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Preach'd before the

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Feb. 24. 167 $\frac{4}{5}$.

BY

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Chaplain in Ordinary to His MAJESTY.

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HEB. iii. 13.

—Lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.



When the Jewish Christians had formed themselves into an established Church, and were become considerable for their number as well as for their zeal and devotion, their obstinate Brethren thought it high time for their own security, at least to weaken and divide them, if they could not wholly suppress and destroy them. For this end, they made use of different instruments and means, according to the different seasons, and dispositions of men. Sometimes, when they had any encouragement, or connivance from the Roman Power, they set upon them with rage and fury, *spoiling their goods*, and threatening their lives: But this hard usage did only heighten the Heb. 10. 32, 34. courage,

courage, and unite the affections of the more zealous Christians. Sometimes, they suggested to them the mighty veneration, which their whole Nation alwayes had for *Moses* and the *Law*, and what an Infinite scandal and dishonour it would be to them all, to have that *Law*, which was delivered by Angels, confirmed by Miracles, established by Prophets, admired by the Gentiles, and had continued among them for so many Ages, now of a sudden to be laid aside for the sake of a new institution, that expressed no more regard to them than to any other Nation in the World. And so great was the love which the *Jews* had to their own Countrey and Religion, such an opinion was generally received among them of the peculiar favour of God towards them, that they who could not be shocked by persecution, were in danger of being overcome by flattery. From hence the *Author* of this *Epistle* makes it his business to shew the excellency of *Christ* above *Moses*, and of his institution above that of the *Law*, in respect of the *Priesthood* and *Sacrifices*, and the benefits which come by them; and that although this *new and living way* were but lately discovered, yet it was that which was alwayes designed by God, foreseen by the Patriarchs, foretold by the Prophets, and longed for by good men as the *Consolation of Israel*: and it could be no more disparagement to *Moses* and the

the *Prophets* to yield to the *Glories* of the Kingdom of the *Messias*, than it is to the Stars not to be seen when the light of the Sun appears. But besides these, there were some among them capable of being wrought upon by other kind of arguments, such I mean, who out of a sudden transport of zeal, and being convinced by the miraculous operations of the *Holy Ghost*, had declared themselves *Christians*, but yet retained a secret love to their sins, and the pleasures of this World : these were the Persons whom the *Apostle*, not without reason, expresses the greatest jealousy of, as in danger of *Apostasie* : and therefore in many places of this *Epistle*, he represents to them the dreadful consequences of such an *Apostasie*, for it was no less than crucifying the *Son of God* afresh and putting him to an open shame ; it was counting the blood of the *Covenant* wherewith they were sanctified an unholy thing, and doing despiht unto the *spirit of Grace* ; nay it was not only crucifying, but treading under foot the *Son of God* ; and therefore he bids them consider, what punishment such persons would deserve at the hands of *God* into which they must fall, and what hopes there could be of pardon for those who so openly rejected the only means of obtaining it ; For if they did herein sin wilfully after they had received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for

Heb. 6, 6.

10. 29.

26, 27.

of

of judgement, and fiery indignation which shall devour the Adversaries. But he not only sets before them the sad effects of Apostasie, but as one that loved their souls, and designed to prevent their ruine, he giveth them the best advice and counsel against it: He knew well enough, it was not the dissatisfaction of mens reason, which was the ground of their infidelity: but, as mens more open designs are governed by such springs which are least discovered; so, whatever these warping Christians might pretend, as to zeal for the Law, and their ancient Religion, the bottom of all was a principle of infidelity, not arising from want of sufficient reason to convince them, but from a close and secret love of sin which made them willing to quarrel with whatever was so repugnant to it, as the doctrine of Christ. To this end, he puts them in mind of the case of their *Fore-fathers* in the Wilderness, who wanted no arguments to convince them of Gods Goodness and Providence; yet nothing would satisfie them, but they were still murmuring and complaining, till at last God swore in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest. “ And since you
 “ all acknowledge, they had reason enough to
 “ be satisfied, but out of an obstinate and stubborn humour *hardned their hearts in the day of*
 “ *temptation in the Wilderness; take heed Brethren,*
 12. “ *saith the Apostle, lest there be in any of you such*
 “ *an*

Heb. 3. 11.

“ an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living
 “ God; and do not look upon this advice as vain
 “ and needless to you that are called the *believing*
 “ *Jews*, but you have cause to be very watchful
 “ over one another, especially in this Tempt-
 “ ing Age, exhorting one another daily while it is
 “ called to day, lest any of you be hardened through the
 “ deceitfulness of sin. As though he had said to
 “ them, “ You who now glory in the name of *Be-*
 “ *lievers*, and are hitherto as forward as any in
 “ the profession of Christianity, do not think
 “ your selves to be above the need of any helps
 “ to confirm your faith, and to arm you against
 “ the assaults of temptations, for your very se-
 “ curity may betray you; but consider *the sin*
 “ *that doth so easily beset you* on every side, the
 “ various artifices it makes use of to deceive men,
 “ and when it hath once gotten admittance, how
 “ strangely it bewitches and infatuates the
 “ minds of men, how unwilling they are to
 “ be convinced of their sins, how much more
 “ unwilling to part with them, and how natu-
 “ rally the love of sin brings men to infidelity,
 “ and then you will see how great reason there
 “ is, why you should be *exhorting one another daily*
 “ *while it is called to day, lest any of you be hardened*
 “ *through the deceitfulness of sin.*

In which words, are these three things con- siderable.

1. The danger they are in of being hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, who have the most powerful motives and engagements against it.

2. The manner whereby sin doth prevail upon men to harden them, through the deceitfulness of sin.

3. The care that all Christians ought to have to prevent being hardened through the Deceitfulness of sin: Lest any of you, &c.

1. The Danger men are in of being hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, though they have the most powerful Motives and Engagements against it. For never any persons had greater arguments against returning to the practice of sin, than these to whom this Epistle was written.

