewards of the righteous, which will be as lasting as God himself.

These are dreadful considerations, my brother, and he must be a strange kind of a man indeed, that is not affected with them. There are but few so hardy as to think upon the judgments of Almighty God upon sinful men in this world, without some fear, especially when they think of them as hanging over their heads; and how then can they choose but tremble at those of another world, which are infinitely more dreadful? The evils of the world afflict but one, or some few parts at once; one disease seizes upon one part, and another upon another part; in one disease, one sense is pained, and in another, another sense, but never are all the parts and all the senses, at one and the same time, under torment and pain. In this world there is no evil so great, but it hath its decreases and changes, and therefore no man can be so miserable but he will sometimes have some respite and ease: And let the evil be never so sharp and pressing, yet the comforts of hope will not be wanting, and the foresight of a certain end will be a great relief: And yet notwithstanding this, we many times think the evils of this world to be intolerable; and, as sweet a thing as life is to us, we wish for death to deliver us from them.

O how intolerable then must the torments of the other world be, which spare no part or faculty of body or soul, which give not the least ease, nor admit of the least decrease, no not for one minute; which exclude all hope of an end, and overwhelm the soul in utter despair of the least remedy! Let our charity lead us sometimes to visit a poor sick creature, and let us observe what pains he endures for one night: Mark how often he tosses from one side of his bed to the other; hear how he groans, and what bitter complaints he makes; observe how he counts the hours of the clock, and how long he thinks each hour to be; how passionately he wishes for the dawning of the day, and how tedious the night seems unto him. This we look upon as a sad spectacle. O what shall we

think then of the condition of the damned ! How deplorable and how miserable must we needs believe that to be ! To be tormented in every member of the body, and every faculty of the soul, with the sharpest and most exquisite torments, and without the least ease or respite ; and this not for a night of some few hours ; but for an everlasting night, a night that has no morning, and knows no hope of any dawning of the day : To lie in such a night, not upon a soft bed, (as the sick man does,) but in a bed of flames, or a hot burning furnace ; not at liberty to turn to and fro, and to seek ease, but bound hand and foot ; not with the company of compassionating friends assisting and comforting to the best of their power, but with the horrid company of the damned and accursed spirits, that shall add to their sufferings and their sorrows, as much as their power and malice can possibly do.

This must be misery in the height. Who trembles not to think of it ? Who will not do any thing to escape it ? Do we fear sickness and pain here ? And do we not fear the pains of hell much more ? Do we dread a prison and fly from fetters and chains, and hazard our very lives to preserve our liberty ? And are we not as much afraid of that eternal prison, whose gates shall never be opened when once they are shut upon us, and from which there can be no redemption or deliverance ? O dear brother, are we in our right senses or not ? Do we understand what these things mean ? Do they belong to us, or are they meant only for others ? Do we take them for the never-failing truths of God, or for the fancies of brain-sick men ? If we understand them not, if we believe them not, why do we call ourselves Christians ? But if we do, why do we not tremble at the thoughts of them ? Why do we not bethink ourselves how we may escape them ? Why do we not abhor that sin and wickedness which will bring us to them ? Why do we not apply ourselves with all our might, and all our care, to the practice of that piety, which alone, through God's mercy, can deliver us from them ? It is an amazing thing, that these things should make so little im-

pression upon the generality of men; and, but that the Scripture tells us of a god of this world, that blinds the eyes, and hardens the hearts of men, and makes them inconsiderate as brutes, we should be at a loss to give any account of it. We see that they are apprehensive enough of evil in this world, and industrious enough to avoid it; if any evil be great, though it be remote, they dread it; and though its coming be uncertain, yet they take care to prevent it. But, alas! as to these unspeakable evils and calamities, they are stupid and inconsiderate as blocks, the least fear of them is enough, and the least care and pains to avoid them is thought too much. Surely, brother, there was a time, when they had greater effects upon the world than now they have.

Let me show thee what a devout father (St. J. CLIMACIS) has written concerning some penitents he once saw, and then judge what influence these things have had upon men, and what they ought in reason to have now. ‘When first I came into this place,’ says he, ‘I beheld certain things which neither the eyes of the sluggard have ever seen, nor the ears of the negligent ever heard, nor yet may it be conceived in the heart of any careless Christians. I saw many penitents standing with their eyes towards heaven, continually calling upon Almighty God with tears and sighs for pardon and mercy: Others that professed they were not worthy to lift up their eyes towards heaven, or to speak to Almighty God; and these held their faces down towards the ground, offering their souls in silence to the mercy of God, without speaking so much as one word. Others were clothed in hair-cloth, and kneeling with their faces bowed down to their knees, and smiting their foreheads oftentimes upon the earth, did bathe the very earth with their tears; and those that wanted tears did lament very grievously, because they wanted them. They had death continually before their eyes; and speaking one to another, they said, How think ye, brethren? What shall become of us at the dreadful hour? Shall the sentence of condemnation be revoked? Or shall our prayers perchance come into the

LORD'S ears? If they do, how shall they be received? And what profit shall we receive by them? Since they proceed out of unclean lips, it is to be feared, they may find but little favour in his sight. To which others would answer, Who knows whether the Lord will pardon us, whether he will turn himself to us, and not suffer us to perish? Let us now take courage, and persevere continually in crying unto him till the end: Let us return, my brethren, let us return with all speed, and return to the place from whence we are fallen, and let us in no wise pardon this filthy flesh which hath undone us; but since it hath crucified us, let us crucify it.' And then he proceeds to tell us how they treated their bodies, how they watched and fasted, and punished themselves for their offences against God; and how they behaved themselves when any of their brethren lay a dying. They compassed the bed of the dying man, and with earnest and vehement requests, demanded of him, 'How doest thou, brother? How feelest thou thyself? What shall become of thee? Hast thou obtained thy long suit? Art thou arrived at the haven of thy salvation? Hast thou received an earnest of it? Hast thou heard a voice within thee, which said, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," or, "Thy faith hath made thee whole?" Or hast thou peradventure heard another voice which said unto thee, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God?" What answer makest thou, good brother, unto us? Tell us something, we beseech thee, that we may understand by thee, what is reserved for us; for thy suit is now come to an end, and what sentence thou shalt now receive, shall never more be reversed: But our case as yet still dependeth, and looketh for sentence.'

These, my brother, were men that did in good earnest believe the truths of the Gospel concerning another world; and being fully persuaded that the punishments appointed for wicked men are most intolerable, were as fully resolved to flee from them. These were men that made use of that reason and understanding which God hath given them;

and since they thought it prudence to be apprehensive of lesser dangers, and to prepare against more inconsiderable evils; they would not, like the unruly horse that starts at a bird, and runs himself into a precipice, be fearless of the greatest dangers. And are not we concerned, to do the like, and to make the like use of that faith and reason which God hath given us? Does not the fire of hell burn as furiously now as ever it did? Have those everlasting torments had any end prescribed them since that time? Or are we more able to endure them, than they were? Or have we any easier way of escaping them discovered to us, than was known to them? What easy ways our lusts may find out, I do not know; but sure I am, that there is but one safe and sure way, but one way of God's appointment, which was made known to them, as it is to us, and that is, the serving of God with all our might, in a holy and virtuous life; which if we fail to do, we shall, as certainly as God is true, be condemned to everlasting torments. Judge then, whether we have not reason to serve God, and whether it be not madness to live in that careless way which we see most men do?

CHAPTER V

Containing a fifth Argument to a holy life, from the Consideration of those great Rewards God hath prepared for good Men in the other World.

BUT now because these things may seem severe, I must desire thee to consider the reward which God hath prepared in another world for those that serve him faithfully in this. I presume I need not tell thee, that no reward of right does belong to any services we can do; and therefore be the reward great or little, which God hath prepared for us, we must acknowledge ourselves indebted to his infinite goodness for it, and that it is on our parts altogether undeserved; how much more then must we acknowledge ourselves indebted to his goodness, (and what a strong obligation should

we reckon it to his service !) when the reward he hath designed for us, is not little, like our services ; but great, as we can imagine it to be, as our hearts can desire it should be ?

To give thee a little sight of the greatness of this reward, (for it is not possible for thee, or me, to comprehend it fully,) I might lead thee through a multitude of considerations ; but I shall restrain myself to some few, which deserve thy serious regard. And,

1. We cannot but acknowledge, but Almighty God is very kind to his servants in this world, and there is not one of them can say that he now serveth God for nought. God hath given them many good promises, and does give them many good things daily according to those promises. They have a competent share in the good things of the world, and such a blessing together with them, as makes them much more sweet and pleasant to them, than all the possessions of the wicked ; and though they have their afflictions, yet they have their comforts, they have a peace within which none can disturb, and such joys as none can take from them, I mean the peace of their consciences, and the joys of the HOLY GHOST ; they are either free from calamities, or they have such support under them, that they are rather matter of joy than sorrow ; God is good to them at all times in a great measure, but sometimes more abundantly ; witness the great things that he hath done in all ages for them : What great deliverances hath he given them ? What cunning plots and devices against them hath he brought to nought ? What wonders hath he wrought in their behalf ? And how miraculously, when they have been in their greatest distress, has he made them to triumph over all their enemies ? So that, those who have beheld it, have been constrained to cry out in the words of the Psalmist, “ Verily there is a reward for the righteous ; doubtless there is a God that judgeth the earth.” (*Psalm* lviii. 11.)

Now if God deal thus kindly with his servants here, what kindness dost thou think will he show them hereafter ? If whilst they are doing his work, he bestows so many good

things upon them, what may they expect from him when his work is done? And if in the time of their trial they receive such great benefits from him, what shall they receive (thinkest thou) when their trial is ended? If such great things be done for their encouragement in his service, what great things are designed for the reward? Especially considering,

2. That the reward which God intends for them, shall not be proportioned to the little worthiness of their services, but to his own infinite goodness; it shall not be such as their services do deserve, but such as becomes him to bestow: It is a "gift," as the Apostle tells us, (*Rom. vi. 23*), and such a gift as shall show the Infinite Goodness of the Donor. Yea,

3. It is a gift that is designed to show it; God intends the fullest manifestation of his goodness by it, that he may receive everlasting praises both of men and angels. And how exceeding great must that gift be! When a Prince rewards the services of a poor subject, he considers not so much what his loyal subject deserves, as what becomes himself to bestow; and though the service may be but mean, yet he must give as a Prince, largely and freely, with respect to his honour: But if a Prince design, in rewarding a servant, to show his magnificence and liberality to the utmost, and to do himself the greatest honour he can, he will give the greatest things his kingdom will afford, and in the noblest and most honourable way. O how great then, and how good will the reward be, which the King of kings, the supreme Ruler and Governor of the world, will give to his faithful servants! How little less than infinite must that be, which will become so glorious a Majesty to bestow! Especially since he designs to manifest his goodness and bounty in the highest measure, and to let all the world know how much he deserved the love and service of all his creatures? When God before the foundations of the world did design to declare his power, and wisdom, and goodness, what a world did he create! What beautiful heavens! What glittering stars! What elements! And

in how marvellous a manner did he unite and compact them together ! And yet he intended this vast and beautiful building to last but for a time, and then to be destroyed ; and he knew that the noblest of his creatures, which he made to inhabit it, would be rebellious against him, and few of them give him his due honour and obedience. Imagine then what he will do, when he designs the utmost manifestation of his almighty goodness, in rewarding his faithful servants ! What a glorious place will he make for them ! What riches and honours will he confer upon them ! Will they not be as great as his infinite goodness can bestow, or as his infinite wisdom can judge to be becoming it ! And how incomparably great must we needs judge those to be ! And yet we may consider further,

4. That this reward designed for GOD'S servants, is that which CHRIST hath received from his FATHER to give them, for all his pains, and tears, and sweat, and blood ; that it is the purchase of the blood of the SON of GOD, and the recompence of his obedience to the death. Now how great a reward must so beloved a SON deserve by so great and perfect an obedience ! Can any thing, how excellent soever, be thought too good for him, or too great a recompence for his sufferings ? If, considering our own poor services, we could not hope for such manifestations of GOD'S goodness, yet considering the merits of CHRIST, we have no reason to doubt of them ; for if infinite goodness can admit of any motive to show itself to the utmost, this must needs be the greatest and most prevailing. And yet further, to raise our thoughts one degree higher, we may consider,

5. This reward is not only the reward which CHRIST obtained for his servants, but the reward which he obtained for himself, as the very recompence which his heavenly FATHER hath given him for his obedience ; for that it is the very same reward which he has received, that his servants shall enjoy, the Scriptures teach us plainly. We learn it from his own mouth, (*Matt.* xxv. 21,) where he bids the faithful servant, that had improved his talents, "to enter into the joy of his LORD ;" and one of his chosen servants,

that knew as much of the matter as any man ever did, hath told us the same, (*Rom.* viii. 17,) where he expressly affirms, “that we are heirs of GOD, and co-heirs with CHRIST JESUS.” So that whatever glory, or joy, or riches, or honours CHRIST is possessed of upon the account of his obedience, that shall all his faithful servants enjoy together with him. Has GOD exalted him for his obedience, and given him a kingdom above all kingdoms? It is as certain that his servants shall be exalted likewise, and “reign together with him.” (*2 Tim.* ii. 12; *Rev.* xxii. 5.) IS CHRIST ascended into the highest heavens, and does he dwell in the bosom of his FATHER? It is as certain that he shall come one day from heaven, and receive all his servants to himself, that “where he is, they may be also.” (*John* xiv. 3.) IS that frail and mortal body, which he had whilst he was upon earth, and which suffered the pains and torments of the cross, changed into a glorious, immortal, impassible body? It is as certain that “the vile bodies of his servants shall be so changed likewise, and fashioned like to his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself.” (*Phil.* iii. 21.) IS that glory which he is exalted to, that joy and happiness which he is possessed of, never to have an end? It is certain that the glory of his servants shall be as lasting; for it is “an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.” (*1 Pet.* i. 4.)

This, dear brother, is the reward of God’s faithful servants; and can thy heart conceive any thing greater, or thy soul wish for any thing more? Canst thou conceive what it is to put off this vile mortal body, with all its evil affections, and uneasy attendants, to be freed from all diseases, all infirmities and deformities; to be like to the angels in heaven, and having put on incorruption and immortality, to shine like the sun in the firmament, in the kingdom of heaven? Canst thou conceive what a happiness it will be to be with CHRIST, to behold the blessed face of that dear person, who does so highly deserve of us, both upon the score of his infinite perfections, and likewise upon the ac-

count of his inestimable benefits? Canst thou conceive what a happiness it will be to “behold GOD face to face,” as ST. PAUL’s expressions are, (1 *Cor.* xiii. 12,) or “to see him as he is,” as ST. JOHN expresses it; (1 *John* iii. 2;) that is, to have the most clear and comprehensive knowledge of him that finite creatures can possibly have; to know all his adorable perfections, his almighty power, his incomprehensible wisdom, his eternal justice, his resplendent purity and holiness, his immeasurable goodness and love; and to feel the mighty power of this knowledge upon our souls, transforming us into the likeness of GOD, and uniting our wills most perfectly to him, whereby we shall both possess GOD, and be possessed of him? Canst thou conceive what a happiness it will be, for millions of millions of such god-like creatures to be inseparably together, and with united hearts and mouths to be continually singing songs of praise to the great GOD of love, who loved them infinitely, and taught them to love him and one another? And canst thou think how much it will add to their happiness, to have a full assurance, that it shall never have an end, that it shall be as lasting as it is great, and never know the least diminution or decay?

I know all this is far above the reach of thy most raised thoughts; it is too great a happiness to enter into the heart of man: As “flesh and blood cannot inherit it,” (1 *Cor.* xv. 50,) that is, as man in his present weak and corruptible estate cannot be partaker of it; so neither can he comprehend it: When we are possessed of it, then, and not till then, shall we fully understand it.

O blessed GOD, why art thou thus good to ungrateful and unworthy men? Why hast thou prepared such a happiness for those who neither consider it, nor seek after it? Why is such a price put into the hands of fools, who have not the hearts to make use of it, who fondly choose to gratify their lusts, rather than to save their souls, and prefer the momentary enjoyment of sin and folly, before a glorious and happy immortality? Vain and foolish men,

how is it that you understand not your own greatest interest? That that reason and judgment which in other matters attend you, do in this, which is of the greatest moment, so strangely fail you? Does not all the world see, that you desire and seek after such things as you apprehend to be good, and that you are more or less careful in seeking after them, according to the value you put upon them? For a small estate you will take great pains, you will run great hazards, and suffer great hardships; for a great estate you will do and suffer more; and for a crown or kingdom yet more; and why then will you not do and suffer as much for his glorious and eternal reward, which far transcends all the riches and the glories of the world?

