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DISCOURSES

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS,

By the late REVEREND

JOHN LELAND, *D. D.*

THE SECOND VOLUME.

L O N D O N:

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The

The Proofs of a Divine Providence.

DISCOURSE I.

ROMANS xi. 36.

*Of him, and through him, and to him, are
all Things: to whom be Glory for ever.
Amen.*

THE Doctrine of Divine Providence, which comprehendeth God's Preservation and Government of the World, is of the highest Importance. If we should profess to believe never so firmly, that there is a God who gave Being to the World; yet if we should at the same Time believe, that he doth not concern himself about his Creatures after he hath made them, and, particularly, that he taketh no

Care of Men or their Affairs, this would be to all the Purposes of Religion as if we did not acknowledge a God at all. It may be justly said, therefore, that the Belief of the Providence of God is no less necessary than the Belief of his Existence. And if the Matter be rightly considered, it will be found that the one of these is inseparably connected with the other: For if there be a supreme, original, eternal Cause, a God that made this vast Universe, and all Things that are therein, he must be possessed of infinite Perfections, of almighty Power, of unfearchable Wisdom, and boundless Goodness. And how can it be reconciled with these Perfections, to make such a World as this, and then to abandon it, and throw aside all Care and Concern about it? And especially to make reasonable Beings, moral Agents, capable of being governed by Laws, and endued with a Sense of Good and Evil, and yet be utterly regardless how they behave, and whether Virtue or Vice, Order or Confusion, Happiness or Misery, prevails among them? Whatever Reasons induced him to create the World, which may be supposed to have been for the Exercise and Display of his own Perfections, the Manifestation of his Glory, and the Communications of his Goodness, must equally induce him to preserve and govern it
when

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when made. To lay out such a Profusion of Glory and Excellency in the Formation of this vast, beautiful, and well-ordered System, and then leave it to Chance and Confusion, would be to act so capricious, so unaccountable a Part, as no wise Man would be guilty of, and which cannot, without great Absurdity, be ascribed to the absolutely perfect Being. And such a Conduct would be as inconsistent with his Goodness as with his Wisdom. That he should make numberless Orders of Beings, and afterwards take no farther Care of them, as if he were absolutely indifferent what became of them, would be in no wise reconcileable to the Character of the beneficent Parent of the Universe.

These Things are so evident and obvious to the common Sense and Reason of Mankind, that all those who believe that the Formation of the World was owing to a supreme intelligent Cause, must, if they be consistent with themselves, believe, that the same infinitely wise, good, and powerful Mind governs the World when made, and exerciseth a constant Care over it. And accordingly, the *Epicureans*, who denied a Providence, did also deny that the World was made by God, and attributed the Formation of it, not to the Wisdom and Power of an intelligent Cause, but to Chance, or

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a fortuitous Concourse and Jumble of Atoms. And so far their Scheme, however false and absurd, was consistent with itself: For they could find no effectual Way to exclude God from the Government of the World, which was what they wanted to get rid of, but by excluding him from the making of it too. But if the supposing this stupendous System, which beareth so many illustrious Characters of the most amazing Skill and Contrivance, and the various Orders of reasonable and intelligent Beings it contains, to have been produced by a blind undesigning Chance, or by any unintelligent Cause or Nature, be, as it certainly is, the most absurd and ridiculous Conceit that ever entered into the Mind of Man; if there be infinitely greater Reason to believe, that the World was contrived and formed by a most wise, as well as powerful Being, than there is to believe that any the most exquisite Productions of human Skill and Genius are the Effects of Contrivance and Design; then we are almost irresistibly led to conclude, that the same infinite Power and Wisdom, which gave Existence to the World, still maintaineth and presideth over the universal Frame in all its Parts. It is with the greatest Propriety that the Apostle *Paul* declares concerning God, *that of him, and through him, and to him, are all Things.* As all Things are of
 God,

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God, as the supreme original Cause, most powerful, wise, and good, from whom this vast Universe, and all the Orders of Beings in it, derived their Existence; so through him are all Things, *i. e.* on him all Things continually depend, by him they are all maintained, disposed, and governed, and are under his constant Direction and Superintendency, *who*, as the same Apostle speaks, *worketh all Things according to the Counsel of his own Will.* Eph. i. 11. And then it follows, that to him are all Things: they are all for him, and to him, as their supreme and ultimate End. And whosoever believes this, will readily join in the apostolical Doxology, *To him be Glory for ever. Amen.*

That, if there be a God who made the World, there must be a Providence, may be farther argued thus. If God doth not exercise a providential Care over his Creatures, it must be either because he cannot, or because he will not do it. To pretend that he cannot do it were to the last degree absurd. For why should he not be as able to preserve and govern the World as he was to create it? He could not have made the World, if he had not been possessed of infinite Wisdom and almighty Power; and the same divine Understanding and Power would equally qualify him to preserve and govern the World when

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he had formed it. And it would be no less irrational and absurd to pretend that he will not do it. For upon what Foundation can this be alledged? Is it that he thinks it beneath him? But surely it cannot be unworthy of his divine Majesty, to take care of those Things which he did not think it beneath him to create. On the contrary, to neglect them would be much more unworthy and unbecoming him. Or is it that he will not be at the Trouble of looking after them? As if the Happiness of the Supreme Being consisted in an eternal unactive Indolence; or as if it could be any Trouble or Difficulty to an almighty and infinite Mind, who is essential Life and Activity, and who is every where present, and knoweth all Things, to preserve and govern every Part of the World which he himself created, and to which he is always present. Or shall we suppose that the kind Parent of the Universe, who hath implanted in all Creatures a natural Love to their own Offspring, and hath caused them to approve such a Temper as is proper and becoming, doth yet himself cast off all Regard and Affection towards his Creatures, the Productions of his own Power and Goodness? If therefore it cannot be pretended either that God cannot, or that he will not take care of the World which he hath made,

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we have the highest Reason to acknowledge that he actually doth take care of it, and doth preserve and govern it. And indeed this may be justly concluded from the beautiful Order which is still maintained in this universal System. The Frame of Nature, so grand and stupendous, and consisting of such numberless Parts, continueth to be preserved and conducted with such a steady and wonderful Regularity, as manifestly shews the constant Superintendency of a most wise and powerful presiding Mind. Some indeed, by a strange Way of Reasoning, have endeavoured to draw a contrary Conclusion from this. Observing that Things generally go on in a settled Course, and according to stated Laws, agreeably to what is called the Nature of Things, they have imagined that this is owing to a blind Necessity and Fate, and to a necessary Connection of natural Causes, independent on the Will of a supreme Governor. But this is highly absurd. It is in effect to say, that because Order prevails, and Things are conducted by wise and steady Rules, therefore they are not under the Direction of Wisdom and Intelligence, when on the contrary, this is one of the strongest Proofs of it. And if Things were otherwise, it would look as if they were not wisely directed, but were left to an

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uncertain giddy Chance. When inanimate Nature proceedeth in a regular fixed Way, this cannot be owing to itself; for blind unintelligent Nature is not properly capable either of prescribing or following Rules. It must therefore be ascribed to a wise and powerful Intelligence, which appointed what is called the Course of Nature, and continually directeth and presideth over it.

Rational and moral Agents, which, by the Condition of their Natures, have a Power of determining their own Actions, cannot be supposed to be governed in the same manner as the material and inanimate World. There must be Allowance made for the Exercise of their Liberty, as free Agents, yet still under the constant Superintendency of the superior Being who first formed them, and on whom they continually depend. And, with respect to them likewise, there are general Rules, according to which Providence ordinarily proceedeth in the Government of the moral World, and which manifest a prevailing wise and righteous Administration; as I shall have Occasion to shew in the farther Prosecution of this Subject. There are also many particular Incidents and Appearances in the Course of human Affairs, which naturally lead considering Minds to the Acknowledgment of a wise and sovereign

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vereign Providence: such as, That the most important Events are sometimes brought about by the seemingly smallest and most unlikely Means: That Things are conducted, as by a superior invisible Agency, through many intricate Turns, to produce Events contrary to all human Expectation; and Actions are over-ruled to Effects and Issues quite contrary to the Intentions of the Actors: That hidden Things, and the darkeſt Deſigns, are often ſtrangely brought to Light, and thereby great Miſchiefs prevented, and the moſt artful Schemes of human Policy baffled and diſappointed: That ſurpriſing Changes are wrought upon the Spirits of Men, and Reſtraints laid upon their Paſſions, in a manner that can ſcarce be accounted for, and upon which great Events have depended. Many ſuch Things have happened in all Ages and Nations. And any one that is acquainted with the Hiſtory of Mankind, or who hath made wiſe and juſt Reflections upon Events, will eaſily obſerve many Things, not only in the Affairs of Nations, but of particular Perſons, yea, and relating to himſelf and his own Concernments, which can ſcarce be reaſonably attributed to any Thing but an over-ruling Providence, both in a Way of Mercy and of Judgment.

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The Inspection and Superintendency of Divine Providence may be farther argued from previous Significations of future Events, which no human Sagacity could foresee; Instances of which may be met with in the most credible Accounts of Antiquity, but no where so fully as in the Holy Scriptures. There we have many express Predictions recorded, relating to the State of the World and of Mankind, the Rise and Fall of Empires, surprizing public Revolutions, and national Blessings or Calamities, as well as many remarkable Incidents with regard to particular Persons, some of them foretold many Ages before they came to pass. This shews that there is a most wise and comprehensive Mind which superintendeth the Affairs of Men. The same Thing may be concluded from several Things that have been done from Time to Time out of the natural and ordinary Course, for wise and excellent Purposes: of some of which we have as much Reason to be assured, as of any Facts whatsoever; since they come to us with an Evidence that can scarce be rejected, without rejecting and destroying all historical Evidence.

Finally, What a miserable World would this be without a Providence! If a Kingdom, a City, or Family, without a Head or Director, is apt to fall into Confusion; what

what strange Disorder would ensue, if this vast Universe, consisting of such unconceivable Variety of Parts, were without a supreme Director! What could keep together the wonderful Frame? Or, what Security could we have, but that some sudden wild Chance would overturn all? This were a most shocking and unnatural State of Things, which a good Man could scarce think of without Horror. It must therefore be a bad Mind that can cherish or take Pleasure in such a Thought. The Psalmist observes that *the Fool hath said in his Heart, There is no God.* Psal. xiv. 1. The word Elohim, there used to signify God, is that which is particularly designed to denote him as a Governor and Judge; so that it is as if it had been said, the Fool hath said in his Heart, There is no God that governeth and will judge the World; *i. e.* there is no Providence. And this is certainly an Argument of great Folly as well as Corruption of Heart.

Upon the whole, it may be justly concluded, that there is the same Reason to believe, that God in his Providence preserveth and governeth the World, that there is to believe, that there is a God who gave Being to the World. And accordingly, some Notion of a Divine Providence seems to have obtained almost universally among Mankind.

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All the Prayer which have been offered, the Vows that have been made, the Oaths and solemn Appeals to Heaven, so usual in all Ages, suppose a Providence. Yea, every Man may in effect be said to have a Witness for Providence in his own Breast. Conscience is a kind of perpetual Monitor, and as it were God's Vicegerent in the Soul, telling Men, whether they will or no, that there is a supreme Governor and Judge, who continually observes them, and to whom they must be accountable. And there have been few who have been able so entirely to extinguish and silence its Remonstrances and Admonitions, but that some Fears and Apprehensions of this have still remained.

But no where is the Doctrine of Divine Providence so fully and strongly inculcated as in the sacred Writings. And it must certainly be a peculiar Satisfaction and Advantage to be assured in the Name, and by the Word of God himself, of the Care he condescendeth to exercise towards all his Creatures, particularly towards Mankind. To have this plainly and expressly declared to us in a well-attested divine Revelation, hath a happy Tendency to remove the Doubts and Suspicions which might be apt to arise in our Minds, from the Consideration of God's supereminent Majesty and Glory, and our own Meanness and Unworthiness.

We are every where directed in holy Writ, to consider ourselves and all Things as under the constant Inspection and Government of the Supreme Being, to regard his Hand in all the Events which befall us, in every good Thing we receive, and in every Affliction we meet with. The historical Part of Scripture containeth an Account of remarkable Acts of Providence carried down from the Beginning of the World, through a long Succession of Ages; and the moral and doctrinal Parts every where suppose it and build upon it, and it is frequently described in the most lively and striking Manner. Nor is it without good Reason that this is so much insisted upon in Writings designed for the Direction and Regulation of our Faith and Practice. For, if the Belief of a Providence were banished from among Men, there would be no such Thing as Religion, or the Fear and Love of God: no Place would be left for Trust in him, or Dependence upon him. Who would think themselves obliged to serve and worship a God that gives himself no Concern about them, and takes no Notice of their Actions or Affairs? To what purpose would it be to pray to him for the good Things they stand in need of, or to praise and bless him for the Benefits they enjoy? Every Man would then be left to do what is right in his own Eyes, and a wide Door would be
opened

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opened for all manner of Licentiousness. Accordingly, it is often represented in Scripture as an Ingredient in the Character of the worst and wickedest of Men, that they endeavour to persuade themselves that there is no Providence, or that God doth not observe, nor concern himself about the Actions of Men, or the Events which befall them. Thus, after the Psalmist had described, in strong Terms, a Man that abandoneth himself to all manner of Wickedness, and especially to Injustice, Insolence, and Oppression; he representeth him as saying in his Heart, *God hath forgotten, he hideth his Face, he will never see it.* Psal. x. 11. See to the same Purpose, Psal. lxxiii. 11.—xciv. 7. So also, it is observed concerning the Men that were *settled on their Lees*, i. e. who were secure and hardened in their evil Courses, and were for making themselves easy in their Vices, that they said in their Hearts, *The Lord will not do Good, neither will he do Evil.* Zeph. i. 12. There are few indeed that will openly declare this in plain Words, but there are many that say in their Hearts, i. e. who would be glad to have it so, and would fain argue themselves into a Belief that so it is. Or if they cannot bring themselves absolutely to believe that there is no Providence, yet they indulge Doubts and Suspicions about it, they fix

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their Views wholly on second Causes, and overlook the Providence of God, and for the most part consider it as little as if there were no such Thing, or as if it had no Concernment with human Affairs.

But there is no one Thing of greater Consequence to a Life of Piety and Virtue, than to get our Hearts possessed with a firm Persuasion of God's all-governing and all-disposing Providence, and to have a constant Regard to it in our whole Course. Our Belief of this should not be a cold wavering Assent, which will have but small Influence; it must be strong and vigorous, deeply rooted in our Hearts, and established on solid Evidence. Nor must we suffer it to lie as a speculative dormant Principle, but must endeavour frequently to exercise it, and then it can scarce fail to have an happy Influence upon our whole Temper and Conduct. How solicitous, how earnestly desirous would this make us to approve ourselves to God in our general Practice, to walk always as in his Sight, and to commit ourselves and all our Concernments to him with a meek Resignation and steady Dependance! How afraid should we be of offending him! It would be the most effectual Preservative against Impatience and Discontent and an immoderate Dejection under Adversity, as well as against Insolence and Abuse

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Abuse of Prosperity ; and would make us careful to fill up every Station and Relation with the proper Duties of it. And finally, it would be a Source of Satisfaction and Comfort amidst all the Fluctuations and Commotions of this present World. There is no Consideration so fitted to produce an inward solid Peace and Joy of Heart as this, that all Things are under the Direction and Government of the most perfect Wisdom and Goodness. All Nature then puts on a pleasing Aspect, and every thing appears to the Mind in a fair and amiable Light, and Order and Harmony are spread through the whole. Nothing therefore could be worse founded than the Boasts of *Epicurus* and his Followers, who entertained an high Opinion of themselves, and expected to be applauded by others, as the Friends and Benefactors of Mankind, on the Account of their Endeavours to deliver them from the Apprehensions of a Providence. This might indeed be some Relief to very bad Men, and tend to make them easy in their Sins ; but was an Attempt to rob good Men of that which is the chief Support and Comfort of their Lives, and the most powerful Encouragement to the steady uniform Practice of Virtue. It is true, that the Doctrine
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DISCOURSE I. 17

of Providence has been misrepresented and abused. Men have been apt to lay the Blame of their own Faults and Follies upon Providence: And among many of the Heathens, their Notions of Providence were like those they formed of their Deities, whom they represented as capricious, envious, and revengeful, actuated by human Passions and Prejudices. But the Belief of Providence rightly understood, is the most useful and delightful Thing in the World, and is so far from leading to Superstition, that it is the best and most effectual Preservative against it.

Accordingly, this is what I propose distinctly to consider, and shall endeavour in several Discourses to explain the Doctrine of Divine Providence, by which I understand the Doctrine of an all-perfect Mind, preserving and governing this vast Universe, guiding the Course of Nature, presiding over all the Creatures, especially rational moral Agents, and superintending and ordering the Events which befall them, in the best and fittest Manner, with infinite Wisdom, Righteousness, and Equity. I shall endeavour to direct you to a right Use and Improvement of this important Doctrine, and to obviate some

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of the principal Difficulties and Objections which are raised against it. And, I think, I can hardly propose any Subject that is of greater Consequence, or which may be of more signal Advantage.



*The World preserved by Divine
Providence.*

DISCOURSE II.

NEHEMIAH ix. 6.

—*Thou preservest them all.*

IN my former Discourse, some Observations were made concerning the Providence of God in general. It was shewn by several Arguments that there is a Providence, or that this vast World, and every Thing in it, is under the constant Care and Superintendency of that most wise, and benign, and powerful Being that created it. Let us now proceed to a more distinct Consideration of this important Subject.

The Providence of God may be regarded as exercised either in the Preservation of the World, or in the Government of it, to which two main Heads all the Acts of Divine Providence are reducible.

First, That which comes first to be considered, is God's Preservation of the World. In that admirable Address that is made to God in the Name of the *Jewish* Church, after celebrating him as the great Creator of the Universe in those noble Expressions, *Thou, even thou, art Lord alone; thou hast made Heaven, the Heaven of Heavens, with all their Host, the Earth, and all Things that are therein;* it is added, *and thou preservest them all.* Where it is signified, that the preserving this vast Frame of Nature, and all Things that are therein, is owing to the same omnipotent Being that created them. As by creating them he brought them into Existence when they had none before, and endued them with such and such Faculties and Powers; so by his preserving them, we are to understand his upholding them in that Existence, and in the Use of those Faculties and Powers which he hath given them. We must not imagine that Things, when once put into Being, continue to exist independently of him that first created them. For, an independent Existence is not compatible

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ble with the Nature or Condition of Creatures, which owe their Existence wholly to the Will and Power of a superior Cause. It is easily conceivable that the self-existent Jehovah, who existed necessarily from everlasting, must certainly exist to everlasting, by the intrinsic Excellency of his own most perfect Nature. But the Case is otherwise as to contingent Beings, who have the Source and Basis of their Existence without them. As they did not exist originally and necessarily of themselves, but merely by the Will of the Creator, who willed that they should exist, and they existed accordingly; so neither do they continue to exist of themselves, and by the mere Force and Virtue of their own Nature, but by the powerful Will of the supreme original Cause that gave them Being. It is true, that Machines which were contrived and formed by human Art, may subsist for a Time independently of the Man that formed them: Nor is this to be wondered at, since the Matter or Substance out of which they were formed existed before, and did not owe its Being to the Artificer. But no Consequence can be drawn from this, to prove that, therefore, Things which owe their very Existence and Substance entirely to the Will and Power of the first Cause, may

afterwards continue to exist independently of the first Cause. The Works of Mens Hands may subsist at a Distance from the Hands which fashioned them: But the Creatures can never exist in an absolute Separation from God, who is always most intimately and essentially present with his own Works; so that it may be said with the greatest Propriety, that *in him* they have their *Being*, as St. Paul expresseth it, *Acts* xvii. 28. or, as he elsewhere speaks by him, or as it might be rendered, *in him all Things consist*. Col. i. 17.

That we may treat this Subject more distinctly, we may consider this Preservation of all Things, which is an eminent Act of Divine Providence, as extending,

First, To the whole inanimate Creation:

Secondly, To all Things that have Life in their different Degrees, both to the inferior Brute Animals, and to the higher Orders of rational intellectual Beings.

First, God, by his constant powerful Influence, upholdeth the inanimate Creation, this huge material System, in all its Parts. As at the first Formation of it, he put Things into a certain Order, so it is by his Power and Wisdom that this Order and Constitution of Things is maintained according to the first Establishment. Not only the greater heavenly Bodies are preserved

served in their appointed Courses or Stations, but with regard to the lesser Bodies and Particles of Matter, the Laws of Motion and Gravitation, to which, by the divine Ordination, they are subject, continue the same that they were from the Beginning, and produce the same Effects in the same Circumstances. Thus all Things in the material World proceed according to a settled Rule or Method: This we are apt to pass over, with a slight Regard, as a Thing of Course; whereas, it ought to engage our Admiration, and lead us to the Acknowledgment of a constant superintending Providence. To this it is owing, that *the Sun* still serveth for a Light by Day, and *the Ordinances of the Moon and Stars* for a Light by Night. Jer. xxxi. 35. and that the orderly Returns of Seasons are maintained, so that *Seed-time and Harvest, and Cold and Heat, and Summer and Winter, and Day and Night, do not cease.* Gen. viii. 22. It is God that, by his powerful Influence, sustaineth this huge terrestrial Globe which we inhabit, which *hangeth upon nothing*, as *Job* expresseth it, *Job* xxvi. 7. By his Power, and according to his settled Order it is, that the Earth still preserveth its Fertility, that the Minerals continue to be generated and ripened in its Bowels, and that the vege-

table Kingdom flourisheth in all its Glory. As God said at the first Creation, *Let the Earth bring forth Grass, the Herb yielding Seed, and the Fruit-tree yielding Fruit after his Kind, whose Seed is in itself, upon the Earth.* Gen. i. 11. so, by his providential Concourse, and according to his Appointment, the Plants, the Herbs, the Trees, the Flowers in all their Tribes, and the various Kinds of Grain, spring up from their several Seeds, and gradually grow up into Maturity. The Species of them are still continued and kept distinct, and they uniformly preserve their several Virtues, their distinct Forms and Appearances, and bring forth their several Productions in the appointed Seasons. When we thus behold the regular Course of Things in the World about us, we should raise our Thoughts to God, to whose constant Care and Influence this is owing. If left to themselves without a presiding Mind, we could have no Security for their continuing in Being, much less for their being maintained in their regular Order. It is the Power, Wisdom, and Influence of the first Cause ever present with his own Work, and leaving nothing to Chance or Caprice, that is the Foundation of all our Hopes. It is this that giveth us any
Security,

Security that the Sun or Moon shall continue to shine, that the Stars shall maintain their Courses or Stations, that the Air, the Sea, the Earth, and the Things which are therein, shall preserve their Natures and proper Situations, and produce the several Effects, and answer the Uses, to which they were originally designed.

Secondly, God preserveth the Beings that have Life and Sense, with their several Powers, Capacities, and Instincts. He upholdeth them by his providential Concourse in that kind of Life, which according to his own Appointment, and the Order settled by himself in the Beginning, belongeth to them. And this holdeth good both of the inferior Brute Animals, and the higher Order of rational and intellectual Beings. And to this probably the Words of the Text have a special Reference; for what we render, *thou preservest them all*, might be rendered, *thou quickenest them all*, or, *maintaineth them all in Life*.

First, God preserveth and upholdeth the inferior Brute Animals in their several Species, which by a wonderful Provision are successively propagated according to established Laws, and continue to be furnished in all Ages with the same Organs, Powers, and Appetites, and the same admirable Instincts.

By

By these they are enabled to exercise the various Functions of the sensitive Life, and are directed to what is most proper for their Nourishment, their Defence, and their Pleasure. To his Providence it is owing, that even the several Tribes of Insects are preserved, and go through their orderly Transmutations, and come forth in their proper Seasons in numberless Swarms, and in all the Beauty of Colours. To this it is to be ascribed that the Ants continue in all Ages to be the same provident and industrious Tribe, and so dexterously manage the Affairs of their little Commonwealth; that the Bees so artfully build their waxen Cells, and make their Honey, and maintain their well-ordered Polity; that the Silk-worm undergoeth its several wonderful Changes, is provided in its Season with proper Food, and spinneth so precious a Thread out of its Bowels; that the Waters still bring forth abundantly after their Kind, and the Rivers, Lakes, and Seas continue to be plentifully stored with innumerable Quantities of Fishes, in their various Forms, from the huge Whales to the smallest living Creatures which inhabit the watery Element: To which may be added the several Species of Birds, which with great Agility wing the airy
Region,

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Region. *The Hawk* is said to *fly* by his *Wisdom*; *the Eagle* mounteth up at his *Command*, and maketh her *Nest* on high; from whence she seeketh her *Prey*, and her *Eyes* behold it afar off. Job xxxix. 26, 27, 29. *The Stork* in the *Heaven* knoweth her appointed *Times*; and *the Turtle*, *the Crane*, and *the Swallow*, and other *Birds of Passage*, observe the *Time* of their coming. Jer. viii. 7. And the several *Sorts* of singing *Birds* chaunt forth their melodious *Notes*, and sing among the *Branches*. To the *Care* of his powerful *Providence* it is to be ascribed that the several *Kinds* of *Cattle* are preserved, and provided with their proper *Sustenance*; that the *Dogs* retain their *Sagacity* and wonderful *Instincts*, and the *Horse* his *Strength* and *Swiftness*, for the *Use* and *Delight* of *Mankind*. Yea, to this it is owing that the wild *Beasts* of the *Desarts* are provided for. As it manifestly tended to the *Beauty* and *Perfection* of the animal *Creation*, that there should be such *Creatures* formed, and endued with extraordinary *Degrees* of *Fierceness*, *Strength*, and *Courage*, so there is the same *Reason* for continuing, that there was for creating them. Thus are the several *Species* of *Brute Animals* maintained and kept distinct, and are provided for suitably to their respective *Natures* and *Circumstances*, and

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the Individuals of each Species preserve their several Shapes and Forms, Organs and Appetites, and when they go off leave others to succeed them, so that the admirable Scheme is still carried on. The continuing Things in such an established Course and Order, which we behold without Astonishment, because we are accustomed to it, exhibiteth a manifest Proof of a wise and powerful Providence constantly preserving and watching over the various kinds of sensitive Beings. We may therefore on this Occasion justly apply those Words of *Job*: *Ask now the Beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the Fowls of the Air, and they shall tell thee; and the Fishes of the Sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these, that the Hand of the Lord hath wrought this?* *Job* xii. 7, 8, 9.

But secondly, Let us especially consider God's Providence as exercised in the Preservation of the higher Orders of rational and intellectual Beings. It is he that preserveth the Angels in their several Degrees. None of them have an independent Existence. Strong and mighty as they are, they cannot uphold themselves in Being, merely by the Force of their own excellent Natures, but are maintained in that noble and sublime Life which he hath given them, and in the Use and Exercise of their admi-

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admirable Faculties and Powers, by the constant sustaining Power and Influence of the Almighty.

But what we are most nearly concerned to consider, is the Care of Divine Providence in preserving Man. This is what St. Paul signifieth, when in his excellent Discourse to the Athenians, *Acts* xvii. he declareth that God *giveth to all, (i. e. to all Men,) Life, and Breath, and all Things.* Ver. 25. and that *in him we live, and move, and have our Being.* Ver. 28

In him we exist or have our Being. As he gave us our Existence at first, and made us of such a particular Order of Beings, so by him we are continued in Existence, and in that kind of Existence which belongeth to us as Creatures of such a Species. To his Providence it is to be ascribed, that one Generation of Men riseth up after another in the Manner and according to the Laws wisely established by him in the Beginning; that the curious Structure of the human Body is preserved and maintained in its proper Form, and with all its admirable Organs; and that the human Soul continueth to retain its noble Faculties.

In God we not only exist or have our Being, but in him we live. As it was he that first established the wonderful vital
Union

Union between Soul and Body in Man, so it is by his Care and Influence that it subsisteth. To this it is owing that our Food nourisheth and refresheth us, that the vital Functions are carried on, and that we are enabled to exercise our several Sensations. Justly, therefore, doth the Psalmist call him *the God of his Life*. Psal. xlii. 8. and *Job* declareth, that in his *Hand is the Soul of every living Thing, and the Breath, or Life, of all Mankind*. Job xii. 10. And again, *Thou hast granted me Life and Favour, saith he, and thy Visitation hath preserved my Spirit*. Ch. x. 12.

And as it is in God that we exist and live, so it is in or by him that we move. It was he that originally gave us the Power of Motion, and Organs admirably fitted for carrying it on, and it is through him that we are continued in the Use and Exercise of those Organs; so that it may be justly said, that we cannot move a Foot, or lift up a Hand without him. And this holdeth equally with regard to the Operations of our Souls, as the Motions of our Bodies. As he hath endued our Souls with the admirable Faculties of Understanding, Will, Memory, free Agency, and hath implanted in us Affections of various Kinds, so by his providential Concourse, and Support of our Faculties, we apprehend,
judge,

judge, reason, remember, and freely determine our own Actions. It is he that upholdeth the Powers which he gave us, and enableth us to exert those Powers, and put them forth to Action. And this he doeth not only when we do Good, but when we employ our Powers in acting wickedly. And yet this doth not derive the least Stain of Guilt upon God, or make him the Author of our Sins. The natural active Power, and the Use of it, which is in itself good, is from God; the Abuse of it to sinful Purposes is wholly owing to ourselves, and to the Corruption of our Wills. God sustaineth the Sinner in Being, and in the Exercise of his natural Powers, whilst he is committing the sinful Action, but the Obliquity of the Action is wholly from the Sinner himself. And indeed, on Supposition that God hath created reasonable Beings capable of acting freely, and of doing Good and Evil, it is proper that he should uphold them in Being, and in the Use and Exercise of their natural Powers, even whilst they do evil Actions as well as good. For if he should withdraw his sustaining Influence from them the Moment they attempt to abuse their natural Powers, this would be absolutely to hinder them to exercise their Liberty, nor could they in that Case be accounted free Agents at all.

As

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As the God of Nature, he ordinarily upholdeth or continueth them in Being, and in the Use of their natural Powers, in what Manner soever they act; and then afterwards, as the moral Governor, he will call them to an Account for their Actions, and will reward, or punish them accordingly.

I shall conclude with some suitable Reflections.

First, When we consider the universal Dependence of the whole Creation upon God, what admiring Thoughts should it cause us to entertain of God, and what diminishing Thoughts of ourselves, and all created Beings! Who would not adore the great Jehovah, whose everlasting Existence is the solid Basis and Support of the Existence of all other Beings whatsoever? Should not we be even as nothing in our own Eyes, whilst God is all in all? Let us with the profoundest Veneration prostrate ourselves before his Divine Majesty, who is the great I am, the Fountain of Being and Perfection, and be ready to say, *Worthy art thou to receive Honour, and Glory, and Blessing; for thou hast created all Things, and for thy Pleasure they are, and were created!* And not only so, but thou preservest them all; thou upholdest them by thy most
powerful

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powerful Word; and in and by thee all Things consist!

Secondly, We may hence see, what a just Propriety and Dominion God hath in and over us, since it is he that both gave us our Being, and all our Powers and Faculties, and who upholdeth us in Life, and in the Use and Exercise of those Powers. These two taken together, his Creation and Preservation of us, certainly give him the most full and absolute Property in us, and in all our Services, that can be conceived; a Property and Dominion infinitely exceeding what one Creature can possibly have over another. He made us, and not we ourselves; he preserveth and sustaineth us in Being, and not we ourselves; and therefore it is most fit and reasonable, that we should live unto him, and not unto ourselves; and that we should employ our Powers and Faculties according to his Will, and for such Purposes as he prescribeth. Nor can any Thing be more unjust, than to turn the Beings we derive from him to his Dishonour; to use those bodily Members he hath furnished us with, and which he continually upholdeth, as the Instruments of Unrighteousness unto Sin, instead of using them as Instruments of Righteousness unto God; and to employ those reasoning thinking Powers, and that Gift of Speech which he hath bestowed upon us, to Purposes quite

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different from those which he gave them to us for. This certainly involveth in it a very heinous Guilt, and is a sacrilegious Alienation of ourselves from his Service, to whom we do of Right belong. That is a heavy Charge which *Daniel* bringeth against *Belsazzar*, *The God in whose Hand thy Breath is, and whose are all thy Ways, hast thou not glorified.* Dan. v. 23.

Thirdly, Another Reflection that is proper to be made on this Occasion is this, that since God preserveth us every Moment, since we cannot move a Limb, nor think a Thought without him, he must needs be perfectly acquainted with all our Thoughts, Words, and Actions, and all the Events which befall us. Justly may every one of us say with the devout Psalmist, *Lord, thou knowest my Down-sitting and mine Up-rising, thou understandest my Thoughts afar off. Thou compassst my Path, and my Lying-down, and art acquainted with all my Ways. For there is not a Word in my Tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.* Psal. cxxxix. 2, 3, 4. God knoweth every the least good Action we perform, and every good Motion which ariseth in our Hearts. Nor, on the other Hand, can any of our most secret Sins possibly escape his Notice. For it is by his Influence that we are upheld in Being, even whilst we are committing

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committing those Sins against him. Our being able to commit them, our being preserved in Life whilst we do so, is a Proof that he is present with us, and, consequently, that he must know whatsoever we are doing in every Circumstance.

Fourthly, How strange and inexcusable will our Conduct be, if we allow ourselves in an habitual Neglect and Forgetfulness of the Deity! Shall we be unmindful of him, without whom we cannot subsist a Moment, by whom we are constantly upheld in Being, and in the Use of all our reasoning and active Powers? As soon ought we to forget that we ourselves exist. And yet so it is, that a great Part of Mankind go on from Day to Day, without ever thinking of that God to whom they owe it that they are able to think; and without speaking of him who gave, and continueth to them, the Faculty and Use of Speech. They act in too many Instances, as if there were no such Being at all, though without him they could not be. Amazing Perverseness! What a strange Depravation of a reasonable thinking Mind doth this argue! Let us carefully guard against it, and often realize God to our Minds, endeavouring to maintain a constant Sense of our absolute Dependence upon him, so as to stand in Awe of his Power, to be thankful to

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him for his great Goodness, and to be desirous above all Things of his Favour. For how great must his Power be which constantly upholdeth this vast universal Frame, and all the numberless Orders of Beings in it! What Folly therefore would it be, for such Creatures as we are to dare to offend him, and provoke his just Displeasure! How easily could he destroy us in a Moment, and put an utter End to our Existence! Or, if he doth not think fit to do so, as not being consistent with the Designs of his most wise and righteous Providence, he can continue and uphold us in Being under those Punishments and Miseries we had brought upon ourselves by our Disobedience.

The last Reflection I would make upon this Subject is this, That since God continually preserveth us, he hath an undoubted Right to govern us. And this leadeth to the other main Work of Divine Providence, *viz.* The Government of the World, which is what I propose next to consider.

*On God's Government of the World:
And first, of his Dominion over
the inanimate Creation.*

DISCOURSE III.

PSAL. CXXXV. 6.

*Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in
Heaven, and in Earth, in the Seas, and in
all deep Places.*

HA V I N G considered the Providence of God as exercised in the Preservation of the World, let us now proceed to that which deserveth to be considered more at large, *viz.* His governing that World which he hath made, and which he continually upholdeth. And this providential Government of God may be regarded as

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extending to every Part of this vast Universe, and all the Orders of Beings in it. The several Kinds of Beings in the Creation, as far as they come under our Observation and Notice, may be distributed into three great Ranks, the inanimate, the sensitive, and the rational or moral. The Government of Providence, in the properest Sense, is to be understood of God's Administrations towards reasonable Creatures, moral Agents. But it may be also applied to his Dominion over the merely sensitive or Brute Animals; and in a still less proper Sense to his Dominion over the inanimate Creation, which is always subject to his Will, and ordered by him as seemeth most fit to his infinite Wisdom. All these must be joined if we would form a just Notion of the Dominion and Sovereignty of the great Lord of the Universe.

First, I shall begin with considering the Government of God as extending to the inanimate Creation. As by his sustaining Influence he preserveth and maintaineth this vast material System in all its Parts, so by his Government of it, I here understand his directing and regulating the natural Causes and Effects of Things, so as to apply them to the wise Purposes of his Providence. How a Spirit or immaterial Being

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ing operateth upon Matter, we are not able distinctly to conceive or explain. But the Thing itself is past all Doubt. An Image of God's Government of the material World we have in our own Souls governing our Bodies, that little World, or material System, to which we are more immediately related. We only will, and it is done, an Arm, a Leg, the Tongue is moved in an Instant. We have also a Power over several Parts of the World about us, though not in so immediate a Way; a Power of moving, combining, separating the Parts of Matter, and applying them to various Uses, for answering our Necessity, Convenience, or Pleasure. Man can, in many Instances, exert a wonderful Power in producing Effects in the material World. He can dig into the Bowels of the Earth, and extract Metals and Minerals; he can blow up Rocks, and turn aside the Channels of Rivers. And we may reasonably suppose that there are other created Beings superior to Man, that have a much greater and more extensive Power over the material World than any Man, or all the Men upon Earth. So the Scriptures lead us to think concerning the Angels good or bad. And there is no Absurdity in supposing that a created Spirit might be made so powerful as to be

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able to wield this whole earthly Globe, or any Part of it, by only willing to do so, with as much Ease as we move our Bodies, or any Limb of them. But still there must be an infinite Difference between the Power of any created, derivative, dependent Being, in ordering and governing the material World, and that of the supreme, self-existent, independent Jehovah, who is infinite, original, essential Life, Activity, and Intelligence. We find, in fact, with regard to the inanimate World about us, that it is subject to our Direction and Management only in a certain Proportion, and within a limited Sphere; and that even our own Bodies, which are more immediately under our Power, are subject to us no farther than according to the Laws which the Creator hath appointed. And as our Power, so that of every Creature, with respect to the material World, is limited; but the Power of God hath no Bounds or Limits. Matter hath some Influence upon us, and we are subject to Impressions from it, pleasant or painful; but the infinite Mind moveth, actuateth, and governeth the whole Mass of Matter, without being himself impressed and affected by it; he governeth it, not as a Soul the Body to which it is vitally united, but as the absolute Lord of his own Work, which he at first created, and which continually dependeth

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pendeth upon him for its Existence. What Use it may please him to make of inferior Spirits in moving and governing the material System, we cannot tell; but this we are sure of, that they all act in Subordination to him, and under his sovereign Direction, and that he still hath the whole in his own Hands, and is as immediately present to every Part of it, as if he made use of no Instrument at all.

This absolute Dominion of God over the material and inanimate World, and his making use of it to answer his most wise Purposes, is frequently represented in Scripture in a strong and noble Manner of Expression. This is what the Psalmist signifieth in the Words which I have chosen for the Subject of this Discourse, *Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in Heaven, and in Earth, in the Seas, and in all deep Places.* And then it follows: *He causeth the Vapours to ascend from the Ends of the Earth; he maketh Lightnings for the Rain; he bringeth the Wind out of his Treasuries.* Psal. cxix. 91. speaking of the Frame of Heaven and Earth, he saith, *They continue this Day according to thine Ordinances: for all are thy Servants,* i. e. all Things in the World serve thy Purposes, and execute thy Pleasure. Hence God is represented as issuing out his Word and Commandment even to the inanimate Creation. Psal. cxlvii.

15. *He sendeth forth his Commandment upon Earth; his Word runneth very swiftly. And then it is added: He giveth Snow like Wool; he scattereth the Hoar-frost like Ashes. Or, as Elibu expresth it, He saith to the Snow, Be thou upon the Earth; likewise to the small Rain, and to the great Rain of his Strength. Job xxxvii. 6. And Ver. 12, 13. the Cloud is said to be turned about by his Counsels, that they, i. e. the Snow, Rain, Meteors of which he had been speaking, may do whatsoever he commandeth them upon the Face of the World in the Earth: He causeth it to come, whether for Correction, or for his Land, or for Mercy.*

The inanimate Creation is itself incapable of Perception and Enjoyment. It cannot, therefore, be supposed to be ordained merely for its own Sake, but to serve the Uses of sensitive, perceptive Beings; and especially to answer the Purposes of God's moral Administration towards reasonable Creatures, particularly towards Mankind. It is in this Light that we are chiefly to consider God's Government of the inanimate material World, and to this it is that the Scripture principally directeth our Views.

As God perfectly knew from the Beginning all the Causes and Effects of Things in the natural World; so, upon Supposition of his also fore-knowing the free Actions
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of moral Agents, which Reason, as well as Scripture, leads us to acknowledge, it was not difficult for him to adjust the one to the other, so as to make up one great and universal Plan of Government, which is successively executed in the proper Seasons; and indeed none could exercise a perfect Government over the moral Part of the Creation, but one who had also the material System under his Direction and Influence, and could manage it according to his Will.

Whilst Man continued in his State of Innocence, God in his Providence suited the Constitution of Things in the natural World to that State; which Constitution would no doubt have continued, if Man had continued in his original Purity. But when he fell, and Sin entered into the World, God ordered it so in his most wise governing Providence, that the State of Things in the natural World, the Constitution of the Earth and Air, as well as Body of Man, suffered an Alteration which bore the Tokens of the divine Displeasure against Sin. And yet, as Man is still continued here on Earth in a State of Trial and Discipline, there are many Things in the ordinary Course that plainly shew God's great Goodness and Patience, and Forbearance towards him; the Design of which is to train him up in a Meetness for

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for a better World, where the whole Face of Nature shall be so ordered, as to be suited to a State of consummate Holiness and Virtue.

When all Flesh had corrupted his Way, and the Earth was full of Wickedness and Violence, God in his Providence so disposed Things in the natural World, as to bring in the Flood upon that ungodly Race. And at another Time, as the Lord of Nature, he poured forth a fiery Tempest from Heaven upon *Sodom* and *Gomorrab*, and the neighbouring Cities, which kindling the combustible Materials which abounded in that sulphureous Soil, brought a dreadful Ruin upon them, as a just Punishment for their abominable Wickedness. And not only in such extraordinary Cases, but when Things seem to go on in their usual Way, God in his Providence so governeth the natural World, and disposeth the Course of material Causes, as to correspond with, and fulfil his Intentions towards Mankind, whether of Judgment or of Mercy. According to the Scripture, all these Things execute the Orders of his Providence. The Lightnings are represented, by a noble Figure, as saying unto him, *Here we are*, i. e. as offering themselves like Servants to wait his Directions, and fulfil his Commands. *Job xxxviii. 35.* When these nitrous, sulphureous Particles
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are gathered together in the Air, which, according to the Course of Things which God hath established, produce the dreadful Roar of Thunder, and Blaze of Lightnings, they are so governed as to serve the Ends of his Providence, and to produce those Effects which it is his Intention they should produce. *Stormy Wind* is said to fulfil his Word. Pſal. cxlviii. 8. The Winds are for the most part so ordered by Divine Providence, as to be of great Use and Benefit; but they are sometimes made to blow in furious Tempests, and are Instruments in the Hand of God for executing his righteous Judgments upon Men. In like Manner, when God seeth fit to order it so, the Materials which are prepared in the Bowels of the Earth meet together in such a Manner as to produce violent Concussions and Earthquakes there. They sometimes break forth into dreadful Eruptions, which spread Desolation far and wide; at other Times they are so governed as to do little more than threaten and terrify. Of this were the alarming Shocks that were felt in the neighbouring Kingdom, which, if carried to an higher Degree, might have produced the most dismal Effects, but were happily so moderated, that they seem to have been designed only to serve for Warnings to awaken us to serious Reflections,

flections, and to strike us with an Awe of the divine Power. God so ordereth the Seasons in their general Course, that there is sufficient Provision made for Man and Beast; and he frequently sendeth great Plenty, so as to produce that Appearance of Things which the Psalmist so beautifully describeth, Psal. lxxv. 9, 11, 12, 13. *Thou visitest the Earth, and waterest it; thou greatly enrichest it with the River of God, which is full of Water; thou preparest them Corn, when thou hast so provided for it.—Thou crownest the Year with thy Goodness; and thy Paths drop Fatness. They drop upon the Pastures of the Wilderness; and the little Hills rejoice on every Side. The Pastures are clothed with Flocks; the Vallies also are covered with Corn; they shout for Joy, they also sing.* But sometimes it is so ordered, that there are great Drougths and Dearth. *The Heaven is as Iron, and the Earth Brass, and the Rain of the Land is as Powder and Dust; so that the Land doth not give her Encrease, neither do the Trees of the Land yield their Fruit.* Lev. xxvi. 19, 20. Deut. xxviii. 23, 24. In like Manner, there are frequently very healthful Seasons: At other Times there is a sickly Constitution of the Air, venemous Exhalations arise, or pestilential Contagions spread a mortal Influence. In all these Cases

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second Causes may well be admitted; but these Causes are under the Government of a sovereign Providence, which disposeth and applieth them to wise and righteous Purposes. And accordingly these Things are actually made the Matter of the divine Promises and Threatnings to the *Israelites* in the Law of *Moses*: See especially the 26th Chapter of *Leviticus*, and the 28th Chapter of *Deuteronomy*. And it appeareth, from the Accounts given us in Scripture of the History of that People, that these Promises and Threatnings were actually accomplished to them in the Event; and that the Course of natural Causes was so directed and over-ruled by Providence, as to reward them for their Obedience, and punish them for their Disobedience to the divine Laws. And so it hath often been in God's Dealings with other Nations. And both Reason and Religion teach us, in Things of this Nature, to raise our Views to the supreme Disposer, and to acknowledge and reverence a divine Agency.

In order to our having a right Notion of God's Government of the inanimate Creation, it is proper to observe,

First, That he ordinarily maketh use of it for answering his Purposes, without at all altering the usual Course of Things. And this

this

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this is a manifest Proof of his great Wisdom, when we cannot say that any Thing hath happened but what is natural, *i. e.* agreeable to the ordinary Powers and Properties of Things; yet the Time and Circumstances are so conducted, as to produce great Events, and answer particular important Purposes. Thus the Winds have been so ordered, that mighty Fleets have been scattered, or detained in Port; important Expeditions or Invasions have been prevented or forwarded; upon which, Events of great Consequence, and even the Fates of Kingdoms have depended. Innumerable Cases happen, both of a public and a more private Nature, in which, though there is nothing in them that can be said to be contrary to the Order of Nature, yet they are directed and over-ruled to especial wise and important Ends. And the adjusting these Things to one another is not to be looked upon as a mere Contingency, or the Effect of Chance, but as the Work of a sovereign superintending Providence.

Secondly, Sometimes God may over-rule natural Causes contrary to their stated Course, as in the Case of what are called Miracles. Thus the Fire had no Power over the Bodies of *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego*, nor singed so much as an
Hair

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Hair of their Heads, though it immediately consumed those that cast them into the Furnace. *Dan. iii. 22, 27.* The Waters of the Sea stood upright as an Heap, whilst the *Israelites* passed, and were a Wall unto them on their right Hand, and on their left, but soon returned to their natural Course, and overwhelmed the Host of the *Egyptians*. *Exod. xiv. 22, 28. xv. 8.* But however extraordinary these Things may appear to us, they carry no greater Difficulty in them to the divine Power, than the continuing Things in their ordinary Course. It is indeed highly proper, that what are usually called the Laws of Nature, and which are really the Ordinances of Divine Providence, should be generally maintained. Without such stated Rules, and an established Course of Things, there could be no regular Study or Knowledge of Nature; no Men could tell what to do or what to expect, or how to make a Progress in any Art or Science, or in the Conduct of Life: nor would there be any Advantage of Experience; since the same Things might produce one Effect this Day, and, the next, a quite contrary one in the same Circumstances. And yet, on the other Hand, there is no Necessity of supposing that these Laws are so constantly and invari-

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ably observed and executed, and the natural Course of Things so fixed, as never in any Instance to be suspended, or admit any the least Deviation. It is sufficient that these Laws, or this Course of Things, generally take Place. For this layeth a Foundation for an high Probability; and we may justly act and form Schemes upon such a Probability, though not amounting to an absolute Certainty. It is a sufficient Security that we have an Assurance that this Course shall always take Effect, except where infinite Wisdom seeth fit for valuable Purposes to order it otherwise. But it would be an inexcusable Presumption to affirm, that God, having established those Laws, and this Course of Nature, hath bound himself never to act otherwise than according to those Laws. There may be very good Reasons worthy of his great Wisdom, for his acting sometimes contrary to the usual Order of Things; and, even in that Case, it may be justly said that those Things which appear most unusual and anomalous to us, are all comprehended within the general Plan of his universal Providence. They are not to be looked upon as mere sudden Expedients, unforeseen, and unthought of before, but are to be regarded as Parts of the original Scheme. The same Wisdom which appointed or
esta-

established those natural Laws, appointed the Deviations from them, or that they should be over-ruled on such certain particular Occasions, whether brought about by the immediate Power of God, or by the Power of subordinate Agents, which are Instruments in the Hand of God for this Purpose. If Things were always to go on without the least Variation in the stated Course, Men would be apt to overlook or question a wise governing Providence, and to ascribe Things to a fixed immutable Fate, or blind Necessity, which they call Nature. So the Scoffers, mentioned 2 *Pet.* iii. 4. were ready to conclude, that the Earth and the present State of Things would continue for ever without Alteration, because, as they pretended, *since the Fathers fell asleep, all Things continue as they were from the Beginning of the Creation.* Whereas such Changes and extraordinary Operations and Appearances, tend to awaken in Mankind a Sense of a supreme Disposer and Governor of the World, and may answer important Ends, for displaying God's Mercy and Justice, and for giving an Attestation to the divine Mission of those whom he seeth fit to send on extraordinary Errands, for instructing and reforming Mankind.

This Subject may furnish several useful Reflections.

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First, What an awful Idea should this give us of the Greatness and Majesty of God, considered as the Lord of Nature! The vast inanimate material World, the Extent of which no human Imagination is able to conceive, is under his Direction, and he employeth every Part of this unwieldy Mass, as it pleaseth him, to subserve the wise Purposes of his Providence. How huge a Body is this terraqueous Globe; compared with which, the loftiest and most extended Mountains, the View of which is apt to strike us with Astonishment, are small and inconsiderable Things! And yet this Earth is but a very minute Part of this stupendous material System, all of which is under the constant Influence of the almighty universal Sovereign, moved, actuated, and guided according to his Will. He can, with the same Ease, continue Things in the settled Course and Order, or alter and change the whole Frame of Nature, or any Part of it. This is often represented in Scripture in the strongest and most magnificent Expressions, the more effectually to impress our Hearts with a sacred Awe and Veneration of his infinite Majesty. *He is wise in Heart, and mighty in Strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered? Which removeth the Mountains, and they know not; which overturneth them in his Anger: Which*
shaketh

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shaketh the Earth out of her Place, and the Pillars thereof tremble: Which commandeth the Sun, and it riseth not; and sealeth up the Stars: Which alone spreadeth out the Heavens, and treadeth upon the Waves of the Sea. Job ix. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. He looketh to the Ends of the Earth, and seeth under the whole Heaven, to make the Weight for the Winds; and he weigheth the Waters by Measure: And hath made a Decree for the Rain, and a Way for the Lightning of the Thunder.

Chap. xxviii. 24, 25, 26. The Sea, that boisterous Element, is described, by a noble Figure, as in the Hand of God like an Infant bound in swaddling Bands. Chap. xxxviii. 8, 9. He is represented as having *meted out Heaven with a Span, and comprehended the Dust of the Earth in a Measure, and weighed the Mountains in Scales, and the Hills in a Balance. Is. xl. 12. The Lord hath his Way in the Whirlwind, and in the Storm; and the Clouds are the Dust of his Feet. He rebuketh the Sea, and maketh it dry, and dryeth up the Rivers: Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and the Flower of Lebanon languisheth. The Mountains quake at him, and the Hills melt. Nah. i. 3, 4, 5.* He it is that commandeth the Morning, and causeth the Day-spring to know his Place. He can bind the sweet Influences of Pleiades, and loose the Bands of Orion; and can bring forth Max-

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zaroth in his Season, and guide Arcturus with his Sons: For he hath appointed the Ordinances of Heaven, and set the Dominion thereof in the Earth. Job xxxviii. 12, 31, 32, 33. This present Course of Things dependeth wholly upon his Will, and shall continue while he seeth fit, and no longer; and then, when it hath answered the Designs of his Providence, this vast Frame, or at least that Part of it to which we are more nearly related, shall be taken down. *For the Day of the Lord cometh, in the which the Heavens shall pass away with a great Noise, and the Elements shall melt with fervent Heat, the Earth also, and the Works that are therein, shall be burnt up.* And this great Catastrophe of Nature shall be succeeded by a new Face of Things, a *new Heaven, and a new Earth, wherein dwelleth Righteousness.* 2 Pet. iii. 10, 13. Surely when we consider all this, we should prostrate ourselves before him, filled with the most adoring Thoughts of his incomprehensible Majesty. How should such feeble Creatures as as we are be able to resist him, or stand before him when once he is angry? Shall not we stand in Awe of his Power, and dread his Displeasure, who can wield and manage the whole Course of Nature as he pleaseth?

But secondly, God's sovereign Dominion over the whole material World may also let us

see

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see what a proper Object he is of our steady Trust and Dependence. How happy shall we be if our Help be in the Name of the Lord, who at first made, and still governeth Heaven and Earth, and hath this vast universal Frame, and every Part of it, under his Direction, and at his Disposal! What can we want, or of whom should we be afraid, if the Lord of Nature be our Friend? What a comforting Consideration is it to a good Man, that the whole Series of natural Causes is in the Hand of God, directed and over-ruled by infinite Wisdom, Righteousness, and Goodness! Whosoever considereth with Attention the State of Things, may easily observe a wise and benign Disposition in the ordering and governing the inanimate material World, for the general Good of the vital, sensitive, and rational Creation. It is made in numberless Ways subservient to the Enjoyments and Happiness even of the inferior Brute Animals, but especially of Mankind. And may we not then justly conclude, that he will upon the whole over-rule and order the Course of Things, for the Benefit of those who love and serve him in Sincerity? And if, for the present, he frequently maketh use of these Things to chasten them in this State of Trial and Discipline, yet all shall in the Issue be so ordered, as to

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contribute unto, and terminate in their great Happiness.

I shall conclude this Discourse with observing, that a due Consideration of God's Dominion and Sovereignty over the inanimate Creation may convince us, that when the Course of Things in the natural World is disposed to our Comfort and Advantage, *e. g.* when we enjoy healthful and fruitful Seasons, and the like, it is our Duty to give God the Praise. And, on the other Hand, when Things have a contrary Aspect, we should reverence his Hand, and humble ourselves deeply before him. And it is very proper and reasonable for us, in all such Cases, to apply to him by devout Prayer and Supplication. It is the Command of God by the Prophet, *Ask ye of the Lord Rain in the Time of the latter Rain, so the Lord shall make bright Clouds, and give them Showers of Rain, to every one Grass in the Field.* Zech. x. 1. And in the admirable Prayer which Solomon offered up at the Dedication of the Temple, particular Notice is taken of this: *When Heaven is shut up, and there is no Rain, because they have sinned against thee; if they pray towards this Place, and confess thy Name, and turn from their Sin, when thou afflictest them: Then hear thou in Heaven, and forgive the Sin of thy Servants, and of thy People Israel,*

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Israel, that thou teach them the good Way wherein they should walk, and give Rain upon thy Land, which thou hast given to thy People for an Inheritance. 1 Kings viii. 35, 36. And, in the following Words, *If there be in the Land Famine or Pestilence, Blasting or Mildew,* they are directed to apply to God by Prayer and Repentance, that these Plagues may be removed. There is nothing in this but what is highly agreeable to Reason, and to the Practice of all Nations, among whom any Face of Religion hath been preserved. For though in such Cases second Causes are not to be excluded, yet they are still to be regarded as under the Direction and Superintendency of the supreme Governor, who so conducteth and over-ruleth them, as to carry on the Designs of his moral Administration towards Mankind. When therefore we are taught in Scripture to regard humble Prayer, and a sincere Repentance, as proper Means for procuring Blessings and averting Calamities; it must be acknowledged, that such a Constitution is worthy of God, and is wisely fitted to keep up a Sense of Religion, and of their absolute Dependence upon God, on the Minds of Men. And God's having a gracious Regard to such Prayer and Repentance, so as to confer those Blessings, and avert those Evils on the account
of

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of it, is perfectly agreeable to the Scheme of his wise and righteous Providence, and is a remarkable Instance of his adjusting natural Good and Evil to the Constitution of the moral World. Prayer in such Cases is a very proper Act of Homage to God, and a significant Expression of our Dependence upon him, as well as tendeth to exercise and improve good and religious Affections and Dispositions, that pious and devout Temper of Soul which becometh reasonable Creatures, towards the great and universal Lord of the Creation; to whom be Glory and Dominion for ever and ever. Amen.



God's Government and Care as extending to the sensitive Brute Animals.

DISCOURSE IV.

MATT. X. 29.

*Are not two Sparrows sold for a Farthing?
And one of them shall not fall to the Ground
without your Father.*

HAVING considered the whole inanimate Creation, this vast material World, as under the constant Direction and Superintendency of Divine Providence; I shall now proceed to consider God's providential Care and Government as exercised towards the Brute Animals, which are endued with Life and Sensation, but have not
a Prin-

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a Principle of Reason, nor are capable of moral Agency. And these are certainly of an higher and more valuable Kind than any Part of the inanimate Creation. Life in its lowest Notion, as including Self-motion, and even the smallest Degree of Sensation, hath something in it more wonderful than the whole inanimate material World can furnish. There is an amazing Display of the Wisdom and Power of God in the Formation of sensitive Beings, both in the Fabric of their Bodies, which is contrived and formed with a Skill that exceedeth all human Imagination, and in the several Powers, Appetites, and Instincts, which they are furnished with. And it is reasonable to believe that he that first formed them exercises constant Care over them. How many different Species there may be of living Creatures which have Sense and Perception, and yet are not moral Agents, dispersed throughout the several Regions of this vast Universe, we cannot tell; but that there are various Kinds of them here on Earth we well know. The great Author of Nature seems to delight in diffusing Life every where: The whole Earth is full of Vitality; it is as it were one vast Mass or Collection of living Creatures; every Clod swarms with Inhabitants. And what a noble Astonishment should

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should possess our Minds, to regard all these various Kinds of living sensitive Beings, from the greatest to the least and meanest of them, as under the Inspection and Government of the universal Parent, and Lord of all!

The Government of Divine Providence, as exercised towards inferior sensitive Beings; or the irrational Brute Animals, may be considered either as more immediately respecting themselves and their own Benefit. As they are all of them, through the Goodness of Divine Providence, furnished with Organs and Appetites suited to the different Kinds of Life for which they are designed; so the very lowest and meanest of them are in their Degree capable of an Happiness and Enjoyment, which is as truly fitted and accommodated to them, as higher Enjoyments are to Creatures of a higher Kind, and of more enlarged Capacities and Powers. And even with regard to those of them that appear to be most minute and inconsiderable, and whose Lives are of the shortest Duration, it must be considered that their short Lives may be as well proportioned to them, as a much longer Life to Creatures of a greater Bulk. There may, for ought we know, be Creatures of such a Kind, that a Day may be to them a sufficient Time of Existence, and yield them as full Enjoyment

as

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as their Natures are capable of. And the shorter their Lives are, there is a more quick Succession of Individuals. . And concerning the least of them it must be owned, that their vital Existence and Enjoyment, short as it may seem to be, is certainly better than Non-existence, or than an inanimate unperceptive Existence, destitute of Life and Sensation.

With regard to all those Animals which we are best acquainted with, the Care of Divine Providence over them manifestly appeareth in the Provision that is made for maintaining their sensitive Life, for gratifying their Appetites, and for enabling them to attain to the End for which they are designed. They are all carried by strong Instincts to use the properest Methods for preserving Life, and to shun whatever is destructive to it, to seek after and to take that Kind of Food which is most suited to their Nature, to provide themselves convenient Habitations, to propagate their Kind, and to take Care of their young in the fittest Manner, whilst that Care is necessary, and no longer. These several Instincts by which they are guided, and according to which they act wisely and steadily in certain Cases, are not owing to any Contrivance or Reason of their own, but to the superior Wisdom and Power of him

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that first formed them, and still governeth them, and exerciseth a constant Care over them. To this Care it is owing, that the several Species of them are still preserved and continued distinct, and that a due Balance among them is maintained.