They had embraced among the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith towards God, of the doctrine of baptisms and of laying on of hands (for the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost) and of the resurrection of the dead and of eternal judgement. And what can we suppose to have greater force and efficacy to restrain men from sin, than what is contained in these fundamentals of Christianity? But we shall find that no Motives have ever been great enough to restrain those from sin, who have secretly loved it, and only sought pretences for the practice of it.

Such is the frame and condition of humane nature considered in it self, so great are the advantages

advantages of reason and consideration for the government of our actions, so much stronger are the natural motives to vertue than to vice, that they who look no farther, would expect to find the world much better than it is. For why should we suppose the generality of mankind to betray so much folly, as to act unreasonably and against the common interest of their own kind? as all those do, that yield to the temptations of sin: For if we set aside the consideration of a Divine Law, to *sin* is nothing else but to act foolishly and inconsiderately. But on the other side, if men first look into the practice of the World, and there observe the strange prevalency of Vice, and how willing men are to defend as well as to commit it; they would be apt to imagine that either there is no such thing as Reason among men, or that it hath very little influence upon their actions; and that the talk of Vertue was first found out by some great enemy to the Felicity of Mankind. Such different apprehensions would men have from the different wayes of beholding the Picture of Humane nature; either as it is in its own frame, or as it is to be seen in the World. They who have with the greatest judgement and care searched into the nature and first principles of humane Societies, have all agreed that the chief end and design of men in joyning together was, for the

mutual benefit and advantage of each other; and that in order to this, certain Laws of *Justice, Equity, Mercy, Truth, Gratitude, Temperance*, as well as of *Subjection to Government*, ought to be inviolably observed by men. And since these things have the universal consent of mankind to be for their general good, how comes it to pass, that men being joyned in these Societies for such ends, make so little Conscience of the practice of them? How come so many to live, as it were, in open defiance to these Fundamental Laws of Nature? How come others, only to make use of the pretence of vertue to deceive, and of honesty and integrity to cover the deepest dissimulation? If they be not good, why are they pretended? If they are good, why are they not practised? So that whether we consider mankind in it self, or in Society; we find the *Motives* to vertue to be much more weighty and considerable than those to sin; and yet that the practice of men is directly contrary.

But it may be said, *that all this might happen in the world for want of wit and education to polish and improve the natural Faculties of mens minds, and to direct and encourage the practice of vertue.* I wish the world had not so many instances that men of the greatest wit have not been men of the best Morals; but if wit, and education, and Philosophy had been the most effectual means to reclaim
men

men from sin, where should we have looked more for the flourishing of vertue, than in Greece and Rome? And yet in those times, when all the accomplishments of *wit* were at the highest in those places, the manners of men were sunk into the greatest filth of debauchery. It would make one astonished to read the admirable discourses of their *Philosophers*, and to consider the strange height that *eloquence* and *wit* were arrived to among their *Orators* and *Poets*; and then to compare the account given of the manners of the *Gentile World*, not only by their own *Satyrists*, but by the *Apostles* in their several *Epistles*: What a monstrous Catalogue of sins do we meet with in the first Chapter to the *Romans*? Rom. 1. 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32. of sins of so deep a dye, and of so horrid a nature, and such an Inventory of all sorts of Wickedness, that one might imagine the Apostle had been rather describing some vision of Hell than the seat of the Roman Empire. To the same purpose he speaks of the *Corinthians* and *Ephesians*, who thought themselves behind none of the *Greeks* of that Age in the breeding then most in Vogue; but we need not instance in particulars, when St. Peter calls it in general the will of the *Gentiles*, to live in lasciviousness, I Pet. 4. 3. lusts, excess of wine, revellings and banquetings, as well I Joh. 5. 19. as abominable Idolatries; and St. John in short saith, the whole world lyeth in wickedness.

It might be worth our while to consider how so universal a degeneracy of manners should happen in those ages, when men pretended more to Wit and Learning, than they had done in any time before. And for this, it were very unreasonable to assign any Cause that were equally common to all other Ages, such as the corruption of humane nature; which, how great soever it be, is the same at all times; neither do I think it reasonable to lay it wholly on the bad examples of the teachers of vertue, knowing how malicious the worst of men are in endeavouring to make those who seem to be better, to be as bad as themselves: but there are some peculiar reasons for it, and I wish they had been only proper to those times: as,

1. Separating *Religion* and *Morality* from each other. When their *Religion* was placed in some solemn Rites, and pompous Ceremonies, and costly Sacrifices; but all the matters of *Morality* were confined to their *Schools*, there to be enquired after by those who had leisure and curiosity for them. As though God were more concerned for the colour, and age, and pomp of their Sacrifices, for the gestures and shews of their devotion; than for the purity of their hearts, the sincerity of their minds, or the holiness of their lives. When once the people had swallowed that pernicious principle, that *Morality*

lity was no part of their Religion, they had no great regard to the good or evil of their actions, as long as a little charge, and four looks, and going to their Temples at certain times were thought sufficient to expiate their sins. And they were much more encouraged in Wickedness, when the Gods they worshipped were represented on the stage as acting all manner of villanies: and no doubt, they thought it a great comfort to them in their debaucheries, that their Gods were as *good fellows* as themselves. And what could all the precepts of *Philosophers*, or sayings of *wise men* signifie to those who were so far from looking on vertue as any necessary part of their Religion, that they thought those fit to be worshipped for Gods, whom they never believed to have been good men?