The author to the Hebrews tells us, that MOSES did despise the riches and honours and pleasures of the court of PHARAOH for this reward. (*Heb.* xi. 24, 25.) And that a multitude of wise and holy men “have had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, of bonds and imprisonment, and have suffered patiently, yea joyfully,” the worst things that wicked men or devils could inflict upon them, because they had their eyes upon it, and hoped to obtain it. And ST. AUGUSTINE, I remember, professes, that he could be content to do or suffer any thing, yea to suffer the torments of hell for a time, that he might come to heaven at last. And why is it, brother, that we have not as great an esteem of it? Or if we have, why do we not labour, why are we not willing to do and suffer as much for it? Dost thou think that this care and pains are needless, as to the obtaining of it? Or may we hope for it without an holy life? What! dost thou believe God to be a liar, or that he is not in earnest, when he tells thee, that “without holiness no man shall see him?” (*Heb.* xii. 14.) Does not a reward necessarily relate to service, and canst thou expect the reward though thou doest no service? Canst thou imagine, that such a reward, a reward so great and glorious, that the very best of men, notwithstanding the promises of God, hardly presume to hope for it, shall be given to those that

either serve GOD not at all, or no farther than their lusts will give them leave? What! is this a reward for apostates from GOD, for rebels against heaven, for those that desire it not, or value it not, but prefer the pleasures of sin and the profits of the world before it? Will it be the same thing whether men answer the end of their creation or not, whether they dishonour their holy profession by an unholy life or not, whether they love GOD or not, whether they follow the example of CHRIST or not, and in one word, whether they be meet for heavenly glory by pure and God-like dispositions and the participation of the divine nature, or be ever so unmeet for it by brutish lusts or devilish qualities and dispositions?

There is a vast difference between heaven and hell; and ought there not to be a vast difference likewise between those that shall enjoy the one, and those that shall fall under the other? Can the holy and righteous GOD make so great a difference between the eternal estates of men, as to make some eternally happy, and others eternally miserable, who differ here one from another in little or nothing, but only in a little outward profession, or the observation of some few rites and ceremonies, or in a formal and civil carriage or demeanour? Surely, brother, it is impossible that these things should enter into the head of any sober and considering man, and therefore thou must needs acknowledge the necessity of living a holy life, if thou hopest for the heavenly glory and felicity; and is not the heavenly glory encouragement enough for thee to do so? Will not that make thee sufficient amends for the greatest care and pains thou canst take, for the worst things thou canst suffer, or the greatest hazards thou canst possibly run by it? Yes, undoubtedly it will; and therefore I leave the exhortation of the Apostle with thee. “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the LORD, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the LORD.” (1 Cor. xv. 58.) I shall add but one thing more.

CHAPTER VI.

Containing a Sixth Argument to a holy Life, from considering, That these Rewards and Punishments are not so far off, as some People vainly imagine.

THAT THOU wouldest consider these rewards and punishments, not as things at a great distance from thee, but as they are in truth, very near unto thee. There is but a little part of a very short life, of a life which, at longest, is but a span long, between thee and them: We have at most but some few breaths to draw before we must pass into our eternal state, and be either happy or miserable without any manner of change or alteration for ever: Death is continually laying his snares for us, and has so many secret and unknown ways to do his work, that we live every moment as it were by miracle; and it is a much stranger thing that we have lived till this day, than it would be if we should die before to-morrow.

It is true, we are apt to flatter ourselves with hopes of long life; but how fond such hopes are, the unexpected fall of some or other every day about us, may convince us. There are thousands now in their graves, that came no sooner into the world than we, who hoped to live as long as we can do: And what are we, and what are our hopes, that both may not be cut off within a few hours? And why may not we make our beds in the dust as much sooner than we expect, as they have done?

Now tell me, my brother, hast thou so low an opinion of the heavenly glory and felicity, as that it cannot engage thee to serve GOD so little a time for it? Or have hell-torments so little of terror in them, that thou canst not resolve to undergo so short a trouble to avoid them? Or is there any thing in this world which can make thee neglect a matter of so great importance, when thou thinkest how little a while thou canst enjoy it? Reflect upon thy life past, and consider what is become of all thy former pleasures; they are past and gone, and the time is coming

when as much may be said of all thy worldly enjoyments; they will be as far from thee, and as useless to thee, as all thy pleasures are now: In the hour of death, and from that hour to all eternity thou mayest say with them in the *Book of Wisdom*, “What hath pride profited us? And what good have riches with all our vaunting brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow, or like a post that hasteth by.” And therefore be so wise as to condemn these worthless things, and for the little remainder of thy life, to endeavour to make sure of the better and more abiding things, which God hath prepared for thee in heaven.

Thou hast sometimes, perhaps, been visited with sickness, and hast thought thyself to be upon the borders of the grave: Call to mind what thoughts did then possess thee: Didst thou not then look upon the world as vanity? And did not thy past follies torment thee with a bitter remembrance? Did not the few good things that thou hadst done, please thee better than all the world? And didst thou not heartily repent, that thy whole life was not employed in such good ways? Remember, I beseech thee, that it will shortly come to that again; the evil day is at hand, thy present delights will be vanished, and thy worldly enjoyments be useless and unprofitable; and if thou hast not the conscience of a good life to cheer thee, thou wilt be miserable without help or remedy.

O prepare, prepare for that time, and let nothing upon earth divert or hinder thee. Why should that rob thee of thy greatest bliss, which will not profit thee in the least when thou hast the greatest need of it? Why should that make thee miserable for ever, which cannot make thee happy for a little time? ‘Remember thy end,’ said a wise man, ‘and thou shalt never do amiss.’ He who knows that he stands upon the brink of eternity, is a bold fool if he dares do wickedly. He is mad that will commit a crime this day, who knows not but that before the next he may be bearing the punishments of it in everlasting sorrows.

Thus have I laid before thee, dear brother, some argu-

ments and motives to persuade thee to a holy life. Weigh them well, and according to the reason thou findest in them, so do; and I ask no more. Live, as a man created by God on purpose to know and love and serve him here, and to enjoy him for ever hereafter. Live, as a man advanced to the knowledge and profession of Christianity. Live, as a man that must give an account hereafter of his whole life to a just and impartial Judge. Live, as one that believes that he shall be unspeakably and eternally miserable if he lives amiss, and that he shall be eternally happy if he lives as he ought. Live, as one that knows that he has but a short life to live, a life that is but a moment in respect of eternity, and that (yet) upon this little moment his eternal state does depend. In a word: Live, as a man dying, hastening to the grave, and to the judgment-seat of CHRIST, and to everlasting bliss or woe. Live thus, dear brother, and I have my desire. Only let me beg thy prayers, that I may live thus likewise, that both of us may be happy for ever. Amen. Amen.

GENERAL DIRECTIONS

HOW TO LIVE

A HOLY LIFE.

INTRODUCTION.

I AM now to give thee some directions how to live that holy life, which I have endeavoured to persuade thee to. It shall be my care not to trouble thee with many things; and I beg of thee that it may be thine, to consider what I say impartially, and to give it the regard which, upon consideration, thou shalt find it to deserve. Now, because I suppose thee to be convinced, that it is necessary thou shouldst live a holy life, if thou wouldest be happy eternally: The first thing I shall advise thee to, is,

CHAPTER I.

Containing the first Advice, seriously to resolve upon a holy Life.

To resolve upon it. Make an absolute resolution to live a holy life. ‘I see, it is necessary that I should do so, (mayest thou say.) I cannot be happy for ever, if I do not live so; and therefore I am resolved I will live so; and nothing shall divert or hinder me.’ Without this resolution, thou wilt never be able to do what thou mayest desire. Thou mayest begin well, but wilt not persevere to the end. Thou wilt be as the double-minded man which ST. JAMES speaks of, (*Chap. i. 8,*) “unstable in thy ways;” one while in the good way, and another while in the bad, according to the circumstances of thy life, and the sway of thy inclinations. But with this resolution begin

and prosper. Resolution worketh wonders every day in other matters; and in this be confident it will do much more, because GOD will bless it. Thy work is half done when thou art fully resolved; but then care must be taken that thy resolution continue firm and strong; and that it may do so, thou must observe the following directions.

2. Thou must make it soberly and deliberately, not rashly and in haste. Thou must consider what thou art about to resolve upon, what difficulties and discouragements thou art like to meet with, and what dangers and inconveniences may attend thee in it. And when thou hast done this, ask thyself, 'Is it reasonable that I should undertake and resolve upon such a business as this is? Is it possible for me to effect it? Can I march through all the difficulties, and overcome all the temptations which may befall me in it? And can I hope for a sufficient recompence for all the trouble it will put me to?' And for the avoiding of all mistake, it will not be amiss for thee to put down in writing (if thou canst) all thou art to consider upon, as also thy judgment and determination upon every particular. However, fail not to get as clear an apprehension of every thing as possibly thou canst: Run through all the parts and duties of a holy life in thy thoughts, and tell thy heart, 'This I must do, this I must fly from, this I must suffer; Almighty GOD requires it, and I cannot hope to be excused in any thing. Tell me, O my heart, (mayest thou say,) wilt thou be content I shall do it or not? Wilt thou not prove false to me if I do resolve it? These things I must attend to, not for a few days only, or at some certain times or seasons, but constantly and perpetually, throughout the whole course of my life: It must be my business to obey and please GOD in all my ways, and all my worldly affairs and pleasures must give place to it. Tell me, O my heart, how dost thou approve of this? Wilt thou be content that I now begin it?'

Then suppose within thyself the greatest temptations that can befall thee, to discourage and draw thee aside; suppose that thy mother who bare thee in her womb, and nou-

rished thee with her breasts, and loves thee as her life, should come with weeping eyes to thee, and, with the most melting expressions that love and sorrow could put into her mouth, should entreat thee to forbear the doing of thy duty in any matter: And suppose the wife of thy bosom, who is as thy very soul, should join with her in the same desire, and tell thee, as DELILAH did SAMSON, “How canst thou say I love thee, when thy heart is not with me?” (*Judg.* xvi. 15.) And it may be, thy dearest friends and familiars may be importunate with thee also for the same thing: And then say unto thyself, ‘Shall I be able to withstand all these temptations, to resist the importunities of a kind and tender mother, to turn my back upon the wife of my bosom, and to disoblige all my friends, rather than sin against God?’

And further, represent unto thyself the worst things that can befall a man in this world, as likely to befall thyself for thy conscience towards God: Suppose thou must lose all thou hast in the world, yea and thy very life, if thou wilt not sin against him; suppose thou must suffer the sharpest reproaches, and the most cruel death, if thou wilt do thy duty: And then charge thy heart to tell thee, whether it will not sink at such a trial, and basely betray thee to sin and shame. ‘These are hard things indeed, (mayest thou say,) the bare thoughts of them are dreadful; and how much more will the things themselves be, when thou comest to try them! But what good thing was ever obtained without some difficulty? And what wise man was ever discouraged with difficulties, that was sure of a recompence far exceeding the worst of troubles he could possibly undergo? Is it not reasonable, that I should do and suffer any thing that my God shall impose upon me? Should not that life and being which he hath given me, be altogether at his service? May not my loving SAVIOUR justly expect as much from me, since he hath purchased me with his most precious blood? Did not he undergo much more for my sake, than he requires me to do for his? And may not that joy which encouraged him, be a just encouragement

for me? Will not heaven make amends for all? What, if I am weak and frail! What, if there be many subtle enemies to this my undertaking! Is not He that is with me, greater than all that are against me? Cannot the SPIRIT of my GOD make my weakness strong, and cause me to triumph over all my adversaries? Has he not done as much for millions of such as I am? Have not old men, notwithstanding the infirmities of age; and young men, notwithstanding the strength of their desires; and women, notwithstanding the frailty of their sex, taken up the very same resolution, and in spite of all the powers of darkness, made it good to the last minute of their lives? I know my GOD and SAVIOUR will not fail me, and he will make my weakness to redound to the glory of his grace; and therefore I may, I must, I will, I do resolve upon a holy life.

Thus I do advise thee, to consider things before thou dost resolve, that thy understanding may fully approve of it under the most disadvantageous circumstances, and thy will entirely embrace it, and that nothing may befall thee in thy after-life that may stagger thee as not foreseen. This is the counsel of our great and good Master, in two plain parables: (*Luke* xiv. 28, 29, &c. :) “Which of you (says he) intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish it. Or what King, going to make war against another King, sitteth not down first, and considereth whether he be able with ten thousand men to meet him that cometh with twenty thousand?; or else while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an embassy, and desireth conditions of peace.” Which parables plainly tell us, that no wise man will begin to build, but upon fore-sight that he shall be able to finish: That no wise King will begin a war, without first considering his ability to go through with it. Nor can he be thought wise, that will take upon him to be a disciple of

CHRIST, and to follow him in a holy life, before he hath well considered what he undertakes, and what trouble and danger it may cost him to do so; the fruits of such rash and unadvised undertakings can ordinarily be no other than shame and sorrow.

3. And therefore in the Second place I shall commend to thee, that thou do not fully determine, upon once considering, (how seriously soever thou hast done it,) but that thou take the matter twice or thrice into consideration, after some little intermissions; for so thou wilt discern, whether thy resolution be the effect of thy judgment, and thy entire choice: If it proceed from this, what thou approvest of this day, thou wilt approve of to-morrow, and for ever; and the more thou considerest things, the better thou wilt like thy intended resolution, and the more ready thou wilt be fully and finally to fix it. What thou hast considered one day, then, in order to a resolution, take a review of it the next day; consider afresh what thou art to do; consider the pleasures which thou must forsake, and the difficulties thou must undergo; and if, after all, thou find thyself sincerely bent to serve the LORD in a holy life, then fix thy resolution, resolve fully, peremptorily, and irrevocably.

4. When thou hast done this, it will not be amiss to write down thy resolution and protestation in the very words thou hast made it, adding likewise the year, and month, and day, wherein thou didst thus engage thyself; and to keep it by thee, as a thing of great concernment to thee; and once a month at least to look seriously upon it, saying to thy heart, 'Sec, O my heart, what thou hast done, observe the bond which thou hast laid upon thyself; it is thy own act and deed, there is no disowning it, or excepting against it; as sure as I now see it with my eyes, it is recorded before GOD in heaven, and it shall one day be brought forth against me to my everlasting condemnation, if I do not discharge it: Go on, O my heart, go on, as thou hast begun, to keep thy resolution firm, and to pay thy vows unto the Most High; and be confident that the LORD will prosper thy good desires and endeavours, and reward thee according to

his gracious covenant and promise, with everlasting glory and felicity.'

5. All this being done, I think thou mayest do well to make known thy resolution to the world, as often as fitting occasions offer, that is, as often as GOD may receive honour by it, or thyself be secured from temptation or sin. Such occasions thou wilt frequently meet with; sometimes thou wilt fall into the company of evil men, that dishonour the holy religion which they profess, by their wicked and ungodly lives; and they will not spare to reproach thee for not running with them into the same excesses and debaucheries: Then thou mayest do well to tell them, 'That thou art fully resolved against such practices, and that thou didst long since take upon thee a profession which allows them not, as they have also done; a profession of obedience to the doctrine, and of conformity to the example of the holy JESUS; and that thou canst not, without gross hypocrisy and inexcusable folly, act so contrary to it as they do.' Such a declaration as this will honour thy LORD and Master, and shame evil-doers, if they be not past all shame and all hope of amendment.

Sometimes again thou wilt meet with men that will play the Devil's part, and use all their cunning to persuade thee to some sinful act: Such men thou must let know without delay, 'That thou art in the full purpose of thy heart, as well as in outward profession, a Christian; and that thou art resolved to serve thy LORD and Master to thy death, and never to do the thing which thou shalt know will in the least displease him: That how light a matter soever others may make it, to disown him by their works, whom with their mouths they own, yet thou esteemest it so base and shameful a thing, that by the help of God's grace thou art determined never to be guilty of it; and that thou canst not but believe it to be as bad, nay much worse, to be false to GOD than to be false to men; and that they who do not think so, do most unworthily prefer vile dust and ashes, before the high and holy GOD of heaven and earth.'