And as Reason and Observation, if duly attended to, lead us to acknowledge the constant Care of Divine Providence towards the Brute Creatures, mere sensitive Beings, so it is very clearly and expressly asserted in the sacred Writings. We are there told, that God *giveth to the Beast his Food, and to the young Ravens which cry.* Psal. cxlvii. 9. The whole Brute Creation are represented as belonging to the Family of God, for whose Sustenance he continually provideth. *These all wait upon thee, that thou mayest give them their Meat in due Season. That thou givest them, they gather: Thou openest thine Hand, they are filled with Good.* It is added, *Thou hidest thy Face, they are troubled; thou takest away their Breath, they die, and return to their Dust. Thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the Face of the Earth.* Psal. civ. 27, 28, 29, 30. Among the Laws which God gave by *Moses*, there are some that prescribe a kind Treatment even of the Brute Animals. And it is particularly as one Design of the Appointment

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ment of the weekly Sabbath, that their Cattle might rest as well as themselves. *Exod.* xxiii. 12. God giveth it as a Reason for having Compassion on *Nineveh*, that not only there were Sixscore Thousand Persons that could not discern between their right Hand and their left, *i. e.* Infants; but that there was also much Cattle there. *Jonah* iv. 11. And it is to signify his Care even of the Brute Creation, that he is represented after the Deluge as making Covenant not only with Men, but with every living Creature, of the Fowl, of the Cattle, and of every Beast of the Earth, that he would not any more send a general Flood to destroy the Earth. *Gen.* ix. 10, 11. He still so governeth the Earth and its Productions, that there is ordinarily sufficient Provision made not only for Men but for the inferior Animals. *He causeth Grass to grow for the Cattle*, as well as *Herb for the Service of Man*. *Psal.* civ. 14. *O Lord, thou preservest Man and Beast*, saith the devout Psalmist, when celebrating God's universal Goodness and Benignity, *Psal.* xxxvi. 6.

But no where is the Care of Divine Providence towards the Brute Creatures more strongly expressed than by our Saviour in those remarkable Words, where speaking of such inconsiderable Creatures as the Sparrows, he saith, that not one of them

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them falleth to the Ground without our heavenly Father ; or, as he elfewhere expreffeth it, *Not one of them is forgotten before God.* Luke xii. 6.

This Doctrine of our great heavenly Teacher deferveth fpecial Notice. It hath indeed been cavilled againft, as if it were a degrading the divine Majefty to represent him as concerning himfelf about fuch inconfiderable Things as thefe. And it is true, that, ftrictly fpeaking, the higheft and moft excellent of his Creatures may be faid to be beneath his Notice. Yet fince he hath thought fit to create fuch numberlefs Orders of Beings, it is no more unworthy of him to exercife a providential Care over them all from the higheft to the meaneft, than it was at firft to create them. But we are apt to form a very wrong Judgment in this Matter. Many of the Creatures which appear mean and inconfiderable to us, and unworthy of our Notice or Regard, are not really fo in themfelves ; and it is only owing to our Imperfection or Ignorance, that we are apt to defpife them. We are prone to meafure all Things by the Relation they bear to us, and by their immediate Ufefulnefs to us, or the Appearance they make to our Senfes ; which, though wifely accommodated for our Convenience, are not fitted for penetrating into

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the Natures and Essences of Things. Even the meanest living Creatures have a Life and Enjoyment of their own, suited to the Rank they hold in the Scale of Beings, and may have many Uses both with regard to themselves, and other Beings, that we know nothing of. And to superior Intelligences, that do not judge by gross Senses, as we do, but have a clear Discernment of their nice and curious Mechanism, the numberless Variety and exact Adjustment of their several Parts, their Appetites and Instincts, and the Uses to which they are designed, they may appear far from despicable, and may reveal many Wonders and Beauties; and so they would do to us if we had more enlarged Views. All the living Creatures are admirable in their several Ways; and the great Author of Nature, and Parent of the Universe, who seeth not as Man seeth, but looketh with a benign Eye upon all his Works, delighteth in communicating Happiness to them in their several Gradations, and is pleased with their several Enjoyments. The Sun, which diffuseth its Rays to the meanest Insects and Reptiles, as well as to the nobler Kind of Animals, and imparteth its Light and Warmth to them all, and which, were its Beams intellectual, might be supposed to extend its Care and Cognizance to the smallest as well as the greatest,

greatest, exhibiteth a significant Emblem of the universal Care of Divine Providence; which reacheth to all the living Creatures, not neglecting or despising the meanest of them. As the making a World full of Beings that have Life, so the exercising a continual Care over them in all their various Kinds and Degrees of Life, giveth a noble Idea of the immense Power, Wisdom, and Goodness of the Supreme Being. The Objection that is made against this, as if it were beneath the Majesty of God to concern himself about such trifling Matters, which even Men themselves would think unworthy of their Notice; I say, this Objection, though varnished over with a Pretence of consulting the divine Honour, doth in Reality argue very narrow and unworthy Conceptions of his infinite Majesty. It is in effect a judging of God by ourselves. Man's not concerning himself about such Things is owing to his Imperfection. He is not capable, in this present State, of discerning their real inward Natures and Essences. His Views are narrow and limited, and he cannot take in many Things at once. If therefore he were to attend very closely to such minute Matters, he must neglect Things which are of greater Consequence to his Happiness; and his Mind would soon be distracted and overwhelmed with a

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Multiplicity of Cares. But it is otherwise with a Being of infinite Perfection, who is intimately present to every Part of this vast Creation, and knoweth, and taketh Care of all Things at once, with the same Ease as if he had only one single Thing to mind. His noticing the least Things doth not at all take him off from those Things which appear to be of greater Importance; nor doth his attending to the highest, cause him to neglect the meanest. He taketh Care of all, in a Way suited to their several Natures, Conditions, and Circumstances. And as he hath wisely established general Laws, according to which he proceedeth in his Dealings with the several Orders of sensitive Beings, so in his constant Providence he seeth to the Execution and Accomplishment of those Laws. The Events relating to them, their beginning to exist, their continuing in Life, and having an End put to their Life and Existence, are all known to him, and ordered by him, agreeably to those general Laws and Constitutions; except where in extraordinary Cases he may think fit to appoint otherwise.

Secondly, God's Government of the Brute Animals may be also considered as respecting Man, in as much as he frequently maketh Use of them for carrying on and executing his wise, his benevolent, or
righteous

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righteous Purposes towards Mankind. It is an Instance of the Wisdom and Goodness of Divine Providence, that as there is a near Relation between the several Orders of Beings, so the lower, besides their own proper Exercises and Enjoyments, are often made to contribute to serve the Uses of Creatures of an higher Rank in the Scale of Beings. The merely sensitive are in many Instances subordinate and subservient to the rational and moral; and as Man is the chief Inhabitant of this lower World, the inferior Brute Animals are manifestly designed to be subservient to his Use. And indeed, with regard to many of them, it seems evident that the peculiar Instincts given them are intended not merely for their own Benefit, but to render them more serviceable to Man, that they may contribute in various Ways to his Necessities, his Convenience, or Pleasure. They are frequently made Use of by the wise and righteous Governor of the World, to answer the Ends of his moral Administration towards Mankind, in a Way of Reward or Punishment. It is a Promise of the Law of *Moses* to the *Israelites*, that if they hearkened diligently unto the Voice of the Lord, *blessed should be the Fruit of their Cattle, the Increase of their Kine, and the Flocks of their Sheep.* Deut. xxviii. 4. and

the contrary is denounced against them in Case of their Disobedience. Ver. 18. It is mentioned as a great Instance of national Prosperity, when their *Sheep bring forth Thousands*, and their *Oxen are strong to labour*. Psal. cxliv. 13, 14. And on the contrary, it is justly looked upon as a grievous Judgment upon Mankind, when *the Beasts groan*, and *the Herds of Cattle are perplexed*, because there is no Pasture; yea, *the Flocks of Sheep are made desolate*. Joel i. 18. In these Cases the Hand of God must be acknowledged governing and disposing the Events that immediately relate to the Brute Creation, so as to turn to the Benefit or Punishment of Men. How often has it happened that a contagious Distemper among the Cattle has proved a very heavy Calamity upon a Nation. This ought to awaken serious Reflections. Divine Providence should be awfully revered in such Dispensations. And if Care be not taken to improve them, it may provoke a righteous God to inflict still severer Judgments.

Among the Things threatened in the Law of *Moses* against the *Israelites*, as Punishments to be inflicted upon them for their Idolatry and Wickedness; one was, that they should be infested by wild Beasts,
of

of which there were great Numbers in the Defarts adjoining to the Land of *Canaan*. *I will send wild Beasts among you, which shall rob you of your Children, and destroy your Cattle, and make you few in Number; and your Highways shall be desolate.* Lev. xxvi. 22. And in such Cases it must be said that the wild Beasts acted according to their Nature; but the Direction of them at such a Time, to this or that Part of the Country, and to such particular Persons, was the Work of Providence for executing its wise and just Purposes: On the contrary, it is promised, that if they walked in his Statutes, he would *rid evil Beasts out of the Land.* Ver. 6. God can, when he seeth fit, restrain their Fury, and over-rule their natural Instincts and Appetites. So the hungry Lions, contrary to their Nature. were restrained from hurting Daniel, for *God sent his Angel and shut their Mouths*, as it is expressed, *Dan. vi. 22.* Yet, immediately after, when his Accusers, with their Wives and Children, were cast into the Den, the Lions fell upon them with the utmost Fury, and brake all their Bones in Pieces before they came at the Bottom of the Den. Ver. 24. The Plagues of *Egypt* furnish remarkable Instances of God's making use of divers Kinds of living Creatures for executing his Judgments.

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And the Prophet *Joel* speaking of the Locusts, the Caterpillars, and other devouring Insects, representeth them as a mighty Army sent by God in his righteous Judgments to lay waste the Land. See the first and second Chapters of *Joel*. It were easy to produce Instances from the most credible Historians, of great Devastations committed by the most inconsiderable Creatures, which have been Instruments in the Hand of God for chastising Nations*. With regard to particular Persons, even in Cases that are usually called Accidents, it may please God to make use of Brute Creatures for executing the Purposes of his Providence. Thus, *e. g.* if a Man be bitten by a Dog, or gored by a Bull, or thrown and killed by an Horse, though there is nothing in such Instances but what is agreeable to the Course and Order of natural Causes, yet the applying them at that Time, and to that particular Person, is to be regarded as under the Direction of God's most wise Providence, who hath all the Creatures at his Disposal.

I shall conclude with a few Reflections.

First, What an amiable Idea should it give us of the Goodness and Benignity, the

* See several Instances of this kind collected by *Rochart Hieroz*: Par. I. lib. 3. cap. 32, 34.

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Kindness and Condescension of the supreme universal Lord, that he exerciseth a constant Care over the various Orders of the brutal Kind, the meanest not excepted! He who humbleth himself in beholding the Things which are done in Heaven, doth not despise or overlook the least, the seemingly most despicable of all sensitive Beings: He so ordereth the inanimate World, that every Part of it affordeth Food, Habitation, or Entertainment, to some Beings that have Life. And if we had but a distant View of all the innumerable Kinds of sensitive Beings, and knew the Provision made for them all according to their several Capacities, surely it would fill us with Astonishment, to consider the inexhaustible Benignity of the kind Parent of the Universe, who every where spreadeth Life and Enjoyment in unconceivably various Degrees. The wise Man observes, that the *righteous Man regardeth the Life of his Beast*. Prov. xii. 10. He is not for treating even the lower Orders of living Creatures with unnecessary Harshness and Cruelty. And in this he is an Image of the supreme Goodness. God is introduced as declaring, *Every Beast of the Forest is mine, and the Cattle upon a thousand Hills: I know all the Fowls of the Mountains; and the wild Beasts of the Field are mine.*
Psal.

Pfal. l. 10, 11. They are all, even to the least of them, under his benign Care; and all this without Distraction or Confusion. And he ordereth it so, that they have suitable Relishes of sensitive Happiness, and are carried by the Attractions of Pleasure to perform those Actions which are most necessary for the Support of their Beings, for supplying themselves with Food, for continuing their Kind, and taking Care of their Young: And, whether their Lives be longer or shorter, they are furnished with Enjoyments proper for them whilst they live, and have not a Foresight of Death to make them uneasy; so that, upon the whole, their Existence is an Advantage to them: And if some of them prove Food to other Animals, there is nothing in this Constitution that can justly be found fault with. For in this Case it must be said, that as during the Time of their Lives, they have Enjoyments suited to their Natures; so the Kind of Death they suffer, is generally less grievous and lingering, than if they died of themselves in the natural Way; and at the same Time is rendered subservient to the maintaining the Lives of other Animals, and contributes to their Pleasure and Enjoyment. How should we, when we consider these Things, call upon the whole
Creation

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Creation around us, to adore and bless the universal Lord, and supreme Governor of the World! And since the Brute Creatures are unable to do it of themselves, let us offer up a Tribute of Praise on their Account as well as our own, and lend them a Voice and Songs; a noble Specimen of which we have in the rapturous Strains of the devout Psalmist in the 148th Psalm, where he calls upon Beasts and all Cattle, creeping Things and flying Fowl, to praise the Lord.

Secondly, Another Reflection which may be made upon this Subject is, that if God governs and takes Care even of the inferior Brute Animals, this ought to strengthen our Faith with Relation to the Care he exerciseth towards Mankind, and should convince us, that all our Concernments and Affairs are, in a particular Manner, under the Superintendency of Divine Providence. This is what our Saviour hath especially in View, when he declares to his Disciples concerning the Sparrows, *not one of them falleth to the Ground without your Father*; or is forgotten before God: For he adds, *Fear not therefore, ye are of more Value than many Sparrows.* Mat. x. 29, 31. And to the same Purpose, in his admirable Discourse against anxious tormenting Cares and Solitude, *Mat. vi. Behold, saith he, the Fowls of the Air;*
for

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for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into Barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Ver. 26. The Argument is clear and strong, that if the Care of God's Providence extendeth even to the irrational Brute Creatures, we may be sure he will not neglect the rational and much nobler Part of his Creation. This is not to be understood, as if we were not to sow or reap any more than the Brute Animals, who are incapable of doing this; but the Meaning is, that as he provideth for the Brutes in a Way suited to their Natures, so he will much more provide for Men in a Way suited to the rational Nature he hath given them, which requireth, that they should apply themselves to the Use of all proper Means according to their Ability. If they do this, they may, without anxious Solitude, commit themselves to Divine Providence, depending upon it, that he who neglecteth not the inferior sensitive Beings, will take Care of the human Race, especially those of them that exercise a regular Trust in him, and will grant what he seeth to be really good and needful for them.

Thirdly, From what hath been offered concerning the Dominion and Sovereignty of Divine Providence over both the inanimate

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animate and Brute Creation, we may see how careful we should be to please and serve God, and how much it concerneth us to secure an Interest in his Favour. We live in a World where every Thing above, beneath, on every Side of us, is in the Hand of God, and under his Direction. If we be rebellious and disobedient to his Voice, he can arm all the Creatures against us. He can cause the Earth we tread upon to shake under us, and swallow us up; he can point his awful Thunder at our Heads, or can taint the Air we breath in with a poisonous Influence; he can commission the Water to overwhelm us, or the Fire to consume us; or he can make the Brute Beasts the Instruments of our Punishment. And that he doth not so, is only owing to his wonderful Patience and Forbearance, because he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to Repentance. On the other Hand, if we lay hold of his offered Mercy upon the most gracious and reasonable Terms of his Covenant, and are careful to walk before him unto all pleasing, he can make the whole Creation to be as it were in a Covenant of Friendship with us, and to subserve his own kind and gracious Intentions towards us. This is beautifully expressed by *Eliphaz*, when he exhorteth *Job* to return to God,
and

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and be at Peace with him: *Thou shalt be in League, saith he, with the Stones of the Field; and the Beasts of the Field, saith he, shall be at Peace with thee: And thou shalt know that thy Tabernacle shall be in Peace; and thou shalt visit thy Habitation, and shalt not sin.* Job. v. 23, 24. And to the same Purpose, *Hof. ii. 18.* God is introduced as declaring concerning his People, *In that Day will I make a Covenant for them with the Beasts of the Field, and with the Fowls of Heaven, and with the creeping Things of the Ground.* And Ver. 21, 22. *And it shall come to pass in that Day, I will bear, saith the Lord, I will bear the Heavens, and they shall bear the Earth: And the Earth shall bear the Corn, and the Wine, and the Oil, and they shall bear Jezreel.* Where there is held forth to us a wonderful Concatenation of second Causes, all co-operating, under the Direction and Influence of God, the supreme Disposer, for the Good of his People. Let us, therefore, learn to yield a willing and entire Subjection to the great Lord of the Universe. Let us make him our Friend, and all Things shall work together for our Good. Either none of the Creatures shall be suffered to hurt us, or, if they do, we may be sure this is ordered for wise Ends, and shall be over-ruled for

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our greater Benefit. For they can do no more to us than he seeth proper to permit. Him, therefore, let us reverence and adore ; on him let us place our Confidence, and not be afraid what any Creature can do unto us. And to this blessed and only Potentate, the Sovereign Lord of the Creation, who doth whatsoever he wills in Heaven and in Earth, be Glory and Dominion for ever and ever. Amen.



*On God's providential Government
with regard to his reasonable Crea-
tures, moral Agents.*

DISCOURSE V.

PSALM ciii. 19.

*The Lord hath prepared his Throne in the
Heavens; and his Kingdom ruleth over
all.*

THE Dominion and Government of
Divine Providence hath been con-
sidered as extending to the inanimate Crea-
tion, or the material World, and also as
extending to the sensitive Part of the Crea-
tion, or the Brute Animals: Let us now
take a View of it as exercised towards rea-
sonable Beings, moral Agents, which are
undoubtedly the noblest and most excel-

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lent of God's Creatures. The material System, whatever Order or Beauty may be found in it, is not itself conscious of that Beauty and Order; nor are mere sensitive Beings capable of making proper Reflections upon it, or of admiring, obeying, adoring the great Parent and Lord of the Universe. This is the sole Privilege of rational, intelligent Beings. If therefore the Providence of God extendeth to any Creatures at all, we may be sure that he exerciseth a special Care over his reasonable Creatures; and, since he hath given them such noble Faculties and Powers, will govern them in a Way suitable to those Faculties and Powers. And this certainly is the most admirable Part of the divine Administrations. For to govern numberless Millions of active intelligent Beings, so unconceivably various in their Thoughts, Inclinations, and Counsels, and who have each of them a Will of their own, and a Power of determining their own Actions; to exercise a constant Superintendency over them, and direct and order the Events relating to them, and to dispense to them proper Re-tributions, not only according to their outward Conduct, but the inward Thoughts and Dispositions of their Hearts; I say, thus to govern them without infringing the Liberty which belongeth to them as
moral

moral Agents, must needs argue a Wisdom as well as Power, that exceedeth our Comprehension, and which can only be found in the infinite Mind.

It is God's Government of reasonable Creatures, which the Psalmist appears to have principally in View, when he saith that *the Lord hath prepared*, or, as it might be rendered, *hath established his Throne in the Heavens; and his Kingdom ruleth over all*. Heaven is the most magnificent Part of his Dominion; there he exhibiteth the brightest Displays of his Majesty and Glory; and therefore it is represented in Scripture under the glorious Epithet of the Throne of God, and his Dwelling-place. There he reigneth over all the Hosts of Angels in their several bright Orders and Degrees. And accordingly the Psalmist, in the Words immediately following, calleth upon the Angels to bless and adore the great universal Sovereign: *Bless the Lord, ye his Angels, that excel in Strength, that do his Commandments, hearkening to the Voice of his Word*. But though God reigneth most illustriously in Heaven, yet his Presence and Dominion is not confined there. *His Kingdom ruleth over all*. This vast Universe is his Empire, the Extent of which transcendeth all human Imagination. How many different Orders of reasonable

Beings there may be, which inhabit the several Parts of this stupendous Frame, we cannot tell; but whatever they be, they are all under the Government of God, from the highest of them to the meanest. But especially he ruleth over all Mankind, of whatsoever Tribe or Tongue, or Family or Nation: They are all equally the Subjects of his Kingdom.

Before I enter into a distinct Consideration of the Kingdom or Government of God, with regard to the rational moral Part of the Creation, it may be proper to premise some general Observations concerning it.

First, God hath an indisputable Right to the Dominion or Government over all reasonable Beings throughout the Universe, in as much as they are all his Creatures, who to him owe their Existence, and by him are continually upheld in Life. He made them what they are, and hath assigned them the Rank they hold in the Creation. He gave them their admirable Faculties and Powers, and maintaineth them in the Use of those Faculties and Powers; and therefore he is by necessary Right their absolute Proprietor and sovereign Lord, who hath the most just Claim to their highest Love, Reverence, Subjection, and Obedience. His Dominion over
them,

them, and Right to rule and govern them, is not derived merely from any Compact or Covenant with them, nor doth it depend upon their own Consent, but is founded in the Nature of Things, and can never be alienated. As they are all the Creatures of his Power, so they are all the Subjects of his Government, whether they will or no: And in this respect, his Dominion is of a peculiar and unequalled Kind, the like of which cannot possibly be found in any created Beings with regard to one another.

Secondly, It strengtheneth this farther, when we consider how well qualified he is for the Government of the rational moral World, by the infinite Perfection of his Nature. As his Creation and Preservation of all Things giveth him an undoubted Right to rule them, so his infinite Excellency rendereth it fit and reasonable that he should rule. Yea, it may be said to give him an additional Right to it, since it is, in the Nature of Things, fit that the most perfect and excellent of Beings should preside over Beings that are infinitely inferior. So that if we should, by an impossible Supposition, put the Case, that this World, and the Things of it, had come into Being by Chance, yet when once they did exist, the absolutely perfect Being

would have a Right to govern and order them, on the Account of the transcendent Excellency of his Nature; and no other could be fit, or have a Right to do it: *Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O Lord, saith the Prophet, thou art great, and thy Name is great in Might: Who would not fear thee, thou King of Nations? For to thee doth it appertain: Forasmuch as among all the wise Men of the Nations, and in all their Kingdoms, there is none like unto thee.* Jer. x. 6, 7. Because there is none like unto God in Might and Wisdom, therefore to him doth the Dominion appertain. He, and he alone, hath almighty Power, whereby he can do whatsoever he willeth, and is every Way able to execute all the Purposes of his Government. And his Understanding and Wisdom is infinite, whereby he knoweth, in every possible Instance, what is best and fittest to be done; and hath a perfect Knowledge, not only of all the Actions of all reasonable Beings, but of the most secret Counsels and Intents of their Hearts, without which he might commit Mistakes in Government, and reward or punish Persons or Actions that did not deserve it. *The Eyes of the Lord are in every Place, beholding the Evil and the Good.* Prov. xv. 3. He is present to the whole Creation, and is therefore capable of seeing and ordering every

every Thing with his own Eyes: Add to this, that he is of boundless Goodness and Benignity, and delighteth in the Happiness of his Creatures. *The Lord is good to all; and his tender Mercies are over all his Works.*

Pfal. cXLV. 9. He is also a Being of impartial Righteousness and spotless Purity. *Righteousness and Judgment are the Habitation,* or, as it is rendered in the Margin, the Establishment *of his Throne.* Psal. xcvi.

2. Taking all these Things in Conjunction, it appeareth, that God, and he alone, is qualified for the Government of the World; so that if we were to wish for ourselves, for our own Happiness, and that of all the Orders of Beings throughout the vast Universe, we should be desirous that the universal Administration of Things should be in the Hands of God. And there could not be a more unnatural or monstrous Thought, nothing that could possibly argue greater Folly, as well as Depravity of Heart, than to wish that there were no Providence, or that God did not rule. If we could suppose it to be left, to the free Vote and Election of all intelligent Beings, they must all concur in this as their unanimous Desire, if they followed the Dictates of Reason and Nature, that God should govern the World, and all Things that are therein, because it is for the uni-

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verfal Good that it ſhould be ſo, and be-
 caufe no other is fit to govern it but he
 alone.

Thirdly, As to the Nature of God's
 Government of the World, it is, in the
 ſtricteſt and propereſt Senſe, independent,
 ſupreme, and abſolute, though at the ſame
 Time moſt juſt and righteous. This ap-
 peareth, if we conſider what hath been al-
 ready obſerved, that his Right to Govern-
 ment dependeth, not upon the Conſent of
 his Creatures, or upon any original Com-
 pact, but upon his Creation and Preserva-
 tion of all Things; in conſequence of
 which, he hath an entire and abſolute
 Property and Dominion over them: and
 that he is alſo poſſeſſed of infinite Power and
 Perfection; and infinite Power and Perfec-
 tion muſt, in the Nature of Things, have
 abſolute Sovereignty. He hath no Supe-
 rior to control him, or give him Laws;
 no Counſellor to guide him: *For who hath
 directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his
 Counſellor hath taught him?* Iſa. xl. 13.
 Nor is there any Tribunal to which he can
 be accountable. And that Power, above
 which there is no other, and beyond which
 there can be no Appeal, muſt be truly
 and properly abſolute. This cannot be ſaid
 of any created Beings, however exalted
 they may appear to be. There is a Power
 above

above them, and infinitely greater than theirs, that is able to limit and control them, and an higher Tribunal to which they are accountable. Hence the wise Man mentioneth it as a Consideration which should support us against the Oppression of earthly Princes or Magistrates, that *he that is higher than the highest, regardeth, and there be higher than they.* Eccl. v. 8. God is said to be *the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.* 1 Tim. vi. 15. and to be *a great King above all Gods.* Psal. xcv. 3. The mightiest earthly Monarchs cannot be said to be strictly absolute and independent: For, as they all depend upon God, so they all have some Dependence upon their Fellow-creatures, and even upon their own Subjects; they need the Assistance of their Inferiors; nor can they properly govern or execute their Laws by themselves. But God's Dominion and Sovereignty is independent as his Existence. His Authority is self-derived, and centring in himself alone. As he is all-sufficient and self-sufficient, so he needeth no external Assistance or Support for any Thing without him to maintain and establish his Government. And if he useth Instruments in the Management or Administration of it, it is not that he standeth in the least need of their Counsel or Assistance.

ance. Justly therefore is he called, not only *the blessed*, but the *only Potentate*. 1 Tim. vi. 15. because there is no other that is properly supreme, and an absolute Potentate, but he alone.

This absolute Sovereignty of God and of his Government, is frequently and strongly described in the holy Scriptures, and seemeth to be one Thing particularly intended here, when it is said that *the Lord hath established his Throne in the Heavens*. To the same Purpose it is declared, Psal. cxv. 3. *Our God is in Heaven, he hath done whatsoever he pleased*. We are assured, that *all Things were created not only by him, but for him*. Col. i. 16. and that *for his Pleasure they are, and were created*. Rev. iv. 11. And as his good Pleasure was the Cause of their being made, so according to his good Pleasure they are disposed and governed: He is said to work *all Things according to the Counsel of his own Will*. Eph. i. 11. He doeth all Things according to his own Will; but it is called the Counsel of his Will, to signify, that though it is sovereign absolute Will, it is not mere arbitrary unreasonable Will, but proceedeth upon the wisest Reasons, always known to himself, though often hidden from us. *Nebuchadnezzar*, that haughty Monarch, was brought to such a Sense of God's abso-

lute Dominion and Sovereignty, that he made that noble Acknowledgment, *All the Inhabitants of the Earth are reputed as nothing; and he doeth according to his Will in the Army of Heaven, and among the Inhabitants of the Earth; and none can stay his Hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?* Dan. iv. 35. His Power over us is compared to that of the Potter over his Clay. Jer. xviii. 6. *O House of Israel, cannot I do with you as this Potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the Clay is in the Potters Hands, so are ye in mine Hand, O House of Israel.* And Isa. xlv. 9. *Wo unto him that striveth with his Maker: Let the Potsberd strive with the Potsberds of the Earth: Shall the Clay say unto him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy Work, He hath no Hands?*

God hath a Right to do many Things towards his Creatures, which they have no Right to do towards one another. Earthly Princes are of the same Kind of Beings with their Subjects, Flesh and Blood as well as they; and as they did not give them Existence, so they have not a proper absolute Right over their Lives, to take them away at their own Pleasure. But God is the absolute Lord of the Lives and Properties of his Creatures, and can dispose of them as seemeth fit to his infinite

nite Wisdom. *The Lord killeth, and maketh alive; he bringeth down to the Grave, and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich; he bringeth low, and lifteth up.* 1 Sam. ii. 6, 7. As the Creature deriveth all from his Will and Pleasure, and absolutely dependeth upon him, so no Creature can have a proper Claim against him, either for Life or Property, which it is in his Power to withdraw or to continue, as best answereth the Ends of his Providence. And in this he transgresseth no Rule of Justice: For he is not bound by the Laws made for securing Mens Lives and Properties against one another. The Justice of God's Government and Providence is of a transcendent Nature, and is not tied down to our scanty Rules; but is measured by a much superior Rule, the Reason of his all-comprehending Mind, which will ever carry him to do what is, all Things considered, best and fittest upon the whole, and what becometh his own glorious Perfections, and the Relations he sustaineth towards his Creatures.

From this absolute and independent Dominion and Sovereignty of God, it followeth, that there must needs be many Things in the Course of his Administrations, which are above our Reach, and of which we cannot pretend to be competent Judges.

Judges. Even with regard to earthly Sovereigns, it would be justly looked upon as contrary to the Duty of good Subjects, and to the Reverence they owe to Authority, to find Fault with every Thing in the Princes Actings they do not know the Reason of, and to expect to be let into all the Secrets of Government. Many Cases there are, in which it would be accounted highly arrogant to demand a Reason from an earthly Prince or Master, for his acting after this or that Manner in Matters that depend upon his own Prerogative and free Pleasure. And much more inexcusably insolent would it be for such Creatures as we are, or for any created Beings, to pretend to demand a Reason for all God's Proceedings, as if we had a Right to censure every Thing in the Course of his Dispensations which we cannot precisely account for. *Why dost thou strive against him? (saith Elibu) for he giveth not an Account of any of his Matters.* Job xxxiii. 13. Who can search the Depths of his sacred Counsels, or undertake exactly to define what he, in his infinite Wisdom and absolute Sovereignty, may rightfully ordain and appoint? If we would but allow God the Rights of a Sovereign, in the free Distribution of his Favours, in ordering the Times, Seasons, Manner, Degrees of conferring

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Benefits, or of forbearing, delaying, inflicting Corrections and Punishments, and in taking those Measures which he judgeth to be the fittest and best, it would prevent many of the Objections that are made against his Providence and Government. He hath undoubtedly (as was hinted before) wise and good Reasons for acting as he doth, even in Things which seem to depend upon mere Prerogative and sovereign Will and Pleasure; but we have not the least Right to demand to know those Reasons. Or, if he should see fit at some Time or other to let us into the Reasons of his Proceedings, yet he may not think it proper to discover them to us at present, because we cannot be rightly capable of judging of them till the whole Scheme shall be completed.

Fourthly, The last general Observation I would make concerning God's Government towards reasonable and moral Agents, is, that the great End of it is to promote their real Happiness, in a Way worthy of himself, and suited to their rational Natures. The principal End of all good human Governments, is the public Happiness, or the Good of the governed. And Reason and Justice require that it should be so. For, since those that govern, are themselves of the same Species of Beings with those
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those that are governed by them, it is manifest that the Good of the whole Community is, in the Nature of the Thing, of greater Worth and Advantage than the Will and Pleasure, or Interest of a single Person, or of a few. This, indeed, cannot properly be said with regard to God and his Government. As he himself is the Fountain of all Perfection, infinitely superior to the whole rational Creation, and hath infinitely greater Worth and Excellency than they altogether, so it cannot be said that he is under an Obligation to promote the universal Good of the rational Creation, on the Account of his being inferior to the whole, or comprehended in it. But though he is not, on that Account, obliged to pursue the general Good of the rational Creatures, which are the Subjects of his Government, yet he is determined to it by his own infinite Goodness and Benevolence. That Goodness which inclined him to create them, and to give them all their excellent Faculties and Capacities for Happiness, will also incline him to govern them so as to promote their Happiness in a Way suited to the Natures he hath given them, *i. e.* in a Way suited to moral Agency. This, therefore, may be regarded as the great End to which all his Administrations towards them are uniformly

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formly directed, to promote the Happiness of the whole rational Creation, and that of particular Beings in Subordination to, and as far as is consistent with the universal Good; not to make them happy in whatever Way they behave, and however they act, but to make them happy in the right Use of their rational moral Powers, and to train them up by just Degrees, and a proper Discipline, to the true Perfection of their Natures. And God's thus having the universal Good and Happiness in View, is no way inconsistent with his inflicting grievous Punishments upon such of his reasonable Creatures as violate the Laws which he hath given them; since even the general Good of the whole moral World requireth that the divine Laws should be enforced with proper Sanctions, and that just Punishment should be inflicted on the obstinately wicked and impenitent: And to suffer such Persons to transgress the divine Laws with Impunity, would be a Defect in governing Wisdom, and in Goodness too, as that signifieth the promoting the general Happiness.

Upon this View of the Nature and Ends of God's Government of the rational moral Part of the Creation, we may see that the absolute independent Power
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and Sovereignty of the divine Dominion hath not any Thing in it, if it be rightly considered, that should be Matter of Terror and Discouragement, but rather layeth a Foundation for the most solid Confidence and Joy: No Being is properly qualified for absolute Sovereignty, but one of infallible Wisdom, and of infinite Righteousness and Goodness, because such an one can never abuse his Power: And this is unquestionably true of God, and of him only. Though therefore his Power and Dominion be really, and in the strictest Sense, absolute and unlimited, without any external Law to guide or bind him, this should give us no Uneasiness, for the Perfection and Excellency of his own Nature may be said to be an eternal Law to him, which he can never counteract without denying himself. Absolute Power and Sovereignty, when in Conjunction with the most perfect Wisdom, Holiness, and Goodness, is the most comfortable Thing in the World. The more absolute it is in that Case the better, and the greater is our Security. He that is possessed of a Power that is truly and properly independent and infinite, and to which no other Power is superior or equal, can have no possible Temptation to do Wrong, and is raised by his own tran-

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scendent Excellency, above all narrow, selfish, malevolent Affections and Views. He must needs be possessed of an infinite Generosity of Temper, and must be ever exercised in doing the greatest Good, which is the noblest Act of absolute Power and Dominion. *Far be it from God that he should do Wickedness, and from the Almighty that he should commit Iniquity.* Job xxxiv. 10. Beings that have a Mixture of Weakness may be wicked, cruel, or unjust; but he who is absolutely supreme, almighty, and all-sufficient, cannot be reasonably supposed to be capable of doing a cruel or unjust Thing. For what should induce him to do so, who hath no Advantage to procure to himself, no Evil to guard against, no Competitor to fear, no private Interests to secure? So that the very absoluteness of his Dominion, as it is in Conjunction with infinite Perfection, is a Ground of the highest Confidence and Assurance.

Let us therefore rejoice in this, that the Lord reigneth. Infinite Wisdom, Righteousness, and Goodness reigneth. Let the Heavens rejoice, and let the Earth be glad. Let all rational Beings, in every Part of this vast Universe, form one universal

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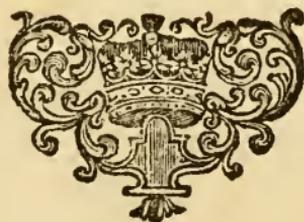
versal Comfort, and break forth into singing.

To this glorious universal Lord let us yield a willing and absolute Submission. As there are no Limits to his Authority, there must be no Bounds to our Obedience. We do not obey him as God, and acknowledge him to be what he is, the supreme and absolute sovereign Lord, if we do not endeavour to obey all his Laws without Reserve, so as not to allow ourselves in the habitual Négléct or Violation of any of them.

And as we must yield an unreserved Obedience to all his Commands, so we must yield an entire Resignation to his disposing Will in all Things. For since he is our absolute Sovereign and Lord, he hath not only an indisputable Right to give us what Laws he thinks proper, but to order and appoint our Condition and Circumstances as he pleaseth. We must never, therefore, in any Instance, allow ourselves to murmur or repine at his Disposals, but must resolve to acquiesce in whatever Lot it shall seem fit to him to appoint us; still carrying this along with us, that whatever his present Dispensations may appear to be, yet all Things shall be ordered for the best

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upon the whole, so as in the final Issue to turn to the greater Benefit of those who sincerely love and obey him. For though he be an absolute Sovereign, yet he is infinitely holy, wise, and good, and never doeth any Thing but with the most wise and benevolent Views, worthy of himself, and of his own infinite Perfection.



*On God's providential Government
towards good and evil Angels.*

DISCOURSE VI.

PSALM ciii. 19.

*The Lord hath prepared his Throne in the
Heavens; and his Kingdom ruleth over
all.*

THERE is scarce any Thing of greater Importance to us, than to endeavour to get just Notions of God's Government of the rational moral Part of the Creation: Some general Observations were made concerning it in our former Discourse. It is proper now to consider it more distinctly, as exercised towards the several Orders of reasonable Beings, the most remarkable

of which, as far as they come under our Notice, are Angels and Men.

I shall begin with considering the Government of Divine Providence towards the Angels.

Whosoever duly considereth what imperfect Creatures we are, will be naturally led to conclude, that we are not of the highest Order in the Scale of created Beings. Man is of a middle Nature, a Compound of Flesh and Spirit; and, as there are inferior Animals, that have Life and Sensation, and Bodies of Flesh, as we have, but are not endued with rational and intellectual Souls, so it is congruous to Reason, and the just Order of Things to suppose, that there are Spirits and Intelligencies, which either are not united to Bodies at all, or are not encumbered with such gross corruptible Bodies as ours. Since this lower Earth is replenished with such a Variety of living Creatures, can it reasonably be imagined, that all the other Parts of this vast Universe are destitute of Inhabitants? And of these there may be various Orders and Degrees, many of which are probably of an higher and more excellent Kind than any that dwell in the inferior Regions. And accordingly, some Notion of such Kind of Beings hath obtained in all Nations and Ages, almost as universally

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versally as the Belief of a God and a Providence. The holy Scriptures are very clear and express to this Purpose. There we are informed of great Numbers of Angels, or spiritual intellectual Beings superior to Man, many of whom are holy and happy, employing their vast Capacities in doing Good, and are called the elect Angels, and holy Angels; others of them, by wilful Disobedience, and an Abuse of their noble Powers, have fallen from their original Purity and Glory, and are represented as evil and malevolent Beings. But both the one and the other are under the Dominion of God, and the Government of his Providence.

First, God exerciseth a sovereign Rule over the good Angels; this is one Thing the Psalmist seems to have especially in View, when he here declares, that *the Lord hath prepared his Throne in the Heavens; and his Kingdom ruleth over all.* For he immediately adds, *Bless the Lord ye his Angels, that excel in Strength, that do his Commandments, hearkening to the Voice of his Word. Bless the Lord, all ye his Hosts, ye Ministers of his that do his Pleasure.* They are said to excel in Strength, and are elsewhere called mighty Angels, to signify that they are of great Power and Activity, compared with whom, the Sons of Men that dwell in Houses of Clay, are weak and feeble Beings. They

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are also represented as doing his Commandments, hearkening to the Voice of his Word, to signify that they are ever obedient to the Will of God, whom they serve with a persevering Constancy, and with an unwearied Alacrity and Diligence. They are of great Splendor and Glory, and are represented as the immediate Attendants of the divine Majesty, employed by him in frequent Services and Ministrations, and are therefore called the Hosts of God, his Ministers that do his Pleasure. They are probably of different Orders and Degrees: This seems to be intimated by the different Names and Titles by which they are described, *viz.* Angels, Archangels, Thrones, Dominions, Principalities, Powers, &c. As to the Nature of that celestial Polity, the Methods of God's Government towards the several Orders of blessed Angels, and the Laws and Constitutions they are under, we must be content to be in a great Measure ignorant of them, till we arrive to the heavenly World. But it is reasonable to believe, that these glorious Beings are frequently employed as the Instruments of Divine Providence in several Parts of this vast Universe. For God, who can do all Things immediately by himself, as being always intimately present to every Part of the Creation, yet chooseth ordinarily to

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work by intermediate second Causes and Instruments, of which the Angels are the noblest. How far it pleaseth him to make use of them in ordering and governing the Motions of the inanimate material System, we cannot tell; but that they are employed for carrying on the Designs of his Providence towards Mankind, is evident from many express Testimonies of holy Writ. Angels were made use of in that amazing Manifestation of the divine Glory, when the Law was delivered at Mount *Sinai*. This is signified by the Psalmist, when he saith, *The Chariots of God are Twenty Thousand, even Thousands of Angels, the Lord is among them as in Sinai, in the holy Mount. Psal. lxxviii. 17.* The Law is called *the Word spoken by Angels.* Heb. ii. 2. And St. Stephen saith, it was given *by the Disposition of Angels,* among Troops or Ranks of Angels, as some render the Words. *Acts vii. 53.* There are Instances recorded, both in the Old Testament and the New, of Angels appearing here on Earth in a visible conspicuous Form and Splendor. But there are not many Instances of this Kind through so long a Succession of Ages. It is wisely ordered that their Ministrations towards us should ordinarily be in a Way of invisible Agency. They are capable, in this Way, of doing us all the Services and good Offices that

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we stand in need of from them, without those Inconveniences which their visible Appearance would bring along with it, which we could not well bear in this present State of Frailty. The Angels are said to be *ministering Spirits sent forth to be Ministers for them who shall be Heirs of Salvation*. Heb. i. 14. They are helpful to us in a thousand Ways which we do not now distinctly know. We have Reason to believe that they are often made use of in preventing Dangers which we do not foresee, or in defending and carrying us safe through them, and disappointing the Rage and Malice of Devils and wicked Men. Many a Deliverance, which we perhaps attribute to a lucky Chance or Accident, is owing, under God, to the vigilant Care of those holy and powerful Guardians which invisibly watch around us. *The Angel of the Lord, saith the Psalmist, encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them*. Psal. xxxiv. 7. The same Thing is signified in those remarkable Words, Psal. xci. 10, 11, 12. *There shall no Evil befall thee, neither shall any Plague come nigh thy Dwelling. For he shall give his Angels Charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy Ways. They shall bear thee up in their Hands, lest thou dash thy Foot against a Stone*. The Angels may also be supposed to be instrumental on several Occasions,

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casions, in suggesting good Thoughts and salutary Counsels; for spiritual Beings may have a near Access to our Souls, and many Ways of operating upon them, which we are not able distinctly to explain. And finally, they minister to good Men immediately at, and after their Death, in conveying their departed Spirits to the heavenly Mansions. Thus our Saviour represents the Soul of *Lazarus*, after his Death, as *carried by the Angels into Abraham's Bosom*. Luke xvi. 22. And he assures us that, *at the End of the World the Angels shall come forth, and shall sever the wicked from among the just*. Matt. xiii. 49, 50. God's thus making use of Angels in his Administrations towards Mankind, is suited to the admirable Oeconomy of his Providence, whereby he ordinarily maketh use of the Creatures as Instruments in executing his Designs towards one another. And it is wisely so ordered, that the better Foundation may be laid for cultivating a sacred Amity between Angels and Men, which shall be compleated in the heavenly World, where they shall be for ever united in holy Love and Concord. And what a noble Idea doth this give us of the Extent and Order of the divine Government! This is one Instance among many, whereby it appears how much the Gospel enlargeth our Views.

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Views. It teacheth us to regard ourselves as nearly allied to the blessed Angels, and as all belonging to the same glorious universal Family of God. It lets us see that there is a Correspondence and Intercourse continually carried on and maintained between the invisible World and this Earth of ours; and that it is the Will of God that there should be a happy Harmony between the several Parts of his intellectual System. With what Pleasure should we raise our Views to that noblest Part of the rational Creation! How should our Hearts flow towards them in Love, when we consider them as united to us in the sacred Bonds of a pure and disinterested Friendship, and join with them in blessing and adoring the universal Sovereign!

But secondly, Let us consider the Government of God as extending to the evil Angels. These, as the Scripture informs us, kept not their first Estate, but left their own Habitation; though, what were the particular Occasions and Circumstances of their Fall, is not distinctly revealed to us. They are represented as of great Power and Sagacity, full of Malice and Envy, Falshood and Deceit. Some Notion of such malevolent Beings superior to Man, has generally obtained in the World; and there have been, from Time to Time,

Facts

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Facts and Events of an extraordinary Nature, which can scarce be accounted for upon any other Supposition. But though they are in a State of Difobedience and Apostacy from God, yet they are still subject to his Dominion, and under his sovereign Cognizance and Control. They are said to be reserved unto Judgment; they are even now under the penal Effects of the divine Displeasure: but there is a farther Punishment prepared for them; and, in the mean Time, God suffereth them to act according to their Nature, only that he setteth Bounds to their Rage, and overruleth their Designs and Attempts to the wise Purposes of his Government. And if we had a distinct View of this Part of the divine Administration, it would undoubtedly open a most surprizing Scene. What can be more admirable, than to consider vast Numbers of evil Spirits, of great Might, Subtilty, and Industry, who, if left to themselves, would spread Ruin and Misery far and wide, yet all under the Control of the supreme universal Lord, who, by a Wisdom which exceeds all Comprehension, defeateth their Malice, and confoundeth their Devices; and often ordereth it so, that they really execute his Will, whilst they think only of gratifying their own corrupt Inclinations.

It

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It appears from Scripture, that evil Spirits are made use of as Instruments for serving the Ends of the divine Government. Remarkable to this Purpose is that parabolical Vision of the Prophet *Micaiah*; 1 *Kings* xxii. 19—23. in which God is represented as on a Throne seated in awful Majesty, and that a Spirit presented himself before him, offering to be a lying Spirit in the Mouth of *Abab's* Prophets, to persuade him to go up to *Ramoth-Gilead*, and was allowed to do it accordingly. The several Circumstances in this Representation are not to be strictly urged, or taken in a literal Sense. But the general Design of it is manifest; which is to signify, that God, as the righteous Governor of the World, did, in his just Judgment, suffer *Abab* to be deceived by a lying Spirit in the Mouth of his false Prophets; in consequence of which he went up to *Ramoth-Gilead*, where Providence ordered it so, that he was slain by the *Syrians*, as a just Punishment for his great Wickedness. And yet it is to be observed, that in this Case *Abab* was not laid under a Necessity of being deceived, nor would have been so, if it had not been his own Fault. For he was faithfully warned of it by one whom he knew to be a true Prophet of the Lord, though he hated him for telling him ungrateful Truths. But he

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rejected the Warning which was given him, and gave himself up to the Delusions of the false Prophets, whom he himself maintained to sooth and flatter him; because what they spake, and the Advice they gave, was agreeable to his own Inclinations and Views.

It may reasonably be supposed, that God makes use of evil Angels in some of those Plagues and Calamities, which are from Time to Time laid upon the human Race, and especially in inflicting Punishments upon the wicked. Thus particularly with regard to the *Egyptians* we are told, that *he cast upon them the Fierceness of his Anger, Wrath and Indignation and Trouble, by sending evil Angels among them.* Psal. lxxviii. 49. And they are also suffered to assault and harass good Men, which they do several Ways; though God, in his wise Providence, over-rules their pernicious Counsels and Attempts to the real Advantage of his chosen.

Any one that is acquainted with the sacred Writings both of the Old Testament and the New, must be sensible, that evil Spirits are frequently represented there as tempting, moving, and inciting Men to Sin. Thus it is observed concerning *Judas Iscariot*, that the Devil put it into his Heart to betray *Jesus*. John xiii 2. And concerning *Ananias* and *Sapphira*, that *Satan*

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tan filled their Hearts, that they should lie against the Holy Ghost. *Acts* v. 3. This is not to be understood as if the one or the other were compelled by *Satan* to do what they did. It was really and properly their own Fault, and was originally owing to their covetous Disposition; and *Satan* took Advantage from it to urge them forward for executing his malicious Purposes. Yet Providence ordered it so, that Good was brought out of these Evils. For, in the Case of *Ananias* and *Sapphira*, their Sin, and the Punishment inflicted on them for it, was over-ruled to the better Establishment of the Gospel, and the procuring a greater Reverence and Sanction to the apostolical Authority, which was of mighty Importance at the first founding of the Christian Church: And, in the other Case, *Satan's* Malice and Subtilty in tempting *Judas* to betray *Jesus*, was over-ruled, contrary to his Intention, to the Overthrow of his Kingdom, and to the promoting the Salvation of Mankind.

It hath been frequently urged as an Objection against the holy Scriptures, that the weak and helpless human Race is there represented as exposed a Prey to evil Spirits, Adversaries mighty and powerful, subtile and malicious, ever seeking to destroy; and that this can scarce be reconciled to the Notion of a wise and good Providence,

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dence, prefiding over the World, and must needs give a strange Idea of God, and fill the Minds of Men with continual Anxieties and Terrors. But if the Matter be fairly confidered, it will appear that there is no juſt Foundation for ſuch an Objection, and the Clamours which have been raiſed upon it.

That there are Spirits of a ſuperior Order to Man, not tied down to ſuch groſs fleſhly Bodies as ours are, is, as hath been already hinted, agreeable to Reaſon and to the common Sentiments of Mankind. And that ſome of theſe Angels or Spirits are evil and wicked, is as ſuppoſable, as that by an Abuſe of their Liberty many of the human Race are ſo. And ſuppoſing that there are ſuch evil Angels or Spirits, it may be expected that they will exert their bad Diſpoſitions in ſuitable Actions; and that if they have Acceſs and Intercourſe with our World, they will endeavour to employ their Powers and Abilities in doing what Miſchief they can among Mankind. Nor is it any more inconſiſtent with the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God to permit ſuch evil Spirits to act according to their wicked Purpoſes and Inclinations in endeavouring to tempt Men to ſin, than it is inconſiſtent with his Wiſdom and Goodneſs, to ſuffer wicked Men to tempt, haraſs, perſecute their Fellow-creatures in this State of

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Trial; provided that he still takes Care, that those evil Spirits be not suffered to tempt Men above what the human Nature is able to bear; and that there are sufficient Helps afforded, by which, if duly improved, they may be enabled to resist their Temptations. Now this is the Representation which is given us in the holy Scriptures. It is there plainly signified, that those evil Spirits, however formidable in themselves, are all under the sovereign Control of the wise and almighty God and Father of Mankind, and cannot tempt or assault farther than for wise Ends he seeth fit to permit. We are there likewise assured, that he is ever ready to communicate his Holy Spirit, with his divine Influences and Aids, to assist and strengthen us; and that there are also Numbers of good Angels that minister to good Men, and who are equal or superior to the evil Angels in Power and Sagacity, and are as full of Love and beneficent Goodness, as the others are of Malice and Envy. And lastly, it is to be considered, that *Satan* can only tempt, or endeavour to seduce us to sin, but is not suffered to compel or necessitate us; nor can he destroy us but by our own Consent. We are furnished with sufficient Means and Helps for repelling his Assaults, if it be not our own

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Fault. Hence we are exhorted to *resist* the Devil, *stedfast in the Faith.* 1 Pet. v. 9. and are assured, that if we *resist* him, *he will flee from us.* James iv. 7. It appears then, that there is nothing in the Doctrine of the holy Scriptures, on this Head, that is contrary to Reason, and inconsistent with the Conduct of a wise and good Providence. On the contrary, this Part of the divine Administrations answereth many valuable Ends, and the Consideration of it may be of no small Use to Mankind. It giveth us an enlarged View of the Divine Providence, as permitting evil Angels, as well as wicked Men, to act according to their Natures; and, at the same Time, over-ruling their Subtilty and Malice in a Subserviency to the wise Designs of his Government. It representeth the Christian Life in a noble Light, as an important Warfare, carried on not merely against Flesh and Blood, but against the Powers of Darknes, and lets us see what great Need we have of exercising a constant Vigilance and Care over ourselves, and of applying to God for the Aids of his Spirit, which, in that Case, he is always ready to bestow. And, in the Issue, it will contribute very much to the Honour and Advantage of good Men, and will render their Reward more glorious, as well as mightily

heighten their Love and Gratitude to God, through whose gracious Assistances they were enabled to overcome such formidable Adversaries. What a glorious Scene will open, when in the great Day of final Re-tributions, they shall celebrate a joyful Triumph over the Devil and his Angels, who shall then receive the just Punishment of their Crimes, and shall never have it in their Power to tempt or disturb God's faithful Servants any more.

These general Hints may suffice, with regard to the Administrations of Divine Providence towards good and evil Angels. So much is revealed to us concerning this Matter as may be of Use to our Conduct in this present State; and this is all that is necessary for us now to know.

I shall conclude with a few Reflections.

And first, How awful and glorious is God the universal Sovereign, as extending his mighty Sway over all the angelic Orders, the most eminent and powerful of created Beings! It would be too mean and narrow a Notion of the divine Dominion, to regard Men as the only or principal Subjects of his Empire. Thousands of Angels stand before him, and Ten Thousand Times Ten Thousand minister unto him; compared with whom, the mightiest earthly Potentates, and all the Force of their
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dreaded Armies, are mean and despicable Things. With what deep Veneration and Submission should we prostrate ourselves before his infinite Majesty, who doeth whatsoever he willeth, not only among the Inhabitants of the Earth, but among the Armies of Heaven, whom the Thrones and Dominions, the Principalities and Powers in heavenly Places, with the profoundest Reverence adore, and before whom the Devils themselves do tremble! How great must he be who giveth Laws to the vast World of Spirits, and governeth them in all their Classes and Degrees, and according to their various Circumstances and Capacities! And what inexcusable Folly and Presumption would it be in such Creatures as we are, that dwell in Houses of Clay, whose Foundation is in the Dust, to oppose ourselves to his rightful Authority, who hath all the Hosts of Angels under his Direction and Command!

Secondly, Since the holy Angels in their several Degrees are under the Dominion and Government of God, let us rejoice in them as our Fellow-servants, Subjects with us of the same glorious Lord; we must not adore them, but join with them in adoring the great God and Father of all. Transported with a divine Ardor of Spirit, let us with the devout Psalmist call upon the

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Angels, the most eminent Part of the rational Creation, to bless the Lord, and endeavour to awaken in our Souls the holy Affections of Love, Joy, and Admiration, to the great Sovereign and Benefactor of the Universe. How should we exult to think that we are under his happy Government, to whom numberless Myriads of holy and glorious Spirits pay their glad united Homage. We should not only as far as we are able join our Praises to theirs, and bear our Part in the glorious Consort, but should endeavour to imitate and resemble them more and more in their perfect Loyalty and Submission, and their chearful active Obedience to the divine Will. They readily apply themselves to whatever Services he puts them upon, and esteem it their Glory to be thus employed, even when sent to minister to us of the human Race, who are Creatures of an inferior Order. And shall we think it beneath us to minister to those of our own Blood, and who are Partakers of the same Nature with ourselves? Like the blessed Angels, let us engage with Alacrity and Delight in whatsoever Services God requireth of us, endeavouring to do his Will on Earth, as it is done in Heaven. By such a Temper and Conduct we shall cultivate a Harmony with those glorious Spirits, and shall have them

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to assist and befriend us here on Earth, and be fitted for the heavenly *Jerusalem*, the City of the living God, where we shall be associated to an innumerable Company of Angels, and shall be Sharers with them in the same blisful Exercises and Enjoyments for ever.

Thirdly, This Subject may be improved for supporting and fortifying our Hearts against the slavish Fears of evil Spirits. Some there are who, through Fear of this Kind, are all their Life-time subject to Bondage. But the best Preservative against this, is a steady Belief of God's universal Government as extending to the evil Angels themselves. They are all under the Check and Control of his wise and righteous Providence, and can do no more than he permitteth. Let us therefore place our Confidence in him, and endeavour to secure an Interest in his Favour, and then we need not fear what all the Powers of Hell can do against us.

Lastly, Let us take Warning from the Fall and Punishment of the evil Angels. In them we may see, that no Eminences of Power, Abilities, or Splendor, can secure any Creatures against the Wrath of God, or can hinder them from being miserable if they allow themselves in a Course of wil-
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ful Sin and Difobedience. Let us not therefore be high-minded but fear, and make it our continual Care and Endeavour to please and ſerve the great Lord of the Univerſe, the bleſſed, and only Potentate, to whom be Honour and Power everlaſting, Amen.



General

*General Observations concerning God's
providential Government towards
Mankind,*

DISCOURSE VII.

PSALM ciii. 19.

*The Lord hath prepared his Throne in the
Heavens; and his Kingdom ruleth over
all.*

THESSE Words of the Psalmist make a noble Representation of the Greatness and universal Extent of the divine Dominion; but they seem to have a special Reference to God's Government of the rational moral Part of the Creation. The principal of these, as far as we have
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any Notion of them, are Angels and Men. Some Observations have been made upon the Government of Divine Providence with regard to the Angels. Let us now consider the Government of God as exercised towards Mankind, which is that Part of the divine Administration in which we are more immediately concerned, and which it most nearly importeth us to know.

Man is undoubtedly the most excellent of all God's Works in this lower visible Part of the Creation; the only Being here on Earth capable of knowing and contemplating his Maker, of obeying and adoring him, and rejoicing in a Sense of his Favour and Approbation. The Wisdom, Power, and Goodness of God is eminently conspicuous in the wonderful Frame of his Body, but especially in the noble Faculties of his Soul, whereby he is vastly superior to the Brutes, and is capable of rising in his Affections and Views beyond Things present, and sensible to Things spiritual and eternal, to the supreme, the infinite Good; which shews that he was designed for a sublime Felicity. And can it then be thought, that Providence, which extendeth its Care even to the inferior Animals, neglecteth Man, the principal Inhabitant of this lower World, and to whom all the
other

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other Classes of Beings here on Earth are subservient and subordinate? Surely we have great Reason to think that the most wise and powerful and benevolent Lord and Parent of the Universe, whose Kingdom ruleth over all, doth in a special Manner exercise his Government and Care towards the human Race.

I shall first make some general Observations concerning the Nature and Methods of God's providential Administrations towards Mankind: And then shall proceed more distinctly to consider the Influence and Agency of Divine Providence as extending both to Communities and to particular Persons, to the Hearts and Thoughts of all Men, to their outward Actions, and to the Events which befall them.

With regard to the Nature and Methods of God's providential Administrations towards Mankind, it is proper to observe in general,

First, That as Men are moral Agents, so God governeth them as such, and consequently hath given them a Law to be the Rule of their Conduct. That Man is a moral Agent is as evident as it is that he is a reasonable Creature, or that he is capable of Virtue and Vice, of Praise and Blame. And whatever some Persons may dispute in Speculation, moral or free Agency

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gency is what all Men are intimately conscious of. The self-condemning and self-approving Reflections of every Man's own Heart and Conscience plainly shew it to be so. God hath not only given Man a Body, and animal Perceptions, whereby he is nearly connected with the material World, and is capable of sensitive Delights, but he hath given him a higher Principle of Reason and Understanding to direct him what is right and fit to be done, a self-determining, and self-reflecting Power, whereby he is capable of governing his Appetites and Passions, of choosing and acting for himself, and of passing a Judgment upon his own Actions. The human Constitution is an admirable Effect of the divine Wisdom; and God's having made Men Creatures of such a Kind, *i. e.* moral Agents, is a demonstrative Proof that he will govern them in such a Way as is fit for moral Agents to be governed, *viz.* by giving them Laws enforced by proper Motives, to direct and engage them to their Duty, in such a Manner as is consistent with Liberty and Free-agency.

That there is a Law which all Mankind are placed under, a little Reflection may convince us. This is usually called the Law of Nature, and hath a real Foundation in the very Nature and Relations of Things,

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Things. Thus if we consider the Nature of God, and the Relation between him and us, it is manifest that we owe him the highest Love, Reverence, Affiance, Adoration, and Obedience. From the kind and social Affections implanted in our Hearts, and the Relation we bear to one another, it may be fairly concluded, that we are designed to exercise Justice, Charity, Benevolence, and Fidelity. And if we duly consider the Constitution of our own Nature, as consisting of Flesh and Spirit, it should make us sensible that we are obliged to shun all Intemperance and Excess, and by the Exercise of Patience, Temperance, Prudence, and Fortitude, to keep our Appetites and Passions in a regular Subjection to the Government of right Reason; and that it is our Duty to aspire after progressive Improvements in Knowledge and Virtue, as that in which the true Perfection of our Nature doth consist. There is nothing in all this but what will appear to a Mind that is not corrupted and depraved with vicious Prejudices, to be fit and right, and founded in the very Nature of Things: and whatsoever clearly appeareth from the Nature and Relations of Things to be fit and right for reasonable Creatures to perform, we may be sure it is the Will of God they should perform;

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form; since by thus constituting the Nature of Things, and placing them in such Relations, he hath constituted their Duty, and shewed that it is his Will that they should act suitably to those Natures and Relations. And when it is thus considered as the Will of the supreme Lord, it becometh a Law to them in the strictest and properest Sense of the Word.