2. When they had thus rendred vertue unnecessary, by making it no part of their Religion, the next thing was to make it appear *ridiculous*; which was a certain way to make *Fools* out of love with it; who do not consider, what is fit to be laughed at, but what is so. When *Socrates* at *Athens* undertook with many sharp and cutting *Ironies* to reprove the vices of his Age; and with a great deal of Wit and Reason to persuade men to the sober practice of Vertue, the licentious people knew not what to do with him, for they were not able to withstand the force of his

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his arguments; at last *Aristophanes* (having a *Comical Wit* whereby he was able to make any thing seem ridiculous although he knew very well the *Wisdom* and *Learning* of *Socrates*; yet) to please and humour the people, he brings him upon the Stage, and represents his grave instructions after such a manner, as turn'd all into a matter of laughter to the people of *Athens*: which did more mischief to the reputation of *Virtue* among them, than the taking away his life did. For, his dying convinced the people he was in good earnest, and brought a great veneration to his memory; whereas the other expos'd him only to scorn and contempt; and the people were made judges whether it were with cause or no: who besides their ignorance and want of judgement, were too much parties to be Judges. This is the method which men take, when they set their *wits* against *virtue* and *Goodness*; they know it is impossible to argue men out of it; but it is very easie by ridiculous postures, and mimical gestures, and profane similitudes, to put so grave and modest a thing as *virtue* is out of Countenance, among those who are sure to laugh on the other side. I do not think such things can signifie any thing to Wise men; but when was the world made up of such? and therefore it signifies very much to the mischief of those, who have not the *courage* to love *despised* *virtue*;

nor

nor to defend a Cause that is *laughed down*. And to these I may now add,

3. The *bad examples* of others, especially of those to whom it belonged to *teach and encourage vertue*, above others. No man will pretend, that it is ground enough for him to do a thing meerly because he sees another do it; yet in all Ages men have seen and complained that the power of examples hath outdone that of Laws. Some that think themselves more subtle than others, question whether those mean what they say, who speak one thing and do another; and therefore they will do what they think the others mean; which were a good plea if their actions were better than their words. Others think, that all discourses of vertue, and honesty, and true honour, are meer matter of talk for men to entertain some idle hours with, and that men are universally agreed in nothing but in speaking well and doing ill. These look on vertue as a kind of *Phoenix*, a thing often talked of, and believed by some, but never seen by any: but such find all things so very bad at home, that out of charity to themselves, they believe the whole World to be like them. Others have so much natural modesty and sense of shame that they have not the courage to commit a great wickedness, unless they were hardened to it by the example of greater sinners before them. But the most common

mon reason of the prevalency of example is, that men find in themselves a strong propensity and inclination to do evil, and are willing to meet with such a pretence for committing it, that they do but as others do; and therefore I cannot think that bare example were enough to corrupt the World if there were not some antecedent inclination in humane nature to the practice of evil. For since there is less reason to follow bad examples than good, why should one prevail more than the other in the World, if there were nothing but the bare example to move? But that inclination being considered, we may easily give an account of the ill consequence which the bad examples of those who are to direct and encourage others in vertue, must needs be of to the rest of mankind. *Xenophon* was not without reason so much displeas'd, when he saw some of the best of *Socrates* his Disciples, make their Court to *Dionysius* in *Sicilie*; knowing how inconsistent the reputation of vertue is, with the very suspicion of Flattery: and that nothing makes great men more suspicious of vertue, than when they see *Philosophers* become Flatterers, and carrying on the restless designs of ambition under the pretence of teaching the art of contentment to others. It was this which made the very name of them become so odious at *Rome*, that even vertue it self was hated for their sakes:

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*Xen. ep. ad
Esch.*

so that the very teachers of vertue contributed to the increase of vice. Especially, when by their endless disputes and wranglings about words and terms of art, they made the people suspect they did but play prizes before them; and only pretended to quarrel, but were enough agreed to cheat and deceive them. Upon such grounds as these, all the *Motives* to vertue contained in the *Writings* and *instructions* of *Philosophers* lost their due force and efficacy on the minds of the people, who were rather more *hardned in their sins* by these disadvantages which attended the means that were used to reclaim them from the practice of them.

But when all other *motives* proved ineffectual by these disadvantages, what could be more reasonably expected, than that the *motives* of the *Gospel* should prevail with men, being of so great weight in themselves, and recommended with so much advantage to the World; by the examples of those who delivered them? The great arguments of Christianity against the practice of sin are not drawn from any uncertain *Topicks* or nice and curious speculations; but from the influence mens good or evil actions in this World will have upon their happiness or misery in another. And what concerns another state is revealed with much more clearness, and confirmed by stronger evidence, and enforced by more mo-

ving considerations, than ever it was before among the best and wisest of the Gentiles. The doctrine of Christianity is plain and peremptory in this matter, *that God will render to every man according to his Works*: and that the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. And however prone men are to be deceived with vain words, yet let them look to themselves, *God will not be mocked*, (however men may be) *for because of these things the wrath of God will come upon the Children of disobedience*. No Sacrifices, no prayers, no penances, no vows and promises will keep off this wrath of God without a hearty repentance and timely reformation. Never any Religion or institution in the World made it so much its business to keep men from doing evil, and to persuade them to do good, as the Christian doth. The Apostles thought it the greatest contradiction to their profession, for any men to be called Christians, and to live in the practice of their former sins, *Let the time past of your life suffice you*, saith S. Peter, *to have wrought the will of the Gentiles*, i. e. that time past when you were no Christians. To be a Christian then was all one as of a loose, profane, dissolute person to become sober, religious, exact in his conversation. To put on Christ, was but another phrase, *for making no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof*; To learn Christ, was all one as to put off as concerning the former

mer conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to Eph. 4. 20; the deceitful lusts; and to put on the new man, which after 21, 24. God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Those were the blessed dayes of Christianity, when it was no hard matter to understand what it was to be a Christian; when the niceties of disputes, and the subtle artifices of men of corrupt minds had not yet debauched the notion of Christianity, to reconcile it with the lusts of men. To be a Christian then, was not to be versed in the subtilties of the Schools; or to be able to swallow contradictions without chewing them; or to be as fierce and earnest for every doubtful opinion and uncertain custome, as if the substance of Christianity were like *Epicurus* his World made up of a great number of very small and restless Atomes. To be a Christian, was not to fight for the Faith, but to live by it; not to quarrel for good Works, but to practise them; In short, to be a Christian was to depart from iniquity and to do good, to be meek, and humble, and patient, and peaceable towards all men; to be charitable, and kind; to be sober and temperate in all things, to be holy, sincere, and innocent in his actions towards God and men. This is the true *Idea* of a Christian, and not a meer *Idea*; but such as every one that owns himself to be a Christian is bound by the most Sacred vow of *Christianity* in *Baptism* to be like; so that, if either the consi-

deration of their own eternal welfare, or the nature, design, or honour of Christianity, or their own most solemn engagements can restrain men from the practice of sin, we see that those who are Christians, are under the most powerful *motives and engagements* against it.