Against this I know but one thing that can be objected,

namely, That in case thou shouldest fail to make thy good resolution, returning to thy former wickedness or carelessness, thou shalt bring shame upon thyself, and dishonour to thy holy religion.

And true it is, my brother, that these will be the effects of thy failing; and it is as true, that great care ought to be taken, that nothing be done which will produce so great an evil as either of those. But it is not necessary that thou shouldest fail thus; nay, it is not probable, if thou usest that sincerity, consideration, caution, and circumspection I have recommended, because of the sufficient grace of God, which will never fail thee: So that the force of the objection lies not against all resolving or owning thy resolution, but against doing it rashly or unadvisedly, proudly and vain-gloriously; and it only admonisheth us to proceed with great deliberation and prudence, and forbear that public owning of it, till we have had some proof of our sincerity towards God, by the discharge of our several duties, and the resistance of some of the more dangerous temptations; especially if we know ourselves to be of a hasty temper, and not very constant in other things. But this being secured, I doubt not but thou wilt find my advice good; and I did the rather propose it to thee, because of the abounding wickedness of the age; for though almost every one calls himself a Christian, and thinks himself affronted if he be not so esteemed, yet true Christian piety is owned by very few, and it is become as disgraceful, truly to practise it, or to plead for it, (more is our misery!) as it is to disown that good name, which should never be without it; and therefore we take it to be as much our duty now, thus to own the cause of it against the vile practices of those who sottishly reproach and persecute it, even while they call themselves Christians, as it was of old the duty of Christians to own the name and profession against the persecutions of the Heathen world. Certain it is, that CHRIST is as well confessed, by maintaining and defending that real holiness which he came to implant in the hearts and lives of men, as he is by the belief of those things which he was pleased

to do and suffer in order to it; and therefore on the other hand the denying, the dissembling, or not owning our obligation to this holiness, or our resolution to embrace and live in it, whenever we have a just cause to own it, is as truly denying of CHRIST, as our protesting, in a case of danger, that we know him not. Be not afraid nor ashamed then to make thyself known to the world to be in the resolution of thy heart a true Christian, that CHRIST may not be ashamed of thee before the angels of GOD, in that day when all the secrets of men's hearts shall be made manifest.

Those vile wretches that live to the dishonour of Him whose name they are called by, and to the reproach of human nature, blush not to make known the baseness of their designs, and the lewdness of their actions; they commit their wickednesses in the sight of the sun, and boast of it when they have done; and shouldest thou be ashamed to live worthy of CHRIST, to be truly a son of GOD, and to have a design upon glory and immortality? No, let them be ashamed that do shameful things; but for thee, thy design is worthy of a man, and a Christian. There is a shame, we are told, that ends in death; and surely this is, that when men are ashamed of that which is truly their glory, and dare not be what they know they ought to be, because they may be reproached when they are known to be so.

6. There is one thing more to be added, namely, that thou seek out some good men that have taken up the same resolution, and acquaint thyself with them, and, if possibly thou canst, make them thy familiar friends. Let them know thy design and purpose of living holily and Christianly: Desire their prayers, their instruction, their reproofs, their encouragements, according as they shall see thee stand in need of them; and that they will look upon thee as a poor and unworthy member of that holy body, to which they belong, and of which CHRIST is the head; and that hopes by the mercy of GOD to be glorified with CHRIST, one day, together with them; and that they will therefore have that regard and tenderness for thee which the members of the

same body have for one another ; and desire them to accept of the like regard and love from thee, and of all the good offices that true Christian charity can enable thee to do for them. I confess, it will be no easy matter for thee to find such persons ; the number of them is but small, and they are generally modest and reserved ; perhaps more reserved, all things considered, than they ought to be : For though the vile hypocrisy of pretenders to holiness, in this last age, may seem to commend their desire of being unknown ; yet the growth of atheism and profaneness does more strongly require them to lay open that piety which they practise in secret, and to let the world know, by actions suitable to a good profession, that there are some that own the cause of real holiness.

And let me tell thee by the way, that if these good men of this church will shew themselves, and unite together in the kingdom, disposing themselves into fraternities, or friendly societies, and engaging each other in their several and respective combinations to be helpful and serviceable to one another in all good Christian ways, it will be the most effectual means for restoring our decaying Christianity to its primitive life and vigour, and the supporting of our tottering and sinking Church. But, not to lead thee too far, if thou canst find any of these good people, I charge thee, let thy heart cleave unto them, and let there not be the least strangeness, so far as lies in thee, between you. Be all as one man, (thus it was with the primitive Christians,) and so march forward in the good ways of God against all opposition, observing and “ considering one another, to provoke unto love and to good works ;” having an eye continually to the Captain of our salvation, who is entered into heaven, in despite of all the powers of darkness ; and is there preparing a place for us.

Thou wilt be no sooner engaged with these good men in love and friendship, but thou wilt begin to feel the advantages of it. Thou wilt be afraid of no discouragements, when thou hast gotten the assistance of so many true friends ; and thou wilt never fall back from that resolution,

which hath been the occasion of engaging thee in such good company. If thou forgettest thyself at any time, thou wilt not be without a remembrancer, and whenever thou failest, thou wilt find a restorer; and when thou art seized with any coldness or dulness, they will be ready to warm and quicken thee. These are advantages so considerable, that thou canst not prudently stick at any pains it may cost thee to procure them: And therefore let me tell thee for a conclusion of this particular, that if thou canst not be acquainted with any of these good men, thou must do as much as lies in thee to make some of thy old acquaintance good by engaging them in the same resolution thou hast taken up thyself. To which purpose thou must make use of all the knowledge thou hast of them, and the interest thou hast in them; tell them what thou art resolved upon, with the grounds and reasons of thy resolution; urge them to consider and weigh them seriously and impartially: If they approve of what thou hast done, press them to do the same; if they have aught to object against it, answer their objections, and remove their prejudices; if one way of discoursing will not take effect, try what another way will do, and remember to fit thyself to their tempers and dispositions, so far as innocently thou mayest: If reason will not prevail, try whether importunity will not; and to all endeavours with them add prayers to God for them. One person thus gained, will make thee amends for all thy pains; for besides that he may prove, in a short time, a serviceable a friend to thee, as those that entered upon a holy life before thee; he will be a far greater comfort to thee than any of them; because in all the good he doeth thou wilt have some kind of share; and every step he taketh in those good ways thou hast brought him to, will be as a new pledge to assure thee of thy future glory, there being no greater promises made to any than to those "who turn many to righteousness."

CHAPTER. II.

Containing the second Advice, To take up our Cross and forsake all to follow CHRIST.

THOU must deny thyself, take up thy cross, and forsake all. This is the first thing that is to be done, by those that are resolved upon a holy and Christian life; and it is so necessary to be done in the first place, that if thou failest in it, it will be a vain thing for me to offer thee any further direction. Now, it so much concerns thee to be fully persuaded of this truth, that thou must give me leave to shew thee, that I give no other advice, than what our blessed LORD and Master hath done: See *Luke ix. 23, 24.* “He said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me; for whosoever will save his life shall lose it, but whosoever will lose it for my sake, the same shall save it.” The meaning of which words is plainly this, All that will be Christians indeed must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow CHRIST, and not so much as reserve their very lives, but be ready to resign up all for him.

But lest we should imagine this to concern some choice persons only, whom he designed to bring to greater perfection than others are obliged to aim at, he was pleased to speak as much, at another time, to the multitudes that followed him: “There were great multitudes with him, and he turned and said unto them, If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple; and whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple:” (*Luke xiv. 25—27:*) that is, He that will not deny, and forsake (as we are wont to do those things we hate) whatsoever is dear to him in the world, be it father and mother, or wife and children, or brethren and sisters, preferring CHRIST before them all; and is not fully resolved and prepared to suffer any thing, how hard soever, for CHRIST’s sake, cannot be

a disciple of CHRIST, or a true Christian. To deny ourselves, and all our dearest interests in this world, is essential to Christianity, and therefore he, who will not do this, cannot be a Christian.

Those dear things which he cannot renounce, will not suffer him to take this profession upon him; or if he do take it upon him, they will in time cause him to repent this undertaking, and to fall away from it. And then in the words following, he advises them to consider seriously what they are about to do, before they took upon them to be his disciples; and that his advice might sink more deeply, he expresses himself in two parables, (which I have before mentioned,) namely, Of a man intending to build a tower, and sitting down first to consider the cost; and of a King coming to make war against another King, and considering first his abilities to go through with it: And then he concludes, “ So likewise, whosoever he be of you, that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.” Which conclusion makes it a plain case, that we cannot wisely nor safely engage ourselves to CHRIST, or list ourselves as soldiers under his banner, till we have denied, renounced, given up all interest in whatsoever is dear unto us. Not thus prepared, we do but exasperate an enemy, our old enemy the Devil, whose forces we shall not be able to withstand; and so lay a foundation for our future shame and ruin; and though at first reading, we may think those comparisons but ill applied, (for what agreement is there between having riches and armies, and forsaking all that we have?) yet upon second thoughts, we may perceive a very wise design in it. For Christianity is a spiritual warfare, and some of the most powerful enemies we are to encounter, are, the riches, and pleasures, and honours of this world, and therefore the strength and courage of a Christian soldier, whereby he will obtain a glorious victory, consists in self-denial, and a contempt of this world; and a Christian is God’s building, the temple of God, and the very foundation of this building is laid in humility and self-denial, from whence proceed all those

divine graces, which both perfect and adorn the building, which make humility and poverty of spirit, renouncing the love of this world, and the very possession of it too, in some cases, as necessary to our becoming Christians, as a great deal of money is to erect a stately building. This appears to be a great truth, by the parable of the wedding supper in the former part of the chapter.

The master sent his servants to call them that were bidden, when the supper was ready; but they all desired to be excused: One had bought a piece of ground, and he must go and see it; another had married a wife, and he could not come: But when he sent his servants to call the poor, the blind, and the lame, they came in immediately; so that the poor and miserable people of the world, that have no worldly thing to trust to, are better disposed to become Christians, than the rich and the great that have the world at will, as we say, and wallow in the pleasures thereof.

We have a remarkable instance of the mischief that worldly riches do those that both have and love them, in the tenth chapter of ST. MARK'S Gospel. In the verses before, we find our blessed SAVIOUR displeased with his disciples for forbidding little children to be brought unto him, and saying to them, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of GOD;" that is, Their innocency and simplicity, their willingness to be guided and sustained by others, makes them the fittest emblems of those that truly belong to my church and kingdom. And then he adds, "Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of GOD as a little child, he shall not enter therein:" That is, He that takes not the Christian profession upon him, as a little child, with that very humility, disinterestedness, self-denial, and resignation, as is remarkable in little children, will never submit to those laws which I give to the world, and shall never be received by me as a Christian. Immediately upon this, as a confirmation of this truth, there came a young man to CHRIST, upon a very important business:

This young man's heart was in a good measure set upon eternal life, and he had entertained a great opinion of CHRIST, as appeared by the haste he made, by the humility of his carriage, and the words he used to him. "He came running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He had done much in order to it before, he had kept the commandments from his youth up; so he professed, and there is no doubt he spake what he thought, and what he had done in a good measure; for it is said, "that JESUS loved him," that is, he approved of his good beginnings: But when he told him, there was one thing still wanting, namely, "that he must go and sell all, and give to the poor, and take up his cross and follow him;" the young man disliked his counsel, "became sad, and went away" grieved; and why? "Because he had great possessions;" he had them, and he loved them; and who can blame him for being sad, when he was told, that either he must lose eternal life, or part with them? He had not got his riches by fraud, violence, and oppression, as many among us have done, and resolve to keep them, and yet hope for everlasting life, (for so he had not kept the commandments, which CHRIST spake to him of,) his love to the world had not prevailed so far upon him, as to commit such wickedness; but his fault was, that he had so great a love to his riches, that he could not part with them, no not for the obtaining everlasting life. Had he been as a little child, and valued them no more than a child had done, he had obtained his desire, and had entered into the kingdom of God: But, because it was not thus with him, his good meanings miscarried, and he fell short of that happiness.

Thus was this unhappy man a sad instance of our blessed SAVIOUR'S words; and so the disciples looked upon him, being astonished at the bewitching power of worldly possessions; they were astonished to see a man that meant so well, and was come so near the kingdom of God, overthrown by his great possessions; and since riches had so great a power over him, and could turn him back from the

kingdom of GOD, they believed, they would turn all the rich men in the world from it ; if he, after having kept the commandments from his youth up, did trust in his riches, no rich man could be found, they thought, that did not trust in them ; and therefore said among themselves, “ Who then can be saved ? ” (*Ver.* 16.) Only they who were as little children, were not afraid nor ashamed to confess CHRIST before their greatest enemies. Then the cross of CHRIST was their greatest glory ; and to be made like to him in suffering, and patience, and resignation to GOD, was the great desire and joy of their hearts. Then they could call upon men to deny themselves, and forsake all, as earnestly, as their Master had done before them ; for what else do these repeated exhortations signify, “ of not living to ourselves ; of being crucified to the world ; of being crucified, dead and buried with CHRIST ; of offering ourselves sacrifices to GOD ? ” And indeed, they did it very effectually, whilst their doctrine and practice went hand in hand together ; for, in spite of the wickedness of the world, and the subtle malice of the Devil, they prevailed in all places, and filled every corner of the world with wonders of self-denial, and patience, and contempt of the world ; with men that could take “ joyfully the spoiling of their goods,” and that counted not their lives dear for CHRIST’S sake.

And such self-denying men were Christians generally in the first ages of Christianity : Witness ATHENAGORAS, who speaking of those of his time, tells us, ‘ We are not moved with the loss of our estates, which our enemies wrest from us, nor with the violence that is offered to our reputation, or if there be any thing of greater concern than these ; for although these things are mightily valued amongst men, yet can we despise and slight them : Nay, we can not only when beaten refrain from striking again, and make no resistance against those that spoil us ; but to those that smite one cheek, we turn the other, and to those that take away the coat, we let go the cloak also.’

Thus did the Apostles and first Christians deny themselves, and forsake all ; and are not we bound to do so likewise ? May we be his disciples upon easier terms than they were ? Has he made the way to heaven broader than it was, and given us allowances which he vouchsafed not to them of former ages ? No, certainly.

It is true, we are not altogether in the same circumstances as they were, for the Christian profession (though now honourable among us) was then so vile a thing in the eyes of the world, and so extremely hated, that none could take it up, and own it publicly, without hazarding the loss of all they had ; and therefore, if any were so rash as to take it up, before they had denied themselves, they quickly discovered their rashness, by falling away from it : Therefore, it must be granted, that self-denial is not now so necessary to the retaining the bare profession of Christianity as it was of old : But as to the practice of it, it is certainly as necessary as ever. For though the profession be honoured at present, the practice is as much despised, and the making good what we profess in a pure and holy life, will certainly expose a man to as many evils (God be thanked, that I cannot say to death) as the profession of old was wont to do ; and therefore, he that will satisfy that name which he hath taken upon him, and observe the profession which he hath made in baptism, must be brought to that temper of mind, which those good men in the beginning were brought to, that is, he must be taken off from himself, from all self-interests, and self-satisfactions, must renounce all propriety in himself and every thing else, be dead to the world, have no more affection to the things of the world, than the dead have ; that so nothing may hinder him from living unto God. There are but few indeed that seriously consider this, and therefore we see that men generally account themselves Christians from their baptism ; and as long as they do not renounce their baptism, they are confident that they are so : But he that hath told us, “that many are called,” that is, to be Christians ; but “few are

chosen," that is, will approve themselves to be so, makes another judgment of them; and they will know it one day to their sorrow.

They have fallen by God's providence upon that which is in fashion among us, and they see no reason why they should cast it off, I mean the outward profession of Christianity: But as for that which is not fashionable, that is, the denying of ourselves, and dying to the world, they never understood it; and because they do not deny themselves, and die to the world, cannot live to God.