But God hath not left Men merely to find out their Duty by the Deductions of Reason in considering and comparing the Natures of Things; he hath also implanted in the Heart of Man a kind of conscious Perception of Right and Wrong, an inward Sense of Good and Evil, and of the moral Differences of Things, some Remains of which continue in the human Mind even in its most degenerate State, and can scarce ever be utterly erased. Who would bear the Man that would pretend seriously to affirm, that there is no real Difference at all between Affections and Actions; and that no one of them is more blamable or praise-worthy than another? That there is no Evil in Injustice, Cruelty, Falshood, Perfidy, Ingratitude; and that Piety, Gratitude, Generosity, Benevolence, Sincerity, hath no Beauty or Amiableness in it? That to hate and blaspheme the Deity is as proper and becoming a reasonable

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sonable Creature, as to love, to reverence, and adore him? That to envy and calumniate our Neighbours, to wound, or even kill them without Cause, is as good an Action, as to do them friendly Offices, and assist them in their Need? That it is as honourable and praise-worthy for a Man to be false to his Word, Promises, and Engagements, as to have a strict and firm Regard to Truth and Fidelity; to betray his Country, as to save and deliver it; to neglect and despise his Parents, as to treat them with Kindness and Respect; to return an Injury for a Benefit, as to recompence one Benefit with another? With regard to these and other Cases that might be mentioned, the Mind of Man is so constituted that it can scarce help approving some Affections and Actions, and disapproving the contrary. From whence it appeareth, that there is in the Minds of Men a common Sense of Right and Wrong, of moral Beauty and Deformity, of Duty and Obligation, which it is scarce possible entirely to shake off. There are few but have had Experience of an inward Satisfaction or Remorse, and the Workings of a conscious Principle within, passing a Judgment on their Actions, and acquitting or condemning them according as they have

have been sensible of their having performed their Duty or the contrary.

Taking all these Considerations together, it is manifest that Mankind are placed under a Law; which the Brutes are not, as being destitute of a conscious Principle, and incapable of a Sense of moral Obligation. And it is one of the clearest Principles of Reason, that if God hath given Men a Law, it must be his Will that his Law should be obeyed; and as a moral Governor he will deal with Men according to their Obedience or Disobedience to the Laws which he hath given them. Accordingly we find in fact that as Mankind in all Ages and Nations have had some Sense of a Deity, so they have had some Notions of their being accountable to him as their supreme Governor and Judge for their Conduct. *St. Paul* observeth concerning the Heathens who had not the Advantage of extraordinary Revelation, that they had *the Work of the Law written in their Hearts, their Consciences also bearing Witness, and their Thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.* Rom. ii. 15. And speaking of some of the most profligate among them, who perpetrated great Acts of Wickedness, he representeth them as *knowing the Judgment of God,*
that

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that they which do such Things are worthy of Death. Rom. i. 32.

But secondly, As God hath given Men a Law to be the Rule of their Conduct, so the great and principal Design of his providential Administrations towards Mankind is, that by Obedience to his Law, and by the Practice of Holiness and Virtue, they may attain to the true Perfection and Happiness of their Natures. This will appear, whether we consider the ordinary stated Constitution of Things as ordered by his Providence, or his more extraordinary Dispensations towards Mankind from the Beginning.

First, In the ordinary Course and Constitution of Things as established and carried on by Divine Providence, it is so ordered that a good and virtuous Conduct hath many Advantages attending it, and that the Practice of Vice and Wickedness subjecteth Men to many Evils; so that it may be justly said, that God hath made our present Welfare to depend in a considerable Degree upon our Obedience to his Law, and Performance of the Duties it bindeth upon us; and that there is a Connection established between Virtue and Happiness, Vice and Misery, even in the present Constitution of Things, as far as is suitable to a State of Trial and Discipline.

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cipline. For that this present State is to be regarded in this View, and as preparatory to a State of final Retributions, I shall afterwards have Occasion distinctly to shew, and is what we must always bear in Mind in order to our forming a just Notion of the divine Administrations. We are so constituted, that a truly pious and devout Temper of Mind towards God, and the Exercise of holy and good Affections, and the doing virtuous and benevolent Actions, hath an inward conscious Satisfaction attending it, a real Self-approbation and Self-enjoyment. This layeth a solid Foundation for an habitual Cheerfulness and Peace of Mind, which will greatly contribute to render a Man easy and contented in the various Circumstances and Conditions of Life. And even with regard to the external Blessings of Providence, the Practice of Religion and Virtue both tendeth to procure them in a proper Degree, and to give a juster Relish and Enjoyment of them. The Exercise of Justice, Fidelity, and generous Honesty, Charity and Benevolence, Sobriety and prudent Industry, hath a Tendency in the ordinary Course of Things to promote the bodily Health, to prolong Life, to establish a Man's Credit and Reputation which contributeth not a little to the Success of his Affairs, to procure him

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the Esteem of his Fellow-creatures, and, in general, to cause a Man to pass through Life more safely and inoffensively, more honourably and creditably, with greater Ease to himself, as well as Usefulness to others, than he would otherwise do.

And on the other Hand, a vicious and sinful Course not only is attended with inward Dissatisfaction and Remorse, with the Stings and Agonies of a Man's own guilty Mind, than which, where it is in any great Degree, nothing can have a greater Tendency to render a Man miserable here on Earth; but it frequently exposeth him to outward Evils and Troubles. Pride and Envy, Malice and Revenge, Cruelty and Injustice, Idleness and Debauchery, and Dissoluteness of Manners, tend to destroy the bodily Health, to waste the worldly Substance, to hurt a Man's Credit, to expose him to Poverty and Indigence, to Shame and Contempt, to many Contentions and Vexations, and frequently bring great Evils and Mischiefs, not only upon himself, but upon his Family and Children too. Such is the present Constitution of Things. The Proverbs of *Solomon* abound with wise Observations to this Purpose, drawn from Experience, concerning the good Effects of Wisdom and Virtue, and the pernicious Consequences of Vice

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and Wickedness in this present State. And this holdeth not only with respect to particular Persons, but to large Communities, and may be justly regarded as the Appointment and Constitution of the great Ruler of the World, who hath thereby given a sensible Proof to considering Minds of his Approbation of Righteousness and Virtue, and his just Displeasure against Vice and Wickedness; that he is the Rewarder of the one, and Punisher of the other. As to the contrary Appearances arising from the Sufferings of the righteous, and the Prosperity of the wicked, this shall be fully considered afterwards, when we come to answer the Objections that are urged against the Goodness and Righteousness of Divine Providence.

But secondly, Besides this ordinary stated Course and Constitution of Things, which shews that we are under a wise and righteous Government, let us take a brief View of some of the more extraordinary Dispensations of Providence towards Mankind from Time to Time, whereby it will appear that from the Beginning of the World various Methods have been taken, in the Course of the divine Administrations, for promoting Religion and moral Improvement among Men. The Views which the Scriptures give us of God's various Dispensations

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fations towards Mankind from the Beginning, furnish convincing Proofs of his Concern for human Happiness, and that he hath done a great deal to instruct and direct Men in the Knowledge and Practice of their Duty, to maintain a Sense of Religion and Virtue in the World, and to discourage and restrain Vice and Wickedness. It appeareth from the Accounts there given us, that the first Parents of the human Race were brought into the World, not in an helpless infant State, but in a State of Maturity, and were placed in an happy Situation, and in advantageous Circumstances for preserving their Purity and Innocence; that to supply their Want of Observation and Experience, God vouchsafed to admit them to a near Intercourse with him, and gave them extraordinary Notices of his Will and of their Duty: that when they violated the particular Command given them for a Trial of their Obedience, and Sin entered into the World, it pleased him to make some Alterations in their Circumstances, suited to their lapsed State, and fitted to reclaim, to exercise, and discipline them: and that, as he gave awful Indications of his just Displeasure against Sin, so he shewed his Readiness to receive them to Favour upon their Repentance, and gave them encouraging Inti-

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mations of his gracious Designs for recovering them from their fallen State.

The Knowledge of these Things, as well as of God's Creation of the World, and of his Formation of the first human Pair, might be easily transmitted and preserved fresh and uncorrupted in those early Ages of the World, and tended to furnish great Advantages for Religion, additional to the common Light of Nature and Reason. To which were added, the setting apart the seventh Day to sacred Purposes; the Institution of Sacrifices, both in Acknowledgment of the divine Dominion, and as a Rite of Atonement, for keeping alive upon the Minds of Men a Sense of God's Justice, and of their own Guilt, and of his Reconcilableness to penitent Sinners; the open Declaration God was pleased to make of his Acceptance of righteous *Abel* and his Offering, and his rejecting *Cain* and his Oblation; the distinguished Piety of *Enoch*, and the rewarding him by translating him from Earth to Heaven, which exhibited an illustrious Proof of a future State; and finally, the raising up eminent Persons to be Preachers of Righteousness: All these Things, which are plainly intimated in the short Account given us in Scripture of the divine Administrations during that first Period of the World, had a manifest Tendency

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dency to maintain a Sense of God and his Providence, and of the Importance of religious and moral Obligations on the Minds of Men.

When, notwithstanding these Advantages, all Flesh had corrupted his Way, and Mankind in general were sunk into an amazing Degree of Vice and Wickedness, beyond any Hope of being reclaimed by ordinary Methods, it pleased God to send a destructive universal Deluge to sweep away that whole wicked Race from off the Face of the Earth; which signal Act of Vengeance made a most awful Display of God's righteous Providence, and his Detestation against Vice and Wickedness, and was designed for the Benefit of Mankind in all succeeding Generations to the End of the World. And at the same Time he gave a most remarkable Proof of his distinguishing Regard to Piety and Virtue in the Preservation of *Noah* and his Family, to be the Seed of a new Generation of Men. The Remembrance of this great Event, some Traditions of which have spread almost universally among the Nations, the renewed Revelations of the divine Will, and the Publication of the Law of God in its main Principles, which was then made to this second Father of Mankind, and in him to the whole hu-

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man Race; together with the former Traditions concerning the Creation, the Fall, the original Promise, &c. all which *Noah* was well acquainted with; and the farther Alterations made in the Face of the Earth by the Deluge, and the shortening the Lives of Men, the Length of which had through their Abuse of it probably contributed to that great Corruption of Manners in the old World; all these Things manifestly tended to revive and maintain a religious Sense of the Deity, and a just Regard to his wise and holy Providence. And in this State of Things, it cannot be denied, that enough was done on God's Part in his Dispensations towards Men, to keep up the Knowledge and Practice of Religion and Virtue in the World. And if he had done no more in an ordinary Way for Mankind, but had after this left them wholly to the Light of Nature and Reason, strengthened with these traditional Helps, none could reasonably have found fault. It is probable, that when Mankind came to be scattered abroad, some Time after the Flood, all over the Face of the Earth, the Heads of the Families carried the main principles of the patriarchal Religion, which they had received by Tradition, and which were also highly agreeable to Reason, with them into the several Places of their
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their Dispersion. And there is Reason to think that considerable Remains of it were for a long Time preserved among the Nations. This may be gathered from the best Accounts that are given us of the ancient *Persians* and *Arabians*, and other People of the East. And the same would probably appear concerning many other Nations, if we were better acquainted with the ancient History of Mankind. Even among the *Greeks* there had been old Traditions relating to the Providence of God, the Immortality of the Soul, and other Things probably derived from the first Ages, as appeareth from the Testimony of some of their own most celebrated Writers. It was in *Chaldea*, *Canaan*, *Egypt*, and the neighbouring Countries. And accordingly it pleased God in his wise and good Providence to take proper Methods for putting an early Check to the growing Corruption, even in those Parts of the World where it chiefly prevailed. For this Purpose he called *Abraham*, and made extraordinary Discoveries of his Will to him, who was a Person of great Eminence, and an illustrious Example of Faith, of Piety, and Goodness. He sojourned in *Chaldea*, in *Egypt*, and above all in *Canaan*, where at that Time also was *Melchisedek* and others, among whom the primitive patriarchal Religion

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ligion was still preserved. About the same Time, the extraordinary Judgment inflicted upon *Sodom* and *Gomorrab* for their great Wickedness had a manifest Tendency to awaken in Men, and particularly in the Inhabitants of *Canaan*, and the neighbouring Countries, a just and affecting Sense of God's holy and righteous Providence, and of his Detestation against Vice and Wickedness. From *Abraham* by *Hagar* and *Keturab* proceeded several great Nations; among whom the Knowledge and Practice of Religion derived from their great Ancestor, who was very careful to instruct his Children and his Household after him, *Gen.* xviii. 19. was probably continued for a considerable Time; of which there are noble Specimens in the Book of *Job*. But especially particular Care was taken to preserve the true Religion in the Line by *Isaac*, who was the Heir of *Abraham's* Faith, from whom came *Esau* and *Jacob*, and their numerous Descendents.

The Advancement of *Joseph* in *Egypt*, and the settling *Jacob* and his Family there, who soon were remarkably blessed, and grew up into a Nation, and among whom, though many of them degenerated, the true ancient Religion was in a great Measure preserved, ought to have had a good Effect upon the *Egyptians*, to recover them

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them from their growing Corruption and Idolatry. And when all this proved ineffectual, the bringing the *Israelites* out of *Egypt* with such amazing Displays of the divine Power, and the dreadful Plagues and Judgments inflicted upon the *Egyptians*, and their Gods, which was a visible Triumph over Idolatry in the principal Seat of it; these Things had certainly a great Tendency, where-ever the Knowledge of them reached (and no Country seems then to have been better known than *Egypt*) to awaken Mankind, and reclaim them from the Prevalence of Vice and Idolatry, to the true Fear and Worship and Obedience of the Deity. This also was one principal Design of Providence, in the erecting the *Israelites* into a peculiar Polity, the fundamental Principle of which was the Acknowledgment and pure Adoration of the only true God, and in the giving them a Body of such holy and excellent Laws, in which the main Duties of Religion and Morality, which, through the Corruption of Mankind had been very much defaced, were plainly laid down in clear and express Precepts. All this was designed, not merely for the Benefit of that particular Nation, to whom these Laws were immediately delivered, but to be of extensive Advantage. And it is very probable, that,

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as some learned Men have observed, they were the Original of several of the Laws that were afterwards published in other Nations. The settling the *Israelites* in the Land of *Canaan* in such an extraordinary Manner, the awful Punishments inflicted upon the *Canaanites*, and which were expressly declared to be upon the Account of their abominable Wickedness and Vices of all Kinds, as well as Idolatry; and God's whole subsequent Proceedings towards the People of *Israel*; the Prosperity and Happiness they enjoyed according to the Promises that were made them, whilst they adhered to the true Worship of God, and observed his holy Laws; and the great Calamities inflicted upon them, when they relapsed into Idolatry and Wickedness: all these Things were visible amazing Proofs of a most wise and righteous Providence, and should have had a great Effect, not only upon the *Israelites*, but upon all the Nations around them, to bring them to the Knowledge and Worship of the only true God, and to the Practice of Righteousness. Their Captivities and Dispersions, which had been foretold in their Law, all tended to the same End; and their being scattered abroad in the latter Times of their State in such vast Numbers in *Babylonia*, *Persia*, and throughout the East, as well as in
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the several Parts of the wide extended *Roman* Empire, contributed to spread the Knowledge of Religion, which had been in a great Measure lost among, the Nations. And finally, the whole Frame of the *Jewish* Oeconomy was designed to prepare the Way for the Christian Dispensation, which was the most admirable Scheme of Divine Providence for recovering Mankind from the amazing Corruption into which they were fallen, to the Knowledge, Obedience, and pure Adoration of the Deity, and to the Love and Practice of Holiness and Virtue. God, in his great Love to Mankind, sent his own Son into the World, a Person of unparalleled Dignity and Excellence, to bring a more clear and full Discovery of his divine Will and Counsels for our Salvation, and a more perfect System of pure Morals than ever had been made known to Mankind before; to exhibit a bright Example of universal Goodness and Purity for our Imitation; to make Atonement for our Sins by his Sufferings and Death; and to give the fullest Assurances of a blessed Immortality, and a visible Pledge of it by his own Resurrection from the Dead. This whole Dispensation exhibiteth the most glorious Displays of God's marvellous Grace and Goodness towards Mankind, and at the same Time of his perfect Holiness and Purity,

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rity, and is most excellently fitted to promote real Piety, and the Practice of universal Righteousness. We have there the most admirable Directions, the most powerful Motives, the most effectual Helps and Encouragements to a holy Life. This was made known to the World at a Time when it was most wanted, and when Idolatry and Corruption of all Kinds had arrived to the greatest Height; and in Circumstances that seemed best fitted for the universal Diffusion and Propagation of it. For it made its first Appearance in the *Roman* Empire, which had brought a great Part of the then known World under its Dominion. And it was introduced in a Manner that was very proper for engaging the Attention and Admiration of Mankind, as being attended with the most illustrious Proofs and Evidences of a divine Power, Presence, and Glory. This Religion hath spread very far, and if Christians had been as careful both to preserve it in its Purity, and to propagate and recommend it by their Instructions and Example, as they are bound by the strongest Obligations to be, it would have been probably before now diffused through the Earth. And from the *Jewish* and Christian Revelation is derived whatever of Good there is in *Mohometanism*, which hath been over-ruled by

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by Divine Providence for freeing some Nations from gross Pagan Idolatry.

Thus it appeareth, that God hath in the Course of his Providence done a great deal for preserving and promoting the Knowledge and Practice of Religion and Virtue among Men, and for recovering it when it was in a great Measure lost. And this should fill our Hearts with a grateful Sense of his infinite Goodness as well as Purity, and of his Concern for human Happiness. How many Ways hath he striven with the Perverseness of Men! Of this the Scripture giveth us a noble and affecting View, where we have the best Account of the various Dispensations of God towards Mankind. And what farther extraordinary Means it may please God to make Use of for diffusing and establishing true Religion in the World, we cannot tell; but something of this Kind we are taught to expect by several Passages of Scripture, which seem to refer to a future more general Conversion of the *Jews* to the Christian Faith, and the bringing in the Fulness of the *Gentiles*. And whenever this shall happen, it will disclose a surprising Scene that will fill us with a pleasing Astonishment, and tend mightily to illustrate the Glory of Divine Providence. In the mean
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time let us be thankful to God for the Advantages we enjoy for religious and moral Improvement, and be careful to make a proper Use of them, and to answer the End for which they are given us, by denying Ungodliness and worldly Lusts, and living soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present World.



Con-

Concerning God's Providential Government, as respecting large Communities.

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PSALM xxii. 28.

— *He is the Governor among the Nations.*

THE universal Administration of Divine Providence, as extending to the whole Creation, furnisheth a noble Subject for our Thoughts. But that which is of nearest Concernment to us is God's providential Government as exercised towards Mankind. Some general Considerations were offered concerning it in our last Discourse. Let us now proceed to consider it more distinctly, as extending both to Communities, and to particular Persons, to the Hearts and Thoughts of

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all Men, to their Actions, and to the Events that befall them.

First, Let us consider the Providence of God as respecting Communities. I chuse to begin with this, because, if Providence concerneth itself about Mankind at all, it must be supposed to superintend the Affairs of Communities and Nations; the Events relating to which are of considerable Importance, and upon which the Welfare and good Order of the World very much depends.

And with regard to this I would first observe in general, that the Formation and Establishment of human Societies must be considered as the Work and Appointment of Divine Providence. God, as the Author of Nature, hath implanted in us, not only the Principles of Self-love and Self-preservation, but the kind and social or public Affections, whereby we are carried to serve and assist one another in mutual good Offices, and to love our Friends, our Neighbours, and our Country. So strong is the Inclination that Man naturally hath to Society, that he cannot be happy without it. A great Part of the choicest Pleasures of Life arise from social Affections and Enjoyments. And this natural Inclination which is in all Men to Society, is very much strengthened by the mutual Need
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they stand in of each others Assistance. Nothing is plainer than that Men are formed and designed to be helpful to one another, and that it is but a small Part of the Blessings and Advantages of Life which can be obtained, and but a small Progress that can be made in valuable Improvements and Accomplishments, without social Assistances. So that it is evident, that he that made us designed and fitted us for Society.

Families and smaller Societies were first formed; from the Combination of which, and for their mutual Security and Benefit, larger Societies and Communities arose. And for the preserving Order among them, it is agreeable to the Will of God the supreme Ruler, that there should be Government and Magistracy established, and that Men should be *subject to the higher Powers*. These Powers are said to be *ordained of God, ordained for the Punishment of evil Doers, and the Praise of them that do well.*" Rom. xiii. 1, 3, 4. 1 Pet. ii. 13, 14. The Authority they are invested with, is properly and originally derived from God the Fountain of all Power, but not ordinarily in an immediate Way, but mediately by the Choice, Consent, or Submission of the People. And it may be justly regarded as

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owing to the Influence of Divine Providence, that such a Number of boisterous unruly Spirits are made willing to live in Subjection to the Government of a few. It is also to be ascribed to a wise Providence, that there is such a Variety of natural Genius's or Inclinations observable among Mankind, whereby they are disposed and qualified for acting different Parts, and filling different Stations and Offices in the Community. All are not Heroes, or Statesmen, or Philosophers, endued with great political or intellectual Abilities. Some are strongly inclined to the Pursuits of Learning and Science: others have a turn for Business; and those again are of various Kinds: some inclined and fitted to one Sort of Employment, some to another. Some are for Consultation, some for Action: some have cool Spirits, slow and deliberate; others are quick, fervent, and active. And it is so ordered, that the Generality of Mankind are of moderate Genius and Abilities, fitted for the common Affairs of Life, and they are all capable in their different Ways of being serviceable to the Community. And from hence ariseth social Dependence, and mutual Usefulness, by which Societies are cemented together, and without which the Order and Harmony of them could not well be maintained.

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Secondly, Another Thing which I would observe here, is, that all Blessings and Calamities of a public Nature, and the Revolutions of Kingdoms and States, are to be regarded as under the special Direction and Superintendency of Divine Providence.

That Providence hath a particular Concernment in public Revolutions, the Rise and Fall of Empires, the flourishing and declining of Cities and Nations, can scarce be denied by any one that believeth a Providence at all. It is what Reason and Observation will lead a considering Mind to acknowledge; and it is very expressly asserted in the holy Scriptures. We are told, that *God increaseth the Nations, and destroyeth them, he enlargeth the Nations, and straiteneth them again.* Job. xii. 23. Sometimes he *blesseth them, so that they are multiplied greatly; again, they are minished and brought low through Oppression, Affliction, and Sorrow.* Psal. cvii. 38, 39. *He changeth the Times and the Seasons; he removeth Kings, and setteth up Kings.* Dan. ii. 21. And in general, the Interposition of Providence must be acknowledged, both in all Blessings, and in all Evils and Calamities, of a public Nature.

All the Blessings and Advantages which are bestowed upon Societies, must be thank-

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fully ascribed to Divine Providence. If Arts and Sciences flourish among a People, and they are furnished with valuable Means of Improvement in useful Knowledge; if they have Peace and Plenty, and are free from foreign Invasions and domestic Conspiracies and Tumults, or have Success in just and necessary Wars; if they be blessed with a good Constitution of Government, and have the Advantage of wise and honest Governors to rule over them; if they be preserved in the Enjoyment of their Liberties and Privileges civil and religious; if they have healthful and fruitful Seasons, and other Instances of public Prosperity; in all these and the like Cases the Goodness of Divine Providence is to be acknowledged, not excluding second Causes, but overruling and directing them; and devout and grateful Minds will find abundant Matter of Thankfulness. To which it may be added, that Providence hath eminently appeared in raising up, from Time to Time, Persons of extraordinary Abilities, and rare Qualifications, who have been inspired with great Wisdom, Fortitude, and Zeal for the public Good; whereby they have been rendered signally instrumental for doing great Service to the Community, for delivering oppressed Nations, and restoring the disordered State of Things. And though
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in such Cafes we ought to have a juft Senfe of our Obligations to the worthy Instruments, yet we fhould principally carry our Views to a moft wife fuperintending Providence, and give God the Glory of all.

On the other Hand, the Divine Providence is alfo to be ferioufly confidered in all public Evils and Calamities. It hath often happened that there have been vifible Marks of God's Difpleafure againft a People. Their Counfels have been infatuated, or their Forces enfeebled and difpirited; their foreign Enemies have been fuffered to prevail againft them, or they have been given up to domeftic Tyrants and Oppreffors, or they have been rent afunder by Tumults and Commotions, and have been abandoned to the leading of ambitious and factious Men, who have contributed to the Ruin of their Country, whilft they pretended a great Zeal for its Interests. The Hand of God is to be acknowledged in thefe Things, as well as when a People fuffer by Famine, Peftilence, Earthquakes, inclement Seasons, epidemical Diftempers, &c. which are ufually regarded as the more immediate Work of Providence.

This leads me to obferve,

Thirdly, That in all thefe Cafes of public Bleffings and Calamities, or of nation-

nal Revolutions, Providence proceedeth not merely in a Way of arbitrary Sovereignty, but according to steady and righteous Rules, and for wise Ends and Purposes. It may be justly said, that the Administrations of Divine Providence in dispensing Rewards and Punishments towards Nations or large Communities, are generally more constant and uniform than the Distributions of outward Rewards and Punishments towards particular Persons in this Life. The Reason is, that particular Persons shall receive their principal Rewards and Punishments in a future State; whereas, if Communities or Nations as such be rewarded or punished at all, it must be in this present State in which alone they subsist. The Promises of temporal Blessings made to the *Israelites* in the Law of *Moses* in case of their Obedience to the divine Commandments, and the Threatenings of temporal Evils denounced against them in case of their Disobedience. *Lev. xxvi.* and *Deut. xxviii.* related chiefly to them as a Community. For they did not always hold with regard to particular Persons, as is evident from the Complaints made by good Men under that Dispensation concerning the Afflictions of the righteous, and Prosperity of the wicked. But with regard to the Public, they

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they never failed of being accomplished. When Religion and Virtue flourished among them, and they walked in Obedience to the divine Laws, they were raised to a high Degree of Glory and Reputation, they were successful in their Wars, and had great Plenty and Affluence, and every Thing that could contribute to the public Prosperity and Happiness. And on the contrary, when they revolted from God, and fell into a great and general Depravity and Corruption, they became abject, despised, miserable, and were a Prey to the neighbouring Nations. And in general it may be said, that whenever any public Calamities were inflicted upon them, whether by the more immediate Hand of Heaven, as Famine, Drought, Pestilence, &c. or by the Hands of their Enemies and Oppressors; it was always as a just Punishment for their national Iniquities, their Idolatry, Impiety, and abounding Wickedness and Corruption of Manners. And upon their Repentance and Reformation these Calamities were removed, and their Prosperity restored. This was the general Course of God's providential Dispensations towards them, as is manifest from the whole History of that Nation.

Nor was this peculiar to the *Jews*. The stated Rule of the divine Procedure towards Nations

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Nations is laid down, Jer. xviii. 7, 8, 9, 10.

At what Instant I shall speak concerning a Nation, and concerning a Kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it, if that Nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their Evil, I will repent of the Evil that I thought to do unto them; and at what Time I shall speak concerning a Kingdom, to build, and to plant it, if it do Evil in my Sight, that it obey not my Voice, then I will repent of the Good wherewith I said I would benefit them. It is an Observation

which hath generally held in all Nations and Ages, that *Righteousness exalteth a Nation, but Sin, i. e. abounding Vice and Wickedness, is a Reproach to any People.*

It bringeth Disgrace and Misery upon them. *Prov. xiv. 34.* If we consult the History of Mankind, we shall find that it hath usually happened, that when a People have been remarkable for Justice, Temperance, Industry, and a Zeal for the public Good, they have preserved their Liberties, they have prospered in their Undertakings, and have been in high Reputation and Esteem. Nor can any Instance be brought of a Nation's being given up to exterminating Plagues and Calamities, whilst Religion, Probity, and Virtue flourished among them. But when they have degenerated from their national Virtue, when Falshood

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and Perfidy, Injustice and Violence, Luxury and Debauchery, and a Dissoluteness of Manners, with a Contempt of Religion, have generally prevailed among them, they have fallen into many Calamities, they have been cast down from their Prosperity and Glory, and have been deprived of those Advantages they so much abused. God may indeed, in his great Wisdom and Patience, long bear with a sinful degenerate People. He may suffer them to enjoy great Prosperity for a while, and may pour forth many Blessings upon them, even when they are in a corrupt State. For the Methods of Providence towards Societies are generally slow though sure; and the Punishments that are inflicted upon Nations seldom come in a sudden and extraordinary Way, but are for the most part so ordered, as to appear to be the proper Effects of their own Conduct. The Corruption usually cometh on by Degrees, and doth not become universal at once. And there is often a Remnant of good Men still continued among them, even in a Time of great and general Depravity, and for their Sakes Judgment may be deferred. God first usually sendeth lesser monitory Judgments upon a People, and if they are not reclaimed by these, he sheweth his Justice and Righteousness, by

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by sending more grievous and dreadful Calamities, and sometimes by utterly subverting their State and Polity: And it is observable, that in such Cases God is represented in Scripture as having a Respect to the Sins of former Generations as well as the present; since it is the same Nation or Body politic which still subsisteth in these different Generations; and when the Iniquities of that Body are grown up to such a Height, and have continued so long, that he doth not see fit to bear with them any longer, the Measure of their Iniquities is said to be *full*, the Time is come for executing a severe Vengeance upon them, and the Punishment falls the heavier for having been so long delayed.

It doth not at all cast a Reflection upon the Righteousness of God, that it frequently happeneth, that those whom he maketh use of for executing his Judgments upon guilty Nations, are themselves chargeable with Injustice and Cruelty, and have nothing in View but the gratifying their own Ambition, Avarice, and Lust of Power. This doth not hinder, but that those Evils and Calamities which they are the Instruments of inflicting, are just and right, as proceeding from the supreme Governor of the World. And it is usually so ordered, that they who have been Instruments in
punishing

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punishing others, are afterwards, at that Time which appeareth fittest to infinite Wisdom, justly punished in their Turn for their Vices, their Pride, their Violence and Injustice. Thus God threatens, that after the *Affyrian*, whom he calls *the Rod of his Anger*, had performed his whole Work upon Mount Zion, and on Jerusalem, he would punish the Fruit of the stout Heart of the King of Assyria, and the Glory of his high Looks. Isa. x. 5, 6, 7, 8, 12. And this was signally verified in the Event; first, in the sudden Ruin of Sennacherib's mighty Army, and afterwards in the utter Destruction of that haughty Empire, and laying waste *Nineveh*, the Seat of it. The same Observation holdeth concerning *Babylon*, which for a while triumphed over all Opposition, and erected a most potent and wide extended Monarchy, but at length paid dear for her Insolence, Oppression, and Violence. *Her Foundations are fallen* (saith the Prophet *Jeremiah*) *her Walls are thrown down; for it is the Vengeance of the Lord: Take Vengeance on her; as she hath done, do unto her.* Jer. l. 15. This Vengeance began to be executed upon *Babylon*, by *Cyrus* the Founder of the *Persian* Empire. And when afterwards the *Persians* became infamous for their Pride, Oppression, Luxury, and all manner of Dissoluteness, their Empire was, through
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the righteous Judgment of God, totally subverted by *Alexander* the Great. And that mighty Conqueror himself was soon after cut off in the midst of his Years and of his ambitious Projects; and his Empire was divided by furious Contenders, and at length the several Parts of it swallowed up by the Power of the *Romans*. This People by their Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance, their Contempt of Luxury, and Zeal for the public Good, had risen, through the favourable Interposition of Divine Providence, from very small Beginnings, till they formed the mightiest Empire that ever was upon Earth. But when they fell from these Virtues, and became unjust, perfidious, oppressive, and abandoned to Dissoluteness and Corruption of all Kinds, they were first, through the just Judgment of God, torn asunder by bloody intestine Wars; and afterwards deprived of their boasted Liberties by domestic Tyrants; and at length their Empire, which seemed to be so strongly established, that nothing could overturn it, was subverted by an Inundation of barbarous Nations, who were the Instruments in the Hands of God for executing his Judgments upon them for the Wickedness, the Vices, the Cruelties, and Oppressions of so many Ages.

What

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What hath been hitherto offered, relateth chiefly to civil Communities. Many Observations might likewise be made concerning God's providential Dealings towards Churches, or religious sacred Societies. I shall content myself with a few general Hints on this Subject.

It was a most signal Act of Divine Providence, and which I had Occasion to take some Notice of before, that when the primitive patriarchal Religion, or the true Worship of God which had been derived from the Beginning, was in Danger of being lost among Men, and the World became generally involved in the grossest Superstition and Idolatry, it pleased him to single out a whole Nation from the rest of Mankind, and to erect them into a sacred Polity, set apart by their fundamental Constitution for the Profession and Worship, the Faith and Obedience of the one true God, and him only, in Opposition both to the worshipping Idols or false Deities, and to the worshipping the true God by Images, or in an idolatrous Way. The more effectually to awaken the Attention of Mankind, and to give the more illustrious Confirmation to that Church-constitution, it was wisely ordered, that in the founding and establishing of it there were many signal and amazing Exertions of the divine Power. And the whole of that Dispensation

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penfation was admirably fo contrived, as to prepare the Way for a more fpiritual and perfect State of the Church, which was to fucceed it, and was to be more univerfally diffufed; in the founding of which, Providence interpofed in a yet more remarkable Manner, by a Series of the moft marvellous and extraordinary Events that ever the World faw.

And not only in the firft Erektion and Eftablifhment of the *Jewifh* and *Christian* Church, but in God's fubfequent Dealings towards them, a confiderate Mind may obferve and trace the remarkable Foot-fteps of a moft wife Providence.

The Providence of God hath been often manifested in engaging the Powers of this World, and even thofe who feemed to be in a great Meafure Strangers to true Religion, to befriend his Church. Instances of which we have in what was done by *Cyrus*, *Darius*, and *Artaxerxes*, towards re-eftablifhing the *Jewifh* Worfhip and Polity. But efpecially it hath eminently appeared in the Deliverances vouchsafed to his Church and People, even when their Cafe feemed to be desperate, and there fcarce remained any Hope of Deliverance: As in the bringing back the *Jews* from the *Babylonifh* Captivity, and in the wonderful Reftoration of that Church, when it feemed to be utterly fubverted by *Antiochus Epiphanes*.

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Epiphanes. Through the over-ruling Influence of a wise Providence, Events that were designed for the Destruction of the Church have been made subservient to its better Establishment. Thus *Haman's* Plot, which threatened the utter Ruin of the *Jewish* Nation and Religion, was wonderfully over-ruled to contribute to the Confirmation of it. Divine Providence hath been also remarkable in raising up faithful Witnesses for the Truth, and preserving a pious Remnant in Times of a general Defection from the Purity of Faith and Practice, and sometimes in bringing about a Reformation of long established Errors and Corruptions, by very unlikely Instruments, and even over-ruling the Lusts and Passions of Men for contributing to the abolishing of the false Religion, and establishing the true.

Finally, What was observed with regard to the divine Judgments towards Nations that have fallen into a very corrupt and degenerate State, may be also applied in a great Measure to degenerate backsliding Churches. God declared to the *Jews* by the Prophet *Amos*, *You only have I known of all the Families of the Earth, therefore I will punish you for all your Iniquities.* Amos iii. 2. He had distinguished them above other Nations, by granting them many valuable Privileges,

and erecting his visible Church among them, and therefore he punished them in a remarkable Manner for their Revolts and Backsliding. His Dealings towards them might seem to be sometimes severe, but were always unexceptionably just and righteous; and have left this great and useful Lesson to all Ages, that no external Profession of Religion, or visible special Relation to God as their God in Covenant, will intitle any Church or People to the divine Favour, or secure them from his awful Judgments, if they be destitute of real Virtue and Godliness, and become generally abandoned to Vice and Wickedness: On the contrary, as their Privileges and Advantages aggravate their Crime, so they will be exposed to a more grievous Punishment.

The same holdeth good with respect to Churches professing Christianity. Some Churches which seemed once to be in a flourishing Condition, now lie desolate; their Candlestick is removed, and the Light that shone in them seems to be extinguished. Others which are not utterly deprived of their Privileges yet have been exposed to sore Persecutions. And nothing can be more just than that God should in his holy Providence manifest his righteous Displeasure against backsliding Churches,

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Churches, that have fallen from the Purity and Power of Religion into a State of great Corruption and Degeneracy. The Persecutions they have been exercised with, however grievous they may appear, often answer very valuable Ends. The Church is not always really in the best Estate when it seemeth to be outwardly most flourishing, nor in the worst Estate when it is outwardly oppressed and persecuted. In Times of long external Peace and Prosperity, there are often great Corruptions in Doctrine, Worship, and Practice. The Spirit of this World prevaileth, and Religion degenerateth into Form and Shew, so that though the Church may appear to be outwardly in prosperous Circumstances, yet it hath little more than *a Name to live*, and is really *ready to die*. And on the other Hand, it frequently happeneth that in Times of Persecution, though the Church hath fewer Professors, it hath better Members. The Faith and Patience of the Saints is more exercised and displayed, their Zeal and Piety is more eminent, and the divine Power of Religion doth more gloriously appear. And then in due Time he raiseth his Church, when fitted for it, from their afflicted State, and executeth just Vengeance upon their Adversaries and Persecutors. Thus *Babylon* of old was pu-

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nished for her Cruelty and Oppression of the *Jewish* Church. And so shall it also be in the Case of mystical *Babylon*, which, after having been long suffered to prevail, and to *make War with the Saints*, shall have a dreadful Downfal, wherein the Vengeance and Justice of God shall be illustriously displayed; of which we have a lively Description in the 18th Chapter of the Revelation of St. *John*.

This Subject may furnish several useful Reflections.

And first, We may hence see how much it is the Wisdom and Duty of all the People of the Earth to fear before God, and to render him a religious Homage and Obedience as their supreme universal King and Lord. For the greatest and most powerful Nations are under his Dominion, and he ordereth the Events relating to them according to the Counsel of his Will. From him the mightiest earthly Potentates hold their Crowns and Sceptres. Their Empires and even their Lives are at his Disposal. By him *Kings reign, and Princes decree Justice*: by him *Princes rule, and Nobles, and all the Judges of the Earth*. *All Kings should therefore fall down before him, and all Nations should serve him*. For as much as there is none like unto thee, O Lord, and thy Name is great in Might, who
would

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would not fear thee, O King of Nations? for unto thee doth it appertain. Jer. x. 6, 7.

Secondly, It should help greatly to calm and compose our Minds, when Darkneſs and Confuſion ſeem to be upon the Face of public Affairs, to reflect that all Things are under the Direction and Superintendency of a moſt wiſe Providence. There is nothing which is more apt to fill the Heart of a good Man with deep Concern, than the Calamities that threaten large Communities, Nations or Churches; thoſe eſpecially to which he is moſt nearly related. Sometimes the Aſpect of Things with regard to Church and State is ſo black and diſmal, that we are ready even to ſink into Deſpondency, and can ſee no Reſource, no Way of Deliverance or Escape. But in ſuch Caſes, when Things ſeem to be at the worſt, and have the moſt diſaſtrous Appearance, there is no Confidence ſo proper to comfort us as this, that *God reigneth*, who will certainly order Things for the beſt upon the whole, and whoſe Prerogative it is to bring Good out of Evil, and Order out of Confuſion. When the *Floods liſt up their Waves*, how ſhould we rejoice to think that the *Lord on High is mightier than the Noiſe of many Waters.* Pſal. xciii. 3, 4. He ſtilleth the

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Noise of the Seas, the Noise of their Waves, and the Tumults of the People. Psal. lxxv. 7. Let us therefore check each desponding Thought, and place our Confidence in God alone. When all worldly Supports fail us, we should rest satisfied in this, that Things are not left to a blind Chance. *The Kingdom is the Lord's, and he is the Governor among the Nations. The Lord shall reign for ever, even thy God, O Zion, unto all Generations.* Psal. cxlvi. 10. *The Heathens may rage, and the People may imagine a vain Thing; the Kings of the Earth may take Counsel together against the Lord, and against his Christ; but he that sitteth in the Heavens shall laugh, and the Lord shall have them in Derision.* Though he may seem to forsake his Church for a Time, he will take Care that *the Gates of Hell shall not finally prevail against it.*

Thirdly, In all Events of a public Nature, whether prosperous or adverse, we should fix our Views not merely or principally upon second Causes, but should look above them to God, and endeavour to comply with the Designs of infinite Wisdom and Righteousness. With regard to national Affairs, Men are very apt to confine their whole Attention to second Causes, and to overlook or neglect the Agency of Divine Providence. When they observe

that Prudence and Ability in Counsel, that Courage and Skill in War, are crowned with Success; that the more powerful Nations prove too hard for the weaker; that great and well-disciplined Armies under able Generals prove victorious; they are apt to look no farther, as if Men had wholly the Management of Affairs in their own Hands. But this is a very wrong Way of judging. It is no Argument at all, that because these Events are usually conducted according to the ordinary Course of second Causes, therefore they are not under the Direction and Superintendency of Divine Providence. For it is Providence that hath wisely appointed that this shall be the general Course of Things, and that Events shall ordinarily happen in this Way, that Men may be put upon the Use of all proper Means, without which there could be no Exercise of human Prudence or Industry. But still it must be considered, that a sovereign Providence presideth over all these Events, and over-ruleth them to answer its own wise Purposes; and according as it hath Designs of Mercy or Judgment, can so order the Circumstances of Things, and the Course of second Causes, as to promote the national Prosperity, or the contrary. God can, when he seeth fit, give or withhold a Spirit of Wisdom and Courage,

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or he can cause Things to turn out contrary to all Appearances, of which the Histories of all Nations furnish many Instances. How often have mighty Armies been strangely and unaccountably defeated, and the wisest Politicians baffled and confounded in their best laid Schemes, by unforeseen Incidents ! It is therefore a Principle which we should get deeply fixed upon our Minds, that the Continuance of the public national Prosperity dependeth upon the Appointment of the great Governor of the World, the King of Nations, who always proceedeth in all his Administrations upon the wisest and fittest Reasons ; and that it is a vain Thing for any People to place their Confidence in their own Wealth, or Power, or Policy, in the Wisdom of their Counsels, or in the Strength of their Fleets or Armies, or in any outward fleshly Resources. For how many Ways hath God of contending with guilty Nations, and how easily can he cast them down from the Height of their Prosperity and Glory !

To apply this to the Case of the Nations to which we belong. We have long been continued in the Possession and Enjoyment of valuable Blessings and Advantages both civil and religious, which ought to be thankfully ascribed to the Wisdom of
 Divine

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Divine Providence. We have also from Time to Time met with Corrections and Rebukes of a public Nature. And in these also the sovereign Agency of a righteous Providence is to be carefully observed and acknowledged. We should in all such Cases humble ourselves under the mighty Hand of God, and should *hear the Rod, and who hath appointed it.* In what Way it may please God further to deal with us we do not know. But whosoever observeth the declining State of practical Godliness among us, and the abounding of Vice and Profaneness, and all Manner of Corruption and Dissoluteness of Manners, together with a growing Indifferency to all Religion, and even a Contempt of it, must be sensible, that according to the ordinary Methods of the divine Procedure towards Nations and Churches, there is too much Reason to apprehend God's righteous Judgments. Many are the Projects which may be formed for procuring national Advantages, and promoting the public Good; but all other Expedients to make a People flourish, without Reformation of Manners, and endeavouring to promote Religion and public Virtue, will in the Issue prove ineffectual and vain. Without this, let a Nation appear at present in never such prosperous Circumstances,

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stances, there can be no Security that it shall long continue so. We must not flatter ourselves that because God hath often remarkably distinguished us with his Benefits and Deliverances, that therefore he will continue to spare and favour us. For if we do not walk answerably to our Professions and Advantages, this will only prove an Aggravation of our Guilt, and set our Disobedience and Ingratitude in a stronger Light. If therefore we are desirous in the best Manner to shew our Love to our Country, and draw down Blessings upon it, let us do our Part towards a Reformation by setting ourselves heartily to rectify and reform whatsoever is amiss in our own Temper and Conduct, and by endeavouring to promote, as far as in us lieth, the Practice of Piety and Virtue among others too. The most proper and effectual Way we can take to preserve our valuable Privileges, and to promote the national Prosperity, is not merely to express a clamorous Zeal for Liberty, at the same Time that we abuse it to Licentiousness, than which nothing hath a greater Tendency both through the righteous Judgment of God, and in the Nature of the Thing, to deprive us of our Liberties; but it is to endeavour to make a just and wise Improvement of our Advantages, to maintain a strict Re-
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gard to Religion, Probity, and Purity of Manners, and to guard against Vice, Libertinism, Profaneness, and Debauchery. This and this alone will make and preserve us a flourishing, a free, and happy People. God grant that this may be the Blessing of these Nations to the latest Posterity. Amen.



God's

God's providential Government with regard to particular Persons considered: And first, as extending to their Hearts and Thoughts.

DISCOURSE IX.

PSALM xxxiii. 15.

He fashioneth their Hearts alike.

IT is of great Importance in Religion to have our Minds established in the firm Belief of the Providence of God, especially as exercised towards Mankind, whether singly or collectively considered. Some Considerations have been offered concerning God's providential Government, as respecting Communities. Let us now proceed to consider it as extending to particular
3 Persons.

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Persons. This hath a near Connection with the former; for there could be no proper Care taken of collective Bodies, if the particular Persons of which they are composed were absolutely neglected. To pretend that Providence doth not concern itself about Individuals, about their Actions, or the Events which befall them, would be to all the Purposes of Religion the same Thing as to deny that there is a Providence at all; since in that Case every Man would be left to do what is right in his own Eyes, without the Dread of a supreme Governor and Judge. All the Arguments which have been brought to demonstrate a Providence in general, do also, if rightly considered, prove that it extendeth its Care to particular Persons. And indeed it is hard to conceive a Providence respecting reasonable Creatures, and yet not concerning itself with particular Persons, Cases, and Circumstances. And though it must be acknowledged to be an amazing Scheme, to make Provision for all particular Persons and Cases, without infringing the general Laws of Nature, or the Freedom of moral Agents, yet who will undertake to prove that this is impossible, or even difficult, to an infinite Mind? That immense Being, whose Essence possesseth every Part of this vast Universe, is present

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to every Individual of the human Race. It is in him that we all, from the highest to the meanest, live and move, and have our Being. And if that most wise, holy, and absolutely perfect Being, the great Ruler of the World, be always present to every Individual of the human Race, then every Individual of the human Race, and whatsoever relateth to each Individual, must be under his Inspection and Superintendency. And as his infinite Understanding hath a perfect Knowledge of all Things before they come to pass, it can be no Difficulty to him to form a Scheme of Things in his all-comprehending Mind, which shall take in all the Cases and Circumstances of particular Persons, in such a Manner as is perfectly consistent with the true Exercise of their rational and active Powers. And our not being able distinctly to explain how this is done, is no just Objection at all against it.

The Government of Divine Providence with regard to particular Persons, may be considered as extending to their Hearts and Thoughts, to their outward Actions, and to the Events which befall them.

I shall distinctly consider each of these.

First, Let us consider God's providential Government as extending to the Hearts of Men.

This

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This is what the Psalmist signifies, when having declared that God *looketh upon all the Inhabitants of the Earth*, he adds, *He fashioneth their Hearts alike*. He hath equally formed the Hearts of all Men, of one as well as another, of high and low, rich and poor, and therefore the Hearts of all Men are known to him, and in his Power. They are all equally subject to his Jurisdiction. He both exerciseth a constant Inspection over them, and can dispose, incline, and govern them which Way he pleaseth.

First, God exerciseth a constant Inspection over the Hearts of all Men, and hath a perfect Knowledge of their most secret Thoughts, Purposes, and Dispositions. It is but reasonable to believe, that he who is acquainted with the inward Essences of Things, who formed the Spirits of Men, and gave them their thinking Powers, and who is ever intimately present with them, and supporteth those Powers in Exercise, must needs know every Thing that passeth in their Minds. All the Springs of Thought, all the Motions and Tendencies of the Heart lie open to his all-penetrating Eye, and are known to him with much greater Ease and Certainty than outward Actions are to us. Without this he could not carry on his Administrations towards
Mankind

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Mankind in a proper Manner. If he were not acquainted with the Hearts of Men, it were to little Purpose to give them Laws for governing and regulating their inward Thoughts and Affections, since in that Case he could not certainly know, whether his Laws were observed or not. It is the Heart that denominateth Men good or bad, so that if God did not know the Heart, he could not form a certain Judgment concerning their real Characters, nor reward or punish them accordingly; and thus might great Mistakes be committed in the Government of the World. The Scriptures, therefore, are very clear and full in asserting the perfect Knowledge God hath of the Hearts of all Men. *Solomon* in his admirable Prayer addresseth himself thus to God; *Do and give to every Man according to his Ways, whose Heart thou knowest; for thou, even thou only, knowest the Hearts of all the Children of Men.* 1 Kings viii. 39. That is a remarkable Passage which we have *Jer. xvii. 9. The Heart is deceitful above all Things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?* i. e. What Man, what Angel, what Creature can perfectly know it? And then it follows: *I the Lord search the Heart, I try the Reins, even to give every Man according to his Ways, and according to the Fruit of his Doings.* To

the same Purpose *David* declareth, that the *Lord searcheth all Hearts, and understandeth all the Imaginations of the Thoughts.*

1 Chron. xxviii. 9. God is said in this and other Passages of Scripture, to *search the Hearts*, not as if he needed to make a laborious Enquiry; for he knoweth them by immediate Intuition; but to signify the Certainty and Exactness of his Knowledge. This is what we must still bear in Mind, when we are considering the Government of Divine Providence. For it lieth at the Foundation of all God's Administrations towards Mankind, both in this and in a future State. It both sheweth, that he will hereafter call Men to a strict Account, and will *bring every secret Thing into Judgment, whether it be good, or whether it be evil;* and that he now knoweth how to order his providential Dealings towards Men in this present State in the fittest Manner. If we did but know the Hearts of Men as he doth, we should undoubtedly see the Reasons of many of his Dispensations which we are now ignorant of, and it would appear that Benefits or Calamities are often very properly applied, in Instances which at present we find it hard to account for. He seeth the rising Designs and Schemes of the subtlest Politicians, when first formed in their Hearts, and can easily render their
their

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their Devices of no effect. For *he discovereth deep Things out of Darkness, and bringeth to Light the Shadow of Death,* as *Job* expresseth it. *Job* xii. 22. Justly therefore is a *Wo* pronounced unto them *that seek deep to hide their Counsel from the Lord, and their Works are in the Dark, and they say, Who seeth us, and who knoweth us?* *Isa.* xxix.

15. As if they laid their Plots so cunningly, that God himself could not discover them. This argueth both great Impiety and Folly. What a Check would it be to wicked Men, did they but seriously consider and believe, that the most secret Thoughts and Purposes of their Hearts, though covered over with fair and specious Pretences, are ever subject to the Inspection of the supreme Lord and Governor of the World! As, on the contrary, it must be a great Comfort to good Men under the undeserved Censures and Reproaches which may now be cast upon them, that there is a Providence which governeth the World, to whom their Integrity and the Uprightness of their Intentions is fully manifest.

Secondly, As God knoweth the Hearts of Men, so he can govern or influence them as he pleaseth. He hath a Power of directing and over-ruling the Thoughts, Inclinations, and Intentions of Mens Hearts, in such a Manner as is agreeable to the

wise Purposes of his Providence. This is a Power that cannot reasonably be denied to the great universal Lord, who is the Author of our Beings, and who formed the Spirit of Man within him. And it is very expressly asserted in the sacred Writings. Thus it is declared, *Prov. xxi. 1. The King's Heart is in the Hand of the Lord, as the Rivers of Water; he turneth it whithersoever he will.* The Hearts of all Men are in the Hands of God, but those of Kings are particularly mentioned, as they seem to be more absolute than other Men, more self-willed, and harder to be controlled. Yet God can turn their Hearts, their Counsels, and Intentions, as it pleaseth him, as the Husbandman or Gardener can turn Streams of Water, through Trenches, to what Part of his Ground he thinks proper. We read in Scripture of God's *touching Mens Hearts.* *Sam. x. 26.* Of his *preparing* their Hearts. *1 Chron. xxix. 18. Psal. x. 17.* Of his *opening* the Heart. *Acts xvi. 14.* Of his *inclining* the Heart. *Psal. cxix. 36.* And *strengthening* the Heart. *Psal. xxvii. 14.* No Creature hath a direct and absolute Empire over the Heart and Thoughts in Man; and yet it cannot be denied that Men may in many Instances, and by many Ways, influence one anothers Hearts, Affections, and Inclinations, whether

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ther to good or bad Purposes. This they often do by Arguments and Persuasions, and by laying before them such Motives and Inducements, as are fitted to prevail upon them. And certainly, God hath a much greater Power over the Hearts of all Men, than one Man can possibly have over the Heart of another. He who hath the nearest Access to our Spirits, who is perfectly acquainted with all the Avenues of our Minds, and the properest Ways of working upon them, must undoubtedly be able to influence our Hearts in a thousand Ways, which now we cannot distinctly explain, and yet without offering any Violence to the Freedom that belongeth to us, as we are moral Agents.

Particularly, he can, when he seeth fit, put such Thoughts into Mens Hearts, as may best answer his own most wise Designs. Indeed it is absolutely inconsistent with the perfect Holiness of his Nature and Government to suppose that he can ever be the Author of evil and sinful Thoughts. It is an eternal Truth, that *God cannot be tempted with Evil, neither tempteth he any Man.* Jam. i. 13. But with regard to those Things that have a moral Goodness in them; or which, though in their own Nature indifferent, yet are so circumstanced as to be capable of serving

valuable Ends, there is no Difficulty at all in supposing him, on some Occasions at least, to put Thoughts of this Kind into the Minds of Men. And there is great Reason to think that this is frequently done, and that many excellent Designs of Providence are in this Way brought about, and many Evils prevented. For the most natural Way of working upon Men as reasonable Creatures, and influencing their Actions and Affairs, seems to be by suggesting proper Thoughts to their Minds, and placing them in such a Light as is fittest to make an Impression upon them. Many Cases may happen, in which the influencing the Thoughts and Determinations of one Man, may be of great Importance, not only to himself, but to many others. And in such Cases it cannot be unworthy of the great and all-wise Disposer and Governor to interpose. There are few Persons that have carefully observed what passeth in their own Minds, but who have had Experience of Motions sometimes arising there, in a Manner they are not well able to account for, which yet have afterwards appeared to be of no small Consequence to them, and have produced good Effects. And in these, a truly religious Man will be apt gratefully to acknowledge the Interposition of Divine Providence.

God

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God can work upon the Spirits of Men in a Way of immediate Influence, and yet in such a Way as is perfectly agreeable to their rational Natures, and which doth not put any improper Constraint upon others. He can also, and probably often doth, make Impressions upon their Minds by various Means, which he is pleased to make Use of in his wise and sovereign Providence to this Purpose. He can easily order it so, that such Arguments and Motives shall occur to their own Thoughts, or shall be suggested to them by others, whether Men or invisible spiritual Beings, as he knoweth will induce them to take such or such Resolutions; or he can so dispose outward Objects and Circumstances as will have a great Influence upon their Minds. Thus God put it into the Heart of *Cyrus*, according to what had been foretold concerning him. *Isa.* xliv. 28. to give full Liberty to the *Jews* to return into their own Land, and to rebuild their City and Temple, and furnish them with large Helps out of his Treasury. This was, all Things considered, a very extraordinary Grant, and a remarkable Instance to shew that the Hearts of the greatest Kings are in the Hands of the Lord. And afterwards, when some other of the *Persian* Monarchs shewed the *Jews* uncommon Kindness,

and gave them not only Permission, but great Encouragement to finish the Temple, and to settle and order every Thing according to their Law, notwithstanding the Representations made by their Enemies to the contrary, and which seemed to be founded on the Rules of human Policy, this is piously ascribed to God. Ezra vii. 27. *Blessed be the Lord God who hath put such a Thing as this into the King's Heart.* And it is observed, Chap. vi. 22. that *the Lord hath turned the Heart of the King of Assyria* (so the Persian Monarch is there called) *unto them, to strengthen their Hands in the Work of the House of God, the God of Israel.* And that good Man *Nehemiah*, having formed an important Design for the public Welfare, acknowledgeth that his God had put it into his Heart. Neh. ii. 12.

Another Instance of God's Power over the Hearts of Men, is his causing them to change their Purposes and Inclinations, even where they seemed before to be most fixed and determined. When *Jacob* was greatly afraid of his Brother *Esau's* bitter Repentment against him, which seemed to threaten the Ruin of him and his Family, he applied to God by fervent Prayer, to deliver him from his Hand. And the Consequence was, that *Esau's* apprehended Hatred was surprisingly changed

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ed into Love and Friendship, so that he treated *Jacob* in the most tender and affectionate Manner. A remarkable Instance this to verify the Wise-man's Observation, that *when a Man's Ways please the Lord, he maketh even his Enemies to be at Peace with him.* Prov. xvi. 7. How suddenly was *David* turned from his wrathful Purpose of executing a severe Vengeance upon *Nabal* and his Family, for his ungrateful and brutish Treatment of him! It is true, that the prudent Conduct of *Abigail* had a great Influence this Way. But *David* made a wise Reflection upon it. He regarded *Abigail* as an Instrument in the Hand of Providence, and therefore, as he was thankful to her, so he carried his Views principally to the supreme Disposer. *David* said to *Abigail*, *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this Day to meet me. And blessed be thy Advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this Day from coming to shed Blood, and from avenging myself with mine own Hand.* 1. Sam. xxv. 32, 33. When king *Abasucrus* seemed absolutely determined upon the utter Extirpation of the *Jews*, and had confirmed it by a solemn Decree, how soon were his Intentions and Dispositions so wonderfully changed, as to shew them the highest Favour, and to put it in their Power to destroy the Enemies that had

had contrived their Ruin! This was brought about by a remarkable Train of Incidents, all under the Direction of a sovereign Providence, which caused that haughty Monarch, without offering any Violence to his Will, entirely to change his Inclinations and Purposes, both with respect to his favourite *Haman* and the *Jews*.

God's Power over the Hearts and Minds of Men doth also appear in his directing their Counsels or infatuating them, as seemeth fit to him in all his wise and righteous Providence. *In all thy Ways acknowledge him, saith Solomon, and he shall direct thy Paths.* Prov. iii. 6. This plainly supposeth, that God can, and often doth, in his good Providence guide and direct Men to the best and properest Measures, especially in Matters of Consequence, upon which perhaps much of their Comfort and Happiness doth depend. He hath many Ways of doing this, by clearing and enlightening their Judgments, by dispelling their Errors and Prejudices, and by so ordering Circumstances, that their Way is made plain before them, and proper Considerations are represented to their Minds in a strong and convincing Light: And this sheweth the Propriety of applying to God for Direction, especially in Cases of Difficulty and Importance. On the other
Hand,

Hand, God in his just Judgment often infatuates and confounds the Counsels of the wisest Politicians, so that they are utterly at a loss what Course to take, or they take that which shall end in their Destruction. *He leadeth Counsellors away spoiled, as Job expresseth it, and maketh the Judges Fools. He taketh away the Heart of the Chief of the People of the Earth, and causeth them to wander in the Wilderness where there is no Way. They grope in the Dark without Light, and he maketh them to stagger like a drunken Man.* Job xii. 17, 24, 25. To the same Purpose the Prophet *Isaiab*, after having declared that the *Princes of Zoan* are become Fools; that the *Counsel of the wise Counsellors of Pharaoh* is become brutish, and that they had seduced Egypt, even they that were the *Stay of the Tribes thereof*; ascribeth it to the over-ruling Influence of Divine Providence. *The Lord, saith he, hath mingled a perverse Spirit in the midst thereof, and they have caused Egypt to err in every Work thereof.* Isa. xix. 11, 12, 13, 14. When *Absalom* and the Men of *Israel* preferred the Counsel of *Hushai* before that of *Achitophel*, the sacred Writer observes that *this was because the Lord had appointed to defeat the good Counsel of Achitophel, to the Intent that the Lord might bring Evil upon Absalom.* 2 Sam. xvii. 14. There was no
moral

moral Evil in preferring the one Counsel to the other, and it was no way unbecoming the Holiness of God, so to influence the Minds and Judgments of *Absalom*, and those that were with him, as to cause them to embrace that which was in a political Sense the worst Counsel, in order to bring a just Punishment upon them for their Rebellion and Wickedness, and to hinder them from executing their malicious Purposes against their good and lawful King.

It will not be improper on this Occasion to take particular Notice of what is said in Scripture concerning God's hardening Mens Hearts. This hath been always looked upon as a considerable Difficulty. For clearing of which it must be observed, that whereas Sinners are sometimes represented as hardening their own Hearts; and, at other Times, God is said to harden them; these two are to be understood in a very different Sense. Hardness of Heart, when understood of an Obstinacy in sinning, and a presumptuous persisting in an evil Course, is always really and originally owing to the Sinner himself. For God never did, never can infuse any sinful Dispositions into the Souls of Men, nor can in any Sense be the proper Author or Cause of their Obstinacy and Presumption in Wickedness. This is only chargeable upon themselves.

Thus

Thus it is observed concerning *Zedekiah*, that *he stiffened his Neck, and hardened his Heart from turning unto the Lord God of Israel.* 2 Chron. xxxvi. 13. And concerning the obstinate *Jews*, that *they refused to hearken, yea, they made their Hearts as an Adamant Stone, lest they should hear the Law, and the Word which the Lord of Hosts hath sent in his Spirit by the Prophets.* Zach. vii. 11, 12. The same Thing is plainly signified in the Warnings that are given Men not to harden their Hearts; *To-day if you will hear his Voice, harden not your Hearts.* Psal. xcv. 7, 8. And Heb. iii. 13. *Exhort one another daily while it is called To-day, lest any of you be hardened through the Deceitfulness of Sin.* The most noted Instance in which God is represented as hardening the Heart, is in the Case of *Pharaoh*, and yet he is expressly said to have hardened his own Heart. See *Exod.* viii. 15, 32. ix. 34. And in general it may be said, that the Sinners whose Hearts God is said to harden, are Persons that have hardened, and continued to harden their own Hearts. And therefore, what God doth in this Case, is in a Way of just Judgment upon them for their Wickedness and Obstinacy.

