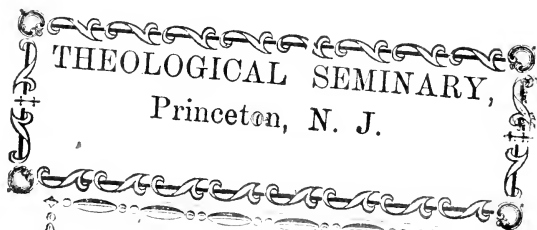




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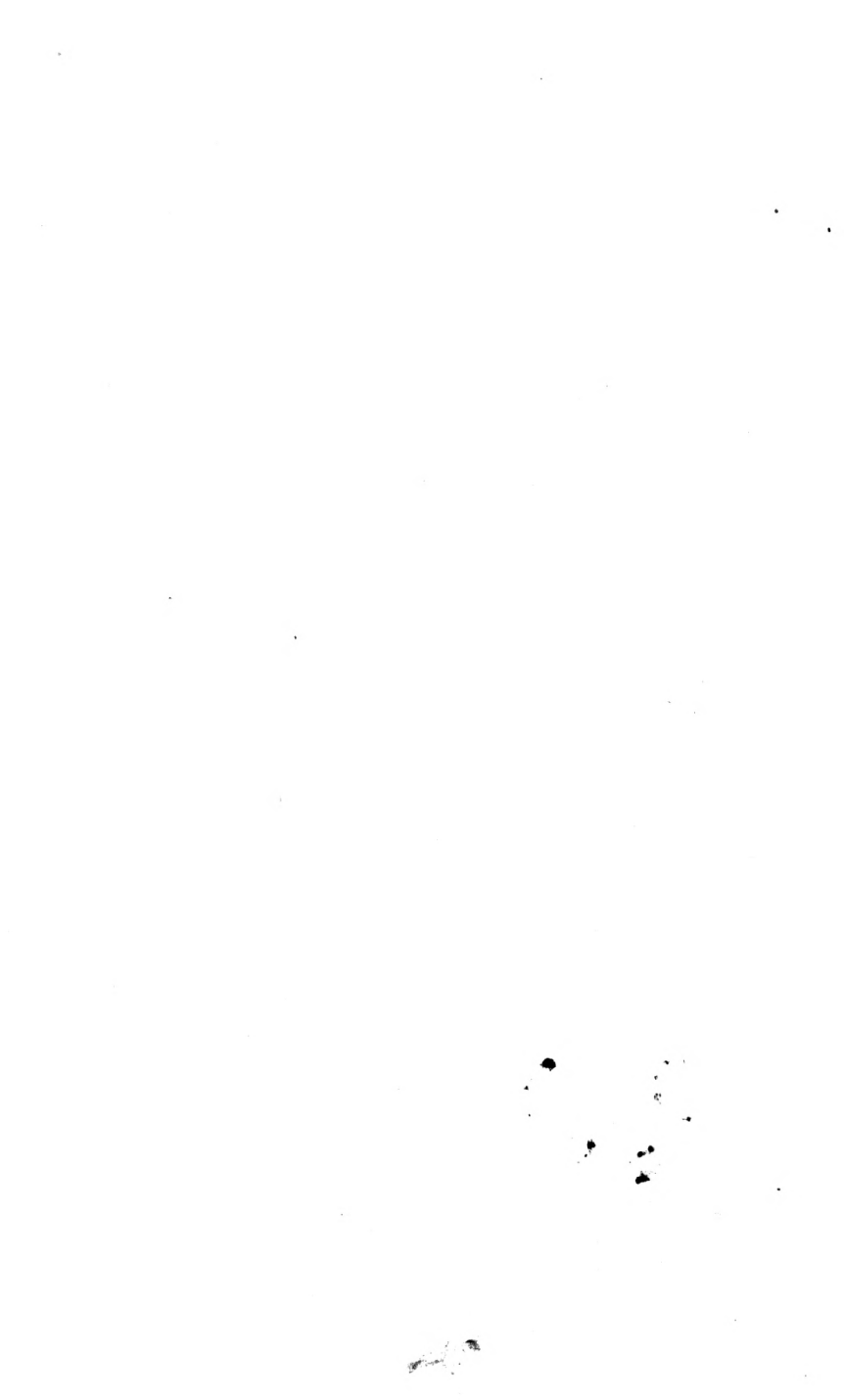
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S E R M O N S

O N

SEVERAL SUBJECTS,

By THOMAS SECKER, LL.D.

Late Lord Archbishop of CANTERBURY.

Published from the original Manuscripts,

By BEILBY PORTEUS D.D. and GEORGE STINTON D.D.

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The Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom: and the Knowledge of the Holy is Understanding.

WE all naturally desire Happiness: we all know, that obtaining it greatly depends on a wise Choice of our Conduct in Life: and yet very few examine, with any Care, what Conduct is likeliest to procure us the Felicity that we seek. The livelier Part of the World, hurried along by a giddy Tumult of Passions and Fancies, venture, with a most intrepid Gaiety of Heart, on whatever looks pleasing to them: and are in much too great Hastē for present Gratification, ever to stay and once think what may be the Consequences, either to others, or even to themselves. The good-natured and flexible are easily drawn to fol-

low the more active and enterprising of their Acquaintance; and the thoughtless and indolent find it unspeakably the least Trouble to let themselves be born along by the Tide of Custom and Fashion, just as it flows and ebbs by Turns. Yet surely Reason doth not make Part of our Nature for no Purpose; nor Experience discover any Thing more plainly, than the numberless Miseries that proceed from going on thus at all Adventures.

Those, therefore, who are a little more considerate, take a different Course: yet often scarce a better, and sometimes a worse. They despise the Weakness of being caught with every Bait of present Pleasure, or abandoning their Lives to the Direction of mere Chance; and follow, with great Attention, Art and Industry, what the World calls their Interest. But this being their only View, the disappointed are totally miserable: and, more or less, all are disappointed; the far greatest Part, very grievously. And the small Remainder, who seem to attain their Wishes, betray, under the fairest Shew of outward Prosperity, evident Tokens, that they have very little inward Enjoyment to compensate for the many and long Anxieties that usually precede.

Few Things come up, even at first, to what they promised: and such as do, fall below it very soon; leaving the Mind, at best, languid and unsatisfied. But if such Persons have taken, as they commonly do take, forbidden Ways, amongst others, to their Ends; then additional Uneasinesses crowd in upon them: painful Reflections on their past Behaviour; solicitous Apprehensions of what may follow, both here and hereafter. For there is deeply rooted in the Heart of Man an inbred Sense of Right and Wrong; which, however heedlessly overlooked, or studiously suppressed by the gay or the busy Part of the World, will, from Time to Time, make them both feel, that it hath the justest Authority to govern all that we do, as well as Power to reward with the truest Consolation, and punish with the acutest Remorse.

Others, therefore, see the absolute Necessity of bringing Virtue and Duty into the Account, when they deliberate concerning the Behaviour that leads to Happiness. And were the Regard, which they pay to these, universal and uniform, their Happiness would be as complete as human Nature and Circumstances permit. But too often they, who practise conscientiously

some Duties, with strange Inconsistency utterly despise others. And, which is stranger yet, many, who profess the most general Concern for moral Obligations, quite forget the first and strongest of them all, the Reverence due to Him, who made us. The Ties, which unite them to their Fellow-Creatures, they readily acknowledge: but unaccountably slight their absolute Dependence on their Creator, and the consequent Veneration, which they owe to that Being, *of whom, and for whom, and to whom are all Things* ^a. Now if any Dispositions are good, religious ones are such. They proceed from the same Principle, with the very best of others: the Exercise of them is the noblest Exertion of that Principle; and yet some affect to set up Virtue in Opposition to Piety; and would be thought desirous to serve the former, by depreciating the latter. Some again, who are more upon their Guard, yet explain themselves freely, on Occasion, to allow nothing further than this; that Religion may be of Use to keep the Bulk of Mankind in Order: not reflecting, that the upper Part have still greater Need of its Restraints, than

^a 1 Cor. viii. 6. Heb. ii. 10. Rom. xi. 36.

the lower; and that whenever it comes to be spoken of, as only an Instrument of Policy, it will be no longer so much as that. But lighter Minds run wilder Lengths by far: and absolutely indifferent what Harm may come of it, perpetually treat all sacred Subjects, as if Freedom of Thought about them consisted in pouring the utmost Contempt upon them that was possible.

Yet perhaps very few, if any, of these, would they consult their Hearts honestly, do so much as imagine they have any Reason to doubt, but a World, so visibly full of beautiful Order and gracious Design, must have been first formed, and be still governed by a most powerful, intelligent, and beneficent Cause. This, the least Degree of Consideration, how else the Frame of Things could be what it is, will sufficiently shew: and every Advance in the Knowledge of Nature, makes the Proof, in Proportion, fuller and more obvious. If then there exists a Sovereign of the Universe, Almighty and All-wise, it cannot be a Matter that we are unconcerned in. He, by whose Pleasure we are, and according to whose Determinations about us we shall be happy or miserable, is not a Being unrelated to us:

nor, while he continually superintends every Thing else on this Earth with the exactest Care, will he ever neglect the worthiest Object, which it presents to his View, the Affections and Behaviour of his rational Creature, Man. He must expect every Thing to act, as its Nature requires. And having distinguished ours with the Knowledge of Himself; he cannot have left it in our Choice, to lay him aside out of our Thoughts, as if we knew Him not: but must have intended, that we should pay Him those Regards, which are his due.

Now the first of these, and the Foundation of all the rest, is a proper Temperature of Fear and Love: two Affections, which ought never to be separated in thinking of God: and, therefore, whichsoever is expressed implies the other. The Text hath mentioned only *Fear*: but evidently means that Kind, which Children feel towards a wise and good Parent; which the Psalmist had in his Thoughts, when he said, *There is Mercy with thee: therefore shalt thou be feared*^b. As God is infinitely good; and hath not only bestowed on us all the temporal Blessings, that we enjoy;

^b Psal. cxxx. 4.

but offered us, on the most equitable Terms, through the Mediation of his blessed Son, and the Grace of his holy Spirit, Pardon of our Sins, Assistance of our Weakness, and everlasting Life; surely he is amiable in the highest Degree: and Insensibility to his Goodness, whilst we are moved with the faint Shadows of it in his Creatures, would be shocking Depravity. But then he is also inconceivably awful; absolute in Authority, resistless in Power: we and all Nature are intirely in his Hands, and depend on the Breath of his Mouth. Such a Being, we must own, *is greatly to be feared, and had in Reverence of the Highest of them that are round about him*^c: Much more then ought the Sons of Men to contemplate him with Abasement, and even *rejoice in him with Trembling*^d. Far is this from being below the firmest and the bravest Soul. Not to feel a Dread of God, must be the grossest Stupidity: and not to own it, the most impotent Affectation. A worthy Heart will think Pride against its Maker the Extremity of Wickedness: and value itself on expressing zealously that loyal and thankful Submission, which is due so justly to the King

^c Pf. lxxxix. 7.

^d Pf. ii. 11.

of All; that faithful and affectionate Obedience, which his Precepts claim, who hath bought us to himself, with his Blood; that respectful and ready Compliance to which His holy Motions are intitled, who graciously *worketh in us both to will and to do*^e. In these Things consists the true *Fear of the Lord!* For as the Text, though conceived in the most general Terms, undoubtedly comprehended at first the whole of Jewish Piety, we ought to understand it now, as comprehending the Whole of Christian. And that practising this, is the true Wisdom of Man, I shall proceed to shew you distinctly, by considering its Influence

I. On the Conduct,

II. On the Enjoyment, of our Lives.

I. On our Conduct.

Some indeed, mistaking the Dictates of Sensuality and Vanity for those of Reason, presume to speak of the Author of our Nature, as if, by giving us the several Inclinations belonging to it, he had warranted the unrestrained Indulgence of them all: and so would make his Being of no Consequence to our Actions. But a little Reflection will easily

confute so wild an Imagination; and shew us, with how great Propriety the wise King hath said, that *the Knowledge of the Holy is Understanding*. He, who is perfectly holy and righteous himself, must have regard to what is right and fit in others. He, who hath provided with such fatherly Care for the common Good of us all, can never have left us at Liberty to defeat his Purpose, by injuring and corrupting one another, and filling his World with Confusion and Misery at our Pleasure. He hath not planted in us Passions, Affections, and Appetites, to grow up wild as Accident directs; but to be diligently superintended, weeded and pruned, and each confined to its proper Bounds. He hath not endued us with a Principle of Conscience, to be overborn by Resentments and Interests, drowned in sensual Gratifications, led captive by Fashions and Fancies: but to be cultivated and improved; and then obeyed, as the Guide of Life. Its Authority is derived from himself: and its Judgment upon us will be finally affirmed by his own. For it cannot be, that the Sovereign of all the Earth should either fail to reward such as dutifully promote his gracious Designs, or let any one be a Gainer by acting in Contradiction

tradition to them. These things every Person's own Heart, if permitted, will tell him very plainly. But our Understandings are unhappily prejudiced in Favour of our bad Inclinations: and were they less so, the unassisted Reason of fallen Man is able to trace out but a very imperfect System of Religion. And therefore to complete the Assurance of its great Truths, express Revelation from above hath given us undeniable Evidence, that universal Virtue is God's Law, and eternal Happiness or Misery its Sanctions: adding at the same time whatever more particular Notices, Directions, and Encouragements our Condition wanted: Now what can possibly influence Men, like such a Motive so enforced? And how weakly must they judge, or how ill must they mean, who would abandon so solid a Foundation of right Behaviour, to lay the Stress of so important a Building on any other!

It would both be unjust and unwise to reject the smallest Inducement to any Part of Goodness: for we greatly need every one that we can have. But it is extremely requisite to observe, where our chief Security lies, and place our chief Trust there. The Reasonableness, the Dignity, the Beauty of Virtue, are

are doubtless natural, and ought to be strong Recommendations of it. But how faint Impressions do they make on the Ignorant and Slow of Apprehension, on Minds agitated with Passions, or hardened in Sins! And indeed how soon do such Impressions, if single and unsupported, fade away out of all Minds, or dwindle into mere Speculation, amidst the Temptations of a bad World, the Allurements of Sense, and the Treacheries of *a deceitful Heart*^f! Again: the temporal Advantages of Virtue and bad Effects of Wickedness, ordinarily speaking, are weighty Arguments. But still, how often doth that Weight fall on the wrong Side; or give little Help, if any, to the right! In short, many Incitements to think and act as we ought, are in general useful: but none is at all Times sufficient, excepting only the Fear of God *taught as the Truth is in Jesus*^g.

This is one unchangeable Motive, level to the Apprehension of every Person, extending to the Practice of every Duty, including at once every moral Disposition of Heart, and every prudent Regard to our own Good. There needs but a Thought to bring it with

^f Jer. xvii. 9.

^g Eph. iv. 21.

such Force to our Minds, as will check the strongest Passions, curb the most extravagant Levi y of Spirit, overbalance the greatest temporal Advantages; and make whatever is our Day appear, in the strongest Light, to be our In . . . The Fear of God can pierce the inmost Reccesses of our Minds, and search the Rightness of our most secret Desires. Reflecting well what his Eye sees there, will make us see it in a Point of View, that we never should else; and put us on approving our Souls to him by Simplicity and Truth: no longer attempting, as unhappily we are too prone, to cheat others and ourselves with false Appearances; but faithfully bewailing all our past Faults, and watchfully guarding against all future ones. Particularly, the Consciousness of having such a Witness to each Action and Purpose, must powerfully incline us to be very composed and moderate in every Proceeding, very mild and reasonable towards every Person. Reverence of God's Authority will make us fear to injure the meanest of our Fellow-Creatures; since even he is under the Protection of the Almighty. And hope of sharing in his Bounty will teach us to imitate it by the tenderest Exercise of Humanity and

Com-

Compassion. Thus influenced, those of higher Rank would be public Blessings and Examples: their Inferiors would love and honour his Image impressed upon them: and all would endeavour to fill worthily whatever Station the Wisdom of Providence allotted them: discharging conscientiously the Duties of the most laborious, and counting it an Honour to serve God in the least considerable.

But let us now inquire,

II. What Effect the Fear of God must have on the Enjoyment of our Lives.

Unquestionably it will make bad People uneasy. But then it is both for the World's Good, and their own, that they should be so. It is not their thinking of their Condition, that renders it a dreadful one. The less they feel it, the worse it is: and feeling it to Purpose will be the happiest Thing possible for them. Farther: this Fear doubtless restrains Persons from dissolute Pleasures, and dishonourable Means of obtaining Profit, Power, Advancement. But so doth Virtue: so for the most Part doth common Prudence. And Religion never forbids us even a hurtful Gratification, but it offers us Happiness hereafter in Return for our present Self-denial. Farther still: we
must

must own, it gives a peculiar Seriousness and Awe to the Mind of Man. But we have need to be kept in Order by a Sense of God's parental Authority: and without it should quickly become ungovernable, mischievous, and wretched. He requires us not in the least to be gloomy and comfortless; or full of Terrors, while we mean to do well: but freely permits us the chearfullest Use of all our Faculties, that is consistent with Innocence, and with making Improvement in Goodness our chief Care, as it will be our chief Felicity.

And if the Thought of Him doth moderate the Liveliness of over-gay Dispositions; it prevents, by so doing, many great Evils, into which they would otherwise hurry us; and fills us with much more inward and deeply-felt Satisfaction, than those light and trifling ones, that only play upon the Surface of an inconsiderate Mind. Or did that Composure, which Piety introduces, lessen our Enjoyments for a Time; yet, being what our State on Earth, which is in many Respects a serious one, demands; if we are wise, we shall gladly conform ourselves to the Condition which God hath placed us in; and trust Him, that the Consequences will be happy.

Such

Such indeed will every one, who makes the Trial, soon find them. What Pleasure can be greater, than a full Persuasion, that our Behaviour is approved by Him, who knows our Hearts, and will reward with his Friendship whatever we do aright? The World is generally a negligent Spectator, and too often an unfair Interpreter, of the best Actions. This cannot but give Uneasiness and Discouragement to Virtue, unless it be animated by nobler Views. But the Recollection, that God looks on with Esteem, sets us above the Censures of Men, and even above their Applauses. For were all Mankind to join in doing Justice to exalted Merit; how poor would the Recompence be, and how low the Delight, compared with His, who can lay open his Principles and his Behaviour, with humble Confidence, before the Judge of all!

Then as to the Sufferings of this Life; which, very frequently make up a great Share of it; Religion entirely prevents many of them, by withholding us from the Sins and the Follies that commonly bring them upon us. And it wonderfully diminishes the rest, by loosening our Attachments to what we
must

must expect to be disappointed in, or separated from; and leading us, from the *broken Cisterns* of worldly Comfort, to God *the Fountain of living Waters*^b; in the Assurance of whose Grace, our great Interest is safe, under every Change; and by the Superintendency of whose Providence *all Things work together for our Good*^c. What are the poor Consolations of Philosophy, or the Amusements, which thoughtless Minds take Refuge in, to deceive their Sorrows, compared with such cheering Reflexions as these! Still, what is naturally painful, must be felt so: but the insupportable Part of every Affliction is taken away, when we consider it, as ordered by Him, whose Right to dispose of us we must acknowledge, and of whose kind Intention to us we may always be sure.

A Heart, habitually formed to such Meditations as these, with what Serenity must it pass through its allotted Pilgrimage here below! It hath nothing to fear: it hath nothing to hide, from others or itself. It can bear Solitude, and its own Inspection. It can even rejoice in the Sense of his Presence, who is to others inexpressibly terrible;

^b Jer. ii. 13.

^c Rom. viii. 28.

but to the pious Soul an immoveable Ground of Security, an inexhaustible Source of Happiness. For, indeed, what greater Happiness can we wish to ourselves, than to be placed under the fatherly Guidance of infinite Foresight and Power; born up under all the Calamities of Life; and, which is the great Point, exalted with the noblest Hopes of what shall follow after Death!

Our Time on Earth is so short; and our Pleasures at best so languid and rare, and mixed with so many Anxieties, Pains and Sorrows; that surely it is a melancholy View, to think of ending here; and after a very few Days are gone over our Heads, becoming for ever, as if we had never been. Yet this is much more than irreligious Persons can possibly promise themselves. Could there be no God, they would have no Certainty, but that their Beings might continue, and might be miserable. For what is there that may not be, on the Supposition of an ungoverned World? But since there is a God; slighting and disobeying him must be Crimes, and must be punished. We may have little Attention to this perhaps, in the Tumult of youthful Fancies and worldly Pursuits. But

when the Close of the Scene approaches, and Age or Sickness rouses up Reflection from its Sleep, then will the Sinner, in all Likelihood, see, with Terror unspeakable, those awful Realities, of which if he is never convinced in this World, he will only be the more wretched in the next. But the darkest Hour to such, may, with Reason, be the joy-fullest to him, who having faithfully acknowledged God in all his Ways, perceives that now his Work is over, and his Reward at hand. Undoubtedly it is best to use no stronger Expressions on this Subject, than the less experienced may feel to be just: else, Words want Force to describe the Difference between these two Conditions. It is true, not all pious Souls are conscious of it, just at the Time of their Departure. Frequently their setting Sun is obscured by Insensibility: sometimes overcast by Doubts and Fears. But they shall instantly behold it rising again, to shine with unclouded and increasing Lustre to all Eternity. For *Light is sown for the Righteous, and Gladness for the Upright in Heart. Rejoice in the Lord, ye Righteous, and give Thanks at the Remembrance of his Holiness*^{*}.

* Pf. xcvi. 11, 12.

Such then is the good Influence of the Fear of God: and his genuine Fear can have no bad one. Reverence of a wise and holy Being will never mislead Men into any Thing wicked or weak. False Religion, indeed, may do both: and so may false Notions of Virtue or Friendship, or any other valuable Quality. But this was never thought an Argument in any Case besides, against being governed by the true; and yet less ought it in the present. *God must be worshipped by us in Spirit and in Truth*¹, let others worship him as wrongly as they will: and his Laws must be obeyed, let ever so many mistake Errors of their own for such. The Danger of Superstition is a very powerful Reason, why religious Belief and Practice should be watched over, and directed right: but cannot possibly be a Reason, why dissolute Profaneness should be encouraged or suffered. Let rational Piety be thoroughly established, and Superstition falls of Course. But if the Former be rooted out, the Latter will certainly grow up in its Place. There is a natural Bent in human Minds to believe and respect an invisible Power: and if it be turned aside from point-

¹ John iv. 24.

ing, in a proper Manner, towards its proper Object, it will soon acquire some other Form; probably an absurd and pernicious one. Infidelity promises great Freedom and Enjoyment of Life: but in Fact it proves, in Proportion as it prevails, a State of Madness and Confusion, of perpetual Danger from others, of Discomfort and desperate Resolutions within Mens own Breasts: and therefore, after some Trial of it, they will eagerly run away from it into the opposite Extreme.

True Religion then being of such Importance, there are some Things, which may justly be expected of Mankind in its Favour.

1. That they, who have not yet carefully searched into the Grounds of it, should not take upon them to treat it with Scorn, or even Disregard. What so deeply concerns all Men, and what the wisest and most considerate of Men have lived and died in the firm Belief of, ought not surely to be thrown aside, on hearing only a few superficial Objections, and ludicrous Turns of Words to its Disadvantage. There must need more than this to confute it; and therefore whoever, with little Reading and little Thought, finds much Inclination to disbelieve, should learn to suspect himself,

himself, instead of his Creed, and be modest in Proportion to his Unacquaintedness with the Subject.

2. It may be expected also, that they, who profess to examine, should do it fairly. Most Men will be backward to confess, that they wish against Religion; because it is confessing, that they have Reason to fear, if the Universe be well governed. But each ought to think well, whether this be not secretly his Case, and remove the Prepossession of his bad Life, before he pretends to be an upright Judge. After that, if he finds Difficulties, let him remember, that they are to be found in every Thing, and yet something must be true. If he meets not with the Sort, or the Degree of Evidence, which he looked for; let him recollect, that a fair Mind will be satisfied with any that turns the Scale. If he doubts of some Points; let him still hold fast those, which remain undoubted; and preserve that Respect to Religion in general, which will prove his best Guide in every Particular. Nay, were it possible for him to doubt of the Whole; yet, since Doubt is not Certainty, his Practice however should be on the safer Side. And if he sees, as one should think he

must, that Scepticism and Infidelity will destroy the chief Comfort of the Good, endanger the Virtue of all, and weaken the Bonds of Civil Society; never let the poor Vanity of propagating his Notions tempt him to be the Author, or Promoter, of so dreadful a Mischief to human Kind. But

3. The last, and most important Thing of all to be expected is, that they who are so happy as to believe, should secure and complete their Happiness by what alone can do it, a suitable Behaviour. Too often the contrary Course is taken: and many who had once some Regard for Religion, but unhappily accompanied with vicious Indulgencies, force themselves to throw it off, that they may sin undisturbed. But let no one imagine, that denying God will make the least Amends for disobeying him; or that stifling our Convictions can ever give any true Peace; which is only to be had by enforcing them home on our Hearts, and conforming our Lives to them. This we have all need to do with the utmost Care, amidst so many, so powerful, so sudden Temptations to the contrary, as the World and the Devil, and our own corrupt Nature, throw in our Way. And as the Reverence of

our heavenly Father is the most effectual Preservative, we ought to keep up that in its full Strength, by frequently repeating fervent Prayer to him, and affecting Meditations upon him. How intirely the Exercises of Devotion are laid aside by some; and with what Indifference, and even Contempt, a mere outward Shew of them, now and then, is just retained by others, who yet call themselves Christians; too many of you, I fear, know too well: and it furnishes Matter of melancholy Reflection, not only to every pious, but every prudent Mind. For good Men must feel, that the Regard, due to God, is a most inward, constant and awful one: and wise Men must surely perceive, that neither can the common Welfare be preserved without Morals; nor Morals, without Religion; nor Religion, without Worship; private Worship, to strengthen our own Sense of Duty; and public Worship, to spread it amongst others.

On all Accounts, therefore, it is our most important Concern to cultivate and express the Affections of Piety; which are indeed the noblest Movements of our Souls towards the worthiest Object, towards the Attainment of the most blessed End: and

to awaken ourselves from the Remissness, into which we apt to fall, on this Head beyond others, by reminding our Hearts often, that God is present, and a future State soon will be so; and how soon to any of us, none can tell. May we all resolve, from this Moment, to strive earnestly for a happy Share in it, through Faith in the Merits of our dear Redeemer, and a right Use of the Suggestions of the Divine Spirit: to both whom, with the Father Almighty, be Honour and Praise, now and for ever! Amen.

S E R M O N II.

M A R K viii. 34.

And when he had called the People unto him, with his Disciples also: he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his Cross, and follow me.

EVERY Word, which proceeded out of the Mouth of our blessed Lord, must unquestionably deserve a very serious Attention. But some Things being peculiarly needful to be known, or liable to be forgotten; to these, on proper Occasions, he demanded the especial Regard of his Hearers: and as they were bound to pay it, so are we. Thus in the foregoing Chapter, finding it requisite to confute the Jewish Traditions in Favour of that ceremonial Purity in their Persons and Food, which led them to overlook the moral Purity of the Heart, we are told, that *when he had called all the People unto him, he said, Hearken unto me every*

every one of you, and understand. There is nothing from without a Man, that entering into him can defile him: but the Things which come out of him, wicked Thoughts and their Consequences, those are they that defile the Man: if any Man hath Ears to hear, let him hear^a. With the same Kind of Solemnity he delivered the Words of the Text: which indeed had still greater Need of it, as the Former contradicted only received Opinions and Customs; but these, the strongest of our natural Passions and Appetites. *When he had called, &c.*

Taking up the Cross relates, in the primary and strict Sense, only to suffering patiently for the ^b Truth: a Duty, God be thanked, less common amongst us at present, and which therefore I shall pass over. In its larger Acceptation it will be found to coincide with *Self-denial*: a Word of great Importance to be rightly apprehended, because it expresses here the Condition, on which alone we shall be acknowledged the true Followers of Christ. The Terms of Salvation are indeed elsewhere laid before us in Phrases more intelligible at first Sight: but illustrating this darker one will not only contribute to prove that the different

^a Mark vii. 14, 15, 16. ^b Vid. Suicer in Στραυρος, p. 1005.

Views of the Christian Doctrine are all consistent with each other, but discover to us the principal Cause of our acting wrong, with the most effectual Method of Amendment, perhaps more fully, than any Thing else can. I shall therefore endeavour,

I. To explain the literal Meaning of the Expression :

II. To shew with what Limitations it must be understood :

III. To set before you the Obligation of the Duty, comprehended under it ; and its Importance to our Virtue and our Happiness.

I. To explain the literal Meaning of the Expression.

We speak every Day of denying ourselves such or such a Pleasure, that is refusing to ourselves the Enjoyment of it. But the Scripture Sense goes much beyond this, and extends to renouncing and disowning ourselves ; throwing out of our Thoughts the Relation that we bear to our own Persons ; and behaving with as little Indulgence, as if a mere Stranger to us, were in Question. Of Course

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we have in general the most Concern for those of whom we have the most Knowledge. And hence, in the sacred Books, knowing or owning any one signifies having a Regard for him: and denying any one, the contrary. Thus wicked Persons are said to *deny God, while they profess to know him*^c, and our Saviour in return will deny them at the great Day, saying, *Depart from me, I know you not*^d. Thus also, in the Old Testament, when the Children of *Levi* had suppressed a Rebellion of the People against God and their lawful Governors, by falling without Distinction upon all whom they found engaged in it, *Moses* describes the heroick Behaviour of that Tribe in these Terms: *who said unto his Father and to his Mother, I have not seen him, neither did he acknowledge his Brethren, nor knew his own Children; for he observed thy Word and kept thy Covenant*^e: That is, they preferred their Duty to Heaven and the Publick, before the tenderest private Regards. *Job* comes yet nearer to the Phrase before us; *Though I were perfect*, which he had just been disclaiming, *yet would I not know my Soul*^f; were

^c Tit. i. 16. ^d Matth. vii. 23. xxv. 12, Luke xiii. 25, 27,
^e Deut. xxxiii. 9. ^f Job ix. 21.

I freer from Faults than I am, it should not tempt me to Self-partiality.

But indeed the Context may suffice to shew the Meaning of the Text. Our Saviour had been foretelling his future Sufferings. *Peter's* warm Zeal for his Master overpowered his Respect, and he *began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord, this shall not be unto thee*^s. But the Holy *Jesus* immediately rebukes him in Return before the Disciples; tells him he was, in the Tendency, though not the Design of his Words, a Tempter, an Adversary to him; and influenced by human Weakness, instead of religious Fortitude. *Get thee behind me Satan: for thou savourest not the Things that be of God, but those that be of Men*^h. Then calling *the People to him* also, but in Kindness to the well-meaning Apostle concealing from them the particular Occasion, he assures them, with that noble Disinterestedness, which he shewed perpetually, that if they would become his Disciples indeed, they must *deny themselves* and follow him: disregard as he did and should do, every Instinct and Aversion, every Passion and Affection that belong to the human

^s Matt. xvi. 21, 22.

^h Ver. 23.

Frameⁱ. And harsh as this Declaration may seem, he hath used a harsher yet. *If any Man come to me, and hate not his Father and Mother, and Wife and Children, and Brethren and Sisters, yea and his own Life also, he cannot be my Disciple^k*. Agreeably to which, St. Paul sets it down at the Head of a long Catalogue of most dreadful Sins, that *Men shall be Lovers of their own Selves^l*. But now it will be thought full Time, that a Doctrine so alarming should

II. Be put under due Limitations.

For, after all, Self-love being a Part of that Nature, which God hath given us, can we, or ought we to divest ourselves of it? Is there any Possibility of Happiness without it? Doth not Religion apply to it as our main Principle of Action, recommend its Precepts chiefly from their Tendency to our Good; and even make our own *Love to our Selves* the Measure and Rule of that, which we ought to have for *our Neighbour^m*? Why, doubtless these Things are true: and so evidently true, that we may be sure our blessed Saviour, whose Life was in no Respect unnecessarily austere, and whose Doc-

ⁱ See Authorities of the Fathers for this Interpretation in Suicer, voc. *Απαρνεομαι & Αρνησις*. ^k Luke xiv. 26. ^l 2 Tim. iii. 2. ^m Matt. xxii 39.

trine is every where else so rational and mild, could never intend to require in the Text, and the few others that resemble it, either that we should deny and disregard ourselves intirely, which is impracticable; or uselessly, which would be unfit. And therefore, as he could not, without the utmost unreasonableness, be suspected of forbidding a prudent and virtuous Self-love, he might safely and advantageously employ the strongest Terms in prohibiting a weak and vicious one: for in such Cases Abate-ments at least sufficient hardly ever fail of being made. However, to prevent Mistakes and Misrepresentations, he hath taught us more particularly, how to interpret all his Injunctions of this Kind, by interpreting himself the hardest of them, (that of *hating* every Thing which we naturally hold dear) to bear only the comparative Sense of *loving* nothing *more than him*ⁿ, but preferring Obedience to the Laws of God before any other Consideration. For in the strict and literal Meaning, his Apostle hath told us, *no Man ever yet hated his own Flesh*^o.

Had he enjoined us a Number of difficult Observances, of which we saw not the Use, we

ⁿ Matt. x. 37.

^o Eph. v. 29.

ought certainly to have believed they had one, and obeyed him implicitly. But since, on the contrary, he hath established a spiritual Religion, neither imposing unaccountable Restraints, nor encumbered with many or troublesome Ceremonies; we ought, both to receive it with most joyful Reverence, and to preserve it in that amiable Simplicity, in which he delivered it: not laying on ourselves any Burthen, but such as may enable us to bear the better what he hath laid on us; and much less usurping Dominion over the Practice of others.