But yet such there have been (I wish I could not say such there are) who have broken through all these things, and *have been hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*. One might have thought; if any persons had been out of this danger, they had been such as the *Apostle* makes this exhortation to; who had seen the *miraculous operations of the Holy Ghost* for confirming the *doctrine and Motives of Christianity*; nay who had themselves been

Heb. 6. 4,5. *made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and had tasted of this Heavenly gift, and of the good Word of God, and of the powers of the world to come*: Who had testified their repentance for their former sins in the most publick and solemn manner, and had entred into the most Sacred Vow of Baptism, never to return more to the practice of it: who had done this in the heat of persecution, which they endured with courage and rejoycing; yet after all these things, the *Apostle* expresses a more than ordinary jealousy lest any of them *should fall away, and their hearts be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*. When *Critias and Alcibiades* had forsaken the paths of vertue, which they seemed very forward in,

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in, while they continued under the instructions of Socrates, Xenophon saith, there were some that contended that they never had any Vertue at all, because those who once had it could never lose it: but for his part, he saith, he was by no means satisfied with their opinion: for as men by discontinuing bodily exercises make themselves incapable of doing those things which they were most expert in before; so men by the neglect of improving their minds in Vertue; and giving way to the temptations of honour and pleasure (which was the case of Critias and Alcibiades) may by degrees lose the force of all the Motives to Vertue and consequently the Vertue it self. It is agreed by all men who understand any thing in these matters, that even Grace, although it be the effect of a divine power on the minds of men, is of it self capable of being lost; the great dispute is, whether it may be lost past all recovery? But as we have no more reason to set any bounds to the Grace of God in mens Recovery, than as to their first Repentance; so we ought to consider, that there is such a falling away mentioned by the Apostle, of those who have been once enlightned, of which, he saith, Heb. 6. 4, 6. it is impossible to renew them again to repentance: and that Scripture deals with all persons in its exhortations, and admonitions, and threatnings, as if they were capable of falling to the utmost degree: and to suppose that thing impossible to be done, which the gravest counsels, and the most

^{Ἀπομνημ.}
 Εὐβλ. α'. ρ.
 416.

most vehement perswasions are used to keep men from the doing of, is to make a severe reflection on the wisdom of them that give them. And the *Apostle* here leaves none of them out; but bids the most *forward believers* beware of an *evil heart of unbelief*; and those who had been most softened by repentance, take heed of being *hardned through the deceitfulness of sin*. So that we see, how powerful soever the *motives* to *Vertue* are; how great soever the *engagements* against *Sin*; yet the *Apostle* thought it needful to give them warning against the *deceitfulness of sin*.

2. But what kind of *deceitfulness* is this in *sin*, that the best and wisest men are so much cautioned against it? What irresistible *charms* doth it use to draw men into its snares? with what infusion doth it so far intoxicate mankind to make them dote upon it, against the convictions of Reason, and dictates of Conscience, and the power of perswasion, and the most solemn and repeated Vows and Promises against it? nay to make men pursue it, to such a degree as rather to be damned for it than forsake it? If we were to consider this only by Reason, we could imagine nothing less than that *sin* at one time or other hath laid such a mighty obligation on mankind, that rather than part with it, the greater part of men, out of meer gratitude, would be content to suffer for ever with it: or, that it is a thing so absolutely

absolutely necessary to the comfort of mens lives, that they cannot live one good day without it : Whereas in truth, the whole race of mankind hath suffered extreamly and continually by it : and it is so far from being necessary to the comfort of mens lives, that the greatest troubles and vexations of life have risen from it ; and men may enjoy far greater satisfaction, and more real contentment ; and more noble, and solid, and lasting pleasures if they did utterly renounce and forsake it. But this still makes the difficulty so much the greater, how it should so far bewitch and infatuate the far greatest part of mankind ; and of those who know how dearly they must suffer for it in another World ? And yet to assoil this difficulty, we have only two Accounts to give how sin comes to deceive mankind so generally, so fatally ; and those are
 1. By subtle insinuations ; 2. By false reasonings.

1. *By subtle insinuations.* The great Masters of pleading in ancient times have told us, that there are some Causes which are never to be managed by plain and downright reasonings, (because they are too weak to bear that method of handling) and then they bid men have a care in their beginning, of coming close to the business ; but they must fetch a compass about, and by secret arts and degrees insinuate
 them.

themselves into the good opinion of the Judges before they are aware of it. This is the very method which is made use of by the *deceitfulness of Sin* ; it dares not stand the examination of any close reasoning, for all its artifices would presently be discover'd then ; but it makes use of these arts of insinuation. 1. It endeavours to raise a good opinion of it self by false colours and representations of things. 2. When it hath done that, it draws men on by degrees to the practice of it. 3. When men are engaged in the practice of sin, then it represents to them how much it is their own interest to defend it, and so brings them from *the counsel of the ungodly, and the way of sinners, to the seat of the scornful.*

1. It endeavours to raise a good opinion of it self by *false colours* and representations of things. The first precept of insinuation is to remove prejudice ; for while that continues, all that can be said will be of no force. While men look on sin as vile, and loathsome ; as mean and unworthy of a man ; as inconsistent with the peace and contentment of their minds, so long temptations are easily resisted : all arts must therefore be used to make it appear with all the address and flattery which is most apt to entice a poor deluded sinner. Then, the fetters and shackles which it brings to enslave men with, must be looked on and admired as ornaments ;