And this judicial hardening their Hearts includes,

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First, God's giving them up to their own perverse Inclinations, and to the Power of their corrupt Lusts and evil Habits, and justly with-holding from them the Influences of his Grace and Spirit. Remarkable to this Purpose is that Passage, Psal. lxxxii. 11, 12. *My People would not hearken to my Voice, and Israel would none of me: So I gave them up unto their own Hearts Lusts, and they walked in their own Counsels.* And there is nothing in this but what is unexceptionably just and right. As God may, without the least Impeachment of his Holiness and Righteousness, cut off Sinners in the midst of their evil Courses, and put an End to their Lives, and to all the Opportunities and Means of Grace now afforded them; so he may, even before he taketh them out of the World, as a just Punishment for their long continued Obstinacy in sinning, leave them to the Counsels of their own perverse Hearts, and cease striving with them by his Spirit. And it is useful that it should be so in some Instances, that Sinners may be rendered the more afraid of persisting in an obstinate Course of Wickedness. Now, because by God's thus abandoning them, their Hardness of Heart still groweth upon them more and more, he is said in that Case, in a strong Manner of Expression, to harden their

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their Hearts, though in Strictness he only leaveth them to harden themselves in their evil Ways.

But secondly, Another Thing intended when God is represented in Scripture as hardening the Hearts of Men, is, that in his holy Providence he ordereth it so, that Things are put in their Way, which, though in their own Nature they have no Tendency to harden them, yet through their Corruption and bad Dispositions, do in the Event increase their Hardness and Obstinacy. The dreadful Plagues and Judgments inflicted upon *Pharaoh* and the *Egyptians*, had certainly a manifest Tendency in the Nature of the Thing to reclaim and overcome the Hardness of that Monarch. And yet those very Judgments, in several Instances, seemed only to provoke and irritate his Pride and Stubbornness. And when he sometimes appeared to be terrified and subdued by them, and prayed to have those Plagues removed, that Respite which was granted at his Request, and which ought to have mollified his Heart, and led him to Repentance, only served to confirm him in his evil Purposes. See *Exod.* vii. 22. viii. 15, 31, 32. ix. 34, 35. When Men have contracted such a strange Hardness of Temper, and are given up by God to their own Obstinacy,

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all the divine Dispensations towards them only harden them the more. His Mercies encourage them in their evil Courses, his Judgments exasperate and make them desperate. *Why should ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more.* Isa. i.

5. And when God doth those Things to Sinners, which through their own Perverseness have this Effect, he is said to harden their Hearts; though in these Cases they themselves are truly and properly the Authors of their own Hardness, and only take Occasion from the divine Dealings to strengthen themselves in their Obstinacy. It is true, God knoweth that his Dispensations towards them will eventually have this Effect upon them. But this doth not render it improper for him to use those Methods; yea, it is wise and just in him to do so, to shew that no Means have been wanting which were proper to reclaim them, and to render their Hardness and Obstinacy more inexcusable, and thereby justify the Punishments he intendeth to inflict upon them.

This leadeth me to add, thirdly, That God's hardening Mens Hearts, is sometimes to be particularly understood of his ordering it so in his righteous Judgment, that they go on obstinately in those Counsels which will end in their Destruction. And the hardening their Hearts in this Sense,

them, which they had deserved by their great Wickedness.

I shall conclude with some Improvement of this Subject.

First, What awful adoring Thoughts should we entertain of God, the supreme universal Lord, and of his governing Providence, when we consider the sovereign Influence and Dominion which he exerciseth over the Hearts of Men! This is his own proper and peculiar Prerogative. The Empire of the Heart is what belongeth not to any Creature, but to God alone. The most absolute earthly Monarchs can only call Men to an Account for their Words and Actions; but the Heart lieth out of their Reach, and they can take no proper Cognizance of what is transacted there. Who then would not reverence that sovereign Lord of Angels and Men, whose Dominion extendeth to the Secret of our Souls, to which no created Eye can penetrate? How venerable doth the divine Majesty appear in this View! Let all our inward Powers bow down before him, and pay him an awful Homage. Let us worship him in our Hearts, which is what he most regardeth, without which no external Adoration or Form of Devotion shall be accepted in his Sight. How careful should

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we be to *keep our Hearts with all Diligence*, and to exercise a constant vigilant Care over the inward Thoughts, Affections, and Dispositions of our Souls, since we have to do with a God, who not only hath given us a Law which reacheth to the Thoughts and Intents of the Heart, but who himself continually inspecteth the Hearts of all Men, and will in the great Day which he hath appointed for that Purpose, make manifest the Counsels of the Heart, and *will judge the Secrets of Men by Jesus Christ*. Rom. ii. 16. 1 Cor. iv. 5.

Secondly, Since God knoweth and governeth the Hearts of Men, we may hence see how proper and reasonable it is to apply to him for directing and influencing our own Hearts, or those of others. The most important Matter of Prayer is that which relateth to the Power which God hath over the Hearts and Minds of Men. One of the best Expressions of our good Will towards our Enemies, and those of evil Dispositions, is to be earnest in our Prayers to God for them, that he would turn their Hearts, that he would by his sovereign Influence over-rule or rectify their depraved Tempers, and incline them to that which is good and just and pure. And with regard to ourselves, that which above all Things we should desire of God is that he

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would be graciously pleased to cleanse and purify our Hearts, to correct whatever is amiss in the Temper of our Minds, and to strengthen, confirm, enlarge good Affections and Dispositions there. And indeed it may be justly regarded as a wise Constitution, that in order to our obtaining his gracious Influences and Aids, it is ordinarily necessary, that we should apply to him for that Purpose with an ingenuous Humility and Sense of our Dependence. Let us therefore by the Prayer of Faith lay ourselves open to his divine Communications, making it our earnest Request that in the hidden Part he would make us to know Wisdom, and influence our Minds to a right Determination and Choice ; that he would give us that Truth, that Purity and Simplicity of Heart which is pleasing in his Sight, and would inspire us with an inward Love of Virtue, and with an Abhorrence of Vice and Sin ; that he would turn our Affections and Views towards himself, that we may love him above all ; and that he would put his Fear into our Hearts, that we may never depart from him. Such have been the Desires and Prayers of good Men in all Ages. Thus the Psalmist prays, *Create in me a clean Heart, O God ; and renew a right Spirit within me.* Psal. li. 10. *Teach me thy Way, O Lord, I will walk*
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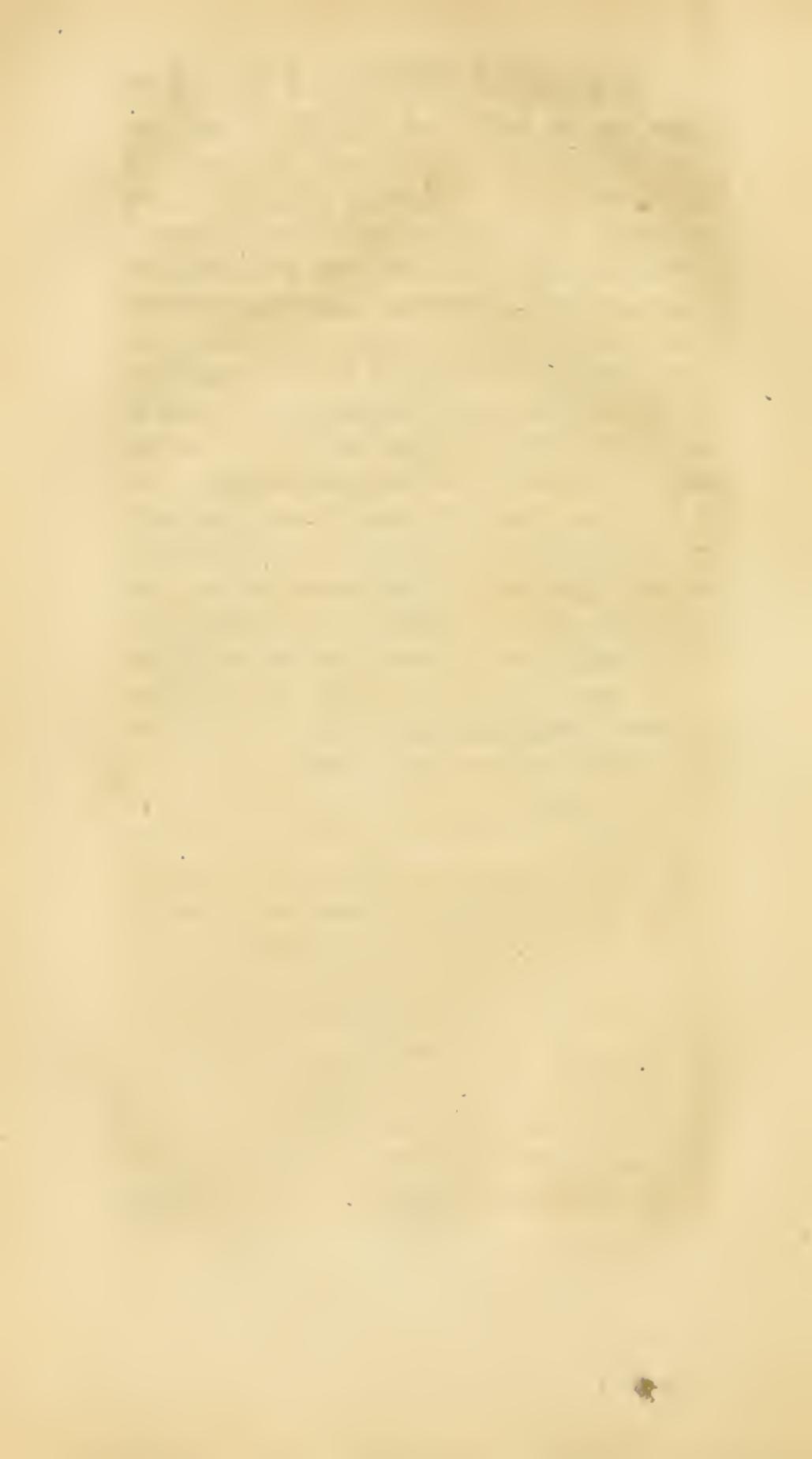
walk in thy Truth; unite my Heart to fear thy Name. Pſal. lxxxvi. 11. Incline my Heart unto thy Testimonies, and not unto Covetouſneſs. Pſal. cxix. 36. I will run the Way of thy Commandments, when thou ſhalt enlarge my Heart. Ver. 32. Search me, O God, and know my Heart; try me, and know my Thoughts; ſee if there be any wicked Way in me, and lead me in the Way everlaſting. Pſal. cxxxix. 23, 24.

There is nothing in ſuch Addreſſes but what is founded in the moſt juſt and worthy Notions of God and of his Providence. We may upon juſt Grounds hope, that if we ſet ourſelves to do all that in us lies to keep our Hearts under a proper Diſcipline, to correct bad Diſpoſitions and Inclinations, and to cultivate and improve good ones, and at the ſame Time from a Senſe of our own Weakneſs apply to God for the Aſſiſtance of his Spirit, he will communicate his gracious Influences for enabling us to govern our Appetites and Paſſions, and to make a Progreſs in holy and virtuous Attainments. And eſpecially there is great Reason to think that he will grant extraordinary Supplies of inward Strength, when we are exerciſed with extraordinary Trials and Difficulties. This is what we may expect from his Goodneſs as he is a Lover of Virtue and of Mankind; and to our

unspeakable Comfort we are actually assured of it by his own express Promises in his holy Word. Nothing can be fuller to this Purpose, than that Declaration of our blessed Saviour, in which he assureth us, that God is more ready to give his holy Spirit to them that ask him, whose proper Work it is to excite, strengthen, and confirm good Affections and Dispositions in our Hearts, than earthly Parents are to give good Gifts unto their Children. *Luke xi. 13. If ye being evil know how to give good Gifts unto your Children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?* i. e. to them that apply to him for that Purpose, by humble and fervent Prayer.

Finally, How afraid should we be of provoking God to leave us to ourselves, or to give us up to our own Hearts Lusts, and to our own Counsels! It highly concerneth us therefore, to beware of stifling Convictions, and of neglecting and abusing the Means which he hath provided for our Reformation and Amendment. Let us take Care that evil Habits do not gather Strength upon us, and our corrupt Lusts grow more headstrong, lest as a just Punishment for our obstinate persisting in our sinful Courses in Opposition to all the Methods of his Grace and Providence to re-

claim us, he should at length abandon us to a judicial Blindness and Hardness of Heart, which is the most miserable State we can be in. To-day, therefore, while it is called To-day, let us hearken to his sacred Voice, and not harden our Hearts against him. Let us endeavour to comply with the Significations of his Will by his Word and by his Providence, and maintain an humble and submissive Temper of Mind before him, as becometh those who expect soon to be accountable at his solemn Tribunal for their inward Frame as well as their outward Practice. God grant that we may now live in a constant Preparation for that great Event, so as to approve ourselves to the great Searcher of Hearts, the supreme universal Judge, to whom be Glory and Dominion for ever. Amen.



*On God's Inspection and Government
of human Actions.*

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PROV. v. 21.

*The Ways of Man are before the Eyes of the
Lord, and he pondereth all his Goings.*

THE Government of Divine Providence towards Mankind extendeth both to their Hearts and to their outward Actions. This latter is what we are now to consider. And surely, if God inspecteth and governeth the Hearts of Men, their most secret Thoughts, Counsels, and Purposes, as was shewn in our last Discourse, it cannot in Reason be denied, that their external Actions must needs be also under his
sovereign

sovereign Cognizance and Superintendency. This is what the Wise-man signifieth, when he declareth, that *the Ways of Man are before the Eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his Goings. He pondereth them, he weigheth them as in a Balance, as the Word properly imports, and observeth them with the greatest Exactness. He beholdeth them not merely as an idle Spectator that is wholly unconcerned and indifferent about them, but as the supreme Governor and Judge, so as to govern and over-rule them to the wise Purposes of his Providence, and to reward or punish them in the properest Manner, and in the fittest Season. Thine Eyes are upon all the Ways of the Sons of Men, saith the Prophet, to give every one according to his Ways, and according to the Fruit of his Doings. Jer. xxxii. 19.* And not only doth God know all Mens Actions when they are done, but he hath a perfect Fore-knowledge of them before they are done. He knoweth how all Men will act in every Circumstance. And though the Manner of God's fore-knowing the free Actions of Men be hard to account for, (nor is it to be wondered at that it should be so) yet the Thing itself is what Reason as well as Scripture leadeth us to acknowledge. It has been generally owned among all Nations which have believed that there

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is a God and a Providence. Nor can it well be conceived how the Scheme of Providence could be compleat without it. And there is a plain Proof of it in many express Predictions of human Actions, which have all the Appearance of being free and contingent that any Actions can have, and yet were certainly fore-known many Ages before they happened. Several remarkable Instances of which may be found in the sacred Writings.

The Providence of God as respecting the Actions of Men may be distinctly considered, both with regard to their good and evil Actions.

First, All the good Actions Men perform are under the divine Inspection and Government. He is perfectly acquainted with the Principles from which they flow, and all the Circumstances that attend them. And he makes Use of them for answering the Ends of his moral Government, for promoting the Interests of his Kingdom, and the good Order of the World, and for rendering Men useful to one another. And it is pleasing to him to see his reasonable Creatures acting in a Manner agreeable to Reason, Truth, and Righteousness, and employing the active Powers he hath given them to valuable Purposes. He ordereth it so in his Providence, that such good Actions

tions are often in some Measure rewarded even in this Life, and procure present Blessings and Advantages to those that perform them ; at least, they are attended with an inward conscious Satisfaction, which is far to be preferred before any sensual Pleasures or Gratifications. Or if, as is frequently the Case in this State of Trial and Discipline, good Actions are attended with great Difficulties and Discouragements, and through the Ignorance of mistaken and prejudiced, or the Malice and Wickedness of ill-designing Men, meet with very bad Returns, and expose the Doers of them to present temporal Evils and Sufferings, he will certainly take Care that they shall be rewarded in a future State : not one of them shall be forgotten before God ; they shall be produced into open View, and shall receive an ample and glorious Recompence.

And the Concernment which the Providence of God hath with Mens good Actions, doth not only appear in that he observeth and approveth them, and will take Care that they shall be properly rewarded in the fittest Season ; but it is farther to be considered, that Divine Providence frequently interesteth itself in exciting Men to good Actions, and assisting them in the Exercise of those Actions, and in
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removing Impediments, and furnishing proper Occasions and Opportunities. It cannot reasonably be denied, that God may have many Ways of doing this, without infringing the Freedom which belongeth to Men as they are moral Agents, and so as that the good Deeds they perform may still be truly and properly said to be of their own doing, and may be rewarded as such. There is nothing in such a Supposition but what is worthy of God, and agreeable to his supreme Wisdom and Goodness. The Doctrine of the Holy Scriptures is very clear and exprefs on this Head. And it is of great Importance to us to get a Sense of it strongly fixed upon our Minds. What an animating Consideration must it needs be, when we set about the performing a good Action, to be assured that the great Lord and Father of all, on whom our Happiness depends, observeth the good Deed in every Circumstance, and is ready to assist us in the Performance of it, and to support us under the Difficulties which may attend it! This should both encourage us to apply to God by Prayer for his divine Assurances, and should engage us, when we have done any Thing that is good, to give Thanks to his holy Name for the Opportunities he hath put into our Hands, and the gracious

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cious Aids he hath been pleased to afford us.

But secondly, Let us consider how far the Providence of God concerneth itself about Mens evil Actions: For here the Difficulty principally lies.

And for clearing this the following Things may be observed.

First, God never is the proper Author or Cause of evil Actions. He never impelled Men by any positive Influence to the Commission of those Actions. This necessarily follows from the perfect Holiness and Righteousness of his Nature, which is frequently declared and asserted in the strongest Manner in the sacred Writings. Evil and sinful Actions are what he most expressly forbiddeth in his Law; and it were greatly absurd and dishonourable to him to suppose that he should incline or determine Men by any positive Influence to commit those Actions which he himself hath forbidden and condemned, and against which he hath denounced awful Punishments. The true original Cause of Mens doing bad Actions is owing to their own corrupt Inclinations, and to their Abuse of their Liberty; and therefore on themselves they are properly chargeable. This is what St. *James* signifies in that remarkable Passage I had

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had Occasion to mention before, *Let no Man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted of Evil, neither tempteth he any Man. But every Man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own Lust, and enticed.* Jam. i. 13, 14.

Secondly, Though God is not the Author or Cause, of Mens evil Actions, yet they cannot be done without his Permission; and they all come under his Inspection; he knows and observes them in every Circumstance. As the God of Nature he upholdeth Mens natural Powers, without which they could not be able to act at all, and he leaveth them ordinarily to the free Exercise of those Powers, even whilst they abuse and employ them in doing Evil. He suffers them to act according to their own Inclinations, or to be tempted to evil Actions, though not compelled, or brought under a Necessity of committing them, for they may still abstain from doing those Actions, if they will but make a proper Use of the Powers which they really have, and of the Assistances which God is ready to afford them.

And as evil Actions cannot be done without God's Permission, so he hath a perfect Knowledge of them with all the Circumstances which attend them. Let them be done never so secretly, and though
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the greatest Care and Pains be taken to conceal or disguise them, and varnish them over with fair and specious Pretences, yet they cannot escape his Notice. He beholdeth them as they really are in their hidden Springs and Principles. And it cannot but be displeasing to that most holy and righteous Being, the great Governor of the World, to see his reasonable Creatures acting so contrary to the End of their Creation, abusing and dishonouring their excellent Powers, by doing those Things which are base, unjust, and impure, and *yielding their Members the Instruments of Unrighteousness unto Sin*. He ordereth it so in his Providence, that such Actions are often attended or followed with the present Marks of his Displeasure, and bring many Evils upon the Actors of them even in this World; or if, as must be expected in a State of Trial, evil Actions do now in many Instances pass undetected or unpunished, or even seem to produce some present temporal Advantages, he will take Care that, if impenitently persisted in, they shall in due Time be brought to Light in their proper Malignity and Deformity, and shall meet with such Retributions as will shew him to be a just and righteous Judge. And this Consideration, that not one of our evil Actions can possibly pass unobserved by God,

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God, that they all come under the Notice of his righteous Providence, is of great Moment. If a Sense of it were deeply fixed in our Hearts, no Prospect of worldly Advantage or Gain, no Allurement of sensual Pleasure, would be able to prevail upon us to do a vicious or unjust Thing. There is a wonderful, and one would be apt to think an almost irresistible Force in this Thought, if properly impressed upon the Mind. God seeth the Act of Impiety, Fraud, or Impurity I am going to commit, and shall I dare to affront him to his Face, and to transgress his Laws under his own Eye? If at present he should seem to connive at it, and not follow it with an immediate Punishment, yet the Time is coming when he will most certainly call me to a strict Account.

But thirdly, Another Thing which ought to be considered with regard to the Providence of God as respecting Men's evil Actions, is this, that though they are what he cannot but disapprove, yet he frequently over-rules them for serving the wise Purposes of his Government, and takes Occasion from thence to bring about his own excellent Designs. And in this no small Part of the Wisdom of Divine Providence in its Administrations towards Mankind doth consist.

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It may be useful to take a distinct View of some Instances of this Kind.

Thus *e. g.* God frequently makes Use of the evil Actions of some Men to punish the Sins of others, and to execute his just Judgments upon them.

It is an Observation which hath been made by those who have carefully considered the present Course of Things, that a great Part of the outward Punishments inflicted upon bad Men in this Life, are the Effects of the evil Actions of other bad Men. And though in such Cases the Evils and Mischiefs inflicted upon the Sufferers may be wrong and unjust as coming from the immediate Actors of them, who have nothing in View but the gratifying their own Passions, or promoting what they take to be their worldly Interest, yet it is wise and just in God to order it so that the Effects of those injurious Actions fall upon Persons who really deserve to be punished for their own Wickedness. Thus what the King of *Assyria* only designed for answering the Ends of his own Ambition, was over-ruled by God to the just Punishment of the *Jews* for their Idolatry, Hypocrisy, and great Corruption of Manners; as is signified in that remarkable Passage, *Isa.* x. 5, 6, 7. *O Assyrian, the Rod of mine Anger, and the Staff in their Hand*
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is mine Indignation, I will send him against an hypocritical Nation, and against the People of my Wrath will I give him a Charge to take the Spoil, and to take the Prey, and to tread them down like the Mire of the Streets. Howbeit, he meaneth not so, neither doth his Heart think so, but it is in his Heart to destroy and cut off Nations not a few.

And as God often makes use of the evil Actions of wicked Men to punish the Wickedness of other bad Men, so he also overrules them for chastising his own Children on the Account of their Iniquities and Backslidings. A remarkable Instance of this we have in the Punishments inflicted upon *David* for the Sins he had committed. For though he had sincerely repented of them, yet it was proper that Crimes of so heinous a Nature, and which had caused so great Scandal, should be followed with public open Marks of the divine Displeasure. Hence it was that *Absalom* was suffered to carry his Rebellion to so great a Height, to defile his Father's Wives, to drive him from his capital City, and reduce him to the utmost Danger and Distress. The true immediate Cause of all this was *Absalom's* Wickedness, who freely followed the Dictates of his own Ambition, and the Bent of his corrupt and vicious Inclinations. And God in his righteous Providence so or-

dered it, that he had an Opportunity given him of gratifying these his wicked Inclinations, and ambitious Views. This was permitted as a just Punishment for the Crimes *David* had been guilty of; as appears from the Threatnings which had been denounced against him on this Account by the Prophet in the Name of God. 2 *Sam.* xii. 10, 11, 12.

The like Observation may be made with regard to *Shimei's* cursing *David*. When *Abishai* would have killed him, *David* said, *So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?* This is not to be understood as if God had expressly commanded *Shimei* to curse *David*, or had put that Malice and Wickedness into his Heart, or moved his Tongue to utter those opprobrious Expressions. But Circumstances were so disposed, that *Shimei* had a favourable Opportunity given him to vent the Malice, the Envy and Rancour which had been hidden in his Heart, in bitter envenomed Reproaches against *David*. And that Prince wisely carried his Views to the over-ruling Providence of God, who had permitted and governed this for his Correction, and who would not have suffered these several Evils to have befallen him, or have given an Opportunity

portunity to those wicked Persons to treat him in so injurious a Manner if he had not deserved those heavy Judgments and Calamities.

On this Account wicked Men may be called God's *Sword*, and his *Hand*, as they are by the Psalmist. *Pfal.* xvii. 13, 14. And indeed, if good Men must be corrected, and suffer for their Faults, as it is often necessary they should, the wicked are the readiest Instruments for such ungrateful Work, and need only be left to their own Inclinations, and to have an Opportunity given them for that Purpose. And in every such Case, it becometh the Sufferers with *David* to look beyond the immediate Instruments, by whose Malice, Injustice, or Cruelty they suffer, and to adore the Hand of God, and acknowledge and submit to his righteous Judgments.

It may be farther observed, that evil Actions are often over-ruled to the Punishment of the Actors themselves. The Psalmist mentioneth it to the Glory of Divine Providence, that *the Wicked is snared in the Work of his own Hands.* *Pfal.* ix. 16. It frequently happens, that those Councils and Actions which bad Men design to the Prejudice or Ruin of others, become the Occasion of their own. *They fall into the Pit which they have digged, and*

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in the Snare which they have laid is their own Foot taken. Ver. 15. Thus God may, and often doth make the Sinner's own Wickedness prove his Punishment. And whilst he suffereth him to perpetrate the Evil he seemed most intent upon, ordereth it so that this very Thing bringeth such Mischiefs upon him as serve to punish him both for that and other Crimes he hath been guilty of.

I would observe in the last Place, that God frequently so governeth the wicked Actions of Men as to bring Good out of them. This indeed is far from diminishing the real Evil of those Actions. For Sin of itself, and in its own Nature, hath only a Tendency to Evil; but such is the sovereign and admirable Wisdom of Divine Providence, that it causeth Good to arise out of that Evil. A memorable Instance of this we have in one of the worst Actions that was ever done in the World, *viz.* the betraying and crucifying the holy *Jesus*. *St. Peter* in his excellent Discourse to the *Jews* on the Day of Pentecost, expresseth himself thus; *Him, i. e.* *Jesus, being delivered by the determinate Counsel and Foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked Hands crucified and slain.* Acts ii. 23. And to the same Purpose is the Prayer offered up by the Disciples. Acts iv.

27. *Of a Truth, against thy Holy Child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the People of Israel, were gathered together for to do whatsoever thy Hand and thy Counsel determined before to be done.* There were many Things which concurred here: The Avarice and Perfidy of *Judas*, the bitter Envy and Malice and worldly Policy of the *Jewish* chief Priests and Rulers, the blind Fury of the People, the Baseness and Injustice of the *Roman* Governor; all which were really the Faults of the Persons concerned, and the evil Actions they committed were properly of their own doing. Nor did God exert any positive Influence for inclining and engaging them to all their several Parts in this detestable Affair. But he perfectly foresaw all these Things, and determined to order Circumstances so as to give them an Opportunity of acting according to their Inclinations, and of executing their sinful Purposes; and the Event that followed upon all this, *viz.* the Sufferings and Death of *Christ*, was the Appointment of his Providence for the most wise and excellent Ends, and was rendered happily productive of the greatest Good, for promoting the Glory of God, and the Salvation of Mankind. The same Observation may be applied, in an inferior

Degree, to the selling of *Joseph* by his Brethren. Their selling him for a Slave, which was intended by them to keep him in perpetual Bondage, and to prevent his having that Superiority over them which his Dreams had seemed to portend, was over-ruled by Divine Providence for opening a Way to the eminent Dignity he was afterwards raised unto, so much for his own and their Benefit. This he takes Notice of to them in a very patheticall Manner. *As for you, ye thought Evil against me, but the Lord meant it unto Good, to bring to pass, as it is this Day, to save much People alive.* Gen. l. 20. The Plot which *Haman* formed, and was suffered to carry far for the Destruction of *Mordecai* and the whole People of the *Jews*, proved, by a wise over-ruling Providence, the Occasion of the Advancement of *Mordecai* to the highest Honours, and of the *Jews* being established in a more firm and flourishing Condition than before. There is no Action or Event in that whole Story, but what singly and separately taken is natural; the several Persons concerned acted freely, and some of them with a very ill Intention, yet the Incidents and Conjunctions were so laid together, as plainly shewed that the whole was under the superior Direction of a most wise Providence.

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How often has God made grievous and cruel Persecutions subservient to the farther spreading and Diffusion of Religion, and to the Establishment of his Church, which it was designed to subvert! St. Paul's Bonds, and the *preaching of Christ out of Envy and Strife*, with a View to add Affliction to his Bonds, was over-ruled to the Furtherance of the Gospel. *Phil. i. 12, 13, 15, 16, 18.* And it may be frequently observed in the ordinary Course of Things, that God makes use of the injurious Actions of bad Men for exercising the Graces and Virtues of his Children, their Faith, their Patience, their Constancy and Fortitude, their Self-denial and Resignation, their Meekness, and Readiness to forgive Injuries, and to render Good for Evil. These are Dispositions which tend highly to the Glory of God, and to shew forth the Beauty of Religion, and the Energy of its divine Principles; and which both furnish excellent Examples to others, and will upon the whole be of great Advantage to good Men themselves, to render them more meet for Heaven, and encrease their future Reward.

I shall conclude this Discourse with taking Notice of an Objection which hath been often urged against Divine Providence, drawn from suffering so much Sin and
Wicked-

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Wickedness in the World. If there be a wise and righteous God who governeth the World by his Providence, why doth he not interpose to put a stop to the abounding Wickedness of Men? Since if he be almighty he is able to do it, and if he be infinitely holy, he must be supposed to be willing to do it.

Several Considerations might be insisted upon to take off the Force of this Objection.

First, It ought to be observed, that God actually doth in his sovereign Providence prevent many bad Actions which would otherwise be committed. And if we had but a full View of all the Evils which are thus prevented, we should, instead of allowing ourselves to find Fault, be sensible of our great Obligations to a wise and good Providence, for restraining and setting Bounds to the Wickedness of Men. God often so ordereth Circumstances, that Men have not an Opportunity given them to bring their sinful Purposes into Act. There are Obstacles laid in their Way, which disappoint their Designs, so that *their Hands cannot execute their Enterprize*. Job. v. 12. and *the mischievous Devices which they have imagined, they are not able to perform*. Psal. xxi. 11. There are innumerable evil Actions which are as it were stifled in the Birth;

Birth; and it may be justly said, that there is comparatively but a small Part of the Wickedness actually perpetrated in the World, which would be perpetrated, were it not for the over-ruling Agency of Divine Providence. And in many Cases, where God doth not see fit wholly to prevent Mens bad Actions, yet he so limiteth and restraineth them, that they are not able to effect all the Evil they designed, or which their Actions had a natural Tendency to produce. He holdeth them as it were in a Chain, so that they cannot go their utmost Lengths in doing Mischief, and saith to them as to the raging Sea, *Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther.*

But secondly, It must be considered, that there is no total preventing of Sin in the present State of Mankind, without absolutely destroying the Liberty of human Will and Actions, which would be in no wise consistent with the Wisdom of God as a moral Governor, or with the Nature of Man as a moral Agent. Sin properly and originally consisteth in the evil Intentions and Dispositions of the Heart or Mind. For the outward Actions separated from these are not properly Sins. And how could these be prevented, except God should miraculously by his Almighty Power so work upon the Minds of all Men, as to
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hinder any evil Thoughts or Intentions from rising there? And to do this ordinarily and perpetually, would be inconsistent with that Freedom of thinking and choosing, which belongeth to us as we are reasonable moral Agents. And as to the outward Actions it would equally abridge human Liberty, if Men were in all Cases hindered from acting according to their Intentions. This could not be done without putting a perpetual Constraint upon Men, and quite altering the Course and Order of the World, and the Nature of this State of Trial and Discipline. Besides, how could Men's evil Intentions appear to be justly punished, if they were never suffered to break forth into Act? The Justice and Righteousness of God could in that Case scarce be made openly manifest.

Thirdly, It must be farther considered, that God hath done all that was proper for him as a moral Governor to hinder Men from committing Sin. For he hath given the most holy and excellent Laws to direct them in the full Extent of their Duty, and hath enforced those Laws by the most powerful and important Sanctions. He hath in his Word both made the most glorious and encouraging Promises to Holiness and Obedience, and hath declared in the strongest Manner his just Detestation of Sin,

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Sin, and denounced the most awful Threatnings against it, than which nothing can possibly be better fitted to deter Men from indulging themselves in a Course of presumptuous Sin and Disobedience. He hath so formed our Natures as in the most important Instances to give us an inward Sense of the Evil of Sin, so that the Practice of it is followed, in Minds which are not depraved and corrupted with vicious Prejudices and Passions, with an inward Dissatisfaction and Remorse; and Conscience is placed within us as a Witness and Judge, to remonstrate against the committing of it, and to condemn it when committed. Add to this, that in the general Course of God's providential Dealings, there are many Things which are designed to shew the Evil of Sin, and the pernicious Consequences which attend it. The Scripture teacheth us to regard all the Miseries to which the Nature of Man is now subject, as the Effects and Punishments of Sin. And besides the Evils brought upon particular Persons by their Sins, there have been from Time to Time Calamities and Events of an extraordinary Nature, relating to large Communities, which may be looked upon as Tokens of the divine Displeasure against the Sins of Men. Thus doth a wise and holy Providence

dence take many Ways to convince Men of the Evil of Sin, and to excite in them a Hatred and Abhorrence of it. And upon the whole it may be said, that God hath by his Law, and in the Course of his Providence, done as much to encourage Men to Holiness and Virtue, and to discourage and deter them from Vice and Wickedness, as is fuitable to this State of Trial, and becoming him as a moral Governor in the present Circumstances of Mankind.

To which it may be added, that God in his holy Providence often over-ruleth Mens sinful Actions to wise and valuable Purposes. And therefore his permitting Men to commit them is no just Objection against his Providence. It hath been shewn that God frequently over-rules the evil Actions of Men for punishing their own Wickedness or that of others, or for correcting and chastening his backsliding Servants; that in many Instances he causeth Good to arise out of them, and turneth them to quite different Purposes than were intended by the Actors of them; and that the Permission of Sin giveth Occasion to the exercising and bringing forth into open Light, some of the noblest Affections and Dispositions of the human Nature, as also some of the divine Attributes, which would not otherwise be so eminently conspicuous; such

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such as God's impartial Justice and Righteousness, the Wisdom of his moral Government, his Patience and Long-suffering towards Sinners, the Riches of his Grace and Mercy in pardoning the truly penitent, and restoring them to his Favour. And finally, it hath given Occasion to all the admirable Methods of our Redemption and Salvation by *Jesus Christ*, which will lay a Foundation for everlasting Love, Joy, and Praise.

And now to conclude, Since it appears that the Sin which is actually committed in the World is far short of what would be committed if a wise and holy Providence did not interpose to prevent it: Since God could not entirely hinder Men from doing evil Actions without laying them under such Restraints as are inconsistent with the Liberty of moral Agents constituted in a State of Trial: Since he hath done all that was proper for him as a moral Governor, to dissuade and deter Men from the Practice of Sin; and to engage them to the Practice of Righteousness and true Holiness: And finally, since in his most wise and sovereign Providence he over-rules the Sins of Men to answer many valuable Purposes, and often brings great Good out of those Evils: All these Considerations taken together fully vindicate the Conduct of
Divine

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Divine Providence in permitting Mens sinful Actions, and shew that in this his Wisdom is to be adored, and at the same Time that the Purity and Holiness of his Nature and Government is free from the least Stain or Blemish. And this no Doubt would appear to us with a brighter and more convincing Evidence, if we had a more distinct and compleat View of the divine Administrations.



On God's Government and Disposal of the Events which befall us.

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MATT. X. 30.

The very Hairs of your Head are all numbered.

HAVING considered the Providence of God as extending its Care and Government both to the Hearts of Men, and to their outward Actions, it remaineth that we now consider it as disposing and governing the Events in which they are concerned. These are of various Kinds, relating to their Lives, Fortunes, Conditions,
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and Circumstances, their Bodies and Souls, their Persons and Families, and, in a Word, to all the Good and Evil which befalleth them. And it is the constant Doctrine of the holy Scriptures, that all Events whatsoever are under the Superintendency of God's most wise Providence, and that nothing happens to us without his Direction or Permission. Our Saviour could not more significantly express this than by declaring as he doth to his Disciples, *The very Hairs of your Head are all numbered.* The Expression is manifestly proverbial. When *David* promises the Woman of *Tekoa* that there should be no Hurt done to her Son, he signifies it by saying, *There shall not an Hair of thy Son fall to the Earth.* 2 Sam. xiv. 11. And *St. Paul* intending to assure those that were with him in the Ship, that none of them should come to any Harm, saith, *There shall not an Hair fall from the Head of any of you.* Acts xxvii. 34. In like Manner our Saviour tells his Apostles, *The very Hairs of your Head are all numbered.* Not one of them shall fall to the Earth, not the least Evil shall befall you, any farther than God in his wise and sovereign Providence sees fit to permit. The Phrase is very proper to signify that even the most inconsiderable Things which relate to us, are under the

Care of Divine Providence; much more easy may this be concluded with regard to the more important Events that concern us.

That Events are not absolutely in our own Power a little Reflection and Observation may convince us. With regard to Life itself, which is the Basis of our present Enjoyments, and upon which many other Events depend, it is evident that as the Commencement of it did not depend upon our own Pleasure, so neither is it in our Power to prolong it as we think fit. This dependeth upon the Will of the supreme Lord, who can lengthen or shorten the Term of our Continuance in this State of Trial, as seemeth fit to his infinite Wisdom. *In his Hand, as Job speaks, is the Soul of every living Thing, and the Breath of all Mankind.* Job xii. 10. And the Psalmist addressing himself to God saith, *My Times are in thy Hand, i. e. at thy Disposal.* Psal. xxxi. 15. And as our Times, so the Events of Time are not wholly in our own Power. Many Things happen in the Course of human Affairs, which oblige us to acknowledge with the Prophet, *I know, O Lord, that the Way of Man is not in himself, it is not in him that walketh to direct his Steps.* Jer. x. 23. *i. e.* it is not in his Power to order the Events of Life as

he pleaseth. We must not imagine that Men are entirely and absolutely the Masters of their own Fortune, and can assign to themselves what Lot and Condition in the World they think properest. *The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich; he bringeth low, and lifteth up.* 1 Sam. ii. 7. It dependeth upon God the supreme Disposer, who knoweth what is fittest with regard to every particular Person, to appoint what his outward Circumstances and Opportunities shall be, whether he shall be in a high or low Condition, whether his Endeavours shall meet with the desired Success or not. There are indeed general Rules of Providence, according to which the Events of Things are ordinarily conducted. As there is in the material World what we usually call the Course of Nature, *i. e.* a stated Order of Things according to which Providence sees fit to act for producing certain Effects in a regular Way; under which general Laws are comprehended a numberless Variety of particular Instances: so there are in the Government of reasonable and moral Agents, stated Rules of Procedure, formed and established with great Wisdom, which are generally observed by Divine Providence in the ordering and governing Men and the Events relating to them, and which may be called
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the Course of Providence in the moral, as the other is in the natural World. Without this, God's providential Government of his reasonable Creatures, would only be a loose Heap of sudden arbitrary Expedients, without any certain Method or Connection, which would be unworthy of a wise Governor. Nor could any Man in that Case know how to act, or what to expect, what to hope or to fear; no Man could understand the Meaning of the divine Administration, or form any Rules of Conduct from it. But then, on the other Hand, God's governing by general Laws must not be understood as if he only prescribed or appointed some general Methods of Procedure in the Beginning, and afterwards concerned himself no farther. These general Laws and Constitutions do by no Means exclude the constant Presence and Influence of Divine Providence, which extendeth to particular Cases and Persons, and ordereth and disposeth the Circumstances and Events relating to them as seemeth most fit to his sovereign Wisdom; and that in such a Manner as is no way inconsistent with those general Laws, and without disturbing or confounding the usual Course of Things.

Thus *e. g.* it may be regarded as a general Law of Providence, which is laid

down by the Wise-man, *Prov. x. 4.* that *the Hand of the diligent maketh rich.* But this is not to be understood, as if God in his Providence only established this general Constitution, and left the rest wholly to Men themselves, and put it entirely in their own Power whether they shall be rich or not. All that can be justly concluded from it is, that Diligence and Industry is the most probable Way, according to the ordinary Course of Things and Appointment of Divine Providence, for acquiring Riches, and without which we cannot reasonably expect to obtain them. But then it must still be remembered, and so this general Rule must be understood, that it doth not depend upon a Man's Industry alone, but that several Circumstances and Opportunities must concur. And it is evident from common Observation and Experience, that it is not absolutely in Mens own Power to order those Circumstances and Opportunities as they please. It dependeth upon the Appointment of Divine Providence to order and dispose Circumstances so for this or that particular Person, that his Diligence shall have the Effect. And another Man may be so situated, that though he useth equal Diligence, it is not in his Power to acquire Riches. Other Instances might be produced to the same

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same Purpose. It is proper that Events should be ordinarily conducted in such a Manner that the Probability of succeeding in the Use of Means may engage Men to a prudent Application and Diligence; and on the other Hand it is also wisely ordered, that Events do not constantly answer Expectations and Appearances, and the Means that have been used. *The Race is not always to the swift, nor the Battle to the strong.* For Men would be apt in that Case to forget that they are at the Disposal of a higher Lord. They would ascribe all to themselves and to second Causes, and neither look up to God for a Blessing on their Endeavours, nor be sensible of their Obligations to him for the Success they meet with; and so would in Time be in Danger of losing all Regard to his governing and disposing Providence. Reasonable Beings are capable of having a Sense of their Dependance upon God, which the Brutes are not. And therefore it may be justly supposed, that God expecteth and requireth of them that they should maintain a due Sense of this their Dependance; and that in Testimony of their Dependance, they should apply to him for his Assistance and Blessing. And it is reasonable to believe, that in many Cases Designs may meet with Success or not, according to their Performance

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or Neglect of this Condition, pursuant to a Constitution of Divine Providence for that Purpose.

Having offered these general Considerations concerning God's Disposal of Events, it may be useful to consider this Subject more distinctly, with regard to prosperous and adverse Events, and even those which appear to be casual and fortuitous.

First, All prosperous Events and worldly Blessings are in the Hand of God, and under the Disposal of his Providence. If we meet with Success in our lawful Designs and Endeavours, if we have a competent Portion of those outward good Things, which contribute to the Convenience of Life, these are all to be thankfully ascribed to God's good Providence. And when we view them in this Light, it lays a special Obligation upon us to endeavour to use them to his Glory, and according to his Will, and should make us careful not to abuse them, to Pride and Intemperance. *Both Riches and Honour come of thee, saith David in his noble Address to God. 1 Chron. xxix. 12. God brings it as a Charge against Israel, She did not know, or consider, that I gave her Corn, and Wine, and Oil, and multiplied her Silver and Gold. Hof. ii. 8.* Not only

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only spiritual Blessings, which are of the most excellent Nature, and have the greatest Influence on our Happiness, are to be regarded as coming from God, *from whom every good and perfect Gift doth descend*, as St. *James* expresseth it, but even those Blessings and Advantages which are of a temporal worldly Nature. These are dispensed with great Variety, and in different Measures and Proportions, according to the Will of the supreme Disposer, and always for wise Reasons, though in many Instances we may not be able at present to discern those Reasons.

It is indeed still supposed, and must be carefully remembered, that there are Means to be ordinarily used on our Parts in order to our obtaining and enjoying those Blessings, and that it is the Appointment of Providence that it should be so. And to expect those Blessings, or to hope for Success in our Designs, without the Use of proper Means, is a tempting of God, and a transgressing the Orders of his Providence. But when we have asked the properest Means we can, we must consider the Event as in the Hand of God; and if the Means we use prove effectual, and our lawful Endeavours are crowned with Success, to his wise and good Providence we must ascribe it. Thus *e. g.* if we would enjoy the Blessing
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of Health, we must expect it in a Course of Sobriety and Temperance; if we would obtain a Competency of worldly Wealth, we must seek it in a Way of honest prudent Industry; if we would acquire and maintain a good Name and Reputation, and the Love and Esteem of others, the best Way we can take, is to follow the Things that are true, and just, and pure, and lovely, and virtuous and praise-worthy; if we desire to succeed in any particular Design which we think to be of Importance to us, we must take those Measures which Prudence doth suggest, and which in the usual Course of Things are most likely to accomplish it; at the same Time applying to God by Prayer for a Blessing on these our honest Endeavours. And if in consequence of such Means and Endeavours, we meet with the wished for Success, we must ascribe it principally not to ourselves, but to the Disposal and Appointment of Divine Providence. And indeed whatever Advantages we enjoy by our own Prudence and Industry, and by a right Use of our Abilities and Opportunities, are as really the Effects of God's Providence to which we owe those Abilities and Opportunities, as if we obtained those Advantages from him in a more immediate Way, without any Pains or Endeavours

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deavours of our own. And in like Manner, with respect to the Benefits we receive from our Fellow-creatures, though we ought to retain and manifest a grateful Sense of their Kindness, yet we must look above them to God the supreme Benefactor, in whose Hand they are Instruments for doing us Good, and who so ordereth it, that the Effects of their Kindness extend particularly to us.

But if after all, we have not so large a Portion of these external Advantages as we perhaps could wish, we must consider that it is the Appointment of Providence, that God's faithful Servants, the Objects of his special Love and Favour, have often but a small Share of these temporal good Things. And this is so ordered for wise Ends, that they may not look upon such Things as these to be the principal Rewards of Piety and Virtue, or place too much of their Happiness and Satisfaction in them, but may raise their Hopes and Views to Blessings of a more durable and excellent Nature, reserved for them in a future State. And if, as is frequently the Case, *the ungodly prosper in the World, and increase in Riches*, we ought to be persuaded that God hath also wise Ends in permitting and appointing this: as I shall have Occasion more distinctly to shew, when I come to consider

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consider the Objection that is urged from thence against the Righteousness of Providence.

Secondly, All the evil and adverse Events which befall us, are under the Government and Disposal of Divine Providence. *Shall we receive Good at the Hand of God, saith Job, and shall we not receive Evil? Job. ii. 10. Shall there be Evil in a City, saith the Prophet, and it may be equally said, Shall there be Evil in a Family, or to a particular Person, and the Lord hath not done it? Amos iii. 6.* This is plainly to be understood, not of moral Evil, or the Evil of Sin, but of the Evil of Affliction or Adversity. In which Sense also God is introduced as declaring, *I make Peace, and create Evil. Isa. xlv. 7.* It is a general Appointment of Providence, that *through much Tribulation, through many Exercises and Trials of their Virtues, shall good Men enter into the Kingdom of God.* But we must not imagine that Providence hath no farther Concernment in their Trials, than by making this general Constitution or Appointment. The sending, or determining the particular Trials with which this or that Man shall be exercised, the ordering the Seasons and Circumstances of those Trials, and the continuing or removing them, is to be regarded as the Work
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of God's wise and sovereign Providence. Afflictions and Adversities are represented in Scripture as *the chastening of the Lord*. They are Instruments of Correction and Discipline, and are designed by him for excellent Ends, *viz.* to put us upon serious Reflections on our past Ways, to embitter Sin to us, to exercise our Faith, Patience, and Resignation, to disengage our Affections from this present World, and to turn our Thoughts and Views to a better. Not only are we to consider Divine Providence as concerning itself in those calamitous Events, which are in no wise owing to any human Agency, such as Pestilence, or epidemical Diseases, Storms, Earthquakes, Inundations, inclement Seasons, and the like; but even in those Evils and Afflictions, which are the immediate Effects of our own Folly and ill Conduct, and in those which are brought upon us by the Agency of our Fellow-creatures: Such as Injuries and Wrongs, undeserved Calumnies and Reproaches, Persecutions, and Acts of Violence. In all these Cases, we should look beyond second Causes to God the sovereign Disposer. For though he doth not put Men upon doing evil Actions, which are properly owing to the Corruptions of their own Hearts, yet he so over-ruleth those evil Actions, that the
Effects

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Effects of them light upon such particular Persons. And we must still take this along with us, that those wicked Men could not have done us those Injuries and Wrongs, if God had not for wise Ends permitted it, for our Correction or Punishment, or for the Exercise of our Virtues. A due Sense of this would greatly contribute to quiet and compose our Minds under Afflictions, and would cause us to reverence the Hand of God in them. It would help to take off some of our Resentments against our Fellow-creatures, and to allay the Bitterness of Revenge. And finally, it would put us upon endeavouring to make a right Use and Improvement of Afflictions, that we may comply with the Ends of Providence in sending them upon us.

Thirdly, The last Thing I would observe with regard to God's Government and Disposal of Events, is, that even fortuitous or casual Events are under the Superintendency of Divine Providence. Many of the Events that befall us, whether good or evil, are the Effects of Design in rational Agents, either ourselves or our Fellow-creatures. But there are also many Events which are usually looked upon as fortuitous, in which either inanimate or Brute Creatures are the Instruments; or if Men, they happen without any Intention on their
Parts,

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Parts, of producing such Events. Now all these, which we are apt to ascribe to Chance, and which cannot be attributed to any known designing Cause, are under the Disposal of a most wise and sovereign Providence. What is usually regarded more casual than the casting of a Lot? Yet the wise Man observeth, Prov. xvi. 33. *The Lot is cast into the Lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.* If a Man, without knowing or intending it, should kill another by a Chance-stroke, e. g. by the flying off of the Head of an Axe when cleaving Wood, or by throwing a Stone at random, without seeing or intending to hurt any Person; this would be looked upon as accidental Death; and it would be really so with regard to him that was the Occasion of it, but not with regard to God. For that Hatchet or Stone would not have hit or killed the Person that died by it, without the Direction or Permission of Divine Providence, which had a Design in it, though the Man who was the immediate Occasion of it, had not. And hence, in that Case, it is said, that the *Lord delivered* him that was thus accidentally killed, *into the Hand* of the Man, who without intending it killed him. *If a Man lie not in wait, but God deliver him into his Hand, then I will appoint him a Place*

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a Place whither he shall flee. See *Exod.* xxi. 13. compared with *Deut.* xix. 5. When a certain Man in the Syrian Host drew a Bow at a Venture, and smote King *Abab*, it was Providence directed the Shaft, to accomplish its Purposes in the Death of that Prince, according to what had been foretold concerning him, though the killing *Abab* was accidental, with respect to the Man that shot the Arrow. The coming of a Message to *Saul* to inform him that the *Philistines* had invaded the Land, just at the Time when he had almost surrounded *David* and his Company, might appear to be accidental; yet it was so ordered by Providence, with a View to deliver *David* from the imminent Danger to which he was exposed. See *1 Sam.* xxiii. 26, 27, 28. What could seem more accidental than the coming by of the *Iskmaelite* Merchants at the Time that *Joseph's* Brethren thought to put him to Death? And yet this slight Circumstance was ordered and over-ruled by Divine Providence, for carrying him into *Egypt*, which laid the Foundation of his future Fortunes. *Abasuerus's* not being able to sleep the Night before *Haman* intended to procure an Order from him for hanging *Mordecai*; and his calling for the Book of Records, or *Chronicles*, to be read before him, and happening to light upon

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that Part of the Book which relateth to *Mordecai's* Services; all these seem to be trifling Circumstances, and what we call purely accidental; and yet they were wisely ordered and disposed by Providence for bringing about great Events; the Advancement of *Mordecai*, the Destruction of *Haman*, and the Deliverance of the *Jewish* Nation. Such Events as these, seemingly so fortuitous, and yet conducted to important Ends, should awaken in us a lively Sense of Divine Providence, and should convince us that God governeth human Affairs, even in Cases which at first View appear to be the Effects of Chance.

When Persons in their private Affairs meet with what are regarded as lucky Hits, which are not the Result of their own or others Contrivance, and yet have a prosperous Effect; in all these Cases Providence is to be acknowledged. Many Instances of this Kind may be frequently observed with regard to ourselves and others. The same Observation may be made as to what we usually call evil and unlucky Accidents, as Casualties by Fire, sudden unexpected Hurts, &c. When any of these Things happen to us, we ought to consider the Hand of God in them, and to regard them as ordered and disposed by his Providence. And when we are

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preserved from such evil Accidents, and sudden unforeseen Perils, we have great Reason for Thankfulness, and should acknowledge the Care of Providence in watching over us, without which many such Things would befall us. Whereas they never happen, but when it seemeth fit to the Divine Providence they should happen, which hath always wise and just Ends in permitting or ordering it to be so.

Thus we have considered the Providence of God as disposing and governing all Events. Many important Reflections naturally arise upon this Subject.

First, What a profound Veneration should we conceive for the Deity, considered as the sovereign universal Disposer of all the Events that concern us, and how desirous should we be to please and serve him, and to secure an Interest in his Favour! When we regard him as presiding over Contingencies, and amidst all the endless Variations of human Affairs, conducting an amazing Multiplicity of Events without Distraction or Confusion, and with a proper Regard to human Liberty, how glorious should he be in our Esteem! And to heighten our Admiration, let us carry our Views farther, and consider him as ordering all Events, not only relating to the Individuals of the human Race, but to all the
numberless

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numberless Orders of Beings throughout this vast Universe. Such Knowledge is too wonderful for us, it exceeds our Comprehension, and that of every other finite Being. Who can duly consider this, and not admire and adore! But it should not merely fill us with Admiration, but should make us sollicitous above all Things to serve him, and approve ourselves in his Sight. How careful are we generally to make an Interest with those of our Fellow-creatures, on whom we have a Dependence, and who, we think, have it in their Power to do us great Service or Prejudice! But we should endeavour to get this fixed upon our Minds, that there is no Creature on whom we have the ten thousandth Part of the Dependence that we all have upon God. And shall we not therefore make it our principal Care and Endeavour to obtain his Approbation, and to walk before him unto all pleasing? Especially considering, that not only the Events relating to this present Life and World, but to those of a future eternal State, are in his Hands.

Secondly, The Consideration of God's disposing and governing all Events should engage us to acquiesce in that Lot and Condition, which it seemeth fit to him in his wise and sovereign Providence to assign us. This is not to be understood, as if,

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whatever Station or Circumstances we are in, it were unlawful for us to endeavour by proper and prudent Means to get into a more advantageous Situation, and to better our Condition and Circumstances. We must not cover our own Sloth, and Neglect of the Use of Means, with a Pretence of acquiescing in the divine Disposals. But if upon using all proper and lawful Endeavours, we have no reasonable Prospect of being able to alter our Circumstances to Advantage, we must acquiesce, and looking upon this as the Lot assigned us by Divine Providence, must endeavour to act suitably to it with a chearful and contented Mind. We must neither fret and repine at our own Condition, nor envy at the Success and Prosperity of others; for this would be in effect to charge God with an unequal Distribution. And whatever Station we are in, we should look upon it to be the Will of God, that we should fulfil the Duties of that Station whilst we are in it.

Thirdly, Another Duty we owe to Providence is to exercise an intire Submission and Resignation to God under all the Afflictions which befall us; and that not merely of Necessity because we cannot help it, but from Choice; from a Sense both of his absolute Propriety in us, and
 Dominion

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Dominion over us, and of his Wisdom, Righteousness, and Goodness, and that he ordereth all Things in the best and fittest Manner: We must never under our Sufferings allow ourselves to murmur against God, or to find Fault with his Dispensations, or give way to bitter Passions and Resentments, but must wait patiently for him, trusting that he has wise and holy Ends in laying Afflictions upon us, and that he will either deliver us from them in the fittest Season, or will support us under them, and cause them to work together for our Good.

This leads me to observe, thirdly, that since all Events are under the Government and Disposal of Divine Providence, we should commit ourselves and all our Ways unto the Lord, with a firm and steady Trust and Dependence. This is what is frequently and expressly required of us in the holy Scriptures, *Cast thy Burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee.* Psal. lv. 22. *Commit thy Way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass.* Psal. xxxvii. 5. *In all thy Ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy Paths.* Prov. iii. 6. With the diligent Use of all proper Means on our Parts, we must join Prayer to God, which is wisely appointed to preserve a due Sense of our constant

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Dependence upon his Providence, and to put us in mind that we ought not to attempt, or desire to obtain any Thing, but what we may safely commend to God, so as to look up to him for a Blessing with it. And when we have used our best Endeavours, we must place our Reliance on the divine Wisdom, Goodness, and All-sufficiency; by which I do not mean a Confidence that God will grant us the particular Thing which we desire, but that he will either do that for us, or do what is really as good or better, and that he will order all Things in the wisest and properest Manner. This it is to commit our Way unto the Lord, and to exercise a regular Trust and Dependence upon him. And it lays a solid Foundation for inward Peace and Satisfaction, and intitleth us to the divine Protection and Blessing. For God frequently assureth us in his Word of his special Care towards those who put their Trust in him. *Psal.* xxxi. 19. xxxiv. 8. and the whole xci. Psalm.

I shall conclude with this Observation.

How vast is the Advantage of a Man that looketh upon all Events as under the Direction of Divine Providence, above him who doth not consider the Hand of God in them? All the good Things he enjoys, come to him with a redoubled

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Sweetness and Pleasure, when he regards them as the Effects of the divine Favour and Goodness; and Afflictions appear with a quite different Aspect to him, from what they do to the irreligious and profane. It may be justly said of him, according to the Observation of the Psalmist, that *he shall not be afraid of evil Tidings; his Heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.* Psal. cxii. 7. He is prepared for all Events, and can never lose all Hope, or sink into utter Despondency under his Burdens and Pressures. And this lays a solid Foundation for a noble Fortitude. And whereas it hath been brought as a Charge against Religion, that a Dependence on Divine Providence, has a Tendency to make Men neglect the Use of Means; this is far from being a fair Representation of the Case. The truly religious Man, who rightly believeth and dependeth upon Divine Providence, is as careful as any Person whatsoever in the Use of all proper and lawful Means. For he not only uses them, as others do, as the most probable Way of succeeding in his Desires, but as a Duty laid upon him by the Authority and Will of God, and the stated Order of his Providence, which hath appointed that Means should be used on our Parts: but then, in this he has a signal Advantage above other Men, that

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if he meets with a Disappointment, he can calmly acquiesce, because he believes it to be ordered or permitted by the supreme Disposer, for wise and righteous Ends. This shews the great Benefit of Religion. It tends to produce a true Greatness of Soul, and directs us to a proper Conduct in every Circumstance. It manifestly contributeth to the Ease and Satisfaction of this present Life, as well as to prepare us for eternal Happiness in a future State.



Concerning

*Concerning the Wisdom of Divine
Providence.*

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ISAIAH xxviii. 29.

*This also cometh from the Lord of Hosts,
who is wonderful in Counsel, and excellent
in working.*

WE have in several Discourses taken
a general View of the Providence
of God as extending to the inanimate, to
the brutal and sensitive, and above all to
the rational Part of the Creation, especially
to Mankind. But besides what has been
already offered, there are several other Ob-
servations relating to this Subject, which
will tend to illustrate the Wisdom, the
Good-

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Goodness and Righteousness of God in his providential Dispensations, and to obviate some of the principal Objections that have been urged against Divine Providence. These are Things of no small Importance, and which deserve to be distinctly considered.

What I now propose is to offer some Considerations concerning the Wisdom of Providence, with regard to which we may justly make use of these Words of the Prophet, that he *is wonderful in Counsel, and excellent in working*. And this, if considered in its most comprehensive Notion, would open to us a Subject of vast Extent. The same Wisdom which established what we call the Course of Nature, and put Things into such an admirable Order in the Beginning, still continueth to maintain and direct the Course and Order of Things. All the general Laws by which the material System is governed, which, though few and simple, produce an amazing Variety of Effects, are so many standing Proofs of the divine Wisdom. And the most sagacious Enquirers into Nature, the farther they have carried their Enquiries into these Matters, have been struck with the greater Admiration and Astonishment. What marvellous Wisdom appears in the apt Connections and Correspondencies between
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the several Parts of this vast universal Frame, and in the steady Order and Regularity which is preserved amidst a numberless Multiplicity of Motions and Appearances, seemingly discordant and opposite to one another, yet all conspiring, without knowing it, to carry on the most wise Designs for the Good of the whole. The Wisdom of Providence still more remarkably appears in the animal World, in the admirable Powers and Instincts with which the various Tribes of vital and sensitive Beings are furnished, and whereby they are enabled to act in certain Cases with a surprising Sagacity, and are fitted for the several Functions and Enjoyments, which are suited to that Kind of Life for which they are designed. It appears also in the Provision that is made for the Continuation of their several Species, not one of which has been entirely lost or extinguished through so long a Succession of Ages.