Extremely ill therefore hath the Church of *Rome* understood the Nature of Christianity, in appointing as proper Instances of Self-denial, so many frivolous and vexatious Austerities of Abstinences and Penances, that serve to no good Purpose; and encouraging Multitudes to make Vows of living separate from the World in Poverty and Celibacy, only to spend a tedious Life in the meritorious Employments of wearing different Habits, eating different Food, keeping different Hours, and observing different Rules in common Things from the rest of their Fellow-creatures and from one another: as if it could be the Intention of infinite Wisdom and Goodness to set Men on
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finding out new Ways of being uneasy and absurd. They plead indeed, that such Methods habituate them to a Spirit of Obedience, and a Readiness of parting with their own Inclinations. But Obedience to God cannot be shewn by doing what he never commanded: and blind Obedience to mere Men he hath cautioned us against, instead of requiring it. We are to *deny ourselves and follow Christ*: not to *deny ourselves and follow Guides*, equally fallible with ourselves, into whatever Extravagancies they direct, that will only produce Ignorance and Bigotry in one Part of the World, and Contempt and Abhorrence of Religion in the other. But these additional Duties, which the Church enjoins, they say, conduce to the more easy Practice of those which God hath enjoined. Why, some of them, in some Cases, may: and then they should, with Prudence and Moderation, be used and recommended. But prescribing by mere human Authority a great Number of such Things, at all Adventures, for almost all alike, or for any during their whole Lives, is an evident Mark, either of wrong Judgement, or bad Design. To the Inconsiderate indeed they make a specious Appearance. But if we re-

flect, how exorbitant a Degree of ill-used Power and Wealth hath been artfully obtained by requiring them first, and occasionally dispensing with them afterwards; how little Good is done by them, that might not as well have been done without them; and how very much Evil naturally must, and in Fact doth, arise from them; needless Difficulties and Disquiet to the Good, false Hopes to Sinners of compensating for the Wickedness which they continue to indulge, spiritual Pride in those who observe them rigidly, and uncharitable Censures, nay often Persecutions also, of such as do not; we shall be fully convinced, that superadding thus imaginary Duties to real ones is far from promoting the true Interests of Christian Piety. And indeed all Hardships under which Men put themselves of their own Accord, not being enjoined in Scripture, nor evidently needful to preserve them from Sin, and to raise their Thoughts to a better World, (especially if they tend to promote Rigour and Sourness rather than Mildness and Humility) hurt instead of benefiting them, and discredit Religion with others: which in itself is a *reasonable Service*^p, and directs us *not to refuse*

^p Rom. xii. 1.

the good Creatures of God, but to receive them with Thanksgiving^a.

But some will ask, is not this explaining away to nothing what Christ hath most solemnly commanded as a very important Duty? How doth such Doctrine leave any Room for Self-denial? And wherein after all will it consist? I answer, in what Human Nature usually finds much more Reluctance to practise, than any of the Severities mentioned yet. For there are none, that wicked Men will not gladly undergo, rather than quit their favourite Faults. Besides, the strict Imposers of unnecessary Restraints on their Fellow-christians or themselves in some Points, generally make Amends in others by proportionable Indulgences of unlawful Gratifications. And so, between both, it seldom fails, but Sin and Superstition make a Shift to go on, Hand in Hand, very comfortably. But the true Self-denial allows of no such Compromises. It is an absolute and universal Surrender of every Part of us to the Disposal of our Maker: not only of the Cravings of Flesh and Sense, but of Self-opinion, Self-will, Self-interest: of Love and Hatred, Hope and Fear: nay, not

^a 1 Tim. iv. 4.

of our Appetites and Affections only, but of every *Imagination** of our Understandings also, short of that full Conviction of Truth, which the God of Truth himself hath appointed for our Guide. In a Word, it is giving our whole selves away from ourselves, as it were, into his Hands; and determining, once for all, that not our own Thoughts, Inclinations, and Desires, shall govern us, but the Laws of God: not *our Will, but His*, however contrary to it, shall *be done*†. These inward Principles are, in a moral Sense, the Man: and it is, in full Propriety of Speech, denying and renouncing ourselves, when what we should conceive or wish or chuse is laid intirely out of the Question, and the only Thing regarded is, what Heaven points out to us, to believe and do, whether by Reason or by Revelation. Mortification and Self-denial have both of them been often almost wholly misapprehended: and even, when somewhat better understood, have been much confounded one with the other. But though nearly akin, they are very distinguishable. The former is killing, destroying Sin within ourselves: the latter, disowning and casting off whatever is

* 2 Cor. x. 5.

† Luke xxii. 42.

dearest to us, in such Degree as is necessary to destroy Sin. And this being the Nature of the Duty, we need never fear, but Occasions of practising it will be frequent and trying enough. The much greater Need will be to fill our Souls with a strong Conviction of what I shall now endeavour to shew,

III. The indispensable Obligation of it, and its unspeakable Importance to our Virtue and our Happiness.

That Being, *of whom and to whom are all Things* †, whose Nature is absolutely simple and infinitely perfect, *cannot*, as the Apostle expresses it †, *deny himself*. There is nothing within him, but Rectitude and Holiness; nothing without him, but what wholly depends on him: and therefore his sole Rule of Action must be his own good Pleasure. But the most exalted of Creatures, being his Servants and his Property, are essentially so far bound to Self-denial, as not to do their own Will, but the Will of him who sent them into Life. And in Proportion as the Frame of any moral Agent is compounded of superior and inferior Principles, the more he will be obliged to disregard and deny the lower, in order to

† Rom. xi. 36.

‡ 2 Tim. ii. 13.

follow the Dictates of the higher. But wretched Man, fallen and sinful, lies under a heavier Necessity of this Kind: for, made up of wrong Propensities, in the Degree that he is, in order to *deny Ungodliness and worldly Lusts*^w, he must *deny himself* continually. Christ indeed hath procured us by his Blood the Means of Recovery from this lamentable Condition: but still he only frees us from Slavery, to subject us to a just and gracious Government: *we are not our own, for we are bought with a Price*^x: and since by Him we live, who *were dead in Trespasses and Sins*^y, we are to *live henceforth, not unto ourselves, but unto Him, which died for us, and rose again*^z. So that both as Creatures, and as fallen and redeemed Creatures, Self-denial and Self-surrender is our indispensable general Duty. And we shall find it previously necessary to the right Performance of every particular Duty that lies before us.

Our Appetites, Passions, and Fancies, are by Nature many: and partly by the Corruption of our Nature, partly by voluntary Indulgence, they are headstrong and mischievous.

^w Tit. ii. 12.

^x 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

^y Eph. ii. 1.

^z 2 Cor. v. 15.

What must be the Consequence then, if we either study to humour them still farther, or let them take their own free Course? Plainly, that they will become quite ungovernable, and multiply Sin and Guilt upon us without End. The very Thought of Virtue and Piety will be so excluded, as seldom to occur to us: and whenever Conscience doth adventure to sound the unwelcome Words in our Ears, it will be silenced, overpowered, and banished from the Place where it ought to dwell and preside. Sometimes it may carry a single Point or two: but still, what upon the whole is uppermost in our Hearts, will upon the whole govern our Lives; and the occasional Victories, obtained now and then, will be attended with continually greater Difficulty and Pain, and therefore will be attempted less and less frequently. Look around you: look within you: what is our general Condition here on Earth? Immoderate Desire of Wealth or Power, or Fame, or Pleasure, or Ease, Resentment, Envy, Vanity, some wrong Inclination or other, is is well if not more than one, springs up early: an ill-judging Self-love cherishes it without Examination: we take it hastily for granted, that here lies our

Happiness, and accordingly pursue it: many, without ever putting the Question, whether Virtue or Religion forbid them or not. Others indeed do chance to reflect a little at Times; some of them enough to form a Sort of Resolution, that they will quit such and such of their Vices, perhaps all of them. But then, as they will, notwithstanding, preserve in general the same false Tenderneſs for themselves that they ever had, and leave to mere Inclination or Caprice the same Dominion over them; it is easy to foresee, that these Resolutions must have a very ineffectual, a very short-lived Influence, and every Thing quickly relapse into its former State. So long then as we suffer it to be at all a determining Reason for acting thus or thus, in Cases of Importance, that we have a Mind to act so, there cannot be any Hope of our behaving right with the least Uniformity or Constancy: and the only Way is, to strike at the Root of all our Faults, wrong Self-indulgence, instead of cutting off little Branches and Twigs, that will sprout afterwards faster than before.

Nor is this of more Consequence to our Virtue than to what is closely connected with it here, and inseparably hereafter, our Happiness. Every Principle in

our Nature was originally placed there for our Good, but, when corrupted and improperly exerted, produces Harm to us. And in particular, the dear Affection that we bear to ourselves, if it seeks to attain its End by mistaken Means, must fail of it, and make us miserable. The tender Fondness that will suffer us to miss no Pleasure, and bear no Hardship, will as certainly destroy all Firmness and Health in the Soul, as it doth in the Body, and unfit us in both Respects equally for what we must have to go through in Life. Under this unhappy Management, groundless Aversions and pernicious Desires grow continually more vehement; wild Fancies multiply; each of them claims the absolute Sway, and we are torn in Pieces by their Contentions. Or if they rule more amicably by Turns, the various Pursuits to which they successively prompt us, we often see at the Time, are leading us to Ruin: yet we know not how to be so cruel to ourselves, as to prefer the united Interests of this World and the next to a present favourite Inclination. So we grasp momentary Pleasures, quickly followed by lasting Uneasiness: are tormented by daily Disappointments in what we obtain, as well

as what we aimed at without Success: and very commonly, after innumerable Follies and Sufferings, the whole ends in Despondency and Sourness, Dislike of ourselves and every one around us, Dissatisfaction with the universal State of Things, and the very Author of it: whilst, like ungoverned Children, we know not what we would have, and nothing can please us. For the same Gratification of every Humour, that makes Children both wicked and wretched, hath just the same Effect on all those, who, by treating themselves in the like Manner, contrive to be no wiser throughout the Course of their Lives than they were at the Beginning. But, whether we go on to be tossed through a restless Variety of wrong Pursuits, or fix on some one, that shall carry us forward more uniformly in Error, it is in Effect the same Thing. By the one Means or the other we are sure to be miserable, even in this World, and unspeakably more so in the next, if we permit our own Wills and Passions to be our Guides.

Therefore our blessed Lord, *the Way, the Truth, and the Life*^a, who perfectly knew, both what our Nature and Condition require

^a John xiv. 6.

of us, and what our Maker designs us for, hath pointed out the only wise Method; that we *deny ourselves, and follow Him*: that, renouncing the Indulgence of our own Inclinations, we take his Example and his Laws for our only Rule; and, without standing to compute what we may lose or suffer by it in this or that Case, venture to give up Body and Soul in all Cases to his Government; and seeking Happiness by no other Means than Obedience, trust God for the Consequences. Were we but in such a State of Mind, we should have one invariable Rule to act by, "This is my Duty, therefore nothing shall seduce me from it: this is contrary to my Duty, therefore nothing shall engage me in it." We should have one general and full Answer constantly ready for all Temptations, instead of the manifold Disadvantages and Hazards of debating Particulars with each of them singly. Their Force must be unspeakably lessened, would we but follow this Direction in earnest; never admit an ensnaring second Thought to creep in and puzzle a plain Case, nor afford Time to a vicious Desire to argue the Point with us, and paint itself out in plausible and inviting Colours to deceive us; but, the

Moment we see it to be vicious, look on it in that sole View, reject it without Delay for that sole Reason, and think no more of it. Else we shall be all Inconstancy and Irresolution, distracted between the *Services of two Masters*; sometimes preferring one, sometimes the other; then contriving a thousand silly Schemes to reconcile both, and entangled by every Endeavour in fresh Perplexities, Whereas, would we throughly give up our whole Selves into the Hands of our rightful Sovereign, and fix the Regard we owe Him for the one Principle of our Conduct; the Presence of that Thought would awe into Silence whatever was opposite to it; our bad Inclinations would die away and be forgotten; good ones would spring up, and have nothing to oppose their Growth; a better Self, *a new Man created after the Image of God* would be formed within us, instead of that which we had put *off*^b; and our Advances in Goodness would be astonishing: like those of the pious Corinthians, whose charitable Contributions, the Apostle declares, were beyond his Hopes: *but, saith he, they first gave their own Selves to the Lord, and then to us by the Will of God*^c.

^b Col. iii. 10.

^c 2 Cor. viii. 5.

This indeed is the only Way to be religious : and Religion is the only Way to be happy. For, the true Good of Man, let us search for it ever so long, or fancy about it what we please, can never be found where it is not ; and is only where our Maker hath placed it. All our Capacities for it are of his bestowing : our whole Being is at his Disposal. If we withhold any Thing from him, the Holiness of his Nature, the Honour of his Government, bind him to convince us of our Guilt and Folly. If, on the contrary, we resign all to him, he will *give us back richly to enjoy*, as the Scripture expresses it^d, all that is innocent and safe : he will reward us eternally hereafter for abstaining from what would hurt us even here : and it is inconceivably absurd to imagine we can provide for our own Interests better, than by intrusting them with Him. Nor perhaps in general do Men imagine they can : but they see what is right, and dare not attempt it. A cowardly Apprehension of Pain in the Effort keeps us in the far worse Pain of a divided State of Mind and Life. We avoid some Faults, and cannot prevail on ourselves to avoid others. We resolve against all Sin, it may be : but

^d 1 Tim. vi. 17.

cannot resolve against the Things that we know will lead us into Sin: so we leave Stumbling-blocks in our own Way, and undo every Thing as fast as we do it. Then for a while Self-reflection causes bitter Remorse, but immediately Self-indulgence brings forth new Transgressions; and, in this wretched Circle, we go round and round to our Destruction: whereas one thorough Determination, well kept, of yielding up all without Reserve to God, would extricate us from this Labyrinth, and settle us in a firm State of inward Peace: the present Advantages of the Change would be great beyond Belief; the future, infinite: and thus the Self-denial our Saviour enjoins would appear to be the only true Self-love.

But then we must not think, that forming such a Resolution is all that we need in order to accomplish it. A vain Opinion of our own Strength is one Part of the Self that we are to deny: else we shall never have Strength to any real good Purpose. Our blessed Lord assures us, that *without Him we can do nothing*^e. St. Paul assures us, that *we are not sufficient to think any Thing as of ourselves*^f. And repeated Experience hath given us all, I fear, too many

^e John xv. 5.

^f 2 Cor. iii. 5.

Proofs of this Truth. If then we are wicked, our only Way is, that, yielding to the Convictions of God's Word and Spirit, we apply in the Name of our blessed Redeemer for Power to *deny ourselves and follow Him*: that through him, as our High Priest, we *present our Souls and Bodies a Sacrifice to God*^g, beseeching him to accept the Gift, to take and keep Possession of us. And though we think ourselves ever so good, yet if we imagine we are become such, or hope to continue such, by our own Abilities, we deceive ourselves, and *know nothing yet, as we ought to know*^h. By the Grace of God I am what I am, saith the Apostle; *I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the Grace of God, which was with me*ⁱ. *I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and I live by the Faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me*^k. Nay, lastly, if we flatter ourselves, that even by the Means of Help from above we have attained to a Perfection of Self-denial, or of any other Virtue, we mistake our Condition, endanger our Humility, and neglecting to press forward,

^g Rom xii. 1.^h 1 Cor. viii. 2.ⁱ 1 Cor. xv. 10.^k Gal. ii. 20.

shall be driven back. Indeed, though Perfection is ascribed to Men in Scripture, by Way of Opposition to Characters wilfully and essentially defective^l, and of Comparison with others of inferior Goodness^m, and in Respect of God's gracious Acceptation through Christ *Jesus*ⁿ; yet, strictly speaking, the Hope of ever attaining it here is vain, notwithstanding that the Struggle to advance towards it ought to be incessant: for the nearer the Approach, the greater the Reward. But *who can say, I have made my Heart clean, I am pure from my Sin*^o? *For there is not a just Man upon Earth, that doth Good, and sinneth not*^p. When we put off these Bodies, and not before, *that which is perfect being come, that which is in Part shall be done away*^q. Our Understandings shall be thoroughly enlightened, our Affections completely purified, our Wills intirely conformed to that of our Heavenly Father; we shall love ourselves only as bearing his Image, and *God shall be all in all*^r.

^l Job viii. 20. ix. 22.

^m Job i. 1.

ⁿ Col. i. 28.

^o Prov. xx. 9.

^p Eccl. vii. 20.

^q 1 Cor. xiii. 10.

^r 1 Cor. xv. 28.

S E R M O N III.

TIT. ii. 6.

Young Men likewise exhort to be sober-minded.

INstructing Men to *remember their Creator in the Days of their Youth*^a, is laying in their Hearts the only Foundation of every Thing good and happy: but the Work is far from being completed, when the Foundation is laid. Not only the general Duties of Life are to be built upon it; but the particular Duties of every one's Condition in Life: for these of all others, we are most concerned, and yet often least willing, to know and attend to. They should therefore be drawn out, and laid before us as minutely as they well can: and each be called upon to study those more especially, which he is more especially obliged to practise. Now as the several Tempers, Ranks, and Employments of Men, and the several Relations they

^a Eccl. xii. 1.

stand in to each other, so their several Ages also, lay them under peculiar Obligations: for which Reason St. *Peter* and St. *John* in their Epistles address themselves to younger Persons, and to elder separately; and St. *Paul* in this Epistle directs *Titus* to do the same thing. But though both have much need of Admonition, yet the Young plainly need it most; as they are just entering into the World, with little Knowledge, less Experience, and yet scarcely ever any Distrust; with lively Spirits and warm Passions to mislead them, and Time to go a great Way wrong, if they do not go right. In the Spring-season of Life, especially as it advances towards Summer, whatever the Soil produces, (and the human Heart is fruitful of Evil) shoots out so fast, that a few Days neglect of weeding and pruning, occasions a visible Alteration for the worse. And therefore the utmost Care should be taken then, to keep all in good Order, by the continual Exercise of that *Sobriety of Mind*, that considerate Self-government, which the Apostle prescribes indeed to every one, but which they who principally want it, ought to understand as principally prescribed to them. It is true, in this Verse he mentions only *young Men*: but in the

preceding he had given the same Rule for young Women: and accordingly I shall speak to both, without Distinction, in two Discourses on this Subject.

I. The first and chief thing, in which young People are concerned to shew Sobriety of Mind, is moderating their natural Fondness for Pleasure; and the two Sorts of Pleasure, from which they are in Danger, are, sensual Gratifications, and gay Amusements.

As to the former, *St. Paul* hath directed that *Fornication and all Uncleanness be not once named amongst Christians*^b. And the less they are named, even to caution against them, the better: provided it be well understood and considered, that they not only fill the Lives of those who are guilty of them, and of others, with a Variety of temporal Sufferings, too commonly experienced; but fatally indispose them to the Love of God and Virtue, and disqualify them for the spiritual Happiness of the World to come. Therefore *dearly beloved, I beseech you, as Strangers and Pilgrims, whose chief Interest lies not here, but in another State, abstain from fleshly Lusts, which war against the Soul*^c. All Ranks, both Sexes, how strangely soever

^b Eph. v. 3.

^c 1 Pet. ii. 11.

Multitudes of one seem to forget it, are equally bound by this Restraint: bound to avoid every thing likely to misguide their Conduct, or to inflame their Desires; and to employ their Thoughts so constantly on what is good or lawful, as to exclude from them what is bad. For by such Care, early taken, the Preservation of their Innocence will be easy: which, for want of it, is falsely imagined impossible. Thus then, to speak in the Words of our Apostle, *Let every one know how to possess his Vessel in Sanctification and Honour, not in the Lust of Concupiscence, even as the Gentiles, which know not God*^d. And to that End, *Let every one, as Solomon advises, keep his Heart with all Diligence: for out of it are the Issues of Life*^e.

Together with the Sins of this Kind, those of Intemperance in drinking, or even eating, which are closely connected with them, ought to be carefully shunned, as peculiarly opposite to the Character of *sober-minded*, by young People; who of all others have the least Need of such Indulgences, and are the most hurt by them; subjected to painful and dangerous Diseases; exposed to early Distress in their Circumstances; and besides, for the most

^d 1 Thess. iv. 4, 5.

^e Prov. iv. 23.

Part, either funk into Stupidity and Insignificance, or raised into Wildness and Madness, frequently followed by proportionable Dejection and Melancholy. Therefore, instead of such Excess, they must, as *St. Paul* farther directs, *keep under the Body and bring it into Subjection*^f; not by hurtful or fanciful Austerities, but by rational Self-denial: remembering, that even in common Exercises and Contests of Strength and Activity, *every Man, that striveth for the Mastery, is temperate in all Things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible Crown, but we an incorruptible*^g. This and every Passage of Scripture, which admonishes to *flee youthful Lusts*^h, they must frequently read and recollect and pray over, as the most powerful Means to secure, and if they fall, to recover, themselves. For *wherewithall shall a young Man cleanse his Way? even by ruling himself after thy Word*ⁱ.

The other Sort of Pleasures, especially dangerous to young People, are gay Amusements. Undoubtedly Cheerfulness is as innocent, as it is amiable: it may and should be expressed by those that have it, and allowed and encouraged by those who have it not: for it both gives

^f 1 Cor. ix. 27. ^g v. 25. ^h 2 Tim. ii. 22. ⁱ Ps. cxix. 9.

Delight, and doth good. The Disposition to it was unquestionably planted in us by our Maker, with Intent that it should be gratified: and Youth is plainly the natural Season for it. But still, all this by no Means exempts it from Discipline and Government. Suppose a Constitution or a Temper by Nature warm and cholerick should be industriously or negligently farther heated, instead of being watched and moderated, what would be the Consequence? Suppose that Gravity and Wariness, which is as natural to old Age as Gaiety to Youth, should for that Reason be carried on to its utmost Extent: plainly that would be wrong. Surely then the contrary Extreme is equally wrong. And indeed if we consider the Make and Circumstances of Man, we shall soon discover many Motives for keeping a strict Hand upon our Inclinations to all the several Things which I have just mentioned.

Love of Pleasure is undeniably one Part of our Nature: but Sense of Duty, and Concern for lasting Happiness, are as evident and much more important Parts: yet we must often trample upon these, if we always follow that. Immoderate Desires of present Gratification, if we suffer them to be constantly solliciting us,
will

will frequently prevail when they ought not ; and hurry us on suddenly, or intice us gradually, to such Lengths as we never intended ; possibly till our Heart is totally corrupted, and the Care of our Conduct intirely thrown aside. Witness the many Examples of Dispositions, that once promised better Things, betrayed by Indulgences merely indiscreet at first, into gross Vices, and sometimes open Diffoluteness. Now what ruins or impairs our Virtue, is in Proportion prejudicial to our Happiness ; even that present Happiness, which the Votaries of Pleasure are pursuing. Not only Reason proves this, if they would condescend to be reasoned with, but daily Experience. How many have we all of us seen or heard of, who setting out with nothing worse than a thoughtless Passion for Diversion and Entertainment, have grievously, nay perhaps irrecoverably, injured, in a few Years, some their Healths or Fortunes, others their Characters and Peace of Mind ; and treasured up for the Remainder of their Days, Pain and Want, Remorse and Shame, it may be artfully palliated, but severely felt ! Think then awhile, you that are young, and have Pity on yourselves. Shall all this firm and vigorous

Strength, this Affluence of Circumstances, this Ease of Heart and Openness of Face, this delightful Prospect of being esteemed and happy through the whole of Life; shall it, merely for want of a little Self-restraint, be cast away in the very Entrance upon Life, and exchanged for Guilt and Misery, to abide with you during the rest of it? For these are the natural Fruits of such Neglect: and it is the weakest Vanity, to hope that you shall escape better than others, unless you keep safe upon firm Ground.

Or suppose you come off ever so much better than you had Cause to expect: still making Pleasure your main Business must hinder you, first from preparing for, then from attending to, the proper Employments of your Station: by which alone you must be great Sufferers, and probably others besides you. But farther; indulging, and, by Indulgence, adding Force to Desires of this Kind, spoils and vitiates the inward Frame, just as feeding too freely on Meats of high Relish doth the bodily Appetite. Common Food quickly becomes insipid: and in a little Time we are surfeited of what pleased us most. Then follow sickly Longings for we scarce know what: and the Conclusion is abhorring and nauseating every Thing.

Thing. So it is with the Mind. They who must always have somewhat extremely delicious to fill up their Hours, reject as flat and tasteless a Number of Things, with which others are very well entertained. What they themselves were entertained with once, after a while grows cloying: and as the World is not formed to afford exquisite Novelties frequently, they have miserable Intervals of eager wishing for Delight, which if they seem now and then to obtain, their Satisfaction in them very soon deadens away to nothing. And thus they waste their Days in the Affectation of wonderful Felicity, but in the real Suffering of most wearisome Satiety and Listlessness. Human Nature is not fitted to support a perpetual Flutter of Jollity and Mirth: Which, like spirituous Liquors, may appear at the Instant to raise and enliven those who use them; but, generally speaking, will soon wear them out, and sink them down into a deplorable State of Languor and Lowness; from which at length the most pernicious Augmentation of the Dose will scarce afford them a Moment's Relief.

Therefore be persuaded to look forward a little, and attend to Consequences. Let the Love of Pleasure importune you ever so strongly;

strongly ; still, how delightful soever the Draught is, to swallow it can never be all, that a thirsty Person hath to consider. It must be a much more material Question, whether no Mischief will ensue. Mistake not the Beginning of Life for the Whole. Providence in great Wisdom hath furnished every Period of it with proper Satisfaction of its own, and proper Employments for the Service of the next. Youth is to prepare us for the comfortable Enjoyment of Manhood : Manhood for that of old Age : each Part of our Existence on Earth for the Blessedness of Heaven. Second the Intention, pursue the Direction of your gracious Maker ; and be assured you will never find your Account in contradicting it. You relish only such and such Things at present ; but provide for the Feelings you will have hereafter ; and, like those who are to travel through different Climates, lay in for them all, what the knowing and prudent advise. Suppose in your Childhood you had done whatever was then agreeable to you, and Nothing else : how sad a Figure must your Youth have made ! Why, just as contemptible and wretched will your riper Age be, if you follow that Rule now.

Or could you escape all Inconveniences here from such Behaviour; yet, as you cannot think this even a moral, much less a religious Manner of Life, you may be sure it must end ill hereafter. You were created, not merely to please yourselves, but to serve your Fellow-creatures, and honour your Maker. You have Faculties given you for these Purposes: you are to account for the Use of them. They are become by the Fall of our first Parents weak and insufficient: you have used them ill; and made your Condition yet worse. A Method of Pardon and Recovery is offered to you; but offered on Terms of deep Repentance, humble Faith in a Redeemer, diligent Care to preserve yourselves from Sin, to improve yourselves in Goodness: eternal Rewards are promised to such as thus become qualified for them; eternal Punishments are threatened to those, who are *Lovers of Pleasure more than Lovers of God*^k. Think well of this: and run mad after them if you can. *Rejoice, O young Man in thy Youth, and walk in the Ways of thy Heart, and in the Sight of thine Eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into Judgment*^l. Solomon doth not forbid here all

^k 2 Tim. iii. 4.

^l Eccl. xi. 9.

Use of worldly Gratifications, but all such Use as we cannot answer for.

Therefore allow yourselves in fit Instances of Pleasure, at fit Seasons, to a fit Degree; and enjoy them with a merry Heart: but never let the Thought of living to Pleasure get the least Possession of you. Be industrious to check so absurd and destructive an Imagination, by diligent Application to some proper Business, and fixing a frequent Return of Hours devoted to retired and serious Recollection. The mere Composure and Quiet of them will be no small Advantage to you: but you will find it a much greater, to stop from Time to Time, and see whereabouts you are; to consider whether you are fallen into no wrong Course; whether you make any Progress in the right; whether any Danger be near, whether you are taking the best Method to avoid it. No Joy on Earth can exceed that of answering these Questions well. And if any Thing be otherwise than well, knowing it, is the only Way to mend it, and that, the only Way to inward Peace: of which our gracious God and Father is willing that they, who have most offended him, should on their sincere Repentance and Reformation immediately partake. Therefore often examine your own Condition:
and

and at such Times also, turn off your Eyes a little from the gay Scenes of Life; take the other Parts of it into View, and consider on the whole, what this World is. A very different Place, from what those who are intoxicated with youthful Warmth and sanguine Expectations, for a while imagine it to be. Set therefore in your View the Disappointments and Perplexities, the Cares and Fatigues, the Pains and Sorrows, of which you amongst the rest of Mankind must undergo your Share: and while the Appearance of Things is brightest, as the wise King directs, *remember the Days of Darkeness, for they shall be many*^m. Not that you are to break your Spirits or damp your Activity, by melancholy Prospects and Apprehensions; but only to compose your Hearts into a State suitable to that which you live in, and form your Minds to be content with few and low Enjoyments from the Things around you: for in such a World as this, it is certain Misery to aim at high Happiness.

Still Prudence may secure you a good Degree of Comfort here: and Religion will exalt it into Joy. For to the pious Soul Light will arise out of Darkeness; and all the Vanity

^m Eccl. xi. 8.

and Vexation of the present Life give Assurance to those, who go through it as they ought, that God will make them ample Amends in a better. Therefore in your Hours of private Meditation, fail not to renew the Remembrance of your Creator; think of all you enjoy as his Gift; think of all his Laws as kind and necessary Provisions for your temporal or eternal Welfare; think of every Transgression as the grossest Folly, mixed with the basest Ingratitude; and have *Joseph's* Reply in Readiness for every Temptation, *How can I do this great Wickedness, and sin against God*ⁿ? Fervent Devotion from a pure Heart is undoubtedly the most pleasing of all Employments: for it is the Exercise of the sweetest Affections, Hope and Love on the worthiest of Objects; a Being infinitely able, and equally attentive, to reward our Attachments to him, to defend us from every real Evil, to bestow on us every real Good, and in due Time the full Enjoyment of the supreme Good, himself. Therefore warm but your Hearts with these delightful Sentiments; and you will never repine at any needful Restraints from earthly Gratifications. Only preserve in your Piety

ⁿ Gen. xxxix. 9.

itself that Soberness of Mind, which is requisite in every Thing: that it may not fly out into Raptures of Enthusiasm, or Zeal without Charity; but may be uniformly rational, mild and beneficent.

This Article of moderating their Love of Pleasure, is of such singular Importance to the Young, that I could not avoid enlarging upon it much more, than I shall on any of the rest.

II. A second Instance, in which they have great Need to be *sober-minded*, is their Desire of imitating others; and doing many Things in Compliance with Fashion, to which they would otherwise have no Inclination: Now conforming to those around us in Points of Indifference, is one commendable Part of social Behaviour. And moderately absurd Customs, if they be harmless, it is very allowable, when once they become general, to follow and despise at the same Time. But if you catch yourselves growing really fond of such Things, running to the utmost Lengths of them, and building to yourselves a Kind of Reputation upon them; then it is high Time to stop, indeed to retreat. For attending to Trifles will take off, in Proportion, your At-
tention

tention to Matters of Moment: and if your Esteem be misplaced, your Lives will be misled. But, above all, beware of yielding, where it may more immediately endanger your Innocence: beware of that Indifference to Religion and religious Duties, which of late hath appeared so peculiarly infectious; beware of being led insensibly into such a Turn of Talk and Behaviour, such Methods of employing your Thoughts and your Time, however polite they are accounted, as may weaken your Regard to the Principles of Virtue. Always examine the Rules of Custom by those of God's Word, of Reason and Experience; and where you have Cause to distrust your own Judgment, adhere to that of prudent Friends, if need were, against the World. But indeed it is generally a small Part of the World, a few forward empty People, that make the high Vogue in every Thing, and are followed thoughtlessly by others. Be not deceived therefore by the Self-sufficiency, Noise and vain Shew, of Wretches like these; nor ever mistake their Opinion for the Sense of Mankind: but be assured, many more will esteem you for right Conduct, than wrong; and even the silent Approbation of the Wise and Good will do you much more Service, than the loudest

modest Applauses of the Inconsiderate and the Libertine. You may be afraid perhaps of the Censure or Ridicule of the latter: but only take Care to be pious and regular without Ostentation or Sourness, and by acquiring, as far as you can, every laudable Accomplishment, to make Amends for wanting that of being wicked; and there will be small Doubt of your receiving much better Quarter from such, than they commonly give one another. At least, if you cannot *prevent* their Scorn, surely you may stand against it, and despise it: or, if your Mind be too tender for that, as in some young People it is, you have another Remedy, as obvious and easy as it is necessary; keep out of the Way of hearing it. Allow the most agreeable Persons, that would weaken your Sense of Duty, as little Familiarity with you as ever you can: and strengthen yourselves in Goodness continually, by the Example, the Countenance, the Encouragement, the Advice, of serious and discreet and amiable Companions.

3. A third Thing which due Sobriety of Mind requires, especially of the Young, is to avoid Affectation: pretending, and endeavouring without Cause, to be what they are not, and to like or dislike what they naturally

turally do not. While any Thing continues in Fashion, they, beyond others, are hurried away by a strange Desire of appearing much fonder of it, not only than there is Ground to be, (which belongs to the last Head) but than they really are: and often behave fillily, and sometimes wickedly, to express their Passion for Things, which at the Bottom they have none for; at least hardly any other, than what they took up, merely because they thought it looked well; and can easily lay down again at the shortest Warning, as Experience shews, and be just as highly delighted with any Thing else. Now plainly such as these prostitute their Share of good Sense to whatever happens to be the reigning Folly. And there are too many others, who though perhaps very zealous against these public Affectations, have their private ones, to which they allow full Scope. I am sensible, that Matters of this Nature may seem beneath the Notice of this Place: but nothing is so, which produces real Evils in Life. It is very true, in young Minds, as in warm and light Soils, Numbers of Weeds will spring up. But if they are nursed and cherished, instead of being rooted out, they will exhaust the Ground, and choak
the

the good Seed. Therefore examine whatever you perceive within you, rather with the greater Care for its being of your own Growth: and never tolerate strong Fancies with weak Reasons for them. Do not imagine Things graceful, or important, or proper, without knowing why: or that you can ever make them so, if they are not so: or that any Way whatever, of thinking, behaving, or appearing, is in the least the better for your adopting it. Some perhaps may for a while, injudiciously or artfully, applaud your Peculiarities: they may procure you much Notice, and seemingly of a favourable Kind; but this will never end well. You will get a wrong Bias, and lose the true Notion of the Value of Things; will lay yourselves open to the Designs of the Crafty, fall into Contempt with the Discerning, and by Degrees with every one. Youth indeed hath Advantages, which may partly conceal, partly excuse, these Absurdities: but then they will fix upon you, and remain with you, after every Thing that can palliate them is gone. You will have put on a Character, under a false Notion of its becoming you, and not know how to lay it aside, even when it misbecomes you most no-

toriously. And if all Affectation be thus bad, how dreadful is that monstrous Affectation of Profaneness and Vice, not uncommonly seen in Persons who perhaps would like full as well to be pious and virtuous, if they could but believe it would make near so genteel a Figure! But venture to believe, that a blameless Conduct, though it will not raise so early or so great a Talk about you, will, sooner or later, distinguish you to your Advantage, which nothing else can: or, however the World may overlook you at present, God will do you abundant Honour hereafter. *Whatsoever thou takest in Hand, remember the End, and thou shalt never do amiss* °.

4. The fourth Particular comprehended under St. Paul's general Direction for young People in the Text, and the last that can be mentioned now, I shall express in his own Words: *Not to think of themselves more highly than they ought to think, but to think soberly* ^p. Liveliness and Want of Experience peculiarly dispose them to err in this Point; and the superficial Education, the Disregard to all Authority, Human or Divine, and the Liberty and the Practice of saying and doing what

° Eccles. vii. 39.