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its most sordid and filthy pleasures must be thought great and manly ; and a little present honour and advantage appear more valuable than an eternal state of Happiness and Glory. These are things we should think it very hard for men to be deceived with ; and yet every day we find they are so ; and which is far more, they are ready to take it very ill of those who go about to undeceive them. In other cases, if a man tells another, that he is like to be deceived with a false and counterfeit Jewel instead of a true one ; or to buy a bad Title to an Estate instead of a good one, he thinks himself very much obliged to him for his fidelity and kindness ; only in the case of a mans beloved sins, although they will prove the greatest cheats in the World to him, yet he cannot well endure to be told so ; but his blood is apt to fire and enflame him into a passion against him that doth it ; and although it be meant with the greatest innocency and kindness, it is ready to be interpreted to be only the effect of malice and ill will. For now sin hath insinuated it self so far into him, that no one can be thought a friend to the person, who is not so to his sins ; and they are then come to that height of friendship and community of interests ; to have common friends and common enemies. Now all the discourses of the freedom, and

pleasure, and satisfaction of a mans mind in the practice of vertue appear very dull and insipid things; and fit only for *Learned Fools* or *Philosophers* to talk of.

Nothing deserves the name of *Liberty* with them, but a power of doing what they please. What nonsense and contradiction doth it seem to them for those to be accounted free, who are under any bonds or restraints? No matter to them, whether they be from God, or Nature, from Reason or Conscience, as long as they are restraints, they look on them as inconsistent with their notion of liberty. And next to those who threaten men with punishments in another World for what they do amiss in this, they account those the greatest Fools that first found out the distinction of good and evil, and just and unjust in the actions of men. "What Fools (say they) were they to
 "fasten dishonourable and reproachful names on
 "some of the most pleasant and beneficial acti-
 "ons of life? For thus a man is debarred that
 "noble and manly Vice of Drunkenness for fear
 "of losing the reputation of Sobriety; and the
 "extravagancies of Lust, for fear of doing inju-
 "ry to his neighbours Bed; and supposing a
 "man hath never so much advantages in his
 "hands to enrich himself by defrauding ano-
 "ther, yet he must not do it, because although
 "an

“ an estate be in the keeping of a Fool, yet
 “ another must not be a Knavé to get it from him.
 Thus do these miserable Slaves to Vice pity the
 weakness of those who have so little wit (as they
 think) not to understand the Liberty they enjoy :
 But thus do mad men pity the dulness of those
 that are in their wits, that do not sing, and rant,
 and despise the World, as they do : and fancy
 themselves to be Kings and Princes, while they
 are tyed fast in their chains, and lye in Straw.
 And upon such grounds as these, the most rude
 and barbarous *Indians* did better understand the
 liberty of mankind, than the most civilized Na-
 tions. For all civility is a debarring men of
 some part of this natural liberty, *i. e.* of those
 things which men have a power to do ; and
 upon this ground all antient Law-givers and
 Wise men, who by degrees brought several Na-
 tions to Order and Government, and to live by
 Laws, ought to be hated as the greatest Ty-
 rants and Usurpers upon the liberties of man-
 kind : and the natural consequence of this
 would be the overthrow of all Laws, and Or-
 der, and Government in the World. But if
 there must be some restraints upon men, then
 we are to consider what restraints are just and
 reasonable, within whose bounds we are to con-
 tain our selves ; and whatever tends to the dis-
 honour of God, to the injury of others, or to

our own destruction, it is all the reason in the World we should abstain from. And if men would but do this, they would be kept from the practice of sin : And so this imaginary notion of a boundless *liberty* will appear to be only one of the *false colours* that sin puts upon evil actions, on purpose to tempt men to the commission of them.

But there is another Poison which more subtilly and dangerously insinuates it self into the hearts of men, and by which sin gets the possession there, and that is the *love of pleasure* ; I do not mean the pleasure of the mind, or the pleasure of a good conscience, for there is no danger in these ; but it is the love of sensual pleasure which is most apt to ensnare men in the practice of sin. It is under this representation chiefly, that sin deceives, betrayes, entangles, bewitches, destroyes the souls of men : It is this which fills the imagination, and darkens the understanding with filthy steams and vapours, and hurries a man on with the impetuous violence of passions, without considering the mischievous consequence which attends it, either as to his honour in this World, or his salvation in another. This danger which attends the pleasures of sin was well represented in one of the Eastern Parables, of a man violently pursued by Wild Beasts to the top of a Precipice, where there was a Tree growing

Perzoes
Proleg. 3.c.
10. ad Spe-
cim. sapient.
vet. Indo-
rum.

growing on the side of a great lake, and at the foot of it a prodigious Serpent lying ready to devour him; the man being in this astonishment gets upon the first branch of the tree he could reach; but he was no sooner there, but his horrour increased at the apprehension of his danger on every side of him; and that which added the most to his consternation was that the very branch on which he stood was almost eaten off; while he was in this terrible fright, he looks up to the top of the tree, and there sees some wild honey trickling down the body of the tree, which he was so taken with, and so pleased with the sweetness of it, that he forgets his danger, till of a sudden the branch breaks, and down he drops into the lake without recovery. This is the true representation of the pleasures of sin, which men are so much entertained with, that they never consider the hazard they run, and scarce think of their danger till they drop into that state of misery from whence there is no redemption.