This might suffice, my brother, to convince thee, that thou must deny thyself, and forsake all, if thou desirest to live a Christian life. But because I know men's backwardness to entertain this hard saying, and because it is so absolutely necessary, that those who will live a Christian life, do both believe and practise it; I shall show thee yet further, that the not considering, or the not practising this self-denial, hath been the main cause why so many have rejected the Gospel in all ages, and why so many of these that have seemed to receive it, have yielded so imperfect an obedience to it. Didst thou never read in thy Bible, how few of those that heard CHRIST preach whilst he was upon earth, and saw the miracles that he wrought, especially of the greater sort, did truly believe in him? "Have any of the Rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him," was a choking question to any that would dare to speak for him. Those few disciples that he had, were of the poorer sort, that had not much to trust to, or much to lose for his sake; if any of the richer or greater sort were convinced that he was the CHRIST, yet they did not dare to own it, they would go by night to tell him of their faith; but openly they professed it not: And what might be the reason of this? Had not these great men those natural powers of judging, of assenting and consenting to the truth, which the others had? Was not their natural courage as great, and would they not have showed it as much in other cases, as these poor people could have done? Yes, undoubtedly. In all other matters they were the wise, those the ignorant;

they the bold and the hardy, those the poor-spirited and cowardly: But in this case the wise were fools, and the courageous were dastards.

And how was this? Those great, those rich and proud men could not, or would not learn this one lesson, which would have opened their eyes, and raised their poor spirits; to that degree of boldness, which they beheld in the disciples of CHRIST, and wondered at: "How can ye believe," said CHRIST himself to them, "as long as ye receive honour from one another, and seek not the honour that cometh from GOD only?" (*John* v. 44.) They loved themselves, and the praise of men too well, to approve of any thing that would lessen their reputation, or bring them one step lower in the esteem of the world: And they were too covetous, to leave all, to follow one that had not a house to put his head in.

Didst thou never observe the monstrous unbelief of many among us, and the gross hypocrisy of others? Didst thou never observe what great opposition is made by some men, against some of the clearest truths of Christianity, who yet seem very fond of other truths, that are not so clear, and lie not so level to human capacities? And didst thou never take notice, how strict some men are in some things, who yet allow themselves in the breach of very plain and very weighty precepts? Some men can preach and pray from morning till night, and talk Scripture to each other with much seeming seriousness, when like the Pharisees of old they will embrace any fair occasion to devour the house of a poor widow or orphan, or to exalt themselves in the world.

And what, dost thou think, is the reason of these things? The same, without doubt, that hindered the Jews of old from receiving CHRIST: And if these truths which they profess to believe, and these Christian duties which they are constant in, did as much oppose their interest, as the acknowledging of JESUS to be the CHRIST, did oppose the interests of the unbelieving Jews, they would quickly discover the truth of it, by falling away from those truths and

those duties, if not also from the whole religion. Not that I believe, they have been mere dissemblers from their first profession, or that they are, and have been so zealous in some things merely for the compassing of worldly ends, without any conviction of the truth or goodness of them, (for I doubt not but many of them have meant well from the very beginning,) but the corrupt affections, which did so fatally prejudice the Jews against the person of CHRIST, as strongly prejudice them against a great part of his doctrine. Those corrupt affections which they should have renounced at their first setting out, are like a thick cloud upon the eyes of their minds, not suffering them to discern those truths, which to resigned men are as manifest as the sun at noon-day, and as a strong bias upon their wills, drawing them aside from those good paths which they have a desire to walk in. They purpose well in the general, like the rich man before spoken of, when he came to CHRIST, and they do well in those things that oppose not their inordinate affections; but when they are to learn those duties, to which their lusts will not be reconciled, either they are not able to understand them, or have not the power to practise them.

I conclude therefore, that if we are resolved to be Christians, we must in the first place renounce ourselves, and our worldly affections: Our desires and resolutions would be vain, and come to nought, if we fail to do it.

It remains, that I endeavour briefly to beget a good opinion in thee of the duty I have been speaking of; to show thee, that it is not such an unreasonable thing as some men imagine, and that CHRIST cannot reasonably be thought a hard master for laying it upon us. For, surely,

1. He that hath laid nothing upon us, but what our state and condition, and his own design of love towards us, did make necessary, cannot be judged hard or cruel to us; and hath CHRIST required any thing more in this matter? No, undoubtedly; he could not give us health and life (how much soever he desired it) without removing our diseases: He could not be the Author of salvation to us, without

taking away that which was our destruction. And what was our disease and ruin, but an inordinate love of ourselves, and our fellow-creatures, whereby we fell away from God, to be as gods ourselves, to do our own wills, and to satisfy our own desires? Now, what is it that we would have, when we quarrel with CHRIST, and call his commandment grievous? Would we have our health and our desires too? Would we live and die also? Would we serve God a little, and ourselves much more? Or would we serve him so far only, as we shall please ourselves, and have that taken for all the service we owe him? If thou thinkest this to be unreasonable, as thou canst not but do, thou must needs acknowledge it to be necessary that thou shouldest be taken from thyself, and all worldly things, that thou mightest serve thy God. But besides,

2. We cannot reasonably look upon him as a hard master, who submitted himself to that which was imposed upon us, being himself the greatest example of self-denial, and forsaking all, that ever was. What thinkest thou of his appearing in our frail flesh, of his low estate in the world, of his pain and travail, of his thorny crown and cross? Was there no self-denial in all this, such as angels and men may justly be astonished at for ever? He, "who, in the form of God, thought it no robbery to be equal with God, made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of a man, and being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." He who might have commanded all the riches and glory in the world, "became poor, that by his poverty we might be made rich." He, who made all mankind to serve and please him, "pleased not himself," but became a servant for our good. He, who could have had more than twelve legions of angels for his guard, yielded his cheeks to be smitten, his face to be spit upon, his back to be scourged, his hands and feet to be nailed to an infamous tree, and his side and heart to be pierced by the vilest sinners, whom with one word of his mouth he might have turned into hell.

Thus did our great Master deny himself, and forsake all : And can we poor worthless wretches think it much to deny our vile selves, and to forsake those little things, which we call our own,- for his sake? Had he dealt with us, as those that once sat in MOSES'S chair did with their disciples, "laying heavy burdens upon them, and grievous to be borne, which they themselves would not touch with one of their fingers;" we might have had some seeming cause of complaint : But since he himself hath borne the burden, which he had lain upon us, yea and a far greater, we are most unreasonable, if we open our mouths against him. He is too soft and delicate a servant that would fare better than his LORD, or be exempted from that work, which his LORD disdaineth not to put his hand unto. But

3. I beseech thee, brother, tell me what it is which thou judgest hard and unreasonable in this commandment Is it that we who own ourselves to be nothing of ourselves, and to have nothing of ourselves, should be as nothing to ourselves, and challenge no propriety in ourselves, but in subordination to Him of whom we are, and from whom we have received all? Is it that He who hath made us for himself, and who hath freely given us all we do possess, will dispose of us and all according to his pleasure? Is it that we should prefer him before ourselves, and his will before our own, and be ready to part with all that he hath given us, whenever he is pleased to call for it? Is it that we should be content to receive evil from him as well as good, when he shall see it fit for his own glory and our greater good? I dare say, there is nothing in all this, that thou wilt except against; and this is all that is required of thee. But yet further,

4. Suppose it appear after all, that what is here required, is not only just and reasonable, but profitable for us; may we not look upon them to be very unreasonable, that quarrel with it? And truly thus it will appear to be, upon very little consideration: It is no small advantage, to be at liberty to obey GOD entirely, and to be able to do it, with ease and pleasure: It is no little benefit to be out of the

reach of the Devil's malice, and of all those dangerous weapons wherewith he assaults and destroys poor souls. And this we shall infallibly obtain by the practice of this one duty. For what is it, that indisposes us to the service of God, that makes his righteous laws to be grievous to us, but our taking upon us to be something of ourselves, and to dispose of ourselves according to our own wills? What is it that gives the Devil so much advantage over us, but our disorderly passions and affections; and whence have all his temptations their force, all his artifices their success, but from our inordinate love of ourselves, and these worldly things? And therefore, when we have put off this love and banished these things from our hearts, we have disarmed our enemy or taken off the edge of all his weapons; we have baffled his accursed policies, and secured ourselves from his devices. Men may talk of riches, and honours, and pleasures, as long as they please, to those that are dead; and they may threaten them with reproaches and pains, till they have wearied themselves, and not find them moved in the least with it; and no less unmoveable shall we be, to all the temptations of the Devil, if we be but perfectly mortified and resigned. These are great advantages; but there is yet one more, no less considerable, that this will raise us above all the troubles, perplexities and sorrows of this miserable world, so that let what will come upon us here, it shall never be able to hurt us. For whence have all the evil things of the world (as we are wont to call them) their sting and edge, but from our unrenounced selves, our unmortified passions? We will be something, and every thing must be as we will have it; but in the event we find we are nothing, and that we can do nothing, and the stubborn things will not comply with us; and therefore we are troubled, we are in pain, we are overwhelmed with sorrow. This is an evil that hath no remedy but self-denial, and resignation to God; and this is a remedy that never fails. When we have put off ourselves, as we ought, and disengaged our affections from all earthly things, and given God leave to dispose of his own creatures, and

to govern his own world : Then we shall be in peace, then we shall be happy, and not till then ; then nothing can go against us, because we shall be willing to comply with every thing.

By this time I hope I have perfectly reconciled thee to this duty, and that thou art resolved to put it in practice. It remains now that I show thee, as briefly as may be, how to do it. And,

5. Because thou wilt certainly meet with many and great difficulties in thy first endeavours, and the difficulties will be the more and greater, by how much the more thou hast loved thyself and the world formerly, and hast been accustomed to please thyself, and to indulge thy affections ; it will be necessary,

(1.) That thou enter upon the practice of it, with the strongest convictions, both of the necessity and reasonableness of it : And that thou arm thyself with such considerations as may beat down all opposition, and effectually encourage thee against all the difficulties thou canst encounter with. And after this manner mayest thou discourse with thy own heart concerning it : ‘ I am told, that I must deny myself, and forsake the world, and take up my cross, if I will be a true Christian : I am told it by CHRIST himself, and if I do not believe him, why do I call him my LORD ? I know that his words have been confirmed, and are confirmed daily by a thousand instances : Nay, I am myself an unhappy instance of the truth of them, having made but little progress in Christian knowledge, and less in Christian virtue, merely for want of a serious regard unto them. But if I do believe them, why do I not practise accordingly ? Does not my everlasting happiness depend upon my being a Christian indeed ? And can I reasonably stick at any thing that is needful for the securing myself of that ? Is it fit that such a poor thing as I am, should take upon me to be absolute and independent ? What have I done for myself heretofore, and what can I do for myself hereafter, that I should presume to please myself, or seek myself in any thing ? I

cannot add one inch to my stature, I cannot make one hair white or black, I cannot do myself the least good, nor remove from myself the lightest evil ; and shall I take upon me to do my own will without respect to Him, by whom alone I am, and without whose influence I can do nothing ? And what is the world, that I should set my heart upon it, and prefer it before my GOD and SAVIOUR ? Did my love of it ever do any good, or will it do me any without GOD's blessing, or when I am to leave it ; that I should cleave so close unto it ? I know that it is GOD alone gives me any portion in it, that gives me any comfort by it, and I know that he can deprive me of both when he pleases ; and therefore I shall be, not only a rebel, but a fool, if I resign not myself and it to him, and say not, whatever is laid upon me, " It is the LORD, let him do whatsoever seemeth good unto him." Come therefore, O my heart, let us be no longer rebels against heaven, and enemies to our own happiness : We are not our own, we are not the world's, but we are GOD's, we are CHRIST's, therefore let GOD dispose of us as he will, and let him give those worldly things to whom he pleases, so that we may have his favour, and enjoy it for ever. O vain, O transitory world ! I am now dying, and I will be for ever dead unto thee, that I may follow CHRIST, and live unto my GOD. Favour these good desires, favour them with thy grace, O my GOD, and suffer not a soul, that earnestly aspires towards thee, to fall short of thee.' With these and such like thoughts, thou wilt do well to enter upon the practice of this duty. But then I advise thee,

(2.) To do as much as thou canst, to keep these and the like thoughts continually in thy mind. However, fail not to begin every day with them. When thou first beholdest the light in the morning, after thou hast sent up thy heart to GOD in some short acknowledgments of his mercy towards thee, tell thy heart, that thou hast by GOD's goodness another day added to thy life, which thou must employ for him and his service, who hath bestowed it on thee, and not for the pleasing of thyself ; and charge it, as it will

answer for it at the great day, that it take care to do accordingly. The like thoughts and resolutions will do well again about noon, and indeed at any time of the day, and the oftener they return into thy mind, the more easily wilt thou come to that perfect resignation, which thou art concerned to aim at. But yet further,

(3.) It will behove thee to be frequent in exercises of mortification and self-denial. Restrain thy wonted liberties, and deny thyself thy accustomed satisfactions; acquaint thyself with hardships, and turn not away from sufferings, remembering that thou art a soldier under the ensign of the cross, and therefore must not be nice and tender, soft and delicate. Mortify thy senses, and accustom them to those things that are least agreeable, knowing that there are some offices to be done sometimes by a Christian, such as visiting poor prisoners, and dressing of poor people's sores, which men of a nice and squeamish sense will hardly be persuaded to perform. Mortify thy passions likewise, and keep them strictly within their bounds; for as he is a beast that is a slave to sense, so is he a fool that is governed by his passions. In one word, consider thyself well, mark thy temper, thy inclinations, and keep thyself and them under constant discipline and correction. Hast thou a trifling spirit? Art thou delighted with the railleries, sportings, and jestings, of wanton fancies and loose tongues? Fail not, I beseech thee, to restrain thy inclinations; avoid the company of light persons, and turn away thy thoughts from trivial matters, to the concernments of a soul that must shortly appear before the bar of a just and holy God; remembering that the Master whom thou professest to serve, was a serious, grave, and useful person, and not a buffoon or stage-player. It was the grief of a devout man many years ago (ST. BERNARD) to observe the lightness, laughter, and security of many Christians, and his continual fear, that he should see them forsaken of the divine grace, of which they showed themselves so unmindful. What grief, what fear, dost thou think, would have possessed his heart, if he had lived

in this age, and had been a witness of our vanity in this kind? We live in a merry world at present, and nothing is sacred enough to escape our sportings: But believe it, God will shortly spoil our vain mirth, and make us serious, whether we will or not. Art thou soft and slothful, inclined to sensuality and voluptuousness? Rouse up thyself, and be always doing, take up with coarse fare, fast often, lie hard, go frequently to the house of mourning, and keep Him continually in thine eye, who after a life of continued travel in doing good had no easier bed than a cross to rest upon. Do the riches of the world please thee? Refuse them when they are offered, or let the hand of liberality immediately distribute them to those that want them; and keep in mind those good men, whom thy Bible tells thee of, who, though they could have enriched themselves by miracles, yet continued poor, and had not so much as an house to put their heads in. Do worldly honours and the applauses of men delight thee? Retire from public employment, and hide thyself in meanness and obscurity; be exact and open in the practice of those virtues which are most unfashionable, and which the generality of men have a mean opinion of; and forget not, that there was a person once in the world, who was able to have governed the whole world, that led the greatest part of his life in country villages, and among poor people, and would not have his great and mighty works publicly spoken of.

This is to practise self-denial; and by these and the like practices, thou wilt in a short time arrive at that perfect resignation, to which I desire to lead thee. But then in the last place,

(4.) Be sure that in these practices, and in whatever else thou dost, thou take nothing to thyself; but refer thyself and all to Almighty God. Thou mayest begin well, my brother, in renouncing thyself, and yet mayest end ill in that very self which thou didst at first renounce; and this thou dost, if thou do these things for the satisfaction of thyself, and seekest thy own glory in them.

Forget not therefore this last advice; it is not for thyself,

but for GOD, that thou must be thus employed ; that thou mayest be entirely resigned to GOD, and be for ever united with GOD. Thou must be as nothing to thyself, and the world must be as nothing to thee, that GOD may be all in all.

CHAPTER III.

Containing a third Advice, To give up ourselves, Souls and Bodies, entirely to GOD.