^p Rom. xii. 3.

every one pleases, that prevail in the present Age, have heightened and spread the Error to Degrees never known before. Hence they perpetually despise the most useful Qualifications, and the worthiest Behaviour; admire Trifles, Follies, and Sins, as Distinctions and Excellencies; claim a high Merit for Accomplishments of which they have little or no Share; imagine themselves totally free from Defects that are most glaringly visible in them; pity and scorn those whom they have more Cause to envy: and thus, judging falsely, in the most dangerous Manner, of Things and Persons, others and themselves, are utterly misled in the main Concerns of Life. Yet they fail not to see, but take a Pride in observing, from Time to Time, that this is the Case of such and such of their Acquaintance: now, would they but reflect, that it *may* be their own too, it would be no inconsiderable Step towards a Cure. It must put them on examining what Advantages and good Qualities they are really possessed of, what the real Value of them is, what Deductions are to be made from them on Account of Imperfections and Failings, and what Ground they have, on the whole, to hope for the Esteem of wise Men, and the

Acceptance of an all-wise God. It must remind them to consider over again the hasty Judgments of their early Days, and review, with a suspicious Eye, perhaps many Notions which they are very well satisfied in, without knowing why, and are proceeding to act upon at all Adventures. Most People indeed should have more Diffidence than they have, but the Young much more than others. It is not natural, it is not possible, that, in the very Entrance of Life, one who hath taken no Pains to know any Thing should know every Thing. And therefore when such are found, as they are very Day, perfectly contented with themselves; absolutely clear, that their own Way of thinking and acting, whatever it chances to be, is right; when they will venture, in Questions of the greatest Moment, to decide, without the least Hesitation beforehand, or the least Doubt afterwards, perhaps directly contrary to what the ablest Persons in all Ages have done; and hold every one in utter Contempt, that can possibly be of another Opinion; this is surely an astonishing Want of Sobriety of Mind. At least be a little modest, till you can truly say, that you have considered and inquired with some Care: for
after-

afterwards, in all Likelihood, you will be so of Course. Especially be modest, in Proportion as any Point is of Consequence, and out of your Reach. For Instance, in Religion. The Duties of it are plain, and plainly reasonable. So are the Doctrines too, as far as we can understand them, and judge of them: but we can understand and judge of some of them but very imperfectly. They relate to the infinite Nature of God, to the boundless Views of his Providence, to future Times, it may be a future World. No Wonder, that of such Things we do not comprehend the whole; though he may have good Reasons, whether we perceive them or not, for telling us Part: and yet, without comprehending the whole, some Parts must seem unaccountable. Now such Difficulties as these, or possibly less, a raw self-sufficient Youth chances to think or be told of, runs away with them, and derides the Weakness of those who believe what they are taught. But can it possibly make any Doctrine of Religion doubtful, that Persons, bred up in the Manner that, God knows, too many are, and living afterwards as may be expected, do not understand it, or do not like it, or have heard more of the Objections against it than the Arguments for it? Or

Should they not rather learn to suspect, that they have not a sufficient Acquaintance with the Subject? For what will become of good Sense and right Behaviour in the World, if People are to think themselves Masters of every Thing which they know but any Thing of, and to despise every Thing they know Nothing of? This is both a very unreasonable and very immoral Turn of Mind: it destroys all Reverence for Truth, all Attention to the virtuous Conduct of their Faculties and their Lives: it leads them, for the most Part, to early Misery here, and hardens them beyond all Things against that penitent Conviction, which alone can prevent their Misery hereafter. Justly therefore doth the Prophet denounce: *Wo unto them that call Evil Good, and Good Evil: that put Darknes for Light, and Light for Darknes. Wo unto them that are wise in their own Eyes, and prudent in their own Sight.— Therefore, as the Fire devoureth the Stubble, and the Flame consumeth the Chaff: so their Root shall be as Rottenness, and their Blossom go up as the Dust; because they have cast away the Law of the Lord of Hosts, and despised the Word of the Holy One of Israel.*

⁹ Isa. v. 20, 21, 24.

S E R M O N IV.

T I T. ii. 6.

Young Men likewise exhort to be sober-minded.

IN discoursing on these Words, I have already mentioned four Particulars, in respect of which it is peculiarly necessary for young Persons to preserve Sobriety of Mind, and exercise a watchful Government over themselves: their natural Gaiety and Love of Pleasure, their Fondness for imitating the Customs and Fashions of the World at some Times, their Proneness to Affectation and wrong Singularities at others, and their almost universal Inclination to entertain too high an Opinion of their own Advantages, Accomplishments, and Abilities. Were this Opinion to go no farther than their own Breasts, it would be a great Fault, and have very bad Effects: but when it is shewn to others, and even demands their Notice, the Case becomes
much

much worse. And therefore an additional indispensable Duty, comprehended under the Character of *sober-minded*, is,

5. That how well soever they may apprehend they see Cause to think of themselves, they should behave with Humility towards those with whom they have any Intercourse: and remember that, in young People above all, Modesty is exceedingly graceful, and a remarkable Want of it shocking. It is not meant that they should be frightened, confused, and disconcerted in what they say or do before Strangers and Superiors: this would be a Weakness; though, when it doth not go very far, an amiable one. Much less is it meant to enjoin so strict a Silence or Reserve, as may bring the Goodness of their Understandings or Tempers in Question: but only, that their Words, Looks, and Actions, should express a Consciousness of what is very true, that they have Reason, from their Youth and Inexperience, to be in some Degree suspicious of themselves, even where they seem to be most plainly in the right. Still, what they are fully convinced, on deliberate Consideration, is their Duty, they must adhere to, so long as the Persuasion continues, though Persons,
ever

ever so much farther advanced in Age or Knowledge, dissuade them from it. But even in this Case, and certainly then in others, they ought to shew every Mark of due Regard to those from whom they differ. And the most obliging Submission is very consistent with Liveliness and Spirit: it may give strong Proofs of Dignity, at the same Time with Respect; and by throwing the most advantageous Light on every Accomplishment, it will please every one worth pleasing, beyond all Things.

It is very true, that quite different Methods, a confident Behaviour, and a Manner, in Conversation, bold even to great Lengths of Indecency, seem to take with too many: even with some, who cover their Ignorance or Neglect of true good Breeding and Politeness, with high Pretences to both. But then, as the Liking which they have, or pretend to have, for these undaunted Spirits, can be accompanied with no real Esteem, so it seldom holds long; and yet seldomer either produces or intends any Good to those who are distinguished by it. For Persons of Judgment will by no Means pitch on those for any Purpose of Importance, with whose empty Forwardness they

they are most diverted for an idle Hour. The very Quality, that recommends them in this latter Respect, is an insuperable Objection against them in the former.

Another Thing ought to be observed, which in our Youth, at least, we commonly overlook; that they, who love to be often placing themselves in full View, whatever Care they take about their Appearance, are apt to have more seen of them, than is to their Advantage. And this Danger is the greater, as whoever desires too earnestly to make the best Figure he can, will almost certainly be carried on to aim at making a better than he can, and of Consequence will make a much worse than he needs. Great Numbers, who might have passed through Life with abundantly sufficient Approbation and Regard, by the mere Help of plain good Sense and good Temper, have, by affecting more Agreeableness or Sprightliness, more Judgment or Knowledge, perhaps than they had, or however than they had Occasion to shew, become ridiculous to those whom they wanted to think highly of them. But a farther, and more serious Evil, is, that where the Passion for being remarkable is permitted to grow very strong, if laudable Methods will
not

not bring it about, People are forely tempted to use others: to procure Admiration of their Persons by improper Arts and Freedoms, of their Learning by Assertions of groundless Novelties, of their Wit by Ill-nature or Profaneness. And yet after all, generally speaking, these Contrivances prove insufficient. Traps, laid for Applause, are almost always seen; and so disgust those who see them, that they often refuse even real Merit its due Acknowledgements, when they are too openly claimed. Now and then indeed these vain Characters do push themselves into early Reputation, without any Title to it. But, as their hasty Growth is unaccompanied with inward Strength, after being a short Time gazed at and envied, they are crushed under the Weight of their own Fame, and sink back into Nothing; while every one rejoices at their Fall, and wonders how they came ever to rise so high in the Esteem of the World.

On all Accounts therefore young Men ought ever to express, in their whole Conversation and Demeanour, a moderate Opinion and Distrust of themselves; with no small Esteem and Deference for others, how far soever they may be from making a showy Appearance.

For

For still, such Persons may have a great deal more even of ornamental Accomplishments, to produce on fit Occasions, than you are aware of. Or supposing them not at all comparable to you in these Respects, they may excel you in much more important Things; in good Conduct, Virtue, and Piety. Whatever Advantages you have over any one besides these, remember it depends intirely on your Use of them, whether you shall be the better or the worse for them: and be assured, they will never be truly beneficial to you, without Humility of Heart and Behaviour. Instead therefore of the unprofitable and unsafe Employment of admiring yourselves, and endeavouring to make others admire you, for Qualities of small and doubtful Value, indulge but a moderate Complacence in the very best that you conceive you are possessed of; think how imperfect you are in them, how many others you want, how many bad ones you have; and far from cherishing the poor Vanity of vying with those around you, prostrate yourselves before God, and earnestly beseech him to turn his Face *from your Sins, and put out all your Misdeeds; to make you a clean Heart, and renew a right Spirit within you*^a.

^a Pf. li. 9, 10.

6. Another Duty, comprehended under Sobriety of Mind, and closely connected with the former, consists in avoiding inconsiderate and vehement Positiveness in Discourse; to which the Young, who think well of their own Judgments, and know little of what others have judged or on what Grounds, are much addicted. Now affirming any Thing, as more certain than you have good Cause to believe it, is really an Offence against Truth, though you should happen to be in the Right; and peculiarly unbecoming in those, who are most likely to be often in the Wrong. Insisting on a Point too earnestly sometimes provokes very dangerous Resentments, especially when two of the same warm Temper are of different Persuasions. And cooler and wiser Men will seldom care to venture upon giving you Information, when they see you so little disposed to receive it. For want of such Monitors, you will often go on, for a long Time, asserting as unquestionable, what is false or doubtful. Others will perceive it soon: you will be forced to see it yourselves at last: and then what Shame and Vexation will you have brought upon your own Heads! Whereas proposing your Notions with an ingenuous Diffidence will secure an easy Re-

treat, if they chance to be confuted; and urging your Reasons, when they are strongest; with Modesty of Speech, will make you beloved, as well as admired. You should therefore constantly bear in your Thoughts, and imitate, the engaging Behaviour of *Elibu* in *Job*: who, having first waited till his Elders had spoken, *answered and said: I am young, and ye are old: wherefore I was afraid, and durst not shew you my Opinion. I said, Days should speak, and Multitude of Years should teach Wisdom. But there is a Spirit in Man: and the Inspiration of the Almighty giveth them Understanding: therefore hearken to me: I also will shew you my Opinion* ^b.

7. A seventh Instance of Sobriety of Mind, yet more important than the former, indeed so visibly important that a few Words will suffice about it, is guarding carefully against Rashness in Conduct. Words may pass over, and prove of small Importance; but Actions are always of moment: and yet the Young too commonly act without Scruple or Distrust. Sometimes this arises from the Pride of thinking, that they cannot act amiss: but sometimes also from mere Thoughtlessness,

^b *Job xxxii. 6, 7, 8, 10.*

or a lively Impatience of Deliberation, joined with that peculiar enterprising Disposition, and Unwillingness to believe any Harm will follow, which Youth inspires, and riper Years find bitter Reason to lament. For indeed, what one Thing is there dreadful in Life, which this adventurous Giddiness doth not frequently bring on Men, in the very Beginning of their Days, and it may be fix down upon them to the End? You, of all others, ought to be cautious: for you have much to lose, even in this World; and to plunge at the first Step into Misery is a deplorable Thing. You must be sensible, that Multitudes have done so, and Multitudes are doing so every Day, through mere Negligence, perhaps but a little Negligence: and if you are guilty of as much or more, how can you hope to escape better? It will cost you far less Time and Trouble to avoid Errors, than to retrieve them. Some cannot be retrieved at all: others, but imperfectly. With your best Care you will find it hard enough to keep intirely clear of them: and what then must become of those, who professedly take no Care at all, but give up their Lives to Fancy and Chance?

8. Another Point, in which it is very uncommon, and yet very needful for young People

to be sober-minded, is, in moderating their natural Hastiness of Temper, and Readiness to take Offence. It is in vain to think of reckoning up all the Occasions, on which this Fault appears in them: but some ought to be mentioned particularly.

One is, that they are too commonly provoked at receiving Advice, and resent it as an Affront. Now if it be given, as it certainly is for the most Part, solely or chiefly from Good-will to you: what a monstrous, what a barbarous Thing it is, to wound the Hearts of your best Friends doubly; first by your Indiscretions, then by your Ingratitude: to tell them, that is no Concern of theirs, which they cannot help being most tenderly concerned about; and insist on the Right you have, to ruin yourselves, if you please! But perhaps they take upon them, not only to advise you, but be angry with you: and that you cannot bear. Now it is very possible, their Anger, or however the Degree, or Time, or Manner of expressing it, may be improper: or, on the other hand, it may be more necessary, than you imagine, or care to own. But at least, it is a Proof that they mean you well: else, why should they give themselves any Disquiet about you? And even if they

they do mistake in some Things, or go too far in their Fears for you, still the Reason of their Sollicitude is so kind, that the Excess of it may well be excused. Or suppose it not to proceed from Affection, but from what you will, Conceit, Cenforiousness, Hatred, if you please; it will be well worth your while, to attend to it so far however, as to make your Advantage of it, by amending or vindicating or guarding yourself. And if they, who give you good Advice, be your Enemies, it will be much better to grieve them by taking it, than to please them by persisting in Sins or Follies.

There is a farther Instance of Warmth of Temper in young People, which frequently hath very bad Consequences, though it proceeds from an excellent Principle. They set out with the liveliest Sense of Right and Wrong in many Cases: would God it were the same in all! They have usually a strong Abhorrence of doing unworthy Things for the Sake of Interest: and it is great Pity, they have not an equal Abhorrence of doing as unworthy Things for the sake of Pleasure and Applause. But this Aversion to Baseness and Unfairness, (though it can never be too deeply rooted, and to begin the World with Indifference in these Respects

is a very bad Sign, yet,) if they are naturally of eager Spirits, hurries them on into most grievous Errors. In publick Affairs they grow hot-headed and outrageous; inattentive to the Weight of those Reasons, and the Merit of those Persons, that are against them; impatient to take the worst of Methods, that promise but the Attainment of their imagined good Ends; in short, excessively unreasonable and injurious; and all with an Intention of acting the honestest and noblest Part that can be. In private Life the same immoderate Warmth prompts them to conceive sudden and furious Antipathies on the slightest Foundations: to magnify small Faults or none into unpardonable Crimes; and pursue the supposed Offender with most unrighteous Resentment, mistaking it all the while for just Indignation. Now Men of such vehement Dispositions, which exert their Vehemence chiefly in the Season of Youth, if they have any Reflection, cannot help knowing their Danger: and therefore should conscientiously and perpetually be on their Watch against it: should think seriously in their cooler Hours, how much the Misrepresentations of others, how much more the Violence of their own Natures, may disguise Things to them; and, it
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may be, have actually done it many Times already : think what Imperfections there are, in the Minds and Behaviour even of those who are well-disposed, in their own amongst the rest : think, even supposing the Things, or the Persons, they are angry with, very bad, whether the Bitterness of their Anger may not be as bad : think how much better and safer it is, to lean towards the milder Side ; and how exceedingly blameable they will have been, should all this Heat, or a considerable Part of it, prove at last to be groundless and unjust. But, next to the Danger of unreasonable Aversions, ought to be mentioned,

9. That of unreasonable Fondnesses : against which the Young, if they will preserve a due Sobriety of Mind, must always be strictly on their Guard. They have had little Opportunity for, and therefore can have little Skill in, a Part of Knowledge, that requires a great deal, judging of Characters. And yet they will enter all at once into such bosom Friendships with almost mere Strangers, as a prudent Person would scarce contract with those, whom he had known longest. Sometimes these sudden Intimacies end in as sudden Quarrels. And when they last longer, the Case is often

yet worse. The Favourites, chosen so hastily, are for the most Part ill chosen: and when a Confidence without Reserve (for Youth hath very little Reserve) is placed in those, who either design, or only judge amiss; in how many Respects may they misguide, to what Contempt may they expose, to what fatal Errors may they lead, their inconsiderate Admirers! Therefore beware of plausible Insinuations and agreeable Appearances: allow none to put themselves upon you for what they please; but examine them well, and always consult your old and sure Friends in the Choice of new ones. Indeed if you never chuse any, perhaps it may be no Harm. Familiar Acquaintance you may have with many. A proper Degree of Trust you may repose in some. But your Life may pass, without meeting with one, to whom you can with Safety open your Heart intirely. And most of the pretended strict Friendships are mere interested Combinations in the Elder, and a Mixture of fond Fancy and Affectation in the Younger. Therefore keep on the watch; and particularly against those, whom perhaps you are least apt to suspect, who express the most Complaisance to you, and are the fullest of
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your Praises, especially to your Face. If this Behaviour be owing to Weakness, they are unworthy of your Esteem: if to Design, they are dangerous. For the Scripture hath said, *a Man that flattereth his Neighbour, spreadeth a Net for his Feet*^c. Instead therefore of running into the Arms of such, keep them at a Distance. And with whomsoever you enter into a closer Connexion, continue still to observe, with Candor indeed, but with Vigilance too, how they conduct themselves, what Impressions they are making upon you: nor think it any Breach either of Fidelity or Good-nature, to part with the dearest Friend upon Earth, rather than endanger your Piety, your Virtue, your Happiness, or even your Character. Farther yet; carefully avoid the Weakness and Injustice of extolling your Intimates too highly, either in your Discourse or even your Imagination, and disparaging others in Comparison: but still more carefully avoid promoting their Interests in Opposition to Reason and Equity, to private Right or publick Good.

10. Another Part of Sobriety of Mind, highly and peculiarly requisite for the Young, is a discreet Management of their Expences. Covet-

^c Prov. xxix. 5.

ousness indeed, hateful and despicable as it is in the Elder, would be somewhat worse in them: but all is not Covetousness, that they are apt to call so: and Extravagance is a Mark only of Folly, not of Generosity, or Good-nature. They, who squander needlessly at some Times, will be driven to spare improperly at others, when they should have been bountiful: and so will make a truly mean Figure, because they would needs make a falsely great one. Then, if their Profuseness rise to any Height, it creates them great Uneasiness with their Parents and Friends: whom it always fills with Fears about them, and frequently straitens and distresses: it occasions (as they must run in Debt) Difficulties and Losses, oftentimes Ruin, to those, with whom they have Dealings; and usually to such of them, as deserve it least: they must bring themselves into continual Perplexities: they will of Course be tempted, either to drown the Sense of them by Intemperance, or to aim at getting out of them by dishonest Arts and Methods, of one Kind or another; yet probably in vain. And if they come to have Families, they will in all Likelihood utterly undo those, who ought to have been the Object of their tenderest Love and Care.

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Remember therefore to set out cautiously: consider well, that to rise in your Way of Living is very easy; but to lower it, one of the hardest Things in the World: and lay it down for a Rule, that no Income whatever can support Negligence and Expensiveness.

11. The eleventh Proof, which young Persons should give of a sober and reasonable Mind is to fix upon, and keep closely to, some fit Manner of spending their Time. For none of it is given us to be thrown away: and unless they apply early to what they ought, a Habit of Idleness will soon take firm Possession of them. To those of lower Rank, Necessity reads the daily Lesson of Industry: it will make their Condition comfortable and reputable: and if they think of being maintained at their Ease, they are infallibly ruined, Body and Soul. But whatever Rank we are of; without some Employment, Life must be tedious: and unless proper Employment be chosen to fill up the empty Spaces of it, gross Imprudences and Sins will be crowding into them. Or if the Idle could avoid these, yet surely it is bad enough, that they cannot avoid making a despicable Figure in the World; that their Inattention, which will gradually produce an Incapacity of

conducting their own Affairs, must subject them to an absolute Dependance upon others, who may impose upon them without Fear, to their great Prejudice, in more Ways than one. And besides, how painful will the Reflection be to you, (if ever you have any Reflection) what happy Circumstances you might have been in, what an honourable Appearance you might have made, had it not been for this contemptible Quality! But a still more alarming Thought is, that those Abilities and Opportunities of improving yourselves, and being useful to your Fellow-Creatures, which God hath bestowed on you, he will hereafter call you to answer for: and he hath warned you beforehand, that *the unprofitable and slothful Servant, who hath hid his Talent in the Earth, shall be cast into outer Darknes*^d.

All People therefore, and the Young especially, should keep themselves, not only employed, but employed to good Purpose. Both their Friends and they should be very careful, not to direct their Aim to a wrong Point: for there are unhappy Mistakes of this Kind. Such Things are frequently made the Study and Business of Life, as those who employ themselves in

^d Matth. xxv. 25, 26, 30.

them had much better know nothing of; at least can be little the better for knowing ever so well. But they take up a groundless Fancy of their own, or follow a weak Judgment or silly Example of another; set their whole Hearts on gaining a Reputation in some errant Trifle; and so, with great Pains, become very accomplished, and good for nothing. Not that slighter Accomplishments, if they be real and suitable to our Station, are to be overlooked: or Beginners in Life to be severely blamed, if they do place a little higher Value on such Matters than they deserve. But much Care should be taken by those about them, and still more by themselves, (for who is so nearly interested?) that Occupations of mere Amusement do not fill up too much of their Thoughts or Time. Perhaps they are very innocent, perhaps they are very elegant: and therefore even the well-disposed, amongst others, indulge their Inclinations for them without Scruple. But still there is an essential Difference between Things of Entertainment only, and Things of Use: and young People should be formed, as soon as possible, to attend to this Difference; and should always remember, that the Subjects for their Minds to dwell upon, the

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Employments for their Days to be spent in, are partly the particular ones, that belong to the several Situations, in which they are now, or probably will be placed; partly the general ones, of improving their Understandings in proper Knowledge, but above all their Hearts in the Love of God and their Duty: and to throw away Life upon other Pursuits to the Prejudice of these, is not only an Imprudence, productive of great Inconveniencies in this World; but a Sin, justly liable to Punishment in another.

12. And lastly, one Instance more of Sobriety of Mind, which ought to be sacredly regarded by the Young, is preserving and expressing a due Esteem and Reverence of such as are farther advanced in Years. It is true, the natural Temper of the two Extremes of Life is very different: but Providence hath kindly mixed them together in Society, for mutual Benefit. Undoubtedly the Aged are subject to Imperfections and Faults: yet probably you often accuse them unjustly: or if not, have not you Imperfections and Faults too, upon the whole more justly disagreeable to them, than theirs are to you? Still these ought not to hinder you from being loved:

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nor should those hinder them from being respected. They should interpret candidly the Sallies of your Inconsiderateness: and you in return, should pass over the little Failures in Point of Temper, which Infirmities may render very excusable in them; and bear with the Restraints of possibly too great Caution, Parsimony and Regularity: though in general their long Experience must have made them better Judges of these Points, than you are as yet. But indeed it will for the most Part be in your own Power, to take off these Restraints from yourselves in a great Measure, if not entirely. Check but that Levity, which raises in them Suspicions of you; behave so, that you may safely be trusted; and endeavour to be agreeable to them, as they do continually to be useful to you: and all will be well. Your Sprightliness and gay Humour was unquestionably designed in some Degree to comfort and enliven their declining Age. Be not unwilling therefore to spend some Share of it that Way: but bestow a little of your Cheerfulness upon them, in the Season when you have Plenty of it, and you will give them a great deal of Pleasure, when they want it very much. It is a truly good-natured Part to do so. It is a
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proper Gratitude for the many Kindnesses and Advantages, which all young People have received from their Friends of riper Years. And they may make you large Amends for it, often in your worldly Interests, but almost constantly in such Information and Direction, as will do you more Service, than all your Agreeableness can afford them Delight. Probably it is not long, that they may continue with you. Study to profit as much as you can by them, before you are left to yourselves: and give them such a Prospect of your doing well, that they may quit the World with Comfort. In every common Art and Business, you shew great Regard to experienced Instructors: and can they fail to be of proportionable Use in the Science of conducting Life, the most important and most difficult of all others? Besides, the Respect, which you are now perhaps unwilling to pay, you will in Time be very uneasy, if you do not receive. Therefore preserve a Rule of Behaviour, that you will one Day find your own Account in; and suffer it not, by your Fault, to be lost out of the World in the mean while.

I have now gone through my Design. If in the Prosecution of it, I have urged Motives of a
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temporal, as well as a spiritual Nature, so hath the Scripture in a Multitude of Places. And if, together with greater Duties, I have recommended some of lesser Moment; and, amongst other Faults, cautioned against several, which may commonly be thought not to amount to Sins: yet whoever hath a just Concern for those, who are setting out upon the Journey of Life, will think they need every useful Admonition for the Way. And it is highly requisite, that all Persons, especially all young Persons, should cherish, even in smaller Instances, that Soberness and Rightness of Mind, which else will soon be neglected in more important Matters: following conscientiously that Injunction of the Apostle, with which I conclude. *Finally, Brethren, whatsoever Things are true, whatsoever Things are honourable, whatsoever Things are lovely, whatsoever Things are of good Report:—These Things do: and the God of Peace shall be with you* °.

° Phil. iv. 8, 9.

S E R M O N V.

P R O V. xvi. 31.

The hoary Head is a Crown of Glory, if it be found in the Way of Righteousness.

LONG Life is what all Men naturally desire: and yet to most no Part of Life seems to have much Happiness in it; and that Part least of all, to which living long brings them. In their younger and middle Years, between Business and Pleasure, they amuse themselves with tolerable Success. But old Age disqualifies them by Degrees from relishing either: and at the same Time, that it takes away their Supports, adds to their Burthen too; by many Infirmities of Body and Mind, which often make them disagreeable or contemptible to others, and uneasy to themselves. Besides, in the former Stages of their Journey, Expectation of somewhat better to follow,

bears Men up; but in the concluding one, this World hath no new Hopes to present, and many new Fears arise from the approaching Neighbourhood of another: both because dying gives Terror, when living gives little else but Pain; and because the Consequences of dying must of Necessity be viewed with most Concern, when we have least Room left to secure their being such as we could wish.

And yet, since, if God be good, Life must be a Blessing; long Life, it is reasonable to conclude, must, in its own Nature, be proportionably a greater Blessing. For we cannot think he would plant in us the Desire of what could only make us miserable: or when he hath ordered every Thing else with such gracious Foresight, would leave any Portion of Man's Being, especially that which is the Maturity of it here, destitute of proper Enjoyments. Old Age then, how much soever Men complain of it, surely may be both honourable and happy: nay indeed we have plain Proofs, that in fact it sometimes is so, as well as too often otherwise.

It is therefore a very useful Inquiry, since the Thing is possible, how we shall set about it; what Way we shall take to render that Part
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of our Lives reputable and comfortable, which we are some of us in, most of us hoping for, and all of us travelling towards. Now to this Question the Text gives a full Answer, *The hoary Head is a Crown of Glory, if it be found in the Way of Righteousness.* Where undoubtedly such Glory is meant as comes attended with Satisfaction and Delight. It is very true, much of our Happiness here arises from Things not in our Power; a good Constitution of Body, a composed and chearful Turn of Mind, an advantageous Situation in the World at first, and favourable Occurrences afterwards. But still the far greatest Part depends on our own Prudence. And since Virtue and Piety comprehend the chief Parts of Prudence, and without them there can be no Prudence to any Purpose; the wise Man hath named the principal Thing, *Righteousness*, as if it were the only one, that *crowns the hoary Head with Glory.* To illustrate and confirm his Judgment in this Point, I shall endeavour to shew,

- I. What Assurances Virtue and Piety contribute towards making old Age honourable and happy.
- II. That they must be effectual.

I. Now they contribute to this End by two Means: laying the proper Foundations for it in the former Part of Life, and leading to the proper Behaviour for it in the latter.

1. Laying proper Foundations in the former Part.

Neglect of right Conduct in our early Years is the main Reason, that our advanced ones are despicable and miserable. The Irregularities of Youth make old Age infirm and painful, when otherwise we might have been vigorous and gay, and enjoyed an Autumn, not at all upon the whole inferior to the Spring. The idle Expences of Youth load our declining Days with Perplexities and Distresses, when a little timely Care might have secured us ever after from Anxiety, and furnished us with Plenty of all Things against the Time when we need it most. Neglect of Application to proper Knowledge in the Beginning of our Course leaves us destitute, through all the Conclusion of it, both of the Entertainment and the Respect, which we then peculiarly want, and Knowledge is peculiarly fitted to give. For as the Son of *Sirach* observes, *If thou hast gathered nothing in thy Youth, how canst*

canst thou find any Thing in thy Age^a? Again: early Indulgence of ill Temper must fix a Habit, that will fill our Life, especially the Close of it, with perpetual Vexation and Disquiet: Default of cultivating in Time valuable Friendships, excludes us from the Benefit of them, when they would be more valuable than ever: Default of educating well those who belong to us, makes them grow up to be Curses, instead of Blessings, to our grey Hairs. But, above all, forgetting *our Creator in the Days of our Youth^b*, deprives us of those joyful Hopes that revive and warm the decaying Frame, and sinks us down under the heaviest and justest Apprehensions and Terrors. All these Evils Virtue and Religion would prevent: perhaps intirely; at least in a great Measure. And it is a dreadful Thing, that Men will not be brought to consider this soon enough. They will not only slight the Motives of another Life, though it be very near us all, but will scarce look a single Step before them in this. For surely did they see what they are doing, and believe in earnest, that they are employing their Youth to make their riper Age unhappy, they would change

^a Eccles xxv. 3.^b Eccles. xii. 1.

their Conduct. But all they think of is, to crowd into a small Space as much Self-indulgence as they possibly can; till they almost destroy the Relish of that by Excess in it; and absolutely all Regard to any Thing better. And then, after the gay Madness of a few Years, what remains of Life grows insipid and wearisome; and the Reliefs they commonly fly to only increase their Shame and Wretchedness. But right Behaviour will secure us that Regard, even in the first Part of our Days, which we must not in any Part expect without it. *For honourable Age is not that which standeth in Length of Time, nor that is measured by Number of Years. But Wisdom is the grey Hair unto Men, and an unspotted Life is old Age^c.*

These Considerations, though much more useful, when they are thought of soon, yet are never too late to be highly beneficial. Indeed our Condition can at no Time be either so bad or so good, but we may still make it worse or better, as we please. They who have lived ever so ill, may by undoing, as far as they can, what they have done amiss, prevent the worst Consequences of it; and obtain, in a

^c Wisd. iv. 8, 9.

small Time, no small Degree of Favour from God, Honour from Men, and Comfort in themselves: while, on the other Hand, they who began ever so well, may, by deviating from their Duty in the finishing Period, overturn all. To prevent this, it is needful we should inquire into the

2d Method, that Religion and Virtue take to crown old Age with Glory: which is, directing to proper Behaviour when that Age comes. And such Behaviour consists again in two Things: avoiding the Faults, to which we are then peculiarly subject; and practising the Duties, to which we are peculiarly bound.

I. Avoiding the Faults, to which we are then peculiarly subject. And here,

The most common Faults which Persons in Years are charged with, often unjustly and inconsiderately, but sometimes also with too much Reason, are, Artfulness and Insensibility, Selfishness and Avarice. As they become, by Length of Time, more knowing and more practised in the Ways of Men, they contract a Disinclination to frank and open Dealing, and are apt to carry Prudence so far, that it degenerates into Craft. Their Tempers also growing less tender, and gradually callous, by seeing and

going through the various Evils of Life, they have not always a sufficient Sensibility of Heart remaining, to ensure to others kind and compassionate Usage from them. And these are Sins of great Infamy and great Guilt: which Religion and Virtue strictly prohibit; and both enjoin and encourage the most honourable Fairness and friendliest Humanity, as ordinarily conducive to our Interest as well as Credit in this World, and certainly the Way to endless Felicity in the next.

With the Errors, just mentioned, is usually connected, one of very bad Repute, yet very frequent in old Age, a mean and penurious Behaviour. They who are sparing in their younger Days seldom fail to be much more thrifty in their Decline: and sometimes the profuse, when they leave off that Folly, endeavour to make Amends for it by running into the opposite. Yet, one should think, the aged, as of all Persons they are in the least Danger of wanting, should be the least fond of hoarding, and the farthest from strong Attachments to the World, as they are the nearest to having done with it. Perhaps indeed longer Experience of the Vicissitudes of Things gives them livelier Apprehensions of what may still happen.

happen. But as no Provision can absolutely secure them, going beyond the Bounds of reasonable Caution is taking much Pains to little Purpose. Laying up for Posterity is another Excuse, and very often a false one. For where they have no one at all, that either Nature or Reason binds them to lay up for, they will be as anxiously busy and frugal, as if they had ever so many: a Case which *Solomon* hath described admirably well. *There is one alone, and there is not a second: yea he hath neither Child nor Brother: yet there is no End to all his Labour, neither is his Eye satisfied with Riches; neither saith he, For whom do I labour, and bereave my Soul of Good? This also is Vanity; yea, it is a sore Travel*^a. Probably indeed somewhat of the industrious and saving Turn was allotted by the Wisdom of Providence to old Persons in general, because most of them have young ones depending on them, that need it. And if they have, to neglect them for the Sake of indulging their own Pleasure or Indolence, is unnatural Wickedness. But still, sparing and accumulating without Reason or Use, is both Sin and Folly. The chief Inducements to it seem to be, that, former Gratifications

^a Eccl. iv. 8.

losing their Agreeableness, Men are driven to take up with this: which also they look on as the most certain Means of making those about them, for their own Interest, behave well to them. But surely they had much better, with respect to themselves, have pitched at the first on such proper Things for the Objects of their Esteem and Desire, as they could not fail of delighting in to the last; and with respect to others, it is far wiser to aim at real Regard from them, by virtuous Instruction given them, and prudent Kindness exercised continually towards them, than to be content with this wretched Method of procuring by Hoards of Wealth a mere Pretence of Regard from them. For they who on such Grounds pay Court to the aged outwardly, can scarce avoid despising and hating them inwardly; and sometimes long for their Deaths, as Nothing is to be expected from them during their Lives. Instead therefore of thus tormenting themselves and those about them, old Men should throw aside needless Cares, and venture to partake of fitting Comforts: enjoy Good cheerfully themselves, and do Good cheerfully to others. For why should we not chuse to be thanked and blest for those Acts of Beneficence now, which, if we omit till we die,

it will be said we only bestowed what we could not keep: whereas if we give when we might have withheld, this is a voluntary Sacrifice, and an Evidence to our own Hearts, as well as to the World, that we act from a right Principle.