But besides these soft and voluptuous sinners, (who are easily deceived and hardly drawn out of the snares they fall into) there are others of a more brutish, restless, and designing temper, and to these sin appears under another shape to deceive them, with all the advantages of external Splendour and Greatness. And thus they who possibly might escape the baits of pleasure, are carried away by the more plausible temptations of Riches and Honour. It is supposed by some,

Mat. 4. 8, 9. some, that when the Devil tempted Christ with the offers of *the Kingdoms of this world*, if he would fall down and worship him, he did not know, who he was, but had a mind to try him by the most probable way of discovering what was within him: But surely the Devil thought him some extraordinary person, or else he would never have made so large an offer at first, *viz.* of no less than *all the Kingdoms of the World*, whereas very much less than one of these hath served to corrupt and debauch the minds of many who have been great pretenders to Piety and Vertue. It was indeed somewhat a hard condition the Devil joyned with his offer, *to fall down and Worship him*, because he then designed not only a Victory but a Triumph; but with others he conceals the condition and draws them on by degrees, still rising higher and higher in his temptations, thereby feeding and enlarging their desires; till the love of this World hath gotten such an entire possession of their hearts, that they scarce ever in good earnest think of another till their souls are passing into it. And then it may be, they sadly reflect on their own folly, in that they have preferred the deluding scenes and pompous shews of worldly greatness, before the compleat and endless felicity of another life. But it very often happens, that it is not so long, as till their leaving this World, that men come

to understand the restless folly of ambition. For the things of this World are like *Epicurus* his *Atoms*, alwayes moving and justling one against another ; and one mans ambition serves to supplant anothers, and they who cannot raise themselves may yet help to ruine others ; and oft-times those very designs by which they most hoped to advance themselves, prove the occasion of their fall and destruction. The *Mahumetans* have a story to this purpose ; *In the time of Jesus* Warn. Prov. Persic. p. 33. *three men in a journey hapied to find a Treasure ; but being hungry, they sent one of their number to buy provisions ; he consults how he might get this treasure to himself, and for that end resolves to poison their meat, the other two agreed to share it between them, and to kill the third as soon as he returned ; which they did, and themselves soon after dyed of the poisoned meat. Jesus passing by with his disciples, said, This is the condition of this world ! see what the love of it hath brought these men to ! Wo be to him that looks for any other usage from it. This is the first way whereby sin doth insinuate into the minds of them ; viz. by false colours and representations of things.*

2. But when sin hath so far insinuated it self to bring men to a better opinion of it, it doth not presently hurry them on to the greatest height of wickedness ; but leads them gently and by easie steps and degrees, lest they should start back presently with the fright of some dreadful sin.

sin. Which will appear if we consider, how one comes to be corrupted by sin that hath had the advantage of a modest and vertuous education: if those who design to debauch him speak out at first in plain words what they aim at, a sudden horrour seizes upon him at the apprehension of it, and it may be he hates their company for ever after. But there is so much a sense of shame left in humane nature, that men dare not tempt others to sin, at least at first, in plain terms; and the same temptation which being represented one way would affright, appearing with greater art and dissimulation may easily prevail. And sin is a thing, that men hate to be forced, but too much love to be cheated into the practice of it. How doth a young sinner struggle with himself, and would if it were possible get out of the noise of his own Conscience, when he hath offered force and violence to it! He is very uneasie to himself, and wisheth a thousand times he had never committed the sin, rather than to feel such horrour and disquiet in his mind, upon the sense of it. But if this doth not make him presently repent, and resolve never to be guilty again of the same folly, (as in all reason it ought to do) then by time and company he wears off the impression of his guilt, and the next occasion of sinning makes him forget the wounds of his Conscience, and the smart

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he endured before ; and the fresh temptation revives the sense of his former pleasure, and then he is able to withstand no longer ; and thus by repeating the same acts, by degrees he becomes a very hopeful sinner, and the reports of his Conscience are but like that of sounds at a greater distance ; they lessen still more and more, till at last they cannot be heard at all. And when he hath thus mastered his Conscience, as to any one sin, which at first he was fearful of committing, and hath found such an *Ice* upon his Conscience as will bear him, he goes on still farther and farther, till nothing be too hard for him. He that at first started and trembled at the hearing of an horrid oath, now can hear whole volleys of them discharged without shrinking ; and can bear his part in that hellish *Concert* : and he that was so hardly brought to be wicked himself, may in a little time (as some men are strange proficient in wickedness) tempt and encourage others to the practice of it.

3. And when men are arrived to an habitual continuance in sin, then for their present ease and security, they cast about for any wayes to defend it. For whatever is become of Conscience, they may have such a sense of reputation left, that they would not be thought *Fools*, and be contemned and despised by others. But although

it be impossible for such to avoid scorn and contempt among all those who have any true regard to Vertue or Honour, yet they will endeavour rather to defend themselves in doing ill, than recover their reputation by repentance. And because it would puzzle the wits of the most subtle and concerned persons to find out pretences and excuses for some kinds of sins ; therefore the easiest way is to represent all the World as alike bad, although not alike cunning ; and although it may be not in the same way, yet in something as ill in it self, but more agreeable to their Age, temper, and condition of life. Thus the greatest sinners love to herd themselves in a croud, and think it some poor defence for their sins, that they would have others believed to be as bad as they : as though a man were in the less danger by the plague, because it is a general contagion. But if it happen that some persons in the World should have any reputation for Vertue among them, then all the weaknesses, and indiscretions of such, are sure to be enquired after, that so what is accounted vertue, may be thought only natural sourness of temper, or want of wit to be otherwise. But if any such should be found in a miscarriage, what Joy and Triumph doth this make ? what load of circumstances and aggravations do they lay upon them ; as though one single miscarriage of such persons were

were to weigh down a thousand enormities of theirs. And because it is impossible to defend their extravagant courses by *Reason*, the only way left for them is to make *Satyrical Invectives* against *Reason*; as though it were the most uncertain, foolish and (I had almost said) *unreasonable* thing in the World: and yet they pretend to shew it in arguing against it: but it is pitty such had not their wish, *to have been Beasts rather than men*, (if any men can make such a wish that have it not already) that they might have been less capable of doing mischief among mankind; by representing all the excellencies of humane nature, which are *Reason*, and *Vertue*, and *Religion*, but as more grave and solemn fopperies. But how hard are such men put to defend their vices, that cannot do it, without trampling under foot the most noble perfections of their own nature!