But above all, the Wisdom of Providence is most eminently exercised towards rational and moral Agents, which are the noblest Part of the Creation. The human Constitution is a Master-piece of the divine Power and Skill, whether we consider the Fabric of the Body of Man, which compriseth a wonderful Variety of Parts in a small Compass, all harmoniously corresponding

sponding to one another, and excellently adapted to their several Ends and Uses, or the sublime Faculties of the human Soul, especially its intellectual and moral Powers. And Reason teacheth us to conclude, that the same infinite Wisdom which so wonderfully contrived and modelled the human Frame, still presideth over Mankind, and governeth them in the wisest and fittest Manner. And so undoubtedly it will appear, when the entire Scheme of Divine Providence towards Mankind is compleated, and his Designs are brought to their final important Issues. But at present we see only Parts of his Ways, and cannot have a full View of the Wisdom and Beauty of Divine Providence. And yet there are many Things in the present Course of God's Administrations, with respect to Mankind, in which a truly religious and thoughtful Mind may easily discern the Proofs of a sovereign Wisdom. This is manifest from several of the Observations that have been already made in the Prosecution of this Subject. How admirable must that Wisdom be which penetrates into the Secrets of Mens Hearts, and governs their Intentions and Counsels, their Actions and the Events which befall them, whether prosperous or adverse, and even those which seem to be most casual and fortuitous; and this
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without infringing the Liberty which be-
longeth to them as moral Agents, so that
whilst they think only of answering their
own particular Interests and Views, they
are really contributing to carry on the
Scheme of Divine Providence! But espe-
cially, who can comprehend that Wisdom,
whereby God over-ruleth the Sins of Men,
of which he is not the Author or the Cause,
for accomplishing his own excellent De-
signs! And whilst he permitteth bad Men
to act according to their own Inclinations,
causeth Good in numberless Instances to
arise out of those Evils, and bringeth Light
and Order out of Darknes and Confusion!
The Wisdom of God's Providence might
be also illustrated by a distinct Consideration
of his most remarkable Dispensations to-
wards the Church and World from the
Beginning, of which we have an excellent
Account in the sacred Writings, and which
ought greatly to recommend them to our Es-
teem. Some Hints have been already given
to this Purpose; but to treat this Subject
fully and distinctly would take a large Com-
pass. At present I shall only make a few
Observations on several Things in the di-
vine Proceedings towards Mankind, which
though at first View they may seem to have
a contrary Appearance, and have been ac-
tually found Fault with by Men of nar-
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row or corrupt Minds, yet are really upon the whole conducted with great Wisdom.

First, The Wisdom of God appeareth in bringing about great Events by the seemingly most inconsiderable and unlikely Means. How often have surprising Revolutions been effected by contemptible Instruments, or have had their first Rise in what we call Accidents, which appeared at first to be of no Consequence, and were slighted as not worth regarding! Mighty Armies have been overthrown by a weak and despised Enemy. Thus *Benbadad's* numerous Host was vanquished and put to a shameful Rout, by two hundred and fifty of the *young Men*, i. e. Servants who belonged to the *Princes of the Provinces*, followed by a Handful of the *Israelites*, whom he thought only of taking alive without any Difficulty. *1 Kings xx. 15,—21.* It is wisely ordered that such Things should sometimes happen, that when there is so great a seeming Disproportion between the Means made Use of and the Effects produced by them, Men may more plainly see, and be brought to acknowledge, the sovereign Agency of Divine Providence in ruling the Affairs of Men. In the first Establishment of the Christian Church, it pleased God to make use of
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the Ministry of the Apostles, who being destitute of all those Advantages and Accomplishments which are apt to attract the Regards and Admiration of Mankind, seemed the most unlikely Instruments that could be pitched upon for converting the Nations. But so it was appointed that, as *St. Paul* speaks, *the Excellency of the Power might be of God, i. e. might appear to be of God, and not of Men.* 2 Cor. iv. 7. *Not many wise Men after the Flesh, not many mighty, not many noble were called,* at the planting of the Gospel. 1 Cor. i. 26. And yet it soon made an astonishing Progress, through the divine Power and Blessing accompanying it. Whereas, if its first Propagators or Converts had been Men of great Power, Riches, Eloquence, and Interest, its Progress would not have been looked upon as so extraordinary; and there would have been some Pretence for regarding it as a cunningly devised Scheme of a wordly Nature and Original. The preaching of *Christ crucified*, which was to *the Greeks Foolishness*, triumphed over all their boasted Learning and Philosophy. Thus God chose the foolish Things of the World to confound the wise, and the weak Things of the World to confound the Things that are mighty; and base Things of the World, and Things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea,

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yea, and Things which are not, to bring to nought Things that are—that no Flesh might glory in his Presence, but he that glorieth might glory in the Lord. 1 Cor. i. 27, 28, 29, 31.

Secondly, Providence often accomplisheth its Designs by Means which not only seem small and inconsiderable, but contrary to the End proposed, and maketh the Counsels of Men subservient to Events quite opposite to their Intentions and Views. Thus the Decree procured by *Haman* for the Extirpation of the *Jews* proved, by the over-ruling Disposition of Divine Providence, the Means of their better Establishment, and of their getting rid of their bitterest Enemies. And the same *Haman's* waiting in the Court with a View to get an Order for hanging *Mordecai*, and the Counsel he then gave to the King, and which he intended for his own Honour, became the Occasion of procuring the highest Honours for him whom he above all Men hated and despised. These are remarkable Things, which when they happen fill us with Wonder, and should lead us to consider a most wise and comprehensive Mind presiding over human Affairs. Who had seen *Joseph* sold by his Brethren as a Slave, carried as such into *Egypt*, and afterwards cast into Prison upon the Accusation

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cufation laid againft him by his Mafter's Wife would not have thought him abfolutely ruined beyond Recovery? and perhaps have been ready to think hardly of Providence, for fuffering fo much Innocence and Virtue to be oppreffed? And yet by a furprifing Turn thefe very adverfe Events opened the Way for his Advancement to the higheft Dignities. *Jacob's* quitting *Canaan*, with his whole Family, and fettling in *Egypt*, which feemed to be in effect a giving up the Hope of the promifed Land, prepared the Way, at a long Diftance of Time, for his Pofterity's conquering and taking Poffeffion of it. The putting *Chrift* to Death, which the *Jews* intended, according to the Maxims of a worldly Policy, to discourage his Difciples, and fuppreff his Doctrines, and to hinder their Nation's being destroyed by the *Romans*, *John xi. 47, — 53.* both contributed to the fpreading of his Doctrines, and brought on the Deftruction of their Nation and Polity, which they feemed fo defirous to prevent.

Thirdly, Another remarkable Proof of the Wifdom of Divine Providence is the admirable Timing of Events, and ordering them in the fitteft Season, and in the propereft Manner. Of this we have a fignal Instance of the Time of *Chrift's* coming and Manifeftation in the Flefh. The

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Apostle observes, that *when the Fulness of the Time was come, God sent forth his Son made of a Woman, made under the Law.* Gal. iv. 4. The Time was come, which had been determined for that great Event in the divine Counsels, and many Things concurred to render it the fittest and properest Season. Learning, Eloquence, and the liberal Arts, had long flourished in the heathen World to a great Degree. But it appeared, that the *World*, by all their Wisdom, *knew not God*. It had been sufficiently tried, what Philosophy could do, and it was found ineffectual to recover the Nations from that absurd and gross Idolatry and Polytheism, and that amazing Corruption of Manners into which they were fallen, and which about the Time of our Saviour's appearing had arrived to the most monstrous Height. At the same Time the *Jews*, among whom alone the Worship of the true God free from Idolatry and Polytheism was preserved, were fallen in a great Measure from the true Spirit and Design of the Oeconomy they were under. They had lost the Substance of Religion in Forms and Traditions, and were become greatly corrupt in their Practice. The Church had been long enough disciplined under carnal Ordinances, and it was Time for a more spiritual Dispensation to succeed. Add
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to this, that the Way had been prepared for *Christ's* coming by a wonderful Series of Prophecies and Predictions, pointing to the Saviour that was to come, and to the Time of his coming, and to the most remarkable Parts of his Offices and Character, and which gave a mighty Force to the other illustrious Attestations, whereby his divine Mission was confirmed. The *Jews* were then spread in great Numbers through the Nations, and their Scriptures came to be generally known, being translated into *Greek*, the common Language, so that many were brought to look for the Messiah, and a general Expectation of the Appearance of an extraordinary Person about that Time prevailed. Thus there was a Concurrence of many Things to make it seasonable for the promised Redeemer to appear, and to introduce a new and more perfect Dispensation. To all which it may be added, that the greatest Part of the then known World was united in a peaceable Subjection to the *Roman* Dominion, which tended to facilitate the Progress of the Gospel through the several Parts of that wide extended Empire. And therefore instead of making it an Objection, as hath been often done, that *Christ* came no sooner, we should regard it as a great Proof of the divine Wisdom as well as Goodness,

that he appeared when he did, which was on many Accounts the properest Season for his appearing, and when the State and Circumstances of the World most required it, and were best suited to it.

Fourthly, The Wisdom of God's Providence is eminently displayed in humbling and casting down haughty Oppressors in the Height of their Pride, and in the Fulness of their Power, and in delivering his People when reduced to the greatest Extremity. Thus it was with regard to the bringing forth the *Israelites* out of *Egypt*. The Power of *Pharaoh* was at its Height; he thought none could oppose him, and therefore, in the Insolence of Presumption, said, *Who is the Lord that I should obey his Voice, and let Israel go?* *Exod. v. 2.* The *Israelites* were reduced to the lowest Distress; their Lives were made bitter through heavy Bondage, and they had no Expectation of Deliverance. And then it was that Providence interposed for humbling the Insolence of *Pharaoh*, and breaking his Power, and for rescuing the *Israelites* from their long continued Oppression and Bondage. It frequently happens, that when the Church and People of God are ready to say, *Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Will he be favourable no more?* when they are entangled as helpless *Birds* in the *Snare of the Fowler*; then through a most season-

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reasonable Interposition of Divine Providence, *the Snare is broken, and they escape*; so that they say with Thankfulness and a pious Confidence, *Our Help is in the Name of the Lord, who made Heaven and Earth.* Psal. cxxiv. 7, 8. In such Instances the Wisdom as well as Power of God is very conspicuous. This Way of Proceeding tendeth to hide Pride from Men, and to take them off from all Creature-dependence, that they may not make Flesh their Arm, but turn their Hopes and Views to God alone. It exerciseth their Faith and Patience, and putteth them upon earnest Prayers and Supplications, and afterwards giveth a peculiar Accent to their Praises and Thanksgivings. They are hereby better prepared for receiving and improving the intended Mercy; and it is a Ground of Reliance on God in their future Straits and Difficulties. Whereas if their Deliverance had come sooner, and in the Way they expected, before they were reduced to such Extremity, they might have been apt to ascribe too much to second Causes, and in a great Measure overlook the Providence of God. The 126th Psalm is remarkable to this Purpose. *When the Lord turned again the Captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our Mouth filled with Laughter, and our Tongue with singing.*

ing. Then said they among the Heathen, The Lord hath done great Things for them. The Lord hath done great Things for us, whereof we are glad. Psal. cxxvi. 1, 2, 3.

Fifthly, The Wisdom of Providence is also observable in conducting its Designs through different Paths to the same admirable Issue, and causing a Variety of Things to contribute to the same End. Providence often seemeth to go a great Way about for accomplishing its Designs, so that we scarce know whither Things are tending, till at length, when the whole is finished, it appeareth that every Thing was most wisely conducted. Some of the Instances that have been already mentioned are remarkable to this Purpose. What a Variety of Things concurred to *Joseph's* Advancement, some of which seemed to tend the quite contrary Way, and threatened his Ruin! By what a long Train of Incidents was the Way prepared for erecting the *Jewish* Polity, and settling *Israel* in the Land of *Canaan*! But especially it deserves to be considered that as no Event was ever so important as the coming of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, so never was any Event ushered in with so great and solemn Preparation. The glorious Scheme was laid from the Beginning; Things were disposing towards it for many Ages. The calling of *Abraham*, the choosing the Seed
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of *Jacob*, and keeping them distinct from the rest of Mankind, the whole *Mosaical* Oeconomy with its typical Rites and Ordinances, containing a Shadow of good Things to come, the raising up a Succession of Prophets, by whom God spake at sundry Times and in divers Manners; all these Things, which took up a long Time, were designed to be subservient to this most illustrious Event, this most amazing Dispensation of Divine Providence. And it was so ordered, that many Things in the civil State of the World did also contribute to the same End.

Sixthly, There are several Things relating to the Distribution of Rewards and Punishments in this present State, which at first View may have an odd Appearance, and yet, if carefully considered, shew the Wisdom of Divine Providence. It hath been often thought very strange, that bad Men should have temporal worldly Blessings and Advantages conferred upon them, and that good Men should be chastised with worldly Evils and Calamities; and yet upon an attentive Examination of the Case, it will appear, that it is very proper it should be frequently so in this State of Trial. But not to insist upon this at present, which shall be considered more at large when we come to vindicate the Righteousness of Di-

vine Providence; I shall now instance in two Things with regard to the present Distribution of Rewards and Punishments, which deserve our Notice. The one is, that the Rewards of Mens good Actions, and the Punishments of their evil ones, often extend to their Children or Posterity. The other is, the punishing Men for their Sins even after they have sincerely repented of them.

It cannot be reasonably denied, that the Rewards of Mens good Actions, and the Punishments of their evil ones, frequently extend in their Effects to their Children or Posterity. How often may we observe, that Persons fare the better for the Piety and Virtue of their Parents and Ancestors, and enjoy Advantages which were originally owing to the Goodness of those from whom they descended! And on the other Hand, the Effects of Mens Wickedness often fall heavy upon their Posterity. They frequently inherit distempered Bodies, Poverty, Disgrace, the Loss of Honours and worldly Substance, and other Evils, which were originally brought on by the bad Conduct of their Parents or Progenitors. This indeed never extendeth to the final Retributions of a future State, since it could not be thought just or fit, that any Persons should be made happy or
miserable

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miserable for ever, for the Virtues or Faults of their Parents or Ancestors. But it is wisely ordered, that it should be frequently so with regard to temporal Evils or Blessings in this State of Trial and Discipline, in which alone these Relations of Fathers and Children do properly subsist. It tendeth greatly to recommend Piety and Virtue, and to make the Benefits and happy Effects of it more conspicuous, when the Advantage of a Man's Virtues and Services overflows to his Children after him, and contributes to derive a Blessing upon them. And on the other Hand, it rendereth Sin and Vice more odious, and furnisheth powerful Dissuasives against it, to consider that the bad Effects of wicked Actions are not confined to those who commit them, but frequently extend to their Children too; so that a Concern for the Welfare of their Children and Families, as well as their own, should have a great Influence to engage Persons to the Practice of Religion and Virtue, and to deter them from vicious and ungodly Courses.

The other Thing I mentioned, and which deserves also to be considered, is, that God often seeth fit to punish Men for their Sins even after they have sincerely repented of them. Though he so far pardoneth them that they shall not be condemned, or made
miserable

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miserable on the Account of those Sins in a future State, yet he frequently ordereth it so that they suffer under the Effects of them in this. A remarkable Instance of which we have in God's Dealing with *David*. Though when he was brought to a deep and ingenuous Repentance for his Sins, the Prophet *Nathan* was commissioned to declare to him in the Name of God, *The Lord hath put away thy Sin, thou shalt not die.* 2 Sam. xii. 13. yet many and grievous Penalties were inflicted upon him; the most shocking Calamities were raised against him out of his own Family; all which were to be regarded as the Judgments of God upon him on the Account of his Sins. And this is certainly a very wise Procedure well suited to this State of Discipline, the more effectually to impress Mens Minds with a deep Sense of the great Evil of Sin, and God's just Displeasure against it; in that he will not let it go absolutely unpunished, even in those who have turned to him with a true Contrition. Let no Man, therefore, presume to venture upon Sin in the Hope and Expectation of Pardon upon Repentance; since even though his Repentance should be sincere, and of the right Kind, yet many bad Effects of his Sins may still continue. How often doth it happen that Persons, even after

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ter Repentance and Reformation, are made to *possess the Sins of their Youth!* In consequence of their former Vices they suffer by grievous Pains and Diseases of Body, or by Breaches made upon their Fortunes, even after they have heartily repented, and forsaken those Sins which first brought those Evils upon them.

Seventhly, The Inequality of Mens outward Conditions and Circumstances, the Uncertainty and Instability of human Affairs, and the many Vicissitudes to which they are subject, which have been often urged as Objections against Providence, do yet, if duly considered, furnish manifest Proofs of the divine Wisdom. It might easily be shewn that the remarkable Variety of Mens Conditions and Circumstances in this present State is much more wisely ordered, than if all Men were levelled to the same Condition. It gives greater Scope for Industry, and is better suited to the Variety of Mens Powers and Capacities. It would be as absurd to expect or require, that all Men in the Community or political Body should be in the same Station or Circumstances, as that all the Members of the natural Body should be exactly in the same Situation and Position. Different Abilities, Conditions, and Stations, are necessary to mutual Assistance and Dependence, and to
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the Exercise of social Virtues, and bind Men more strongly together in Society; all concurring in their several Ways to the Service and Advantage of one another, and of the whole. Those in an inferior Station are as useful and as necessary in their Place in Society, as those in a higher. And it is manifestly proper that most of Mankind should be in a low Condition, and have Tempers and Capacities fitted for it. So that it may be justly said, that the Difference of Genius's, Conditions, and Circumstances, tendeth to public Happiness, and to the greater Good of the whole; and that without it much of the Beauty, Order, and Harmony of Society would be lost.

The Uncertainty of Events, and Instability of human Affairs, is also very suitable to the Nature of a State of Trial and Discipline. It tendeth to humble our Vanity and Self-confidence, and to make us sensible of our Dependence upon a superior Power, as also to keep us from setting too high a Value on earthly Things, or seeking for Rest and Happiness in them. It should both prevent our being haughty and insolent when possessed of Riches and outward Advantages, and our being immoderately dejected when deprived of them. We are thereby farther instructed that the best Way
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we can take for our own Security, is to keep close to the Rule of Duty, which is a steady and constant Thing, and can alone make us uniform in our Conduct. Whereas those who without Regard to this, endeavour, according to the Maxims of a worldly Policy, to accommodate themselves to the Times, and to the present View of Affairs, often meet with miserable Disappointments through unforeseen Changes in the Face of Things; so that their own Arts turn to their Prejudice. It may be added, that these Uncertainties and Fluctuations of human Affairs often give an Opportunity to the Exercise of the noblest Virtues, such as Patience, Fortitude, Equanimity, and a steady Confidence in God under the severest Trials.

The last Thing I would mention with regard to the Wisdom of Providence, is this, that God often bringeth about his Designs by hidden Methods which we are unable to search out or to comprehend. This hath been frequently made an Objection against Providence. But whosoever considereth this Matter with Attention will be sensible, that if there be a Providence at all, many of its Methods must be unsearchable, and exceed our Comprehension. If it were otherwise, and we could easily comprehend all the Reasons of the divine
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Proceedings, we should be apt to entertain too low an Opinion of God's Wisdom, and too high an one of our own. It would look as if his Wisdom were finite and limited, and his Views short and narrow like ours. Among Men, they are accounted but shallow Politicians, all whose Counsels are easily penetrated by the Vulgar. It may therefore be justly affirmed, that if the World be wisely governed, there will be secret and hidden Ways of Providence. *It is the Glory of God to conceal a Thing*, saith the Wise-man. *Prov. xxv. 2.* It tendeth to the Glory of his Divine Majesty, that in many Instances he governeth by Methods which are concealed from us, and above our Reach. This hath a Tendency to keep us humble, and to exercise our Faith and Resignation to God, and constraineth us to cry out with a devout and awful Admiration, *Oh the Depth of the Riches both of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his Judgments, and his Ways past finding out!* *Rom. xi. 33.* We are told that secret Things belong to God. *Deut. xxix. 29.* *Verily*, saith the Prophet, *thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel the Saviour.* *Isa. xlv. 15.* Some of God's most remarkable Works of Providence in Favour of his Church and People have been

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brought about, not in that Way or Time, nor by those Means which they were apt to expect. The Things we are greatly afraid of, are often turned to our Advantage, and the Things from which we promised ourselves most Satisfaction, and upon which we built the greatest Expectations, prove vain and unprofitable, and even pernicious. This should convince us, what short-sighted Creatures we are, and that Things are conducted by a wise and sovereign Providence, compared with which the greatest human Sagacity is but Darkness and Folly.

I shall conclude with a few brief Reflections.

First, Let us delight to trace, as far as we are able, the glorious Footsteps of God's admirable Wisdom in his providential Dispensations. This is a worthy and noble Employment, when we engage in it not from a Principle of vain Curiosity, but from an earnest Desire to behold and adore the manifold Wisdom of God. We should often consider and review the wonderful Acts of his Providence, wrought in former Ages, which will help us in our Enquiries into his Proceedings, whether of a private or public Nature. *Whofo is wise and will observe these Things,* saith the Psalmist, speaking of the Acts of Divine Providence,

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even he shall understand the loving Kindness of the Lord. Pſal. cvii. 43. How venerable doth God appear as ordering all Things in the wiſeſt Manner! For nothing is more apt to engage our Admiration than Wiſdom. The Scriptures particularly ſpeak of the Wiſdom of God as moſt illuſtriouſly diſplayed in the Methods of our Redemption, which is the moſt ſignal Work of Providence, and the moſt beneficial to Mankind, that can be conceived. And therefore this ſhould be in a ſpecial Manner the Object of our devout Contemplations, for *herein God hath abounded towards us in all Wiſdom and Prudence.* Eph. i. 8. And theſe are *Things which the Angels themſelves deſire to look into.* 1 Pet. i. 12.

Secondly, When we are not able to account for God's Actings in the Methods of his Providence, let us not allow ourſelves to find Fault, but reſt ſatisfied in this Perſuaſion, that they are ordered for the wiſeſt Reaſons, though we do not at preſent diſcern thoſe Reaſons. It is manifeſt that we are ignorant of many Things, without the Knowledge of which we are incapable of forming a proper Judgment of the Reaſons of the divine Diſpenſations. It is but little that we know of the wonderful Works of God in the natural World, of the Eſſences and Conſtitutions of Things,

and their mutual Relations and Respects; nor are we acquainted with the Hearts of Men, their secret Intentions and Dispositions; and yet without knowing these we cannot in many Instances perceive the Propriety of his Dealings towards them. We are often ignorant of the special Ends which Providence hath in View, and therefore cannot rightly judge of the intermediate Events, and their Subserviency to those Ends. And there may be a vast Variety of Means to those Ends which we know nothing of. Our Views are narrow and partial, whereas those of Providence are of great Extent, taking in the Succession of all Times and Ages, and all the Connections and Relations of Things both to one another, and to the whole. We should therefore never take upon us to censure the divine Proceedings, but always attribute any seeming Irregularities in them to our own Shortfightedness, and to our not having a full View of Things in their proper Harmony. The Infiniteness of the divine Mind both shews that the Methods God is pleased to make use of must be in many Instances above our Comprehension, and at the same Time is the greatest Security that all Things shall be ordered in the best and fittest Manner; since no Demonstration is more certain than this, that infi-

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nite Wisdom must be always perfectly in the right, and can never take wrong or imperfect Measures.

This leads me to add,

Thirdly, That we ought to wait upon God in an implicit Dependence upon his sovereign Wisdom, leaving it to him to do Things in that Season, and in that Manner which appeareth to him to be the fittest. Nothing is more unbecoming such Creatures as we are, than to be fretful and discontented because Things are not done in our own Way; as if we could take upon us to prescribe to infinite Wisdom, and being God's Counsellors could teach him. Our Part is to wait patiently and constantly in a diligent Performance of our Duty, and in the Use of all proper Means, depending on him so to order Events in his great Wisdom, as shall be most for his Glory, and for our real Benefit. That is an excellent Advice which is given us, *Prov. iii. 5. Trust in the Lord with all thine Heart, and lean not unto thine own Understanding.* For as *Job* speaks, *with him is Wisdom and Strength, he hath Counsel and Understanding. Job. xii. 13. Blessed are all they that wait for him,* saith the Prophet. *Isa. xxx. 18.* And again, *Thou wilt keep him in perfect Peace,*
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whose

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whose Mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee. Isa. xxvi. 3. I shall conclude this Discourse with that comprehensive Doxology of the Apostle Paul, Rom. xvi. 27. To God only wise be Glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.



On the Goodness of Divine Providence.

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PSALM cxlv. 9.

The Lord is good to all, and his tender Mercies are over all his Works.

THE Goodness of God is frequently celebrated in the sacred Writings, and represented as furnishing the properest Subject for our joyful Praises and Acknowledgments. And in these Words of the Psalmist the great Extent of it is described, *The Lord is good to all, and his tender Mercies are over all his Works.* It was free and sovereign Goodness that moved him to create the World. He that made Hea-

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ven and Earth, and all Things that are therein, and who hath spread such Order and Beauty throughout this vast System, must be infinitely good, and kind, and beneficent. And the same Goodness which inclined him to create all these Things, will extend itself to them when created. And in this View how amiable and glorious doth he appear! We behold with Pleasure a Person of diffusive Benevolence, who delighteth in doing Good to all about him; and the more extensive his Benevolence is, the more he is the Object of our Admiration and Esteem. And from these imperfect Traces of Goodness in Creatures like ourselves, we are naturally led to the original universal Goodness, the supreme Benevolence. God, by implanting in us such a Sense of the Beauty, the Excellency, and Amiableness of such a Temper and Character, has taught us to raise our Affections and Views to him, the best and most excellent of Beings, in whom is Goodness without any Limitation or Defect. For what Limitation can there be to his Goodness, who is all-sufficient and self-sufficient, and who must therefore be incapable of Envy, or of any Malignity of Temper, or Narrowness of Disposition, and can never have his Benevolence cramped or confined by partial or selfish Interests,

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terests, since he hath nothing to gain or lose by any Being or Beings whatsoever? Infinitely happy in himself, and in the absolute Fulness of his own Perfection, he takes a divine Delight in distributing the Effects of his Bounty through the whole Creation. If the Sun were an intellectual Being, what a noble and extensive Pleasure may we suppose would it find in a Conscioufness of spreading Warmth, Light, and Joy, to enlighten, refresh, chear, and animate a World of Beings, which, without its invigorating Influences and Beams, would wither and languish, and be covered with Darknes and the Shadow of Death? But even this would exhibit but a very faint and imperfect Representation of the immense and boundless Benignity of the supreme Being, from whom the Sun derives its Influences and Rays, and who is the Fountain of Life and Happiness, not only to all the Creatures which inhabit this lower World, and the solar System, but to the several Orders of Beings throughout this vast Universe, the Extent of which transcendeth all human Imagination. Who can without a grateful Admiration consider the universal Providence of God as exercising its benign Care over all the various Kinds of Beings, sensitive, rational, and intellectual, preserving, cherishing,

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providing for them all according to their different Degrees of Life, and the several Powers and Capacities for Happiness which he has furnished them with? The very meanest are not neglected. Especially, how ravishing would it be, if we had the Beauties and Felicities of the heavenly World opened to us, and there beheld the divine Goodness shining forth in its highest Glory to all the Orders of the blessed Angels, the most eminent of created Beings! But this we must be content to be in a great Measure ignorant of till we get to Heaven. In the mean time, what it principally concerneth us to consider, is the Goodness of Divine Providence as exercised towards Mankind. Of this we have the most sensible and convincing Proofs. We taste, we feel the Effects of it every Day of our Lives; God hath not left himself without Witness in any Age or Nation of the World, in that he hath been continually doing Good, and pouring forth a Variety of Blessings and Benefits on the human Race. And yet there is scarce any Thing which has been more objected against than the Goodness of Providence; and that principally on the Account of the Evils and Miseries that are in the World, and which it is presumed would not be, if infinite Goodness governed the World,
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and presided over the Affairs of Men. This therefore is a Matter which deserves to be carefully considered, since to entertain wrong or disparaging Thoughts of the divine Goodness, would be of the most pernicious Consequence to Religion and Virtue.

In treating of this Subject I shall first lay down some Principles, which may be of Use for regulating our Notions of the divine Goodness, and which may tend to prevent or rectify Mistakes which Persons are apt to fall into concerning it.

Secondly, I shall make a general Representation of the Goodness of Divine Providence towards Mankind in this present State. And then shall proceed to consider the Objections that are raised against it.

First, I shall lay down some Principles which ought to be carefully attended to, in order to our forming right Notions of the divine Goodness, and of the Manner in which it is exercised.

1st, The Goodness of God and of his Providence, is not a blind inconsiderate Goodness, acting by a Necessity of Nature to the utmost of its Capacity; but it is a most wise Goodness, *i. e.* it is a Goodness always in Conjunction with, and under the Direction of infinite Wisdom. This is a Principle

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Principle so reasonable and evident, that it can scarce be contested; and yet the Objections which have been made against the Goodness of Divine Providence, seem to have been principally owing to Mens not attending to this as they ought. When they hear of infinite Goodness, they are apt to form a Notion of an absolute Goodness, acting always, and in every Instance, to the utmost possible Degree; and therefore they look upon every Evil which happeneth to the Creatures in any Part of the Universe, to be inconsistent with it. But it is manifest, that mere Goodness and Benevolence, let us suppose it never so great, if it acted necessarily, and in all Cases, without Distinction or Discernment, would lose much of its Excellency, and could scarce be accounted a Virtue or a Perfection. So it evidently is among Men. Goodness in a private Man, much more in a Prince, may be carried to an Excess, if it be exercised promiscuously without Consideration or Judgment. It is then that Goodness and Beneficence is truly admirable and praise-worthy, when it is in a happy Conjunction with Wisdom and Prudence, and is exercised towards proper Objects, at proper Seasons, and in proper Measures and Degrees. We must not imagine that God dispenseth his Benefits by a natural
Necessity;

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Necessity; as the Sun sendeth forth its Rays, and a Fountain its Streams. Such a Notion of the divine Goodness would be dishonourable to God, and of ill Consequence to the Interests of Religion and Virtue in the World. But his Goodness is that of a most holy and understanding Mind, and is always exercised in such a Way as seems most fit to his infinite Wisdom, and when considered in this View is most amiable and venerable, and such as becometh the infinitely perfect Being.

2dly, It must be farther considered, that the Goodness of God in his Providence, is the Goodness of a free and sovereign Benefactor, who is the absolute Lord of his own Gifts, and can dispense them in what Measures and Proportions he sees fit, of which he is certainly the best Judge. The Nature of Goodness no Way requires that he should exactly confer the same or equal Benefits upon all his Creatures, or make them all equal in their Capacities or Degrees of Excellence. For then there must have been only one Species of Beings created, and that of the highest Kind. Whereas it cannot be reasonably denied, that both the Wisdom and Goodness of God is eminently conspicuous in the creating and providing for numberless Species of Beings, from the higher Orders

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ders of created Intelligences, through all the various Degrees of Life, to the very lowest of sensitive Beings: those of an inferior Kind contributing, in their several Stations and Degrees, to the Beauty, Order, and Harmony of the Universe, as well as those of an higher. And as Goodness doth not require, that God should make all his Creatures of one and the same Species, so neither doth it require, that he should make all the Individuals of the same Species equal among themselves, and give them all precisely the same or equal Capacities and Advantages. It is in no wise inconsistent with the infinite Goodness of God, that he should dispense his Gifts and Blessings with great Variety. No wise Man pretends to find Fault with the Goodness of an earthly Prince or Benefactor, merely because he bestows his Favours in a larger Degree upon some Persons than upon others. And shall we confine the sovereign Lord of the Universe within narrower Limits than we do our Fellow-creatures, or make him less the Lord of his own Gifts than they are? The contrary is an absurd Notion of Goodness, neither founded in Reason, nor agreeable to Fact and Experience. And yet some Objections that have made a great Noise against the Goodness

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ness of Divine Providence, proceed upon this Supposition.

3dly, The Goodness of God as exercised towards Man, is farther to be considered as the Goodness of a moral Governor, and therefore it must be exercised in a Way suited to the Nature of moral Government. It must not therefore be extended equally at all Times to the good and bad. Nor must the Effects of it be bestowed indiscriminately upon Men however they behave, and without any Regard to their moral Conduct. For this would be to overthrow and dissolve all Government, and to confound the Differences between Good and Evil. If Men be moral Agents, and if God beareth towards them the Relation of a moral Governor, his Goodness must be dispensed towards them as becometh a wise and righteous Governor, and therefore cannot be inconsistent with the Exercise of his rectoral Justice, nor consequently with the inflicting Punishments upon obstinate Offenders. Yea, Goodness itself considered in the most extensive View requireth such Punishments to be inflicted, as tend to the Good of the whole, and to the preserving the Peace, Order, and Harmony of the moral World. No considering Man ever pretended that it is a Derogation from the Goodness of an earthly
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earthly Prince, that he takes Care to vindicate the Authority of his Laws, by causing Malefactors to be punished; but, on the contrary, would look upon it as a great Diminution of his Character, if he should suffer all Manner of Crimes to be committed with Impunity. And therefore no penal Evils can be properly objected against the Goodness of God's Providence, which are necessary to the Vindication of his Justice, or to answer the wise Ends of his Government, and secure the good Order of the World. And this Consideration, if duly attended to, would cut off many Objections which are confidently urged against the Goodness of Divine Providence.

4thly, In considering the divine Goodness as exercised towards Men here on Earth, we must regard them as in a sinful State, a State in which there are many and great Corruptions, and, at the same Time, as in a State of Trial and Discipline. There must therefore be such a Measure of Goodness and Happiness communicated, as is suited to the Nature and Design of such a State, *i. e.* there must be so much Goodness exercised towards Mankind, as may shew that this present State is a State of Discipline, a Dispensation of Mercy and Forbearance,
and

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and not a State of final Judgment; so much Goodness as ordinarily to over-balance the Evils and Calamities to which we are now exposed, and to render Man's Life on Earth tolerable, and generally agreeable; and yet not so much Goodness as is proper to a State of perfect Felicity, which would be no way suitable to the present Condition and Circumstances of Men here on Earth. It is very proper, yea it is absolutely necessary, that there should be a Mixture of natural Evils in this World, as a Check and Correction to the moral Evils which so much abound. An unmixed Prosperity, Ease, and Affluence, would be of the worst Consequence to Mankind in this present State. They are now no way fitted for it, and in all Probability it would, as Things are now circumstanced, render the World far more wicked, and consequently in the Issue far more miserable than it is. It would render bad Men more profligate, and would have an ill Effect on good Men themselves.

5thly, No Evils are a proper Objection against the Goodness of Providence, which are, in the End, productive of greater Good, and which are in their Design and Tendency beneficial upon the whole. No Rule of Goodness requireth, that even if Creatures were perfectly innocent,

cent, they should always be entirely exempted from all Pains and natural Evils. For the Advantages arising from the Exercise of Patience, Magnanimity, Fortitude, and the like excellent Dispositions, for which there would be no Trial if there were no Afflictions or Sufferings, would more than compensate for any present Uneasiness which these Things might occasion. Those Difficulties which tend to the Exercise and brighter Display of Virtue, will, upon the whole, contribute very much to the Enlargement of Happiness. God may, in his great Goodness, promise a perfect Felicity, without the least Mixture of Pain or afflictive Evils, as the Reward of a Virtue which hath proved victorious in Time of Trial. But, antecedently to such a Promise, there is nothing in the Nature of Things, which should render it unbecoming the divine Goodness to suffer an innocent Creature to be exercised with Afflictions and Troubles; and, in that Case, it would mightily heighten the Felicity and the Satisfaction of the Reward, that it cometh after such difficult Trials. And, if it be not inconsistent with the Goodness of God to lay Afflictions and Hardships even upon innocent Creatures, for the Trial and Exercise of their Virtues, provided these were followed with
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a proportionably greater Degree of Happiness; much less is it inconsistent with his Goodness to lay afflictive Evils upon sinful Creatures. Especially when it is considered, that in their Case something of this Kind seems to be absolutely necessary for recovering them from their moral Disorders, and for the Formation and Establishment of good and virtuous Habits. And if these Things are of a medicinal Nature, if they be made instrumental to correct and reclaim from bad Dispositions, or to strengthen and improve good ones, they answer a valuable End; and instead of being Objections against the Goodness of the supreme Ruler and Disposer, are Proofs both of his Wisdom, and of his Goodness too. For in judging of the Goodness of Providence towards reasonable Creatures, we must take in the whole of their Existence; and that may be said to be really best for them, which is the best upon the whole, and in the final Issue of Things.

Having premised these Principles for clearing our Way, let us now proceed, secondly, to take a general View of the Goodness of Divine Providence towards Mankind as appearing in this present State.

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Although, according to the Account the Scripture gives us, this Earth would have been a happier, a more delightful Place, if Man had continued in a State of Innocence; and although there was an Alteration for the worse in the Face of this lower World, when Man, the chief Inhabitant and Lord of it, sinned against his Maker (which very Alteration was intended for wise and righteous Purposes); yet still it is certain, that even in this present State, *the Earth is full of the Goodness of the Lord.* Psal. xxxiii. 5. civ. 24. Who can undertake to enumerate the various Blessings of a common bountiful Providence? We have not a bare Existence given us, but there is ample Provision made for rendering it agreeable. Many Things concur to make this Earth, in which we dwell, a delightful Habitation. Its Surface is, for the most part, covered with a refreshing Verdure. If we look around us, we may behold the grateful Intermixture of Hills and Dales, lofty Mountains, and wide extended Plains and Lawns, Rivers and Fountains, Woods and Groves, and all the admirable Varieties of the vegetable Kingdom, Plants, Trees, Fruits, and Flowers, of manifold Use and exquisite Beauty, together with the several Kinds of Grain, and other Productions, which
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the Earth brings forth in great Abundance, *Grass for the Cattle, and Herb for the Service of Man.* If we descend into the Bowels of the Earth, it is replenished with hidden Treasures, vast Quantities of Materials, capable of being employed by human Art, which is also the Gift of God, for serving a thousand Purposes in Life, both for real Use, and for Ornament. Even the great and wide Sea, that seemingly boisterous and raging Element, is, in many Instances, subservient to Man's Convenience and to his Pleasure. And if we turn our Views from the inanimate Creation to the various Kinds of living Creatures which inhabit the Earth, Sea, and Air, we shall find that as they are all endued with admirable Powers and Instincts, and are provided with every Thing necessary for the Sustenance and Entertainment of their sensitive animal Life, so they do, in their several Ways, contribute to the Service and the Delight of Mankind. If we look above us, we behold the magnificent Arch of Heaven stretched over us with all its rich and radiant Furniture, a Sight beyond Imagination beautiful and glorious. We are placed in the midst of an august and ample Theatre, than which nothing can be better fitted to strike the Eye, and to fill the Mind with Pleasure

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and Astonishment. Our Saviour justly represents it as a manifest Proof of the Goodness of God, that he causeth his Sun to shine, and his Rain to descend, even upon the unthankful and the evil. And St. Paul declares, that *God hath not left himself without Witness, in any Age, in that he did Good, and gave Rain from Heaven and fruitful Seasons, filling our Hearts with Food and Gladness.* Acts xiv. 17. When the Air breathes upon us its balmy Influence, when we feel the warm, sprightly, chearing Rays of the Sun, and behold it illuminating and beautifying the Face of Nature, and revealing innumerable Objects to our View, in all the Diversity of pleasing Colours and Prospects; when we see refreshing Rains descend, the Earth made soft with Showers, and the little Hills rejoicing on every Side; when, on the other Hand, we behold the various Beauties of a frosty Scene, and snowy Landscape; when we observe the constant regular Vicissitudes of Day and Night, and the orderly Succession of Seasons, Summer and Winter, Seed-time and Harvest, each of them in their several Ways useful and beautiful; surely, in all these Things the Goodness and Benignity of the great Parent of the Universe, and the constant Care he takes of his Creatures, as well as his great Wisdom,

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Wisdom, is eminently conspicuous. He hath so constituted us, that even the necessary Means of our Nourishment, of sustaining and preserving Life, yield us very pleasing Sensations. We cannot satisfy the necessary Cravings of Nature, Hunger, Thirst, and other Appetites, without feeling a sensible Gratification. The Pleasures we take in by the Eye, the Ear, the Taste, and other Senses, are sufficient to make most Men desire Life, notwithstanding the Hardships which may attend it. The Blessings of Providence that have been mentioned, are, in general, spread through all Nations and Countries. Even those Parts of the Earth, which perhaps to others seem to be uncomfortable and inhospitable Regions, yet have their Advantages and Comforts which recommend them to the Inhabitants, so that they would not be willing to change their Clime. To which it may be added, that the poor enjoy the Pleasures of Nature as well as the rich, yea and very often have really more Enjoyment of these Things, and a more exquisite Sensation of them, than those whose abused Plenty and Affluence overwhelms Nature, clogs their Senses, and prevents their waiting the Returns of Appetite. The most valuable sensible Blessings of Life are common to all Men.

But there are Pleasures provided for Men of a far higher and nobler Kind than those that arise merely from the Gratification of the sensitive Appetites. Such are, besides the Pleasures of the Imagination, which are of a large Extent, and strike the Mind with great Force, the Pleasures that are to be found in the Pursuits and Acquisitions of Knowledge and Science, which open to us a thousand Avenues of pure and refined Entertainments; and the nobler Pleasures that result from the Exercise of the kind and social Affections, from good Actions, generous Emotions, from Love, Gratitude, Benevolence; but above all, the divine Joys of Religion, the Satisfaction which flows from the Testimony of a good Conscience, from the Contemplation and Worship of the Deity, and the Exercise of pious and devout Affections towards him, and from a Sense of his Favour and Approbation, and the pleasing Hopes of a happy Immortality, which Man alone of all the Creatures in this lower World is capable of entertaining, and which have been the great Support and Comfort of the best of Men in all Ages.

Such are the Pleasures which the human Nature is made capable of even in this present State. And doth not this shew the great Goodness of God towards Mankind,
that

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that there is a Way opened for them to such various Pleasures and Gratifications, and even to those of the noblest Nature, if they will but make it their earnest Endeavour in the Use of all proper Means to obtain them? And it is very fit they should strive, and exert their utmost Diligence to this Purpose. For it is a most wise general Law of Providence, that nothing excellent and truly valuable is to be obtained without Diligence. And what is thus obtained yieldeth a more exquisite Relish and Enjoyment.

I shall conclude with some suitable Reflections.

And first, From this general View of the divine Goodness, we may see that God is most justly intitled to our highest Love, Admiration, and Esteem. Since we are the only Creatures in this lower World capable of contemplating, loving, and adoring him, and since we have so many undoubted Proofs of his Goodness in the Frame of Nature, in our own Bodies and Souls, and in the numberless Benefits of his common bountiful Providence, surely we should all join to make up one universal Chorus in grateful Acknowledgments to our supreme Benefactor. That Profusion of Blessings which is spread through every Part of the Creation that cometh within

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our Notice, could only proceed from a most beneficent Being. The better to affect our Hearts, let us consider what a Condition we should be in, if we wanted any of the common Benefits which Providence hath provided for our Use and Entertainment; if we were deprived of the comforting Beams of the Sun, or had not the Moon to cheer us in the Night-seasons; if the Earth were not so plentifully furnished with Rivers and Fountains to supply us with Waters, or there were no Metals and Minerals in its Bowels, or Plants and Trees to adorn its Surface; or if Men were left alone upon the Earth without any of the inferior Brute Animals to minister to their Necessities or Convenience; if we were obliged to the Drudgery of eating and drinking merely to support Life, without ever relishing any Pleasure in the Gratification of our natural Appetites; or if we stately wanted any one of the Senses which we are now furnished with. When this happens to be our Case for a Time, and Things are so circumstanced, that we are shut out from the Use and Enjoyment of any of the common Gifts and Blessings of Providence, we then are made sensible of the Advantage of them. But for the most part, through a strange Inattention or Insensibility of Mind, because they are so

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common, we pass them over with a slight Regard: Whereas, the Commonness of them is what above all shews the Extensiveness and the Riches of the divine Liberality. Let us guard against a Temper so unbecoming reasonable and thinking Beings, and do all we can to cherish in our Souls the warm and lively Emotions of Love and Gratitude towards our heavenly Father, and constant gracious Benefactor, and not suffer every little Disappointment we meet with to mar the Relish of the innumerable Benefits we receive. We ought often to consider the Goodness of God, not only as extending to all Mankind in general, but as exercised towards ourselves in particular. How manifold are the Experiences we have had of his kind Providence watching over us and taking Care of us in every Stage and Condition of Life, delivering us from Dangers, supporting us under our Distresses, and providing for us out of the Stores of his Bounty! All the Blessings of every Kind that we have ever received, or which we now enjoy, spiritual and temporal, whether relating to our Bodies or to our Souls, yea, and the Acts of Kindness done us, and the Benefits we receive, by the Hands of our earthly Benefactors, are to be ultimately ascribed to the Goodness of a sovereign superintending Providence.

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It should therefore be our Language, as it was that of the devout Psalmist, *How precious are thy Thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the Sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in Number than the Sand: when I wake, I am still with thee. Bless the Lord, O my Soul, and let all that is within me bless his holy Name. Bless the Lord, O my Soul, and forget not all his Benefits.* And it should mightily enhance the Goodness of God towards us, to reflect that in many Things we all offend, and yet are daily receiving the Effects of his Goodness and Benignity. It is astonishing to think what heinous Sins are committed, what Indignities are offered to the divine Majesty, whose Goodness still continueth to strive with the Perverseness of Men in this present State of Trial and Discipline, and poureth forth a great Variety of Benefits upon the degenerate human Race. But above all it should fill us with the highest Admiration of God's infinite Goodness to consider the wonderful Methods of his Wisdom and Grace for the Salvation of lost Sinners, in sending his own Son to redeem us, and his Holy Spirit to assist, guide, and comfort us in this Pilgrimage State, and in promising to crown our sincere, though imperfect Obedience, with a glorious Resurrection and eternal Life. This openeth to

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us a most marvellous and delightful Scene, in which God's infinite Love to Mankind shines with the brightest Glory. And now what should be the Effect of all this Goodness upon our Hearts? The properest Return we can make, is to love him with a superlative Affection, and to manifest the Sincerity of our Love by the best Expressions of it that are in our Power, *viz.* not only by praising and blessing his great and most excellent Name, but by keeping his Commandments, and making it our continual Endeavour to please and serve him, and to glorify him in the World, and especially by imitating his supreme Goodness and Benevolence, in doing Good to all as far as we have Ability and Opportunity, and even rendering Good for Evil. By such a Conformity to him in his infinite Goodness, we shall be fitted for the Enjoyment of him, and for being happy in his Love to all Eternity.

Lastly. I would conclude with warning you to beware of abusing the divine Goodness. There is nothing which aggravateth the Evil of Sin so much, as that it is committed against the Love and Goodness of the best of Beings, our most gracious and bountiful Benefactor. To take Encouragement from the Mercies of God, to per-
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sist in a presumptuous Opposition to his Authority and Laws, has something in it so strangely base and disingenuous, that it exceedeth the Power of Language to describe the Malignity of it. If any Man should declare in express Words, because God is infinitely good, and is daily loading us with his Benefits, therefore I will offend and dishonour him, I will disobey his Laws, and cast Contempt upon his Government; I say, if we should hear any Man openly declare this in so many Words, it would appear so monstrous, that it would be apt to fill our Souls with Horror. And yet thus it is that Sinners act; whatever they may profess in Words, this is the real Language of their Practice. They presume upon his Mercy and Indulgence, and flatter themselves that he is so good that he will not be severe to punish their Transgressions; and therefore they allow themselves to violate his holy Commands, and fly in the Face of his Authority and Government; and instead of being led by the Blessings he vouchsafes them to love and obey him, employ them in making Provision for the Flesh to fulfil the Lusts thereof. Thus they *despise the Riches of his Goodness and Forbearance, and Long-suffering, not knowing,*

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i. e. not considering, *that the Goodness of God leadeth to Repentance.* Rom. ii. 4. But let such Persons consider that the Goodness of God is not a soft weak Tenderness like that of a too fond and indulgent Parent, or of a good-natured, but unsteady Prince, who has not Resolution enough to vindicate his Authority and Laws from Contempt: But his Goodness, as was before observed, is such as becometh the wise and just Governor of the World, and is exercised in such a Manner as is agreeable to his most perfect Wisdom, Righteousness, and Equity. If therefore we be so base and disingenuous as to continue and abound in Sin, because Grace aboundeth, we shall find in the Issue that abused Goodness is the most dreadful Thing in the World. By wilful continued Impenitency and Disobedience we shall shut our Souls against the Influences and Irradiations of the supreme Love and Goodness. And then though God be infinitely good, we shall be miserable, we shall banish ourselves from the Joys of his beatific Presence, and shall draw down upon us the most awful Effects of his righteous Displeasure. It is only in a Course of sincere Piety and Virtue that we can expect to be admitted to the sacred Intimacies of Communion with
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the God of Love, and may upon good Grounds look forwards with Joy to that glorious State where infinite Love shall take us into its nearest Embraces, and we shall be perfectly happy in the immediate Vision and Fruition of the Deity to all Eternity.



*Objections against the Goodness of
Providence considered.*

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PSALM cxlv. 9.

The Lord is good to all, and his tender Mercies are over all his Works.

IN my former Discourse on these Words several Principles were laid down for leading us into right Notions of the divine Goodness, and the Manner in which it is exercised towards his Creatures; and then we proceeded to make a general Representation of the Goodness of Providence towards Mankind in this present State.

It now remains that we consider the Objections which are urged against it. And these are principally drawn from the great Difference that is made between some of the human Race and others in the Distributions of the Gifts and Blessings of Divine Providence; or from the Variety of Evils and Miseries to which Mankind are subject in this present State, and which could scarce be supposed to be the Case if infinite Goodness governed the World.

First, It is objected against the universal Goodness of God, that there is great Difference made between some and others of the human Race, in the Distribution of the Gifts and Blessings of Divine Providence. The Matter of Fact cannot well be denied. It is true that with regard to the Incapacity of Mens outward Conditions and Circumstances it might easily be shewn, that the Difference arising from thence between some and others in real Satisfaction and Enjoyment, is not near so great as many are apt to imagine; since a low Station hath its Advantages, and Persons in mean Circumstances are often free from Inconveniences, to which those in higher Stations and more splendid Circumstances are subject. It may be said therefore, that Happiness is in this Respect more equally diffused among Mankind, than it seems to be

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be to a superficial Observer. Yet still it must be acknowledged that the Goodness of Providence is more remarkably dispensed to some of the human Race than to others. Some whole Nations are in a more advantageous Situation than others, with respect to Opportunities of Improvement in Arts and Sciences, and useful Knowledge, especially in moral and religious Knowledge. Nor can it be denied, that in the same Nation some particular Persons have superior Genius's and Capacities, finer Endowments than others, happier natural Tempers and Dispositions, better Education and Instruction, and greater Advantages for virtuous Improvement. These Things are to be regarded as under the Direction of Divine Providence. And this is analogous to its Way of acting in all Parts of the Universe that we are acquainted with, since we may every where observe different Degrees of Excellence and Happiness among different Species of Beings, and among the several Individuals of the same Species.

But granting this to be the Truth of the Fact, it is not easy to see with what Pretence of Reason it can be made an Objection against the Goodness of Divine Providence. Doth it follow that God is not good, though he doeth much Good to all, because the Effects of his Goodness are ex-

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tended in a greater Measure and Degree to some than to others? The Goodness of God, as hath been already observed, is the Goodness of a sovereign Benefactor, who is the absolute Lord of his own Gifts. And if he dispenseth the Effects of his free Benignity to different Persons in different Proportions, according to his good Pleasure (for which undoubtedly he hath always wise Reasons, though we may not know those Reasons) this must be acknowledged to be an Exercise of his Sovereignty, but is no real Objection against his Goodness.

It was shewn in a former Discourse, that God hath done a great deal in the Course of his Providence, to promote the Knowledge and Practice of Religion and Virtue among Mankind. He hath given to all Men the Light of Nature and Reason, which, if duly improved, might be of great Benefit. And it appears from Scripture, that there were important Discoveries made to the first Ancestors of the human Race, which if carefully preserved and propagated as they ought to have been, might have been of signal Use, for maintaining a Sense of Religion, and the Knowledge and Fear of God. And if the Nations did in Process of Time lose or abuse both the Light of Nature, and the additional

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tional Notices and important Traditions, derived from the first Ages, and which were originally owing to extraordinary Revelation, the Blame must be charged wholly upon themselves. It was because *they liked not to retain God in their Knowledge, and became vain in their Imaginations, and their foolish Heart was darkened,* and they most inexcusably revolted from God to Idols, and *serv'd and worshipp'd the Creature more than the Creator.* We are not sufficiently acquainted with the History of Mankind, to know what Helps and Advantages God may in his Providence have vouchsafed from Time to Time in different Parts of the Earth. But it is not improbable that some Helps and Advantages may have been formerly granted, even to Nations which appear now to be the most deeply immerf'd in Ignorance, Idolatry, and Barbarism; among some of whom there are Traces to be found of Usages, which seem to shew that they formerly had some Knowledge of the true Religion. And if at length they almost entirely extinguish'd it, it would be an inexcusable Rashness to arraign the Justice or Goodness of God, on the Account of that which was the Effect of their own culpable Negligence and Corruption. And if God has been graciously pleas'd to grant more frequent and extra-

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ordinary Advantages for Knowledge and Improvement to some other Nations, it would be an odd Thing in them that are thus highly favoured, instead of gratefully acknowledging and adoring the distinguishing Goodness of God towards them, to find Fault with his Providence, because all are not possessed of the same Advantages. Their Business and Duty is to make a right Use of their own Privileges, and to bless God for them; and as to others that want them, to leave them to the Mercy of God, who we may be sure has wise Reasons for his Procedure towards them, and will deal justly and equitably with them, and will make all proper Allowances in the Judgment of the great Day for the Disadvantages they were under. And this is sufficient to satisfy a reasonable and unprejudiced Mind, and ought to prevent or silence all Murmurings against the divine Goodness on that account.

I proceed now, secondly, to consider the Objection which is brought against the Goodness of Providence, from the Evils and Miseries that abound in the World, and to which Mankind are now subject. These are too many to be distinctly enumerated. How often are Men tormented with grievous Pains and Diseases of Body,

which occasion the most bitter and dolorous

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rous Sensations ! Or they are perplexed with anxious distracting Cares, or they meet with vexatious Crosses and Disappointments, pinching Straits and Difficulties, and a Variety of Troubles and Sorrows, which in a great measure destroy the Comfort of Life. Every State and Condition hath its Uneasiness attending it, from which those that are looked upon to be in the happiest Circumstances are not exempted. So that it may be justly said, that *Man that is born of a Woman is of few Days and full of Trouble.* Job. xiv. 1. To which it may be added, those Calamities which are of a more extensive Nature, inclement Seasons, Famines, Pestilences, Earthquakes, public Devastations, in which whole Nations or large Communities are involved.

This must be acknowledged to be a considerable Difficulty. But it ought not to make us doubt of the divine Goodness, of which we have so many convincing Proofs. It is not to be wondered at, that there are some Things in the present Course of the divine Dispensations, which we find it hard to account for. This ought to be attributed to the Narrowness of our Views ; and we should be persuaded that all those Difficulties would be perfectly cleared up to us, if we could behold the whole Extent of God's Providence and Government as

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taking in all Nations and Ages, and the Reasons and Ends of his Dispensations in their proper Connexion and Harmony. But besides this general Consideration, several Things may be offered which will help to take off the Force of the Objection.

First, Let it be considered, that many of those that are called physical or natural Evils, are the Effects of excellent general Laws, which are manifestly for the Advantage of the whole. Thus *e. g.* many of the uneasy or painful Sensations which we feel, are designed to remind us of supplying the Necessities, or repairing the Decays of Nature, or to put us upon our guard against what would prove pernicious or destructive to our Constitution. Of this kind is Hunger and Thirst, and the Pains that accompany Hurts or Wounds, and broken or dislocated Bones, and the Sickness which attends a distempered State of Body. These Things tend to put us upon using proper Methods or Remedies, and if it were not so, we should be apt to neglect a due Care of ourselves, and the maintaining or preserving our Constitution, which might in that Case fall into Ruin before we were aware. By the same Law by which Pleasure and Ease is annexed to a sound Constitution of Body, Sickness and Pain must be annexed to an unsound or dis-

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disordered one. By the same Rule that the bodily Organs are so disposed as to receive agreeable Sensations from certain Objects; that are fitly proportioned to them, others which are disproportioned to them will occasion disagreeable Sensations. For it would be absurd to suppose that our Senses should be so constituted as that Objects should be alike to them. For this would be to suppose, that our sensitive Organs should have no determinate Power or Figure at all, since if they have, some Things will be well fitted to them, and others not; and these must strike the Senses in a different Manner, except they be so formed, as not to be affected by any Thing at all; and I believe none will say, that this would be so good a Constitution as the present, or that it would be for our greater Advantage and Happiness that it should be so.

Secondly, It is to be considered, that most of the Evils and Miseries which now disturb human Life, are owing to Men themselves, and are the Effects of their Sins. And why should Providence be charged with the Evils that Men bring upon themselves by their own ill Conduct? They are indeed very prone to lay the Blame of their own Miscarriages upon God and his Providence. *The Foolishness of a Man perverteth his Way, and his Heart fretteth*

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against the Lord. Prov. xix. 3. But this is highly unreasonable. Nothing can be more fit and just than that Men should suffer by their own Sins, and so feel by Experience what an *evil and bitter Thing it is* that they have sinned against God. Mens Pride, Envy, Revenge, Discontent, and ungoverned Passions, do more to embitter their Lives than any outward Evils whatsoever, which without these would be comparatively light and tolerable. And many even of the outward Evils Men suffer are brought upon them by their own Vices, or at least by their Rashness and Folly, their Wilfulness or Negligence; or by the Sins and injurious Actions of other Men. The near Conjunction of Men in Society produceth in general many good Effects, and tendeth greatly to the Advantage and Satisfaction of human Life; yet it often happeneth that in consequence of this Conjunction they are exposed to Evils from one anothers Actions. And this cannot be entirely prevented without absolutely excluding them from each others Society and Intercourse, which would produce much greater Inconveniences. To which may be added, that it is very wisely permitted, that Men should suffer by the Sins of others, the more effectually to convince them of the Evil of Sin, and excite in them an Abhorrencè

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horrence of it. When we ourselves are guilty of bad Actions, we are apt to be so blinded by our Passions, and by our Self-love and Partiality in our own Favour, that we have not a just Sense of the Evil of such a Conduct. But we are made thoroughly sensible of the great Evil of Injustice, Fraud, Violence, Debauchery, when we or our Families suffer under the evil Effects of them as done by others.

Whosoever thinks impartially must be convinced, that there could be no preventing the Misery that is in the World without preventing Mens Sins. If it be urged that a World governed by infinite Goodness ought to be so ordered, that there should be no Misery at all, and therefore no Sin; this is in effect to say, that in a World governed by infinite Goodness, there should be no Creatures made with a Freedom of moral Agency, or endued with a Power of chusing or doing Good or Evil, and of determining their own Actions. But since Liberty and a self-determining Power, Reason, and Choice, are certainly noble Faculties, how will it be proved that the making Creatures endued with these Faculties is inconsistent with infinite Wisdom and Goodness? And if not the making them, then neither is the governing them according to their Natures, that is,

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governing them as becometh moral Agents, and leaving them to their own free Choice and Liberty, inconsistent with infinite Goodness. And if they be left to their own free Choice, this is to put it in their Power to make themselves miserable. But it is sufficient in that Case to vindicate the Goodness of God, that they shall not be miserable but by their own Fault, and that it is in their Power by a proper Choice and Course of Action to procure to themselves a high Degree of Happiness and Perfection, vastly superior to what merely sensitive Beings are capable of. In a System where there are rational and free Agents, by the same wise and excellent Rules according to which certain Ways of chusing and acting will produce happy and beneficial Effects, the contrary Choices and Actions will have contrary Effects, and be productive of evil and hurtful Consequences. Nor can this Constitution be justly found fault with, but must be acknowledged to be fitly ordered, and to be calculated for the general Good. And it is evident, that if there were no such Creatures as free Agents, the World would be far less perfect than now it is, and that there would be much less Happiness upon the whole. The Happiness they are capable of enjoying is of a more excellent Kind than

than they could have enjoyed, if they had not a Power of chusing and acting freely. How great is the Satisfaction arising from the overcoming great Temptations, from Constancy, Fortitude, and all the pleasing Reflections on past Trials! and from the gradual Improvement of the intellectual and moral Powers, till they are made perfectly happy in the noblest Exercises and Enjoyments! And it shall give a peculiar Relish to their Felicity, that it shall come to them as the Effect of their own Conduct, and the Reward of their Piety and Virtue. And, on the other Hand, if there be Misery in consequence of the ill Conduct of rational moral Agents, this is not to be charged upon Divine Providence, since it is wholly owing to their own Abuse of the noblest Powers, and of the excellent and high Prerogative of Reason, Liberty, and free Agency.