Some indeed cannot part with much beforehand: and to part with all, is seldom or never discreet. The Advice of the *Preacher* hath in general a very just Foundation: *Give not thy Son, thy Brother or Friend, Power over thee while thou livest, and give not thy Goods to another: lest it repent thee, and thou entreat for the same again.—For better is it, that thy Children should seek to thee, than that thou shouldst stand to their Courtesy. In all thy Works keep to thyself the Preeminence: —at the Time when thou shalt end thy Days, distribute thine Inheritance*^c. But then on the other Hand, to grudge those who belong to us the Expence of a proper Education, or what is requisite for disposing of them decently in the World; to deny them the Means of appearing suitably to their Rank, and keep them in Straits, while we have Superfluities ourselves, is very cruel, and equally pernicious. In all Likelihood, either they will grow niggardly

^c Eccles xxxiii. 19, 23.

in Imitation of us, or extravagant from Hatred to us; or their Spirits will be broken, or their Opportunities of advancing themselves lost: or if they should do well, in Spight of our ill Behaviour to them, what Thanks can we possibly deserve from them, though we do leave them at last, what they would have been much more obliged to us for a moderate Share of, prudently bestowed some Years before? And this holds, not only concerning our Relations, but all our other Dependants, and indeed the poor also: that when they want it, and we can afford it, the sooner we are liberal to them, the better. And therefore the same Person, who was the Author of the foregoing Rule, delivers also the following: *Do Good unto thy Friend before thou die; and according to thy Ability stretch out thy Hand, and give to him*^f.

Thus then Religion and Virtue direct the aged to avoid the Faults of that Wariness of Temper, to which they are peculiarly inclined. And another Fault, of which they are in no little Danger, but cautioned against it by the same Means, is that of giving improperly and unequitably what they do give, either in their Lives or at their Deaths. Now and then

^f Eccles. xiv. 13.

perhaps the Vanity of doing generous and charitable Actions makes them too negligent of their Families. But much oftener the Vanity of raising a Family makes them negligent of the needy and the worthy, their Servants, their Intimates, their Relations, nay, it may be, their very Children, excepting one; upon whom they heap all they can, and leave every one else disappointed of what they had Reason to expect, and perhaps in Distress for Want of it. Sometimes a different Sort of Evil happens: the aged are imposed on by artful People, that get about them, and ingratiate themselves by Flattery and Compliance and Officiousness, till they obtain Interest enough to carry every Point they will, in their own Favour, or for the Advantage of those that employ them; and supplant others, that, in Nearness, or in true Desert, either stand before them, or at least on a Level with them. Nor are the aged, with all their Caution, by any Means so much on their Guard against these Wretches as they ought. At other Times the Fault is more intirely their own. They suffer little Piques and Prejudices to influence them, contrary to the justest Motives, and their own former kind Intentions. Now
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this is very hard and wrong; that a groundless Dislike, or a trifling Offence, or even every great Offence, should change a reasonable Disposition of Things: above all, when perhaps Expectations have been given, and the World made acquainted with them, and Steps in Life taken in Consequence of them. Whatever Right they may plead to do as they will with their own, they are not at Liberty to act thus; but ought to look on the proper Disposal of their Fortunes as a Matter of Conscience; and take into serious Consideration every Circumstance that should naturally have Weight in the Case. Nearness of Relation is a Ground of Preference, which should never be disregarded without the strongest Motives to the contrary: Motives, which not only we ourselves think sufficient, but other good and wise Persons, uninterested in the Case, allow to be such. Farther Claims, never to be overlooked when we have Ability for taking Notice of them, are, Kindnesses formerly received, Promises given, Length and Faithfulness of Service or Attendance, Merit, Want. And all these Demands the Uncertainty of Life admonishes every one to provide for paying as soon as he can; but the certain Approach of Death requires

quires the old not to postpone it a single Day. And performing this Duty, as they ought, is one valuable Instance of Righteousness, which will give them Comfort in their own Breasts, procure them Regard (so far as it is known) whilst they live, and do them lasting Honour when they die.

Another Danger, to which the aged are yet more peculiarly exposed, is Ill-temper. Decay of Spirits, and Loss of Strength, joined often with beginning Disorders, which they feel in themselves, before others perceive it, are very apt to make them fretful and impatient: a Thing so natural, that the young and healthy should make large Allowances for what they may want Allowance for themselves, sooner than they imagine. But the old and infirm should consider, that the several Ages of Life have their several Trials assigned them; and this is one of theirs: which Virtue and Religion as much require they should not be overcome by, as that the young should not give Way to any of the Temptations which beset them. Being out of Humour without knowing why, is childish Weakness. Being so, because we perceive ourselves declining, is quarrelling with the Constitution of Things.

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and with Providence itself. And though our Decline be attended with Wearifomenefs and even Pain, yet Peevifhnefs under thefe will only add to them. Befides, it is very hard, that thofe about us muft be made to fuffer more than is neceffary, becaufe we are uneafy; and it is great odds, but they will fhew they think it hard by fuch Behaviour as will augment our Uneafinefs: whereas bearing with Mildnefs and Patience, for the fhort Time we have left to bear, what God pleafes to lay upon us, is expreffing a Refignation very acceptable to him, and a Sweetnefs of Difpofition very delightful to all that fee it. They who act thus will feldom fail to be attended on with Pleafure; to have, as they well deferve, every Expreflion of Regard and Tendernefs fhewn them, and every Method taken, which Love and Pity can invent, to alleviate their Sufferings.

It is therefore both the Duty and the Wifdom of the aged ftudiously to preferve a compofed and even Mind; to look upon Things in the moft pleafing View they can; to turn their Thoughts and Difcourfe to make others chearful when they can; at leaft to appear willing and inclined to let others make them fo;

fo; and when they cannot rise to any Height of good Humour, to keep however from falling into bad.

But instead of acting thus, too often they increase the Moroseness, which their own Infirmities breed in them, by a much less excusable Fault, a malevolent Envy at the Health and Strength and Gaiety of others. Now this is highly blameable; instead of rising from the Feast contented and thankful Guests, to grudge those who come after them what they have already had their Share of, and may still have a further and very entertaining one, if they please; by continuing candid Spectators of those Scenes, in which their Time to act is past. But the Pleasure, which perhaps they might otherwise take in such a View, is frequently palled by a Suspicion, that their Company is wanted no longer; that all about them are grown weary of them, wish them dead and out of the Way. Now indeed where at any Time this is true, that young Persons murmur at the Goodness of God in granting their Parents and Friends that Length of Days; which they will certainly in their Turns, (whatever they think now) desire for themselves; it is both so wicked, and usually so

ungrateful and imprudent too, that no Wonder if it raises great Concern in those to whom it relates: which however they will do much better to conceal and moderate, than express and indulge. But then to imagine such a Thing, without evident Cause, is giving ourselves as much needless Uneasiness, and doing the Person suspected as grievous Injustice, as well can be. Human Creatures are but seldom so unnatural: and excepting a few, who are very profligate, they hardly ever think the Lives of others too long, unless they find their own made unhappy by them, without deserving it. Therefore let us but be sure to take Care of our Behaviour, and be our Stay what it will, we shall seldom if ever have Ground to doubt our Welcome. Jealousy in all Cases, but especially when attended with its most common Attendant, Ill-temper, is the likeliest Way in the World to make that true, which it apprehends to be so. Those therefore, who would prevent their Deaths being longed for, must make their Lives, if possible, agreeable and useful. They must be doing Things for the Benefit and Satisfaction of the Generation that is rising under them; and give them what Prospect they are able of being well paid for

waiting a while. They must shew themselves easy to be pleased, and receive kindly the Regards paid them, and the Services done them; neither resenting it, nor wondering at it, if there be some Failures in both; as doubtless there were formerly in their own Behaviour at the same Age. They must endeavour to make the Time that young People spend with them not only as improving, but as easy as they well can; and after all, not require too much of it; but both allow, and indeed contrive for them, such proper Seasons of innocent Relaxation and Amusement elsewhere, as it must be known they cannot but desire. They who in their early Days were treated with this Humanity themselves, are inexcusable unless they afterwards treat others with the same: and such as were not, should remember, not only how strictly they were bred up, but how hardly they bore it, and how unreasonable they thought it.

At present indeed too great Indulgence is much the commoner Fault, and will certainly appear, (may I not say, hath abundantly appeared already?) to be a most fatal Error; worse by far than any moderate Degree of over-great Rigour. But the Extremity of it

may be full as bad as total Negligence. The one makes those that are guilty of it despised; the other makes them hated; and which bids fairest to ruin those that are educated under its Influence would be hard to say. Sometimes the same Persons have both these Faults at once. Their Favourites can do nothing wrong; those out of Favour nothing right. And such Partiality is the readiest Way to spoil both. To the former it is a dangerous Privilege: to the latter, a Provocation that may drive them to Despair: and the Importance of each Error demands our utmost Care to avoid it, by preserving an impartial and considerate Conduct. On the one Hand, young People ought absolutely to be restrained from criminal Pleasures, and obliged to such Application and Employment of themselves, as their Duty and Condition require. Nay, whatever hath but a Tendency to make them wicked or useless, must, in Proportion to that Tendency, be discouraged and prohibited. For elderly Persons are far from having the Sense they ought, either of their past Sins or their present Obligations; if because they had formerly Vices themselves they indulge those who belong to them in the same Vices now. But then, on
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the other Side, it is a grievous Fault too, if the Consciouſness of their own youthful Irregularities induce them, when they are old, to suspect and condemn others without Reason. For what can be more unrighteous than to punish the Innocent, or think no one is innocent, merely because we know ourselves to have been guilty? Nor is another Conclusion, though frequently drawn, by any Means, a just one, that in our younger Days we were under such and such Restraints; perhaps too, (if we have not forgot) were tolerably well contented with them; and therefore no one that belongs to us shall ever have any greater Liberty. But we should remember, that different Tempers require different Treatment: and even the Customs of different Ages must have Allowances made to them, and in some Measure be complied with. It is very natural for the aged to think highly of the Practices of their own Times, and be displeas'd with the Novelties which another Generation introduces. Nor can it be denied but in several Respects there is at present sufficient Foundation for such Dislike. But this however must not be carried too far. In Matters that are indifferent it is of no Importance what Usages

prevail : or if a less becoming, or less convenient one, doth take Place ; provided that be all, the Harm is not great. The World hath always had its Follies of this Sort as well as others : only, when they are out of Date, they are soon forgotten. And though we should carefully dispose young People, to comply with the Dictates of good Sense, even in the least Things, because that leads them to do so in greater ; yet their smaller Deviations from it must be born with : and to inveigh against these as heinous Crimes, is confounding the Distinctions of Things ; and, by overstraining the Point in Trifles, we lose the Regard, that might else be paid us in Articles of Importance.

And indeed more considerable Instances of Misbehaviour in Youth, ought to be animadverted on by the Elder with due Moderation. For the Heart may not be near so wrong, as the outward Action : and prudent Gentleness will often reclaim those, whom harsh Treatment will exasperate beyond Recovery : especially if they can persuade themselves, as they easily do, that any Part of it is unjust. Therefore it should be a constant Rule, to hear them patiently in their own Defence ; admit their Excuses, as far as they are at all well grounded ;

ed; and place their Failings before them in that Point of View, which is likeliest to convince their Judgment, and gain their Esteem: for till that is done, nothing is done effectually. To this End they should always be permitted the Freedom of a decent Reply: and if they should sometimes abuse that Freedom a little, taking a mild Notice of it will generally be the best Way to shame them, or at least should be tried first.

There is likewise, in Matters which are at all disputable, another Motive for this Conduct. Undoubtedly, in general, the aged have had by far the greatest Opportunities for seeing and weighing Things; and are the fittest Judges of their Nature and Consequences. The Presumption is intirely on the Side of their Opinion: and this ought to be considered much more than it is. But then they have not always used their Opportunities to the best Advantage. They may have stood still a great while without Improvement; and consequently be in some Respects behind those, whom in Years they precede. It is not impossible, but the Notions, by which they judge now, may have been taken up altogether accidentally at first, when they were as raw and thoughtless,

as those whom they direct and reprove. Or, however, though in plain Matters, as known Duties and Sins, and allowed Instances of common Prudence and gross Folly, we cannot be mistaken; yet in others, the wisest may sometimes judge wrong, and the most unexperienced hit upon the Truth. Mildness of Temper and Speech therefore is very useful, on this Account amongst others, that if we should happen to mistake, we may confess it without Reluctance or Loss of Credit; (for it will be in vain to think of concealing it;) and may deserve more Respect, instead of less, from those whom we treat with so much Fairness and Condescension. When both Sides are ingenuous enough to act thus; when a superior in Years can frankly yield to the better Argument of a younger than himself, and the younger in Return behave with Modesty, and a Sort of decent Confusion, at the Advantage he hath happened to gain; it is hard to say, which Character is the most amiable; and it is great Pity that both are so rare.

I must not proceed further at present: and possibly some may think, I have dwelt too much already on Particulars, not important enough to be looked on as religious Obligations:

tions: and that this Sort of preaching is not preaching Christianity. But I beg them to consider, that the Design of the Gospel is to make us good in small Matters, as well as great; happy in our present State as well as our future; that, for want of observing such Rules, as I have now given, much Wickedness and much Misery obtain in the World; and when they are neglected, as they are too often, by Persons *professing Godliness*^e, their Profession is dishonoured, and their Salvation endangered. The common Duties therefore of common Life, from the highest to the lowest, must be distinctly set forth, and earnestly inculcated. But then it must be constantly understood at the same Time, that we have not Strength to perform any Duties, but through the Grace of Christ: nor will our Performances be accepted and rewarded, but through the Merits of Christ. Always remember therefore, what surely you need not always be told, that *as the Branch cannot bear Fruit of itself, except it abide in the Vine, no more can we, except we abide in Him: He is the Vine, we are the Branches: he that abideth in Christ, and Christ in him, the same bringeth forth much Fruit: for without Him we can do nothing*^h.

^e 1 Tim. ii. 10.

^h John xv. 4, 5.



S E R M O N VI,

P R O V. xvi. 31.

The hoary Head is a Crown of Glory, if it be found in the Way of Righteousness.

THE Uneasinesses of Life in every Period of it are many, and often heavy: but old Age abounds with Sufferings beyond the rest. Some of these proceed unavoidably from our Make, and the Situation in which we are placed; but so much a larger Share from our own ill Conduct, that the wisest of Men hath not feared to pronounce in the Text, that an uniform Course of Religion and Virtue would crown even that Part of our Days with Honour and Happiness, in which we are too commonly despised by others, and wretched within ourselves.

To illustrate and confirm a Truth so instructive and important, I have proposed to shew from these Words,

I. What

I. What Assistances Religion and Virtue contribute to this most desirable End.

II. That they must be effectual.

Now the first Way, as you have already seen, in which Religion and Virtue contribute to render old Age honourable and happy, is by directing us, in the former Part of Life, to make the necessary Provisions for its being so: not to ruin our Healths beforehand by Irregularities, nor our Fortunes by Extravagance; not to make our grey Hairs contemptible for want of timely Application to useful Knowledge and Business, nor hateful by a preceding Life of Injustice or Ill-nature; nor fill our Souls with Terrors, when our latter End approaches, by forgetting *our Creator in our Youth*. For these are Burthens, with which we need not, unless we will, load our declining Years.

I then shewed you, that after this previous Care, Virtue and Religion direct us, how to behave aright, when the Time comes; to avoid the Temptations, and practise the Duties, which it brings along with it.

I. To avoid the Temptations.

Amongst these, one capital Danger is that of a selfish Disposition: which too frequently manifests its peculiar bad Influence on the
aged,

aged, in Artifice and Fraud, Hard-heartedness and Insensibility; unseasonable and immoderate worldly Pursuits; in their denying themselves what is fit; or grudging to bestow on others, what Nearness of Blood, or Promises made, or Expectations raised, or Gratitude, or Friendship, or Generosity, or Charity, require. And besides all this, they are very liable to give improperly and unequitably what they do give. Another Fault, that greatly diminishes both the Honour and the Comfort of the Old, is ill Temper: sometimes arising from their own Infirmities, and Envy at the Health and Gaiety of others; sometimes from thinking, that they are not respected and esteemed enough, and indulging Suspicions that their Death is wished for; sometimes again, from seeing younger People, especially those under their Care, conduct themselves in a Manner they disapprove.

Under each of these Particulars, I laid before you the Maxims and Methods, which Virtue and Religion prescribe, for the avoiding of Dishonour and Unhappiness in the concluding Scenes of Life. I now proceed to an Error of a different Nature; into which they, who escape the former, frequently fall, though equally contrary to the Rule of Duty; I mean,
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Fondness for unallowable Gratifications and Amusements.

Vicious Pleasures in old Age are doubly immoral. Offences against Modesty and Chastity at that Time of Life are unnatural, void of all Excuse, and deliver over those who commit them to a most peculiar Sort of Contempt. Offences against Sobriety and Temperance, far from cheering and enlivening, in any proper Manner, oppress and precipitate declining Age; and turn the Wisdom, which should procure Reverence to the hoary Head, into gross and often public Childishness, if not worse. Continuing therefore to these Years in Follies, which we ought never to have begun, is exceeding bad: and nothing but beginning them at these Years, of which there are sometimes Examples, can be worse.

But suppose old Persons only to dote upon innocent Levities, they must expect to be ridiculed for it by the livelier Part of the World, and lamented by the more serious. That no prevailing Taste for any Thing more valuable, should be even yet acquired, is very deplorable: and throwing away, in this idle Manner, the small Remainder of their Days, after all the foregoing Part, will render their Case completely

pletely wretched. A Life well spent hitherto, would have made better Ways of employing their Time agreeable now: and one ill spent will make them absolutely necessary. Not that the aged are to be totally debarred from fitting Relaxations. Very often, by Reason of Infirmities of Body or Mind, some Indulgences of that Sort become highly requisite for them. And indeed, unless there be very particular Occasion requiring it, old Age is not the Season for Men to increase their Application to any Thing that fatigues them; but to moderate it gradually, and give themselves Ease in Proportion as they need it. Besides, it is a good-natured Part, sometimes to join a little in the Diversions of the young; which also we may be able thus, much more effectually than by any other Way, to superintend and bring under prudent Regulations. But to make this, or any Thing else, a Pretence for gratifying Inclinations, that we are ashamed of owning; to fill up as many of our Hours, as we possibly can, with idle Entertainments; to pursue them eagerly; be lavish of Expence upon them, and make them the Business of Life; to be continually seeking out for still more Opportunities of running away from Thought, and of

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destroying Time, instead of improving it to the noble Purposes of our Being; is always contrary both to Religion, and to Reason itself; but more especially inconsistent with that Seriousness and Dignity of Character, which the aged beyond all others are bound to support. What may be pardonable; or even justifiable, in Youth, will often fit very ill on them: and the same Things, done by the one and the other, are no longer the same. Every Station and every Age hath its distinct Propriety of Behaviour. And it is a principal Step, both towards gaining and deserving Esteem, to understand and maintain this Propriety. But the strictest Attention to it will justly be expected of that Age, which hath nothing to boast of, if it hath not Superiority of Judgment and Discretion. All Affectation therefore of Youthfulness, when Youth is over, whether in our Appearance, our Discourse, or Occupations, will disgust those that see it: and be on good Grounds thought, if not a Sin, yet a very blamable Weakness, and that of a wrong Mind. People are never justly liable either to Censure, or to Ridicule for being what they are and must be; but for labouring to seem what they are not, and perhaps cannot be.

And

And as their acting an ungraceful Part, will be observed, so they will not fail to have, either such Intimations from others, or such a Conscioufness of it within themselves, as will give them an Uneasiness from Time to Time, to which nothing, but growing wiser, will put an End. Therefore on every Account it ought to suffice them, that they have been fond of Trifles and Vanities, as long as ever it was tolerable to be so: and they should now put on another Character once for all, that will be more easily sustained, and become them better; withdraw themselves like the venerable *Barzillai*, (whose Resolution was doubtless recorded as a Pattern ^a) from the Delights, and the Pretensions that are become unsuitable to their Years; and leave them willingly to the succeeding Generation.

By this Time, it may be hoped, I have gone through the chief Temptations, against which the Aged ought peculiarly to guard themselves. The next Instruction, given them by Religion and Virtue, is

2. To practise the Duties, to which they are peculiarly bound.

Indeed most, if not all, the Duties of Life belong to every Part of it: but some of them

^a 2 Sam. xix. 35.

are more especially the Business of one Part, some of another. And the first of this Sort, incumbent on Persons advanced in Years is, serious Reflection on their past Conduct; accompanied with earnest Endeavours to undo, as far as they can, whatever they have done amiss, and rectify the Errors of their busier and warmer Days. It is very true, no one of our Days ought to pass over us, without carefully asking ourselves, what we are doing: and if we neglect it, till we are nigh the End of them, many important Things will be forgotten, and yet so many disagreeable ones crowd into our Memory, that we shall set about the Inquiry into our Condition with little Heart; and go through it, if at all, with great Pain. It is a fatal Mistake, not to consider how we act, till we have almost done acting. But however, when this Mistake hath been committed, it is beyond Comparison, better to own it and amend, than persevere in it. And therefore such above all others, as have Reason to know, that hitherto they have given themselves but small Leisure for Recollection, should now at least, before the Time is quite past, retire a little from the World into the Secret of their Hearts, and coolly think over their own History: not

to see, what further wrong Things they can add to those, which they have done already; not to place their Conduct in false Lights before others, or palliate it to themselves; but to judge impartially, as in the Presence of God, after weighing the various Obligations they have been under, to him and their Fellow-Creatures, how far they have fulfilled, and how far they have transgressed, the one or the other. A Review of this Kind, uprightly and diligently made, may very possibly give many of our Actions an exceedingly different Appearance to us, from what they bore in the Heat and Hurry of our livelier and more thoughtless Years. Still, if the new Light, which we may thus receive, could be of no other Use, than barely to shew us, what in Reality we have been and are, some perhaps would imagine it no very desirable Thing. But as it may enable us, even yet, to become what we ought to be; all must confess it to be important beyond Expression. No Scheme of Life indeed can be more absurd, than resolving beforehand to spend it inconsistently; one Part in doing ill, the other in being sorry for it. And seldom do they, who set out with this Resolution, execute more than the first half. But

whenever it doth happen, that any such, or any other Person, is convinced of his past Sins; though his Reformation must be uncommonly exemplary, to be of equal Value with Innocence; yet, if it be at all sincere, it must be unspeakably preferable to final Impenitence. For there is great Virtue shewn, in breaking off the Chains of inveterate Habits, confessing and quitting favourite Errors, and bearing patiently that Variety of Reflections which the Vicious and Thoughtless are extremely apt to throw upon all, who by ceasing to act like them, appear to condemn them. Nor will this amiable kind of Goodness ever miss of its Reward. God will graciously accept of such Acknowledgments as we can make, though we can never make sufficient; provided we trust not haughtily in the fancied Merits of our imperfect Repentance, but humbly throw ourselves on his promised Mercy in our blessed Redeemer. And wise and good Men, far from reproaching us with the Faults we have searched out and forsaken, will be industrious to give us Marks of their Esteem: an abundant Compensation for losing the good Word, perhaps not the good Opinion, of our former Companions in Sin.

The more piously and virtuously Men have lived, the less Necessity they will have in their old Age, for so minute a Review of their Ways: but then they will receive the greatest, the most seasonable Comfort from it. And however good they have been; upon strict Inquiry, they will be very likely to find a much larger Number of Blemishes and Spots, than they thought of, that have stuck to them in some Part or other of their Journey through this dirty World; which it may afford their Hearts inexpressible Ease, in their dying Hours, to have cleared their Consciences and their Characters from, by judging themselves, before they go to be judged of the Lord.

A Mind, thus humbled and purified, will naturally turn itself to the next Duty, which peculiarly belongs to the Aged, that of religious Exercises and Contemplations. These Things, in the active Part of Life, are much less practised than the Obligations we are under, and the Direction and Consolation we might receive from them, require. And false Excuses of Want of Leisure are pleaded, whilst Leisure enough can be found for Trifles without Number; and for too many Sins, which

consume no small Part of the Time of those, who imagine, or pretend, they have none for Religion. Indeed the Pretences they make for neglecting the Worship of Him who made them are so wretchedly poor, that in any other Case, of the least Seriousness, they would be quite ashamed to mention them. But this, it seems, is a Subject, which they scarce conceive it worth while to talk or think seriously upon. The Time will come, here or hereafter, when they will be of another Opinion: and the sooner it comes, the happier for them. The Cares and Pleasures of Life, when they are at the Height, are far from being any Reason to forget God: but the Decline of Life brings new Reasons with it for remembering Him. That calmer Season at least hath many vacant Hours; and what can fill them so properly and beneficially as Acts of Devotion and pious Meditation, adapted to the State in which we then are? The Aged have had longer Experience of God's Mercies than others, to furnish Matter for Thanksgivings: and it may be feared have been guilty of more Transgressions or Omissions, that will give them Cause for Confession, Self-abasement, Deprecation of Punish-

Punishment. Then besides, they must surely, by this Time, have fully seen and felt the Vanity of the World in every Shape. Hitherto deceitful Hopes have amused them on, and kept them in Pursuit of one Thing or another, that hath never answered their Expectations; or if any did for a while, it is gone, and nothing new remains to promise themselves. Now then, at farthest, the utter Delusion of aiming at Happiness, otherwise than by Religion and Virtue, is visible to the weakest Eye: and nothing appears of real Value but the Consciousness of acting right, and the Prospect of being rewarded for it.

These then are the Thoughts which alone can support and enliven old Age. And how uncomfortable soever a Stranger to such Thoughts may imagine this Condition to be; yet in Truth it is a great Blessing to perceive the Necessity of making that our last Refuge, which would have been at all Times our wisest Choice. Not that, in such a Situation, Men are to weary themselves with tedious and unprofitable Tasks of Piety, or sour their Minds with a scrupulous Attention to serious Things, and no others; but only, in Proportion as they are able, to attend conscientiously on every

Office of public Worship, with sincere Endeavours of profiting by it; to excite and nourish good Dispositions, by the Use of such Books as are fittest for that End, especially the holy Scriptures; to lift up their Souls, from Time to Time, to the greatest and best of Beings, place themselves before him, and exercise towards him the various Affections which are his Due: detaching their Hearts, by these Means, from the World they are going to leave; and forming them more perfectly to the Temper and Employment of that State, of which they are now upon the Borders: not disquieting themselves, if they do not succeed in this as well as they could wish, but going on to do it as well as they can.

The remaining Duty of aged Persons is to imprint on others, whenever they have Opportunity, the same right Sentiments of Life and Conduct which they have acquired themselves. For it is St. *Paul's* express Injunction, that they be *Teachers of good Things*^b. Too commonly they take just the contrary Course; first, live immorally; then seek for Arguments to make their own Minds easy in Wickedness; and lastly, set up the Business of bringing over

^b Tit. ii. 3.

Converts to it. And when the Authority of old Age is employed thus in serving Vice or Profaneness, especially if it be adorned with Rank, or Wit, or the Reputation of Knowledge, it is capable of doing incredible Mischief. But surely it might in all Reason suffice them that they have been bad themselves: and there is no Manner of Need that they should add to it the Guilt (which one should think there were not any violent Temptation to) of corrupting others to no Purpose. It cannot be so evidently and so highly for the Interest of Mankind, to live without Principle and die without Hope, as to make it worth their while to become Preachers and Missionaries of Infidelity and Profligacy: a shocking Employment, by which some have chosen to make their grey Hairs detestable; and done many Times more Harm, by thus patronizing Sin, than before by committing it.

But another Sort, who mislead the Young less visibly, but very fatally, and in much greater Numbers, are they; who, having learnt, in their earlier Days, neither Notions of Religion nor Irreligion, nor of any Thing in the World but Profit or Pleasures or Honours; lead

lead others after them in the same wrong Way of thinking, and do infinite Mischief, without ever considering, whether they do any.

Now the more there are amongst those to whom Age gives Influence, that, either designedly or inadvertently, promote Wickedness, the more zealous the Remainder should be in opposing it: which, if they were, they might hope for great Success. The Judgment of such, as have weighed Things maturely, and seen and experienced their good and bad Consequences long, and known the World thoroughly, and being now ready to quit it can have no farther Interest to serve in it, must be of great Weight, in Confirmation of what Reason and Religion teach: especially if it be delivered with Prudence and Mildness, and proper Demonstrations of true Good-will. Nor can there be a nobler Way of spending the Conclusion of Life than to exert all our Abilities, and all the Credit that we have acquired through the former Part of it, in doing the most important Service to those whom we shall leave behind us: to redeem our own Miscarriages by reclaiming others; to warn the Unthinking, confirm the Unsteady, and give

give public Testimony, on full Trial, to the Cause of God and Goodness.

But then, besides testifying in general, that this is the Way to Happiness, the Aged have many Advantages for recommending more particularly, sometimes one Duty, sometimes another, as Need shall be. And besides what Men usually call Duties, there are other Things, no less really so, which they who have once gained Respect, may easily induce many of those who know them, to practise to their great Benefit: that Prudence, which preserves from Sin the best Way, by preventing Temptation; that Reasonableness of Temper, and Propriety of Behaviour, in every common Incident, which habituate Men to the same Temper and Behaviour on Occasions of Importance. Nay, Things that contribute nothing to the Morals of Men, if they be conducive in any Way to their Convenience or innocent Delight, it belongs to the Wisdom of the Aged to be diligent in teaching: and whatever they have perceived in Life to be either good or bad, they are bound to admonish others to do or avoid; that so, when the Time comes, they may give up the World to those that follow them, if possible, better than they found it;

or however, as little worse as they can in every Respect.

These then are the Directions, which Virtue and Religion furnish, to make *the hoary Head a Crown of Glory*. What remains is to shew,

II. That, would we but observe them carefully and prudently, they must be effectual to that End: as far, I mean, as, in the present State of Things, any Instrument almost can be depended on for attaining any Purpose. And the Proof of this will lie in a small Compass.

It is no Wonder in the least that those Persons are destitute both of Honour and Comfort in their old Age, who have neither prepared as they ought for it, nor will behave as they ought in it. But to have born the various Trials of a long Life (many of them, God knows, very hard and difficult) with a Spirit and a Conduct well suited to each, and be still going through the Remainder in the same Manner; or at least, after deviating for a Time to have returned into the right Way again; with a genuine Concern for having ever forsaken it, and to be now making Amends by more exemplary Goodness for past Failings: these are Characters intitled to universal Esteem. And though Length of Time may wear off superficial

ficial Ornaments, yet the solid Merit of Disinterestedness and equitable Bounty, Mildness and good Temper, Sobriety, Modesty, and Decency, serious Reflection, rational Piety towards God, and judicious Good-will towards Men, shewn in promoting Virtue, Prudence, and useful Knowledge; this, under all Disadvantages of any other Kind, must have Charms, to which no one, that is not void of Discernment, can be insensible. *O how comely a Thing is Judgment for grey Hairs, and for antient Men to know Council! O how comely is the Wisdom of old Men, and Understanding and Counsel to Men of Honour. Much Experience is the Crown of the Aged, and the Fear of God is their Glory^c.* At Length indeed the Mind itself may come to bear great Marks of Decay, as well as the Body. But even then, the very Ruins of so beautiful and majestic a Structure will be looked on with Reverence. And as long as Persons in Years can enjoy any Thing; such Regard as this, paid by those about them, in which Nature hath wisely and kindly disposed them to take peculiar Delight, must support and revive them to a great Degree.

^c Eccles xxv. 4, 5, 6.

S E R M O N VI.

But they have farther and most valuable Satisfactions, that depend not on others at all. As many as have proceeded so far in Life with Innocence, must feel from it the highest Joy: they who have truly repented, cannot fail to be sensible of much Consolation. And the Delight of recollecting how happy it is, that they were not cut off in their former Sins, will more than outweigh their living to undergo not a few Sufferings. Besides, if old Age brings on some Uneasinesses, it removes others. Many Passions grow calm then, which formerly, if they did not hurry us into Follies and Crimes, gave us much Trouble to govern them: many Afflictions, that once were exceeding bitter, soften by Degrees into a pleasing Kind of melancholy Remembrance. And though, the longer we live, the greater Number of mournful Spectacles we must see; yet a suitable Provision is made in our Frame, that as Age increases, we are, generally speaking, less and less affected by whatever Loss happens to us. Then, under the heaviest Burthens that we experience, it must surely be some Relief to think, that there cannot be a great deal more to come upon us. In the Beginning of Life we have large Room to be
appre-

apprehensive concerning what may befall us during the Course of it. But towards the Cloſe, when almoſt all is got tolerably over, and neither Temptations, nor Misfortunes, nor Dangers, private or public, can give us any long Diſquiet; to be ſo near finiſhing our Voyage, and juſt entering into Port, muſt needs inſpire us with great Tranquillity and Peace of Mind. From old Age, as from a Station of Security, Men may look back with Complacence on the Hazards they have eſcaped, and delight themſelves anew in the Gratifications they have enjoyed, For to lament their being paſt, when we have had our due Share of them; is both Ingratitude and Abſurdity. Indeed it is a conſiderable Felicity in our Make, and ſeems calculated particularly for the Benefit of the Aged, that the Memory of paſt Pleaſures is agreeable, and yet that of paſt Sorrows far from painful.