These however are the more ingenuous sort of sinners, that yield *Reason* and *Religion* to be of *Vertues* side; but there are others that make use of some shallow pretences of *Reason* to excuse themselves in their sins: which is the second way whereby sin deceives men, *viz.*

2. *By false Reasonings*: and those taken either,
 1. From their Present impunity: 2. Or from their Future Repentance.

1. From their *present impunity* in sinning, men

are apt to deceive themselves into a continuance in it. This is the account the Wise man hath
 Eccl. 8. 11. long since given of mens being hardned in sin ;
Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily ; therefore the hearts of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. It seems somewhat hard to understand the consequence, why men should grow more desperately wicked, because God gives them a space to repent ? Is it necessary that if God doth punish at all, he must do it presently ? that would seem to be rage and fury, or a necessity of nature, and not justice. Cannot judgement be duly executed, unless the Judge break open the Prison doors, and torment the Malefactor in his chains ? Why may not God respite the punishment of sinners, when he pleases, to another state, since he hath declared
 Act. 17. 31. *that he hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the World in righteousness ?* What incongruity is there in this to any principle of reason or justice ? Will not this time of Gods patience, be a sufficient vindication of his lenity and goodness in order to the drawing men to repentance ? And will not the day of his future judgement be a full vindication of his justice ? Will not the insupportable horrors of a miserable eternity discover far more Gods abhorrence of sin, than present sufferings in this life, which, the greater they are, the less they continue ? But all this
 false

false way of reasoning ariseth from that gross piece of self-flattery that such do imagine God to be like themselves; *i. e.* as cruel and revengeful as they are: and they presently think, if any persons did offend them at the rate that sinners are said to offend God, and they had so much power in their hands to punish them as he has, without any fear of revenge upon themselves, they would be sure to dispatch them presently; but because they see God doth it not, therefore they conclude that all the talk of Gods anger and hatred against sin is without ground: and from hence they take encouragement to sin. So the Psalmist saith in Gods name, *These things thou didst and I kept silence*; and they presently took his silence for consent; for it follows, and *thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thy self*: but the Psalmist adds, how ill he took this at mens hands, and that he would one day make them know the difference between the forbearance of sinners, and the love of their sins; *but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thee.* And therefore he bids them be better advised, and *consider this while they forget God, lest he tear them in pieces, and there be none to deliver.* Psal. 50. 21.
v. 22.

2. Men are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, from the hopes of their future repentance. For that is one of the great cheats of sin, that every one thinks he can repent and shake off his

his

his sins when he hath a mind to do it. Sin doth not lye like a heavy weight upon their backs, so that they feel the load of it; and therefore they think it is easily removed, if they would set themselves to it. Most of those that believe a God and a judgement to come, and yet continue in sin, do it upon this presumption, that one time or other, they shall leave their sins, and change the course of their lives before they go out of this world. They have not only thoughts of repentance, but general purposes of doing the acts of it at one time, or other; but that time is not come, and God knows whether it ever will or no. For sin entices them and draws them on still; and when any motions towards repentance come into their minds, that presently suggests, *It is time enough yet; why so much haste? there will be trouble enough in it when you must do it, what need you bring it so fast upon you? Are not you likely to hold out a great many years yet? what pitty it is to lose so much of the pleasure of life, while you are capable of enjoying it? There is old Age coming, and when you will be good for nothing else, then will be time enough to grow wise and to repent.* But O foolish sinner, who hath bewitched thee to hearken to such unreasonable suggestions as these are! For

3. In the last place, it ought to be our present, our constant, our greatest care to prevent being
hardned

hardned by the deceitfulness of sin. For to this end, it is not enough to consider of it at one time or other in our lives, but we must be exhorting one another daily, while it is called to day, lest any of us be hardned through the witchcraft and deceitfulness of sin: And if it be so much the duty of others to shew that regard to one anothers souls; how much more doth it become us to do it, who expect to be called to an account at the great day for the discharge of our trust in this matter? It is a dreadful passage we read of in the Prophet Ezekiel, and enough to make our ears to tingle at the repeating it, *When I say unto the wicked, Ezek. 33.8.*
O wicked man thou shalt surely dye, if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall dye in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand. We would fain believe this to have been some particular and extraordinary commission given to the Prophet by God himself, which doth not concern us; for what will become of us, if not only our own faults (which God knows are too many) but other mens shall be charged upon us? when either through neglect, or flattery, or fear of displeasing, or for any mean and unworthy ends, we betray our trust, and instead of preventing prove the occasion of mens being too much hardned through the deceitfulness of sin. But although we neither pretend to be *Prophets*, nor *Apostles*, yet it is
our

our Office to take care of the *Souls* of men, and can we discharge that, as we ought to do, if we do not with all faithfulness warn men of the danger they run into *through the deceitfulness of sin*? It were happy for us if we could say, *that all the Lords people are holy*; for then we should have nothing to do, but to praise and commend their Vertues, which were an easie and a delightful task: but what pleasure is it to rake into the sores, or to reprove the Vices of a degenerate age? to be thought troublesome and impertinent, if we do our duty; and men of no conscience, if we do it not? But our work is neither to libel our Auditors, nor to flatter them; neither to represent them as better, nor worse than they are; nor to charge them with more guilt than their own consciences do charge them with: but our business is, to beseech and exhort them by the mercies of God, by the sufferings of Christ, by the love and tenderness they have for their immortal souls, that they *would to day, while it is called to day, take heed lest they be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*. And that will appear to be very reasonable on these considerations.