I. To GIVE up thyself, thy soul and body, all the faculties of the one, and all the members of the other, together with all thou hast, entirely to GOD through CHRIST JESUS, uniting thyself to him in the closest manner, and by the strongest bonds that possibly thou canst, resolving to be his and only his for ever. To make thee capable of doing this, was the design of my former advice ; and if thou canst practise that well, thou wilt readily follow this : For those bonds being broken which kept thee from GOD, thou wilt as naturally incline to him, as fire does ascend upwards when that which keeps it down is removed ; and therefore, the fewer words may serve to enforce this advice. The heads of some few considerations I shall briefly offer thee, which thy own thoughts may work upon, as thou seest good. In the first place then,

1. Thou must acknowledge thyself to be GOD's creature. He is the only spring of thy being and life. And is it not just then that thou shouldest live to him, and to him alone ? Art thou not a very unreasonable creature, if thou refusest to be his, by whom alone thou art, and without whom thou canst not be at all ? Yes, surely.

2. Thou must acknowledge GOD to be the only Supporter, Preserver, and Maintainer of thy life and being : Thou livest by him as surely as the tree by its root ; and if he withdraw his quickening influence but one moment, thou art dead without remedy. Those necessaries for the pre-

servicing of life, which the world furnishes thee with, are all from him, and all the virtue and efficacy they have for that purpose is no less from him. It is he that refreshes thee by heat and light, that nourishes thee by meat and drink, that cures thee by medicine, and without him thou couldst have no nourishment, no health, no refreshment. And with what reason then canst thou withhold thyself from him? Surely, with none at all.

3. Thou believest **God** to be thy Saviour, that is, that he hath given thee his only begotten **SON**, to deliver thee from sin and death, and to bring thee to everlasting life; and that as he in our nature hath offered up himself a sacrifice upon the cross for thy sins, so he hath undertaken to bring back thy lost soul to **God**. And therefore thou art a most ungrateful wretch, if thou wilt not comply with his gracious undertaking, but refusest to be **CHRIST**'s, that thou mayest be **God**'s for ever.

4. Thou dost believe and acknowledge, that for this end he hath taken possession of thee by his **HOLY SPIRIT**, who is continually working in thee, to dispose thee, by putting off all selfish inclinations and desires, and by abandoning all that is dear to thee, to offer up thyself, as **ABRAHAM** offered up his **ISAAC**, a sacrifice unto **God**. And therefore thou canst not, without the guilt of the most abominable sacrilege, take upon thee to be any thing or to do any thing, but for **God** and to **God**.

5. Thou hast made an outward profession of giving up thyself to **God**, and being **God**'s long ago. This thou didst at thy baptism, when, renouncing the Devil, the world and the flesh, thou didst give up thyself to **God** the **FATHER**, **SON**, and **HOLY GHOST**; and this profession thou hast probably renewed at the table of the **LORD**, where commemorating the greatest expression of the greatest love to man that ever was, thou didst 'offer and present thyself, thy soul and body, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice to the **LORD**;' and thou hast seemed to the world, to this very day, to own all this. And therefore, if thou art not, if thou wilt not be **God**'s, by the full consent of thy

heart, thou art the vilest hypocrite upon earth, and an accursed traitor to thy great Creator, to thy gracious and loving SAVIOUR. To all this thou mayest add,

6. That this is that holiness which the Scriptures so frequently recommend unto thee, and without which thou canst not hope to see the LORD. When things are separated from common uses, and are given up to GOD so as never to be made use of but for him, or in his worship and service, they are called holy things; and so indeed they are, so far as things can be. Thus when thou hast separated thyself, taken off thy heart from all created things, and given up thyself to GOD, to be his, and only his, in faithful obedience for ever, thou art holy, and not till then; and if thou thinkest otherwise, thou dost dangerously deceive thyself. Add to this,

7. That this is thy perfection, and the greatest perfection thou art capable of. Thou canst do nothing better than to resign thyself to GOD; and thou canst not possibly be in any better state, than in a state of pure resignation to him. And therefore, in the last place,

8. Thou mayest safely believe, that this is thy happiness, and the greatest happiness thou canst attain to. The truth is, these three words, holiness, perfection, and happiness, are the very same in signification. He that says, that the saints in heaven are blessed, says no other thing than this, that they are made perfect; and he that says they are made perfect, says no other thing than this, that they are completely holy; and he that speaks this, says no more, than that they are entirely GOD's, that they are perfectly disengaged from every thing that might withhold them in the least from him, and so united to him that nothing can dissolve the union: So that all that I would now persuade thee to, is but to make thyself as perfect and happy as thou canst be: And methinks in this case it should be no hard matter to prevail with thee, when thou canst not but see thy interest in that which is recommended to thee as thy duty; it is impossible, if thou art the man I now suppose thee to be, but thou must yield thy full consent unto it. And therefore

leave these things to thy serious thoughts, and proceed to give thee some directions how to perform this good and happy work.

II. That thou art concerned to take the greatest care that may be to do it well, I presume I need not tell thee; and therefore, as I earnestly recommend the following directions to thee, so I hope thou wilt not fail to practise them. And because it is a matter of great moment in every thing to begin well, I advise thee,

1. To separate thyself for some time from the world. Retire into thy closet, or into some secret place, where no eye may see thee, and nothing divert or disturb thee. And when thou art there, consider, that thou art come thither about a business of the greatest importance; thou art to give thyself to God, to unite thyself more firmly to him; but of thyself, and without God's special grace, thou art not able to do it: If he does not draw thee, if he does not overcome thy heart by the sweet and powerful influences of his love, thou wilt make but faint and feigned offers of thyself unto him. And therefore thou must not fail, in the First place, To fall upon thy knees, and with the greatest reverence to acquaint him with the desires of thy soul, and to beg his acceptance of them, and his blessing upon them. And if thou knowest not how to do it better, thou mayest make use of this form of words:—'My LORD, and my GOD, thou knowest the very bottom of my heart, and my desires are not hid from thee: I am encouraged by my own happy experience of thy goodness, as well as by thy gracious declarations of thy will, to present myself before thee, notwithstanding I know myself to be unworthy of the least favour from thee. I am ashamed when I think how I have demeaned myself hitherto towards thee; and that I have lived so long a stranger, yea an enemy to thee, taking upon me to dispose of myself, and to please myself in the main course of my life. I abhor myself for it, and acknowledge that I deserve for ever to be abandoned by thee; but thou hast not dealt with me according to my deserts, blessed be thy goodness for it; and therefore, I now desire unfeign-

edly to return unto thee, and renouncing all interest and propriety in myself, I desire to give up myself entirely to thee; I would be thine, and only thine, in all love and obedience for ever; but, I know I am nothing, and can do nothing of myself; and if ever I am thine, I must be indebted wholly to thy goodness for it. O my GOD, my SAVIOUR, and my Sanctifier, turn not away thy face from a poor soul that seeks thee; but as thou hast kindled these good desires in my heart, confirm, increase, and satisfy them. Reject not that poor gift which I would make of myself unto thee, and enable me to make it in such a manner, that it may be acceptable in thy sight. LORD, hear me, help me, and show mercy to me, for CHRIST JESUS'S sake. Amen.'

2. When thou hast thus offered thy desires to GOD, rise from thy knees, and, Secondly, Begin to stir up thy soul, to a perfect surrender of itself, by the arguments before laid down, pressing them upon thyself with all thy might. And that they may have as great an influence upon thee as is possible, thou mayest imagine that thou hearest Almighty God speaking to thee from heaven in this manner:—'Consider thyself, O man, and take notice what thou art, and what good things thou dost possess: Look upon thy body, and all its useful members; consider thy soul and all its faculties, and tell me whence thou art, and to whom thou art indebted for them: Look upon the world that furnishes thee with all things necessary; and tell me who was the framer of it, and who made it serviceable to thee? Canst thou deny, that I have done all this? And wherefore then hast thou lifted up thyself against me, and presumed to act as if thou hadst no dependence upon me, or obligation to me? If thou sowest thy seed in thy field, thou expectest to reap the crop; if thou didst nourish and provide for a poor beast, thou thinkest that thou mayest use him at thy pleasure: But I have maintained and preserved a creature, (hear, and be ashamed of thyself,) and thou wilt allow me no right and title to him and his service. Tell me, O thou unjust and ungrateful wretch, did I ever give thee liberty to dispose of

thyself? Did I ever give thee occasion to think that I made no reckoning of thee, or that I expected no acknowledgment from thee? No, wretched creature, thou didst know that I made thee for myself, and that I would not give away my interest in thee; and that as I made thee capable of serving me, so I expected and desired it from thee: And therefore did I love thee from the beginning, and bestowed innumerable gifts upon thee: I gave thee all things that were fitting for thee, and assured thee that I would withhold no good thing from thee; yea, I gave thee my own only begotten SON, who descended out of my bosom to assure thee of my love, as well as to convince thee, that thou hadst deserved my hatred. Thou canst rage against a poor servant that neglects his business; yea, thy poor neighbour shall feel the effects of thy displeasure, if he wrong thee; they must seek thy pardon, and think themselves beholden to thee, if by so doing they can make their peace: And yet I have humbled myself to thee, thou vile worm, and have not spared my own SON, that I might spare thee, and bring thee to a due sense of thy duty to me. Heaven and earth can witness for me, that I have stooped low enough, in desiring the friendship of rebellious dust and ashes; and they shall also witness the justice of my severity to thee, if so much love and condescension will not work upon thee.

Here thou mayest pause a while, and observe how thy soul is affected with these things; and then thou mayest imagine again, that thou hearest Almighty GOD speaking further to thee, and more fully relating the wonderful history of his love in CHRIST JESUS. And after he hath given thee an account of his mean birth, of his humble and painful life, of his cruel death, and his design in all this, proceeding to show thee with how much love, and with what tender regard for thee, he left this world, and ascended to his Father; and how, after he had done and suffered in his own person, as much as was necessary, he sent the HOLY GHOST to complete the great work of thy eternal salvation. And then imagine, that he tells thee what that blessed SPIRIT hath for his part done for thee; what gifts he hath

bestowed, what wonders he hath wrought, what methods he hath used, and with what goodness, and patience, and long-suffering, to bring thee to a right understanding, and a real sense of his love, and of all thy duty to him; and to excite, encourage, and enable thee to the performance of it; and in the end bespeaking thee: ‘And now, wretch that thou art, must all his love be lost upon thee; and must I lose thee for ever, after all that I have done for thee? Will nothing work upon thy hard heart, upon thy proud and stubborn will? Will nothing conquer the perverseness of thy Spirit? Not the commands of thy Maker! Not the death of thy SAVIOUR! Not the good motions and inspirations of thy Sanctifier! Canst thou withstand my power, that thou art thus obstinate against my goodness? And if thou wilt not suffer me to save thee, dost thou think that I am not able to destroy thee? O foolish creature, and unwise! consider these things seriously; remember what thou hast done, and what unreasonable courses thou hast taken hitherto, and proceed no farther in thy folly, but return to that love that calls thee, that entreats thee, that would save thee.’

Here thou mayest pause a little, as before: And if any thing more be necessary to shame and humble thee, to soften and melt thee, thou mayest turn thyself to consider thy own engagements, and to charge upon thyself that monstrous perfidiousness which thou hast, and wilt continue to be guilty of, if thou dost now withstand the calls of God. And that thy perfidiousness may appear the more detestable, thou mayest consider in the last place, what that is which thou hast been engaged in, and art now called upon to do; it is not to do any thing unjust or unreasonable, it is not to destroy thyself; but on the contrary, to do the justest, the most reasonable, and the best thing that thou art capable of doing; it is to return to the Author of thy being, and thereby serve the end of thy creation, and consult the only happiness of thy soul; it is to unite thyself to the Supreme Good, to make thyself his, and to make him thine for ever. And is this a thing so much against thee,

that thou needest so much persuasion to it? ‘O my soul, my foolish soul, (mayest thou say,) what canst thou say for thyself in this case? Is there any excuse for thy folly, any plea for thy wickedness? No, far be it from thee to seek for any: Let us rather amend what we have done amiss, and be more wise for the time to come. Happy had we been, if we had needed, from the beginning, so much invitation to destroy ourselves; but since we could do that upon none at all, let us no longer withstand this which is so importunate with us to save ourselves.’

Then turning thyself to God, (in whose presence thou hast been all this while,) thou mayest speak, as I hope thou wilt be able with truth to do, in this manner to him:—‘I am overcome, I am overcome, O GOD, I can no longer withstand thy mighty love: I must, I do yield myself a captive to it. I am thine, I do acknowledge, by all right, and I will be thine for ever. I can do no less in return to that wonderful love thou hast showed me; and I can do no more. O let this little be accepted by thee, and receive me for thine own; take possession of me by thy SPIRIT, and let it preserve me for ever to thyself, as I now sincerely resign up myself and all I have to thee.’ Then,

3. Casting thyself upon the ground, say thus; and say it with all thy heart and soul:—‘TO GOD the FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST, my Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, do I give myself, soul and body, and all that belongs unto me, to be guided, governed, and disposed of according to his will, and to his honour and glory; and may he be a witness to this my act, which I promise never to revoke; I do it with an upright heart, and an unfeigned purpose to make it good to my life’s end. Thou art my witness, O my GOD, be thou also my helper with thy continued grace, and so shall I be faithful to thee according to my heart’s desire. Amen, Amen.’ But then,

4. As in matters of the world, that which is done in private between man and man, must in some cases receive a further confirmation, by such solemnities as are appointed

by human laws; so that which thou hast done thus between GOD and thy own soul, must be farther confirmed, and as it were completed, by those solemnities which the laws of God require; and therefore fail not to take the first opportunity to go to the table of the LORD. At that holy table GOD will not fail to meet thee, attended with an innumerable company of angels: And therefore, when thou art at that table, and beholdest what manner of love is there showed thee, let thy heart speak in this manner to Almighty GOD:—‘ There is all the reason in the world, O heavenly FATHER, that I should give up myself entirely to thee, since thou hast not withheld thy SON, thy only SON, from me. There is all the reason in the world, O my blessed SAVIOUR, that I should surrender myself, and all I have, into thy hands, since thou didst offer thyself a sacrifice upon the cross for me, and dost now offer these pledges of the all-sufficient virtue of that sacrifice to me. There is all the reason in the world, that I should resign myself to thee, O holy and blessed SPIRIT, since thou dost offer thyself to be a principle of holiness and life in me. And therefore, as I now accept, with all thankfulness, those inestimable favours, and declare my acceptance of them in the sight of these thy servants, and all thy holy angels here present, by receiving these tokens and pledges of them, according to thy command and institution; so do I give up myself and all I have to thee, and declare it before the face of all these witnesses; and I earnestly desire, that even my unworthy self may be accepted through the perfect sacrifice of my dearest SAVIOUR, and be sanctified by the HOLY GHOST, and be owned by my GOD, to the everlasting praise of the holy, blessed, and undivided Trinity, whose I am, and whose I will be for ever and ever. Amen.’ But then,

5. When thou art gone from this holy table, retire as soon as possibly thou canst, whilst these good thoughts are warm in thy breast, into thy closet; and there take the book of thy spiritual accounts into thy hand, (for I would not have thee to be without such a book, for recording these things wherein the welfare of thy soul is concerned, lest thou be

condemned by the care and exactness of those whom we call good husbands in worldly matters,) and with thy pen write thus:—‘In such a year, and such a month, and on such a day, I did, through God’s grace, with all the devotion of my heart and soul, make an entire surrender of myself, and all things belonging to me, to Almighty God, protesting and vowing, that he should have the full guiding, governing, and disposing of me and mine for ever.’

And then that thou mayest have a more distinct understanding of what thou hast done, thou mayest under-write these following particulars, namely,

‘I have given up myself entirely to God; and therefore I must not serve myself, but him all the days of my life.

‘I have given him my understanding; and therefore my chief care and study must be to know him, his nature, his perfections, his works, his will. These must be the subject of my meditations night and day: As for all other things, they must be as dross and dung to me; “and the knowledge of them must be as loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of God in CHRIST.” I must believe all his revelations, and, silencing all carnal reasonings against whatsoever he teaches me, I must rest myself on his veracity, being fully persuaded that he can neither be deceived himself, nor deceive me.