But farther ſtill; recalling to their Thoughts the Perſons and Occurrences they have known, the Times that have gone over their Heads, and the wonderful Diſpenſations of Providence to themſelves or others, with which they have been filled, muſt be a fruitful Source of improving Amuſement to them; and
relating

relating these Things, an acceptable Entertainment and Instruction to others. Years, as they advance, do indeed lessen our Activity; but perhaps by no Means our Usefulness: for to advise and direct is both the superior Part, and that for which fewer are qualified, than for executing what is resolved. Or, to put Matters at the lowest, how little soever the Aged have an Opportunity of doing, they have at least that of suffering, as becomes good Christians; of bearing the Inconveniencies of their Condition with a chearful Acquiescence; and being content to be useless, if Infinite Wisdom sees it fit they should. So that the very same Infirmities, which disable them from exercising some Virtues, directly lead them to exercise others, though not so conspicuous, amongst Men, yet as truly valuable in the Sight of God, and therefore as sure to increase their Reward. Whatever then is the Will of their Heavenly Father, they are prepared for. If it be his Pleasure, that they should languish on here, they have great Encouragement to *wait with Patience all the Days of their appointed Time till their Change come*^d. And if he calls them soon, they have

^d Job xiv. 14.

all possible Reason to obey willingly; and yield up their Breath with Thankfulness into his Hands who hath indulged them so long an Use of it, and knows it would be no more a Blessing to them. *O Death, acceptable is thy Sentence unto him whose Strength faileth, that is now in the last Age and vexed with all Things^e!* Well may such resign their Spirit quietly to him who gave it, and praise his Goodness, that *they go to their Grave in a full Age, like as a Stock of Corn cometh in, in its Season^f.*

To die, is just as natural as to be born. That *one Generation should pass away, and another come^g*, is the settled Law of Things. Our Predecessors have made Way for us, and it is but fitting, that we should make Way for our Successors: that they also, in their Turn, may enjoy the Pleasures of Life, and feel its Pains; busy themselves, and be talked of; die, and be forgotten. *Fear not therefore the Sentence of Death. Remember them that have been before thee, and that come after thee. For this is the Sentence of the Lord over all Flesh; and why art thou against the Pleasure of the Most High^h?* Still it is very true, the Manner in which we

^e Eccles xli. 2.^f Job v. 26.^g Eccles i. 4.^h Eccles xli. 3, 4.

are to pass out of the present World, though a great Part of its Terrors are mere Imagination, hath yet something in it shocking enough; especially when we consider it as being originally the Punishment of Sin. And though, at a proper Period, we may have a Satiety of this earthly Life, as well as of other Things here: yet to expect the intire Loss of our Being then, would be a Thought of dreadful Gloominess; and were this to be our Case at Death, it must affect thinking Persons, on whom that awful Change was coming immediately, with a Dejection and Horror scarce to be born. But our gracious Redeemer hath *delivered them, who else through Fear of Death, would all their Life-time, and especially at the Close of it, have been subject to Bondage*ⁱ. To Believers in Him the blessed Knowledge of a better State shines forth, totally changes the Prospect, and makes our standing on the Brink of this Life, in Truth, the joyfullest Situation we were ever in: for what can be better for us, than that *this Corruptible should put on Incorruption, this Mortal Immortality*^k?

ⁱ Heb. ii. 15.^k 1 Cor. xv. 53.

For the vicious indeed old Age hath no Comfort, and much Terror. There have been few Things in their past Lives, that can give them Pleasure when reflected on; and many, that must give them inexpressible Concern. For the proper Satisfactions of their present Condition they have never learnt to have any Relish; and the Thoughts of their approaching one, it will be hard for them to avoid, and yet much harder to support. A most dreadful Dilemma: to be weary of this Life, yet afraid of the next; and the strongest Fears to fall infinitely short of what there is to be feared. But to the aged pious Christian, the Consideration of hereafter, if dwelt on as it ought, almost annihilates every Thing that could disquiet him here. He will never regret that he is no longer qualified for worldly Enjoyment, when he thinks of the unspeakable Bliss that he knows is at Hand, nor faint under worldly Afflictions, *which are but for a Moment*, since they are *working out for him so soon eternal Glory*¹. The Punishment prepared for the Wicked strike him with no Terrors; but the Rewards prepared for the Righteous fill him with such Comfort, that *though his outward*

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 17.

Man perisb, yet his inward Man is renewed Day by Day^m; when his Flesh and his Heart faileth, he triumphs in the Declaration, that God is the Strength of his Heart, and his Portion for everⁿ. There may possibly have been much wanting hitherto of the Esteem and Honour, with which his boary Head was intitled to be crowned; but now, having fought the good Fight and finished his Course, henceforth there is assuredly laid up for him a Crown of Righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give him at that Day^o.

^m 2 Cor. iv. 16.

ⁿ Pf. lxxiii. 26.

^o 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8

S E R M O N VII.

1 TIM. vi. 17, 18.

Charge them that are rich in this World, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain Riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all Things to enjoy: that they do good, that they be rich in good Works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate.

EVERY Condition of Life hath its peculiar Dangers to be avoided, and Duties to be done, but none hath Dangers more threatening or Duties more important, than that of the Rich and Great: whose Situation, notwithstanding, is seldom considered by those who are in it, as having any Thing to be feared; and is generally imagined by others, to comprehend almost every Thing, that is to be wished. Now the Mistakes even of the lower Part of the World concerning this Matter are attend-

ed with some exceeding bad Consequences; disposing them very unreasonably to envy their Superiors, and be uneasy at their own Lot. But the Mistakes of the Rich and Great themselves concerning the Advantages and Obligations of their Station, produce the most fatal Effects that can be, on themselves and all around them. And it greatly adds to the Unhappiness of their Case, that whilst they have many Things to divert their Attention from what is right, and prompt them to what is wrong; to make the gratifying of their bad Inclinations easy; and support them in the World, let them act as they will; they have commonly scarce any one to remind them, if they act amiss. Intimations of Misbehaviour, however prudently given, are to most Persons disagreeable: but to Persons of Rank they appear disrespectful too. And such of them, as will bear to be told of their managing their Healths or their Fortunes ill, shew a great Reluctance to let their Conduct, in Point of Religion or Morals, be touched with any Seriousness. So that, just where they need Admonition most, they have the least given them. It is but few, that can with Propriety use Freedom enough with them, to do any Good:
for,

for, to flight and distant Hints they think no serious Regard is due. And amongst those that can, there are fewer yet that will undertake an Office, in which they have little Prospect either of Success or Thanks. Indeed the Generality of those that come about them, in all Likelihood, mean nothing but their own Interest, or their own Amusement: and these, they may be sure, will take Care never to offend them by giving them good Advice: but there is much Cause to suspect, what the Great, notwithstanding, seldom do suspect, that they will often court them by giving them bad: or, if they do not directly persuade them into Sin, (which might sometimes be too gross Behaviour) will however more covertly dispose them to it; encourage and countenance them in it; either to bring about some particular End, which they have to serve by it, or with a general View of making themselves agreeable.

To be thus environed with Temptations, and probably sensible of none of them, is a most pitiable Condition. And yet the Rich and Great, when they are led wrong, do not so deserve Compassion, as not to deserve much Blame too. For as there are some Things to excuse their Faults, there are many that aggra-

vate them. Their Education, so costly and laboured in several Respects, must have been conducted with the absurdest Negligence in the most material; if it hath not given them a much superior Knowledge of their Duty, to that which common Persons can usually acquire. Their Disengagement afterwards from Cares, that others are swallowed up in, affords them peculiar Leisure for Thought and Recollection; and the vast and evident Importance of their whole Behaviour, on such a Multitude of Accounts, one should think could not fail of engaging their Attention to every Step they take. So that if they have fewer occasional Admonitions given them; it might be hoped they would have less Need of them: for their very Situation admonishes them constantly, that they are raised by Providence above others, in order to be Authors and Examples of Good, not Evil, to their Fellow-creatures. This is directly their Business and Trust: it is the noblest and happiest that can be. The Labours of it are softened by many honourable and pleasing Distinctions, which God hath bestowed on them; for which he will justly expect they shall make him a Return: if it be such as it ought, they will be eminent for ever
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in the next World, as well as for a few Days in this: And how can Persons be excusable, that are uninfluenced by such Considerations?

It is very true, our Saviour doth express in very strong Terms, the Difficulty of a rich Man's entering into the Kingdom of Heaven. But he means, of such a one's professing himself a Subject of Christ: which required uncommon Resolution at that Time, when all worldly Advantages were to be given up, and the bitterest Persecutions undergone for the Sake of the Gospel. Yet even then no Man was excused, either from embracing or practising Christianity: much less now. And if at all Times the Great have Temptations beyond others, they have also Reasons beyond others for struggling with them, and will be rewarded beyond others for overcoming them. Therefore St. *Paul* in the Text gives them no Dispensations, but only provides for them stronger Warnings; and instead of authorising the Ministers of God's Word to wink at their Faults, requires that they admonish them with singular Earnestness to perform their Duties: the only Prerogative in Relation to this Matter that can be allowed them. But as in general the least offensive, and therefore most efficacious

efficacious Way of admonishing, is by publick Instruction, we usually confine ourselves to that; and the upper Part of Mankind ought to attend upon it more constantly, and hearken to it more seriously, in Proportion as they are less likely to be told their Faults and their Dangers, in private, to good Purpose: and should *suffer the Word of Exhortation*^a to be given with greater Plainness and Freedom to them all in common, the greater Objections there are against taking any considerable Liberties with each of them singly.

And as those of middle Rank, may yet when compared with their Inferiors, be considered as highly exalted, and do accordingly consider themselves as such: all Degrees above the lowest, are concerned to observe the Apostle's Charge: and the very lowest will find their own Failures, and their own Obligations intermixed of Course with what will be said about those of their Betters.

Now the peculiar Dangers of the Rich and Great (for though the Apostle names only the former, the Connexion is so close, that he may well be understood to mean both) arises either from the Eminence of their Station, or the

^a Heb. xiii. 22.

Abundance of their Wealth: and therefore the Text points a Caution against each. But I shall be able at present to treat only of the first: which is, *that they be not high-minded.*

Every Superiority, of every Sort, which Men only imagine themselves possessed of, is too liable both to be over-rated and improperly used. But superior Fortune and Condition are Advantages so visible to all Eyes, create such Dependences, and give such Influence; that it is no wonder, if they tempt to uncommon Haughtiness. Even such as rise to them by Accident, are so eager to have all the World acknowledge them to be what they are just become, that they often quite forget what they were a while before. Such as acquire them by their own Application and Abilities, hardly ever fail to think very highly of themselves on that Account. And they who are born to them, usually set out from the first with despising those beneath them: as indeed to be descended from Ancestors of Note; to bear a Name which others have been accustomed to respect; to enjoy perhaps hereditary Honours, and on every Occasion to be addressed in other Language, than is used to the vulgar Sort of Men; these Things are
enough

their good Opinion and good Will, is mere common honest Policy.

But one Sort of Condescension to Inferiors may be of peculiar Advantage; I mean, listening to useful Information and Advice from them: Things, which the Great are very apt to think themselves above, when every one else sees they have much Need of them. *The rich Man, as Solomon observes, is wise in his own Conceit: but the Poor, that hath Understanding, searcheth him out*^b. Neither Affluence, nor high Rank, by any Means imply Superiority of Judgment; or if they did, the best Judgments often want to be instructed in the Nature and Circumstances of what they are to judge upon; and indeed to be guarded against the Mistakes, to which Inexperience, Inadvertence, or unseen Prejudices, may expose them. And the more important any Matter is, and the less carefully and seriously we have weighed it, the more Necessity there evidently appears, that we should hear others in Relation to it. How attentively then should the Greatest hear the appointed Teachers of Religion: the *one Thing needful*^c to their eternal Happiness; and perhaps the very Thing that many of them have

^b Prov. xxviii. 11.

^c Luke x. 42.

hitherto considered the least, yet possibly set themselves the most to despise and ridicule ! But in their worldly Affairs too, it might prevent innumerable Errors and Distresses, if they would vouchsafe, on fit Occasions, to receive and encourage Lessons of Wisdom from those beneath them. This, you will easily discern, is a very different Matter from being led and governed : to which the most self-sufficient of Men, under artful Management, are often the most subject. It is governing ourselves by exerting the rational Powers, which God hath given us, instead of being Slaves to our Passions and Fancies. We cannot alter Truth : and therefore, how exalted soever our Condition be, we should think it no Disgrace, but the highest Honour, to submit to it. Nor is the Obligation of doing so in the least different, whether we discover it ourselves, or learn it from others. If Reason hath at all a Right to direct us ; it hath an equal Right, whence soever it comes. And the most truly considerable Persons have always been the readiest to follow the Opinion of such, as were in all Respects their Inferiors, whenever they happened to be in the Right. Nor is there perhaps any Part of Humility,
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that

that can give us more Reputation than this, or do us more Service.

But if Humility in the Great could be no other Way beneficial to them; yet avoiding the Guilt of so injurious a Behaviour, as indulging a proud Spirit prompts them to, is surely a Motive important enough. Hence it is that instead of *learning* Forgiveness of *him*, who was *meek and lowly in Heart*^a, they often resent Offences of very small Consequence, nay undesigned ones, very immoderately; and some, even to the demanding of the Blood of others at the Hazard of their own. And though perhaps they themselves began the Injury, yet they imagine their Honour binds them to violate the Laws of God and Man in Order to revenge it: which absurd Notion they have patronized in the World, till Persons, so far beneath them, have taken it up, that one should hope they might be induced to lay it down for that Reason, if not for better. But the Haughtiness of the Great, without being combined with Anger, doth in cold Blood infinite Mischief. And they should consider, that it is the same Aggravation of the Fault, if one who is justly possessed of Superiority al-

^a Matt. xi. 29.

ready, unjustly affects more; as it would be in the rich to pilfer and rob. In Countries of legal Liberty indeed, there is not so much Room, for the Pride of the upper Part of the World to bear hard upon the lower. And truly both may thank God for it: the one that they are thus delivered from the Temptation; the other from the Suffering. For very dreadful is both the Wickedness and the Misery, to which unlimited Power leads: and *Solomon* describes the latter very pathetically: *I returned and considered all the Oppressions, that are done under the Sun: and behold, the Fears of such as were oppressed, and they had no Comforter: and on the Side of their Oppressors was Power; but they had no Comforter. Wherefore I praised the Dead, that are already dead, more than the Living, which are yet alive. Yea, better is he, than both they, which hath not yet been; and hath not seen the evil Work, that is done under the Sun*^c. But though a merciful Providence hath preserved this Nation, freer than any other, from such Extremities; yet every where the Rich and Great make their Inferiors suffer a great deal too much; sometimes by a designed and studied Haughtiness, often

^c Eccl. iv. 1, 2, 3.

by a careless and contemptuous one, which renders them inattentive to what those in lower Life may feel; when perhaps from Principle, such as it is, they would avoid doing Injuries to their Equals, and are by no Means without Tendernefs towards them.

Thus too many treat their Tenants hardly, or permit them to be so treated: sometimes indeed from Avarice; sometimes from the Urgency of Wants which Follies and Vices have created; but frequently, from not thinking it worth while to inquire, whether such mean Creatures are well or ill used, and refusing to be troubled, with their Complaints and Remonstrances; which, though often groundless, may often likewise be very just. Now were we in this wretched Case, we should soon discern it to be extremely cruel in our Superiors, to imagine us undeserving of being regarded and eased in bad Times, or under the Pressure of unexpected Accidents; to indulge their own Love of Money, or keep up their idle Expensiveness to the full, whatever we and our Families might undergo, whose Labour must pay for all; to throw new Burthens upon us, not because we were able to bear them, but because they were unwilling; to subject us,

without Redress, to the Partialities and Resentments of their Agents, or crush us under the Weight of their own; obliging us perhaps to seek a Livelihood elsewhere to our certain Loss and probable Ruin, if at any Time we were less obsequious to them than they required, though on Occasions where we ought to be left free. Such Behaviour all Men would think exceedingly barbarous, were they to experience it: and therefore all should resolve never to be guilty of it, and apply to this Case amongst others, that admirable Exhortation of the Son of Sirach: *Make not an hungry Soul sorrowful; neither provoke a Man in his Distress: reject not the Supplication of the Afflicted, neither turn away thy Face from a poor Man. Turn not away thine Eye from the Needy, and give him no Occasion to curse thee. For if he curse thee in the Bitterness of his Soul, his Prayer shall be heard of him that made him.—Let it not grieve thee to bow down thine Ear to the Poor; and give him a friendly Answer, with Meekness.*

Another Sort of Persons, for whom Superiors too commonly will not vouchsafe to have the Consideration that they ought, are those who come to them upon Business. Obliging

^f Eccles iv. 2, 4, 5, 6, 8.

such to an unreasonable Attendance, making them wait long, and it may be return often, (when perhaps only Idleness, or Caprice, or Occupations that might well be interrupted, prevent their being dispatched immediately) is a very provoking and a very injurious Kind of Statelines. Time ought to be precious to all Men; and is peculiarly precious to those, who have Affairs and Appointments to fill it with, that either must be attended on, each in its Season, or they and theirs must suffer, perhaps be undone. And were it considered, but near so much as it ought, how very large a Share of the Time of others, a few of these proud or thoughtless Men are sufficient to consume, it would be found a Matter of no small Seriousness.

But there is another Fault still worse frequently joined with this; deeming it beneath their Notice, whether such of their Inferiors, as have just and reasonable Demands upon them, are paid when they ought. At the same Time they would think it infamous not to pay, what they lose to the vilest Wretch in the pernicious Practice of gaming, though the Law, for the publick good, discourages and almost forbids their doing it. Notwithstanding

standing which, by a monstrous Perverſion of Language, they call theſe laſt their Debts of Honour, in Oppoſition to the former. It is very true, that Motives, not at all akin to Pride, frequently induce thoſe of high Rank to neglect or even reſuſe ſatisfying their Creditors. But ſo far as they take Liberties in this Reſpect, which, were they leſs conſiderable in the World, they would not dare to take and probably would not think of taking; ſo far their Injuſtice ariſes from a haughty Confidence in their own Greatneſs, and a contemptuous Indifference, to what Inconveniencies and Difficulties they expoſe others. There needs but a little Conſideration to ſee, what exquisite Diſtreſſes ſuch a Conduct muſt produce; and how pitiable the Situation of thoſe poor People muſt be; who, on Pain of loſing all their Buſineſs, dare not reſuſe Credit; and yet are in a likely Way to be ruined, if they give it. The common Method of ſaving themſelves, I fear, is, by making unreaſonable Gains from the good Part of their Customers, to indemnify themſelves for the Delays, and often final Diſappointments, which they meet with from the bad. But this is plainly puniſhing ſuch as uſe them well, for the Faults of others

who use them ill: a Behaviour of which no one should be guilty, and therefore no one should be driven to it; but least of all by those, whose Circumstances either do or might exempt them the most intirely from any Necessity of such Injustice. The Care of being punctual in the Discharge of their Debts, and considerate, for that Purpose, in comparing their Income and Expences, and attentive to keep the latter within the Compass of the former, far from being below the greatest, enables them to shew themselves truly great on many Occasions, when otherwise they could not: but the Figure which they make in the Eyes of Mankind, amidst all their Splendor, for the want of this Care; and the poor Arts, to which they are obliged to condescend, for quieting their Creditors, and supporting their Extravagances, are extremely unsuitable to a Station, that claims distinguished Respect.

Another, very blameable, and very pernicious Instance of High mindedness in the Great, is, imagining the Management of their Families an Attention too low for them. Even that of their Children they very commonly despise to an astonishing Degree. And yet think it no Dishonour, to throw away on every
Trifle

Trifle and Folly, that they can hunt out, many of those Hours, a few of which might do a great deal towards making Life a Blessing, (which now through their Fault is often a Curse) to those whom they have brought into it. Or if they have Humility enough to inspect some Part of their Education, it is usually the outward and shewy, but least material Part: and they would be ashamed of the Supposition of their taking any serious Pains, to plant in them those Principles of Religion and Virtue, on learning which the present and future Happiness of their Children depends; and their own, on teaching them. If Persons can treat the very *Fruit of their Body*^s in such a Manner; no wonder, if the Servants under their Roof are treated amiss. And yet a tender Regard to the meanest of them is unquestionably the Duty of the highest of those who employ them. For our common Humanity requires, that their disadvantageous Condition be not rendered more so than it needs, either by Design or Negligence, of which Nature hath given them as a strong Feeling as their Betters. And therefore, of our own Accord, we should inquire and consider about them: when they

^s Mich. vi. 7.

offer Complaints, we should receive them; and if there be some Impropriety in the Manner of making them, pass over that, as proceeding perhaps from Ignorance, perhaps from a present Sense of suffering; look to the Substance of what they alledge, and grant them due Redress. Again, when they seem to be in a Fault, we should submit to hear patiently, and examine equitably, every Plea they have to make. For there may be Circumstances of no small Weight, in their Favour, both as to what they remonstrate about, and what they are accused of, which we may not have rightly understood or considered; and therefore should permit them to be laid before us. Otherwise we treat them as unworthy of common Justice, and incur that Guilt, which *Job* hath expressed in such affecting Words that they can never be omitted, when this Subject is mentioned. *If I did despise the Cause of my Man-servant, or my Maid-servant, when they contended with me; what shall I do when God riseth up, and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him? Did not he that made me, make him: and did not one fashion us in the Womb* ^h?

^h Job xxxi. 13, 14, 15.

I am very sensible, that entering in Person too minutely into the Particulars of every small domestick Concern, may fit ill upon People of Rank; and perhaps be inconsistent with their Attention to Affairs of more Importance. But so far as they can with any Propriety look into Things, they should be careful, not only to behave mildly and equitably to their Servants themselves, but to see that they behave so one to another. For in large Families especially, there are sometimes dreadful Grievances of this Kind: and requisite Subordination may be sufficiently preserved, without either countenancing or permitting Oppression.

Not that, under Colour of Gentleness to them, we should suffer them to live uncontrolled, and to do as they please. This would be a false good Nature, and extensively pernicious. We may think perhaps, that we shall hurt Nobody by it, but ourselves; and even this we ought not to do. But indeed, along with ourselves, we shall hurt the Fortunes, it may be the Morals too, of those who ought to be dearest to us; for wicked Servants are dangerous Corrupters: we shall set an Example of ill Management in our own Families, which will make it more difficult for
others

others to manage theirs well: and we shall do the greatest Prejudice of all to those, who will probably at present the least complain of it; I mean the poor Wretches, whom we indulge so wrongly. For it is hardly to be hoped, but that our Negligence about their Conduct, will tempt them, either to be dishonest, or idle, or wasteful, in our Service; or vicious and dissolute; or however, forgetful of their Duty to God. And we owe it to them, as we have taken them under our Care, to preserve them, if we can, from all these Sins; to direct their Steps in the Ways of Religion and Virtue; and not expose them to Ruin here, and Misery hereafter, for want of vouchsafing to look a little after them: a shocking Instance of Haughtiness in Relation to *our Brethren for whom Christ died*ⁱ.

I have enlarged so long on these Particulars, in which the upper Part of the World are too *high-minded*, to attend to their Duty; that I must comprehend the rest in a very few Words; which I beg all, who are concerned, to reflect upon more distinctly, and apply to themselves impartially. Whoever makes his Rank or his Wealth a Privilege, either to say

ⁱ 1 Cor. viii. 11.

or do Things to any one that are injurious or unbecoming; or to omit Things that are right and good: whoever makes use of his Inferiors for his own Advantage or Amusement, to their Inconvenience, and neglects them when he hath done: whoever expects more from them, in any Respect, than he hath a reasonable Claim to; or makes his Superiority, by the Ostentation of it painful, or by the Misuse of it detrimental, justly falls under the Apostle's Charge, as a *high-minded* Offender against Man and God. And though Offences of this Kind are heinous in all Persons, yet they are peculiarly so in Christians; whose Rule, which they profess to follow, is: *Be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly Love; in Honour preferring one another: mind not high Things, but condescend to Men of low Estate*^k. *Let nothing be done through Strife or vain Glory, but in Lowliness of Mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every Man on his own Things, but every Man also on the Things of others. Let this Mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the Form of God, took on him the Form of a Servant,*

^k Rom. xiii. 10, 16.

*and humbled himself unto Death, even the Death of the Cross*¹. *All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with Humility: for God resisteth the Proud, and giveth Grace to the Humble*^m.

¹ Phil. ii. 3—8.

^m 1 Pet. v. 5.

S E R M O N VIII.

I TIM. vi. 17, 18.

Charge them that are rich in this World, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain Riches; but in the living God, who giveth us richly all Things to enjoy: that they do good, that they be rich in good Works; ready to distribute, willing to communicate.

IN this Passage the Apostle requires the Ministers of God's Word, first, to caution Persons of Wealth and Rank against the Sins of which they are peculiarly in Danger: then to lay before them the Duties, to which they are peculiarly bound. I have endeavoured already to obey his Injunction, in Relation to the former of the two Sins, which he specifies, that of *being high-minded*; and now proceed to the latter, *trusting in uncertain Riches*: which Phrase comprehends placing the Happiness of Life

Life either in Wealth itself, or in those Pleasures and Amusements, which it is commonly made the Instrument of procuring. The Prohibition therefore of doing this extends to regulate the Acquisition, the Possession and Use of a great Fortune: and to go through the Subject fully, each of these Points must be considered.

I. The Acquisition. In Speculation it seems hardly to be expected, that any one, who is once Master of enough to answer his real and reasonable Wants, should feel any Desire almost, on his own Account, of having more: that he should take much Pains about it, is very wonderful; and that he should do any Thing wrong for it, quite unaccountable. But that they, who have superfluous Wealth already, should both disquiet themselves and injure others merely to obtain a larger Superfluity, is incredibly absurd. And yet, in Fact, these are the Persons whose Passion for augmenting their Incomes is usually the strongest. *When Riches increase, set not your Heart upon them*, is the Caution of scripture^a; and accordingly the Son of Sirach pronounces, *Blessed is the Rich, that is found without Blemish, and hath not gone*

^a Pf. lxii. 10.

after Gold. Who is he? and we will call him blessed; for wonderful Things hath he done among his People. Who hath been tried thereby, and found perfect? then let him glory^b. For indeed neither the mean nor the unjust Things, to which Necessity prompts the Poor, are to be compared with those, which Persons, far above Necessity, will notwithstanding do for Gain. Too many there are, who seem to account their Follies and their Vices in the Number of Things necessary; and though they have abundantly sufficient to live according to their Rank, provided they would live prudently and virtuously, will submit to acquire, by wicked Means, what they want only to support them in wicked Courses. And others, though unable to find out either good or bad Uses for what they have already, yet are not at all the less eager for adding more to it; but will do almost any Thing to enlarge, what they enjoy nothing from, except, as *Solomon* observes, *beholding it with their Eyes*^c; and he hath observed further, that *the Eye is not satisfied with seeing*^d. Desires increase continually, and Cares along with them. Such Acquisitions cannot

^b Eccles xxxi. 8, 9, 10.
Comp. iv. 8. v. 16.

^c Eccl. v. 11.

^d Eccl. i. 8.

really promote even their present Happiness; or supposing they could, yet if using unfair or low Arts to serve their own Interests be excusable in the Wealthy, in whom it is that any Thing is inexcusable? No Temptation is a Warrant for doing wrong; but to do wrong, without any Thing that deserves the Name of a Temptation, is exceedingly bad. And it cannot be Nature, but merely an absurd Habit, wilfully indulged, that tempts Men to accumulate what they have no Need of.

But though Riches alone render Eagerness for more very blameable and unbecoming, yet Greatness added to them doubles the Fault. For exalted Rank absolutely calls for the Exercise of honourable Disinterestedness. And there are several Things, in Strictness, very lawful and honest, which yet are beneath People of Condition; who, as far as they can with any tolerable Prudence, ought ever to avoid the Shadow of a mean Action; and leave no Room for the Imputation of being misled by sordid Motives in any Part of Life. For who shall set the Example of resisting such Considerations, if they give Way to them? And yet what Sort of Example is there more
needful

needful or more beneficial? Not that People of Birth and Fortune ought to think themselves above all Views, either of private Advantage or of due Recompence for their public Services. This, in many Cases, would be a false and romantic Delicacy; unreasonably detrimental to themselves and their Families, and productive of no Benefit, but Harm, to the World around them. But in every Case, to act with a steady Regard to Truth and Right and common Good, and, without Hesitation, to prefer their Character before their Interest, when they interfere, is indeed the general Duty of all Men, but of the Rich and Great above all. Whoever violates it in private Life is almost sure to contract an Infamy, that will make his Gains a dear Purchase. And in Affairs of a more public Nature the Guilt at least is the same; often greater, as the Mischief done, or however the bad Example set, is more extensive. I am very sensible how common it is for Men of Seriousness and Worth in other Respects, not to consider these Things as Matter of Conscience at all, and accordingly to take strange Liberties in Relation to them. But a little impartial Reflection would soon shew, that both Reason and Religion prohibit

the obstructing of useful Measures by Opposition, forwarding bad ones by Subserviency, encouraging Wickedness or Worthlessness, departing from Justice and Equity, for any selfish or any party End whatever. Were even a general Good proposed to be served by it, *Evil* is not to be *done that Good may come*^e; nor will any come from it that would not have been more effectually obtained, and longer preserved, by other Means. And as for Good merely personal, whoever aims at that by Methods hurtful to his Country, whatever outward Advantages he may get by it, will lose all Title to Peace within. And it will be found, if not soon, yet, which is worse, too late, that his own Interest, and that of his Posterity, are so connected with the Interest of the whole, that all Advantages, made by a Behaviour inconsistent with it, will be truly *uncertain Riches*, as the Text calls them; will *make themselves Wings and fly away*^f, in the Time of general Calamity; or perhaps long before, in the preceding general Wickedness, which he hath been instrumental in hastening on: and then Reproach and Shame will be the only Portion left to him or his. But how righteous.

^e Psal. lxxiii. 3.

^f Prov. xxiii. 5.

foever the Acquisition of their Wealth may have been, the *Rich in this World* have Need that a Charge be given them,

2. Concerning the Possession of it. In the Possession alone, some of them seem to have placed the whole of its Value; *making* literally, as *Job* expresses it, *Gold their Hope, and saying to the fine Gold, Thou art my Confidence*^s: and neither employing it to any Benefit of their own, nor of any one else. Now keeping a Heap of Wealth, merely for the Sake of keeping it, is an apparent Absurdity. Keeping it, merely for the Repute of having it, is a very low Inducement. And if laying up against future Accidents be pretended, a moderate Store will suffice for a reasonable Security, and nothing can secure us absolutely. Indeed the larger the Fortune, the more Room for Accidents, in one Part or another of it; and the Loss of a small Part will be as grievous to a Heart set upon Riches, as that of a larger to another Man. Besides, whoever lives only to the Purpose of saving and accumulating, will be tempted by this ruling Passion to a sinful Neglect of the Poor and the Worthy among his Friends and Dependants, perhaps

^s Job xxxi. 24.

among his Relations and very Children. For that important Obligation of *providing for their own, and specially for those of their own House*, (on which St. Paul, in the Chapter before the Text^h, hath laid so great a Stress, and which the Covetous imagine, or pretend, they are so faithfully performing) doth not consist at all in hoarding up for them as much as they can, but in bestowing upon them as much as they need. This not only the Context proves, and the Use of the original Word in other Authors, but the Nature of the Thing. For whoever is in Want of any Thing requisite, is evidently unprovided for, how much Wealth soever another may say he keeps for him, whilst he really keeps it from him. And when any one hath made Provision enough for those who peculiarly belong to him, to put them in a Way suitable to their Condition, he can seldom be bound, and is not always at Liberty, to do more. The Care of them indeed is the first Demand upon him; yet after this is sufficiently taken, and even while it is taking, there may be many other most equitable Claims; and they are all of them intitled to a proportionable Regard by that general Pre-

^h 1 Tim. v. 8.

cept of Reason, as well as Scripture, *Withhold not Good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the Power of thy Hand to do it*ⁱ. Some Occasions present themselves to every one, and frequent Occasions to the Rich and Great, on which extending Acts of Liberality far beyond the narrow Bounds of a Family, is indeed but discharging a Debt; which the Participation in common of human Nature brings upon us, and he that *hath made us all of one Blood*^k expects we shall pay. Nor will he fail to impute it for heinous Guilt, at the Day of Judgment; (as our Saviour hath given us awful Warning) if they whom he hath particularly qualified for Works of Charity, and expressly appointed the Stewards and Dispensers of what he hath bestowed on them purposely for that very End, shall, in Breach of so sacred a Trust, confine to themselves the Bounty which was placed in their Hands, that all around them might receive a proper Share of it.

But some of the higher Part of Mankind adventure to go still greater Lengths than this, to preserve the Possession of what they have: detain from others, without Scruple, what even

ⁱ Prov. iii. 27.

^k Acts xvii. 26

in legal Justice they are intitled to; and defend themselves against the Demand of it, on the Advantage-ground of their Wealth, or their Rank and Station; which render it often difficult and expensive, sometimes impossible for their Inferiors to obtain Redress. A most ungenerous, dishonest, tyrannical Use of the Prerogatives of their Condition! Every one must see it to be so: and they, upon whom the Eyes of every one are fixed, should have no little Regard to this Consideration, amongst others that are still weightier. The Privileges granted by Law to some were granted for the Security of the public Good, not the Patronage of private Oppression. And those, which others take to themselves, of awing or ruining, by the Superiority of their Fortune or their Credit, such as presume to think of recovering what is denied them, are contrary to the whole Intent of Law and of human Society. Not to say, that whoever hath a Spark of true Greatness, will be desirous to put any one, with whom he hath a Controversy, fairly on the Level for an equitable Decision of it, and will say, with *Elihu* in *Job*, *If thou canst answer me, set thy Words in Order before me, stand up. Behold,*

*bold, my Terror shall not make thee afraid, neither shall my Hand be heavy upon thee*¹.

But perhaps they will plead, that the Demands, which they refuse to satisfy, are unjust Impositions. And without Question, if that be really and evidently so, they not only are warranted to stand out themselves, but ought to protect others in doing it, as far as they properly can. But then, it is never allowable to make this Plea, without being satisfied of its Truth; and Men cannot be reasonably satisfied of any Thing, concerning which they have not impartially sought for full Information, and coolly considered it. They may have entertained Suspicions, they may have heard Reports, they may have received positive Assurances, perhaps from the prejudiced, perhaps from the ignorant; but these Things, without knowing what the other Side hath to answer, are no Foundations at all to determine upon, in Matters of Property: where it should ever be observed, as a general Rule, that though we are indeed concerned to inquire what Demands are ill grounded, and reject them; yet we are much more concerned to inquire what are well grounded, and comply with them. Our

¹ Job xxxiii. 5, 7.

Interest only is at Stake in one Case, and often a very small Interest too; but our Honour and Conscience in the other. For whoever presumes, in any Matter, to say, he will not do what Justice or Equity requires he should do, may in other Respects be a worthy Man, but in this he is very blameable: and were the same Temper to influence his whole Conduct, he would be completely wicked. Indeed, to say the Truth, unjustly withholding Things is much the same Crime as unjustly taking them away. And whoever is in Reality, as well as Name, a Man of Honour, were it ever so much in his Power, by his own Authority, or the Complaisance of others, to procure himself unequitable Profits or Savings, without any Possibility of Controul; will not endeavour, will not permit, that a Preference or Favour, injurious to any one Person in the World, shall ever be shewn him. He will check the Baseness of those who would pay Court to him by such vile Practices, and obviate the Fears of such as apprehend they may displease him by acting uprightly, where it makes against him. Far from contriving or desiring to be eased at the Expence of those beneath him, he will require to be put on

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no better a Footing than other Men; and to be charged with his full Share of the Burthens of Society, since he receives his full Share of its Benefits. No Matter, that while he behaves thus, others, and it may be those of his own Rank, will not fail to behave very differently, nor he perhaps to be a Sufferer by it. He will be content, if they please to have it so, that seeking and enjoying unfair Advantages shall be their Character; and refusing and despising them, his.