1. That none are out of the danger of it, while they live in this tempting World. What need have we to take care of being deceived by that, which hath been too hard for the *best, the wisest,*
and

and the *greatest* of men? Man in his best state, even that of Innocency, was deceived by the insinuations of sin: when there was no matter within for the temptation to work upon, no reason suggested that could move a common understanding, no interest or advantage that could sway him; no other moving cause appears to us of that fatal Apostasie of *Adam*, but either the imagination of some unknown pleasure, or the bare curiosity of trying an experiment what the effects would be of tasting *the forbidden fruit*. And ever since so general hath the corruption of mankind been, so successful have the artifices and deceits of sin been in the World, that the best of men have not wholly escaped them; but have sometimes fallen in those very Graces which have been most remarkable in them, as *Abraham* in his trust in God, *Moses* in his meekness, *Job* in his patience, *Peter* in his zeal for Christ. What cause then have others to look to themselves!

If wisdom and experience would have secured men, we should have thought, of all men in the World, *Solomon* the least in danger of being deceived by the insinuations of sin, who had given such excellent cautions against those very snares he fell into himself; and that to such a degree, that his case is left disputable to this day, whether he ever recovered by repentance or no. What numbers are there upon

record of those mighty men, who have made the earth to tremble at the noise of their Armies; who have led Kings in chains after their Triumphal Chariots, and have been served by those whom others have adored; yet have, notwithstanding all this, been enslaved themselves by some mean lust, and destroyed by the power of an effeminate passion? What can be strong enough to resist those charms, which neither innocency, nor wisdom, nor power are sufficient security against? Nothing, but the *Grace of God*, and continual care of our selves.

2. The less men suspect their danger, the more cause they have to be afraid of it. None are more fatally deceived by sin, than those who apprehend no danger in it, or think they can escape it when they please. How strangely infatuated are those through *the deceitfulness of sin*, who think with themselves, that after they have spent their lives in sin, they shall make God amends by a few dying groans, and such a repentance as can have *no amendment of life*? Most men, who are the greatest slaves to their sins, are so much deceived by them, as to think they have them wholly at their command, and can when they please cast them off: and such imaginations keep them faster in subjection to them. For if they did apprehend themselves under such slavery, as really they are, they would

would grow weary and impatient of the yoke; whereas now because they are not forced to commit their sins, they suppose they can with ease forsake them. But none are such incurable Fools, as they that think themselves Wise; and none are so miserably deceived as they that think themselves too cunning for their sins. If it be so easie to shake off your sins, remember that your condemnation will be so much more just, if you do it not; for God required no hard thing for you to do: and if it be so easie, why is it not hitherto done? Why do you mock God so often, and pretend every year to repent, and yet are every year as bad, if not worse than other? Why are not *the fruits of repentance* seen in the amendment of life for one year, or a moneth, or one bare week? Is it not worth while to do so little for him, that hath done so much for you? Methinks, common ingenuity might prevail with men, at least to let God have some part of their lives entire to himself, without interfering with the Devil. But therein lyes a great part of the *deceitfulness of sin*, that it falls out here, as in some malignant Diseases, men seldom understand their danger, till they are almost past recovery.

3. None are so likely to be hardned in sin, as those who delay and put off their repentance. For the very putting it off is a sign that sin

hath a greater power, than the convictions of Conscience: for why should men ever intend to repent, if they did not think it necessary? and if they think it necessary and yet do it not, it is plain there is something within them stronger than Conscience, which keeps them from it. So that he that intends to repent, and yet lives in sin, hath that aggravation of sin above others, that he sins against his Conscience all that time. Tell me then, O thou subtle sinner, that hopest to be too hard for God and for sin too, by enjoying thy sins as long as thou canst, and then repenting at last, to escape the vengeance of God: dost thou in good earnest intend ever to repent or no? If thou dost not, never deceive thyself; God will not accept these pretences and promises instead of real repentance. If thou dost intend it sincerely, what makes thee to intend it? is it not, that thou art convinced it is much better to be done than not, but canst not find it in thy heart to do it yet? Thou knowest all this while it were much better to leave thy sins, than to live in them, it were far better to be sober, and temperate, and pious, and devout, than to be debauched and profane; and yet for all this, thou dost not repent, but goest on in the same course. Consider then, that this very circumstance deeply aggravates every sin that is committed after it. For it is not a bare neglect
of

of repentance, which thou art guilty of, but a contempt of God and Goodness; it is, not only not repenting, but it is an obstinate and wilful resolution of sinning: for there is no *medium* between living in sin and forsaking of it; and nothing deserves the name of Repentance, that is short of that. And if thou art so wilful and unreasonable now, as notwithstanding thy resolutions to repent, to live still in thy sins, how canst thou ever hope to repent at last, when thy heart will be so much more hardned by continuance in sin?

4. Lastly, Consider the sad condition of those who are hardned through the deceitfulness of sin. They are said in Scripture to be *past feeling*, and to be given over to a reprobate mind, i. e. to have lost all sense of their danger, and of the ill condition they are in; they despise all means of instruction, and scorn all those who would do them good, and who mean them no other injury but to perswade them to be happy. With what disdain and contempt do those proud and lofty sinners, who are once arrived at this height of wickedness, look down upon all those, who endeavour by *Reason* and *Scripture* to convince them of their sins! As though it were not possible for any thing to make men seem more ridiculous to them, than to see them concerned to plead the cause of Vertue and Religion. “To what purpose

Eph. 4. 19
Rom. 1. 28.

"pose is all this ado about Repentance? why
 "should not men be let alone to do as they
 "think fit? for let them preach their hearts out,
 "men will do as they please. This is the lan-
 guage of those who are already hardned in their
 sins; but God forbid, it should be so of any here
 present; who make it our prayer to God *to be
 delivered from hardnes of heart, and contempt of his
 word and commandments.* And we have great rea-
 son so to do; for there is no judgement short
 of hell, like to the being given up to a *reprobate
 sense*: for all the most weighty arguments and
 most forcible perswasions are to such but like
 showres falling upon a Rock, that make some
 noise and slide off again, but make no impres-
 sion or entrance into them. *God Almighty* give
 us all his *Grace* to understand our danger and to
 repent in time, that *none of us be hardned through
 the deceitfulness of sin.*

FINIS.