‘I have given him my will; and therefore I must have no will of mine own; whatever he wills, I must will also: I must will his glory in all things, as he does; and that must be my chief end in every thing: I must prefer it before all desirable things, and subordinate my own desires, delights and satisfactions to it: I must say, as the Psalmist, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth, that I desire besides thee:” I must do whatsoever God commands me, and forbear whatever he forbids; and I must do it for this reason chiefly, because he does command or forbid me: Nay, I must delight to do it; and it must be to me “as my meat and drink.” (*John* iv. 34.) I must consent to suffer whatever he will lay upon me; and

though it may be his pleasure to lay hard things upon me, and grievous to be borne, yet I must not repine or murmur, but with cheerfulness and thankfulness submit myself to it. Whatever threatens me, I must say, "It is the LORD, let him do what seemeth him good;" and whatever befalls me, "I must give thanks; for that is his will concerning me in CHRIST JESUS."

'I have given him all the passions and affections of my soul; and therefore he must dispose of them, govern, and set bounds unto them; he must have my love, my fear, my delight, my joy; and nothing in the world must have any share in these, or any of my affections, but with respect to him, and for his sake: What he loves, I must love; what he hates, I must hate; what he is well pleased with, I must rejoice in; what he is grieved with, I must mourn for; the objects of his pity I must have compassion on: And all in such measures and degrees as he is pleased to prescribe me.

'I have given him my body; and therefore must glorify him with it: I must not dare to abuse it by gluttony, drunkenness, adultery, fornication, or any other uncleanness: I must look upon it as his temple, and therefore must preserve it pure and holy, fit for my GOD to dwell in: I must not wrong it by pampering or indulging it; nor by showing too much rigour towards it, in over-much fasting, watching, labouring; but must keep it, as far as in me lies, healthy, vigorous, active, and fit to do him all manner of service.

'I have given him not myself only, but also all that belongs to me; and therefore, my children, my friends, my servants must all be his, if I can make them so.

'I have given him all my worldly goods; and therefore I must prize them, and use them only for him: His house, his Priests, his poor must have their portions from me with a willing mind; and though I have no more than necessaries for my life, yet I must be content to part with them when my LORD shall command me.

'I have given him my reputation; and therefore I must value it, and endeavour to maintain it only in respect to

him, as it may do him service, and advance his honour in the world.

‘ I have given him myself and all ; and therefore I must look upon myself to be nothing, and to have nothing out of him : He must be the sole Disposer, Governor, and Guide of myself and all : He must be my Portion and my All.’

And then in the close thou mayest add this :—

‘ Thus have I given myself to GOD, and to all this have I bound myself in the most solemn manner ; and with my own hand do I now testify my full consent unto it, and I am resolved to make good the whole, and every part of it, God assisting me, to my life’s end. I doubt not but I shall meet with many temptations to the contrary, I shall be often told of my singularity and preciseness ; and some may tell me in kindness, that I do more than is necessary, and that I must accommodate myself to this or that person, company, custom ; but my answer shall be to all, I am not my own, I am not for myself, nor for my friends, nor for the world, nor for its customs ; but for my GOD. I will “ give to CÆSAR what I owe to CÆSAR, and to GOD what I owe to GOD.” The LORD be merciful to me, his unworthy servant.’

All this, I say, thou wilt do well to write in thy book of spiritual accounts ; and as often as thou art called to the table of the LORD, take a view of it, and call thyself strictly to an account how thou hast made it good, and how and wherein thou hast failed ; and give God thanks for what thou hast been able to do, and humble thyself before him for all that thou hast omitted, confessing it with sorrow, and earnestly begging pardon for it, renewing thy resolutions and vows, and imploring a greater measure of his grace to enable thee to do better for the time to come. Thou shouldest do this once a week at least, upon the Saturday in the evening, or early in the morning on the LORD’S day. I must confess, I am not able to promise thee, but thou wilt discern many failings when thou comest thus to examine thyself, though thou hast been ever so careful to keep close to GOD ; but yet, let not this discourage thee, because thou hast to do

with a God that knows thy frailty, and abounds in mercy and compassion; and as long as thou dost not withdraw thy heart from him, nor slack thy endeavours to make good thy resolutions, thou mayest rest thyself assured thou shalt not want the choicest tokens of his love, I mean a daily supply of grace, and strength to obey and please him. Thou mayest feel thyself at first to be weak as a little child, but be not dismayed at it, for thou wilt find in a little time, that SPIRIT which first breathed into thee this new life, will preserve and cherish it, and make thee to “grow up to a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of CHRIST.”

Thus have I showed thee, my dear brother, how thou mayest become a real Christian, “a new creature in CHRIST JESUS.” And when these things are done, thou mayest safely account thyself to be one; and all those privileges which the Holy Scriptures assure thee belong to real Christians, thou mayest justly challenge as belonging to thyself. Are they “one with CHRIST?” So art thou. Have they “the SPIRIT of CHRIST?” So hast thou. Have they “fellowship with the FATHER and the SON?” So hast thou. Are they “the children of GOD, heirs of GOD, and co-heirs with CHRIST?” So art thou. This is a happy and honourable estate; no ambitious soul can aim at any thing higher. It is that to which all that call themselves Christians pretend; but they, and they only, that have thus resigned themselves to God, have attained. But by how much the greater thy happiness is in this estate, so much the more thou art concerned to take care that thou fall not from it, and to use all diligence to keep thyself in a firm possession of it; remembering that thou art not yet in heaven, where there is no falling away from God, but in a place of manifold temptations, where many draw back, and after they “have known the way of righteousness, turn from it;” for which purpose I must proceed to give thee some further directions.

CHAPTER IV

Containing the fourth Advice, To grow in the Knowledge of GOD, and of the Things of GOD.

I. THOU must endeavour daily to grow in the knowledge of GOD, and to get more clear, distinct, settled apprehensions of the things of GOD.

The reason of this advice is plain; the more thou knowest of GOD, and the more clear thy apprehensions of divine things are, the better thou wilt love GOD, and the more closely will thy heart cleave unto him.

There are some things indeed of such a nature, that the less men know them, the more they esteem and love them: Whilst they look upon them at a distance, and know them but imperfectly, they seem great and good, worthy of esteem and love; but when they come to handle them, and know them thoroughly, they are convinced that they deserve neither. But the things of GOD are of another sort; such is the perfection of their nature, that the more they are unfolded, the more we admire them, and the more strongly do they draw our souls towards them: And if there be any men that do not value them, we may be confident that they do not know them. What is it else that ST. JOHN means, when he tells us, “By this we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments: He that saith he knoweth him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” (1 *John* ii. 3, 4.) Doth not this imply plainly, that they who know GOD truly, will obey him, and that the reason why they do not love and obey him, is their ignorance of him? Either they know not GOD at all, or their knowledge is so slight, so imperfect, that it makes little or no impression on their heart: Their conceptions of GOD are like those conceits which we have of some things in our sleep, which either affect us not at all, or are forgotten by us, as soon as we awake. But he that does know GOD, does also know himself; and he that knows GOD and himself, cannot but keep in a state of resig-

nation and subjection to GOD continually. He will feel those impressions upon himself, which holy JOB did, when GOD had made himself a little better known unto him than he was before, and will say from the very bottom of his heart, “ Behold I am vile;” he will know that it is not for a worm to contend with the Creator of all things, not for him that was born like a wild ass’s colt, to presume to find out the Almighty to perfection. He will feel the truth of what the Psalmist says, “ They that know thy name will put their trust in thee:” (*Psal.* ix. x :) And will heartily assent to a saying of a great man, ‘ That the more we reject ourselves, and commit ourselves to GOD, the better it is for us.’ He will say, as a devout man once did, ‘ What art thou, O LORD, and what am I?’ He will be continually admiring his sovereign greatness, and will be no less sensible of his own worthlessness. He that knows GOD truly, will also know the world; and he that knows GOD and the world aright, will never be drawn from GOD by any of the world’s allurements; he will know, that the world is nothing of itself; and will he set his heart upon that which is not? He will know, that without GOD it can contribute no more to his happiness, than it did to his being: And can this steal away thy heart from the Author of all good, which never did nor can bestow the least good upon thee? How vile doth this earth seem unto us, when we lift up our eyes and look upon the heavens? Surely much more vile will all things be esteemed by him, whose soul is possessed with a true knowledge of the Maker of them.

It was therefore a true saying of a holy man of old, (ST. AUSTIN,) ‘ That no man loses GOD, but he that is deceived.’ And another person many years after him is said to speak no worse, when, being in an ecstasy, he cried out, ‘ O my GOD! O my LORD! O the GOD of my heart! O that all men did know thee! they would never offend thee, they would ever love thee.’ For surely, (as the author of the *Book of Wisdom* tells us,) “ To know GOD is

perfect righteousness, and to know his power is the root of immortality." (*Wisd.* xv. 4.)

This may suffice to show thee the reason of my advice. Let me now as briefly direct thee how to practise it.

II. To this purpose let me tell thee,

1. That thou art not concerned to know as much as may be known of GOD: But only so much as is necessary to keep thee entirely resigned and obedient to his will; and therefore thou must not trouble thyself with those nice and curious speculations, which are of no use or tendency to this end. That knowledge, whatever the object of it is, which will not conduce to make thee better, is impertinent, useless, and unprofitable; the hunting after it has ruined thousands, but never saved one soul.

2. Though thou art not concerned to know as much as may be known of GOD, yet thou must endeavour to know these great and useful things I have spoken of, as well as possibly thou canst; and therefore, thou must not content thyself with that slight and superficial knowledge, which the generality of men have of them, who rather dream of divine things, than know them; but thou must labour for a clear, distinct apprehension of them, and for a firm and well grounded persuasion, both of the truth and goodness of them. And to this purpose, thou must,

3. Apply thyself to the use of all good means, and that with great care and diligence; remembering, that if it be a folly to do meaner things slightly, to be careless and slight in such a matter as this, can be no less than madness.

Now the means that you are to use, are these that follow:—

(1.) Reading the Holy Scriptures, and hearing them read: This thou art to do daily; thou must borrow some part of every day from thy worldly employments, to read or hear them read. Our blessed SAVIOUR bids us search the Scriptures. (*John* v. 39.) AND ST. PAUL tells us, "They are able to make us wise unto salvation." And if any man's words are of greater weight with us than theirs, we ill deserve the name of Christians.

(2.) Reading good books : I call those good, which treat of the great things of GOD discreetly, plainly, convincingly, and affectionately : Of which sort I know not many in the world, and therefore thou art to take the best advice thou canst have, in the choice of them.

(3.) Hearing of sermons and good discourses made by CHRIST'S Ministers. These discourses CHRIST'S Ministers are commanded to make, for the edification of CHRIST'S Church ; (see *2 Tim.* iv. 1, 2;) and therefore Christian people must needs think themselves bound to attend unto them ; and they are over wise or over good, that conceit they have no need of them : I mean, they are neither wise nor good.

(4.) Frequent conferring with serious Christians about divine things ; which is a means of improving knowledge, that hath several advantages above any other : For besides this, we shall instruct others as well as ourselves, imparting our own knowledge to them, whilst we receive of theirs : That which we thus learn, we apprehend more clearly, and are more deeply affected with, than we are with that which we receive any other way ; and therefore, it is much to be lamented that it is no more used by those that call themselves Christians : And if we may not infer from the neglect of it, that men are not so knowing in the things of GOD, as they take themselves to be ; I am sure that they are not so good as they ought to be : They seldom forbear to talk of that which they love, when there is occasion offered for it ; so they would never be silent in these things, if they had that hearty affection for them, which they ought to have.

And as for the common excuse among the more serious sort of people, that they would not be taken for hypocrites : It is so far from justifying their neglect, that it manifests the naughtiness of their hearts, whilst they show themselves more careful for their own esteem, than for the honour of GOD, and the concerns of their souls.

There would be little or no religion seen in the world, if the abuse of it by hypocrites would warrant men to cast off the profession of it. There were too many hypocrites

in holy DAVID'S time, and "yet his tongue did not cease to speak of GOD'S righteousness, and of his praise all the day long." (*Psalms* xxxv. 28.) And the Apostles' times were not so happy as to be without them, and yet they call upon Christians, "to exhort one another daily;" (*Heb.* iv. 13;) "and to teach and admonish each other," and that by "psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs," as well as other ways. (*Coloss.* iii. 16.)

Those good men did never think, that the danger of being accounted hypocrites would discharge them from "seasoning their discourses with salt," or from speaking such things in their conversation with each other, as might be profitable, "and minister grace unto the hearers." (*Ephes.* iv. 29.)

(5.) Meditating frequently upon the good things we read and hear. This is another means for the improvement of our knowledge in the things of GOD; and it is so necessary, that without it all the rest will avail us but very little; for this is the digesting of what we read and hear: It is that which implants those notices of things which we have got in our hearts, and makes them bring forth those good fruits which in their own nature they are fit to do.

Thou must be frequent then in the use of this means, and let no day pass without spending some time in it: And if thou art in such circumstances, that thou must either omit to read good books, or to meditate, I advise thee to omit that, rather than this: For he that reads but little, and meditates much, will be a wiser and better man, than he that reads much, and meditates little.

(6.) Prayer. This is a means which must accompany all the rest, and ought never to be omitted; for certain it is, that we can know no more of GOD, than we are taught by him; if he do not manifest himself unto us, if he do not enlighten our minds, we shall advance but little by all we can do.

The Psalmist tells us, that "it is GOD that teaches men knowledge," (*Psal.* xc. 10,) and ST. PAUL tells us, that wisdom and knowledge are the gifts of the SPIRIT;

(1 *Cor.* xii. 8;) and if we desire that Spirit, or those gifts, we must ask for them; for thus did the holy men of old, as the Scripture assures us. (*Psal.* xxv. 4; cxix. 66.) And this the Apostle ST. PAUL taught us to do, when he prayed for the Colossians, “That they might be filled with the knowledge of GOD, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that they might walk worthy of the LORD, unto all pleasing; being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of GOD.” (*Coloss.* i. 9, 10.)

(7.) And then, in the last place, there is another means of improving our knowledge, of as great use, though little thought of, as any of the former; namely, the making a right use of that which we know; by applying it to practice, and regulating our lives and conversation according to it: By thus using what we know, we shall come to know it better; for there is no knowledge comparable to that which we call experimental; and he that tastes how good the LORD is, and how good the things of GOD are, knows them as much better than others do, as they that taste the sweetness of honey, know it better than they that have only heard of it.

Besides, by this use of what we know, we are put into a better disposition to know those things which as yet we know not; for, as some of the old Heathen wise men are wont to say, ‘as no eye can behold the sun, if it hath not the image of the sun in it, so no man is capable of understanding the things of GOD, but he whose soul is in some measure fashioned to the likeness of GOD;’ and this is confirmed by a more skilful man in divine things, than the wisest of them, I mean ST. PAUL, who tells us, “that the natural (or animal) man receiveth not the things of the SPIRIT of GOD, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned;” (1 *Cor.* ii. 14;) which assertion is grounded upon this truth, that there must be some conformity between the knowing faculty, and the thing to be known, or else there can be no knowledge; and therefore,

if we do not improve that little knowledge which we have, to the mortifying our corrupt affections; and if we use not

those external helps which GOD gives, to the spiritualizing of our minds, we can never truly understand the things of the Spirit; whereas, doing this, we shall be able to judge (or to discern) them clearly. And this is that which our great Master teaches us, (*John* vii. 17,) where he shows us, what we must do to attain a true and saving knowledge of his doctrine: “If any man will do his will, he shall know of my doctrine, whether it be of GOD, or whether I speak of myself:” And in another place, to encourage us to the practical use of what we know, he tells us, “He that keepeth my commandments, he it is that loveth me, and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my FATHER, and I will love him, and manifest myself unto him,” (*John* xiv. 21.)



CHAPTER V

Containing a fifth Advice. To live always as in God's Sight.

1. Thou must live always as in GOD's sight, or (as the words of the Psalmist are, set GOD always before thee.

This is a rule of so great use in a holy life, that some have thought, it may serve instead of other rules. And truly, if we suppose men to have sound knowledge of GOD, which I have but now advised thee to seek after, I know no reason but it may; however, the usefulness of it must be acknowledged to be great, and it lies so plain, that many words need not be used to show it thee; for if clear and sound apprehensions of GOD's Majesty, and his sovereign power, unsearchable wisdom, goodness and truth, will possess our hearts with love and fear, and bow our wills to his obedience: Surely that which will keep those apprehensions always present, and in force upon our minds, will keep us always resigned and obedient to him.