It might indeed be reasonably expected from the infinite Goodness, as well as Holiness of God, that he should use all proper Methods becoming a moral Governor, and consistent with the Liberty of moral Agents, to hinder them from committing Sin, and to engage them to a holy and virtuous Practice: And this (as I have had Occasion to observe before) he hath done, by implanting in the Hearts of Men, a
Sense

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Sense of the Beauty and Excellency of Virtue, and the Turpitude and Deformity of Vice and Sin, by the Stings and Remorse of natural Conscience, by the Precepts and Threatnings of his holy Law, forbidding Sin, and denouncing the most awful Threatnings against it, and by ordering it so, that it exposeth Men to many Evils in this present Constitution of Things. And what could he be expected to do more, except he exerted his own almighty Power to prevent all Men sinning, which could not be done without putting a perpetual Constraint upon them, and abridging them of their natural Liberty and Freedom? And yet after all, it may be justly said, that there would be far more of those Evils in the World, which are the Effect of Mens Sins, if a merciful Providence did not interpose, and avert a great deal of the Evil that Sin would otherwise introduce; and which, were Men left merely to themselves, without a wise and good presiding Mind, would render the Earth tenfold more miserable than it is.

Thirdly, Another Thing that is proper to be considered on this Subject, is, that many of the Things that are accounted Evils here on Earth, are more so in Opinion than in Reality. And why should the Goodness of Providence be arraigned for Evils,

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Evils, the Stings of which lie in the wrong Judgment or Imagination Men form concerning them? Our Duty in this Case is not to accuse the divine Goodness, but to correct our own false Opinions of Things. Many look upon it to be a great Evil, that they are in a mean and low Condition, and have not such a large Portion and Affluence of worldly Riches and Honours as some others. And yet this Meanness of Condition is more an Evil in Opinion than in Reality. For Men may be poor and in low Circumstances, (and it is proper on several Accounts that most of Mankind should be so in this present State,) and yet may have many Mercies and Blessings, and as much true Enjoyment, and often more, than Persons in higher Stations, and more splendid outward Circumstances. Disappointments are generally regarded as great Evils, and yet the Evil of them often amounteth to no more than this, that Men fall short of Expectations which they ought not to have indulged, and which were owing to their having fixed to themselves wrong Measures of Happiness. The same may be said of anxious perplexing Cares, which cause great Trouble and Vexation, and which a right Judgment of Things would have prevented, or greatly moderated. In
general

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general it must be acknowledged, that the Evils and Miseries of this present Life are for the most part magnified and exasperated by Mens own Passions, and sometimes entirely owing to them. Many there are who have great Advantages, but they do not enjoy them, nor are thankful for them as they ought. When they are in Circumstances that should make them easy and contented, they create to themselves imaginary Evils. This is not properly chargeable on Providence, but on their own wrong Tempers. And it is but just that that Temper which is their Sin and Fault, should also be their Punishment. Yet such is the Goodness of God, that he hath directed us, both by the Reason he hath given us, if duly improved and attended to, and by the Instructions of his Word, to form right Sentiments of Things, especially concerning the Nature of true Happiness. He hath been graciously pleased to forbid our foolishly disquieting and tormenting ourselves; and he alloweth and requireth us to cast our Cares and Burdens upon him, and to endeavour to keep our Appetites and Passions within proper Bounds, and is ready to encourage and assist us in our sincere Endeavours to this Purpose.

Fourthly, It is proper farther to observe, that a great deal of the Evils and adverse
Events

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Events which are in the World, are overruled to Good. And certainly, as was observed in my former Discourse, those Evils are no just Objections against the Goodness of Divine Providence, which are made to produce greater Good, and prove beneficial upon the whole. Men indeed, for the most part, judge of Good and Evil by their present Feeling, by the present Pleasure or Trouble they yield. But this is not a right Way of judging. As we are now in a State of Trial and Discipline, present Things are principally to be considered as Means to the ultimate Happiness of Man. And what hath a Tendency to promote this, though it may now seem troublesome, is really good. So that in judging of the Goodness of Providence towards us, we must consider, not merely what is at present agreeable or disagreeable to us, but what is suitable for Creatures in such a State as this. And in this View, the with-holding outward Blessings, and inflicting outward Evils and Adversities, may be really an Act of great Goodness. For though, to be deprived of earthly Comforts and Enjoyments, or to be exercised with grievous bodily Pains and Distempers, or with worldly Crosses and Disappointments, and other Things which give us Uneasiness, may seem to be very
hard

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hard Treatment; yet when the Matter is duly considered, it will be found, that Afflictions are necessary in this present State, and answer many valuable and important Ends. They are in the Nature of a wholesome Medicine or Discipline, and no Man will pretend that it is inconsistent with the Goodness or Humanity of a Physician to prescribe bitter and disagreeable Medicines, in order to the Recovery or Establishment of Health, or with the Tenderneſs of a good Parent to correct a beloved Child, when it appeareth to be neceſſary for the Child's real Benefit. So far is the ſending Afflictions upon us in this State of Trial from arguing any Want of Goodneſs in God, that we are taught in Scripture to regard them as Inſtances and Proofs of his paternal Love and Care. We are exhorted *not to deſpiſe the Chaiſtening of the Lord, nor faint when we are rebuked of him. For whom the Lord loveth he chaiſteneth, and ſcourgeth every Son whom he receiveth.* And we are aſſured, that *he chaiſteneth us for our Profit, that we might be Partakers of his Holineſs.* Heb. xii. 5, 6, 10. Afflictions are uſeful many Ways. They tend to put Men upon ſerious Reflections, to awaken them out of their thoughtleſs Security, and to convince them of the Evil of Sin, and inſpire them
with

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Tendency to cause us even to *rejoice in Tribulation*, than to be assured, that *our light Affliction, which is but for a Moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory.* 2 Cor. iv. 17.

Fifthly, Many of the Evils that are observable in this present State, are necessary for the Declaration of God's rectoral Justice and Righteousness. And certainly no Objections can lie against the Goodness of Divine Providence, from Events which are proper to vindicate the Righteousness of it. Though this is not a State of final Judgment, and therefore, *Sentence against an evil Work is not*, in the ordinary Course of Things, *speedily executed*, yet it is very fit that there should be, even in the present Dispensations of Divine Providence, some awful Manifestations of God's just Displeasure against Sin, without which Sinners would be apt to question his Holiness and Justice; and consequently, it is fit that there should be some Punishments now inflicted to vindicate the Majesty and Righteousness of the supreme Governor, and the Authority of his Laws. And accordingly, many of those Evils and Calamities that are inflicted on particular Persons and large Communities, must be regarded in this View. This Observation may especially be applied to those extraordinary Dispensations

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tions, which seem to bear upon them signal Marks of the divine Justice and Hatred against Sin, and to be designed for Warnings to future Ages as well as the present. Such were the universal Deluge, the Destruction of *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah*, and the dreadful Judgments inflicted upon *Jerusalem* and the *Jewish* Nation, which, however disastrous to those that suffered them, were no more than they really deserved, and were designed to be of extensive Use to Mankind in all Ages. But though it is for the general Good that some such Instances and Examples there should be, yet it is manifest, that in the ordinary Course of Things there is much Forbearance exercised towards Sinners in this present State. God is continually doing Good in the Methods of his bountiful Providence, not only to the *good* and *just*, but to the *unjust*, the *unthankful*, and the *evil*. And this is so observable, that those very Persons who accuse the Divine Providence as defective in Goodness towards Mankind, are at other Times ready to turn the Goodness and Forbearance of God towards Sinners into an Objection against his Righteousness. And it may be justly affirmed upon the whole, that there is a great deal more Good than Evil here on Earth, and that the Afflictions and Adversities of Life are very much over-balanced

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by the Blessings and Advantages which Providence putteth into our Hands, if we will but set ourselves to improve and enjoy them as we ought. Things are so circumstanced as generally to render Life not only tolerably easy, but agreeable and desirous to the greater Part of Mankind. All that can be justly concluded from the Evils we now suffer, is, that this present World is not designed to be the State of our final Happiness. The Effect they should have upon us, should be to keep us from being too fond of Life, which otherwise we should be apt to be, and to make us willing to part with it when God calleth us to do so, and to raise our Affections and Views to a nobler State of Existence. And the Evils of this Life considered in this View, are not only wisely but graciously ordered. For after all, this is but a small Part of our Existence, and it is but a little comparatively that we taste and see of the divine Goodness in this present State. But what a glorious and ravishing Scene will open to us in a better World, when we shall enter upon that blessed *Life and Immortality* which is so clearly *brought to Light by the Gospel!* Then shall Sin and Sorrow be for ever banished, and *God shall wipe away all Tears from our Eyes.* *Oh how great is*

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thy Goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee! No Heart can conceive it, much less is any Tongue of Man able to describe it. In all our Contemplations of the Goodness of Divine Providence towards Mankind here on Earth, we must still carry our Views to the heavenly State, where it shall be fully compleated, and shall shine forth in its brightest Glory to all Eternity.

I shall conclude with this Reflection.

What a delightful and comforting Consideration is it, that infinite Goodness governeth the World, and that all Things are under the Direction and Superintendency of a most wise and benign Providence! Happy is the Man that liveth under the Influence of this Persuasion. Whatever be the present Appearances of Things, he hath a strong Security that all Things shall certainly be ordered for the best. No Difficulties can shock him; the whole Face of Things looks placid and serene about him. With what Satisfaction and Complacency may he resign himself and all his Concernments to the Disposal of his kind and almighty Friend, Parent, and Benefactor? It is true Religion, and that alone, which layeth a solid Foundation for a comfortable and peaceable Life. Far be it from us, on any Occasion, to entertain disho-

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nourable Thoughts of the divine Goodness, much more to break forth into unbecoming Reflections upon it. It appeareth from the Account which hath been given, that God permitteth no more Evil than he over-ruleth to excellent Purposes; and that he ordereth it so, that no Man in this present State shall suffer more Evil, than either he hath deserved by his Sins, or than shall turn to his own Benefit, if he be careful to make a wise and just Improvement of it, and shall also tend to the Benefit of others, if they take Warning by his Patience and Virtues. And there is nothing in this, but what is perfectly consistent with a wise and good Administration. Let us therefore frequently review the Instances of God's Goodness towards us, and instead of allowing ourselves to find Fault, break forth into thankful Praises and Acknowledgments, saying in the Language of the devout Psalmist, *What shall I render unto the Lord for all his Benefits towards me? Psal. cxvi. 12. Oh that Men would praise the Lord for his Goodness, and for his wonderful Works to the Children of Men! Whoso is wise, and will observe these Things, even they shall understand the Loving-kindness of the Lord. Psal. cvii. 8, 43.*

Or

On the Righteousness of Divine Providence.

DISCOURSE XV.

PSALM cxlv. 17.

*The Lord is righteous in all his Ways, and
holy in all his Works.*

SOME of the most specious Objections against Providence are drawn from Events that seem to strike at the Righteousness of the divine Administrations. It is pretended, that there are many Things done in the World, which are absolutely inconsistent with the perfect Righteousness of a supreme Governor, and which would not be admitted if this World and the Affairs of it were under the Direction and

Superintendency of an infinitely just and holy Being. But that this is a wrong Charge will sufficiently appear from a distinct Examination of what is offered in Support of it.

The Righteousness of God is frequently celebrated in the sacred Writings. Those Words of the Psalmist which I have chosen for the Subject of this Discourse, are very full to this Purpose. *The Lord is righteous in all his Ways, and holy in all his Works.* He is righteous in all his Dispensations whatsoever, especially towards Mankind; for to these the Psalmist seems here to have a particular Reference. There is not one of his Proceedings in which he is not perfectly just and holy.

In treating of this Subject I shall first offer some general Considerations to shew that God is holy and righteous in all his Ways.

Secondly, I shall consider the principal Things in the divine Administrations towards Mankind, that seem to have a contrary Appearance, and which are usually urged as Objections against the Righteousness of Divine Providence.

First, I shall offer some general Considerations to shew that God is just and righteous in all his Ways.

And

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And 1st, This necessarily followeth from the infinite Perfection of his Nature. It is not conceivable how an absolutely perfect Being can be capable of Injustice or Unrighteousness. For as his Understanding is infinite, he cannot but always discern in every Instance what is fit and proper to be done, and what is most conformable to Truth, Justice, and Equity. And agreeable to the Light of his infinite Understanding is the perfect Rectitude of his Will, whereby he is eternally and invariably determined to will and to do that which appeareth to his unerring Mind to be just and right. If his Understanding dictated one Thing, and his Will pursued another, there would be a Jarring and Contrariety in his Nature. His own Mind must in that Case disapprove and condemn him, which would produce a Confusion and Disorder within, an inward Dissatisfaction and Remorse, absolutely inconsistent with the perfect Felicity of the Supreme Being.

2dly, It will help farther to illustrate this, if it be considered that none of those Things that are the Causes of Injustice and Unrighteousness, can possibly have Place in God. He can never do an unjust Thing through Error and Mistake, by taking wrong for right, or right for wrong. Nor
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is he susceptible of any of those narrow and partial Affections, or corrupt Passions and Prejudices, which so often turn Men aside from the Paths of Justice and Equity. He is incapable of Envy and Ill-will, or of unreasonable Humour or Caprice; nor can he ever be swayed, as Men often are, to do an unjust Thing, by a Regard to his own private Interest. For as he is infinitely happy in himself, and standeth not in need of any Thing without him, and therefore hath nothing to hope or to fear from any other Being, it is evident he can have no private Interests of his own to serve, no Addition of Profit or Power in View.—That carrieth its own Evidence with it, which we have 2 Chron. xix. 7. *There is no Iniquity with the Lord our God, nor Respect of Persons, nor taking of Gifts:* And again, *Surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert Judgment.* Job xxxiv. 12. Injustice and Wickedness can only belong to weak and imperfect Beings, in whom there is a Defect of Power. For none would do wrong, if he thought he could as well attain his Ends in doing right, or if he were not overpowered by some Passion, which is an Argument of Weakness. And therefore it cannot reasonably be supposed, that the almighty and all-sufficient Being should pervert Judgment.

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3dly, The perfect Justice and Righteousness of God may be farther argued from that inward Sense of right and wrong that is implanted in the human Mind, which naturally carrieth us to approve and admire impartial Justice and Righteousness tempered with Goodness and Equity, and to disapprove and condemn Injustice and Oppression, Cruelty and Violence, Fraud and Falshood. This is a Kind of natural Law written in the human Heart, and which exerteth itself when it is not overruled and obstructed by the Influence of disorderly Appetites and Passions, and selfish Interests. And whence could this originally proceed but from the Author of our Beings? We could not have had this Sense, if he had not given it us. And we may justly conclude, that he that hath so constituted our Nature, that we can scarce help approving the right, and condemning the wrong as far as we know it, must himself be a Being of perfect Righteousness, and must approve the Things which are just and true and pure, and have an Abhorrence of whatsoever is contrary thereunto.

If we take these several Considerations together, they form a convincing Evidence that God is righteous in all his Ways. And indeed if there were not a supreme and
 most

most perfect Righteousness at the Head of Things, what Misery and Confusion would ensue? The sovereign Lord of the Universe must necessarily be the highest Power, to whom all Appeals must ultimately lie. And what a miserable Thing would it be if the last Resort were not to perfect Righteousness! *For shall not the Judge of all the Earth do right?* Gen. xviii. 25.

There are two Things in which the Righteousness of God as a supreme Governor doth especially appear. The first is his ordaining just and righteous Laws, and such evidently are all the Laws which God hath given to Mankind, whether discoverable by the Light of Nature, or made known to us by extraordinary Revelation. The Laws which God enjoineth, are excellently represented in the holy Scriptures, and the more attentively we consider them, the more we shall be convinced that they are all of them *holy and just and good, true and righteous all together*, according to the Psalmist's Description of them *Psal. xix. 8, 9. Whatsoever Things are true, whatsoever Things are honest, whatsoever Things are just, whatsoever Things are pure, whatsoever Things are lovely, whatsoever Things are of good Report, if there be any Virtue, and if there be any Praise, these are the Things*

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Things required in the divine Law. *Phil.*
iv. 8.

And as the perfect Righteousness of the supreme Governor appeareth in the Laws which he hath given to Mankind, so also in his consequent Dealings with them, or rewarding and punishing them according to their Obedience or Disobedience to those Laws. And with regard to this, the general Rule of the divine Procedure towards Mankind, is that which is laid down, *Isa.* iii. 10, 11. *Say to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the Fruit of their Doings. Wo unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him: for the Reward of his Hands shall be given him.* The Righteousness of God as a moral Governor requireth that it should be well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked, that the former should be happy, and the latter miserable in the final Issue of Things, and taking in the whole of their Existence. But then it must be remembered, that this present Life is but a small Part of our Existence; and that the State we are now in is only a State of Discipline and Trial, and not a State of final Judgment; that therefore it is not to be expected, that the righteous should be at present fully rewarded, and rendered compleatly happy, or that Judgment should be universally and speedily

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speedily executed upon the wicked. It is sufficient to vindicate the Righteousness of God in the present Dispensations of his Providence, if it be exercised in such a Manner as is suited to the Nature and Design of a State of Trial and Forbearance, which is to be succeeded by a State of Retributions, wherein whatsoever is now wanting and defective shall be fully supplied and rectified. Now this is the View which the Scriptures give us of this Matter. There is enough in the present Course of Providence and Constitution of Things to convince us that God is a good and righteous Governor, and that Righteousness and Virtue is what he approveth, and is ordinarily the best Way to true Satisfaction and Enjoyment even here on Earth; and that Vice and Sin is the Object of his just Displeasure, and in the ordinary Course of Things hath a Tendency to bring Misery upon those that abandon themselves to the Practice of it. But then the proper and principal Retributions to the righteous and the wicked are reserved for another World.

Having taken this general View of the Righteousness of God in all his Ways, I now proceed, secondly, to consider the principal Things in the divine Administrations towards Mankind, that have a contrary
Appear-

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Appearance, and which are usually brought as Objections against the Righteousness of Providence.

It is urged, that if a righteous Providence governed the World, it might be expected, that Virtue and Probity should be rewarded, and Vice and Wickedness punished; but that this is not done in the present State. It is the Observation of the Wise-man, confirmed by the Experience of all Ages, that *all Things come alike to all; there is one Event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean.* Eccles. ix. 2. The former is not remarkably distinguished with the Favours and Benefits of Divine Providence above the latter. Yea, it often happeneth, that the very contrary State of Things obtains, and that good Men instead of having a larger Portion of Blessings given them, have a greater Share of Afflictions and Calamities than other Men. Many of the best Men in all Ages have been loaded with Obloquy and Reproach, injured in their Persons, Reputations, and Properties, by the Malice, the Fraud, and Violence of wicked Men, yea, and often exposed to the most grievous Sufferings and Persecutions, and even to Death itself. And on the other Hand, we frequently see the wicked and unjust prospering in their Wickedness,

flowing

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flowing in Riches, and abounding in all the Delights and Enjoyments this World can afford. The *vilest Men are exalted*, and have those Honours conferred upon them which ought only to be the Rewards of Virtue. And particularly it is to be observed, that the History of all Ages furnisheth us with Instances of successful Ravagers, who have spread wide their Conquests, and laid whole Nations waste, and instead of receiving the just Punishment due to their lawless Violence, have been crowned with Glory and Victory. And doth this look like a World governed by infinite Wisdom and Righteousness? Would it be thus, if a just and holy Being presided over the universal Administration of Things?

This is the Objection in its full Force, and it must be acknowledged to have no small Difficulty in it. Some have made use of it as a Pretence to cover their Atheism, or, which cometh to the same Thing, their Denial of a Providence. And good Men themselves have often been greatly perplexed and puzzled with it. The Prophet *Asaph* owneth concerning himself, in the 73^d *Psalms*, that the Temptation had liked to have proved too strong for him. *Jeremiah*, though he was persuaded of the perfect Righteousness of God, could scarce tell

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tell how to reconcile it with this State of Things. *Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee; yet let me talk with thee of thy Judgments. Wherefore doth the Way of the wicked prosper, wherefore are all they happy, i. e. successful and prosperous, that deal very treacherously? Jer. xii. 1. To the same Purpose the Prophet Habakkuk. Thou art of purer Eyes than to behold Evil, and canst not look on Iniquity: Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy Tongue, when the wicked devoureth the Man that is more righteous than he? And makest Men as the Fishes of the Sea, as the creeping Things that have no Ruler over them. Habak. i. 13, 14.*

That we may return a proper Answer to this complicated Objection, let us distinctly consider the several Parts of it: 1st, As it relateth to the promiscuous Distribution of Events in this present State. 2dly, As it relateth to the Sufferings and Calamities which befall the righteous. 3dly, To the Prosperity of the wicked.

1st, Whereas it is objected, that in this present State all Things come alike to all, and that there is ordinarily no Distinction made in the present Dispensations of Divine Providence between good and

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bad Men, the righteous and the wicked. It is to be observed,

1st, That this is only to be understood with respect to the outward Occurrences of this Life, and the Distribution of external Blessings and Advantages, or external Evils or Afflictions. For as to all those Blessings that are of a spiritual and internal Nature, and which are the choicest of all Comforts and Blessings, good Men have undoubtedly a vast Advantage above the wicked, even in this present State. There are Pleasures, which, according to the divine Constitution, are ordinarily annexed to the Exercise of good Affections, and to the Practice of Piety and Virtue. There is an inward Peace and Satisfaction, which tendeth to produce an habitual Chearfulness in all the Conditions and Circumstances of Life, and on the account of which it may be justly said, that a *good Man is satisfied from himself*. Prov. xiv. 14. *i. e.* he hath a real Source of Happiness within him. No outward Comforts can equal the Joys that arise from the Testimony of a good Conscience, from a Sense of the Love and Favour of God, from the Consolations of the Holy Spirit, and from the Hopes of eternal Glory in a better World. These are Things which bad Men have no Interest

terest in, but of which the righteous have often had large Experience, even here on Earth. In like Manner, as to internal and spiritual Evils, the Sense of indulged Guilt, the Stings and Agonies of an evil Conscience, the Conflicts and Tumults of the disorderly Passions and Lusts warring in the Members, and the direful Forebodings of a future Judgment; it cannot be denied that good Men are more exempted from these dreadful Evils, than the wicked and disobedient. Thus it appeareth, that ordinarily there is a great Difference in this present State between the righteous and the wicked, as to those good and evil Things which are of the greatest Consequence, and upon which our Happiness or Misery doth most immediately depend. For as to outward good Things, and what are usually called the Gifts of Fortune, and outward Evils or Afflictions, these are not absolutely and in themselves good and evil, but may prove good or evil in different Circumstances, according to the Use that is made of them. Happiness is, properly speaking, an internal Thing, and is principally seated, not in the outward Condition and Circumstances, but in the Frame and Temper of the Mind. For it is an undoubted Maxim, that a *Man's Life*, i. e. the Happiness of

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his Life, *consisteth not in the Abundance of the Things which he possesseth.* Luke xii. 15.

But 2dly, Even as to outward Advantages, and outward worldly Evils, the Rule doth not hold univerfally, that these are promiscuously distributed, and that there is, in this Respect, no Distinction made between the righteous and the wicked. For with regard to the most valuable even of external Blessings, and which are usually thought to contribute most to our present Satisfaction and Enjoyment, such as the Love and Esteem of our Fellow-creatures, a fair Reputation and Credit, a sound healthful State of Body, Success in Business, and such a Portion of worldly Substance as is sufficient to answer the real Uses of Life; the good and virtuous, the temperate and industrious are more likely to obtain them, in the present Constitution of Things, than the vicious and profligate. And it may be truly affirmed, that there are more good Men, in Proportion to their Numbers, that have a competent Share of these Things, than wicked Men. And they have also a much truer Enjoyment of these temporal Blessings, in as much as they taste the Goodness of God in them, and with them have those greater spiritual Advantages which have been mentioned, and a comfortable
Sense

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Sense of the divine Favour and Approbation.

And as to the outward Evils and Miseries of this Life, such as extreme Poverty and Want, Diseases of Body, ill Fame and Disgrace, and many other Evils incident to Mens Persons and Fortunes, the wicked are, in the ordinary Course of Things, more subjected to them than the righteous, and they are very usual Effects of a vicious and dissolute Course. And certainly the Wise-man, by saying that *all Things come alike to all, there is one Event to the righteous and the wicked*, never intended to deny this. For the whole Book of *Proverbs* every where aboundeth with excellent Maxims drawn from Observation and Experience, concerning the good Effects and great Advantages of Prudence, Virtue, Temperance, Industry, even in this present Life, and the great Evils, Mischiefs, and disastrous Events Men usually bring upon themselves by their Vices. And with regard to this, it may be said, that God hath, in some Measure, established a Connection between Virtue and Happiness, Vice and Misery, even in the present Constitution of Things, which sheweth the Wisdom and Righteousness of his Providence, his Regard to Virtue, and his Disapprobation of Vice and Wickedness;

and from whence we may conclude, that the Time is coming when he will completely reward the one, and punish the other.

If therefore it be asked, what then is intended by this Observation, that *all Things come alike to all*; I answer,

3dly, That the Design is to signify, that there is not a constant stated visible Distinction made between good and bad Men here on Earth in God's external providential Dealings, so as that we should be able to conclude, that a Man is in the Favour of God, or the contrary, by the outward Events which befall him. That this is the Design of the Wise-man, is evident from his Way of introducing this Passage: *No Man* (saith he, *knoweth Love or Hatred by all that is before him*: And then he addeth, that *all Things come alike to all, there is one Event to the righteous and to the wicked*. Not that it always happeneth so, but that it is frequently so in the Course of human Affairs. And indeed it is no Way proper that there should, in all Cases, be an open visible Distinction made between good and bad Men here on Earth, in the outward Events of Things, and Dispensations of Divine Providence. This would not be suited to the Nature of
a State

a State of Trial, nor could we certainly know whether the divine Dispensations were rightly applied or not, except we were acquainted with the Hearts of Men, and knew who were really righteous, and who the contrary; which shall not be till the great Day of final Retributions, when God *will make manifest the Counsels of the Hearts*, as the Apostle speaks, *1 Cor. iv. 5*. The promiscuous Distributions of outward worldly good or evil Things in this present State answereth many valuable Ends. If good Men were always remarkably crowned with worldly Prosperity, and an Affluence of Riches and Honours, we should be apt to over-rate these Things, and to look upon them as the chief Rewards of Virtue. And this would seem to authorise our too eager Pursuits of them, and would carry us off from the Pursuit of Things of superior Excellence. Whereas, when we observe that God in his wise Providence so frequently bestoweth an Abundance of these external Advantages upon Persons of no moral Worth or Goodness, whilst many of those that are the excellent of the Earth, the Objects of his special Love and Favour, have but a small Portion of them, this tends to convince us, that these are not the choicest and most valuable Blessings,

sings, and consequently should keep us from setting too high a Value upon them, or priding ourselves on the account of them. It should teach us to esteem no Man merely for his external Circumstances, for his Wealth or the Splendor of his Appearance, and to despise no Man for being poor and afflicted. To which it may be added, that when we consider, that even Persons of the greatest Piety and Worth have no Security in the Revolutions of human Affairs, but that they may be deprived of the outward good Things they now enjoy, and may be exposed to great worldly Evils and Calamities; this hath a Tendency to keep our Hearts open to the Miseries and Necessities of our Fellow-creatures, and make us ready to pity and assist them. Whereas, if we had an Apprehension that worldly Prosperity and Affluence were to be regarded as a sure Mark of the divine Favour, and appropriated to the good and virtuous, this would very much check our Compassion and Benevolence, and straiten our Hearts and Hands with regard to the indigent and distressed, as looking upon them to be Persons against whom God had declared in his Providence, and who were the Objects of his righteous Displeasure.

These

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These Considerations may suffice to obviate that Part of the Objection which is brought against the Righteousness of Divine Providence from the seemingly promiscuous Distributions of Things here on Earth. As to what is more particularly urged with regard to the Sufferings of the righteous, and Prosperity of the wicked in this present State, it shall be distinctly considered in our next Discourse.



*Objections against the Righteousness
of Providence considered.*

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PSALM cxlv. 17.

*The Lord is righteous in all his Ways, and
holy in all his Works.*

IN our former Discourse on these Words, after offering some general Considerations to shew that God is perfectly holy and righteous in all his Ways, we proceeded to consider the principal Things in the divine Dispensations towards Mankind, that seem to have a contrary Appearance, and which are usually urged as Objections against the Righteousness of Providence.

And

And 1st, We considered the seemingly promiscuous Distribution of Events in this present World, in which *all Things come alike to all*, and there is no visible Distinction made between the righteous and the wicked in the Course of God's outward Dispensations. And it was shewn that no Argument can be drawn from thence against the Wisdom or Righteousness of Divine Providence.

But 2dly, It is farther urged, that good Men are not only liable to Troubles and Afflictions in common with the rest of Mankind, but that they have frequently a larger Share of them than other Men. Instead of receiving the Rewards of their Piety and Virtue, they are often in very mean and destitute Circumstances, and labour under a Variety of Evils and Sorrows. Some of the worthiest of Men have met with the most severe and injurious Treatment, and have been exposed to the bitterest Obloquy and Reproach, and to the most grievous Sufferings. And would this be permitted if this World were under the Administration of a righteous Providence?

But several Considerations may be offered to take off the Force of this Objection.

And

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And 1st, It doth not appear, that in the common Course of Things, abstracting from Seasons of extraordinary Trial and Persecution, (which shall be considered afterwards,) good Men have a greater Share of Afflictions and Calamities than other Men. On the contrary, it is certain that, as hath been already observed, there are many and great Evils and Troubles to which bad Men are ordinarily more exposed, and which they usually bring upon themselves as the Effects and Punishments of their Vices and Wickedness.

2dly, Another Thing which is proper to be considered on this Occasion is, that some of those under great Afflictions, whom we look upon to be pious and good Men, may not be really so; and if we knew their Hearts and real Characters as God doth, we should, instead of finding Fault with the Severity of his Dealings towards them, acknowledge and adore his Justice and Righteousness.

But 3dly, supposing them to be really, taking in the whole of their Character, good and upright Persons, as it cannot be denied that many such in all Ages have been greatly afflicted, yet they may have been guilty of Sins on the account of which God seeth fit to lay his chastening Hand upon them, and they may have spir-
ritual

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ritual Disorders and Corruptions, which need the Correction of his Rod. And in that Case, far from accusing the Righteousness of God, we should admire the Impartiality of his Justice, in thus manifesting his Displeasure against the Sins and Faults even of those that are the Objects of his special Love and Favour. And what rendereth it more proper that the Faults of good Men should now be punished, is, that their Corrections and Punishments are confined to this present State of Trial and Discipline. And when this is at an End, God shall for ever *wipe away all Tears from their Eyes.*

To this it may be added, 4thly, that the Afflictions of the righteous are sent with a salutary Design, and are made to *work together for their Good*, and so prove real Blessings to them, as was shewn in a former Discourse *. And such Afflictions and Adversities which are in the Intention of God designed for their greater Benefit, and in the Event prove really to be so, cannot properly be brought in as Objections against the Righteousness or even Goodness of God, but rather are Proofs of both. Especially considering the gracious Assistances and Supports which God is pleased to vouchsafe to good Men under their

* See Discourse second, on *Psalm cxliv.* 9.

Troubles,

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Troubles, and which make a great Difference between their Afflictions and those of other Men. If we compare their outward Crosses with the spiritual Privileges and Benefits they are made Partakers of, and with their inward Comforts arising from the Light of God's Countenance, from the Communications of his Grace and Spirit, and from the peaceful Testimony of a good Conscience, and especially from the Hopes of eternal Glory and Felicity, I say, if we balance the Advantages arising from these Things against their outward Crosses, it will appear that the former are much superior to the latter. Nor would good Men under the most afflictive Circumstances exchange Conditions with the most prosperous wicked Man upon Earth.

It must be owned indeed, that in Times of severe Persecution, some of the best of Men have been exposed to Sufferings which human Nature is scarce able to bear. Not only have they endured the *spoiling of their Goods*, and been branded with the most odious Calumnies, but they have been subjected to the most grievous Pains and Torments which the bitterest Rage and Malice could inflict, and have at length been put to a cruel and ignominious Death, not for any Evil they were guilty of, but for their steady Adherence to the Cause of Truth
and

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and Righteousness. But it must be considered, that God hath very wise Ends in suffering such Persecutions. They tend to the purifying his Church, and to the exercising the Faith and Patience of the Saints, and rendering it more illustrious. They shew the Reality and divine Energy of Religion, and the Strength and Prevalency of its Principles and Motives. They also tend mightily to the Honour and Advantage of the Sufferers themselves, who have frequently experienced such divine Consolations and Joys, as have enabled them to triumph in their sharpest Sufferings, and have rendered them far happier than their cruel and insolent Persecutors. To which it must be added, that their Reward in Heaven shall be proportionably more glorious. For this is what we must always have in View, when we are considering the present Afflictions and Sufferings of good Men, that there is a Happiness prepared for them in a future State, which shall infinitely transcend all their Sufferings. And of this we have the fullest Assurance given us in the Gospel Revelation. And it furnisheth a full and satisfactory Answer to all that can be objected against the Righteousness of Divine Providence, with regard to the Afflictions and Adversities to which good Men are exposed

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exposed here on Earth. They are designed to form them into a Meetness for that future Glory, and to heighten their heavenly Reward. And shall those Things be complained of, that shall have such a happy and glorious Issue? We may justly reckon with the great Apostle St. Paul, that *the Sufferings of this present Time are not worthy to be compared unto the Glory which shall be revealed.*

Thirdly, As the Afflictions and Sufferings of the righteous, so also the Prosperity of the wicked hath been frequently urged, to shew that this World is not under the Government of a wise and righteous Providence. The worst and vilest of Men, instead of being punished as they deserved, and as might be expected under a just Administration, have often been placed in very advantageous and flourishing Circumstances, possessed of large Treasures, and exalted to high Honours and Dignities, to the Wonder and Envy of all that beheld them.

But upon a careful Consideration it will appear, that this furnisheth no proper Objection against the Righteousness of Divine Providence.

It hath been already shewn that wicked Men are often in a very miserable and calamitous Condition even here on Earth,

and that such is the present Constitution of Things, that in the ordinary Course of human Affairs, Wickedness, Injustice, and Dissoluteness of Manners, tend to bring great Evils on those that practise them. It is also certain, that God frequently executeth his Judgments in a very remarkable Manner upon those that have distinguished themselves by great and uncommon Wickedness, especially upon bloody Persecutors, impious and audacious Scoffers and Blasphemers, cruel and insolent Oppressors; so that those who have observed, have been led to *fear*, and to *declare the Work of God*, and *wisely to consider of his Doings*. Psal. lxiv. 9. and have acknowledged, that *verily there is a God that judgeth in the Earth*; and that the *Lord is known by the Judgment which he executeth*. Psal. ix. 16. But it cannot be denied that it also frequently happeneth, that wicked and ungodly Men are in very prosperous and splendid outward Circumstances, and have a large Affluence of the good Things of this present World.

And with regard to this I would first observe in general, that it is no way proper or fitting that all wicked Men and wicked Actions should be immediately punished in this present State. For this would change the very Nature of this State of
 Trial

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Trial and Discipline, and confound it with a State of Judgment. The Righteousness of Divine Providence should be now exercised in such a Manner as to preserve the World, and not to destroy it. Whereas, if Punishments were immediately to follow every wicked Person and evil Action; if God did not bear with Sinners, nor Men bear with one another, which in that Case they would look upon themselves to be under no Obligation to do; this World would become a mere Shambles, a Place of utter Desolation and Misery. Where would be the Exercise of divine Mercy? or what Space would be left for Repentance? And yet it is certain that many who have been bad Men, and done wicked Actions, have afterwards reformed, and some of them have proved remarkably good and useful. God's bearing with Sinners in this present State of Trial, and even conferring many Benefits upon them, sheweth *the Riches of his Goodness, and Patience, and Long-suffering*, and that he is not *willing that any should perish, but that all should come to Repentance*. And it hath a Tendency also to form them to a merciful forgiving Temper towards one another. Prosperity is one Way of trying Persons as well as Adversity. And will any say, that it is never proper that bad Men should be thus tried? If the Way

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of Indulgence were never to be used towards them, it could not be said that all proper Methods were used to amend and to reclaim them. The Goodness of God in its natural Tendency *leadeth Sinners to Repentance*; and if it hath not that Effect upon them, will leave them without Excuse. We should therefore on such Occasions acknowledge and admire his Patience and Forbearance, but not find Fault with his Righteousness, which will certainly be manifested in the fittest Season, of which undoubtedly he is the best Judge.

It may be proper farther to observe, that we may in some Cases pass a wrong Judgment on Persons, and look upon those to be bad Men that really are not so; or at least may regard them as much worse than they are. For when Men see others prosper, they are often apt, through Envy and Impatience, to represent them in too unfavourable a Light, and give wrong Turns to their Actions. Or, if they be really, taking in the whole of their Actions and Character, bad Men, yet they may have some valuable Qualities, and God may see more Good in them than we know, yea, they may in some Instances be Instruments in the Hands of Providence for doing Service to the Community,

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munity, or to his Church and People, and therefore he may see fit to give them temporal Rewards. And it is a Proof of the divine Goodness and Righteousness that he doth not suffer the good Qualities and Services even of bad Men to pass wholly unrewarded. It is also to be considered, that many Men, who are not Persons of real Piety and Virtue, may yet be of eminent natural and acquired Abilities, and of great Industry and Sagacity, and may be very assiduous in the Use of those Means, which, according to the stated Rules of Providence, and Laws of Society, have a Tendency to procure temporal Blessings, Riches, Power, and Dominion. And if Providence in such Cases suffereth them to obtain what they so earnestly seek for, and crowneth political Gifts and Abilities with political Rewards, there is nothing in this Procedure but what is wise and fit. And indeed, considering that there are such Numbers of bad Men in the World, it can scarce be avoided, but that Persons of this Character must frequently be possessed of great Wealth and Power, especially since they are often more eager and diligent to obtain them than other and better Men, except God should extraordinarily interpose to alter the common Course and State of Things

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here on Earth, which for wise Reasons he doth not generally think fit to do.

Another Consideration of no small Moment, which ought not to be passed by if we would form a right Judgment concerning the Matter before us, is this, that the Prosperity of the wicked, which maketh so great a Shew, and exciteth so much Envy, is merely external. The Spectators who judge only by the Splendor of their Appearance, may think them to be in a happy Condition, when they are really miserable. Let them be placed in never such advantageous outward Circumstances, yet if they be under the Power and Tyranny of impetuous Lusts, and base disorderly Appetites and Passions, if they are swollen with vain Pride, or cankered with Envy, or embittered with Malice, Hatred, and Revenge, or racked with Ambition, and restless insatiable Desires, especially if their own Minds and Consciences reproach and condemn them for their Impieties, their Debaucheries, their Acts of Injustice and Oppression, as they must when they allow themselves Time for serious Reflection; if this be the Case, they are wretched in all their Affluence, and the meanest good Man that hath a Sense of the divine Favour, and is contented in his low Condition, is really far happier than they.

With

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With regard to prosperous Tyrants, and mighty Conquerors, who have often met with great Success in their lawless Ravages, and in executing their ambitious Designs to oppress and inflave Mankind, it must be considered that this is permitted for very wise and righteous Ends. They are Scourges in the Hand of God for chastening guilty Nations. And as it is proper that such Nations should be punished, so there are no Instruments fitter to execute those Punishments than such Persons as these, though they themselves have nothing in View but the gratifying their own Passions, and their Lust of Dominion and Power. The Devastations and Cruelties they commit are just Punishments on the People that suffer them, considered as inflicted by a holy and righteous God, though they are often very unjust, as Prosperity and Success of wicked Men is no Objection against the Righteousness of Divine Providence, when it is necessary for executing his just Punishments upon guilty Nations, that they should prosper and have Success.

If it be urged, that though they be suffered to prosper for a while, yet Justice requireth that they should also be punished in their Turn for their Wickedness and Injustice, their Cruelty and Violence; I answer, that so it frequently happeneth.

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Those wicked Persons, after having been Instruments in the Hands of God for punishing others, are themselves punished in a very exemplary Manner, and are cast down from their Prosperity and Glory. Several Instances of this Kind the Histories of all Nations and Ages will furnish us with. But supposing that they continue in a prosperous Condition, and in great Power and Splendor through the whole Course of their Lives, it must still be remembered, that the principal Punishments of the wicked, as well as Rewards of the righteous, are reserved for a future State. And it perfectly clears the Difficulty to consider that there is a Time coming, when those mighty and lawless Oppressors, who had no human Power to control them, shall be distinguished with dreadful Punishments before Heaven and Earth, and shall receive a full Recompence for their Pride, Cruelty, Injustice, and their many enormous Acts of Wickedness. And it is a general Rule, which we should always take along with us in considering God's providential Dispensations towards Mankind, that it is his Will and Design that we should not terminate our Views here on Earth, but should look forwards to another World, to a State of final Retributions. Not to do this, would be to overlook and confound the proper
Order

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Order and Oeconomy of Divine Providence, which, taken in its just Extent, comprehendeth God's Administrations towards Mankind both in this and in a future State, both which concur to make up one great Scheme of Government.

I shall conclude with this Reflection, that we should, on no Occasion, allow ourselves to entertain any harsh or injurious Conceptions of the Righteousness and Equity of God's Dealings towards his Creatures. It must certainly be an inexcusable Rashness in such short-sighted Creatures as we are, who know so little of the Reasons of the divine Dispensations, and have such imperfect Views of the Works and Ways of Providence, to take upon us to judge and censure the Counsels and Proceedings of the Deity. We should reject with the utmost Abhorrence, the very Thought of charging God with Injustice, saying, as *St. Paul* did in a very difficult Case, *What shall we say then? Is there Unrighteousness with God? God forbid.* Rom. ix. 14. Or, as *Elibu* expresseth it, *Shall even he that hateth Right govern? And wilt thou condemn him that is most just?* Job xxxiv. 17. *When Clouds and Darknes are about him, and we cannot at present penetrate into the Reasons of his Dispensations, we must be ready to acknowledge with the devout Psalmist, that*

Righteousness

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Righteousness and Judgment are the Habitation, or, as it might be rendered, the Establishment of his Throne. Psal. xcvi. 2. And what Comfort should this yield amidst all the Difficulties of this present State, and all the Injuries we may now sustain from our Fellow-creatures! A righteous God seeth all our Wrongs, and will redress them in that Time and Manner which he in his infinite Wisdom knoweth to be fittest and best. He may indeed suffer those that have a just Cause to be oppressed, because they deserve to be punished upon other Accounts, or because he intendeth so to order it, that this present Trial shall turn to their greater Benefit. But this we may be sure of, that he always favoureth the righteous Cause, and it shall most certainly appear in the final Issue of Things, that he doth so. Nor can any Man upon good Grounds expect his Favour and Blessing in an unrighteous Cause or Course, though he may for wise Ends suffer such Persons to prosper and prevail for a while. For it is a stable Truth, that he *beholdeth Mischief and Spite, to requite it with his Hand, i. e.* to requite it in the fittest Season. And that *the righteous Lord loveth Righteousness, his Countenance doth behold the upright; viz.* with an Eye of Favour and Complacency. Psal. xi. 7. And how happy is it to be
under

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under the wise and equal Government of that infinitely perfect Being, who loveth Righteousness, and hateth Iniquity, and who cannot possibly, in any Instance, do a wrong or unjust Thing! Let us therefore with the profoundest Reverence acknowledge and adore him under this glorious Character, and join in that noble Song of *Moses* and of the Lamb, in which the Saints of God under the Old Testament and the New, the Church militant, and the Church triumphant, joyfully concur, *Great and marvellous are thy Works, Lord God almighty; just and true are thy Ways, O thou King of Saints. Who would not fear thee, and glorify thy Name? For thou only art holy, and thy Judgments are made manifest.*
 Rev. xv. 3, 4.

Concerning

Concerning a future Judgment and State of final Retributions, when the Administrations of Providence towards Mankind shall be completed.

DISCOURSE XVII.

ECCLES. iii. 17.

I said in mine Heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a Time there for every Purpose and for every Work.

IN my last Discourse several Things were offered for vindicating the Righteousness of God in his Dispensations towards Mankind in this present State; but
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it was observed, that this cannot be fully done without taking a future World into the Account. For it is then that the great Scheme of Providence shall be completed, and all those Difficulties which now puzzle and astonish our Minds shall be fully adjusted and reconciled. We cannot therefore more properly conclude this Subject, in treating of which we have endeavoured to take a general View of the Administrations of Divine Providence towards Mankind, than by turning our Thoughts to a State of future Judgment and Retributions, when all the Designs of God towards the human Race shall be brought to their final important Issues.

To this the Words of the Wise-man, which I have now chosen to insist upon, seem plainly to refer. He had said in the Verse immediately preceding, *I saw under the Sun, the Place of Judgment, that Wickedness was there; and the Place of Righteousness, that Iniquity was there.* It hath often happened, that they whose proper Work and Office it is to execute Justice and Judgment, to punish evil Doers, and to do Right to the injured and oppressed, are themselves unrighteous and unjust. They join with the Oppressors against the poor and innocent, and suffer Judgment to be perverted in Favour of the wealthy and powerful. This made
a great

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a great Impression upon his Mind, and he frequently takes Notice of it in this Book. Thus Ch. v. 8. he representeth it as no uncommon Thing to see the *Oppression of the Poor, and violent perverting of Justice and Judgment in a Province.* And Ch. iv. 1. *I returned* (saith he) *and pondered all the Oppressions that are under the Sun; and behold the Tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no Comforter; and on the Side of their Oppressors there was Power; but they, i. e. the oppressed, had no Comforter.* This so affected his Heart, that in the Bitterness of his Concern he adds, *Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead, more than the living which are yet alive.* But this seems to have been the Language of Passion and Melancholy. A more just and reasonable Conclusion from the same Premises, and which he formed in the cool deliberate Judgment of his Mind, is that which is contained in the Words we are now to consider; *I said in mine Heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked.* Since it often happeneth that no Justice is to be found at earthly Tribunals, it is natural and reasonable to believe that there is a Time coming, when God will set all Things right, and will call all Mankind to an Account for their Actions, and put a remarkable Difference between the righteous and the

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the wicked. For, as it is added, *there is a Time there*, i. e. with him, *for every Purpose, and for every Work*. He hath in his great Wisdom appointed the properest Time for every Work, and therefore we may be sure he hath appointed a Time for this, which is the most important Work of all, and upon which the good Order of the World and of his Government doth very much depend; *viz.* the judging all Men, both the righteous and the wicked, and distributing proper Retributions. And to this the Wise-man hath a manifest Reference in that remarkable Passage with which he concludeth this Book: *For God shall bring every Work into Judgment, with every secret Thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil*. In which Words he cannot be supposed to intend that God doth always and in every Instance execute Judgment upon Men in this present Life: the contrary to which he most expressly declareth in this Book. For he complains, that in this World *all Things come alike to all*, and that *there is one Event to the righteous and to the wicked*. Ch. ix. 2. And again, that *there is a just Man that perisheth in his Righteousness*, and that *there is a wicked Man that longeth his Life in his Wickedness*. Ch. vii. 15. Or, as he expresseth it Ch. viii. 14. *There is a Vanity which*

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which is done upon the Earth, that there be just Men unto whom it happeneth according to the Work of the wicked: and there be wicked Men to whom it happeneth according to the Work of the righteous. When therefore he saith, that God shall bring every Work into Judgment, it must be understood of a Judgment which shall be executed upon Men in a future State after this present Life is at an End. And what plainly demonstrates this, is, that he declares universally, that God will bring every Work into Judgment, with every secret Thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. For who will pretend to say, that this is done in this present World? The Expressions are as strong as those used by St. Paul in describing the last general Judgment, that then every Man shall receive the Things done in his Body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. 2 Cor. v. 10. and that in that Day God shall judge the Secrets of Men. Rom. ii. 16. To which it may be added, that to interpret these Words as referring to a future Judgment, seems best to agree to the Scope and Design of this Book, which is to shew the Vanity of all Things here below, and to the Conclusion he draweth from it: *Hear the Conclusion of the whole Matter: Fear God, and keep*

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his Commandments ; for this is the All of Man. So it is in the Original, *i. e.* his whole Duty and Happiness too. And then he addeth, *For God shall bring every Work into Judgment, with every secret Thing, &c.* The Argument is strong and cogent, if understood of the future Judgment, when God will call all Mankind to a strict Account for their Conduct. And it is with a View to this, that he warneth a young Man in the Heat of his youthful Lusts and Passions, to consider, that *for all these Things God will bring him into Judgment.* Ch. xi. 9. To this future Judgment therefore he may be reasonably supposed to refer, when he here declareth, *I said in mine Heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked ; i. e.* he shall so judge them as to reward the one, and punish the other. For to judge Men, and yet in consequence of such a Judgment to appoint no Retributions of Rewards and Punishments, would be to all the Purposes of Government, as if they were not judged, yea, it would be a more inconsistent Conduct than not to call them to an Account for their Actions at all.

I have insisted the more largely upon opening the true Intention and Design of this Passage, because it affordeth a clear and strong Proof of what some Persons are

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are very unwilling to own, that the Belief of a future State of Judgment and Retributions obtained among the good Men who lived under the Old Testament Dispensation.

But what I chiefly design in this Discourse, is to prove, that it is a Principle highly agreeable to Reason, that there is a Time coming in a future State, in which God will certainly judge the righteous and the wicked, and will render to them proper Retributions of Rewards and Punishments.

For illustrating which, I shall first offer some general Considerations tending to shew that this present Life is not the whole of Man's Existence, and that it is designed by Providence only for a probationary State, or a State of Trial and Discipline, and not of final Judgment or Retributions.

And then I shall proceed more distinctly to prove, that the proper and principal Rewards of the righteous, and Punishments of the wicked, are not dispensed here on Earth, but are reserved for a future State.

First, I shall offer some general Considerations to shew that this present Life is not the whole of Man's Existence, and that it is designed for a probationary State,

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a State of Trial and Discipline, and not of final Judgment or Retributions.

That this Life is not the whole of Man's Existence, or the only State he is designed for, may be fairly argued from the very Frame of his Nature, compared with the present State of Things here on Earth. The Brutes soon arrive at all that Perfection for which their Natures are designed. They are provided with Enjoyments fitted to satisfy the utmost of their Desires and Capacities. Nor is there any Likelihood, that if they had a much longer Life afforded them, they would become more perfect, or arrive to higher Degrees of sensitive Happiness, the only Happiness they are capable of, than now they can attain to. But Man hath Faculties of a superior Nature, whereby he is capable of making immortal Proficiencies in intellectual and moral Improvements; and it is but a small Progress comparatively that he can make in these Things within the short Compass of this frail and transitory Life. Nor are any of these present earthly Enjoyments adequate to the Capacities of the human Soul, or capable of filling and satiating its infinite Desires. And can it be thought then that Man was endued with such vast and sublime Capacities, only that he might take a few Turns on this earthly Stage,
and

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and then disappear for ever, and be lost in an utter Extinction of Being, without having Time or Opportunities given him for ever arriving to the proper and ultimate Felicity and Perfection of his Nature? To suppose Man to be made for no other Life than this, would be to suppose him to be one of the most unaccountable Compositions in all Nature. It would be to suppose the most admirable Powers given him with an Intention to cut him off before they can arrive to their proper Maturity; an excellent Work begun without any Design of ever compleating it; a grand Foundation laid promising a glorious Fabrick, and no Care taken to carry on and finish the Structure. A Way of proceeding which would be unworthy of a wise Man, and therefore not to be charged upon the infinitely wise and good God.

To enforce this Way of reasoning it may be observed, that Man alone of all the Creatures in this lower World, hath a Power of looking forwards to Futurity, and of carrying his Expectations and Views beyond the Grave. He alone is capable of feeling the Force of Arguments and Motives drawn from another World, from a future State of Happiness or Misery. Of this the Brutes are incapable, which sheweth that they are not de-

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signed for a future Existence, and that this is the only Life they are made for. And if Man had been designed for no other State than this, it is reasonable to believe, that his Prospects, like those of the inferior Animals, would have been bounded within this present Life, and that he would not have been made capable of looking farther; nor would the wise Parent of his Being have framed his Faculties so as that he should be governed by the Hopes or Fears of an hereafter. It strengtheneth this, when it is considered that the Desire and Hope of a future State of Immortality, is the strongest in the most excellent and virtuous Minds, and in Proportion as it prevaieth, furnisheth powerful Incentives to the most worthy and laudable Actions and Pursuits, and may therefore be justly regarded as deriving its Original from God himself.

Thus the Frame of our Nature, if duly attended to, plainly sheweth, that Man was not intended merely for this present transitory Life, since he is exactly so constituted, and hath such Faculties and Powers given him, as would have been given him, if he had been designed for Immortality. And therefore we may justly conclude, that the wise Author of his Being designed him for it. And consequently that

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that this present Life is not the whole of his Existence, but only the first Stage of it. And if so, it is reasonable to think that this Life is intended by Providence for a probationary State, a State of Trial and Discipline, and not of final Judgment or Retributions. And accordingly to a careful Observer it will appear, that here are but as it were the first Rudiments of Virtue; excellent Dispositions are in an immature State, and are carried on from small and very imperfect Beginnings. We have many Appetites and Passions which need to be governed, and kept within proper Bounds. And we have now a great deal to do in point of Self-government, and for the forming of our Tempers. To which it may be added, that the present Course of Things, and of the divine Dispensations towards Mankind, is precisely such as may be expected in a State of Trial, and is wisely suited to it. For in such a State it might justly be expected, that a great Variety of Methods of Trial and Culture should be employed; that Men should be placed in different Circumstances; that there should be a Mixture of Good and Evil, of Pleasures and Pains, of Prosperity and Adversity. For each in their several Ways are proper for trying and exercising Mens Virtues, for correct-

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ing what is amiss, and forming them to worthy Habits and Dispositions. It might also be expected, that if this be a State of Trial, Things should be so conducted upon the whole, as to lead us to conclude that Virtue, Piety, and Goodness, is what God approveth, and that Vice and Wickedness is the Object of his just Displeasure, and yet that the former should not receive its full Reward, nor the latter its full Punishment, in this present World.

And accordingly this is now the general Course of Divine Providence in its Administrations towards Mankind. There is a great Mixture of Events here on Earth. External Good and Evil, Prosperity and Adversity, are dispensed to all Sorts of Persons. And though in the present Constitution of Things, God giveth various Tokens of his favourable Regards to good Men, from whence we may conclude, that true Virtue and Goodness is what he loveth and approveth; yet he frequently exerciseth them with sharp Afflictions and Troubles, as may be expected in a State of Trial and Discipline. And in like Manner, though there are many Things from Time to Time in the Course of God's Dispensations, which shew his Displeasure against Vice and Wickedness, yet, for the most part, he exerciseth Forbearance towards

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wards bad Men, without inflicting any extraordinary Punishments upon them; yea and it often happeneth that they are indulged in Prosperity and Affluence unto the End of their Lives. This is not to be wondered at in a State of Trial and Forbearance, but would be no way proper, if this were a State of final Judgment and Retributions. For in such a State it would be necessary, that all the righteous should be rewarded, and all the wicked punished, and that this should be done in an open public Way. It would be also necessary that Mens secret Dispositions should be brought to light, whether good or bad, and that they should be rewarded or punished accordingly, since their inward Dispositions constitute their real Characters, and properly denominate Men and their Actions good or evil. But it is evident that this is not ordinarily done in this present State. There is no open constant Difference now made between the righteous and the wicked. It cannot be pretended that all the righteous are rewarded, and all the wicked punished. On the contrary, that which the Wise-man complaineth of is frequently the Case here on Earth, that *there be just Men to whom it happeneth according to the Work of the wicked; and there be wicked Men to whom it happeneth*

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happeneth according to the Work of the righteous. Eccl. viii. 14. The principal Rewards now conferred upon good Men, are of a spiritual, secret, invisible Nature, and therefore often not regarded by the World. And the present Punishments of the wicked are often chiefly internal, transfacted in their own Minds and Consciences, To which it may be added, that we do not at present certainly know who are the righteous and the wicked; and how then can we be sure, whether and how far they are rewarded or punished? Their Hearts are in a great Measure concealed from us. We are often imposed upon by specious Appearances, unable to penetrate through the Disguise of the formal Hypocrite, or to distinguish between the counterfeit Virtue and the true. How often do false and artful Men pass through the World in a fair Disguise, whilst Persons of undissembled Piety and Integrity, of real Sincerity and Truth of Heart, and who are incapable of acting a deceitful Part, are traduced and misrepresented! There must therefore be a Time coming, when the Secrets of all Hearts shall be revealed, and Men shall be dealt with according to their true Characters and real Dispositions: when the Hypocrite, that at present not only escapeth Censure, but obtaineth Applause, shall

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be detected and exposed : and when there shall be an open eternal Discrimination put between the just and the unjust ; and it shall appear that all the former are rewarded, and all the latter punished : without which the Righteousness of God cannot be fully displayed and vindicated.

These several Considerations plainly shew, that this present Life is not the whole of Man's Existence ; and that it is designed for a probationary State, a State of Trial and Discipline, and not of final Judgment ; and consequently, that there must be a future State and Season, in which God will judge the righteous and the wicked.

But to set this in a clearer Light, I shall proceed more distinctly to shew, that neither the righteous receive their proper and full Reward here on Earth ; nor are the wicked punished in such a Manner as would be necessary if this were designed to be a State of final Retributions. But as I have not Time to insist upon this at present so fully as it well deserves, I shall reserve the Consideration of it to another Opportunity, and conclude with this Reflection.

That since it appeareth that this present Life is not the whole of Man's Existence, and is only a probationary State, or a State of Trial, we should take Care that our whole Temper and Conduct be suited to
such

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such a State. Let us not act as if we were to have no other Life but this. Let us not suffer our Desires and Views to center and terminate here, but carry them forward to a future World. We must not take up with any earthly Enjoyments as our proper final Portion and Happiness, but must be still looking towards that State to which this is designed to be preparative. We should regard the Circumstances in which we are now situated, all the Good and Evil, the prosperous and adverse Events which befall us, as designed in several Ways to prove and exercise us, and as Part of the Discipline allotted us by the sovereign Lord who hath placed us here on Earth, and should endeavour to make Use of them all for helping forward our moral Improvement. And it is of vast Importance to us what Habits, what Dispositions are now settled and established in our Minds. For as this is the first Stage of our Being, our good or ill Behaviour in this present State, and the Habits to which we are now formed, will lay a Foundation, both according to the Appointment of God, and the natural Tendency of Things, for our Happiness or Misery in the future Part of our Existence. It highly concerneth us therefore to be careful to redeem and improve our precious Time, and to exercise a constant Watch
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over ourselves. We must guard against the Snares and Temptations to which we are now exposed, and must take Pains to get evil Habits and corrupt Dispositions corrected and restrained, and to cultivate and improve good ones. For as we sow here, we shall reap hereafter. This is what St. *Paul* plainly signifieth in that excellent Passage, with which I shall conclude, *Gal. vi. 7, 8. Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a Man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his Flesh, shall of the Flesh reap Corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap Life everlasting.*



Concerning

Concerning a future Judgment and State of final Retributions, when the Administrations of Providence towards Mankind shall be completed.

DISCOURSE XVIII.

ECCLES. iii. 17.

I said in mine Heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a Time there for every Purpose and for every Work.

IN my former Discourse several Considerations were offered to shew that this present Life is not the whole of Man's Existence, and that it is designed for a probationary

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bationary State, a State of Trial and Discipline, and not of final Judgment; and consequently that there must be a future State and Season in which God will judge the righteous and the wicked.

But to set this in a clearer and stronger Light, I shall now proceed more distinctly to shew, that neither the righteous receive their proper and full Reward here on Earth, nor are the wicked punished in such a Manner as would be necessary if this were designed to be a State of final Retributions.

First, The righteous do not receive their proper and full Reward here on Earth. That which good Men aspire after as their proper Felicity, is not the Enjoyment of worldly Riches or Honours, or of sensual Pleasures, but a Happiness arising from the Perfection of Righteousness, Goodness, and Purity, from the nearest Communion with God, and Conformity to him in his amiable moral Excellencies. But this is what they are not capable of fully attaining to in this present World. They are still reaching forward, and endeavouring to make a continual Progress in the most holy and virtuous Dispositions. But after all their Efforts they fall greatly short: Many are the Defects which attend them whilst they are in the Body. The best of Men are most
sensible

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ſenſible of this, and ready to acknowledge with the Apoſtle *Paul*, that they *have not yet attained, neither are already perfect*; and therefore they moſt earneſtly aſpire after a better State, where they ſhall be entirely free from all their Sins and Defilements, and arrive at the true Perfection and Felicity of their Natures. But what a chilling Thought would it be, if this immature and imperfect State were all they had to hope for! If they were to have no Proſpects or Opportunities of ever arriving to any higher Degrees of moral Excellence, or of being raiſed to a nearer Conformity to God, or a fuller Enjoyment of him, than they can attain to in this preſent ſhort and mortal Life! Is the good Man only left to ſtruggle with his Appetites and Paſſions for a while, and after having, by a careful Diſcipline, brought them under proper Regulations, muſt he, when he is juſt entered as it were upon a Courſe of Wiſdom and Virtue, and beginning to make a hopeful Progreſs in the divine Life, be ſnatched away at once, and an utter End be put to all his noble Purſuits and Attainments? Shall all the earneſt Deſires and Aspirations after Immortality and Perfection in Holineſs, which are kindled in the religious and virtuous Soul, prove vain and abortive, and end in eternal Diſappointment? What a Discou-

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agement would this be to the most worthy and excellent Aims and Endeavours!