But besides the Sins, which may be committed in the getting or keeping of Wealth, there are

3. Others, committed too frequently in using it; which Persons of superior Fortune and Rank must be charged to avoid, and which undoubtedly the Text comprehends. For *putting their Trust in Riches*, is just as much the Description of those, who place the Happiness of Life in the Enjoyment of large Estates, as those who place it in the Possession of them. Nay indeed, as a very great Part of the antient Wealth consisted immediately in Plenty of those Things, which give Pleasure in the Consumption of them; so Voluptuousness, which surely the Apostle would not omit on this Occasion,

Occasion, was perhaps more especially designed to be forbidden than Rapaciousness, or excessive Parsimony. And it confirms this, that when our Saviour was cautioning his Hearers against *laying up Treasure for themselves*, instead of *being rich towards God*; the Parable, by which he chose to do it, was that of a Person, who having, as he thought, abundant Provision of good Things for many Years, determined upon it from thenceforth to *take his Ease, eat, drink, and be merry*^m. Now this Man is the Representative of a numerous Multitude, who agree intirely in his general Scheme, though they differ from each other in several Particulars.

Some trust in their Riches so very inconsiderately, that they trust there will never be an End of them, let them be squandered as extravagantly as they will. So they set out with gratifying themselves in every Thing, and looking after nothing; till, having been the Admiration of the Weak, and the Pity of the Wise for a few Years, and contribute to undo their Equals by their Example, and their Inferiors by the Honour of employing and not paying them; they are reduced from the Grandeur,

^m Luke xii. 17—21.

which they should not have affected, to Difficulties that they need never have known. But they will feel them now the more severely for their preceding Indulgences, and yet perhaps will be tempted to plunge forward, through Meanness and Wickedness, into deeper Ruin, instead of retreating as soon as they perceived their Mistake: which last if they would do, with an ingenuous Acknowledgment of it, they would deserve to be treated with much Tendernefs, as having erred only through Inexperience, and thoughtless Levity, not ill Design.

Others, if they do not dissipate their Estates in so wild a Manner, yet use them principally to minister to their Sensuality and Debauchery; Vices, which Men of superior Fortune somehow imagine they have a Sort of Right to be guilty of: and Men of superior Rank behave, too many of them, as if they had no other End of their Being. Commonly they do so in the Beginning of Life, and, in Truth, not uncommonly to the End of it. Yet it is evident, beyond Denial, that Reason no more allows, and Inclination no more excuses, these Things, in the highest of Mankind than the lowest; and were all Mankind to practise them with-

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out Restraint, there would be no living in the World. Indeed there is not any Degree of vicious Practice, but hath its proportionable Degree of Mischief, to some one or another, following it; especially as one wrong Step leads on imperceptibly, and at last, (as the Guilty are apt to think) unavoidably, to many others: and thus the most harmless and best-natured Vices in Appearance, produce perhaps the cruellest Injuries. But the fatal Effects of sensual Indulgences and dissolute Pleasures on the Healths, the Fortunes, the Usefulness, the Reputations, the Peace, of those who give Way to them, on the Quiet and Prosperity of Families, on the good Order and Strength of Civil Society; are so obvious in themselves, so often insisted on from this Place, and so universally acknowledged, (how little soever the Acknowledgment influences Men) that there can be no Need to inlarge on them at present. And were they much less notorious than they are; yet, since God hath been pleased to interpose his peremptory Commands in a Case where surely he may; and to deliver by express Revelation such Rules for the Government of every Appetite, as his Infinite Wisdom saw to be fit; it behoves the
greatest

greatest of those, who presume to transgress the Limits which he hath set them, to consider well with themselves what Plea they will make to him another Day for so doing. That Nature prompts them to it, is not always a Truth; for their Excesses are often a Perversion, a Force upon Nature: and it is never a Justification, unless it be justifiable for Men to do every Thing to which they are inclined: when yet they shew perpetually, that they can, if they please, curb their strongest Inclinations of this Sort, on Motives far less considerable than those of Religion. And for the remaining Excuse of general Custom, what is wrong for one to do is wrong for more; and God will not dispense with his Laws, merely because a Number of his Creatures join to disobey them: besides that Persons of Rank are bound, both in Honour and Duty, to set the Example, not to follow it blindfold. Examples of Vice they have set, till those about them and beneath them have learned much more of it than their Superiors, I believe, wish they had; but they must wish in vain, till they change their own Conduct. And indeed, the Men of Condition especially, have left no Room for any of themselves to make a distinguished

tinguished Figure in Wickedness, without becoming abandoned to the most shocking and pernicious Degrees of it; nor hardly then. But by a virtuous Example they may be most honourably singular; for the Esteem of Goodness is still general, however rare the Practice be. And not only the sober Part of Mankind, but the Bulk of the immoral, (though doubtless more delighted with such as keep them in Countenance, and often poorly affecting to ridicule others) yet, do, and must, inwardly, both respect and envy the worthy few, who adorn exalted Rank by an uniform Regularity of Life, in the Midst of every Temptation to the contrary.

Another very bad Use of Wealth, in which too many seem to place (if one may judge from the Vehemence with which they pursue it) no small Part of their Happiness, is that of Gaming. Whence it arises, that so strange a Passion fixes itself so deep in the Hearts of such Numbers, is hard to say; whether it be an absurd Covetousness, an unmeaning Fondness for Victory, a groundless Persuasion of superior Skill, an idle Conceit of being favoured by Fortune, or a wretched Longing to get rid any now of unwelcome Thoughts and tedious Hours.

Hours. Whatever be its Origin, its Effects are most fatal. That all Play is at all Times, and to all Persons, either unlawful or inexpedient, I would by no Means affirm. But that very often it is so, cannot be denied; and every one, who takes a Share in it, should consider seriously the Nature and Tendency of what he doth. If it inclines him to passionate, and perhaps profane Expressions; if it inwardly agitates his Mind, sours his Temper, or wastes his Spirits; if it tempts him to any Sort or Degree of Fraud or Unfairness; if it mixes him with Company dangerous or unsuitable to him; if it devours more Time than is consistent with a due Attention to the Business of his Station, public or private, or to the regular Order of his Family; if it takes up any Part of the Time that ought to be spent in religious Recollection of his Ways, or other Improvement of his Soul at Home in Piety and Virtue; if either by its direct and immediate, or any concomitant Expences, it leads him into Difficulties and Distresses, that may lead him into Sin; if it consumes a greater Part of his Income than Justice to his Creditors, the Duty of providing for those who belong to him, or of liberal Charity to every proper good.

good Purpose allows; or if, without any other Harm, it engages his Heart, and a Fondness of it grows upon him; if it lowers his Character, and so lessens his Ability of doing Good in the World: nay, supposing it doth him no Harm at all, yet if it doth Harm by his Means to others; if it brings the Worthless and the Wicked into Credit and Familiarity with their Betters; if it intices the Well-meaning by Example, or forces them by false Shame, into doing any Thing, which either in itself, or in their Circumstances, is unlawful or unwise: in every one of these Cases it is without Question very blameable. And whoever impartially considers how he shall preserve himself clear from Guilt, as to all of them, will assuredly find it requisite either to abstain from Play intirely, or to restrain it in every Respect to much narrower Bounds than most Men do. For the Great have, in this Matter, as well as many more, trusted to their Riches so indiscreetly, and neglected other Considerations so intirely; and their Inferiors, down to the lowest of those that can call themselves Persons of Fashion (and even beneath that Rank) have followed them so thoughtlessly and wildly, that Play is become one of the prin-
cipal

incipal Sins of the present Age, is spread to a Degree that none of the former ever knew, and daily brings forth Fruits that many succeeding ones may have Cause to lament.

But supposing Wealth be neither spent in this, nor any of the gross Vices mentioned before; yet if it be employed in ministering to a Course of more decent and refined Luxury, or in supporting such a Pomp of Life as nourishes Vanity and Pride, or in filling so much Time with unprofitable Entertainment, that little Room is left in the Mind for Objects of Importance: these Things also the Rich and Great must be charged to amend. For though their Condition will permit Plenty and Elegance, Diversions and Amusements, perhaps Dignity and Grandeur; yet it will not permit their living to these Things, their being quite taken up with them, and lost in them. For not only the Transition is too easy from several innocent Pleasures to forbidden ones, and Expensiveness in any Way breeds powerful Temptations, both to omit right and to do wrong Things; but supposing these Dangers avoided, yet a Life devoted wholly or chiefly to the Grati- fications of Sense, the Enjoyment of Greatness, or Indulgence of Trifles, is not the Life of a

rational Agent; less still of a moral and religious one; but least of all of a miserable Sinner, who has so very much to account for, and that so very soon. And what our Account will end in, if we make it our great Business here to delight ourselves, without looking further, *St. Paul* hath given us a strong Intimation, when he saith, *they that live in Pleasure are dead whilst they live* ⁿ. Our Saviour too hath forewarned us at large to the same Purpose, in that awful Parable of the rich Man, who, being neither charged with Injustice nor Debauchery, but only described as *clothing himself in Purple and fine Linnen, faring sumptuously every Day, and receiving these as his good Things, on which he placed his Heart; did notwithstanding after Death lift up his Eyes in Torment, and petitioned in vain for a Mitigation of his Sentence* ^o: an undeniably just one upon all those who *trust in uncertain Riches, or any Thing they can procure with them, instead of the living God, who giveth us all Things richly to enjoy*. But this Part of the Text must be reserved for the Subject of another Discourse. I would only observe further at present, that our blessed Lord hath cautioned us no less against *the Cares*

ⁿ 1 Tim. v. 6.

^o Luke xvi. 19—31.

than the Pleasures of *this Life*; and that his Reason to avoid *overcharging our Hearts* with either, is the most forcible that can be; lest *that Day come upon you unawares*^p. Riches and Greatness no one thinks can secure him from Death; but they can make many forget it as absolutely as if they did think so; and please themselves with the Imagination, that they have *much Good laid up for many Years*, till, when they apprehend it least, *their Soul is required of them*^q. Therefore we should often call to Mind the Psalmist's Admonition: *They that trust in their Wealth, and boast themselves in the Multitude of their Riches, none of them can redeem his Brother, nor give God a Ransom for himself, that he should live for ever, and not see Corruption: when he dieth, he shall carry nothing away; his Glory shall not descend after him. Man that is in Honour, and understandeth not, is like the Beasts that perish*^r: like them in this World; but will wish in vain to be like them in the next, when all that have lived unmindful of God, *the Kings of the Earth, (as St. John foretells) and the Great and the Rich and the Mighty, shall hide themselves in the*

^p Luke xxi. 34.
6, 7, 9, 17, 20.

^q Luke xii. 19, 20.

^r Ps. xlix.

Dens, and in the Rocks of the Mountains; and shall say to the Mountains and the Rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the Face of him that sitteth on the Throne, and from the Face of the Lamb: for the great Day of his Wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?

^s Rev. vi. 15, 16, 17.

S E R M O N IX.

I TIM. vi. 17, 18.

Charge them that are rich in this World, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain Riches; but in the living God, who giveth us richly all Things to enjoy: that they do good, that they be rich in good Works; ready to distribute, willing to communicate.

I Have already, in two Discourses on these Words, explained and enforced the two Cautions, which St. Paul requires that the Ministers of God's Word shall give to Persons of Wealth and Rank, against the Sins, to which they are peculiarly liable. And now I proceed to the Duties, of which he enjoins they shall be peculiarly reminded.

I. The first is, to *trust in the living God, who giveth us all Things richly to enjoy.*

After warning them against placing their Happiness in the Pre-eminences, the Pos-

essions or Pleasures of this World, it was very natural to direct them where they should place it: for somewhere we must. And his Precept carries the Proof of its own Fitness along with it. For *the living God* must have the greatest Power to reward our Trust, and he who *giveth us all Things richly to enjoy*, hath shewn himself to have the greatest Will also. All that we are, and have, and can hope for, proceeds from him, and depends upon him. Since therefore he hath made us capable of knowing this; Duty, Gratitude and Interest, conspire to demand, that we devote our whole Being to him; use what he hath bestowed on us agreeably to the Rules, which he hath prescribed, and for the Attainment of the Ends, which he had in View; nor ever be so absurdly attentive to his Gifts, as to forget the Giver: whose Bounty, the more largely we taste of it, ought surely to inspire the warmer Love. And therefore the Rich and Great, on whom Providence hath conferred so many distinguished Benefits and Privileges, (of the Value of which they seem in general highly sensible) are bound, beyond others, to a most affectionate Piety in return: and yet, is it not on the whole visibly true, that these of all others
express

express the least Piety in the whole Compass of their Behaviour.

Too many of them scorn to observe or acknowledge any Rule of Conduct at all, unless it be Fashion, worldly Advantage or Pleasure. A great Part of those who will own, and occasionally seem zealous for the Obligations of Virtue, or however of some Virtues, manifest very little Sense, if any, of the Duties of Religion. Some have never had the Condescension, or imagine they never had the Leisure, once to think of it: others have heard Objections against it, or at least have heard there are such; which, to prove themselves no Bigots, they resolve to believe are unanswerable, without further Inquiry. And not a few, who are fully persuaded, after a Sort, both of the Greatness and the Goodness of God, still are as absolutely negligent of him, as if no Regard whatever were due to him for either. Yet, if we are to reverence Authority, and love Mercy, and believe in Veracity, and be sorry for Offences, amongst Men; why are not all these Things unspeakably more necessary in relation to our Creator? Some Persons, it may be, when they are pressed upon the Subject, will plead, that they are by no Means without

inward Regard to God; though they cannot say, they give much outward Demonstration of it, in Acts of Worship. But how real, how deep, how practical, this Regard is, they would do well to ask their Hearts very carefully: for he that sees their Hearts knows with Certainty; they that see only their Lives, can form a strong Presumption: and no one will ever be a Gainer, by attempting to deceive either God, or Man, or himself.

But supposing them sincere, what Reason can there be, why Respect to God should not be paid outwardly, when Respect to every Superior besides is? For surely his knowing we have it, is no sufficient Reason for omitting to express it: since visible and stated Acts of Homage to him appear notwithstanding, both from Reason and Experience, highly requisite, to preserve and strengthen a Sense of Religion in our own Minds, and to spread it in the World. Or could we have doubted of this otherwise; yet, when he hath expressly required himself to be worshipped, both in public and in private, what Pretence have we to a Shadow of Piety, if we either disobey or think meanly of that Command? And they among the Great, who neglect to honour God, discern

very clearly the Necessity, not only of their Inferiors paying Honour to them, but of their paying Honour to Persons that are a little above them: and would think the Excuses extremely frivolous in their own Cases, which they are determined, shall be good and valid in his. What can this Inconsistence mean? Surely they do not think it beneath them, to *fall down and kneel before the Lord their Maker**, while they can bow so very low to a Fellow-Creature, perhaps a worthless one. And yet really, the Manner, in which they sometimes speak of Religion, looks a good deal this Way. I mean, when they own its Importance to keep the Vulgar in order, and their Obligation to attend on its Exercises conscientiously, for that Purpose; but intimate, that some how or other they themselves are exempted. Now the Difference in the Eyes of God, between the highest and lowest of Men, is as nothing: and if any Part of the World hath Need to be restrained by the Ties of religious Duty; the upper Part, being the least subject to other Restraints, hath the greatest Need: nor can it be more their Interest, that the rest of Mankind should have a Sense of Piety kept up amongst them;

* Ps. xciv. 6.

than it is the Interest of the rest of Mankind, that the Great should. But if this were otherwise, they may depend upon it, that if they will flight Religion ; such as see them do so, will not be influenced by them to respect it. And therefore all the Choice they have is, either to shew some Regard to its Precepts themselves ; or to be content, that their Families, their Dependants, and the World about them, shall have none. This latter is the Resolution, that many seem to have taken : what will follow from it, hath been already felt too much ; and if they go on, will be felt continually more. But God grant, they may rather see, before it be too late, both the Wickedness and the Folly of throwing off that Reverence, which is so justly due to him, whose Laws are, every one of them, Provisions for our temporal Happiness in this World, as well as our eternal Felicity in the next. Men of Rank and Fortune, have a much greater Concern in the Welfare of Society, than others ; and therefore are more bound in Point of Prudence to support Religion : they have a much greater Ability of doing it, and are particularly intrusted with it, and therefore are more bound in Point of Conscience. But what completes their Obligation,

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tion, in both Respects, is, that if they neglect it, the Endeavours of others will, humanly speaking, be all in vain. There may be some Hope, even for a wicked Nation, while the Fear of God remains in any considerable Number of the wealthy and ruling Part of it: but when they once come to be thoroughly corrupted; then every Thing is ripe for Ruin. And therefore the Prophet *Jeremiab*, after complaining very pathetically, of the Sinsfulness and Impiety of the Bulk of his Countrymen, still thought there was one Resource left. But when he found, that those of high Condition were as bad or worse, than the rest; he immediately gives up all, and pronounces their Destruction. *I said, (speaking of the common People) These are poor, they are foolish; they know not the Way of the Lord, and the Judgment of their God. I will get me unto the great Men, and will speak unto them: for they have known the Way of the Lord, and the Judgment of their God. But, these have altogether broken the Yoke, and burst the Bonds. Wherefore a Lion out of the Forests shall tear them, and a Wolf of the Evening shall spoil them; a Leopard shall watch over their Cities;—because their Transgressions are many, and their Backslidings are increased*^b.

^b Jer. v. 4—6.

But it is possible for us to keep up a sufficient Profession of Religion, to secure both public Order and domestic Tranquillity; yet by no Means have a sufficient Sense of it, for obtaining eternal Life: and what will the former avail us without the latter? It is not a merely prudential and political Piety; it is not one, that will only form our Behaviour into an outward Regularity, or affect our Hearts transiently now and then, that will stand us in Stead hereafter: it must be a fixed inward Principle, that moves us effectually to look beyond every Thing in this World, to God the Fountain of all Good: and to take him for *our Hope and our Portion in the Land of the Living*^c. He offers himself for such, and surely we ought to accept the Offer. He is able to make us happy, and nothing else is: whatever earthly Good we have most Pleasure in, quickly fails: or if it did not, in a few Years Life itself will fail: and *what is our Hope, when God taketh away our Soul*^d? In that awful Hour, if we have not him to trust in, we shall have nothing; and the Foundation must be laid now, if we would build upon it then. But Honours, Riches, and Pleasures unaccountably turn away

^c Pl. cxlii. 6.^d Job xxvii. 8.

Mens Attention from these obvious Truths; and present them with such Temptations, to trust in themselves and the external Advantages of their Condition, for all the Happiness they need; that they cannot be admonished too often, to *trust only in the living God*; and that, only in such a Manner, as he hath declared they safely may.

Some have a bold and irreverent Confidence, that all is well with them in Respect to the divine Favour, on no other Ground than that they are guilty of only such Faults, as the Generality of the World are: as if God would not dare to punish a Majority; and Men might be as wicked as they would, provided there were but enough of them so. But over and above this, Persons of Rank seem extremely apt to think, that they shall be treated with peculiar Indulgence: whereas indeed, since *much hath been given them, much will be required of them*^c; and in Comparison, *Mercy will soon pardon the Meanest but the Mighty shall be mightily tormented*^f. Others acknowledge the Necessity of a virtuous Life for all Men, but indulgently presume their own to have been so, which in the next breath hath been far otherwise; and then *say they are righteous* that they are righteous^g, *as the Pharisees did* ^{Will. vi. 6.} ^{g Luke xviii. 9.}

imagine God their Debtor. Or if they do confess they have been faulty; Repentance and Amendment, (which they apprehend to be sufficiently in their own Power at any Time) they conceive, immediately blots out all, and gives them a Claim of Right to Pardon and Reward. Now on the contrary, Reason itself shews, that Forgiveness is an Act of mere voluntary Mercy: and that nothing is due from Justice, even to a Creature perfectly obedient, but that his Being be not made, on the whole, worse than not being. To this, Experience adds, that our best Obedience is very imperfect: and agreeably to both, the Gospel teaches, that *by the Deeds of the Law shall no Flesh be justified; for all have sinned, and come short of the Glory of God: that we are justified freely by his Grace, through the Redemption that is in Jesus Christ, whom God hath set forth to be a Propitiation, through Faith in his Blood; that he might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus*^b. It teaches also, that *we are not sufficient of ourselves, even to think any Thing; but our Sufficiency is of God*^c. That *by his Grace we are what we are; and when we perform good Works, it is not we, but the Grace of God*

^b Rom. iii. 20—26.^c 2 Cor. iii. 5.*which*

which is with us^k; and proceeds from his *holy Spirit*, whom *he will give to them that ask him*^l.

A Doctrine, which so entirely *excludes boasting*^m; must be very disagreeable to human Pride in general: but especially mortifying to those, whom the Flattery of the World, and of their own Hearts, hath accustomed to consider themselves in a Light, extremely different from that of miserable Sinners. For this Reason, amongst others, in the early Ages *not many mighty, not many noble, were called*ⁿ effectually: and down to the present, worldly Greatness hath ever been a powerful Obstacle to Christian Humility, in Faith, as well as Practice. What our Saviour said to the Jews: *How can ye believe, which receive Honour one of another, and seek not the Honour, which cometh from God only*^o, holds but too true concerning the upper Part of those who call themselves his Disciples. They therefore should apply with peculiar Care, to become such indeed; by looking into their own Breasts, and considering well their Need of the divine Mercy; *casting down Imaginations, and every high Thing, that exalteth itself against the Knowledge of God; and bringing into Captivity every Thought to the Obedience of Christ*^p. Trusting

^k 1 Cor. xv. 10.

^l Luke xi. 13.

^m Rom. iii. 27.

ⁿ 1 Cor. i. 26.

^o John v. 44.

^p 2 Cor. x. 5.

in ourselves, can afford us only a false Peace for a Time, which will ruin us at last: *but whose putteth his Trust in the Lord, Mercy embraceth him on every Side*². He hath a Covenant-right to Pardon and Comfort, Assistance in all Good, Protection from all Evil, and everlasting Life to crown the whole.

But then to make his Title sure, he must exert his Trust in all Circumstances, *and walk by Faith, not by Sight*³. Even good Persons are strangely apt to lay much too great a Stress on worldly Advantages. Hence it is, that they desire them so earnestly, and delight in them so highly; without considering, that God and a good Conscience, can make us far happier without them, than others are with them. Were we but convinced of this, we should feel, with what Justice the Psalmist pours Contempt on the vehement Pursuers of what this Earth hath to give. *There be many that say, who will shew us any Good? but, Lord lift thou up the Light of thy Countenance upon us. Thou hast put Gladness in my Heart, more than in the Time, that their Corn and their Wine increased. I will lay me down in Peace; and take my Rest: for it is thou, Lord, only, that makest me dwell in Safety*⁴.

² Pf. xxxii. 10.³ 2 Cor. v. 7.⁴ Pf. iv. 6—9.

For Want of reflecting on whom we depend, we are apt to be elated *in our Prosperity, and say, we shall never be moved*; when indeed it is *the Lord of his Goodness that hath made our Hill so strong*: and the Moment he *turns his Face from us, we shall be troubled*^c. From the same Cause we are apt to be dejected when Afflictions befall us, or Dangers threaten us; forgetting, that though *great and many are the Troubles of the Righteous, the Lord delivereth him out of them all*^d in this World, if it be expedient for him; if not, he shall be supported under them, and they shall increase his Reward in the next. But the Wicked God *shall destroy for ever, and root them out of the Land of the Living: the Righteous also shall see it and fear, and say, with awful Approbation of the Divine Justice, Lo, this is the Man that took not God for his Strength, but trusted unto the Multitude of his Riches, and strengthened himself in his Wickedness*^e.

We should all therefore learn to live more to our Maker; to imprint on our Hearts, and exert in our whole Behaviour, a stronger Sense of his present Providence, and future Rewards. It would be a Direction, a Security, an Im-

^c Pf. xxx. 6, 7.^d Pf. xxxiv. 19.^e Pf. lii. 6, 7, 8.

provement, a Comfort to us, beyond Expression. But especially they, who have the greatest Number of interesting and pleasing Objects in this World to fix their Thoughts upon; they, who may seem to have the least Need of looking further, have indeed the greatest, to be frequently charged, as the Jews were by *Moses*; *Beware lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly Houses and dwelt therein; and when thy Silver and thy Gold is increased, and all thou hast is multiplied, then thine Heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God**. Now if those Persons forget him, who have the most Reason to remember him thankfully, it is double Guilt, and indeed proportionable Folly. For what can be more obvious, than that considering all our good Things, as the Marks of his Kindness to us, must unspeakably enhance their Value; nor can it lay us under any other than beneficial Restraints in the Use of them. Then besides, how naturally doth this Consideration lead us forward to the yet more delightful one, of that sweet Security, in which we may live here under the Superintendency of so gracious a Being; and of those infinitely better Things, which he hath yet in

* Deut. viii. 11--14.

Store for us hereafter. *This God is our God for ever and ever. He shall be our Guide unto Death^y. Thou shalt guide me with thy Counsel, and after that receive me with Glory. Whom have I in Heaven but thee? and there is none upon Earth, that I desire in Comparison of thee. My Flesh and my Heart faileth, but God is the Strength of my Heart and my Portion for ever^z.* There is nothing enthusiastic, nothing extravagant, in such Reflections and Feelings as these, when they are grounded on good Evidence of our Title to God's Favour; and in that Case we cannot act a more pious or more rational Part, than to indulge and enjoy them. Only we must not dwell upon Contemplation so as to forget Action; but, as the Psalmist directs, *Trust in the Lord, and be doing Good^a.* Agreeably to which Rule,

2. The second Duty prescribed in the Text, as peculiarly necessary for the Rich and Great, is, *that they do Good, that they be rich in good Works.* Extensive and important as this Duty is, its Nature is so well understood, and the Motives for practising it so obvious, as to make it unnecessary for me to enlarge particularly upon

^y Pf. xlvi. 14. ^z Pf. lxxiii. 23, 24, 25. ^a Pf. xxxvii. 3.

it. And indeed, if Men of Rank and Fortune observe duly the preceding Part of the Apostle's Charge, they will easily be induced to observe the concluding one. If they are neither so *high-minded* as to neglect and despise their Fellow-creatures; nor so selfish as to *trust in uncertain Riches*, in the Acquisition, the Possession, or voluptuous Enjoyment of them, for their Happiness, but expect it only from their Acceptance with the *living God*; they will naturally imitate him whom they desire to please, particularly in his Beneficence, the most amiable of all his Perfections. And it is not by their Wealth only that they are able, and therefore called to do Good, but by their whole Behaviour, by the Example of their Piety and Justice, their Abstinence from criminal and imprudent Pleasures; by an active, yet mild, public Spirit, and an honourable Disinterestedness in private Life, united with a decent Frugality; by Attention to the Interests, present and future, of their Families, their Friends and Dependants; conducted in such Manner, as always to be consistent with a general Care, to encourage and recommend worthy Persons and Actions, and treat the unworthy with the Disapprobation and Contempt

tempt which they deserve. These are Methods, by which those of Rank and Influence may do much greater Service to Mankind than large Liberalities would do; and by a contrary Behaviour, in any one of the above-mentioned Instances, they may easily be Authors of more Mischief than their whole Estates would compensate for. Now the Apostle hath determined, that *though they bestow all their Goods to feed the Poor*, yet if they have not the Charity to act in other Respects as they ought, *it will profit them nothing* ^b.

But still, though Almfgiving is by no Means the whole of Beneficence, yet it is an essential Part in those whom God hath qualified for it. And he hath *given them all Things richly* and in Plenty, not merely for themselves *to enjoy*, in the vulgar Sense, but that others may enjoy a due Share of them, and they the Pleasure of imparting it; the worthiest and highest Enjoyment of Wealth that can be. This therefore is the Purpose for which we should remember we are intrusted with it, and be bountiful in Proportion to the Trust; for to withhold but Part of what is due; knowingly, is the same Kind, though not the same Degree

^b 1 Cor. xiii. 3.

of Unfaithfulness, as to with-hold the whole, Indeed how much exactly is due, God hath no where determined; nor could there, in the Midst of so great a Variety of Circumstances, have been given particular Rules, fitted to every Case: nor hath any pious Mind, that endeavours to judge and act as rightly as it can, the least Reason to be anxious for Want of a more precise Knowledge, where it is not to be had. But, in general, that both our Charity and our Generosity should bear some decent and liberal Proportion to our Abilities, and the *Rich in this World be rich in good Works* also, not only the Text enjoins, but common Reason dictates; and if we are deficient, the *poor Widow*, with her *two Mites*^c, will far outdo us in that very Virtue, by the Practice of which our Maker justly expects we should appear distinguished.

Nor is it sufficient for the Rich to give plentifully, but they must do it, on every fit Occasion, speedily; *be ready to distribute*, and not stay till the Circumstances of the Poor are beyond Recovery, or their Spirits broken under the Weight of their Misfortunes, but make Haste to help them, and, as far as possible, pre-

^c Mark xii. 42.

vent Distress. *Say not unto thy Neighbour, Go and come again, and To-morrow I will give, when thou hast it by thee^d, and delay not to shew him Mercy^e.* Nor is it enough to be outwardly expeditious, but we must be inwardly *willing to communicate*; not part with our Benefactions *grudgingly and of Necessity*, as obeying the Divine Command merely because we dare not disobey it; *for God loveth a chearful Giver^f.* To the Poor indeed it is all one from what Principle we give, but to us the Difference is infinite. In the Heart lies all the Value. Ever so little will be accepted of Heaven, if it proceed from a Mind that would gladly have done more; and ever so much will be despised, if we secretly wish we could have saved it. St. *Paul's* Exhortation therefore is of unspeakable Importance: *He that sheweth Mercy, let him do it with Chearfulness^g.* And indeed, what can we have more Cause to rejoice in doing? It is very comfortable to think that we are able; it is delightful to think, that by our Means the Miseries of God's Creation are lessened; it is no small Satisfaction to be loved and blessed in this World, but it is the greatest possible

^d Prov. iii. 28.
ix. 7.

^e Eccles xxix. 8.
^g Rom. xii. 8.

^f 2 Cor.

to lay up in Store for ourselves a good Foundation against the next, that we may lay hold on eternal Life, and have it laid to us by our Judge at the last Day. Well done, good and faithful Servant, thou hast been faithful over a few Things, I will make thee Ruler over many Things: enter thou into the Joy of thy Lordⁱ.

^h 1 Tim. vi. 19.

ⁱ Matth. xxv. 21.

S E R M O N X.

MATTH. xi. 5.

—*And the Poor have the Gospel preached to them.*

THESE Words are Part of our Saviour's Answer to the Disciples of *John* the Baptist, who came to inquire, whether Jesus were himself the Messiah, or only a Prophet commissioned to foretell his Coming. For it appears from the first Chapter of St. *John's* Gospel, that many of the Jews expected, besides *Elias*, another Prophet to procede or accompany their great Deliverer; mistaking perhaps the Prophet described, *Deut.* xviii. for an Attendant of the Messiah, instead of the Messiah himself, whom they were apt to consider only in the Character of a King. And as Jesus had now manifested himself some Time to the World, without taking this Character

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upon him, it was natural enough for *John's* Disciples to imagine, that perhaps he came in the other only. *John* himself indeed knew, and probably had told them the contrary; but finding them still desirous of a further Satisfaction, was extremely willing they should have it: and to make the Inquiry as easy to them as possible, directs them to propose the Question, not in their own Name, but in his. On their doing it, Jesus performs in their Sight a considerable Number of his usual beneficent Miracles, joined, as it should seem, with suitable Instructions; and then, without declaring himself expressly, (which he chose, for wise and kind Reasons, to avoid before the Multitude) dismisses them with an Answer, taken, the greatest Part of it, out of the Words of *Isaiab*; in which he had foretold, that the Messiah should perform just such Miracles, and give just such Instructions. For we read, that *in that same Hour he cured many of their Infirmities and Plagues, and unto many that were blind he gave Sight* *. Then he answered and said unto them, *Go and shew John again those Things, which ye do hear and see. The Blind receive their Sight, and the Lame walk; the Lepers are cleansed,*

* Luke vii. 21.

and the Deaf hear ; the Dead are raised up, and the Poor have the Gospel preached to them.

The Prediction, of his applying himself peculiarly to instruct the lower Part of the World, it is probable, he purposely reserved to the last Place ; because his doing it, (besides its being the Completion of a Prophecy) was, though not a Miracle, as the rest were, yet a singular Proof, both of the Humanity of his Temper and Doctrine, and of his Disinterestedness too. For this Method was incapable of doing him Service, and in Fact did him no small Prejudice with those, who had the Power of that Nation in their Hands. The Jewish Teachers and Rulers, who were the same, kept the common Sort at a very great Distance ; and on that, amongst other Accounts, were highly revered by them. The Familiarities therefore, to which Jesus condescended, immediately set all these against him ; and furnished them with an Opportunity of representing him and his Disciples as equally contemptible. Thus, when their own Officers, (whom it seems his Discourses had struck as powerfully as they did the rest of the Multitude) could not help applauding him before their Faces, *Never Man spake like this Man ;* their Answer is, *Have any*
of

*of the Rulers, or the Pharisees, believed on him? This People, which knoweth not the Law, are cursed^b. But indeed the humble and unbiaſſed Minds of the Illiterate are much better Judges of Truth, when propoſed to them, than ſuch as are blinded with learned Prejudice, worldly Intereſt, or ſenſual Pleaſures. To the former therefore principally our Saviour vouchſafed his Inſtructions, grieving to ſee them ſcattered abroad, as Sheep having no Shepherd^c; and they, receiving his Doctrine into *honest and good Hearts*^d, became in great Numbers his Followers: and at firſt were almoſt the only ones he had. For St. Luke tells us, *he lifted up his Eyes on his Diſciples and ſaid, Blessed be ye Poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God^e*. The Goſpel indeed makes all bleſſed who receive it, both by its uſeful Precepts, and its gracious Promiſes; yet the Poor eſpecially, as they have moſt Need of thoſe Directions and Supports in this Life, and Affurances of Happineſs in the next, which it communicates. But then, to receive them, they muſt be not only poor, but his Diſciples. It is not being in a low Condition, but being virtuous and pious*

^b John vii. 45—49.
viii. 15.

^c Matth. ix. 36.

^e Luke vi. 20.

^d Luke

in that Condition, that intitles Persons to God's Favour, as it is not being wealthy and great, but making an ill Use of Wealth and Greatness, that provokes his Displeasure. So that the Happiest or the Wretchedest here, may, according as they behave, be infinitely more happy or wretched hereafter. Our Saviour therefore, we find, in St. *Matthew*, expresses himself thus: *Blessed are the poor in Spirit*^f, they, whose Dispositions are suited to their mean Circumstances, reasonable and resigned, lowly and submissive.