We know by experience, that the eyes of those whom we honour, and in whose favour we desire to be, have a great influence upon us, and make us take heed to ourselves,

and to all our behaviour ; and therefore the masters of virtue among the Heathens were wont to advise their scholars to imagine some excellent person, for whom they had a great veneration, to be always present with them, as an observer of their actions.

And can the remembrance of God's all-seeing eye be less powerful with us, to make us circumspect in our ways, and careful to approve ourselves in all things to him? Can we have a greater regard to the eyes of mortal men, whose favour can never stand us but in little stead, than we have to the eyes of the everlasting God, in whose favour is life, and in whose approbation consists our everlasting happiness? No; it is impossible. "I have thought on thy name," saith the Psalmist, "and have kept thy law." And in another place, "My ways are always before thee, therefore have I kept thy testimonies." (*Psalm cxix.* 168.)

It is a good story, which we have of a young man, who, being tempted by a strumpet, seemed to consent to her unlawful desires, but required some secret place to content her: She therefore led him into a private room, and when he excepted against it as not private enough, she led him into another; and that not pleasing him, she brought him into the most secret place in the house, and told him that it was not possible any eye should see him there: But then the young man, putting on a more serious countenance, demanded of her, whether she thought they could there be concealed from the eyes of Almighty God? With which question, and some short discourse that was pertinent to it, he was a means of converting her altogether from her sinful course of life.

Now if the consideration of God's presence does sometimes work these effects upon some of the worst of men, how happy will the effects of it be upon those, who have so known and loved him, as to renounce both themselves and the world for his sake; who love him as much for his goodness as they fear him for his power? Surely, as those men cannot but delight to think of him, and cannot but account themselves happy, that they are always under so good an

eye ; so the consideration of it must needs keep them constantly resigned to him, and in all things obedient to his will.

2. Thus much for the reason of my advice: I proceed, Secondly, To direct thee in the practice of it. It must be confessed, that it will be a hard matter for some to practise it: Those whose consciences are burdened with the guilt of sin, will find it very difficult, if not impossible: Such men must first practise the duties of self-denial and resignation: But to those that are resigned to God, and united to him by love, as I hope thou art, nothing can be more easy, pleasant, and delightful; our souls willingly employ their thoughts upon that which they love, and gladly embrace all opportunities of being in its presence; and therefore very brief directions may suffice thee concerning it: And,

(1.) Let me advertise thee, that the practice of it must be grounded upon a firm persuasion of God's omnipresence and omniscience: He "fills heaven and earth." He encompasses them without, and he fills them within; and as the Author to the Hebrews assures us, "all things are naked and open to his eyes;" they pierce to the very marrow of our bones, and to the bottom of our bowels; they accompany all the wanderings of our imaginations, and discover the hidden images of our memories: They look through the closet-foldings of our hearts, and discern the most subtle devices of our spirits.

(2.) Now, the firm belief of those things being laid for a foundation, thou must accustom thyself, to behold God in every thing; though he is no where to be seen by the eye, yet thy mind may perceive him in every place, and in every thing, in the heavens above, and in the earth beneath, and in every part and corner of them: In the men thou conversest with, and in the beasts thou rulest over; in the fowls of the air, and the fish of the sea; in the grass of the field, and the trees of the forest; in thyself, and in every thing round about thee; in all these he may be clearly discerned exerting that power, wisdom and goodness, which first

gave being to them, in sustaining, preserving and disposing of them.

And does he thus lie open to thee in every thing, and has he made thee capable of discerning him, and wilt thou take no notice of him? Far be it from thee.

(3.) But then, Thirdly, Thou must not only behold God in every thing, but thou must behold him in every thing looking upon thee, observing what regard thou hast to him, and how thou demeanest thyself before him; as thy heart must tell thee wheresoever thou art, and whatsoever thou lookest upon, God is there; so it must tell thee likewise, that there God seeth thee. God is with thee every where, and his eyes are always upon thee; be thou also at all times with God, by an actual application unto him.

The people of Israel committed great wickedness, because they said in their hearts, "God hath forsaken the earth, and the Lord seeth not." (*Ezek. ix. 9.*) Do thou bring thy heart to tell thee the contrary in all thy ways, and that will restrain thee from every evil thing.

(4.) But then to make this practice both more profitable, and more pleasant to thee, thou wilt do well, in the last place, to accustom thyself to frame some acts of love upon every apprehension of God's presence, and in all humility to offer them unto him. As God is worthy of the greatest love, so in every thing we look upon, he appears to be so: And therefore it is very fit, that we should express ourselves to be sensible of it, by some acts of love, as often as any thing presents him to our minds: Now these acts may be made several ways; I will set thee down some of the chief of them, to the end thou mayest more readily lay hold upon all occasions for so good an exercise.

They may be made,

[1.] By way of Admiration. Thus, O God! how great is thy Majesty! how great is thy goodness towards the sons of men! what manner of love is that wherewith thou hast loved us! "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

[2.] By way of Esteem. Thus mayest thou say, as a devout man was wont, ‘My God, and all things!’ And as another, ‘None but CHRIST, none but CHRIST:’ And as the Psalmist, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.” And again, “There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? . But LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.”

[3.] By way of Protestation and Resolution. Thus ST. PETER said thrice to his LORD and Master, “LORD, thou knowest that I love thee.” Thus the Psalmist, “I will love thee, O LORD, my Strength.” And in another Psalm, “I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.”

[4.] By way of Desire. Thus mayest thou say with a holy Father, ‘Let me find thee, O the desire of my heart! Let me possess thee, O love of my soul! O let me hold thee fast for ever in the very midst of my heart, O blessed Life! O sovereign Sweetness!’ Or with the Psalmist, “As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O GOD; my soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?” When will the LORD call home his banished? When shall I return to my Father’s house?

[5.] By way of Oblation and Resignation. As thus: LORD, I am thine, I am thine by a thousand titles; and I will be thine, and none but thine for ever; thine I am, thine is all I have, and therefore to thee do I resign myself and all.

[6.] By way of Humiliation. Thus good JACOB, “I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies.” Thus holy JOB, “Behold, I am vile.” And thus the Psalmist, “LORD, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him; or the SON of man, that thou takest account of him? Man is like to vanity, his days are as a shadow that passeth away.” What art thou, O LORD? and what am I? Surely thou art the fulness of being, but I am nothing.

[7.] By way of Confidence and Reliance upon God.

Thus: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, but GOD will never forget his people. Though my father and mother forsake me, yet the LORD will take me up: Though I perish, yet will I trust in him. He clothes the lilies of the field, and feeds the fowls of the air, and will he not feed and clothe me? He hath given me his only-begotten SON, and will he not with him give me all things?"

[8.] By way of Praise. Thus: "Great is the LORD, and worthy to be praised; yea, his name is exalted above all blessing and praise. All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD, and all thy saints shall bless thee. Whilst I live I will praise the LORD, I will sing praises unto GOD whilst I have any being."

These are some of the ways wherein holy men have been wont to express and exercise their love to GOD; and in some or other of these, I would have thee to be continually exercising and expressing thine, according as occasion is given thee, or as the things that bring GOD to thy mind direct and lead thee. Thou wilt not be long accustomed to these practices, but thou wilt be sensible of such advantage by them, as no words of man can express: Thou wilt perceive thy heart more closely united to GOD every day, and wilt have such a sense of his love continually upon thy soul, as will make all the changes of thy life comfortable, and fill thee often with joys, that can be compared to none but those of the saints in heaven.

The truth is, we are never more like to those blessed spirits, than when we are thus employed; for what do they but contemplate the beauty of his Majesty, and make acts of love to him? But here is the difference, they see him clearly as he is, they behold his unveiled face, and consequently exercise their love with the greatest fervours, and partake of the highest joys; whereas we, beholding him only in the glass of his creatures, are much more cold in our love and therefore less happy in our joys.

I can foresee but one thing that thou canst object against

these exercises, namely, That they will be a hinderance to thy worldly business. But this, one word may serve to remove; for these being works of the soul, and not requiring any help from any member of the body, may be intermixed with all thy ordinary employments; and if there be any of such a nature, as will not admit them, without some little stop, as requiring a full application of thy mind; yet that stop will be no hinderance, but rather a furtherance to them; for whilst thou dost thus look up to GOD, upon whom the success of every thing depends, thou wilt be able to proceed more cheerfully in thy employments, and with greater vigour, through the confidence of his blessing upon all that thou art doing.

There is one advice more, which shall conclude this part, and may supply all that is wanting in it.



CHAPTER VI.

Containing the last general Advice, To commit our Souls to the Care and Conduct of spiritual Guides.

THAT thou must commit thy soul to the care and conduct of a spiritual guide. There are three or four things which are well known to Christians, and I hope will be readily acknowledged by thee; which being well considered will let thee know both how necessary, and how beneficial this advice will be to thee.

1. Thou wilt acknowledge, that CHRIST hath settled an order of men as his substitutes upon earth, to take care of souls to the end of the world. This we find him doing immediately before his ascension into heaven. Thus we read in ST. MATTHEW'S Gospel, (*chap. xxi. 18, 19, 20,*) "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth; go therefore and teach (or disciple) all nations, baptizing them in the name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY GHOST, teaching them to observe whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo! I am with you always even to the end of the world." And thus in the 20th chapter of St.

JOHN, (*verses 21, 22, 23,*) “As my FATHER hath sent me, so send I you : And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said, Receive ye the HOLY GHOST ; whose-soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them ; and whose-soever sins ye retain, they are retained.” That our blessed SAVIOUR said all this to his disciples, no Christian can doubt ; and that, by these words, he did commit that power and authority to them, which he had received from his FATHER, for the good of men’s souls, is not to be denied ; and if any question be made, whether this concerned the Apostles only, it may clearly be resolved by considering,

(1.) The meaning of these words, “I am with you always, even to the end of the world :” For how could he be with them to the end of the world, if we suppose those words to concern their persons only ?

(2.) By considering the necessities of the world : For what an unhappy condition would they be in, who were to live in succeeding ages, if no provision were made for their instruction in the Christian faith.

(3.) By considering that the Apostles, after they had received the HOLY GHOST, according to CHRIST’S promise, did understand the commission otherwise ; and therefore we find, that they did by prayer and imposition of hands (the ordinary way of conferring offices among the JEWS) confer the like power upon others, as they saw good for the edification of the Church : And those persons, upon whom they conferred this power, are charged by them “to take heed to the flock, and to feed the church of CHRIST ;” and are said to be called and appointed thereunto by the HOLY GHOST. (*Acts xx. 28.*) And further, those persons that were thus ordained by the Apostles, are charged by them to ordain others in the same way ; and directions are given them, what manner of persons they were to ordain to so great an office. Thus ST. PAUL having put TIMOTHY in mind of that sacred office to which he had been ordained by imposition of hands, (*2 Epist. i. 6,*) and “of that form of sound words, which he had heard from him in faith and love,” (*ver. 13,*) charges him to “commit the same to

faithful men, who might be able to teach others also." (ii. 2.) And the same Apostle tells TITUS, to whose care he had committed the church of Crete, "that he had left him there," and appointed him "to ordain elders in every city." To these ST. PAUL gives directions, "how they should behave themselves in the church of God," (1 *Tim.* iii. 15,) not only as to the ordaining of others, but likewise in many other things relating to the edification of the church; namely,

[1.] As to preaching. "That they should hold fast that form of doctrine which they had received, and teach that, and none other." (1 *Tim.* vi. 14.)

[2.] As to the public worship of GOD. (1 *Tim.* iii. 1, 2, 3.)

[3.] As to government and discipline, the receiving of accusations, the convening of the accused publicly, the correcting of heretical and other disorderly persons, and the excommunicating them, or casting them out of the church, "charging them to prejudice no man's cause, and to do nothing by favour or partiality" (1 *Tim.* v. 19—21.) And so likewise as to the reconciling of penitents, and restoring them to the communion of the church, the hopes of pardon. (1 *Tim.* v. 22.) By all which it appears plainly, that CHRIST did not commit the care of those souls, which he had redeemed with his most precious blood, to those only, who were in a particular manner called his Apostles, in the words before set down, but that he did there settle an order of men, and give authority to that order in a perpetual succession to watch over them, and to see that none of them perish, or fall short of that happiness which he designed for them. But,

2. Thou must acknowledge likewise that this order of men, thus settled by CHRIST to take care of souls, are authorized and empowered by him to preach the Gospel, to make known the love of GOD, as manifested in CHRIST to the world; to receive those that believe the Gospel, into the covenant of grace, and society of Christians, by baptism; to instruct those, whom they have baptized, in the will of GOD, both publicly and privately; to encourage them in

their obedience to it ; to excite and quicken them, when they are dull and slothful ; to reprove and admonish them, when they do amiss ; to restore them when they are fallen, to comfort them in their sorrows, to feed them with the body and blood of CHRIST ; to pray for them, and bless them in CHRIST'S name, to help them all the ways they can in the whole course of their lives, and to assist them in their last agonies, that so they may finish their course with joy. This thou wilt plainly see, if thou wilt consider, beside the places of Scripture already mentioned, the following texts ; *Acts* xx. 20, 21, 26, 27, 31 ; *2 Tim.* iv. 1, 2 ; *Gal.* vi. 1 : *Luke* xxii. 19, 20 ; *1 Cor.* xi. 23, 24 ; *Jam.* v. 14, 15.

3. Thou must acknowledge, that CHRIST hath promised 'to be with those his officers and ministers,' and accordingly he hath been, is, and will be with them, in the exercise of the several parts of their office, "to the end of the world ;" that is, he will assist them with special illumination, direction, and power, sufficient for the dispensation of the Gospel, and the edification of the church, and according to the necessities of the times wherein they are to live : He will furnish them with all necessary gifts, will accompany their endeavours with his HOLY SPIRIT, will hear their prayers, confirm their censures, protect their persons. This we are plainly taught in several places of Scripture, beside those already pointed to See *John* xiv. 16, 26, where CHRIST promises his Apostles "a Comforter to be with them for ever, and to teach them all things." And see *Ephes.* iv, where the Apostle, speaking of the several officers that CHRIST hath appointed in his church, and of the gifts and graces which he doth furnish them with, does intimate that these shall be continued in the church, in such a manner and measure as is necessary, "till we all come (that is, both Jews and Gentiles) into the unity of the faith, and unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of CHRIST ;" that is, to such perfection in knowledge, wisdom, and goodness, as that there will be no further danger "of being like children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." (13, 14.) And further, thou

mayest observe, that, as they are called “the ambassadors of CHRIST,” and are said to “beseech men in CHRIST’s stead;” (2 *Cor.* v. 20;) so CHRIST is said “to speak in them and by them,” (2 *Cor.* xiii. 3; *Ephes.* ii. 17,) “and work mightily and effectually in them.” (Gal. ii. 8.) And further, they are said “to be workers together with CHRIST;” (2 *Cor.* vi. 1;) and “to be labourers together with GOD:” (1 *Cor.* iii. 9:) “GOD giving the increase, whilst PAUL planted, and APOLLOS watered.” (6, 7.) And “GOD opened men’s hearts.” (*Acts* xvi. 14.) Lastly, See *Rev.* i. 13, 16, where, to denote CHRIST’s perpetual presence, assistance, and protection, to these his officers, the appointed guides and governors of the church, after all the times of the Apostles, JOHN only excepted, CHRIST is represented, though in glory, yet walking in the midst of the seven churches of Asia, and “holding the seven stars,” that is, the Angels or Bishops of those churches, (*ver.* 20,) “in his right hand.”

4. Thou must acknowledge likewise, that, as CHRIST hath appointed an order of men, thus to guide and govern his church, and hath charged them to attend unto it with all their might, upon pain of answering for those souls that shall perish through their neglect or default, so he hath charged all men to respect them as his officers, as the guides and governors of their souls on earth under him, and to submit themselves to their conduct and government, in all things relating to the salvation of their souls: And this upon pain of losing all the advantages and benefits, which they can hope for upon the account of what he hath done and suffered for us. Of this thou wilt see no reason to doubt, if thou wilt consider, that this gracious provision which CHRIST hath made for men’s souls, in appointing these guides and governors, and vouchsafing them all necessary assistances for the discharge of their office, will signify very little, in case men be at liberty to submit to them or not, and may be saved, though refusing to submit to them. But besides this, (to give thee all the satisfaction that may be in a matter which many are unwilling to understand,) thou

mayest consider some few places of Scripture, which plainly inform us of the mind of CHRIST concerning it.