And not only are good Men incapable in this present State of arriving at that Perfection and Happiness for which they appear to be designed, and to which they ardently aspire, but they are exposed to Troubles of various Kinds, which answer many valuable Ends if this Life be considered as a State of Trial and Discipline, but at the same Time plainly shew, that this present World is not intended for the Place of their final Rest. They as well as others are subject to grievous Pains and Diseases of Body, to many disastrous Events and vexatious Crosses and Disappointments in the Course of their private Affairs. And with regard to Judgments of a public Nature inflicted upon whole Nations and large Communities, good Men as well as others are frequently involved in the common Calamity. There is no Difficulty in accounting for this, if there be a future State, in which God will distinguish them in a glorious Manner, though here they fall undistinguished in the common Ruin. But if there were no other State to be expected after this Life is at an End, it would be hard to reconcile such a Procedure with the Goodness and Righteousness of Divine Pro-

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vidence. For why should the guilty and the innocent, the righteous and the wicked, share alike?

But it carrieth the Argument much farther, when we consider that many excellent Persons have not only suffered in common with the wicked in this present State, but that they have in several Instances suffered more than other Men. Even their own virtuous Dispositions, their Benevolence and Goodness of Heart, do on many Occasions subject them to peculiar Grievs and Sorrows, by rendering them susceptible of the most tender and affecting Impressions from the Calamities which they see all around them, so that the Miseries of others are by a tender Sympathy made their own. Besides which, they themselves are frequently exposed to Derision and Contempt, and to the most cruel and injurious Treatment from wicked and unreasonable Men. It hath often happened that those who have done signal Services to Mankind have met with the most ungrateful Returns. Not a few have perished in noble Designs and Attempts undertaken from the most upright and excellent Views. There have been Times in which to be remarkable for Virtues and good Qualities, was to be marked out for Destruction, and Eminency in Merit hath been made a

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Crime, and was sure to expose Men to the Rage and Envy of those in Power. And what an overwhelming Thought would it be, if they had no Prospects beyond this present World, in which the best of Men have been used so ill! Numerous have been the Instances of Persons that have been *persecuted for Righteousness sake*. Those of whom *the World was not worthy*, have been *destitute, afflicted, tormented*, treated as the *Off-scouring of all Things*, and after enduring many grievous Sufferings and Reproaches have been put to a most ignominious and painful Death. These are Instances of *just Men perishing in their Righteousness*, which the Wise-man complaineth of, *Eccles. vii. 15*. And if there were no future State, they must perish for ever without any proper Recompence for their exemplary Piety and Virtue. Yea, upon such a Supposition, they would not only be unrewarded, but greatly punished for it. And what a monstrous Supposition would this be, that they should have no other Reward for their uncommon Goodness, than to be exposed to the greatest Sufferings on the Account of it, and to perish under these Sufferings! In this Case they might be said to be irreparable Losers by their Piety, their Devotedness to God, and firm Adherence to the Cause of Truth and

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Righteousness. And can it be supposed, that a just and holy God would suffer this? Will he not take Care that such illustrious Piety and Virtue be suitably rewarded? And if it be rewarded at all, it must be in a future State, since in the Case now put, they have no Reward in this.

It is true that good Men have often great Supports and Comforts under their Afflictions and Troubles, which render their Condition even in those Circumstances really preferable to that of the wicked. But then it must be considered, that those Supports and Comforts arise in a great Measure from the Hope of a blessed Immortality. When they can say with *St. Paul, We rejoice in Hope of the Glory of God*, then they may also say with him, *Yea, we glory in Tribulation also.* Rom. v. 2, 3. Take away this Hope, and you cut the Sinews of their Patience, and deprive them of that which tendeth chiefly to inspire them with a divine Confidence and Joy. That Virtue is its own Reward is indeed a glorious Way of talking, and which in a qualified Sense may be admitted. But if taken in such a Latitude as some have understood it, is no Way agreeable to Reason, or to Fact and Experience. Never did the wildest Flights of Enthusiasm produce any Thing more

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arrogant, or more repugnant to common Sense, than what some Philosophers of old asserted, that a wise Man is perfectly happy in himself, as happy as God, by the mere Force of his own Wisdom and Virtue, independently of any Thing without him, and without any farther Views or Prospects; yea, though we should suppose him to be actually under the greatest bodily Torments, and in the most miserable outward Circumstances that can be imagined, and which by the very Frame of our Nature cannot but produce the most bitter and painful Sensations. Far be it from me to detract from the intrinsic Beauty and Excellency of Virtue, and from the inward Peace and noble Satisfaction which floweth from it. But for any to magnify this so far, as to render the Expectations or Hopes of a Reward prepared for good Men in a future State needless, is under Pretence of a high Esteem for Virtue and moral Excellence to betray its Interests, and to deprive it of its greatest Securities and Encouragements. For that which principally animateth to the Practise of it, is a Sense of the divine Favour and Approbation, and the glorious Prospects it openeth to us. But if there were no future State, how narrow would the Prospect be! How feeble the Proofs that real Piety and Virtue is acceptable and well pleasing to
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the Deity, if he left it to conflict with the severest Difficulties and Trials, and then suffered it to perish without any farther Notice or Regard! How would it appear that he is an Approver and Lover of Righteousness, if he did so little for those who make it the Business of their Lives to cultivate it? If after giving the strongest Evidences of their Love, Resignation, and Obedience to God, amidst the greatest Difficulties, they should instead of receiving a proper Recompence have an eternal Period put to all their Hopes, and to all their virtuous Pursuits?

To all which it may be added, that it hath sometimes happened that Persons of great Piety and Integrity have not only had many outward Troubles here on Earth; but have experienced little of those divine Consolations which other good Men have been favoured with. They have complained of God's hiding his Face from them, and have been oppressed with Sorrow and Sadness. With the best Dispositions in the World they have laboured under black and dismal Clouds of Melancholy, which have filled their Minds with gloomy Apprehensions. So it hath pleased God to suffer it, to convince us the more that this is not the proper State of Rewards for good Men; that there is another and better State to be expected,

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pected, where all those Clouds shall be dispelled, where God shall wipe away all Tears from their Eyes, and they shall rejoice and be happy in him to all Eternity.

From these several Considerations it appeareth, that the righteous do not receive their proper and full Reward here on Earth, and that therefore there must be a future State of Retributions after this Life is at an End.

The same Thing may be argued from there not being an adequate Punishment inflicted upon the ungodly in this present World. It is indeed so ordered by Divine Providence, that Vice and Sin frequently bring great Evils upon Men even in this present Constitution of Things. But this is far from being so universal, or in such a Degree as might be expected, if this were to be the proper and only State of Punishment for the wicked. There are many bad Men who by their vicious Conduct consume their worldly Substance, impair their Health and Credit, expose themselves to Poverty and Shame, and shorten their own Lives, so that they *do not live out half their Days*. But besides that there are good Men who are poor, afflicted, exposed to Obloquy and Reproach, and subject to the same external Evils with the wicked, and whose

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whose Lives are cut off in the midst of their Years; it cannot be denied that there are wicked Persons who enjoy an uninterrupted Course of great outward Prosperity. *They are not in Trouble as other Men, neither are they plagued like other Men. Therefore Pride compasseth them about as a Chain, Violence covereth them as a Garment. Their Eyes stand out with Fatness, they have more than Heart could wish.—Behold these are the ungodly who prosper in the World, they increase in Riches.* Psal. lxxiii. 5, 6, 7, 12. They may therefore be justly said, instead of having their Punishment, to *have their Portion in this Life*, as it is expressed, *Psal. xvii. 14.* They are often exalted to the highest worldly Honours and Dignities, and crowned with Acclamation and Applause. *They become old, yea, are mighty in Power*; or, as the Wise-man speaks, *prolong their Lives in their Wickedness.* Eccles. vii. 15. And if there were no future State, how much happier to all Appearance would their Lot be than that of many pious and righteous Persons, who are all their Lives long afflicted and oppressed, and perhaps end all with a painful and sorrowful Death? There are Sinners of the first Magnitude, whose Crimes as far transcend those of the common Sort of bad Men, as they are superior to them in Dominion and Power, and

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whose evil Actions or unrighteous Decrees have a most mischievous and extensive Influence, and yet they have nothing to fear from any human Judicatories. And if such enormous Sinners are not to be punished in a future State; if after having had the full Indulgence of these Gratifications in which they themselves take most Pleasure, and after having gone on prosperously in their evil Courses to the End of their Lives, they must only like other Men sink into the Grave, and after Death be in no worse a Condition than the best of God's faithful Servants; how could such a State of Things be possibly reconciled to the Wisdom, Righteousness, and Goodness of the supreme Governor? There seemeth to be no Way of accounting for this, but by allowing a future State of Judgment and Retributions, in which there shall be a remarkable Distinction made between the righteous and the wicked, and the former shall be signally rewarded, and the latter shall receive the just Punishment of their Crimes.

If it be urged, that Wickedness carrieth its own Punishment with it, that our Minds are so constituted, as to have an inward Sense of the Deformity of Vice and Sin, which by the very Frame of our Nature is attended with deep Dissatisfaction and Remorse, and with the Stings and Agonies of
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a guilty Conscience, and that this rendereth the wicked miserable in the Height of their outward Prosperity: I answer, that it is indeed a great Proof of the Wisdom and Righteousness of God, that he hath so ordered it, that Men can scarce commit enormous Acts of Wickedness, without being self-condemned, and liable to the Reproaches of their own Minds. This sheweth that the Author of our Natures is himself holy and righteous, that he hateth Sin, and that it is his Will that we should do so too; and consequently it affordeth a Proof that he will awfully punish it; and if Sinners break through these Restraints which he hath laid upon them, this will aggravate their Guilt, and expose them to his righteous Vengeance. But to make the inward Remorse which often accompanieth or followeth bad Actions to be the only Punishment that shall be inflicted upon them, would be a most absurd Supposition. What human Government would be safe, if there were no other Penalties enacted against those that are guilty of the greatest Crimes, but the natural Consequences of Vice, or the Anguish Sinners feel in their own Breasts for having committed those Crimes? Would it be sufficient for answering the Ends of Government, and for deterring evil Doers, to publish fine Edicts, setting before them the Evil and Deformity of
Vice,

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Vice, Injustice, Oppression, Murder, Impurity, and Debauchery, and leaving them to the Stings and Torments of their own Consciences as the greatest Punishments that could be inflicted? Would not such a Scheme of Government be accounted perfectly ridiculous? By the common Consent of all Mankind these are not alone sufficient Punishments. That which giveth the greatest Force to the Stings and Agonies of a guilty Conscience, is the Dread of a supreme Governor and Judge, and the Apprehensions of the Wrath to come. Take away this, and the Pangs and Terrors which attend the Practice of Sin will be very much allayed and diminished. Besides, it is manifest from Fact and Experience, that in this present State there is such a Variety of Amusements and Entertainments, there are so many Things to divert the Attention of the Mind, and to take off, or greatly abate the Edge of keen and bitter Reflections, that Men for the most part find Ways of shunning the Uneasiness of their own Minds, and even of arguing themselves out of it by debauching their Reason to patronize their Vices. Many by a long Course of sinning have contracted a strange Insensibility, and have quite stupified their own Consciences, and even gloried in their Crimes. They have been so far depraved, as not only to take Pleasure

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sure in gratifying their vicious Inclinations, but in reflecting upon them afterwards, and in acting over former Scenes of Impurity and Revenge in their own Imaginations. So that if the inward Anguish and Remorse of their own Minds were to be the only or principal Punishment Sinners were to undergo, then the most profligate and obdurate Sinners, they who had arrived to the greatest Height of Wickedness, would be the freest from Punishment. Those would suffer most who are raw and unpractised in Vice; and the longer any Person had gone on in a Course of sinning, and the more hardened he was in his evil Habits, the less would his Penalty be; which is the most absurd Supposition that can possibly be admitted, and the most inconsistent with the Righteousness of the supreme Governor and Judge.

Upon the whole, it is the Dread of future Punishments that is the most powerful Restraint to Vice and Wickedness. If this were once entirely removed, there would be little comparatively to hinder Sinners from giving an unbounded Licence to their corrupt Appetites and Lusts; the World would be far wickeder and therefore more miserable than it is. And there are few Sinners, whatever Pains they take with themselves, who can get absolutely rid of
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all Apprehensions of this Kind. Still there are some secret Forebodings of a future Account, which are apt to arise in their Minds, and on some Occasions, at least, to give them Uneasiness.

And now if we take the several Considerations together which have been mentioned, they lead to this Conclusion, that there shall be a future State, in which God will judge the righteous and the wicked, and will reward the one and punish the other. And in fact, no Instance can be brought of a well-ordered State, where the Generality of the People had not some Notion (though often blended with much Obscurity) of a future State of Rewards and Punishments, which was both derived to them by a most ancient and general Tradition, and may be justly regarded as the Voice of Nature and Reason, arising from a secret Conviction that some further Retributions are necessary than are dispensed here on Earth. And that which is so agreeable to right Reason to suppose, and which is rendered so probable by the State and Circumstances of Mankind, is put beyond all Doubt by the Gospel of *Jesus*. There Life and Immortality is brought into the most clear and open Light, which is an inestimable Advantage to us. For though, in general, it is reasonable

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sonable to believe that God will reward good Men in a future State, yet in applying this to our own Case, many are the Doubts and Difficulties that will be apt to arise, considering the Imperfection of our Virtues, the Sins we are chargeable with, and the many Defects in our Obedience. Besides that, if left to our own unassisted Reason, we must be greatly at a loss with regard to the Nature and Greatness of that future Reward which it shall please God in his infinite Wisdom and Goodness to bestow. It must therefore be an unspeakable Comfort and Advantage to be assured in the Name of God himself, and by his own express Promise, that he will graciously pardon our Iniquities upon our returning to him with a true Repentance, and will crown our sincere, though imperfect Obedience, with a glorious Resurrection, and Life everlasting; a Reward far transcending all that we are able to express or even to conceive. In like manner we are also assured, that there are dreadful Punishments prepared for the wicked in a future State, which are represented in a Manner very proper to make strong Impressions upon the Minds of Sinners, and to deter them from a Course of presumptuous Sin and Disobedience. We have now the clearest Discovery made to us, and the most
absolute

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absolute Assurance given us, of a future general Judgment. It is declared to us by express Revelation, from God himself, that there is *a Day coming*, a certain appointed Season fixed in the divine Counsels, though, for wise Reasons, the precise Time of it is concealed from us, *in the which God will judge the World in Righteousness*. That then he will *render to every Man according to his Deeds*; to them, who by a patient Continuance in Well-doing, seek for Glory, Honour, and Immortality, eternal Life; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the Truth, but obey Unrighteousness, *Indignation and Wrath, Tribulation and Anguish*. That this Judgment shall be universal, extending to all Mankind without Exception, and shall be carried on with the most awful Solemnity, with the utmost Impartiality, and without respect of Persons, and that the Secrets of all Hearts shall be made manifest. This we are assured of by the most credible and illustrious Messenger that could possibly be sent from Heaven, even the Son of God himself, *Jesus Christ* our Lord, by whom this Judgment shall be immediately administered in the Father's Name, and whose divine Mission cometh to us confirmed by the most illustrious Attestations. And this Constitution, whereby the Saviour of Man-
kind

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kind is appointed to be our Judge, sheweth, that we shall be dealt with according to the Rules of Righteousness and Equity, but not with the utmost Rigour and Severity of unallayed Justice; a Consideration which cannot but minister great Comfort to good Men, and at the same Time giveth no Encouragement to those that persist in an obstinate Course of Disobedience.

I shall conclude this Discourse and all that I have to offer on this important Subject relating to the Providence of God, with observing, that at the great Day of Judgment and final Retributions, the Scheme of Providence towards Mankind shall be accomplished, and shall appear in its proper Harmony and Glory to the whole intelligent Creation.

God's impartial Justice and Righteousness and spotless Purity shall then be awfully displayed. He seemed frequently as it were to connive at Mens Wickedness here on Earth, so that they were sometimes ready to conclude that he was altogether such an one as themselves.—But it shall be made appear at the great Day to the whole moral World how infinitely God hateth Sin. Then shall the most obstinate Sinners be constrained to adore him as glorious in Holiness, and be too late convinced that he is of *purser Eyes than to behold Iniquity,*

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and that he will *by no Means clear the guilty*; for he shall then effectually reprove and condemn them, and shall set their Sins *in Order before their Eyes*. Hence the Day of Judgment is called the *Day of Wrath, and Revelation of the righteous Judgment of God*. Rom. ii. 5.

The Glory of God's infinite Goodness, Grace, and Love, shall then also be made illustriously manifest. It shall appear what a kind Rewarder he is to them that diligently seek him, that he did not forget their *Work of Faith, their Labour of Love, and Patience of Hope*. They might perhaps seem to have been neglected and disregarded here on Earth; they, it may be, went through a Course of grievous Sufferings, Reproaches, and Persecutions, for his Sake: But who can comprehend the Glory of that Reward which he shall then bestow upon them? A Reward infinitely transcending their Labours and Sufferings! He will himself be their all-sufficient Portion and Happiness to all Eternity. All the Wonders of his Love, the Methods of his Grace, the great Things he had done from the Beginning of the World for the Salvation of the lost human Race, shall be brought into open View, and he shall appear in all the Glory of that amiable Character, that he is the Father of Mercies,
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the God of Love, infinite eternal Love and Goodness itself.

The Wisdom of God, as Governor of the World, shall then also shine forth with an unclouded Lustre. All the amazing Difficulties and seeming Contrarieties in the Dispensations of his Providence which now puzzle our Minds, shall be fully adjusted and reconciled. In this present State we view only some separate Fragments of God's Dealings, and not the various Parts together in their proper Connection and Harmony. But then, when the entire Scheme shall be opened, how worthy of God shall it appear! how admirably adjusted in all its Parts! We shall then see, that even those Events that seemed most shocking and hardest to be accounted for in this present State, were all beautiful in their Season, and under the steady Conduct of a superior divine Hand. How delightful will it then be to behold how the Malice and Wickedness of Men, only bent on fulfilling their own Lusts, were, in numberless Instances, over-ruled to subserve the wise and righteous Ends of the divine Government; how Good was made to arise out of Evil, Light out of Darkness, and Order out of Confusion; how God, through an infinite Variety of seemingly contradictory

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Events,

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Events, still carried on the same uniform grand Design, so that though the Parts, separately considered, might perhaps seem to be irregular and confused, yet nothing could be more wisely ordered, and more harmonious than the whole; in a Word, to behold how all the Events of this present State of Trial were ordered in such a Manner, as was most proper to make Way for that State of eternal Retributions that was to succeed! When all these Things are cleared up to us, what a beautiful Scheme of Providence will present itself to our View! How shall those illustrious moral Perfections of the Deity then shine forth in all their Glory, which are fitted to engage and command the affectionate, awful Admiration and Esteem of all reasonable intelligent Beings! The Prospects of this should now fill us with the most adoring Thoughts of the divine Majesty, and effectually prevent all impatient querulous Repinings and Discontents at any of his providential Dispensations, and should cause us to dread his Displeasure, and to desire his Favour and value his Loving-kindness above all Things.

Here, therefore, let us conclude our Meditations on Divine Providence, looking forwards to that important Day of
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final Retributions, and making it our principal Business to prepare for it. *And now unto him that is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the Presence of his Glory with exceeding Joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, both now and ever. Amen.*



On the Universal Deluge.

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2 PETER ii. 5.

And spared not the old World, but saved Noah the eighth Person, a Preacher of Righteousness, bringing in the Flood upon the World of the ungodly.

THERE is scarce any Event that ever happened to Mankind, which is of a more extraordinary Nature than the Universal Deluge, whereby the World that then was, being overflowed with Water, perished; as it is expressed, 2 Pet. iii. 6. And yet it seems to be but little considered. We are for the most part apt to regard it in no other View than as a strange Event, which happened a long Time ago, and in

which we have no Concern. But this certainly is a wrong Way of thinking. Why is this Event so particularly recorded in the holy Scriptures, and the Account of it carefully transmitted to future Generations in Books written by divine Inspiration, if not that we should make serious Reflections upon it, and endeavour to improve it to good religious and moral Purposes? I hope therefore it may be of Use to consider this Subject distinctly.

In treating of which, I propose first to enquire into the Causes of the Deluge, as set forth in the sacred Writings, which will lead us to make some Reflections on the State of the World and of Mankind, whom this dreadful Calamity came upon.

Secondly, I shall consider the Account that is given us of the Deluge itself, the Greatness and Universality of it, and the general Destruction it brought upon the whole Race of Mankind that was then upon the Earth, *Noah* and his Family only excepted.

The next Thing to be considered is the Truth and Certainty of this great Event, and that however extraordinary it may appear, we have sufficient Evidence to convince us that it really happened; as appears both from the express Testimony of holy Writ, and from the ancient Traditions concerning

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cerning it, which spread very generally among the heathen Nations themselves.

I shall conclude the whole with some Observations, which may help us to make a right Use and Improvement of this amazing Dispensation of Divine Providence; and which is what I have principally in View in the Choice of this Subject.

First, Let us begin with enquiring into the Causes of the Deluge, as they are set forth to us in the sacred Writings. And this will lead us to consider the State of the World and of Mankind, when this dreadful Calamity came upon them. As certain as it is that there is a God that made and governeth the World, so certain it is that an Event of such vast Consequence to Mankind, could not have come to pass without the special Direction and Interposition of Divine Providence. And to this the Apostle *Peter* here plainly ascribes it, when he declares, that God *spared not the old World—bringing in the Flood upon the World of the ungodly*. Whatever Use might be made of natural Causes, concerning which learned Men have offered various Conjectures, yet still it must be acknowledged that it was God's Providence which directed and over-ruled the whole. And we may be sure from the best Notions we can form of the divine Perfections, that

that there must have been wise and just Reasons for that astonishing Dispensation. It cannot be supposed that the benevolent Father of Mankind, the supreme Lord and Governor of the World, who is perfectly holy, and just, and good, would have sent such a desolating Judgment upon a World of his Creatures, if it had not been for Ends worthy of his infinite Wisdom and Righteousness. Let us therefore enquire what Light the Scripture affords us into the Reasons and Ends of this wonderful Event. And in general we are assured, that it was the universal Depravation, the Wickedness and Corruption of Mankind, which brought that destructive Deluge upon them. This manifestly appears from the Account given us of it by *Moses*. He observes, *Gen. vi. 5.* that *God saw that the Wickedness of Man was great upon the Earth, and that every Imagination of the Thoughts of his Heart was only evil continually.* This is a very significant Representation of the great and universal Depravity into which Mankind were fallen. Not only were their Actions wicked and corrupt, but their Thoughts and Affections, the Intentions and Imaginations of their Hearts; their inward Part was very Wickedness, their moral Sense of Things, their very Notions of Good and Evil, were strangely depraved. Again it is
said,

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said, Ver. 12. that *God looked upon the Earth, and behold it was corrupt; for all Flesh had corrupted his Way upon the Earth.* But besides this general Account there are some particular Things hinted at by the sacred Historian which deserve to be distinctly considered.

And 1st, It is plainly intimated in the *Mosaic* Account, that sensual Lusts, Impurity, and Dissoluteness of Manners, abounded among them. We are told, *Gen. vi. 2.* that *the Sons of God saw the Daughters of Men that they were fair; and they took them Wives of all which they chose.* It is generally agreed by the most learned Expositors, that by the Sons of God we are here probably to understand the Posterity of *Seth*, so called because they made a Profession of Religion, and of being devoted to the Worship and Service of God. For in Scripture Language the Worshippers of the true God, and who are brought into a special Relation to him, are honoured with this Character. Thus *Moses* saith to the *Israelites*, who were a peculiar People unto God, as distinguished from the heathen World, *Ye are the Children of the Lord your God.* *Deut. xiv. 1.* And God calls them his Sons and Daughters, *Deut. xxxii. 19.* In like Manner by the Sons of God here may be understood those of the old World, who had kept up an Appearance of Piety, and had not hitherto

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therto mingled with the profane and impious Race of *Cain*; but now being allured by the Charms and Beauty of their Women, who are called the Daughters of Men, by Way of Distinction from those who are denominated the Sons of God, they entered into a close Commerce with them, and gave a full Loose to their lustful Appetites. This seems to be signified here, when it is said that *they saw that they were fair, and they took them Wives of all which they chose*. They hearkened only to the Voice of their Passions, and had no Regard to Religion and Virtue in their Choice, and probably took as many of them as their Inclinations led them to, and, if they could not otherwise obtain them, took them by Force; which is a Sense that, in the Opinion of some learned Critics, the Words in the Original will well bear. Polygamy seems to have first begun in the Family of *Cain*; one of whose Descendants, *Lamech*, is the first Polygamist we read of; concerning whom *Moses* observes, that *Lamech took unto him two Wives, Adah and Zillah*. Gen. iv. 19. And afterwards, probably, this Custom became general among the Posterity of *Seth* as well as *Cain*. And there is Reason to think that Corruption and Debauchery made continual Advances, till at length an universal Diffoluteness and Licentiousness overspread the human Race; and all Sense of Modesty

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defty and Virtue feemed to be in a great Meafure extinguifhed.

2dly, It is farther fignified in the Account given us of the old World, that all Manner of Injuftice and Violence prevailed amongst them. Thus, *Gen. vi. 11.* we are told that *the Earth was corrupt before God, and the Earth was filled with Violence*: And this is repeated again, *Ver. 13.* The *Hebrew Word* which we render *Violence*, fignifies not only the doing Wrong by open Force and Rapine, but all Kinds of unjuft and injurious Dealing, without any Regard to Right and Equity. *Moses* obferves, *Gen. vi. 4.* that *there were Giants in the Earth in thofe Days*: There were Giants of the Race of *Cain* before the Children of *Seth* intermixed with them; and he adds that, *alfo after that, when the Sons of God came in unto the Daughters of Men, and they bare Children unto them; the fame became mighty Men, which were of old, Men of Renown.* *Gen. vi. 4.* It is probable, that as Men, in general, were in thofe early Ages of much ftronger bodily Conftitutions than they have been fince the Flood, as may be reasonably concluded from their living to an Age vastly fuperior to the prefent Race of Mortals, fo there were many among them of extraordinary and prodigious Strength and Stature, who, confiding in their own Strength, made Force their

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their only Law, and placed their whole Glory in Deeds of lawless Might and Violence. They became, as *Moses* expresseth it, *Men of Renown*. Thus was all Mankind in a State of War and Confusion; there was no Peace or Security, the Sword decided all Controversies; the Voice of Reason and Equity was not heard. Humanity and Benevolence, and the amiable Virtues of Charity, Meekness, Kindness, Benignity, Peaceableness, were despised and almost extinguished among Men: Nothing esteemed and admired, but Pride, Haughtiness, a brutal Fierceness and Courage, and lawless uncontrolled Dominion, carrying every Thing by Force and Power. Some Traditions of this obtained in the heathen World. As they had traditional Stories among them of the long Lives of Men in the first Ages of the World, so also of Giants, Men of huge Strength and Bravery, above the ordinary Rate of the human Race, and also of fierce and cruel Dispositions, who gloried in Acts of Violence; and that the State of Things was such, that Truth and Justice fled to Heaven, and found no Place among Mankind.

3dly, That which carried their Wickedness to the greatest Height, was Impiety and Profaneness, a daring Contempt and Neglect

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of all Religion. This seems here to be signified by the Apostle *Peter*, when speaking of the Men of the old World, upon whom the Flood came, he calls them *the World of the ungodly*. It is a Question among the learned, whether there was Idolatry before the Flood. There is nothing in the *Mosaic* Account, from which we can absolutely decide or pronounce concerning it one Way or other. The most learned *Jewish* Writers are generally of Opinion that there was. The same is the Opinion of the *Arabian* Writers, and they pretend to fix the Time when Idolatry first began, which they say was in the Days of *Jared*. But as *Moses* takes no Notice of this, it cannot be depended upon. It may however be said, that since all Kinds of Wickedness and Impiety abounded in the old World, it would be a Wonder if they escaped Idolatry, to which Mankind in all Ages have been so very prone. And their falling so early as they did after the Flood into the idolatrous Worship of the heavenly Bodies, and of deified Men or Heroes, seems to make it probable that something of this Kind had been in Use before. And a great deal has been offered by Persons eminent for Learning, to shew that some of those that were worshipped as Deities after the Flood had
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been *Men of Renown* in the antediluvian World.

But whatever becomes of these Conjectures, and whether we suppose Idolatry to have obtained among Mankind before the Flood or not, yet it seems evident from the Account given of them, that they were, for the most part, very impious and profane. This may be fairly gathered from what is said in the Prophecy of *Enoch*, as recorded by the Apostle *Jude*, who tells us, that *Enoch the Seventh from Adam prophesied, saying, Behold the Lord cometh with ten Thousands of his Saints, to execute Judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of their ungodly Deeds, which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard Speeches, which ungodly Sinners have spoken against him.* Jude 14, 15. Here it is signified, that with daring Insolence they set their Mouths against Heaven, and broke forth into profane and blasphemous Speeches. They either denied that there is a God, or would not allow that he concerneth himself with the Affairs of Men. Idolatry, which is a false Religion probably obtained among many of them, as was before hinted, but it seems rather to have been their prevailing Character that they had no Religion at all, or had an utter Contempt of all Religion, and
were

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were chargeable with Atheism, or, which comes to the same Thing, they did not acknowledge a Providence, or God's moral Government of the World. And this being the Case, they threw off all Restraint, and gave an unbounded Licence to all Manner of Wickedness, Violence, and Impurity. They were abominable and corrupt, and had no Fear of God before their Eyes. And this daring and enormous Impiety seems to be signified in the Traditions which were spread in the heathen World concerning the Giants of old, who waged an impious War against Heaven.

Thus I have made a brief Representation, following the Light the Scriptures afford us, of the universal and amazing Depravity of the old World, and which is represented to have been the Cause of that universal Deluge which God sent in just Judgment upon the human Race. Their Corruption did not come to the Height at once, but was gradually encreasing, till at length they became absolutely incorrigible, lost to all Sense of Religion and Virtue, *Vessels of Wrath fitted to Destruction*. God had no doubt used many Methods to reclaim them. They were not removed many Ages from the Creation. *Adam*, the first of Men, who lived

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nine hundred and thirty Years, we may reasonably conclude, took Care to instruct his Posterity in the Things it most concerned them to know, especially with relation to the Creation of the World, the primitive State of Man in Paradise, the Fall, the original Promise. There were also *Preachers of Righteousness* in the old World, Persons of great Authority and Eminence, and who had extraordinary Revelations communicated to them from God himself. Such an one was *Enoch*, remarkable for his Piety in a Time of great and general Corruption, and who, no doubt, did all he could by his Instructions, and by his Warnings, as well as by his holy Example, to stem the Torrent of abounding Impiety and Wickedness. And it pleased God by a visible Translation of him into Heaven, to give a sensible Proof of a future State, which might have been of great Advantage to that unbelieving Generation. There were probably others from Time to Time, who endeavoured to awaken them to a Sense of their Guilt and Danger, and to turn them from the Evil of their Ways; the last of whom was *Noah*, who is here called by *St. Peter*, a *Preacher of Righteousness*. By him God gave farther Warnings; and condescended so far as to acquaint them, that the utmost Time of his

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his Forbearance towards them, and the Space given them for Repentance, and for averting the awful Judgments which hung over them; should be one hundred and twenty Years. This is what *Moses* signifies when he tells us, that *the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with Man, for that he also is Flesh; yet his Days, i. e. the Days of my Spirit striving with him, shall be an hundred and twenty Years.* Gen. vi. 3. And what God declared to *Noah*, that good Man no doubt took Care to declare to others, and to make it generally known as far as lay in his Power. To which it may be added, that his building the Ark by God's own express Appointment, which must have been a long Time carrying on, the professed Design of which was to save himself and his Family from that dreadful Inundation which should overwhelm the rest of Mankind, was a sensible Token and Warning given them in the Name of God, what they were to expect if they did not repent. To this the Apostle *Peter* has a Reference in that remarkable Passage, 1 *Pet.* iii. 19, 20. where having observed that *Christ* was put to Death in the *Flesh*, but quickened by the *Spirit*, he adds, by which also, i. e. by which Spirit, he went and preached unto the Spirits in

E. e 2 Prison,

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Prison, which were sometime disobedient, when once the Long-suffering of God waited in the Days of Noab, while the Ark was preparing. Christ preached to the Spirits in Prison, i. e. to those heinous Sinners who are now Spirits in Prison, reserved unto the final Judgment, but were sometime disobedient in the Days of Noab; he preached to them to call them to Repentance, not immediately and personally, but by his Spirit, and through the Ministry of Noab. But they were disobedient to the divine Call, they continued obstinately to despise all the Riches of the divine Goodness, and Patience, and Long-suffering; and when no Warnings could make an Impression, it seemed fit to an holy and righteous God to order it so, that that wicked and incorrigible Race should be destroyed from off the Face of the Earth, and that a new Generation of Men should arise to people it, who might take Warning from that amazing Desolation, which was designed to be a lasting Monument to all succeeding Ages of the heinous Evil and Malignity of Sin, and of God's just Detestation and Abhorrence of it. Moses, after observing that God saw that the Wickedness of Man was great in the Earth, adds, and it repented him that he made Man, and it grieved him
at

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at his Heart. Gen. vi. 6. This is not to be taken in a gross literal Sense. It is spoken after the Manner of Men, and in a Way of Analogy to human Passions and Affections. But the Intention of these Expressions is plainly this, to signify in a striking Manner that the great and universal Corruption of Mankind was highly displeasing to a pure and holy Deity, and would have affected him with Grief, if his glorious Nature had been capable of it; and that whereas he had long borne with the Wickedness of Mankind, and treated them with great Lenity and Indulgence, now that they were become incorrigible, he would alter the Course of his Dealings towards them, and punish them with such a just and awful Severity, as if it had repented him that he had made Man upon the Earth. But we are not to imagine that in all this there was a real and proper Change of Mind and Counsel in God, as there is in Men when they repent, and when Things have happened which they did not foresee. For the universal Corruption and Depravation of the human Race was what he perfectly foresaw; and the sending the Flood upon them was a Part of the Scheme of Providence formed in the divine Counsels from the Beginning, though

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it was not actually executed till the proper Season, when the Iniquities of Mankind were arrived at the greatest Height. And what an awful Manifestation of the divine Justice this exhibited, I shall have Occasion to shew in the farther Prosecution of this Subject.



On the Universal Deluge.

DISCOURSE XX.

2 PETER ii. 5.

*And spared not the old World, but saved
Noah the eighth Person, a Preacher of
Righteousness, bringing in the Flood upon
the World of the ungodly.*

IN a former Discourse upon this Subject,
some Inquiry was made into the Causes
of the Universal Deluge, as set forth to us
in the holy Scriptures. And this led us to
consider the universal and amazing Corrup-
tion into which Mankind had then fallen,
and which through the just Judgment of
God brought this dreadful Calamity upon
them.

I now proceed, secondly, to consider the Account given us of the Deluge itself, and the direful Effects it produced in the Destruction of the whole human Race, which were then upon the Earth, *Noah* and his Family only excepted.

When God had long borne with the Wickedness of the old World, and had exercised great Patience towards them, which was so far from leading them to Repentance, as it ought to have done, that they grew worse and worse, more and more abandoned to Vice and Impiety; the Time was at length come which had been determined in the divine Councils for executing this tremendous Judgment upon them. They seem to have been then in a profound Security. Notwithstanding the express Warnings which had been given them by *Noah* in the Name of God, and that he had shewn the firm Persuasion he had of the Truth of those divine Denunciations by building a great and capacious Ark for the Reception of himself and his Family, in Obedience to God's Command, yet the Men of that corrupt Generation paid no Regard to those solemn Warnings. They probably looked upon *Noah* as little better than a wild Visionary, and ridiculed the Warnings he gave them as the Reveries of Enthusiasm. They either did not believe

believe a Providence, or that God concerneth himself with Men and their Affairs; or they flattered themselves that he was too merciful to punish his Creatures with such Severity; and thus, under Pretence of extolling his Goodness, they denied his Justice, and did not stand in Awe of his Judgments: or perhaps they treated the universal Deluge as an absurd and impossible Thing, as some Unbelievers have since done. But however this be, they seem to have had no Fears or Apprehensions of the dreadful Ruin that was coming upon them. Our Saviour takes Notice of this. He tells us, that *as in the Days that were before the Flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in Marriage, until the Day that Noah entered into the Ark, and knew not till the Flood came and took them all away, so shall also the Coming of the Son of Man be.* Matt. xxiv. 38, 39. Luke xvii. 26, 27. All on a sudden, when they expected no such Thing, and were busily engaged in their worldly Affairs, or were freely indulging themselves in Mirth and Jollity, and perhaps in Excesses of Riot, the awful Judgment overtook them at once. No sooner was *Noah* entered into the Ark, with his Family, and the several Kinds of Animals which God had ordered to be preserved there, but the
Flood

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Flood came on with an impetuous Violence. In that very Day, as *Moses* informs us, *all the Fountains of the great Deep were broken up, and the Windows of Heaven were opened.* Gen. vii. 11, 13. He first observes, that *all the Fountains of the great Deep were broken up.* Besides the vast Assemblage of Waters in the wide extended Ocean, and in the several Seas into which it is divided, and in the Lakes, Pools, Rivers, &c. there are huge Repositories of Waters in the Bowels of the Earth, as the ablest natural Philosophers who have enquired into these Things have acknowledged. To this probably the Psalmist refers, when after having said, that God *gathereth the Waters of the Sea together as an Heap*, he adds, that *he layeth up the Depth in Store-houses.* Psal. xxxiii. 7. And elsewhere speaking of the Earth, he saith, that God *hath founded it upon the Seas, and established it upon the Floods.* Psal. xxiv. 2. And again, that *he stretched out the Earth above the Waters.* Psal. cxxxvi. 6. Where it is plainly implied, that there are Waters under the Earth, ready to serve the Purposes of Divine Providence. And who can pretend to affirm what Quantity of Waters there may be collected in those huge subterraneous Magazines, or to what Depth they may descend? For ought any Man knows, or can

can prove to the contrary, there might be Waters enough there to overflow the whole Earth, if they could be brought out upon its Surface. And this might be easily effected by the divine Power; the Interposition of which on this extraordinary Occasion must necessarily be acknowledged. When therefore it is here said, that *all the Fountains of the great Deep were broken up*, it signifies that Providence ordered it so, that by some mighty Force the outward Crust of the Earth was in many Places broken at once, and the Waters of the Abyss came rushing forth with an amazing Rapidity, and joining with the Waters of the Sea, Lakes, and Rivers, soon covered the Face of the Ground. And at the same Time we are told *the Windows of Heaven were opened*. The Word in the Original which we translate Windows is very emphatical. It is rendered in the Margin of our Bibles, Flood-gates; *the Flood-gates of Heaven were opened*. Some after the Septuagint translate it Cataracts. The Waters came pouring down from Heaven, not by Drops, but as in Spouts, Instances of which are still seen in some Parts of the World, when Clouds break at once and discharge huge Torrents of Water, which overwhelm whatever they fall upon. These excessive Rains continued without Inter-

mission,

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mission forty Days and forty Nights, as *Moses* expressly assures us, *Gen. vii. 12.* so that the whole Air or Atmosphere looked as if it were dissolved into Water. And who can express the Confusion, the Consternation and Dismay, which then seized that corrupt and abandoned Race of Mortals? They were, as was hinted before, in a State of deep Security, without any Dread of God, or his impending Judgments, when all at once there was an astonishing Change in the Face of this lower World. The Ground in many Parts of the Earth broke and sunk under them, and disclosed horrid Chasms, through which the rushing Waves of the great Abyss came upon them with a dreadful Noise and irresistible Fury, at the same Time the Heaven opened its Flood-gates; so that the mighty Waters came pouring from above, from beneath, on every Side. Stunned with the amazing Din, and surrounded with Terrors, whither could they flee for Refuge? Those haughty Giants, who, confiding in their own Strength and Courage, feared neither God nor Man, and dared to lift up their blasphemous Mouths against Heaven, now find too late the Truth of those Threatnings which they had despised. They now believe and tremble, and feel, by woful Experience, that *verily there is a God that judgeth in the Earth.*

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Earth. Now at last would they lift up their suppliant Hands to Heaven, but all in vain. The Decree is gone forth, the Judgment is irrevocable, nothing before them but Vengeance and Destruction: nothing to be seen but raging Waves, Sea covered Sea, Sea without Shore. All those that inhabited the Plains would soon be destroyed. And as they that possessed the higher Grounds, or fled thither, besides the Waters rising upon them from below, the Cataracts pouring upon them from above, took away all Hopes of Escape, mighty Torrents met them from the Tops of the Hills, and with an irresistible Violence swept away all before them.

And as the Deluge was great at the very first, so it continually increased, and prevailed upon the Earth for one hundred and fifty Days without the least Abatement. *Gen. vii. 24.* Some have pretended that the Deluge reached only over a Part of the Earth. But this seems to be utterly inconsistent with the Account the sacred Historian has given of it. He tells us that *the Waters prevailed exceedingly upon the Earth, and that all the high Hills that were under the whole Heaven were covered. — And all Flesh died that moved upon the Earth, both of Fowl, and of Cattle, and of Beast, and of every creeping Thing that creepeth*

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creepeth upon the Earth, and every Man: All in whose Nostrils was the Breath of Life, and of all that was in the dry Land, died.— And Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the Ark. Gen. vii. 19.

—23. Scarce any Expressions can be imagined stronger to signify that the Flood was universal, and was spread over the whole Earth. And what renders this more astonishing is, that there is great Reason to think that Mankind were then very numerous. Those that have made the most accurate Computations, have thought it highly probable, that considering the Length of Mens Lives in those Ages, and the Strength of their Constitutions, they multiplied much more in the 1656 Years from the Creation to the Flood, than in above 4000 Years since. Who can think of such Destruction without Amazement and solemn Awe! Yet Providence so ordered it, that the human Race was not utterly extinguished. A Remnant, a small Remnant was still preserved to be the Seed of a new Generation.

This leads me to what I proposed to consider in the next Place, the wonderful Preservation of *Noah*, and of those that were with him in the Ark. This *St. Peter* here refers to when he tells us, that *God spared not the old World, but saved Noah,*

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Noah, the eighth Person, a Preacher of Righteousness, bringing in the Flood upon the World of the ungodly. When it is here said, that God saved *Noah, the eighth Person*, the Meaning is, that he saved eight Persons in all, and *Noah* was one of the eight, and the most eminent among them. And accordingly the same Apostle elsewhere observes, that *the Long-suffering of God waited in the Days of Noah, while the Ark was preparing, wherein few, that is, eight Souls, were saved by Water.* 1 Pet. iii. 20. At the same Time that God exhibited such an awful Demonstration of his righteous Abhorrence of Sin and Wickedness, he gave also a most illustrious Proof of his distinguishing Regard to eminent Piety. *Moses* tells us, that when God determined to execute his just Vengeance on that ungodly Generation, *Noah found Grace in the Eyes of the Lord*; and he adds, that *Noah was a just Man, and perfect in his Generations, and Noah walked with God.* Gen. vi. 8, 9. He was not only free from all those enormous Vices and Impieties which then so much abounded in the World, but he was a Man of exemplary Piety and Righteousness, and diligent in every Part of his Duty both towards God and Man. It is said of *Noah* as well as of *Enoch*, that he *walked with God*, he maintained

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maintained Communion with him by Faith, and, under a constant Sense of a present Deity, endeavoured to approve himself to him in the whole Course of an holy and virtuous Life and Conversation. In this Course he persevered when *all Flesh had corrupted his Way upon the Earth*. And this was so pleasing in the Sight of God, that he chose to distinguish him in a very extraordinary Manner. *With thee, says he, will I establish my Covenant, and thou shalt come into the Ark, thou and thy Sons, and thy Wife, and thy Sons Wives with thee.* Chap. vi. 18. And again, Chap. vii. 1. it is observed, that *the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou, and all thy House into the Ark, for thee have I seen righteous before me in this Generation*. There is a particular Emphasis in this Manner of Expression; *Thee have I seen righteous before me in this Generation*. Even in this most wicked Generation, amidst the universal Corruption, thou hast been righteous before me, thou hast maintained thine Integrity, and gone on in an uniform Course of Piety and Virtue. And not only was *Noah* eminently righteous in his own Person, but he was a *Preacher of Righteousness* to others. He endeavoured by his pious Instructions and Admonitions, by his Exhortations as well as Example, to reclaim an ungodly
Race

Race from the Evil of their Ways, and to engage them to turn unto the Lord by a sincere Repentance. He faithfully warned them of the dreadful Ruin they would draw upon themselves, both in this World and the next, by their continued Impenitency and Disobedience, and no doubt promised them Mercy upon their Reformation and Amendment. But they paid no Regard to the Warnings he gave them in the Name of God. The sacred Writer to the *Hebrews* observes, that *by Faith Noab being warned of God of Things not Seen as yet, moved with Fear, prepared an Ark to the Saving of his House, by the which he condemned the World, and became Heir of the Righteousness which is by Faith.* Heb. xi. 7. *i. e.* he not only obtained a temporal Deliverance from the Flood, but had a Right given him to that eternal Life and Salvation which God will, in his rich Grace and Mercy, bestow on those that sincerely believe and obey him.

And not only was *Noab* himself saved from the Flood, but with him, and for his Sake, his Wife, and his three Sons, and their Wives. And these were all that were preserved of the whole human Race. All the rest perished in the Waters, under the visible Marks of the divine Vengeance. And it is to be feared, that this dreadful

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temporal Judgment was not the worst Thing that was to befall them, or which their enormous Impiety and Wickedness deserved. The greatest Punishment in this present World, such as that of *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah*, will not excuse obstinate impenitent Sinners from being accountable and exposed to farther Punishments at the Day of Judgment. Yet I do not think we are obliged to suppose, that the whole Race of Mankind which were then upon the Earth, except *Noah* and his Family, were consigned over to remediless Condemnation and Punishment in a future State, though they were all equally involved in the same deadly Calamity in this. For besides that there must be vast Numbers of Infants and Children who were comparatively innocent, that yet were destroyed along with their Parents, as often happens in public Calamities, I dare not say, nor do I think there is sufficient Ground to affirm, that among the adult, and those that were come to the Use of their Reason, there was not a single Person of the human Race that had any Thing of Piety and Virtue, except *Noah* and they that were with him in the Ark, though he was the most eminently pious Person then in the World, and who had openly distinguished himself in that corrupt and abandoned

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doned Generation, and therefore was in an extraordinary Manner distinguished by Divine Providence in being exempted from the general Ruin. It cannot be denied that good Men may be, and have been, involved in Calamities of a public Nature, inflicted upon large Communities and Bodies of Men for their Wickedness; in which Case it must be said, that though; for wise Ends, God doth not think fit to exempt them from suffering in common with many others in this World, yet he will certainly make a proper Distinction between them in a future State of Retributions. Something of this Kind may possibly have been the Case with respect to some of those who perished in the general Deluge in common with the Bulk of the human Race. However general we may suppose the Corruption of Mankind to have been in the old World, they were not all equally corrupted, nor had arrived to equal Degrees of Wickedness. Nor can it be well supposed, that all the Seeds of Piety, Virtue, and Benevolence, were entirely extinguished in every Individual of the human Race. As Men were then probably spread in great Numbers over the Face of the Earth, there might be here and there some Individuals, in whom some good Thing might be found

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towards God, though so very few as to be scarce discernable, so that there was just Reason for those general Expressions, that *all Flesh had corrupted his Way upon the Earth*. And as it seemed fit to God to send a Deluge which should be universal, and should extend to all Parts of the Earth, supposing there were some Persons here and there of better Dispositions and Characters, scattered in different Places, the divine Wisdom might chuse to suffer them to be involved in the same general Calamity, rather than exempt them from it by an extraordinary miraculous Interposition in Favour of every particular Person. *Noah* was, on all Accounts, the most proper to be thus distinguished, who was a *Preacher of Righteousness*, and had remarkably opposed the growing Corruption, and stood up for the Cause of Religion and Virtue in a profane and atheistical World. He was accordingly chosen to be the second Parent of the human Race, from whom a new Generation of Men was to proceed; and for this Purpose he and his Family were to be preserved, whilst the rest of Mankind was involved in one common Ruin; though no doubt in a future State, a distinct Regard shall be had to the Case and Circumstances of every Individual,

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Individual, and all Things with respect to them shall be adjusted, according to the Rules of the most perfect Wisdom, Righteousness, Goodness, and Equity.

In my next Discourse I shall endeavour to shew, that we have sufficient Evidence to satisfy us of the Truth and Certainty of this great Event, and shall then proceed to offer some Observations and Reflections which may help us to make a right Use and Improvement of this Subject.



On the Universal Deluge.

DISCOURSE XXI.

2 PETER ii. 5.

And spared not the old World, but saved Noah the eighth Person, a Preacher of Righteousness, bringing in the Flood upon the World of the ungodly.

IN my last Discourse on these Words, I considered the Account given us in the sacred Writings of the Universal Deluge, the general Destruction it brought upon the human Race, and the wonderful Preservation of *Noah* and his Family. These are Events of so extraordinary a Nature, so much out of the usual Course of Things, that Doubts might be apt to arise in our Minds concerning them, if we had

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not sufficient Evidence to convince us of the Truth and Certainty of the Facts. And that we have such Evidence, is what I now propose to shew.

The original Account of the Deluge is written by *Moses*, the most ancient and credible Historian of the first Ages. The Relation he gives of it is clear and distinct, and is delivered in such a Manner, as shews that he had a full and exact Information concerning it, of the Truth of which he was perfectly assured. From his Writings we know the Year of the World, and the Year of *Noah's* Life, when it happened. He mentions the Month, and the Day of the Month when it first began; how many Days and Nights the violent Rains lasted without Intermiſſion; how long the Flood continued to increase and prevail, and at what Time it began to decline and abate. He mentions the Day when the Ark first rested on Mount *Ararat*, and when the Tops of the Mountains were seen, as also when the Waters were dried from off the Face of the Earth, and the Day of the Month and Year when *Noah* came forth out of the Ark, by the divine Command. He gives a distinct Account of the Construction and Dimensions of the Ark, and of several other Circumstances, from which it appears

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pears that he was perfectly acquainted with the principal Things, and with many remarkable Particulars relating to this great Event. *Noah*, and his three Sons with their Wives, who were with him in the Ark, had no doubt a thorough Knowledge of these Things; and as they were Eye-witneſſes, and muſt needs have very ſtrong Impreſſions made upon them by Events of ſo extraordinary a Nature, they took Care to tranſmit a faithful Account of them to their Children and Deſcendants, and their long Lives gave them an Opportunity of doing it to Advantage. And when Mankind were diſperſed after the Flood, the Heads of the ſeveral Families carried the Account of this wonderful Event into the ſeveral Regions of their Diſperſion. *Mofes* gives us a particular Account of the Names of thoſe Heads of Families, and principal Leaders of the ſeveral Colonies, from whom the Nations of the Earth deſcended, which ſhews the great Knowledge he had acquired of the Antiquities of thoſe early Ages.

But to ſet this Matter in a clearer Light, it is proper to obſerve, that *Noah* himſelf, the ſecond Parent of Mankind, lived three hundred and fifty Years after the Flood. His Son *Shem*, who had been with him in the Ark, and was ninety-eight Years old
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when the Flood came, lived five hundred Years after it, and consequently, by comparing the Accounts given by *Moses*, it appears, that he lived one hundred and fifty Years after the Birth of *Abraham*. It is manifest then, that this great Father of the faithful was, for a great Number of Years, contemporary with that eminent Person *Shem*, from whom he descended in a direct Line, and who having been an Eye-witness of the Flood, was able to give a distinct Account of the principal Circumstances of that amazing Event. And considering the excellent Character of *Abraham*, it is not to be doubted but he would both take great Care to get a right Information himself concerning a Thing of such Importance, and transmit it to his Descendants. For, to his Diligence in instructing *his Children, and his Household after him*, there is an honourable Testimony given by God himself. *Gen. xviii. 19.* The same Observation may be made concerning that good Man *Isaac*. The Instructions he received from his Father *Abraham*, were by him faithfully communicated to his Sons, especially to *Jacob*, who was fifteen Years old when his Grandfather *Abraham* died, and lived one hundred and twenty Years with his Father *Isaac*. *Jacob* was therefore

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fore capable of giving a full Account of what he had received from his Progenitors to his Sons, the Heads of the twelve Tribes of *Israel*, one of whom was *Levi*, from whom *Moses* descended, and who lived with *Jacob* near seventy Years. *Kobath*, the Son of *Levi*, was *Moses's* Grandfather, and lived with *Levi* an hundred Years, and about forty Years with *Jacob*; and *Amram*, *Moses's* Father, was for many Years conversant with *Kobath*, and even with *Levi* himself, whose Daughter he married. So that *Moses's* being able to give an Account of the Deluge, and other important Events of the first Ages, may without much Difficulty be accounted for. In those ancient Times when Men generally lived much longer than they do now, and were not distracted with such a Variety of Occupations, but led a plain and pastoral Life, which was particularly true of *Moses's* Ancestors, they had a good Opportunity of preserving the Traditions committed to them clear and distinct, especially as they looked upon it as a Point of Religion to do so; and by frequently repeating and inculcating these their Instructions throughout the Course of a long Life, might keep the Impressions fresh and strong upon the Minds of their Children and Descendants. And probably they had other Methods besides their verbal

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bal Instructions of transmitting the Memory of past remarkable Events. And it may be reasonably inferred from the particular Account *Moses* gives of the Deluge, and the chief Circumstances attending it, that there were at that Time authentic Accounts of it remaining, which he knew might safely be depended upon. And if we consider him only as an ancient and faithful Historian of great Wisdom and Probity, which was a Character given him by some of the most eminent heathen Writers, what he has recorded deserves great Regard, especially with respect to such an Event as the Flood, an Event that could not be soon forgotten, and the principal Circumstances of which were no doubt handed down to Persons of different Families and Nations in those ancient Times. But when we add to all this, that *Moses* himself was a most eminent Prophet, the greatest of all the Prophets that appeared before the Time of our Saviour, and whose divine Mission and Inspiration was confirmed by the most illustrious Attestations, this compleats the Evidence; since from thence we may justly conclude, that he was preserved from Mistake and Error in the Accounts he gave, especially with Relation to a Matter of such Importance to Mankind as the universal Deluge,

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Deluge, and the Remembrance of which was designed to continue throughout all Ages. The other inspired Prophets who lived after *Moses*, not only bear Testimony to him and to his Writings as true and divine; but some of them refer in a particular Manner to this great Event. But what gives a mighty additional Weight to all this, it is confirmed to us by the Authority of our blessed Saviour himself. As he frequently refers to the Writings of *Moses* and the Prophets as sacred and divine, so he makes express Mention of the Deluge which happened in the Days of *Noah*; and observes, that the Men of that Generation were in profound Security, till the very Day that *Noah* entered into the Ark, and then the Flood came and destroyed them all. See *Matt.* xxiv. 38, 39. *Luke* xvii. 26, 27, 28. The Truth of the *Mosaic* Account concerning the Deluge, is also confirmed by the Apostle *Peter*, both in the Words I am now insisting upon, and in the 3d Chapter of his second Epistle, Verse 7. as also by St. *Paul*, *Heb.* xi. 7. It appears then that we have the concurring Testimony both of the Old Testament and the New, of *Moses* and the Prophets, of *Christ* and his Apostles, to the Truth and Certainty of the universal Deluge, which therefore comes to us confirmed

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confirmed by all the Evidences that demonstrate the divine Original and Authority of the sacred Writings, and cannot consistently be denied or doubted of by any that acknowledge the Truth and Divinity either of the *Jewish* or *Christian* Revelation.

Secondly, It may be farther observed, that there are remarkable Traces of this great Event to be found among the Pagan Writers themselves. The Tradition of it hath spread very generally among the Nations of *Europe*, *Asia*, *Africa*, and hath reached even to the Savages of *America*. Many Testimonies have been produced by learned Men to this Purpose. It has been particularly shewn, that this Tradition obtained among the ancient *Syrians*, *Phœnicians*, *Egyptians*, *Chaldeans*, *Persians*, *Indians*, as well as among the *Greeks* and *Romans*. But it seems to have been preserved more distinct among those Eastern Nations which lay nearest the Place where *Noah* and his Descendants first settled after the Flood, and where civil Politics were first erected. Not only had they general Accounts among them of the universal Deluge, but of several particular Circumstances relating to it, such as, that the first Race of Men were become prodigiously wicked, and that therefore a Flood was sent upon them, by which they were all
destroyed;

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destroyed; that this Flood was foretold beforehand to an excellent Person, whom they call by different Names, and who was preserved for his Wisdom, Piety, and Virtue; that he was admonished by divine Direction to build an Ark, in which he, together with the Women and Children of his Family, was preserved from the Flood; and not only so, but some of every Species of Animals, Birds, and Beasts, were also taken into the Ark, that they might be kept alive in the general Inundation, and continued with him as long as the Waters remained upon the Earth; that he sent out Birds, particularly a Dove, to try whether the Ground was dried, which returned to him into the Ark, not being able to find a Place to rest in; and that the Ark at length settled on the Mountains of *Armenia*. These several Things are mentioned in Passages still extant, that have been extracted from the Writings of eminent heathen Authors, some of whom have averred, that in their Time there were still Fragments of the Ark remaining in those Mountains, Pieces of which, and of the Bitumen belonging to the Ark, were made Use of by many of the People as Charms and Amulets*.

* A Collection of Passages to this Purpose may be seen in *Grotius de Verit. Relig. Christian. Lib. I. Cap. xvi.*

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But besides all this, there are sensible Demonstrations of the universal Deluge in the marine Shells, the Teeth and Bones of Fishes, and other Things of the like Kind, properly belonging to the Ocean, which, by the most diligent Inquiry, are to be found mixed with the Soil to a great Depth in all Parts of the Earth, at a vast Distance from the Sea, and even on the Tops of the highest Mountains. This evidently proves, that the Waters of the Sea had once been there, and that there had been a Deluge which covered the whole Earth. So that it may be justly said, that all over the World there are Traces of the general Flood; and all the Attempts which have been hitherto made to account for these Appearances on any other Supposition, have been ineffectual and vain.

But notwithstanding the Evidence we have to convince us of the Truth and Certainty of the universal Deluge, many Objections have been raised against it by Men of unbelieving Minds. One of the principal of which is, that there could not possibly be found Waters enough, either in the Bowels of the Earth, or in the Sea, or in the Clouds above, to overflow the Earth to such a Height as *Moses* describes. But, as was hinted in my last Discourse,
those

those that make this Objection proceed upon Suppositions which they cannot prove. We do not know enough of the Constitution of this terraqueous Globe, especially as it was at the Time of the Deluge, or of the great Abyss, or of the Atmosphere and cloudy Region, to be able to pronounce with any Certainty, what Quantities of Water might be furnished from all these. Some of the most eminent ancient heathen Philosophers were so far from seeing any Impossibility in such an universal Deluge, that they supposed there might be successive Inundations of this Kind at certain Periods. To which I add, that there have been several ingenious Hypotheses advanced by learned modern Philosophers to account for it, none of which can be pretended to be impossible, but which I need not take any particular Notice of in this Place.

Another Objection that has been urged with great Confidence is, that the Ark was by no Means sufficient to contain, besides *Noah* and his Family, all the several Kinds of earthly Animals, which were ordered to be shut up there to save them from the Flood, together with the Food and Provisions necessary for their Sustenance whilst the Deluge lasted. This seems, at first View, to be a plausible Objection. But a full Answer has been returned to it

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by Men of great Learning and Judgment, able Judges of these Matters, who have considered the Dimensions of the Ark, as described by *Moses*, with a mathematical Exactness; and have also * made a Computation of the several Species of earthly Animals, Birds, Beasts, &c. hitherto known to the most sagacious Naturalists; and upon a careful Comparison have demonstrated by a nice and particular Calculation, that the Ark was capable of taking in some of every Species of those Animals, with as much Food as was sufficient to support them. Some able Mathematicians that have accurately examined the Structure of the Ark, according to the Account given by *Moses*, have thought it so admirably contrived for the Purpose for which it was intended, as to furnish no inconsiderable Argument of its having been done by a divine Direction.