Preaching the Gospel to the Poor comprehends therefore, of Necessity, instructing them in the Duties, as well as the Comforts, belonging to their State. And as our Lord and Master did both, so should his Ministers. The Duties of the Rich and Great I have lately recounted, and pressed upon them, very freely, from this Place. And now, I hope, you, that are the inferior Part of the World, will patiently bear, in your Turn, the same well-meaning Plainness of Speech that your Betters have born; and make the proper Use of it, as God grant them to do. Under the general Term, *Poor*, is contained a considerable

^f Matth. v. 3.

Variety of Degrees; each therefore should apply peculiarly to themselves the Precepts that peculiarly belong to them, and take no Offence at the rest. Of such as are common to all, they may all reap the Benefit; and the Highest may receive some Admonition from what is said to the Lowest; as it will contribute to regulate, not only their Way of thinking and behaving to their Inferiors, but their Temper and Conduct in other Respects. For to be *poor in Spirit*, a very different Thing from Mean-spiritedness, is incumbent on the Wealthiest and the Noblest.

I. The first Duty to be enjoined you, is, Contentedness in your Poverty. A hard Saying, you will be apt to think, when scarce any one is contented in the Midst of Riches and Honours. But the Discontent of such, you will own, is without Reason. And if it can at all arise from mere Humour, without any Thing in Fact to justify it, possibly yours may be unjustifiable too. In order to try then, whether it be or not, let us consider what Ground for Complaint you can alledge.

That some should have greater Plenty than others, is no more a Hardship, than that some should have better Health or Understandings,

or longer Lives. If there could be a Claim of Right to any of these Things, all Men would have an equal Claim; but as they are intirely the free Gifts of God, he may certainly give them in what Proportion he pleases. He hath made some Orders of Beings, as we see with our Eyes, much lower than the lowest of Men; he hath made others, as we are taught in Scripture, much higher than the highest of Men: and doubtless he could have made them unspeakably higher than they are. If then any Part of the Creation may complain of mere Inferiority, every Part may complain without End. If any Part may complain merely because it suffers something, no Part, that we are acquainted with, is exempt from all Suffering. And amongst other Evils, why may not God permit some to feel Poverty?

Indeed, without perpetual Miracles, how can it be prevented? For supposing Equality of Circumstances were to be established at this very Time, it could never subsist. One Person would be industrious and prudent, and mend his Affairs; another, negligent or injudicious, and ruin them. Now that each should possess for his own, what his own Care and Labour hath acquired, is no more than strict Justice;

Justice; that what each dies possessed of, should descend to his own Children and Relations, preferably to others, is surely but reasonable. And yet from hence will of course follow, by Degrees, all the Wealth, and all the Poverty, that we now see.

The first Christians indeed at *Jerusalem* had all their Possessions in common^s; but this neither appears to have been their Practice any where else, nor to have lasted there, nor to have been designed to last, nor to have been more than a voluntary Agreement. For *St. Peter* tells *Ananias* and *Sapphira*, that they needed not, unless they pleased, either to have sold their Land, or put any of the Purchase-money into the common Stock; but that pretending they had put it in all, (which intitled them to a Maintenance) when indeed they had secreted a Part, and how large a Part we know not, was an impious Fraud^h. Community of Goods therefore was no Command then; and very soon after we find, in the New Testament, the Distinction of Rich and Poor established and allowed every where amongst Believers. Nor can the destroying of it be attempted, without the most dreadful Injustice, Confusions,

^s Acts ii. 44, 45. iv. 34, 35.

^h Acts v. 1—4.

and Mischiefs in human Society; nor could the Attempt succeed. And even supposing every one were to agree in the Scheme, who can say what would follow upon it? In all Likelihood, so universal a Neglect of Industry, that but few of the present Conveniencies of Life would be provided; and perhaps Mankind in general would be more destitute than most of the Poor are now.

If then there must be high and low in the World, why is it harder that you should be of the latter Sort than that others should? Were they in your Place, ought not they to be content? And if so, why ought not you now? It may be, notwithstanding the different Appearances you make, the Difference of your Happiness is very small; or possibly you have the most. The Pleasures, for which you envy the Great, are usually very tasteless to them; and would be so to you very soon, if you were in their Place. Then, amidst all that they seem to enjoy, you little know what many of them suffer, and how much of it they suffer from being in the Station they are. You will say indeed, that the Inconveniencies you feel you cannot avoid; whereas, if they feel any, it is their own Fault. But, in Truth, there are

Disquiets, belonging to their Rank, from which yours is exempt. Or allowing it to be their own Fault, what follows? Why, that your Sufferings proceeding from God's Providence, if you behave well under them, you will be rewarded for them; and theirs, proceeding from their own wrong Conduct, without Repentance they will be punished for them over and above. And who can tell, but were you in the same Situation, you might fall into the same Faults? Power and Rank and Leisure and Plenty may indeed be used to excellent Purposes; but prove commonly, in Fact, such strong Temptations to the worst of Sins, that a Station less exposed to Danger, and which obliges you in several Respects to behave only as all Persons ought to behave, may be the greatest worldly Blessing you could have had; even though it were accompanied with much more grievous outward Disadvantages than it is. But indeed some of those Disadvantages consist in mere Opinion and Fancy. You are miserable, because you think yourself poor; at the same Time there are those, who, if they were but in your Condition, would be happy, for they would think themselves rich. And the very Persons, whom you envy, because they

are above you, it may be are pitying themselves all the while, because others are above them. This, you see, is only Fancy and Folly on both Sides.

But as to more real Inconveniencies. Just in the same Manner, that Custom makes a Life of Pleasure insipid to the Great; it makes a Life of Labour and Hardship tolerable and comfortable to their Inferiors; unless they set their own Minds to make it otherwise. Indeed when Persons are reduced, from Ease and Affluence, to take Pains and feel Straits; this is a Burden much heavier. But even then, Reason and Time, and especially Religion, will teach you to support it very well: If it proceed from your own Fault; you have little Cause to repine, and an useful Admonition to learn more Wisdom. If from God's Disposal of Things, his Justice and Goodness will, sooner or later, amply recompense you for it; and all his Servants will have Compassion on you, and help you, in the mean while. The Exhortation therefore is very reasonable: *Fear not, my Son, that we are made poor; for thou hast much Wealth, if thou fear God, and depart from all Sin, and do that which is pleasing in his Sight*¹.

¹ Tob. iv. 21.

Whatever is brought upon thee take cheerfully; and be patient, when thou art changed to a low Estate^k. But such as are born to that Estate, may, for the most Part, be very happy in it, if they will. And so many of them are visibly fully as happy as the rest of the World; that the Defect must lie in their Temper, not their Circumstances, if others are unhappy. When indeed any uncommon Difficulties befall them: when they have numerous Families, and perhaps little Employment; or when old Age disables them from working; or Sickness calls for Relief, which they have not the Means of procuring; then their Case is very grievous; and all, who know it, should be tenderly affected, and assist them plentifully. But even at such Times of Distress, they should recollect, that their Superiors are by no Means intirely free from the same Uneasinesses. Persons of considerable Rank often find it hard enough to bring up and provide for a Number of Children decently: and when Infirmities and Diseases attack the Wealthiest, though they may have better Advice and Accommodations than others, yet these Things are not able to lighten the Burthen near so much, as they that want

^k Eccles ii. 4.

them imagine. And whoever hath Health; which the common People that live regularly, have the most of; and a good Conscience, which all may have that will; seldom needs to be miserable on Account of his Circumstances. *Health, saith the wise Son of Sirach, is above all Gold: and a strong Body above infinite Wealth. There is no Riches above a sound Body: and no Joy above the Joy of the Heart* ¹.

These Comforts therefore you should value as they deserve: you should reflect also, that of every natural Gratification, which God hath provided for Man, (and all the artificial ones are trifling in Comparison) he hath provided you a good Share. You can behold the Light of the Sun, breathe the Freshness of the Air, enjoy the Beauties of the Seasons, relish your Food, and be refreshed by your Sleep, as well as the greatest Monarchs on Earth. The higher and social Pleasures too, of kind Affections, real Friendships, frank and chearful Conversations, are as much within your Reach, as they can be within any one's, if not more. And if your Rank be not an honourable, it is however a necessary one: and proper Care, to do the Business of it skilfully and diligently,

¹ Eccclus xxx. 15, 16.

will and must, and you cannot but be sensible does, make you regarded and sought after by your Betters. On the whole therefore, even the Poor have sufficient Cause, not only to be content, but thankful to Heaven, for its Goodness to them.

Still the Straits and Hardships of some of them, though God's Help makes the worst supportable, may leave them small Reason to be fond of Life. But so may the Pains and Sorrows of the Wealthiest. And even this Situation affords you one Advantage, that you will have less Inducement to regret the Approach of Death; may detach your Affections without Reluctance from a World, the Enjoyments of which are sadly embittered to others by the Thoughts of leaving it; and comfort yourselves with the Prospect of going to that Place, *where the Weary be at rest, and the Servant is free from his Master*^m. *O Death, how bitter is the Remembrance of thee to a Man that liveth at Rest in his Possessions, that hath Prosperity in all Things! But acceptable is thy Sentence to the Needy, and to him that is vexed with all Things*ⁿ. Yet were Deliverance from present Evils by future endless Insensibility the Thing hoped

^m Job iii. 17, 19.

ⁿ Eccles xli. 1, 2.

for, this would be a melancholy Relief. But Religion sets before us an infinitely brighter View of Things: assuring us, that *God hath chosen the Poor of this World, rich in Faith, and Heirs of the Kingdom, which he hath promised to them that love him*^o. Here then is the strong Consolation, that on however bad a Footing any may be, in their temporal Concerns, we are all on a Level, as to our eternal Interests: or, if there be any Difference, 'tis in Favour of the suffering Part of Mankind. *Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted*^p.

But, admitting that there is by no Means any Ground to complain of God, the Poor will alledge however, that they have Reason frequently to complain of their Fellow-creatures, the Rich and Great, for shewing so little Regard to them in their Necessities. And far from denying this, it is our Duty, who are Ministers of the Gospel, to plead it for them, and excite others to abound more and more in tender Compassion and Liberality towards them.

But then, whilst we endeavour, on all Occasions, that due Care may be taken of you who are Poor; we must remind you, not to be in-

^o James ii. 5.

^p Matth. v. 4.

fenfible of what is done, nor to require more than is reasonable. And here, in the first Place, all the common People of this Nation ought to esteem it an unspeakable Blessing, that they live in a Land of Laws and Liberty; where the Meanest is protected from the Oppression of the Greatest, to a Degree, that would be incredible in most Countries. For too many Countries there are, in which your small Properties, your whole Disposal of yourselves, and your very Lives, would be subject to the Will of arbitrary Masters: and you would neither dare to speak a free Word, nor even to worship your Maker in the Way that your Consciences direct you. Surely then your Condition requires of you, great Thankfulness, not only to God, but to your earthly Superiors, who allow and preserve to you such valuable Privileges; and great Respect, in your Manner, both of behaving towards them, and thinking of them: which is very ill shewn by murmuring against them for Things, that you cannot be Judges of, and in all Likelihood are utterly misinformed about.

But farther: the lowest Part of the Poor, in particular, should consider, what ample Provision for their Wants is made here by Law; such

such as no other Nation upon Earth hath established: what noble Foundations, for their Relief under Sickness or Accidents, and for the Education of their Children, private Charity hath laid: and these Things should dispose them to a better Opinion, both of the Comforts of their own Condition, and of the Goodness of those, to whom they are owing. If still you are any of you in Distress, recollect, whether your own Mismanagement hath not been the principal Occasion of it; and lay the Blame, which you ought, upon yourselves, before you lay any upon others. However, even in this Case you are to be relieved; but not so liberally, as if you had deserved better. Consider too, whether even now you are not able to get or to save more than you do: and remember that no one is bound to give you, what your own Diligence and Frugality would supply you with, if you pleased. But supposing your Want, and your Merit, as great as possible; it is not every one, to whom you apply, that can do for you what you imagine. Undoubtedly the Rich are often hard-hearted: but perhaps the Poor, are full as often, immoderate in their Expectations, and unjust in their Censures. You do not know, what Sums
People

People are able to give in Charity: for, in all likelihood, you are neither well acquainted with their Incomes, nor the various Demands that there are upon them, of other Sorts: which last may easily be greater, than you can well apprehend. Besides, you do not know, what they do give in Charity. That which they refuse to you, or your Acquaintance, they may bestow, and perhaps much more, on others, who possibly are full as proper Objects, whatever you may think. And I doubt not, but many a good Man is frequently curs'd, for denying a Trifle to a clamorous publick Petitioner; who hath been largely and willingly bountiful to private Distress'd, perhaps but the Hour before; and it may be, doth more Service by his prudent Choice, than his liberal Distribution. We ought not indeed to pass over any of the Poor, from Partiality or Penuriousness; but *give to every one that asketh*^a, so far as our Circumstances permit us, and the End of giving, will be served by it. But as giving to some would do Harm, and we cannot give to all enough to do them Good, Charity itself forbids us to interpret this Precept in the Fulness of its literal Extent. Yet God forbid,

^a Luke vi. 30.

that any should seek a Pretext for relieving few or none, because many are undeserving, and they cannot relieve every one. Such a Plea will not excuse them in the Opinion of Men here; much less in that awful Judgment hereafter, when the *Rich and the Poor shall meet together* before the *Lord, the Maker of them all*^r. But as the Wealthy should not contrive to evade Almsgiving, so the Needy should not be forward to suspect them of it; but resolve to *judge nothing before the Time, until the Lord come, who will make manifest the Counsels of the Heart*^s.

One Thing more, to be observed by you in Favour of your Condition, is, that God hath not left you to depend solely on the Piety and Charity of the Rich; but provided, that their Love of Gain, their Vanity, or their Luxury, shall be made what they do not design them for, the Means of doing some Good to their Inferiors, by employing them; as well as much Harm, by setting them an ill Example. More Good might be done indeed, and all the Harm avoided, would they act from the Principles they ought. For the Follies and Vices of one Part of Mankind, are far from being the proper Method of maintaining the other. But

^r Prov. xxii. 2.

^s 1 Cor. iv. 5.

however,

however, it is a remarkable Instance of the Kindness of Providence, to have ordered Things so, that they who mean you little or no Service, shall do you a great deal: and contribute, without thinking of it, to make your Condition comfortable, while perhaps they are making themselves wretched, both in this Life and that which is to come.

Upon the whole then it appears, that you have no Ground of Complaint against God; and much less, perhaps than you imagined, against Men; that your State hath many Comforts belonging to it; and usually not many necessary Sufferings, beyond what others feel. But when any of you have the most, only do your Duty faithfully and prudently, and you may compose your Minds with a full Assurance, that at length all shall end well: *Your light Afflictions, which are but for a Moment, shall work for you an eternal Weight of Glory*, in the next World: and in this, as God hath enabled you to bear them hitherto, he will doubtless enable you to bear them still; nay, perhaps lighten your Burthen when you least think of it. *For the Poor shall not alway be forgotten: the patient Abiding of the Meek shall*

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 17.

not perish for ever ^u. *The Eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, on them that put their Trust in his Mercy; to deliver their Soul from Death, and keep them alive in the Time of Famine* ^w. *Trust in the Lord, and do good: so shalt thou dwell in the Land, and verily thou shalt be fed* ^x. Some Means or other Heaven will point out to you, to prevent your falling into the utmost Extremities. Providence is your Security: the greatest Persons on Earth have no better. Without a Title to God's Favour, no one can be happy: and with it, no one needs be miserable. *For whether a Man be rich, or poor; if he have a good Heart towards the Lord, he shall at all Times rejoice, with a cheerful Countenance* ^y.

^u Pf. ix. 18.

^w Pf. xxxiii. 18, 19.

^x Pf. xxxvii. 3.

^y Eccclus xxvi. 4.



S E R M O N XI.

M A T T H. xi. 5.

—*And the Poor have the Gospel preached to them.*

ONE principal Mark of true Religion is its Tendency to make Men first good, then happy. Precepts of Piety and Virtue, unattended with Rewards, will always be ineffectual: and Promises of Rewards, independent upon Piety and Virtue, must of Necessity be false. Christianity therefore comprehends both, and proposes them equally to all Mankind: requiring Obedience from the Greatest, as a Condition of God's Favour; and offering eternal Felicity to the Meanest, on Performance of their Duties. For this Reason I have lately set before you the peculiar Duties of the upper Part of the World, and have since proceeded to

those of the lower. The only one of the latter, which I have hitherto mentioned, is, that they be content with their Condition; and neither murmur at all against God, who never gives them Cause; nor complain of Men more than they have Cause; nor be dejected in their own Minds; but compose and support themselves by attending to the Comforts of the State they are in, as well as the Inconveniencies of it. With this I chose to begin, and to insist on it largely, because, when once the Poor are convinced, that they may be happy, they will naturally and cheerfully endeavour to become so: for which End they must learn,

2. To be humble: a Virtue closely connected with the former. For as Pride is usually the Origin of Discontent; so Discontent in Return nourishes Pride; till after thinking falsely their present Situation too bad for them, Men come by Degrees to think hardly any sufficiently good. Now all may find great Reason for Humility, on viewing the Imperfections and Frailties of human Nature in general, and their own in particular: but the Poor have additional Subjects of Mortification to reflect on; they see and feel themselves inferior to most around them, dependent probably on some for their
their

their Livelihood; and are excluded from the Possibility of many Improvements and Advantages, which others enjoy, still this is no Ground for Dissatisfaction. For that some are in a better Condition, cannot really change theirs into a worse. It remains, notwithstanding, just what it would be, if none were better. And making Comparisons only to disquiet yourselves, is great Folly. But making them, to learn from that Inferiority in which you are placed, a suitable Way of thinking and behaving, is so needful and so obvious a Lesson both of Wisdom and Duty, that neglecting it is inexcusable.

Those Minds must be grievously hardened in the Wrong, that can have no Impression made on them by such peculiarly strong Calls to be modest and submissive. Nor will this prove a less unhappy Disposition, than it is a faulty one: but, in all likelihood, you will suffer more from the absurd Haughtiness of your Temper, than all the Hardships of your outward Circumstances put together. Instead of esteeming or pitying you, the World will dislike and scorn you. For the Son of *Sirach* expresses only what every one in some Measure feels, when having said, *three Sorts of Men my*

Soul hateth, and I am greatly offended at their Life; he puts down in the first Place, *a poor Man that is proud*^a. Pride in those, who should be the farthest from it, is extremely disgustful, even when it is harmless: but usually it leads on to insolent Behaviour. Now Insolence to Superiors may produce unspeakable Mischiefs to you; but will always produce some: and though it be confined to your Equals or Inferiors, will be the Source of perpetual Uneasiness, as well as Guilt. Yet I am afraid it is exceeding common for the lower Ranks to use those, who are but a little beneath them, with such Contempt and Harshness as they seldom or never experience from the highest above them; and would not think it tolerable, if they did. But surely then you should be willing to give the Treatment, you expect to receive: and seeing, as you must, how well Condescension becomes your Betters; think how ill, Assuming and Overbearing becomes you. But supposing your Haughtiness injurious or displeasing to no one else, it will be greatly detrimental to yourself. You have formerly been in good Circumstances perhaps, or you are descended from a good

^a Ecclus xxv. 2.

Family; and therefore you will not bring down your Heart to your present Condition. But what follows from this? Only that struggling under the Yoke makes it gall you the more; and you are ten Times uneasier, than you need to be: whereas would you but accommodate your Spirit to your Station; you would soon be sensible, that with Men as well as God, *be that humbleth himself shall be exalted*^b: You would enjoy, in this World, a peaceful Composure of Soul; and in the next, that Blessedness, which is reserved for the Meek and Lowly.

But of all Sorts of Pride in the Poor, the strangest and most pernicious is that, which tempts not a few of them to imagine, they are of too much Consequence to do any Thing for their own Maintenance. Indeed when they have formerly been of good Rank and lived in Plenty, especially when their Fall from it is not owing to wilful Sins or Follies, it should be the Endeavour of their Relations and Friends to provide for them, in some Degree, suitably to what they once were. But if such as are especially concerned, either cannot or will not do this, there is little Room to expect, that

^b Matth. xxiii. 12.

others should contribute enough towards it to be effectual. And therefore the unhappy Persons whose Case it is, unless Providence raise them up some unlooked-for Support, sink down of Course to the Level of the common Poor: and it cannot be more the Duty of the charitable to help them, than it is theirs to help themselves by any Sort of honest Employment, for which they are qualified. Once Heaven had placed you in a higher Sphere; now it hath reduced you to a lower: the Occupations of the latter are as much incumbent upon you at present, as those of the former were before: and your Attention to them will be as amply rewarded by the Disposer of all Things. You must support yourself, either by virtuous Diligence, or by vicious Courses. The latter nothing can justify: the former, in whatever way you are called to exercise it, will be no Reproach, but an Honour to you. And the Rich and Great, far from rejecting and disowning their poor Kindred or Acquaintance, for condescending to any useful Business, when Necessity requires, ought to encourage and applaud them. For it is an excellent Mark of a right and good Mind, that they rather chuse to *work with Quietness, and eat their*

own Bread^c, than importune others, or lead themselves into Temptation. And indeed the Temptations, arising from Poverty and Distress, are so very dangerous to those who have lived in Affluence and Credit; that as soon as ever they find Difficulties coming upon them, (if they have any Regard to a good Conscience) they must immediately reduce their own Expences, lower the Appearance and Expectations of those who depend on them, and so conduct every Thing, as may least expose them to the Hazard of acting amiss, and best secure them an honest Subsistence. For, whatever a false Honour may suggest to the contrary, *Better is he that laboureth, and aboundeth in all Things, than he that boasteth himself and wanteth Bread*^d. The Mention of this Matter hath led me insensibly to a

3d Duty of the Poor, and a very important one, that of Industry; to which Humility will greatly incline them, nor will Contentment be at all inconsistent with it. For a principal Reason why the Poor may be justly contented, is, that by Diligence they may go on very comfortably; and their being well enough satisfied with their present Situation is no Manner

^c 2 Theff. iii. 12.

^d Eccles x. 27.

of Objection against endeavouring to better it, when Opportunity offers. Every one indeed is bound to be industrious, in a Way suitable to his Rank, and contribute his Proportion to the common Good, in which he shares. Those of high Degree are able to do much Good singly; the Poor have each of them very little separate Power: but, considered as a collective Body, it is on their Application and Labour that the Wealth and Strength of Nations, all the Conveniences and Elegances of Life, indeed the Peace and good Order of Societies depend; for nothing but right Employment will keep them out of wrong. These Considerations make their Diligence of infinite Importance to the Public; and there are others, besides their Interest in the Public, that make it of equal Importance to themselves. It is true, in point of Conscience, the Rich are no less obliged to it than you; but in point of worldly Necessity, the Difference is very wide. Nor yet is it any Disadvantage to you on the whole, that in this Particular you cannot well avoid acting as you ought. For to how many of your Superiors is it the greatest Unhappiness, that their Circumstances enable them to lead the Lives they do!

But,

But, in your Situation, indulging Idleness and its Companions can last but a very short Time; and then will bring after it such dreadful Consequences, of Distress and Reproach, and Temptation to every Thing bad, (extending not only to you, but to all who belong to you) that you must resolve to follow some honest Employment closely. Be it ever so much against your Liking at first, you will certainly come in Time to be very well pleased with it. Every one, that hath persevered, hath found it so. And then, you will spend the rest of your Days in Satisfaction and Comfort; you will be at Peace within, and respected both by your Equals and your Betters: if you have Children, you will look upon them with Delight, and they upon you with Gratitude; you will make a Provision against Sickness and Accidents; and when you come to old Age, you will be able to afford yourself the Rest and Quiet you want, because you were willing to take Pains before: whereas they, who make Ease and Pleasure the Business of their early Years, will find Shame and Sorrow the Portion of the Remainder. They wickedly neglect the appointed Way of supporting themselves; and such as do, will commonly have bitter

Experience of what it is to crave Support from the Bounty of others. *The Life of him, that dependeth on another Man's Table, saith the Son of Sirach, is not to be counted for a Life---Begging is sweet in the Mouth of the Shameful, but in his Belly there shall burn a Fire*^e. Sayings of this Nature are not in the least designed against Persons, whom Providence hath rendered incapable of supplying their own Necessities. They have nothing to be ashamed of, but ought to be assisted with Tenderness and Respect. God hath sent them to us to receive at our Hands what is their Due; and who so *mocketh* such Poor, *Solomon* hath declared, *reproacheth their Maker*^f. But those who would not be industrious when they could, deserve but little Relief afterwards, unless deep Repentance intitle them to a better Share; and they that will not now when they can, deserve none at all. It was *St. Paul's* repeated Command to the *Thessalonians*, *that if any one would not work, neither should he eat*^g. And we should all observe this Command, both in the Disposal of our own Charity, and of any other with which we are intrusted, either by private Benefactors, or by the Laws of the Land.

^e Eccles. xl. 29, 30. ^f Prov. xvii. 5. ^g 2 Theff. iii. 10.

Overseers of the Poor are intrusted by the latter; intrusted to act with Humanity and Compassion indeed, but with Prudence and Frugality at the same Time. All therefore who in their Turns come to serve that Office, I hope consider very seriously, that the Poor, who are fit for Employment, ought, as far as possible, to find it for themselves, or have it found for them; and that when either of these Things can at all be done, maintaining them in Idleness is only teaching them to be useless and wicked. Indeed the Poor themselves should consider, that contriving to live upon Alms, when they are able, wholly or in Part, to live upon the Produce of their own Labour, is injuring the Community, by doing nothing to promote its Welfare; injuring all who contribute to their Support, by laying a needless Burthen upon them; injuring the rest of the Poor, by keeping from them what else they would receive in greater Plenty. For no one can bestow so much on proper Objects, who is misled to bestow on improper ones too. And the Frequency of such Impositions makes many unwilling to give what else they would; and furnishes others with a specious Pretence for withholding what else, with any Decency, they

they could not. Therefore Industry, besides its being an indispensable Duty of the Poor, in itself, is necessary to their practising a further Duty, to which I proceed in the

4th Place; that is Honesty. For to beg, instead of working, is one Sort of Dishonesty. To undertake any Work for another, and not do it diligently, is a second Sort; often a very provoking, sometimes a very mischievous one. Yet there is a third still grosser, to which Idleness tempts them but too powerfully, mentioned in *Agur's* wife Prayer, *lest I be poor and steal*^h. Now Stealth, open or secret, how commonly soever it be committed, is much too plainly a Sin to be in general defended; and therefore I need not prove to you the Unlawfulness of it. But there are two Cases notwithstanding, in which some of the Poor seem to think it scarce any Fault at all: when either a very small Matter is taken away, or it is from a very rich Person, which makes it small to him. But every one hath the same Right to the least Part of his Property that he hath to the greatest. And let any one be ever so wealthy, his Wealth is his own; and though unquestionably he ought to give of it to the

^h Prov. xxx. 9.

Poor, yet they have no Manner of Authority to take it without his Consent. If they had, it is easy to see into what universal Confusion the Exercise of that Authority would bring the World. But farther: small Misdemeanors of this Kind occasion great Disquiet; Men apprehend themselves unsafe in all about them; know not whom to trust; and the Innocent are often suspected and Sufferers, for what the Guilty thus do. Besides, almost all Offenders begin with little Faults; and from these they venture gradually on, to worse and worse, till they come to make no Scruple of the most capital Crimes, and perhaps fall under the Sentence due to them. Always remember therefore to beware even of small Sins; and carefully observe one Rule more, that when any Thing is committed to your Trust, being dishonest in that, and disposing of any Part of it in a Manner, which you know you ought not, and are not allowed, is one of the basest Kinds of Stealing. Wastefulness also, and even mere Negligence, approach to the same Sin; for by both you injuriously diminish what is not your own. But the most active Cause of Dishonesty in the Poor is, that finding a great deal of Time and Pains requisite to get but a small Matter, they
are

are strongly tempted to shorten their Trouble by unfair Methods. And possibly you may thus gain some Advantages for a while; but very possibly also you may fail, and be discovered and punished even for your first Attempt; or if not, every new Attempt will expose you anew to the same Danger; and it is not one in great Numbers that escapes long. Besides, the continual Conscioufness of your Guilt, and Fear of being found out, and hated and scorned ever after, will be a continual Torment to you; nay, if you are only suspected, and cannot fully confute the Suspicion, which a guilty Person can never do, this alone, in all Probability, may be enough to ruin you. For the Livelihood of the Poor depends almost intirely on their Character, and their Character chiefly consists in their Honesty. That will make Amends for considerable Defects in other Points, but nothing will make Amends for Want of that. Or could you escape every Evil that you justly fear through this whole Life, yet remember another is to follow it very soon, in which you must account for all your Deeds. And he who hath commanded, that *no Man defraud or go beyond his Brother in any Matter,*

Matter, hath declared at the same Time, that *the Lord is the Avenger of all such*¹.

A further Virtue, which the Poor are greatly concerned to practise, much more carefully than many of them do, is that of speaking Truth. But this is so near akin to behaving honestly, the Reasons for both are so much the same, and they that do nothing amiss have so little Temptation to say any Thing false, that I shall pass it over at present. The

5th Duty therefore of the Poor, which I shall insist on, is that of Frugality; without which your Honesty will never be secure, and the Fruits of your Industry will be very foolishly thrown away. Indeed to deny yourselves what you can well afford, and really want, would be cruel and unnatural; suffering the worst Inconveniences of Poverty without Need. But to make your strait Circumstances yet straiter, for the Sake of idle Gratifications, and distress yourselves in Necessaries, only to indulge in Trifles and Vanities, delicate Food, shewish Dress, ensnaring Diversions, is every Way wrong. You will be hankering after more and more Pleasures and Amusements, till they quite beggar you; your Superiors all the while,

¹ 1 Theff. iv. 6.

whom

whom you affect to imitate, will despise you; your Equals will hate and censure you; and your Children, for whom at this Rate you will provide nothing but a bad Example, will have Cause, I had almost said, to curse you: whereas, by avoiding unnecessary Expences, you will preserve the Fruits of your Labour intire; be able to make good Use of Advantages; to stand your Ground under Losses and Disappointments, for they must be expected; to lay up for yourselves, if you prove to have Occasion; if not, for those that come after you: nay, to give Alms out of your little, and exchange it for Treasures in Heaven. Saving is very different from being covetous; it is the surest Foundation for being bountiful. And even the Poor should extend Bounty to any that are still poorer, whenever they can really spare it. Nature and Reason call upon them to do so; agreeably to which the Apostle requires Men to *work with their own Hands, that they may have to give to him that needeth*^k. And as our Saviour hath taught us^l, that our Charity shall be estimated in Proportion to our Abilities, the lowest have as much Encouragement

Eph. iv. 28.

^l Mark xii. 42.

as the highest to do, even in this Way, all the Good they can. A

6th Virtue, closely connected with Frugality, is Sobriety. One should think, that they who find themselves perpetually in Straits could have little Temptation to be guilty of Excesses. But Uneasiness at their Condition drives some, a false Notion of recruiting their Spirits invites others, and unmeaning Custom seduces yet more, into that destructive Vice of Drinking; which, after soothing you perhaps with a short-lived Gaiety and Forgetfulness of Sorrow, will greatly augment the Dejection of your Minds, as well as the Difficulties of your Affairs; and thus force you almost to a Repetition of the same Remedy, which will be followed of course by an Increase of the same Evils, till your Fortunes and Healths are both completely ruined. Your Morals too, for the most Part, by Indulgence in this one Respect, will be gradually corrupted in every other, even if you do escape those desperate Sallies of Wickedness which prove more speedily fatal. Your Families at the same Time, if you have any, will be abandoned to Wretchedness; your Children perhaps murdered in their Infancy, by giving them the same Liquors with which
you

you are more leifurely destroying yourselves; or if they do survive, are pretty fure to inherit, from fuch Parents, nothing but bad Habits of Body and Mind. If therefore you have any Senfe, either of Prudence or Humanity, you will furely avoid this treacherous Sin; which pernicious Arts, and mistaken Policy, have placed but too much within the Reach of the loweft of the Poor: or if you have fallen into it, you will renounce it instantly, and refolutely bear the Uneafinefs which abftaining from it may give you for a while, (for you will certainly overcome it by Perfeverance) rather than plunge forwards to your utter Undoing here and hereafter. A

7th Duty of the Poor, which muft be mentioned, is that of Chafity; a Duty, indeed, of all Perfons, but fo far peculiarly incumbent on them, as the Transgreffion of it brings them to more immediate Ruin. In one Sex it is followed by total Lofs of honeft Employment and Reputation; by Contempt and Scorn, even from the Men that have feduc'd them; by grievous Temptations to deftroy the Fruits of their criminal Pleafures, and to become abandoned to common Proftitution, and with it to every Sin, the Confequence of which will be every

every Misery of human Life. In the other Sex it is almost always accompanied with Breach of solemn Promises; with shocking Hardness of Heart, where the utmost Affection hath been professed; with heavy Expences, that often lead to the grossest Dishonesty. And both Sexes, in common, it exposes to loathsome and fatal Diseases, and to a dreadful Sentence of future Condemnation: for *they, which do such Things*, the Scripture hath declared, *shall not inherit the Kingdom of God*^m. Beware then of a Sin so peculiarly dangerous; and for that Purpose beware of every Indiscretion that may intice you to it. I now proceed, in the

8th Place, to another Duty of the Poor, which one should think might sufficiently recommend itself, good Temper amongst each other. This is necessary in every Rank, in order to have any real Enjoyment of Life; and the more necessary in yours, as you have the fewer Enjoyments of other Sorts. If you receive harsh Treatment from those above you, that perhaps you cannot help; but there is no Manner of Need of your giving it amongst yourselves. You have felt probably what bitter Things injurious Language and insolent Beha-

^m Gal. v. 21.

viour are; why then will you make Use of them? You know by Experience the Need of Tendernefs and Pity, why will you not fhew it to thofe who have equal Need? You and they are Fellow-fufferers in the World; furely that fhould unite you in mutual Kindnefs, not provoke you to increafe your Evils, by being hard upon one another. And yet, I fear, fome of the greateft Hardfhips, both in Word and Deed, which the lower Part of Mankind undergo, proceed from Perfons who are of low Rank themfelves. And how far they are capable of carrying fuch Outrages, and how bad the Effects of them are, *Solomon* hath expreffed by a very ftrong Comparifon: *A poor Man, that oppreffeth the Poor, is like a fweeping Rain, which leaveth no Food*ⁿ. I have only a

9th and laft Duty to recommend, but one peculiarly implied in preaching the Gospel to you, a ferious and deep Reverence for Religion. Religion is intended, not only for the Direction, but the Comfort of all Degrees of Men; and all have Need enough of it, but you the moft by far. Others have Honours, or Pleafures, or Wealth, elegant Amufements or curious Inquiries to engage their Thoughts; and find fome

ⁿ Prov. xxviii. 3.