As GOD the FATHER was pleased to declare, that he had constituted his SON CHRIST JESUS to be the supreme Guide and Governor of souls, and to charge all men to hear and obey him, of which we have clear testimony, *Matt.* iii. 17, and *Matt.* xvii. 5: So CHRIST hath left to the world a clear testimony, that he did commit the authority, which he had received from his FATHER, to his Apostles and their successors; (“As my FATHER sent me, send I you;”) and that it is his will, that all hear and obey them, who will have any interest in him, or benefit by him: “He that heareth you,” saith he, “heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me.”

Where we see, that, as he hath given that authority, which he had received from his FATHER, to these his Ministers, so he doth require all men to own it, and submit unto it; and that he will account the disowning, the not obeying, the rejecting, and despising them in the exercise of it, as the disowning, rejecting, and despising of himself and his authority. But this is not all that the Holy Scriptures speak concerning this matter; it was foreseen by GOD, how hardly the generality of men would be convinced of these things, and therefore the HOLY SPIRIT stirred up the blessed Apostles, frequently to put men in mind of the authority of CHRIST’S Ministers, and the duty that we owe unto them. Thus we find ST. PAUL telling the Corinthians, “That they are the ambassadors of CHRIST, and stewards of the mysteries of GOD, and charging them to to esteem them as such:” (1 *Cor.* iv. 1:) And we find him beseeching the Thessalonians “to know them that did labour among them, and were over them in the LORD, and did admonish them; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake.” (1 *Thess.* v. 12, 13.) And the author to the Hebrews charges them, “to obey them that had the rule over them, [or their guides, or leaders, so the word signifies,] and to submit themselves;” and he backs his

charge with this reason, " They watch for their souls, as those that are to give account ;" that is, they are appointed by CHRIST to watch for men's souls, and they must give an account to him of the souls committed to their charge: And this they can never be able to do with comfort, if they will not obey and submit themselves to them.

I forbear to mention any more places of Scripture, and I omit to urge the practice of the first and best Christians, as also the black characters that are given by some of the holy writers, of those that did slight the guides and governors of the church, and refuse to submit themselves unto them.

Now, having carefully observed and weighed these things, give me leave to put some few questions to thee. Dost thou believe that there is no need of these spiritual guides in the world? If there be no need of them, why did CHRIST appoint them? Why did he not leave men to themselves in the concerns of their souls, as he hath done in those things that concern their bodies, and their estates? For, that he hath not appointed any order of men, to teach men how to provide for their bodies or to increase their estates, is confessed by all. Was there need of these guides for the first preaching of Christianity to the world, and is there no need of them for the maintenance of it in the world? I forbear to press thee with the natural blindness of men's understanding, with that inconsideration, rashness, levity, inconstancy, which are inseparable from human nature; as also with that averseness to the things of God, and the great interests of our souls, which all men feel, and good men cannot but complain of: We may be confident, that if CHRIST had not known the world needed spiritual guides, he would never have appointed any such, nor have promised them those assistances, which thou hast now heard of, nor have taken any care to inform men of the duty they owe them; and therefore are not those men too much puffed up in their fleshly minds, that account these guides to be of no use to them, or are wanting in that respect for them which they ought to have? I doubt not, but thou wilt confess it. But further, dost thou not

understand, by what hath been said, that men may receive great advantages by their spiritual guides ?

Besides, was not the making this provision for the good of men's souls, a great demonstration of CHRIST's love and care for them ? And therefore must not they be great despisers of the love of CHRIST, and enemies to their own souls, that make little account of it ? Or can they with the least shadow of reason call themselves Christians, or expect those benefits which he hath promised to his faithful servants, who have no regard to his ordinances and institutions, or no other regard at all to them, than as they please their own humours ? Therefore thou canst not but acknowledge that my advice is good : That thou commit thy soul to the care and conduct of a spiritual guide. I proceed now to show thee briefly, how thou must practise this advice.

Thou must make choice of a good guide. I call him a good guide, who is able to direct thee aright in all the concerns of thy soul, and will be faithful to thee : CHRIST hath no where promised, that none shall take upon them to be guides of souls, but those that have authority from him ; nor that all those that have authority from him shall discharge their office faithfully. Among his twelve Apostles there was a JUDAS, and among the seven Deacons ordained by the Apostles, tradition tells us, there was one that failed : And in those writings that we have of some of the Apostles, we find complaints of some, that loved the world more than CHRIST. And therefore it is no matter of wonder, if there be some such now ; but it ought to be matter of caution to thee, with whom thou dost trust thy soul.

Thy soul is a jewel of too great value to be put into the hands of every pretender, yea, or of every one whose office it is to take care of souls. And those that are ready to follow the conduct and counsel of every one that will take upon him to be their guide or instructor, are not much less to be blamed, than those that will commit their souls to none ; and therefore, thou art to take the greatest care, and to use the best skill thou hast, in the choice of thy guide ; and because it is a matter of no little difficulty, it

will not be thought impertinent to give thee some assistance. And,

1. I advise thee to betake thyself to thy closet, and to beg of GOD to direct thee in thy choice. Though thou hast ever so much skill in judging of men, yet it is possible that in this case thou mayest be deceived; and the more thou trustest to thy own skill, the greater danger thou art in of being deceived; GOD usually suffering those that have a great opinion of themselves, to miscarry in their best undertakings.

And therefore in this, as well as in other things, thy security lies in an humble confidence of GOD's direction, which thou art to beg of him by fervent prayer; and though the blessing be great, yet thou hast no reason to doubt but thou shalt obtain it; for since he hath done so much for thy soul already, he will not deny thee any thing, that he knows to be necessary for its welfare. "If any of you lack wisdom," saith ST. JAMES, "let him ask of GOD, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." And what greater wisdom canst thou desire, than that which may enable thee to choose a good guide; except it be that which may enable thee to follow him? Which thou art also to ask of GOD. But then,

2. Though thou must not confide in thy own skill, but in the assistance and direction of Almighty GOD; yet, since his assistance and direction can be expected only in a rational way, it will behove thee to make use of that skill which GOD giveth thee; and that, with as much care as if thy success depended altogether upon it. This, in other matters, thou thinkest thyself bound to do; and I can see no reason why thou shouldest not in this case.

Thou must therefore look out and consider, who, among those guides of souls that are known to thee, is most fit to be trusted; and if thou dost desire the opinion of some serious and discreet friends, as thou art wont to do when thou needest a Physician for thy body; I think thou wilt do very well; Only let me caution thee, that thou do not presume to make judgment of any one, with whom thou

art not thoroughly acquainted ; for otherwise, though it is possible thou mayest hit right, yet it is two to one that thou wilt be deceived. And the same caution thou art to take in receiving the judgments of others, which thou wilt not think to be needless, if thou dost consider, that some have better repute in the world than they deserve. And it is commonly observed, that many excellent men have suffered very much from many, merely because they have given credit to the reports of those who were never intimately acquainted with them, and yet have presumed to pass their censures on them.

But to help thee as much as I can in this matter, which is of very great importance, it will not be amiss to give thee a short account of the qualifications of a good guide, referring thee, for further instruction, to the Epistles of ST. PAUL TO TIMOTHY and TITUS. And,

(1.) A good guide is a man of knowledge. He is able to teach thee as much as thou art bound to believe and practise : His lips preserve knowledge, and his tongue can show thee right things. He cannot be a good guide to others, that has need of a guide himself. “ If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch.”

(2.) He is a man of prudence and discretion ; which appears both by his conversation, and in the exercise of his ministry, fitting his instructions to the necessities and capacities of his people ; “ he pours not new wine into old bottles ;” he feeds not children with strong meat, and strong men with milk : He provides for every one what is fitting for him, and that in due season. Indiscretion does oftentimes as much mischief as the grossest ignorance.

(3.) He is humble, meek, and peaceable. So was the great Shepherd of our soul : He was no lordly, domineering person ; no breaker of the peace of the world, or overturner of governments : But was a servant of all, even the meanest of the people : He pleased not himself, but others for their good, and submitted himself patiently and quietly to the authority of the Chief Priests, and of the Roman Emperor.

(4.) He is very grave and serious; not out of sourness or sullenness, but from the real sense of the sacredness of his office, the worth of souls, and the account he must give of them. It is said of a devout man, that when some desired him to give them a certain mark, by which they might know a man to be truly spiritual, he answered them in this manner, ‘If ye see any one that takes delight in sporting and jesting, in the railleries and drolleries of the world, that cannot patiently suffer contempt and reproach, take heed that ye believe not that man to be spiritual, though you should see him work miracles.’ This good man was undoubtedly in the right, and I think he had not been mistaken if he had omitted the latter part concerning the not suffering contempt, and given the affectation of wit and drollery for a sufficient mark of a very imperfect Christian; however it may serve for a mark to discover a bad guide: For if every Christian should be a serious person, (because CHRIST was so,) the ambassadors of CHRIST should be more so; their deportment should be such as may awe the men they converse with, and in a silent way deter them from their sins; and their persons should speak what the statue of SENACHERIB is said to have done, ‘He who looketh to me, let him be religious.’ But though a good guide be thus grave and serious, yet he is not crabbed or morose; but,

(5.) Affable and courteous, and of a sweet and winning conversation; he disdains not to converse with the meanest people, and that freely too; nor to conform to the innocent customs of the world, so far as it consists with the sacredness of his office, and the decorum of his person; having a due respect to those, he becomes all things to all men; and though his gravity shows them to be an enemy to their sins, yet his innocent and cheerful compliances show him to be a lover of their persons. There was never any person more remarkable for this, than our blessed SAVIOUR; who though his gravity was such, that he was never seen to laugh; yet was he of a sweet and

benign temper, and courteous and compliant in all his carriage and conversation, and to his example does every good guide of souls conform himself in this as well as in other things.

(6.) He is a man of courage, he fears not the faces of the greatest persons upon earth, nor is discouraged in the doing of his duty by the thoughts of their displeasure. He is another JOHN the Baptist in this respect, who was not afraid to tell the tyrant HEROD, "that it was not lawful for him to have his brother's wife." (*Mark* xvi. 18.) And like ST. PAUL he can be contented, if GOD will have it so, "not only to be bound, but to die for the name of the LORD JESUS." (*Acts* xxi. 13.)

(7.) He is wholly devoted to the work that CHRIST hath appointed him to do ; it is his only business, and sole care ; and as CHRIST said of himself, that it was his meat and drink to do the will of his FATHER, so it is his, to do the will of CHRIST, in taking care for souls. He is no plodder for the world, no seeker of the-fleece, no hunter after preferment ; these worldly things are as dross and dung to him, and he will not sell poor souls for such gains.

(8.) He is a great lover of souls, and of much tenderness and compassion towards them ; he will do any thing, yea, suffer any thing for their good, and lay down his life (if need be) for their sakes ; he is grieved for their miscarriages more than for all worldly things, as CHRIST "was grieved for the hardness of men's hearts," and is better pleased with their well doing, than with the greatest earthly prosperity ; they are his joy and crown that do well by his ministry : He thinks no honour greater, and knows no greater joy.

Lastly, He is a man of a holy life ; his example teaches us as much as his tongue ; and he is a pattern for his people to walk by. His "conversation is in heaven," and he can boldly call upon men to "be followers of him, and to walk as they have him for an example." Though he is not without his failings and imperfections, as he is flesh and blood, yet no gross sins, nor any indulging, or allowing himself in the least, can the sharpest eye behold in him.

Thus have I given thee a short account of the qualifications of a good guide. Such a guide thou mayest boldly commit thy soul to, and if thou wilt follow his directions, he will keep thee, through the grace of GOD, from all things hurtful, and lead thee into all things profitable for thy salvation.

Being resolved as to the person thou designest for thy guide, I advise thee to go to him; and having informed him of thy desire to save thy soul, and to put thyself under his conduct in order to it; beseech him to receive thee into his care, and to give thee such directions, as he shall think necessary for thee; assuring him that thou wilt follow them to the utmost of thy power. And that he may be the better judge of the sincerity of thy heart in what thou tellest him, and know what directions thou hast most need of; be not ashamed to make thyself fully known to him; tell him what manner of education thou hast had, what manner of life thou hast led, what convictions thou hast had at any time of the evil of sin, what resolutions thou hast taken upon these convictions, how far thou hast made them good, and wherein thou hast failed: Acquaint him with thy natural temper, and thy acquired inclinations: Tell him what evil habits thou hast contracted, what vicious customs thou hast been, or art engaged in; what temptations thou hast found thyself most obnoxious to, and overcome by. In a word, I advise thee to open thy very soul unto him, and conceal not the least thing from him.

Thou wouldest not scruple to discover the state of thy body to a Physician, when thou needest his help; why then shouldest thou be shy of acquainting thy spiritual Physician with the state of thy soul? Art thou more ashamed of the diseases of thy soul, than thou art of the infirmities of thy body? The greater reason thou hast to desire their cure, and in order to it, to make them known. Will thy physician keep the infirmities of thy body secret? No less safe will the secrets of thy soul be in the bosom of thy spiritual guide. Away then with that unseasonable modesty, which will not do thee the least good, but may be the occasion of thy ruin

Having thus acquainted the spiritual guide with thy desires, and having fully opened thyself unto him, set thyself to receive his instructions ; hear him as thou wouldest hear CHRIST himself, whose Minister he is, speaking to thee ; mark what he says with the greatest care : If any thing fall from him, which thou dost not fully understand, desire him to explain his meaning ; if thou dost distrust thy memory, his instructions being many, desire him to repeat them ; and when he hath made an end, give him, together with thy thanks, thy promise to follow his directions ; and so begging his prayers, and his blessing in the name of CHRIST, take thy leave of him.

As soon as thou art gone from him, begin to recollect the advices thou hast received, and to practise accordingly ; and omit not the doing of any thing he hath advised thee to do. Be careful to observe his directions in every thing : Remembering that as a sick man can receive no benefit by the best physician in the world, how well soever he has made him to understand his disease, if he puts up his prescriptions in his pocket, and makes no further use of them ; so the advices of thy guide (how good soever they may be in themselves) will be of no advantage to thee, if thou dost not follow them : Nay, let me add, (which thou art concerned to remember,) that thy case will be much worse than the case of such an imprudent person : For, though he is not like to be benefited by the prescriptions of his Physician, yet he can receive no hurt by his not using them ; whereas thou wilt receive much damage by neglecting those that have been given thee : For, besides this, that all insincere dealing in matters of religion, and trifling in holy things, does in itself tend to harden thy heart, it will certainly provoke God to withdraw his grace from thee, and to leave thee to fall into that destruction, which thou takest no care to avoid.

Return to thy guide after some time, and give him an impartial account of the use thou hast made of his instructions, and the benefit thou hast received by them ; if thou hast failed in any thing, confess it freely, and declare thy resolution to do better for the time to come ; if thou canst

say thou hast failed in nothing, give GOD thanks, and say, as the young man did to our blessed SAVIOUR, (*Matt.* xix. 20,) “What lack I yet?” And then receive his directions, as thou didst before, and take care to practise accordingly.

Keep a constant correspondence with him as long as thou livest; acquainting him, from time to time, with the state of thy soul, with thy progress in wisdom and virtue, with thy temptations and discouragements, with thy failings and imperfections, with thy doubts and fears, with thy joys and sorrows, and undertake not any thing of importance without his advice and approbation; thou wilt quickly be sensible of such advantages by this course, as will effectually encourage thee to proceed in it.

I beseech thee therefore, my brother, by all that is dear to thee, not to despise my counsel. Defer not to make choice of a guide; and when thou hast done it, be not slack to desire his advice, nor backward to follow it; thou mayest be confident of the blessing of GOD in so doing: Thy guide is particularly concerned to give thee the best advice he can, and GOD is concerned to make it effectual for thy good, since he hath particularly ordained it for that end.

But in all thy intercourse with thy guide, thou must look beyond him; namely, to thy GOD, whose minister he is, and who guides and blesseth thee by his ministry, to whom thou must daily address thyself by prayer for a blessing upon his endeavours, and to whose goodness and mercy thou must daily ascribe all the benefit thou dost receive by them.

I conclude all with the words of our LORD, now “thou knowest these things, happy art thou if thou doest them.”

END OF VOL. XXVI.