As to other smaller Objections, they ought to be of no Weight against an Account of a Fact that comes to us so well attested and confirmed. The Dispensation was of so extraordinary a Nature, and carried in it such an immediate Intérposition of Divine Providence for wise and just

* See *Buteo de Arca Noe*. Bp. *Wilkins's* Essay, &c. and *Monf. Pelletier's* *Dissert. sur l' Arche de Noe*.

Purposes,

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Purposes, that it is not to be wondered at, if it were attended with some Circumstances quite out of the usual Course of Things; but which are by no means beyond the Reach of the divine Power.

Upon the whole, we have as much Evidence to satisfy us of the Truth of this great Event, as can reasonably be desired. But it will be of little Consequence to us barely to believe that such an Event once happened, if we do not endeavour to make a right Use and Improvement of it. And to assist you in this, is the Design of what I propose to offer in the farther Prosecution of this Subject.

At present I shall conclude with this general Reflection :

That this wonderful Event exhibits a convincing Demonstration of a Divine Providence as interesting itself in human Affairs, and inspecting Mens moral Conduct and Behaviour. It is probable, as I had Occasion to observe before, that there were many among that wicked and ungodly Generation, who did not believe, or would not acknowledge that God concerneth himself with Mankind, or their Affairs, or any of their good or evil Actions. But nothing could possibly give a clearer Proof of this most important Article, which lies at the Foundation of all Religion, than this

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astonishing Dispensation taken in all its Circumstances. If some mortal Pestilence had destroyed the human Race, or if an Inundation had covered a great Part of the Earth, but not the whole, it might possibly have been supposed to have been the mere Effect of some natural Cause, or accidental Concurrence of natural Causes; or, if the whole Earth had been overwhelmed with the Flood, and none of the human Race saved, it might have been thought to have been owing to some unaccountable fatal Necessity, which, at certain Periods, produces the Destruction of the planetary World, a Notion that obtaineth among some of the Pagan Philosophers. But as this great Event was circumstanced, there was not the least room for such a Supposition. The Deluge was universal, and extended to every Part of our Globe, and it was plainly foretold, and Warnings given of it a considerable Time before it happened, with an express Declaration in the Name of God himself, that this Deluge should be sent in a Way of just Punishment for the great and universal Corruption of Mankind. And at the same Time it was so ordered, that though the whole Earth was covered with the Flood, and even the highest Mountains, yet that excellent Person

Noah,

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Noah, and his Family, were wonderfully preserved, from whom a new Generation were to proceed, together with some of every Species of terrestrial Animals. And an Ark was provided, and admirably contrived for that Purpose, by an express divine Direction and Appointment. All these Things plainly shewed, that it was not a mere fortuitous Event, owing to a blind unguided Chance, or to an unintelligent Nature and fatal Necessity, but was the Effect of the divine Counsels, brought about by a wise and sovereign Providence; and it continues to all succeeding Generations a strong and affecting Proof, that verily there is a just and holy God that judgeth in the Earth, and who taketh Notice of Mens moral Conduct, and will reward or punish them accordingly.



On the Universal Deluge.

DISCOURSE XXII.

2 PETER ii. 5.

*And spared not the old World, but saved
Noah the eighth Person, a Preacher of
Righteousness, bringing in the Flood upon
the World of the ungodly.*

THESE Words exhibit to us one of the most remarkable Events that ever happened to Mankind, and which is capable of furnishing very useful Reflections. In treating of this Subject, we first enquired into the Causes of the Deluge, and this led us to make some Observations on the universal and amazing Corruption into which Mankind were fallen, and which, through the just Judgment of God,

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brought this dreadful Calamity upon them. We then proceeded to consider the Account given us in Scripture of the Deluge itself, and the general Destruction it brought upon the whole human Race, *Noah* and his Family only excepted, who, by an extraordinary Interposition of the divine Power and Goodness, were wonderfully preserved. We next endeavoured to shew, that we have sufficient Evidence to convince us of the Truth and Certainty of the universal Deluge; and that, however amazing it may appear, it was an Event which really happened.

It now remains that we endeavour to make a proper Use and Improvement of this important Subject. In my last Discourse it was observed in general, That this wonderful Event exhibits a convincing Proof of an over-ruling Providence, which interesteth itself in the Affairs of Men, and inspecteth their moral Conduct and Behaviour. Let us now proceed to make some more particular Observations and Reflections upon the Subject we have been considering. And here we shall first take Notice of such Reflections as seem naturally to arise from the Account which is given us of the dreadful Desolation and Ruin which the Flood brought upon the World of the ungodly. Secondly, We shall make
some

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some Observations upon the wonderful Preservation of that excellent Person *Noah* and his Family.

First, Let us consider such Reflections as seem naturally to arise from the Account which is given us of the dreadful Desolation and Ruin which the Flood brought upon the World of the ungodly.

And ist, What an awful Idea does this give us of God's irresistible Power, and of his Justice, and righteous Abhorrence of Sin and Wickedness. There cannot be a fuller Proof of it, than that he sent a destructive Deluge upon a whole World of his Creatures at once, when they became universally corrupted and defiled. There is no Nation now in the World that can be compared for Numbers or Power to that Race of Men which peopled the Earth at the Time of the Deluge, when their Lives were much longer, their Constitutions more firm and robust, and their Courage more daring than the present Generation of Mortals. They braved Heaven by their Impiety and Presumption, yet when the divine Vengeance overtook them, how feeble were they, and unable to make the least Resistance! When God contends with guilty Nations, the united Force of their mightiest Armies is mere Weakness and Impotency. And though he has been
pleased,

pleas'd, in his great Goodness, to promise that he will no more send an universal Deluge to destroy the whole Race of Mankind from off the Face of the Earth, yet he has no where engag'd that he will not destroy any of those particular Nations, Kingdoms and States, into which this Earth is divided, when they are arriv'd to an enormous Height of Wickedness. He has many Ways of executing his just Vengeance upon them. He can do it by the Sword and Devastations of War, by Famine and Pestilence, by Fire, and furious Storms and Inundations. How dreadful was the Ruin of *Sodom* and *Gomorrab*, and the neighbouring impious and luxurious Cities, and the Destruction of the *Canaanitish* Nations for their Wickedness and many crying Abominations! How often has the Pestilence almost depopulated large Cities and Countries! History informs us particularly of one that spread its Ravages through a great Part of the known World, and was thought to have destroyed near a third Part of Mankind. The proper Use to be made of such Instances of the divine Judgments, but especially of that which was the most amazing of them all, the universal Deluge, is to get our Hearts possess'd with a religious Awe of God, and a sacred Dread of his Displeasure. The
Voice

Voice of this Dispensation to all Mankind is this: *The Lord is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting King; at his Wrath the Earth shall tremble, and the Nations shall not be able to abide his Indignation.*

Jer. x. 10. On this Occasion we may take up the Words of the Song of Moses and the Lamb, as it is called, Rev. xv. 3, 4. *Great and marvellous are thy Works, Lord God Almighty, just and true are thy Ways, O thou King of Saints: who shall not fear thee, and glorify thy Name? For thou only art holy: All Nations shall come and worship before thee, for thy Judgments are made manifest. Thou art not a God that hath Pleasure in Wickedness; neither shall Evil dwell with thee.* Psal. v. 4. Who can stand before God, when once he is angry? As no Power is able to resist him, so there is no Place that can hide us from his Presence, no Way can be contrived to escape his avenging Arm. He is the Lord of Nature, and can arm all the Elements against us; for he doeth whatsoever he pleaseth *in Heaven and in Earth, in the Sea, and in all deep Places.* Psal. cxxxv. 6. The universal Deluge gives this most useful Lesson to all succeeding Generations, that the Number and Power of Transgressors is no Security against God's righteous Judgments.

2dly,

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2dly, Another important Reflection which arises upon this Subject is this, Though God may long bear with guilty Persons and Nations, and may exercise great Patience towards them, yet it would be the Height of Folly to presume that he will always do so. On the contrary, the Punishment often comes with greater Weight and Force for having been so long delayed. God had borne with much Long-suffering the Sinners of the old World, notwithstanding their heinous Provocations. And because Sentence against their evil Works was not speedily executed, therefore their Hearts were fully set in them to do wickedly. According to their Hardness and impenitent Hearts, they despised the Riches of his Goodness, and Forbearance, and Long-suffering; but at length the Day of Vengeance came, and of the righteous Judgment of God. This is a Warning to Mankind in all succeeding Ages, not to abuse the divine Goodness, or flatter themselves, that because he delays inflicting upon them the just Punishment of their Crimes, therefore he hath forgotten them, or will pass them over with Impunity. As there is a Time for God's bearing with presumptuous Transgressors, so there is a Time when it is proper for him to change the Method of his Dealings

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Dealings towards them, a Time when Judgment must take Place. This is what his rectoral Wisdom and Righteousness requires. When Wickedness is arrived to a certain Height, it may be necessary for answering the Purposes of God's moral Government to execute his Judgments upon obstinate hardened Offenders, and not to bear with them any longer, but to set them forth as the awful Monuments of his just Wrath. Some Sins there are that do, in an especial Manner, draw down the divine Displeasure upon the People among whom they abound, as an avowed Neglect and Contempt of all Religion, blasphemous Impiety and Profaneness, open Injustice and Violence, and an universal Corruption and Diffoluteness of Manners. These were the Sins of the old World, and which brought the Deluge upon them; and when once they become general in any Nation or Community, they will sooner or later, through the just Judgments of God, expose them to heavy and ruinous Calamities.

Again, 3dly, Another Use that is to be made of what is to be offered on this Subject, is, to regulate our Notions of the divine Goodness, and to convince us that it is not to be regarded as a mere soft Tenderness and Indulgence, inconsistent with

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with a just and seasonable Severity. One would have been apt to think, that the Mercy of the compassionate Father of Mankind would not have suffered him to cut off so many Millions of them at once, as was done at the Deluge, by one awful exterminating Stroke. But we may see by this Instance, that the Love of God towards Mankind is not a mere blind partial Affection, like that of a too fond and indulgent Parent towards his Children, but is in an inseparable Conjunction with the most perfect Wisdom and Righteousness. It is always exercised in such a Manner as is most consistent with the invariable Rectitude of his Nature, with the Majesty of his Government and Laws, and with the wise and righteous Ends of his moral Administration. There is scarce any Thing in which Men are more apt to deceive and flatter themselves, than in what relates to that most amiable and glorious Attribute of the divine Mercy and Goodness. Many are apt fondly to imagine that God is too good to punish them for their Sins, and that he will not suffer any of his Creatures finally to perish. These are Notions of a pernicious Tendency, and which ought to be carefully guarded against. They manifestly tend to encourage Sinners to go on in their evil Courses, to
take

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take away the Fear of God, to vacate the Authority of his Laws, and to subvert all Order and Government. Such sinful and short-sighted Creatures as we are, are certainly very improper Judges of what it is fit for God to do in the Government of the World. We are too apt to be partial in our own Favour, and to entertain very slight Thoughts of the Evil and Demerit of Sin. If it were left to the Determination of the Criminals themselves, the best Laws might be thought too rigorous and severe, and the most just and upright Judge might be censured as a cruel Man, void of all Pity and Compassion. But such an Instance as that of the Deluge, should prevent our flattering ourselves with Hopes of Impunity if we continue to persist in our sinful Courses, and should affect our Hearts with a sensible Conviction, that not only Goodness and Mercy towards those who are proper Objects of Mercy, but impartial Justice and Holiness, and a steady Detestation of Vice and Wickedness, necessarily enters into the Character of the infinitely perfect Being, the supreme Lord and Governor of the World. It is the great Excellency of the holy Scripture, that at the same Time that it makes the most amiable and inviting Display of God's rich Grace and Mercy

towards

towards penitent returning Sinners; it also declares in the strongest Terms, his utter Abhorrence of Sin, and the eternal Opposition of his Nature and Will to all moral Impurity. And all Doctrines and Schemes that tend to make Men easy in their vicious Practices, and to represent Sin as comparatively a small Evil, which does not deserve any severe Punishment at the Hand of God, all such Doctrines and Schemes, however plausible they may appear, are certainly false, and must have a pernicious Influence on the Interests of Religion and Virtue. It is true that God delighteth in the Happiness of his Creatures, and taketh all proper Methods to promote it. But it is in a Way becoming his own glorious Perfections, and suited to their Natures as reasonable Creatures and moral Agents. His Goodness does not carry him to make them all indiscriminately happy however they behave, but to make them happy if they will seek for Happiness in the Way which his sovereign Wisdom and Righteousness hath appointed, *viz.* in the Paths of Holiness and Virtue. But if they refuse this, and obstinately go on in the Way that leadeth to Destruction, their Ruin is owing to themselves; God and his Throne will be guiltless for ever, and it would be the highest Impiety

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Impiety to charge the supreme Being with Injustice or Cruelty, on the Account of the Evils and Miseries they bring upon themselves by their own wilful Impenitency and Disobedience.

Fourthly, This Dispensation exhibits a striking Proof of God's sovereign Dominion over his Creatures, and that he is the absolute Lord of their Lives; *in his Hand is the Soul of every living Thing, and the Breath of all Mankind.* He can without Injustice cut off whole Nations at once, and even put an End to the whole human Race. But though his Dominion be absolute, it is not exercised merely in an arbitrary Way, but in a Manner perfectly consistent with his own infinite Wisdom, Righteousness, and Goodness. He sent a destructive Deluge upon the old World. And in this he did no more than he had a Right to do; and none can resist his Will, or say unto him, *What doest thou?* As he is the Giver of Life, he can withdraw it when he pleases. But yet he did not this merely for his own good Pleasure, but for wise and just Reasons; because the Wickedness of Men was become general and incorrigible, and they were not to be reclaimed by Mercy and Indulgence.

I shall conclude with observing, that as through the just Judgment of God,

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and by an Act of his sovereign Dominion, this Earth, and Mankind upon it, was overwhelmed with the Flood, so the Time is coming when it shall undergo a second Destruction by Fire. And as the former of these was expressly foretold, and solemn Warnings were given of it to Mankind before it happened, so we are assured by the Word of God, that cannot lie, that the latter shall be fulfilled in the proper Season. This is what the Apostle *Peter* takes particular Notice of in the third Chapter of his second Epistle, where speaking of Scoffers that shall come in the last Days, he observes, that *this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the Word of God the Heavens were of old, and the Earth standing out of the Water, and in the Water. Whereby the World that then was, being overflowed with Water, perished. But the Heavens and the Earth which are now, by the same Word are kept in store, reserved unto Fire against the Day of Judgment, and Perdition of ungodly Men.* 2 Pet. iii. 5, 6, 7. Since the one of these has actually come to pass, according to the divine Threatening, it should strengthen our Faith with respect to the future Accomplishment of the other. And as the Flood came upon the old World at a Time when they were in a profound Security,

and

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and had no Expectation of it, so shall it be in the second Destruction of the World by Fire. For, as St. Paul expresseth it, *The Day of the Lord so cometh as a Thief in the Night. For when they shall say, Peace and Safety, then sudden Destruction cometh upon them, as Travail upon a Woman with Child, and they shall not escape.* 1 Thess. v. 2, 3. The proper Inference to be drawn, both from the Consideration of that awful Event of the Deluge which is already past, and of the Conflagration of the World which is yet to come, is this, What Manner of Persons ought we to be in all holy Conversation and Godliness!



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On the Universal Deluge.

DISCOURSE XXIII.

2 PETER ii. 5.

And spared not the old World, but saved Noah the eighth Person, a Preacher of Righteousness, bringing in the Flood upon the World of the ungodly.

THIS remarkable Passage which I have been for some Time insisting upon, relates to a Subject of great Importance, and which well deserves our serious Thoughts. It is not designed merely to amuse us, and to gratify our Curiosity, but to affect our Hearts, and to influence the Conduct of our Lives.

Accordingly in my last Discourse I endeavoured to lay before you some useful

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Observations, which seem naturally to arise from the Account which the Scripture giveth us of the dreadful Ruin and Desolation which the Flood brought upon the World of the ungodly. Let us now turn our Thoughts to the more agreeable and pleasing Part of the Subject, the wonderful Preservation of *Noah* and his Family, which is signified here by the Apostle, when after having said, that God *spared not the old World*, he adds, *but saved Noah the eighth Person, a Preacher of Righteousness*.

I shall not repeat what I offered in a former Discourse for explaining and illustrating this Part of the Apostle's Words, but shall proceed to some Reflections which may help to make a proper Use and Improvement of it.

And, First, We may see the Regard which God, the wise and righteous Governor of the World, hath for true Holiness and Virtue, and the Complacency he takes in it. As the Destruction of the old World by the Deluge exhibiteth a most awful Demonstration of the great Evil of Sin, and God's just Displeasure against it, so the remarkable Preservation of *Noah* and his Family is an illustrious Proof of the great Worth and Excellency of real Religion and Righteousness; that it is what God approveth, and will graciously reward.

To

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To this it was owing that he singled out *Noah* from the midst of a corrupt and abandoned Generation, and took such an extraordinary Way for delivering him from the general Ruin. It was not for his great Knowledge and Understanding, or for his Strength and Comeliness of Body, or for his Courage and Abilities in War, or for his political Wisdom, or Skill in the Arts and Sciences, or for his great Wealth, and the worldly Dignities and Dominion he was possessed of, that *Noah* was so remarkably distinguished by the divine Favour. However eminent he might be for some of these Advantages, there were probably others in the old World who were equal or superior to *Noah* in these Respects; for many among them were, as *Moses* informs us, *Men of Renown*. But it was *Noah's* eminent Piety and Virtue, his holy and exemplary Conduct, which recommended him to the Favour of God. *Moses* observes, that *Noah found Grace in the Eyes of the Lord*, and that *Noah was a just Man, and perfect in his Generations, and Noah walked with God*. Gen. vi. 8, 9. So pleasing was his Piety and Righteousness in the Sight of God, that he extended his Favour, not only to him, but to his Family, and even to the Brute Animals which were with him. This shews of what mighty Ad-

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vantage religious Virtue and uncorrupted Integrity is to Mankind. Degenerate as the World now is, it may be justly said, that it is spared and preserved for the Sake of the virtuous few that are in it. There are many Passages of Scripture from which it appeareth, that guilty Nations have been long spared, and threatened Judgments respited, for the Sake of a godly Remnant which still continued among them; and when these failed, and scarce any of them remained, and the Corruption became universal, desolating Judgments came upon them with a dismal Overthrow. Even *Sodom*, notwithstanding the abominable Corruption of its Inhabitants, would have been spared if ten righteous Persons had been found in it. And though *Noah's* Righteousness could not prevail for sparing the old World, when their Wickedness was become incorrigible, and had arrived at such a Height, that it was not consistent with the rectoral Wisdom and Justice of God to bear with them any longer, yet it so far prevailed, that the Earth, and the Race of Mankind upon it, was not utterly destroyed. God was pleased in his great Grace and Goodness, to make a Covenant with *Noah* to preserve him and his Family to be the Seed of a new Generation of Men, and also to preserve some of each

Species

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Species of Animals, who were to be under the Dominion, and for the Use of Mankind. And still it holds true, that the good Men which are in the Earth greatly contribute to the Preservation of it. They are the Salt of the Earth that keep it from being totally corrupted and putrified. Wicked and vicious Men, who are so apt to insult and oppress the virtuous and godly, and to treat them with Scorn and Ridicule, are more obliged to them than they are aware, since it is principally on their Account that God with-holds or suspends the Calamities which would otherwise overwhelm those Communities, which the wicked by their Impieties and Dissoluteness of Manners expose to Ruin. The Righteousness and Virtue that is still remaining among Mankind, is really the Stay and Support of the World; and it will no longer be fit to be preserved in its present State, when Religion and Virtue has abandoned it.

Secondly, Another Reflection which ariseth upon this Subject is this, that Piety and Righteousness then appears with a peculiar Lustre, and is, in an especial Manner, pleasing in the Sight of God, when it is maintained and exercised in a Time and State of great and general Corruption. It was this that made *Noah's*
 2 good

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good Character so remarkable, that he preserved his Piety and his Integrity untainted, when all Flesh had corrupted his Way, and the whole Earth was filled with Wickedness and Violence. And accordingly, God *said unto Noab, Come thou and all thy House into the Ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this Generation.* Gen. 7. 1. In this evil and most corrupt Generation thou hast kept thyself pure and undefiled, and hast walked before me in Righteousness and Holiness of Life. And certainly it must argue an uncommon Degree of Piety and Virtue, a peculiar Steadiness and Strength of Mind, to dare to be singularly good, when there is nothing but Vice and Corruption to be seen all around; not to be influenced or drawn aside by the Bias of corrupt Custom and Fashion, by Allurements of Vice when it is universally practised and recommended by the Example of those whom the World honours and admires; to stand the Shock of so many Temptations, of the general Scorn, Reproach and Ridicule, cast upon the Ways of Religion and Righteousness; when no Pleasures of the Flesh can entice, no worldly Advantages bribe, no Terrors or Difficulties discourage from the Profession and Practice of true Godliness; this must certainly be highly pleasing to God. And
on

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on this Account it was, that *Noah* was so eminently distinguished by the divine Favour. And what heightened this still more, he was, in that Time of universal Wickedness and Corruption, not only a Practiser of Righteousness himself, but a *Preacher of Righteousness* to others. So the Apostle *Peter* here calls him. He stood up for the Cause of Religion and Virtue in an impious and profligate Generation, and did all that was in his Power by his Prayers, Exhortations, and prophetic Warnings and Admonitions to engage them to turn from their sinful Courses. His Endeavours indeed to bring them to Repentance and Reformation, proved ineffectual, yet God shewed that his Attempts this Way were acceptable in his Sight, though they did not meet with the desired Success. And this yields a most useful Lesson to all succeeding Generations, that let the Times be never so bad, and the Depravation universal, this should not discourage us from using our best Endeavours to put a Stop, as far as we are able, to the overspreading Corruption, to bear up nobly against the Torrent, and to use whatever Means God puts into our Hands to this Purpose; we shall hereby deliver our own Souls, and perhaps prevail to bring a Blessing upon others too.

This

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This leads to another Observation, *viz.*

Thirdly, That in the midst of Judgment God usually remembers Mercy, and preserves a Remnant to whom he exerciseth his Grace and Favour. Thus it eminently was with regard to *Noah* and his Family. Though the Ruin was so universal, and extended generally to the whole Race of Mankind, yet God did not utterly destroy them all. He interposed, in a wonderful and extraordinary Manner, to preserve *Noah*, and them that were with him; and was graciously pleased to establish a Covenant with him and his Children, that he would not destroy the Earth any more by sending an universal Deluge. This was done in great Mercy for allaying their Fears. He declared his Acceptance of *Noah's* Piety and Devotion, and of the Sacrifice which he offered, and promised, that the Course of Nature which had been so greatly disturbed by the Flood, should be renewed and re-established; and that the orderly Succession of Seasons, *Seed-time and Harvest, and Cold and Heat, and Summer and Winter*, should be continued, whilst the Earth remaineth. *Gen. viii. 2²*. He renewed his Blessing to *Noah*, as he had done to *Adam* at the Beginning, together with the Grant of a Dominion over the Earth, and all the Creatures in it,
for

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for his Use and that of his Posterity, which they might otherwise be apt to fear was forfeited. They were encouraged again to replenish the Earth, and had many Intimations given them of the divine Grace and Favour to engage them to Obedience.

I would conclude with observing, that if we take the whole of this Dispensation together, the bringing the Flood upon the World of the ungodly, and preserving *Noah* and his Family, it manifestly tended to the general Good, to the maintaining the Cause of Righteousness and Virtue in the World, and laying a Restraint on the Prevalency of Vice and Wickedness. It might, for any Thing we know, or can prove to the contrary, exhibit an awful Display of the divine Justice and Vengeance against Sin to other Orders of Beings, and even to the Angels themselves, and thus might answer Purposes of Providence, which we are not at present acquainted with. Or however this be, it is of Use and Advantage to the human Race, if we take in the whole Compass of Ages and Generations to the End of the World. It is true, that that Generation of Men was destroyed, and it was proper it should be so, *for all Flesh had corrupted his Way upon the Earth*; such a Race of Creatures was
not

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not fit to be continued to inhabit the Earth any longer; they were become absolutely incorrigible; the Means of Forbearance and Indulgence had been tried in vain, no Amendment or Reformation was to be expected. Yet God did not think fit to put an utter End to the whole human Race, or to extinguish this Order of Beings, so that they should have no farther Place in his Creation. He was therefore pleased to preserve that excellent Person *Noah*, and his Family, from whom a new Generation was to be propagated. And they had, in several Respects, Advantages above those of the old World for deterring them from Vice and Sin, and engaging them to the Practice of Righteousness, and for impressing them with a Sense of Religion, and a believing awful Regard to God's Providence. It is true that *Noah*, the second Father of Mankind, was not perfectly innocent and sinless as *Adam* was at his first Creation. But then he had great Experience, and was six hundred Years old when the Flood came. He had seen the wretched and corrupt State into which Mankind had fallen, and the direful Effects to which their Wickedness had exposed them, and therefore was well qualified to warn his Posterity against those evil Practices which had brought
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so dreadful a Destruction upon the World of the ungodly. Though he was not absolutely free from Infirmities and Defects, yet he had persevered in an uniform Course of Righteousness amidst the strongest Temptations. He had the Advantage of the Revelations and Discoveries which God had made to *Adam*, and which might easily be transmitted to him, since *Methuselah*, his Grandfather, had been Contemporary with *Adam* near two hundred and fifty-eight Years, and *Noah* himself lived several hundred Years with *Methuselah* and others of the antediluvian Patriarchs. He was therefore well fitted to instruct his Posterity in the great Articles of the primitive Religion relating to the Perfections and Attributes of God, the Creation of the World, a governing Providence, the innocent and happy State in which Man was at first formed, his Fall from that State by his Sin and Disobedience, and the Evils and Miseries that were thereby brought upon the human Race; as also the Discoveries that were made of the divine Mercy, and the Promise of a Redeemer or Deliverer that should arise to Mankind from the Woman's Seed. *Noah* was now become the Heir and Depositary of this Promise, which was to be accomplished in the proper Season. And it must be farther

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considered, that *Noah* had not only the Advantage of the Revelations made to *Adam* and the Patriarchs before the Flood, but he had farther Revelations and Discoveries made to him by God himself. He was able therefore to recommend Religion and Righteousness with particular Advantage. He had three Sons with him in the Ark grown up to Maturity. He had, we may be sure, taken great Care to train them up in the Ways of Religion, in the right Knowledge, Adoration, and Obedience of the only true God, and to preserve them from the general abounding Impiety and Corruption. And whilst they were in the Ark, and had the striking Proofs of the divine Vengeance against the Wickedness of Mankind, and of his Mercy in their own wonderful Preservation, continually before their Eyes, this must needs give a mighty Weight to their pious Father's Instructions, and must tend to impress a strong and affecting Sense of the main Principles of Religion upon their Minds, to fill them with a holy Fear of God, the wise and righteous Governor of the World, and to raise them to an ingenuous Trust and Hope in his Grace and Mercy. And as *Noah* continued to live three hundred and fifty Years after the Deluge, it is not to be doubted that he
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took the properest Methods in his Power to preserve and promote the Knowledge and Practice of Religion among his Descendants.

It cannot therefore be denied, that Mankind after the Flood had considerable Advantages, if they had been careful to make a right Improvement of them. That awful Catastrophe of the Deluge, which they knew was sent as a Punishment for the Wickedness of the old World, naturally led them to reflect with Horror on the Crimes and Vices, which the Men of that impious Generation had been guilty of. And the extraordinary Favour shewn to that excellent Person *Noah*, should have made them sensible, that the Way to please God, was to persevere in an uniform Course of Righteousness and true Holiness. Such was the Effect which the extraordinary Dispensation of Divine Providence ought to have had upon Mankind, not only in the Ages immediately after the Flood, but in all the following Ages, as long as the Account of it shall be preserved in the World. It is amazing, that notwithstanding all this, Men fell soon after the Flood from the Knowledge and Worship of the living and true God, into a State of deplorable Darkness, Idolatry, and Corruption of Manners. Yet in this State of Things, God did not

utterly abandon Mankind, but graciously interposed for upholding the Knowledge and Practice of true Religion in the World. For this Purpose, in about two hundred Years after the Death of *Noah*, he gave an extraordinary Call to *Abraham*, from whom many Nations proceeded. He favoured him with renewed Revelations of his Will, and vouchsafed to establish a gracious Covenant with him, and promised, that in his *Seed* should *all the Families of the Earth be blessed*. It pleased God afterwards to erect the *Jewish* Polity, the proper Design of which was to preserve the Knowledge and Worship of the one true God in Opposition to the spreading Idolatry, and to prepare the Way for that more perfect Dispensation of Religion which was to be brought by the Son of God himself, the great Saviour of Mankind, who had been promised and foretold at sundry Times, and in divers Manners, from the Beginning. He accordingly came in the Fulness of Time, to bring the clearest and fullest Revelation of the divine Will, that had ever been given to Mankind, to free them from Condemnation and Wrath, to make Atonement for the Sins of the World, and to guide and assist Men by his Word, by his Example, and by his holy Spirit, in the Way to everlasting Life. This is the
Dispensation

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Dispensation which, to our unspeakable Comfort and Advantage, we are now constituted under, and which shall continue to the Consummation of all Things, when the present Scheme of Divine Providence towards Mankind shall be completed. Then shall that *Day of the Lord* come, in the which the Heavens shall pass away with a great Noise, and the Elements shall melt with fervent Heat, the Earth also, and the Works that are therein, shall be burnt up. 2 Pet. iii. 10. Those good Men who shall then be found alive upon the Earth shall be snatched from the midst of a World in Flames. They shall not die, but shall be wonderfully changed; and shall, together with the risen Bodies of the Saints, which had lain many Ages in the Grave, be caught up in the Clouds to meet the Lord in the Air. And thenceforth they shall be for ever with the Lord, happy in the blissful Vision and Enjoyment of God and the Redeemer unto all Eternity.

On the General Conflagration.

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2 PETER iii. 10, 11.

The Day of the Lord will come as a Thief in the Night, in which the Heavens shall pass away with a great Noise, and the Elements shall melt with fervent Heat, the Earth also, and the Works that are therein, shall be burnt up. Seeing then that all these Things shall be dissolved, what Manner of Persons ought ye to be in all holy Conversation and Godliness!

THE Subject which these Words present to our Thoughts is of great Importance, and well deserves our serious Consideration. We are apt to be struck

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with an Account of any extraordinary Events, especially if they be such in which not only the Interests of particular Persons and Families, but of large Communities, of populous Cities and Nations, are involved. But what are any of the Revolutions that happen to particular States and Kingdoms, the Overthrow of flourishing Cities and mighty Empires, or what are the most dreadful Devastations, by Sword, Fire, Pestilence, Earthquakes, Tempests, even those of them that spread farthest, and produce the most pernicious Effects, compared with the Dissolution of this present World at the Judgment of the great Day!

I had Occasion some Time ago to consider the Account the Scriptures give us of the general Deluge, which it pleased God, in his just Judgment, to send upon the World of the ungodly; and whereby the whole human Race, which was then upon the Face of the Earth, was destroyed, except *Noah* and those that were with him in the Ark. It was observed to you, that this is an Event which is not only clearly recorded in the holy Scriptures, but of which there are remarkable Traces to be found in the History and Traditions of the most ancient Nations, as appears from the Testimonies of the heathen Writers themselves. We have the Promise
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and Covenant of God to assure us, that this Earth shall not again be overwhelmed with an universal Flood. But let us not therefore flatter ourselves that this World, in the present Form of it, shall be of a perpetual Duration. There is a Time approaching when it shall be dissolved and consumed by Fire. And there is no Passage in the sacred Writings that is more express and full to this Purpose than these Words of the Apostle *Peter*, which I have now chosen to insist upon. There is such an Emphasis in every Expression, such a Pomp and Solemnity in the whole Description, especially when we consider it in its Connection with the Context, as sufficiently demonstrates that it cannot be understood merely of *Christ's* particular coming to the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, to which some have endeavoured to apply it. If we look back to the third Verse of this Chapter we shall find that the Apostle tells us of some *Scoffers that shall come in the last Days, walking after their own Lusts, and saying, Where is the Promise of his coming? For since the Fathers fell asleep, all Things continue as they were from the Beginning of the Creation.* i. e. the World continues still the same that it was some thousand Years ago; there are no more Signs of a Decay or Dissolution now than there were

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then: and therefore, where is the Promise of *Christ's* coming to Judgment; or of the general Resurrection and Dissolution of the World? we have been told of these Things long since, and yet they seem to be as far off as ever. To these Scoffers St. *Peter* gives a full Answer in the 5th, and following Verses. He first observes, that *this they are willingly ignorant of, that by the Word of God the Heavens were of old, and the Earth standing out of the Water.* Verse 5. If they did but consider that the Heavens and the Earth were made of old by the Word of God, it would not seem an impossible Thing that they should be destroyed, or the whole Frame of them changed by the same almighty Power that created them; especially considering the Proof that has been already given of this in the universal Deluge; *whereby, as he speaks, Verse 6. the World that then was, being overflowed with Water, perished.* And as then the Earth was overflowed with Water, so it is to undergo a second Destruction by Fire. *The Heavens and the Earth which are now, says he, Verse 7. by the same Word are kept in Store, reserved unto Fire against the Day of Judgment, and Perdition of ungodly Men.* And whereas this Time seems to be long delayed, the Apostle answers, 1st, That though it may seem

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seem long to us, it is but a short Time to the blessed God. For *one Day is with the Lord as a thousand Years, and a thousand Years as one Day.* Verse viii. And, 2dly, That the Cause of this seeming Delay is not any Slackness on the Part of God in the Performance of his Promise, but his Patience and long-suffering Goodness towards Sinners, that he may give them Time and Opportunity for repenting, and reforming their evil Ways, and laying hold on his offered Mercy. *The Lord is not slack,* says he, Verse 9. *concerning his Promise, (as some Men count Slackness) but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to Repentance.* And then he proceeds to describe the coming of *Christ* to Judgment, and the general Conflagration that shall attend it, in the most emphatical Terms. *But the Day of the Lord will come as a Thief in the Night, in the which the Heavens shall pass away with a great Noise, and the Elements shall melt with fervent Heat, the Earth also, and the Works that are therein, shall be burnt up.* There are two Things here to be distinctly considered. The first is, that there is a Time approaching, here called *the Day of the Lord*, when this World, and all Things in it, shall be destroyed by Fire. The second is, that
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this Day of the Lord shall come as a Thief in the Night.

First, We are here assured, that there is a Time approaching, when this World and all Things in it shall be destroyed by Fire. Some Notion of this obtained pretty generally amongst the Pagans, and was probably a Tradition derived to them from some of the early Patriarchs, and which came originally by divine Revelation. It was an Opinion held by the Epicureans, Stoics, and other Philosophers, as might be shewn by many Testimonies, and is so among the *Indian* Bramins at this Day. The Passage in the Poet *Ovid* is well known, where he speaks of a Time determined by the Fates, in which the Sea, the Earth, and the Palace of Heaven shall burn, and the whole prodigious Fabric of the World shall be brought to Ruin. This Tradition was, like many others, greatly corrupted. Many of the Philosophers ascribed the Conflagration of the World to a physical and fatal Necessity, and some of them supposed that there would be several such successive Conflagrations, returning at certain Periods, in the endless Revolutions of Ages. But to pass by these Reveries, it is in the holy Scripture alone that we have an Account of the fiery Dissolution of the World, which can be safely

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ly depended upon. And the appointed Time when this Conflagration of the World shall be, is here called, *the Day of the Lord*. Not as if all were to be done precisely within the Compass of one natural Day; but it is usual in Scripture to call any Time of whatsoever Continuance, wherein God delivereth his People, and executeth Vengeance upon his Enemies, the Day of God. Thus *Isa. xxxiv. 8.* where the Destruction of *Idumea* is spoken of in Terms which seem to bear some Allusion to the general Judgment, it is called *the Day of the Lord's Vengeance, and the Year of Recompences for the Controversy of Zion*. What is called *the Day of the Lord's Vengeance* in the former Part of the Verse, is called *the Year of Recompence* in the latter. Thus in the Text the Time in which *Christ* will judge the World, and consume it in avenging Flames, is called *the Day of the Lord*, and, Verse 7th, *the Day of Judgment, and Perdition of ungodly Men*. In that great Day, we are here told, *the Heavens shall pass away with a great Noise, and the Elements shall melt with fervent Heat, the Earth also, and the Works that are therein, shall be burnt up*. Let us a little consider the several Parts of the Description.

1st, It is here declared, that *the Heavens shall pass away with a great Noise*, or,

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as it is expressed Verse 12th. *The Heavens being on Fire shall be dissolved.* The Word *Heaven* in Scripture Language admits of various Significations. It is often understood of the *Heaven* of the blessed, which is in Scripture called *God's Throne, and his Dwelling-place*, because there he is peculiarly present, and makes the brightest Displays of his Glory, there the holy Angels behold his Face, and there shall the glorified Saints live and be happy for ever. It is evident that this is not included in the *Heavens* mentioned here, and which shall pass away at the great Day. The Fire of the general Conflagration shall not approach those blissful Regions, where eternal Joy and Felicity shall dwell. But it is to be observed farther, that *Heavens*, in Scripture Language is also used to signify that vast and glorious Expanse where the heavenly Bodies, as they are called, perform their Courses, or have their Stations appointed them by a divine Hand. Hence we often read of the Stars of *Heaven*. It is also frequently put for the Air or Atmosphere, where the Clouds and Meteors are formed. Accordingly we read of the Clouds of *Heaven*, Rain from *Heaven*, the Dew of *Heaven*, the four Winds of *Heaven*, the hoary Frost of *Heaven*; and the Birds that fly in the Air are called

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ed the Birds of *Heaven*, and are said to fly in the open Firmament of *Heaven*, Now if the Inquiry be what those *Heavens* are which are referred to in the Text, all Interpreters are agreed, that the least that can be supposed is, that these Expressions take in the whole Atmosphere about us, the Air which surrounds this earthly Globe, and is stretched above, beneath, and on every Side of us. But many are of Opinion that the Words are to be taken in a larger View. And though they are not for extending them to all the starry Heavens, as if that whole vast and unmeasurable Expanse, which exceeds the utmost Flight of human Imagination, with all the fixed Stars, those stupendous Orbs, which are each of them probably so many Suns with their attendant Planets, were to be dissolved at the great Day, when Mankind shall be judged, which it were absurd to imagine, yet they think it probable, that by the *Heavens* here may be understood, that Part of the starry Heavens which hath a near Relation to our Earth, and which is usually called the solar System. And if this Interpretation be allowed, what a dreadful Pomp must it add to the Solemnity of that awful Day, that not only this Earth of ours, with the circumambient Air, but those heavenly Bodies which more immediately

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diately minister unto us, the Sun, Moon, and those Planets that belong to our particular System, of which Man is probably the principal Inhabitant, shall be involved in this great Catastrophe of Nature. Amazing Thought! St. *John*, when giving an Account of the future general Judgment, represents it thus, that the Earth and the Heaven fled away from the Face of him that sat upon the Throne, and there was found no Place for them. *Rev.* xx. 11. And the Psalmist in his noble Address to God, *Psal.* cii. 25, 26, 27. after having said, *Of old hast thou laid the Foundation of the Earth, and the Heavens are the Work of thine Hands; adds, they shall perish, but thou shalt endure; yea, all of them shall wax old like a Garment; as a Vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed. But thou art the same, and thy Years shall have no End.* It is particularly observed in the Text, that *the Heavens shall pass away with a great Noise.* Indeed if this had not been so expressly mentioned, we might justly suppose it would be so. If the Noise of Thunder in Clouds about us be so terrible, what must it be when the Frame of those prodigious Bodies shall burst asunder and fall into Ruins. How shall the raging
Fire

Fire roar! Its Fury shall not be confined to this lower Region, but shall spread its Triumph through the encircling Heavens! On every Side shall the dreadful Echoes rebound. The hideous Noise of the most impetuous Thunders that ever terrified amazed Mortals, is infinitely less, compared to this, than the Crack of a small Nut to the loudest Thunders.

2dly, The next Thing here mentioned is, that *the Elements shall melt with fervent Heat*. Learned Critics have observed, that the Word, which we render *Elements*, is used by eminent *Greek* Authors to signify the Planets, and so it is understood by some of the most ancient Christian Writers. And if taken in this Sense, it differs but little from what was said before, only the Expression is varied for the greater Emphasis. Or we may take the Word here rendered *Elements* in a more restrained Sense, as having a particular Reference to this lower Air, or Atmosphere, which contains a Mixture of Elements, where are the Balancing of the Clouds, the Region of Vapours and Meteors, the Repository of Lightnings and Thunders. Vast Quantities of Fire are lodged in those airy Magazines, which shall then be brought forth, and break out into the fiercest Explosions. The whole Air shall

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shall be inflamed. The Clouds which before shed down upon the Earth refreshing Rains or Dews, shall then pour out Streams of liquid Fire, of which that which consumed *Sodom* and *Gomorrab* yields but a very faint Representation. Nothing shall be seen but universal Flame and burning Sulphur, even where before were the Treasures of Snow and Hail, and where the hoary Frost of Heaven was gendred.

3dly, The last Part of the Description is this, that *the Earth, and the Works that are therein, shall be burnt up*. Not merely shall the Surface of the Ground be scorched, but the whole Earth shall be burnt up. The raging Flame shall penetrate its inmost Bowels, and shall reach to its very Centre. Even the vast Ocean itself, with all its huge Collection of Waters, shall evaporate into Smoke, and shall become a dry and sandy Defart, or be turned into a Lake of Fire. The Vulcano's or burning Mountains, which are now to be found in several Parts of the Earth, shew that there is a large Quantity of combustible Materials stored up in its Bowels. Fire is in a greater or less Degree mixed with all earthly Bodies, though it is now for the most part so disposed and governed by Divine Providence, as to be of great Use to Mankind, and is generally restrain-
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ed from producing mischievous Effects. But then shall the raging Element be commissioned to spread its Ravages far and wide; and the subterraneous Fires, joining with the Inflammations in the Air, shall produce an universal Combustion and Confusion. Not only shall the more soft and less durable Parts of the Earth be dissolved, and the Woods and Forests send up an amazing Blaze, but the everlasting Hills themselves, which seemed to be formed for a perpetual Duration, the huge Mountains that scale the Sky, and the flinty Rocks shall split asunder, or melt like Wax before the Sun. And if the Works of Nature here on Earth shall be consumed, much more all the Improvements of human Art. What will then become of strong and impregnable Fortresses, rich and magnificent Cities, stately Palaces, with all their sumptuous Furniture, beautiful Gardens, delightful Retreats? They will all be reduced to a deformed Heap, and buried in one common Mass of fiery Ruin. Where will then be all the Provisions that are made to gratify a luxurious Appetite? Where will be the boasted Monuments of human Splendor, the Pride, the Pomp, and Grandeur of the mightiest Empires? Whither will guilty Mortals flee for Refuge,

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fuge, when the Air above them, and the Earth beneath, and under their Feet, shall be all in Flames, and on every Side tremendous Thunders and Lightnings, Tempests and Whirlwinds of devouring Fire. Then shall the most obstinate and hardened Sinners believe and tremble, and find too late what *a fearful Thing it is to fall into the Hands of the living God.*

And let none say, How can these Things be? There is nothing in all this but what may without Difficulty be effected by the Power of the Almighty. He can, as hath been already hinted, easily kindle and let loose upon us the fiery Matter that is dispersed in inconceivable Quantities throughout the Earth and Air: or he can order it so that we shall be involved in the fiery Tail of a Comet; or that this Earth, and the several Planets in this solar System, which are now kept by the Divine Providence at proper Distances from the Sun, shall have their Course and Direction so altered, as to be drawn in by the attractive Force of the Sun, and swallowed up in that immense Ocean of Fire. But we need not be curious to enquire how all this shall be performed, which may be done in many Ways which at present we have no Notion of. It is enough that we are assured in the Word of God, that
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there is a Time coming, when this World and all Things in it shall be destroyed by Fire.

It has been a Question among Divines, Whether the Substance of all these Things shall be utterly abolished and annihilated, or only the Form of them changed. And as to this it may be observed on the one Hand, that it seems manifest that the primary and immediate Effect of this general Conflagration of the World shall be the destroying and reducing it to a confused Heap and fiery Ruin. And on the other Hand, it is not probable that the very Substance of all these Things shall be entirely annihilated. Melting, burning up, and dissolving, which are the Expressions here made use of, do not properly signify annihilating the Substance, but altering and destroying the Form of Things. That last dreadful Conflagration shall not reduce this World and all Things in it to nothing, but shall turn them into Ashes and Confusion. And God may, after having manifested his righteous Judgments by destroying and dissolving this our System, cause a new and beautiful World to arise out of the same Materials, for the Glory of his infinite Power, Wisdom, and Goodness. To this Purpose many understand what is said, Verse 13th

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of this Chapter, where, after having mentioned the general Conflagration, the Apostle adds, *Nevertheless we, according to his Promise, look for new Heavens and a new Earth, wherein dwelleth Righteousness.* And it is supposed by some Interpreters, that St. Paul hath a Reference to this, when he saith, that *the Creature itself shall be delivered from the Bondage of Corruption into the glorious Liberty of the Children of God.* Rom. viii. 21.

I should now proceed to the second Thing I proposed to consider, *viz.* That this *Day of the Lord*, in which the World and all Things in it shall be destroyed by Fire, *will come as a Thief in the Night.* But this, with some other Things for the farther Illustration of this Subject, and the practical Improvement of it, must be reserved for another Discourse.

On the general Conflagration.

DISCOURSE XXV.

2 PETER iii. 10, 11.

The Day of the Lord will come as a Thief in the Night, in which the Heavens shall pass away with a great Noise, and the Elements shall melt with fervent Heat, the Earth also, and the Works that are therein, shall be burnt up. Seeing then that all these Things shall be dissolved, what Manner of Persons ought ye to be in all holy Conversation and Godliness!

I have already entered upon the Consideration of this remarkable Passage, in which, first, it is asserted that there is a Time approaching, here called *the Day of*

the Lord, when this World, and all Things in it, shall be destroyed by Fire. Secondly, That this Day of the Lord will come as a Thief in the Night. And then we are directed to the proper Improvement of this great Event. Seeing then that all these Things shall be dissolved, what Manner of Persons ought ye to be in all holy Conversation and Godliness!

The first of these was considered in my former Discourse. A Representation was made, following the Light the Scripture affords us, of the general Conflagration or Dissolution of the World by Fire. We endeavoured distinctly to enquire into the awful and pompous Description here given of it by the Apostle *Peter*, that *the Heavens shall pass away with a great Noise, and the Elements shall melt with fervent Heat, the Earth also, and the Works that are therein, shall be burnt up.*

I now proceed to the second Thing here observed, and that is, that this *Day of the Lord*, in which the World shall be dissolved by Fire, *will come as a Thief in the Night.* And there are two Things which seem to be intended by this Manner of Expression.

1st, That the precise Time when this shall happen is utterly unknown to us. A Thief does not send Word beforehand

at what Time he will come. And *Christ* has not determined in his Word the certain Period in which we may expect him to put an End to this present State of Things. The Day of the general Conflagration, which in the Text is called *the Day of the Lord*, is in the 7th Verse called *the Day of Judgment, and Perdition of ungodly Men*. And our Saviour expressly tells us, that *of that Day and that Hour knoweth no Man, no not the Angels which are in Heaven, neither the Son, but the Father*. It is a Secret which for wise Ends God hath thought fit to conceal from every Creature. Even the Son himself, *i. e.* our Lord *Jesus Christ*, in his human Nature did not know it whilst he was on Earth in the Days of his Flesh; and this should silence a bold Curiosity, and put a Stop to all rash and presumptuous Enquiries about it.

2dly, Another Thing that is implied, when it is here declared, that this great *Day of the Lord will come as a Thief in the Night*, is, that it shall surprize the Inhabitants of the Earth, and strike them with a sudden Terror when they least expect it. When the Men of that Generation shall be sunk into a deep carnal Security and a very degenerate and corrupt State, the Signs of the Son of Man, the dread-

ful Harbingers of approaching Judgment, shall appear at once. The Trump of God shall blow, and fill all the Earth and the vast Concave of the surrounding Heavens with its awful and pompous Sound. A Fire shall go before him, and burn up his Enemies round about. His Lightnings shall enlighten the World, the Earth shall see and tremble. The Hills shall melt like Wax at the Presence of the Lord, at the Presence of the Lord of the whole Earth. It shall seem as if the Frame of Nature were seized with convulsive Pangs and expiring Agonies. And what Tongue of Man is able to express, or what Heart to conceive the Amazement, Consternation, and Dismay, that shall then overwhelm guilty Mortals, even those of them that dared before to lift up their blasphemous Mouths against Heaven, and who seemed to have arrived at the highest Degree of obstinate Impiety! That this is one Thing principally intended here in this Expression of *the Day of the Lord's coming as a Thief in the Night*, is plain from the Account St. Paul gives of it, 1 Theff. v. 2, 3. *Yourselves know perfectly* (saith he to the believing Thessalonians) *that the Day of the Lord so cometh as a Thief in the Night. For when they shall say, Peace and Safety, then sudden Destruction cometh upon them, as*
Travail

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Travail upon a Woman with Child, and they shall not escape.

I now come to what principally concerns us, and that is, the practical Improvement we should make of this important Subject. For it is not designed merely as an amusing Speculation to gratify our Curiosity, but ought to have a proper Influence upon our Temper and Conduct. This is what the Apostle *Peter* here directs to, when after having given a sublime Description of the general Conflagration, he adds, *seeing then that all these Things shall be dissolved, what Manner of Persons ought ye to be in all holy Conversation and Godliness!*

And 1st, The Consideration of this should fill us with a holy Fear of God, and with adoring Thoughts of his infinite Majesty, his almighty Power and sovereign Dominion. Thunder and Lightning have in all Ages been regarded as awful Proofs of the irresistible Power, Majesty, and Grandeur of the Divinity. There have been Instances of Persons, who before made a Scoff of all Religion, who have been brought by violent Thunders to serious Thoughts of God, and a Sense of the Duty and Worship they owed him. This is what one of the heathen Poets owns concerning himself. Thunder is frequently

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ly represented in the Old Testament as the Voice of God. The whole 29th Psalm is designed to celebrate its Effects in Strains of the most exalted Piety and Devotion. *The Voice of the Lord is upon the Waters; the God of Glory thundereth. The Voice of the Lord is powerful: the Voice of the Lord is full of Majesty. The Voice of the Lord breaketh the Cedars of Lebanon. The Voice of the Lord divideth the Flames of Fire. The Voice of the Lord shaketh the Wilderness, it maketh the Hinds to calve, and uncovereth the Forest.* But what are those Thunders or Earthquakes that are apt to fill us with Amazement and Dread, and which are for the most part confined within narrow Bounds, in Comparison of the dreadful Shocks and Convulsions at the great Day, when this whole terraqueous Globe, and the surrounding Heavens shall be rent asunder, and be involved in one general fiery Ruin. Many of the ancient Philosophers, who made high Pretensions to Learning and Wisdom, when they beheld the constant Revolutions of the Heavens, and the Stability of the Course of Nature, attributed this to a blind fatal Necessity, rather than to the free Appointment of a most wise intelligent Cause; they maintained the Eternity of the World in its present Form, and that the Heavens are incorruptible,

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ruptible, and not subject to Change. But how much juster and nobler is that of the Psalmist, when speaking of the Earth and Heavens in his admirable Address to God, *Psal. cii. 26, 27.* he expresseth himself thus, *They shall perish, but thou shalt endure; yea all of them shall wax old as doth a Garment; as a Vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy Years shall have no End.* The Dissolution of this material World shall shew that it did not make, nor is able to subsist and support itself by its own Force. It is God that hath established it, and it shall continue only during that Time which he hath assigned for its Duration. With what Reverence then should we adore that eternal Majesty, who at first erected this vast and magnificent Theatre by his almighty Hand, and will at the appointed Season change and take it down, and put an End to this present State of Things! *Let all the Earth therefore fear the Lord, and all the Inhabitants of the World stand in Awe of him. Psal. xxxiii. 8.* Shall such impotent Worms as we are, Creatures of Yesterday, that dwell in Houses of Clay, whose Foundation is in the Dust, dare to oppose our Wills and Appetites to his Will and to his Authority? *He is wise in Heart, and mighty in Strength,*

as

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as *Job* speaks, *who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered? Which removeth the Mountains, and they know not: which overturneth them in his Anger: which shaketh the Earth out of his Place, and the Pillars thereof tremble. Yea, as it is elsewhere expressed, the Pillars of Heaven tremble, and are astonished at his Reproof. Who knoweth the Power of his Anger? Not to fear what Man can do unto us, when we are engaged in a just Cause, argues a noble Fortitude, and a true Greatness of Mind; but not to fear God, who at first created, and can destroy a World, is not Courage but Madness. How careful therefore should we be not to expose ourselves to his just Wrath! how desirous to secure an Interest in his Favour! And, blessed be his Name! he encourageth and inviteth us to lay hold of his offered Grace and Mercy. Hear what he himself saith by his Prophet, *Isa. xxvii. 4, 5. Who would set the Briers and Thorns against me in Battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together. Or let him take hold of my Strength, that he may make Peace with me, and he shall make Peace with me. Sweet and comfortable Words! Who would not be desirous to be at Peace with this almighty Jehovah! And in order to this we must come to him in the Way of his own**

Appoint-

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Appointment through *Jesus Christ*, who hath made Peace by the Blood of his Cross, and through whom that gracious Covenant is established, in which Pardon and eternal Salvation is freely offered to perishing Sinners upon the most reasonable and condescending Terms.

2dly, The Consideration of the approaching Dissolution of the World should affect our Hearts with a deep Sense of the heinous Evil of Sin, and God's just Displeasure against it. To make an open Declaration of this to Angels and Men, seems to be one great End of this extraordinary and most amazing Dispensation. This Earth of ours has been, for some thousands of Years, the Stage on which the most abominable Impieties, the most scandalous Impurities, and all Kinds of Wickedness and Acts of Injustice and Violence have been perpetrated; and therefore, as under the Law, the Walls of a House infected with the Leprosy were to be pulled down; and as when Persons were devoted to Destruction for their Wickedness, it was sometimes so ordered, that all Things that belonged to them were involved in the same Ruin, and brought under the Curse; so this Earth which has so long been polluted with the Sins of Men, and on which the Lord of Glory was crucified, together
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with the Atmosphere about us, and, as some learned Persons understand this Passage, the whole solar System, of which Man is probably the principal Inhabitant, shall be dissolved in that great *Day of Judgment, and Perdition of ungodly Men*: A Day in which the evil Angels also, which had so great a Share in tempting Men to sin, shall have their final Doom and Punishment compleated. The Sun, Moon, and Planets, which the Nations regarded as Deities, and to whom they generally paid an idolatrous Worship, shall then appear to be unable to preserve themselves or their Votaries. And what an awful Idea must it give us of God's Justice and Purity, that even the inanimate Creation itself, which had been abused to Sin, shall bear the Marks of the divine Displeasure against it! If it was so dreadful to see Fire and Brimstone raining down from Heaven upon *Sodom and Gomorrah*, and turning them into Ashes, that they might be an Ensamble unto them that should hereafter live ungodly, as *St. Peter* speaks, *2 Pet. ii. 6.* what will it be to see the whole Earth, the Elements, and the surrounding Heavens in Flames! How strange is the Malignity of Sin, that has such a Tendency to spread Ruin and Confusion through the beautiful Creation of God!

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3dly, Another Use we should make of the Doctrine before us, is, to moderate our Desires and Affections towards all Things here below, and to give us an affecting Conviction of the Vanity and Insufficiency of this present World and all its Enjoyments to make us happy. To have a just Sense of this is an eminent Point of Wisdom, and of great Importance to the Christian Character. For an inordinate Love to this present World, and a too close Attachment to the Objects and Enjoyments of it, is one of the greatest Obstructions to a holy and virtuous Practice; it is the principal Source of our Miscarriages, and tends to lead us astray in our whole Course. But at the great Day God shall draw a Line of Confusion and Emptiness over the World, and all those Things in it in which Men are most apt to seek for Happiness. Who that looks forward by Faith, and beholds the Fashion of this World passing away, and the whole Frame of it dissolved at the general Conflagration, can help pronouncing over it, *Vanity of Vanities, Vanity of Vanities, all is Vanity!* Surely it would cast a Damp upon our Desires and Pursuits after the most valued worldly Enjoyments, seriously to realize to ourselves that awful Day when all these Things shall be consumed, together

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ther with their infatuated Admirers. Shall we be proud of Riches, or make Gold our Confidence, when we consider, that yet a little while and this Earth, with all the Riches contained in its Bowels, the hidden Treasures of Gold and Silver, and the Repositories of precious Stones, shall become a Prey to the devouring Flames? Shall we make our Boasts of worldly Honours and Dignities, which shall so soon be at an End? Behold Thrones tumbling, Crowns and Sceptres dissolving, the most magnificent Palaces, and all the Monuments of human Grandeur turned into a ruinous Heap! The raging Flame shall not spare them any more than the meanest Cottages. What shall then become of all the Pleasures of the voluptuous Sensualist? Are these the Things that Men lose their God and their Souls for? *Oh ye Sons of Men, how long will ye love Vanity,* and exhaust the Vigour of your Spirits in pursuing after that which shall shortly vanish in Smoke, or fall into Ashes? The Destruction of the World furnishes this most instructive Lesson to Angels and Men, that there is no stable Happiness but in God alone. Without him this whole earthly Globe, and these visible Heavens, would be but a transitory Portion. They shall perish, but he remaineth immutably

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the same infinite Fountain of Happiness, the stable everlasting Portion of his People.

4thly, The last Reflection I would make upon this Subject is this, That since there is a Day coming when this World and all Things in it shall be dissolved, and the precise Time of it unknown to us, we should labour to be in a constant Readiness and Preparation for it. This is what *St. Peter* intends, when in the Words following the Text, he represents it as the Duty of Christians to be *looking for and hastening unto the coming of the Day of God, wherein the Heavens being on Fire shall be dissolved, and the Elements shall melt with fervent Heat.* And again, Verse 14. *Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such Things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in Peace, without Spot, and blameless.* It is of infinite Importance to us that we be found ready for the coming of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, in the Day when he shall be revealed from Heaven with his mighty Angels in flaming Fire. If the Earthquake and great Darkness, and the rending of the Rocks at our Saviour's Crucifixion, could cause even the heathen Centurion to say, *Truly this was the Son of God!* how much more when the World shall be in Flames, and this Frame of Nature rent
 VOL. I. L 1 asunder,

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afunder, at his fecond glorious Appearing, fhall even the moft obftinate Infidels be conftained to acknowledge and adore his Power and Majefty ! Let us therefore, now whilft there is a proper Opportunity for it, whilft the Day of Grace lafts, hearken to his gracious Voice, and come to him by Faith and a fincere Repentance, being perfuaded, that thofe who thus come to him he will in no wife caft out. Let us fet ourfelves without Delay to forfake our evil Ways, and caft away from us our darling Iniquities, and ufe our utmoft Endeavours, through the Affiftance of divine Grace, to get a Work of real Sanctification begun and carried on in our Souls. Renouncing all other Confidence, let us give up ourfelves wholly to the Lord *Jesus Chrift* as the Lord our Righteousnefs and Strength, in a hearty Conſent to the gracious Terms of the new Covenant, being perfuaded of his Sufficiency as a Saviour, and that he is able to keep that which we have committed unto him againſt that Day. And through him let us yield up ourfelves to God our heavenly Father, as ſupreme and rightful Lord and chief Good, whom we humbly reſolve by his Grace to obey, and in whom alone we can be compleatly and for ever happy. And having the Foundation thus rightly laid by a true Conversion
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of Soul, and an unreserved Dedication of ourselves to God through the Redeemer, let it be our great Care to keep our Souls in a constant actual Readiness for *Christ's* second coming, by a careful Improvement of our Talents, and a diligent Performance of the Duties which God requireth of us. Let us be *filled with the Fruits of Righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the Glory and Praise of God*; and especially let us abound, as far as we have Ability and Opportunity, in Acts of Charity and Mercy, that we may lay up a good Foundation for the Time to come, and may lay hold of eternal Life. To them that now go on in a patient Continuance in well doing, that Day which shall fill the ungodly with Amazement and Terror, will be Matter of unspeakable Joy. The Day of their compleat Redemption is then come. The dead in *Christ* shall rise first; their Dust, which perhaps seemed to be scattered abroad and lost, shall be re-united at his commanding Word, and be formed into a beautiful and glorious Frame, shining with a celestial Radiancy and Splendor. And those Saints, that shall then be found alive upon the Earth, shall be changed as in a Moment, in the Twinkling of an Eye, without seeing Death, and shall be caught up in the
Clouds

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Clouds to meet the Lord in the Air: And after having been solemnly acquitted and applauded by the great, the universal Judge, they shall all be thenceforth for ever with the Lord in the Regions of unchangeable Bliss and Glory, happy in the Vision and Enjoyment of God and the Redeemer unto all Eternity.

THE END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