Kind of Satisfaction in these Things, such as it is, and so long as it lasts. But you have nothing, that even seems considerable, to sweeten this World to you, but the Expectation of a better. And well may it be for you, that you are reduced to that, as your only Choice, which beyond Comparison would be your best, if you had ever such Plenty. Seek your Consolation therefore in what is abundantly capable of giving it you; make the Precepts of the Gospel your Business, and its Promises your Joy. Christianity is peculiarly formed for your Benefit. Its Laws are your Charter, by which you claim a Right to Pity and Love from your Superiors, as Members of the same Body; and we, its Ministers, are your Advocates to plead your Cause with them; authorized to offer them eternal Happiness, for being kind to you; to denounce Condemnation against them, if they use you, in any one Respect, cruelly; and to assure you, at the same Time, that the worst Treatment they can give you shall turn to your Good. Think then how justly St. *James* hath declared *the Poor in this World rich in Faith*^o; and let the Rich and Great, if they will, be profane and vicious, and take the Consequences: but let

^o James ii. 5.

no Man beguile you of your Reward^p, either by corrupting your Principles, or misleading your Practice. Religion hath graciously provided for you the Repose and Comfort of this sacred Day, which else you had never known. Make it not a Time of acting contrary to Religion, but stately use the Opportunities it gives you, of learning and being reminded of your several Duties, which you must be sensible you need; of having the Honour to join on equal Terms with the highest of your Fellow-creatures, in presenting Petitions and Praises to God in his House, and feeding at his holy Table. The Remainder of the Sabbath employ, partly in *considering your Ways*^q, and improving your Hearts, by Reading, Meditation, and Prayer in private: partly in a cheerful, but harmless and prudent, social Enjoyment of the Leisure which Heaven hath allowed you. When the Days of Labour return, recommend yourselves every Morning to the Blessing of the Almighty, return him Thanks every Night for his Protection, and offer up to him, in your Hearts, the Work of each Day, as done in Obedience to his Will, and in Hopes of his Reward: for these Things you will find a Support and Re-

^p Col. ii. 18.

^q Hag. i. 5, 7.

freshment beyond all Belief. In your whole Communication learn both to avoid and abhor that monstrous Custom of Oaths and Curses, which are intermixed continually in the common Discourte of too many of the Poor; with great Irreverence towards God, who hath expressly forbidden them; to the great Horror and Grief of all good Persons; with great Danger of running into frequent Perjuries, and all Manner of Profaneness; and without any Pretence of Profit or Pleasure, to make the least Amends for so much Sin. I cannot, and need not, go through the other Obligations of Religion at present. Your Attendance here, your Bibles and other good Books at home, will sufficiently inform you of the Nature and Importance of them; and I beg you not to imagine, that because you are each of you singly of little Consequence in the World, God will take little Notice of your Conduct; but think and act like the Psalmist, *I am small, and of no Reputation, yet do I not forget thy Commandments*. There is nothing beneath God's Attention, any more than above it. The meanest Things on Earth were made and are continually preserved and inspected by him. But indeed the most

^r Pf. cxix. 141.

considerable Thing on Earth is the Behaviour of his rational Creatures ; and whether that be right or wrong is of infinite Moment in his Sight ; but whether they be high or low, of none at all. *He regardeth not the Rich more than the Poor, for they are all the Work of his Hands*^a, and shall all account to him for their Deeds. Our blessed Redeemer preached the Gospel to the Poor, at least as much as to the Rich ; he laid down his Life equally for both ; the Holy Spirit offers equally to both the sanctifying Influences of his Grace ; the Souls of both are equally capable of, and will equally be consigned to, everlasting Happiness or Misery. *I saw, saith St. John, a Throne, and him that sat on it, from whose Face the Earth and the Heavens fled away, and there was found no Place for them. And I saw the Dead, small and great, stand before God : and the Books were opened, and the Dead were judged out of those Things which were written in the Books, according to their Works*^b.

This awful Scene first imprint strongly on your own Minds ; then on all you can, especially on those who belong to you. You have little else to give them, but if you give them

^a Job xxxiv. 19.

^b Rev. xx. 11, 12.

effectually

effectually a practical Sense of their Duty to God and Man, it is an Inheritance beyond all Treasures. You must see how wicked, and how miserable by their Wickedness, Multitudes of your own Rank are: suffer it not to be the Case of those who are dearest to you; but use the little spare Time you have (for you will always have some), and the little Ability you possess (for God will assist you), to instil into their Hearts such early Principles of Piety and Virtue, as may afford you just Hopes of their being good and happy by your Means in this World, and then following you, to increase your Blessedness in the next.

S E R M O N XII.

I S A I A H xxxviii. 1, 2.

In those Days was Hezekiah sick unto Death: and Isaiah the Prophet, the Son of Amoz, came unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, set thine House in Order: for thou shalt die, and not live. Then Hezekiah turned his Face toward the Wall, and prayed unto the Lord.

THESSE Words present to our View a Person of the highest Rank, in the Prime of Life, and the full Tide of Prosperity, seized with a mortal Disease: a Case, which ought strongly to remind the securest of us all, how uncertain our Condition is here on Earth. By the Goodness of God, a Prophet was sent to him, to admonish him of the Preparation, that his State required: and the same Goodness hath provided, that you shall all be
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frequently admonished of the same Thing, by the Ministers of his Word. The Admonition, given him, was the Means of prolonging his Days in Peace and Comfort: and those given you, if received in a right Manner, may, both naturally and providentially, contribute to procure you longer and happier Lives in this World; and will certainly lead you to a Life of eternal Happiness in the next.

The Denunciation made to *Hezekiah*, however awful, is, by Virtue of the original Sentence of God, equally true of every Man, *Thou shalt die, and not live*. The healthiest of us is sick of an incurable Distemper: whether it shall last a few Years, or a few Days only, before it carries us off, is all the Doubt: and the Difference is much less, than we are apt to think it. Would we but consider, how quick the Time is gone, which we have lived over, and are dead to, already; to how small a Matter the Remainder, which will flee away just as fast, can at most amount; and how much short of that we may fall, and in all likelihood shall, since most Men do; we should have little Need of Monitors concerning Mortality. Youth is but the Morning, and full Strength but the Noon of a short Day: throughout the whole

whole of which, every Refreshment of Nature intimates to us its continual Decays; every Loss of a Friend or Acquaintance tell us, how frail we are ourselves; every Sickness calls upon us, with a louder Voice, to think of our Dissolution; and those Disorders, which may seem to whisper it more gently, often bring it on with surprizing Suddenness. But at least old Age gives us, usually the Feeling, always the plain Sight, of its more immediate and unavoidable Approach.

Such constant Warning of this important and irrevocable Change was doubtless intended to produce a constant Regard to it: and if we take every Way to drive out of our Minds, what Providence hath taken so many Ways to fix in them; it is really *fighting against God*^a, and that in a Point of the utmost Concern to us. But then the Thought of our latter End is not designed to disquiet and deject us without Need or Use; but only to engage us in reasoning upon it so justly, and preparing for it so wisely, as that when it comes, (for sooner or later it must) we may meet it with Comfort.

It is very true, the best Preparation for Sickness and Death is a good Life; and whilst we

^a Acts v. 29.

neglect this, no other can be effectual. But then too many have neglected it: and there is the utmost Necessity for them to think, and to be assisted in thinking, of whatever they can do towards retrieving so fatal an Error. Nay, with Respect to others; as the Rules of a good Life extend to our Behaviour in all Circumstances, so there must be some of them peculiarly appropriated to the nearer Prospect of our Departure hence. And as every Thing should be learnt, in the best Degree it can, before we want it for Practice; and such Things especially, as are difficult, and yet of Moment; so studying in our Health the Duties of a sick Bed; contriving beforehand to make them as few and easy as possible; and forming ourselves to a Disposition of going through them as we ought, is no small Part of religious Wisdom. If you delay, till the Time of Illness comes, (and who can foresee, how soon that may happen?) for some Things it will be too late; of some you will be ignorant; others you will forget: and those about you too commonly will be unable, or unwilling, or afraid, to remind you of them. They, whose Office it is, will scarce have an Opportunity given them of attending you: or if they have,
will

will scarce know on the sudden, how to make great Use of it. And upon the whole, but little will be done of what should be done.

We all pray, as often as we join in the Litany, against *sudden Death*. They are undoubtedly the happiest, who have the least Occasion to pray against it; but there are few, if any, who have none. And such, as profess to desire instead of fearing it, would do well to consider, whether they are so very sure as this implies, that every Part, both of their worldly Affairs, and of their eternal Concerns, is in the best Order and Condition, to which they can bring it: or whether in Reality this appearing Readiness to die at any Time, without Warning, be not merely a Dread to think of dying at all, as a Matter near at Hand; unless it be somewhat still worse, Disbelief or Forgetfulness of what will follow after. But in vain do we petition, that our Death may not be sudden, if we resolve that it shall: which in Effect we do, in proportion as we omit those Provisions for the Time of its Coming, without which it must, in the worst Sense *come upon us unawares*^b, be its Advances ever so slow.

We ought therefore to learn in Health what will be incumbent on us in Sickness. And

^b Luke xxi. 34.

since few chuse to teach themselves the Precepts; which belong to so unpleasing a Situation, it remains, that all be taught them here: and the Lesson is of universal Benefit. For in his Turn, every one must expect to be in a State of Wearisomeness and Pain, of Weakness and Danger: and besides, the particular Duties of that State, are more or less, the general Duties of human Life: so that whoever is truly considerate and serious, will doubtless be glad to have them laid before him. This therefore I shall endeavour to do, in the Method pointed out by the Text: which mentions the Obligations of sick Persons,

I. Respecting their Fellow-Creatures: *set thine House in Order.*

II. Respecting more immediately God and their own Souls. *Then Hezekiah prayed unto the Lord.*

The Phrase, which expresses the former, *set thine House in Order*, may be translated more literally, *Given Command concerning*, or, *to thine House*. And this Direction may well be enlarged beyond our Family strictly so called, by a Parity of Reason, to comprehend, both such Regulations of all Affairs in which we are interested,
and

and such Advice to all Persons, with whom we are connected, as appear needful. I shall treat of it therefore in each of these Views; but at present only in the first.

Now this includes the general, and, for ought we know, final Arrangement of our worldly Concerns. As these are frequently either extensive, or intricate, or perfectly understood by none but ourselves; every one ought to be careful, and since they are not, *should often be put in Remembrance*, as the Office for the Sick in so many Words appoints, *to take Order for settling their temporal Estates, while they are in Health*. Not many, it may be feared, have Reason to be contented, that every Thing should lie, at the Hour of their Death, just as it doth now. Some have spent a great Part of their Lives in putting their Houses out of Order, in perplexing and ruining their Affairs, by Extravagance, Negligence or Ill-Management. These have singular Need to restore them, without Delay, to the best Posture they can. And such, as may have acted very prudently on the Supposition of living long, may yet have done little or nothing in regard to the Possibility of dying soon. Now Sicknes frequently affords but little Time;

and almost always brings along with it Uneasiness full enough for us to bear, without the additional Weight of Business. Besides, in that Condition, our Judgment, or Memory, or Attention may be impaired: Weakness of Spirits may subject us to undue Impressions from those, who are about us: our truest Friends and ablest and properest Advisers may be accidentally absent, or artfully kept from us: in short, one way or another, there is a great Hazard of our doing Things wrongly, or at best imperfectly. Fears or Suspicions of this may grievously disquiet us, and add to our Danger: or, though we apprehend that no Evils will arise, from our Want of timely Caution, to those whom we leave behind us, they may come to feel very dreadful ones. And why should not all this be prevented? We must leave what we have, whether we dispose of it, or not. And if we defer disposing of it, because we have not the Heart to do it; such a Heart should not be indulged, but amended. The Difficulty of settling Things, or the Uncertainty how to settle them, will scarce grow less by putting it off to the last. If any Alteration of Circumstances, or of our Opinion, should happen after our Disposition is made, it

may be altered accordingly. And that strange Imagination of being nearer Death, for having completed this or any Provision for it, is a poor absurd Superstition; confuted by daily Experience. On the contrary, you will be more at Ease, and likely to live the longer, for having done your Duty in this Respect. And by making sure to do it in time, you may obviate great Injustice, grievous Contentions and Enmities, long and vast Expences, where, if they be not obviated, the Fault will lie at your Door.

Every one therefore should take the earliest Care of these Matters. But if any one hath omitted it, the Office before-mentioned expressly requires, that he *be admonished in his Sickness to make his Will, and to declare his Debts, what he oweth, and what is owing unto him, for the better discharging of his Conscience, and the Quietness of his Executors.* We of the Clergy have now but seldom the Means allowed us of giving you this or any other Admonition at such Times. I hope, it is not our Fault. Consider, if it be not yours. But however that be, we may and we ought to do it from the Pulpit: where, speaking openly to all in general, we cannot be suspected of any private unfair De-

figh, into whatever Particulars the Subject may lead us.

The principal Point, at which Men should aim in settling their temporal Affairs, is Justice : and one of the most evident Branches of Justice is paying Debts. Our first Care therefore should be, never to contract Debts, which we cannot reasonably hope to pay : and our next, to secure the Payment of those, which we have contracted, as fully and speedily as we can. Else we shall be in continual Danger of injuring, perhaps distressing and undoing, Persons and Families, only for thinking well enough of us to trust us. It is extremely dishonourable, (I might use a harsher Word) at any Season of Life, to indulge our Idleness, gratify our Fancies and Appetites, or support our Rank, at their Expence. But when Sickness gives us a Prospect of never being just to them, unless we are so immediately, we have then every possible Motive for labouring most earnestly to indemnify them. And we ought to prefer the Demands, which they have upon us, before all mere Proprieties, however reasonable ; contrive good Security for them out of whatever we fairly can : and if, after all, we cannot do it effectually, recommend them,

as far as ever there is any Plea for it, to the Compassion of our surviving Representatives and Relations. But as we cannot be certain that they will, and in several Cases there may be no Reason why they should, do what we desire: the only sure way is, to provide, before it is too late, for doing it ourselves. If our Circumstances are upon the whole sufficient to answer all Claims; barely making known the Debts due from us, and owing to us, or at most stating them with the Parties concerned, may be enough; and where it is wanted, employing some Thought and Pains on such Matters, as we are able, will be doing very good Service both to our Creditors, and to our Heirs.

But besides those, who are commonly called Creditors, there is another, and much more dreadful Sort: I mean those, to whom we have done Injuries, and owe Restitution. Injuries ought never to be done. When they are done, Restitution, if it can, ought to be made immediately: and till it is offered so far as our Ability extends, we remain both Debtors and Sinners. If we defer it to the last, we may never make it at all: and though we do, whether God will then accept it, must be doubtful: but if even then we refuse it, unless the

Cause be that we excusably mistake the Nature of the Case, we preserve no Ground for Hope. It is unspeakably better therefore to think seriously at any time, than never, what Wrongs or what Hardships any of our Fellow-Creatures have suffered from us: and to what suitable Compensation they are intitled, either in strict Justice, or in Equity and good Conscience. The Answer to this Question may often be a very afflicting one: but if Men will do amiss, they must take the Consequences. It may also, in some Cases, be difficult to fix upon the right Answer, or to find proper Methods of putting it in Practice, if we know it: but we must not, on Account of Difficulties, lay aside the Thought of doing our Duty; but ask the best Advice, where we are at a Loss; leave Directions, to be executed by others, where we have not Time ourselves; and at least make due Acknowledgements, unless particular Circumstances forbid, where we cannot make Amends. Perhaps nothing further than Acknowledgements will be expected by those, whom we have injured: and then we are bound to nothing farther.

But as we have all more or less Need to ask Pardon, another of our Duties evidently is, to
grant

grant it in our Turn: when others have used us ill, not to *recompense*, or with them, *Evil for Evil*^c; not to deny them proper Kindnesses; or even think of them worse, than they deserve: to accept any Submissions, that do but approach towards being sufficient; and be reconciled to them, not in Words alone, which is adding Hypocrisy to Repentment, but in Reality; affording them as large Proofs, both of our Favour and Confidence, as any good and wise Man, uninterested in the Matter, would think fitting; seriously wishing their Good, in Soul, Body and Estate; and being ready to promote it, as far as we properly can. This is the full Meaning of being in Charity; which we ought to be constantly in with all Men: and, if the Reason of our professing to be so, is merely that we imagine our End to be near; it will be extremely questionable, whether we are so indeed. Yet a late, nay an imperfect Reconciliation is always preferable to none, provided there be any Sincerity in it. For the Expedient, to which, it is said, some have had Recourse, of forgiving if they die, and being revenged if they live, is as wicked and as foolish a Contrivance to deceive them-

^c Rom. xii. 17.

selves and to mock God, as the human Heart can frame. We may indeed have forgiven, yet not have declared our Forgiveness: and it may possibly be prudent, nay kind, in some Cases, to suspend that Declaration, at least in Part, for a while; though seldom, if ever, very long. But at farthest, when Death appears to threaten us, it is high Time to allow, both ourselves, and all with whom we are concerned, the Comfort of seeing our Differences, if possible, intirely made up: that we may lie under no Imputation at our Departure of any Thing unmeet for those Mansions of Peace, that we hope we are going to inhabit. The same Office therefore, which I have already quoted more than once, requires in particular, that the sick Person *be exhorted to forgive, from the Bottom of his Heart, all that have offended him; and if he hath offended any other, to ask them Forgiveness; and where he hath done Injury or Wrong to any Man, that he make Amends to the uttermost of his Power.*

The next Thing, after providing for the Payment of our Debts, and which, like that, should be done in Health, but much rather in Sickness than not at all, is disposing of the Remainder of our Substance: a Matter comprehending too great a Variety

Variety of Cafes, to permit any other than general Directions from this Place. The principal Rule is, that we ought not to be governed in it, to any considerable Degree, by fanciful Fondnesses, much less by blameable Resentments: but act on such Grounds, as not only we ourselves, but other Men of unquestioned Prudence and Impartiality, think are good ones. For where we seem to be most at Liberty, we are still bound to make a rational Use of that Liberty: and should therefore carefully judge as well as we can; and still be a little diffident, whether we have judged right; not wantonly do whatever we please, and be confident that we cannot do amiss, or regardless whether we do or not. Scarce any Reasons ought to exclude our Children: whatever Limitations and Restraints may be sometimes adviseable. Nor, in Default of Children, should any other than very strong Reasons exclude those, whom Nearness of Blood points out for our Heirs. But then we should be content with allowing as moderate a Prerogative to one of our Posterity or Kindred, above the rest, as our Station and Rank, the Constitution of our Country, and the established Maxims of Society will admit: and not

leave all our Family besides, or any Part of it, in undeserved Straits and Contempt, for the Vanity of raising a single Branch higher than we ought.

Another Caution, often too requisite, is, that if our Heirs be different from our Successors in any Station or Office of which we are possessed; or if they, whom we are inclined to favour, be it ever so justly, are different from our legal Heirs; we ought at no Time, and yet less, if possible, at our latter End, to do any Thing unequitable, or even unhandsome, for the Advantage of the former, or to express our Dislike of the latter. Mean Behaviour will sully our Characters, and generous Behaviour give a Lustre to them, on these Occasions beyond most others. For to act right against our own Interest, or that of our Favourites, is peculiarly honourable: and to act wrong, when we are just going to account for our Actions, is peculiarly shocking.

Other Things yet, (sometimes Duties, and almost always Proprieties) belonging to this Part of the Subject, are, Gifts to worthy and useful Friends, answerable to the Intimacy in which we have lived with them, and to their Occasions for such Kindness: also Recom-
pences

pences to Domestics in Proportion to their Services compared with the Exigency of their Circumstances. But however we may be at Liberty in Relation to some of these Points, we are strictly bound to the Observation of another Rule, with Respect to all, who are about us in our Sickness; of a different Nature indeed from the preceding ones, but which it is much better to mention here, than to omit; that we shew them peculiarly at that Time, great Humanity, and Goodness: not requiring from them more fatiguing or constant Attendance, than is fit; nor more Care, Skill and Dexterity, than is to be expected: recollecting, that our Illness inclines us to imagine Things amiss, in a Degree beyond Reality; and that others ought not to suffer merely because we do: thinking often, how disagreeable an Office they go through, and what Benefit and Comfort we receive from it: begging them to forgive us those hasty Sallies of Fretfulness and Impatience, that sometimes will escape us; and making them good Amends in every way that we can, for all the Trouble, which they take about us.

Another Article, usually considered along with some, of which I have just been speaking,
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is: the Manner of our Funeral. And it may sometimes be very proper to direct this ourselves, in order to keep our Friends from the Imprudence of a too expensive, or the Imputation of a too frugal one. Now we shall undoubtedly give a Proof, both of Humility and good Sense, by avoiding, (unless Motives of a public Nature demand it) all Appearance of Ostentation, at a Time that shews the Vanity of worldly Pomp in so strong a Light; and appointing that only such Regard be paid to our dead Body, as may express our Faith of its rising again; together with so much Deference to Custom, as may preserve us from the Charge of a Singularity affected without Reason. Nor let it be thought, that Religion hath nothing to do with several of these Matters, which I have now specified. It hath to do with every Matter, where there is a right and a wrong: and *whatsoever Things are venerable, whatsoever Things are lovely and of good Report, you are to think on these Things*^d: and that you may, we are to teach them.

But there is another Point, of much greater Importance, expressly enjoined in the Office for the Sick: that the *Minister should not omit ear-*

^d Phil. iv. 8.

nestly to move such as are of Ability, to be liberal to the Poor. Our Charity indeed ought to shine forth uniformly, and warm those, who need it, through our whole Life: not make a sudden Blaze, to dazzle the Eyes of others and our own, at the Close of it. What we give in our Health, we give away from ourselves; and we may know, and the World must presume, that we do it from a willing Heart: whereas delaying it to the last hath too much the Look of a shallow Design to bribe God, and catch the Applause of our Fellow-Creatures, with what we can keep no longer. However, they who have always been charitable, should still go on to the End, exercising the same Virtue: which hath great Promises made to it from God in Sickness. *Blessed is he, that considereth the Poor: the Lord will deliver him in Time of Trouble. The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive:—The Lord will strengthen him upon the Bed of languishing* *. They again, who could not give so much in their Lives, as they wished, can sometimes very properly give considerably at their Deaths; which doubtless God will graciously accept: and they who have neglected this Duty carelessly,

* Pf. .xli. 1, 2, 3.

or even wilfully, had much better, on Conviction, amend late, than never. Therefore all should examine, what is incumbent on them: and supply their Deficiencies, if they have been guilty of any. Such as have in no way done much for the Poor, in Proportion to their Circumstances, may be sure they have not done enough. Such as imagine they have done them great Good by the Expences of their Luxury and Pride, should think, whether they have not done them, or others, as much or more Harm by the same Means. And even they, who have done the most real and unmixed Good, ought still, to remember, that they have only been so far truly charitable, as Charity was in Truth their inward Motive. These Considerations may give many Cause to increase their Beneficence, under the Attacks of Diseases, or the Decline of Health. But then they must carefully avoid all Vain-glory in it: else our Saviour hath told them, that in *being seen of Men they have their whole Reward*^f: nor do they always obtain even the Applause, which they seek. They must likewise guard against all Conceit of Merit: and look on themselves not as making a Pre-

^f Matth. vi, 1, 2.

sent, but as paying a Debt, to God and their Brethren; and that so imperfectly, as to be acquitted of Sin only through him, who died to procure Acceptance for their best Performances. Whatever is done thus, though it should fail of the Intent, yet exercises the true Spirit of Almsgiving as usefully to us, as if it succeeded. But still we should exercise it with all the Prudence we can: else we may tempt the Objects of our Liberality to Idleness or Debauchery; and perhaps the present or future Managers of it to Fraud. Yet the Danger of either Abuse ought to make us, not less bountiful, but only more circumspect; and as early in our Benefactions as possible, that we may bestow or settle them in the properest Manner, which is very difficult in a Hurry at the last.

And here it may be useful to observe, that besides the common Charities, to which the present Age, with all its Faults, is remarkably well inclined, there are various other ways of doing good. Sometimes a great deal may be done without any Expence; as by making public beneficial Discoveries: and the Possessors of such Secrets are bound in Conscience not to let them be lost. Sometimes again,
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what is no particular Charity to any certain Man, may be a great and extensive Benefit to Mankind: as Foundations for the Study, or Rewards for the Improvement, of Arts or Sciences. And lastly what may seem to contribute nothing to the temporal Advantage of Men, may contribute to it more than any Thing: or were it ever so little, may be of unspeakable Service to what is of infinitely greater Importance, their eternal Happiness: as Benefactions for the Support, and serious and decent Exercise, of Religion. If Religion be a Truth, (and conscientious Preparation for Death plainly confesses it is) providing for the Maintenance and Honour of it, must be a Duty: and many have been so niggardly, so unjust to it, in the Days of their Health, that they will find they owe it large Compenfations, if they reflect as they ought, in Time of Sicknefs.

But then the utmost Care should be taken to avoid all those Errors, by which the improvident Donations of former Ages have brought so unhappy a Disesteem at present on the most rational Acts of this Part of Piety: Acts however to be more earnestly recommended, and more liberally performed by such as do acknowledge

ledge its Value, because such great Numbers do not. Only we must never imagine, that the larger Alms or Obligations can purchase us either a Licence or a Pardon, (otherwise than as all true Marks of Repentance contribute towards the latter) for any Kind of Sin, particularly of Injustice. God himself hath said: *I the Lord love judgment: I hate Robbery for burnt Offering*^s. Nor must we rob our own Families, more than Strangers, of what they are intitled to. But then they are not intitled to all, that we can possibly leave them: but an equitable Share of it is due to religious and charitable Uses. If indeed we have given a competent Proportion before, and know that they, whom we shall leave to represent us, if we die, have the same Disposition; that may suffice. For different Circumstances require different Methods to be taken. And therefore the Scripture observes, that *a good Man will guide his Affairs with Discretion*^h. But one Part of that Discretion it hath expressly declared to be *dispensing abroad, and giving to the Poor*ⁱ: which whoever doth in a right Manner, will be likely to obtain a Return of God's Bounties, to his Family, as well as himself; in

^s If. lxi. 8.^h Pf. cxii. 5.ⁱ ver. 9.

their temporal Concerns, as well as their spiritual, if that be really best for them. *His Seed shall be mighty upon Earth: the Generation of the Faithful shall be blessed. Riches and Plenteousness shall be in his House: his Righteousness endureth for ever* *.

* Ps. cxii. 2, 3.

S E R M O N XIII.

ISAIAH XXXVIII. I, 2.

In those Days was Hezekiah sick unto Death: and Isaiah the Prophet, the Son of Amoz, came unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Set thine House in Order, for thou shalt die, and not live.—Then Hezekiah turned his Face towards the Wall, and prayed unto the Lord.

IN discoursing lately on these Words, after reminding you of the Uncertainty of Life and Health, and the Need of preparing for Sickness and Death before either of them appears to be at Hand, I proposed to assist you in this good Work, by laying before you the Duties of the Sick,

- I. Respecting their Fellow-creatures.
- II. Respecting more immediately God and their own Souls.

I. The former, I observed to you, are expressed in the Text by the Words, *Set thine House in Order*, or, translating more literally, *Give Command concerning*, or, *to thine House*. And this Direction may well be enlarged to comprehend, both due Regulations of all Affairs in which the Sick are interested, and proper Advice to all Persons with whom they are connected. In the first of these Views I have already treated of it,

And proceed now to the next Point, that of needful Advice to those of our own Family, our Relations and Domestics, with whom may well be joined at least our Friends, and those with whom we have lived in Familiarity.

It is a Character, which God gives of *Abraham* with Marks of great Approbation, *I know him, that he will command his Children, and his Household after him, and they shall keep the Way of the Lord to do Justice and Judgment*^a. Undoubtedly both he and the other good Patriarchs performed this Duty through their whole Lives, as we should also; but we find it recorded of several of them, and therefore may presume it of the rest, that they gave more solemn Admonitions to their Families at their

^a Gen. xviii. 19.

Deaths, in which too our Imitation of them is highly requisite. For the dying Words, and those which probably may be such, of Parents and Masters to their Children and Servants, of Friends to their Friends, and of worthy Persons to such as respect them, naturally make an uncommon Impression. The Occasion is awful; the Minds of the Hearers are usually tender and affectionate; apt to condemn their former Disregards, and to receive what is now said, as carrying in it a peculiar Obligation and Sacredness: besides that it may often render forsaking bad Customs and acting right much the easier to them, if they can say, (what the World will regard more than a better Reason) that such was the dying Injunction of such a Friend.

You will therefore surely improve such an Opportunity, as their Prospect of being deprived of you, though not a certain one, affords you for this excellent Purpose. If you have always, or for a considerable Time, led a pious Life, you will testify to all about you, that you have found it the sure Way to inward Peace, and that you feel the Faith and Love of God a strong Support in your present Hour of Suffering and Trial. If you have been

remifs and negligent you will excite them, by fpeaking of the Remorfe which it gives you, to more Care and Zeal. If you have fallen into grofs and public Sins, you will exprefs to them fully a deep Senfe of your Guilt. For be affured, that taking Shame to yourfelf thus will be true Honour, both in the Eyes of God and Man. Warn others therefore againft the Rocks on which you have fplit, and befeech them to learn, by your fad Experience, without wanting to add their own. If they are well difpofed and good, give them the Pleafure of knowing that you rejoice in it; and exhort them to perfevere, with Tokens of a cheerful Confidence that they will. If you difcern Faults or weak Sides in them, or Dangers to which they will be liable, caution them, not harfhly, but in the kindeft and moft perfuafive Manner, to avoid, for your Sake as well as their own, what you forefee will elfe prove hurtful, if not fatal to them: and beg of them, that, if they fhould notwithstanding go wrong, the Remembrance of your Words may at leaft, when they find they have, prevail on them to retreat in Time. If you have neglected inftructing them in effential Points, acknowledge it to them with Sorrow, and be
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earnest with them to make themselves Amends. If you have instilled into them, by Discourse or Example, any false Notions, whether speculative or practical, labour to set them right as completely as you can. But, throughout the whole of your Endeavours, exact no Promises from them that may be Snares; lay no Burthen upon them that may prove too heavy; let nothing superstitious, or any Way unreasonable, nothing that can be imputed only to the Weakness of your Condition, enter into the Charge that you leave with them. Surely I need not add, (if you have any Sense of Religion) that you are yet less to enjoin them, what may gratify Resentment, perpetuate Variance, or engage them in transgressing the least of God's Laws. For it would be the vilest Abuse of a Death-bed Influence to extort from them, by Means of it, Assurances which it must be a Sin to give, and a still greater to fulfill.

It frequently happens, that when Men approach very near to their End, they are ill able to exhort even those, who are about them, distinctly and properly. But therefore you should be always doing it in a sufficient Degree, that you may have less Need to say much

to them at last. And when a threatening Sickness comes, you should take Occasions of speaking, before it is gone too far; but rather force yourself to say a little, though late, than omit it intirely. And be not in the least afraid that then you may happen to express Convictions and good Resolutions that will not last, and urge upon others better Advice than you shall follow yourselves, if you recover; but consider it as one very weighty Reason more for these Admonitions, that such a Declaration of your Sentiments will assist in tying you down to them; and directing their future Behaviour will greatly contribute to secure your own. Some indeed are at no Time capable of using many Words to Advantage. But perhaps you can use a few that shall have the Effect of many; at least, you can recommend a valuable Acquaintance, an instructive awakening Book, Attendance on public Worship, serious Recollection from Time to Time, humble Prayer to God in private. If therefore it be possible, fail not to make some Advantage of what may prove your last Opportunity. Think how dreadful it will be, if your Children, your Servants, your Friends, should have Ground to say to you in the Day
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of Judgment, “ Had you in your Life taught me any Thing but Sin, and Folly, or Trifles ; had you at your Death warned me of my Duty and my Danger, my Condition might have been intirely the Reverse of what now it must be for ever.” And, on the contrary, what Delight will it bring you, not only to see them happy along with you, but to hear them acknowledge, that you were the Cause of it ; and to enjoy their Gratitude, as Part of your Reward to all Eternity !

I now proceed to lay before you,

II. The Duties of the Sick, respecting more immediately God and their own Souls ; to which our Thoughts are naturally turned by the Words, *Then Hezekiah prayed unto the Lord* : for every Sentiment of Piety may be expressed in Prayer.

His Prayer indeed, if the whole of it be recorded in Scripture, was only that he might recover ; a Request, which for the public Good he had urgent Reasons to make in the first Place. And that being instantly granted, he had no Need to apply further to God, in Relation to his Sicknefs, otherwise than by Thanksgiving, which he did. But they who have more extensive Wants at that Time, are

both authorized and bound to enlarge in Proportion the Subject of their Addresses to the Throne of Grace; and therefore I shall endeavour to comprehend under this Head all the religious Duties of the Sick.

Great Multitudes, in this Nation as well as others, have formerly thought, and too many think still, that they can be acceptable to God by Acts of Devotion, without equitable and kind Behaviour to Men, or virtuous Government of themselves; which Persuasion hath produced an absurd, useles, nay, mischievous Kind of Religion in some, and Contempt and even Hatred of all Religion in others. But amongst us, at present, much the largest Number build their Hopes of future Happiness, if they have any, on their Performance, such as it is, of moral Obligations; with little or no Regard, either in their Lives or at their Deaths, to Dictates of Piety, scriptural or natural: at least, beyond a few Formalities, negligently practised now and then, just as they please. Indeed very many seem to fancy, that the Time of Sickness is the unfittest of all others for attending to such Subjects; that then Persons ought to think as little as possible, and of the most insignificant Things they can. Now, if they
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are but able to keep God out of their Minds when they are ill, it is easy to do it when they are well; and so all goes on as they wish.

But though it be a most fatal Mistake to believe, that every Thing may be done at our latter End, yet it is also a very pernicious one to apprehend, that nothing can be done when the Danger of it seems to approach. For that Season furnishes most favourable Opportunities for such Reflections and such Behaviour, as will not only produce the happiest Effects of all Sorts, if we recover, but greatly better our future Condition, if we die: And though in some Distempers, especially some Periods of them, religious Meditations, agitating the Sick very strongly, would only disorder their Minds, and increase the Hazard of their Lives; yet in others they are unspeakably the surest Relief: and where they do give Uneasiness, which they are far from doing always, will soon afford, if they are pursued as they ought, most valuable Degrees of Comfort and Peace. On all Accounts therefore, he, who hath a Right to our continual and most awful Attention in every Part of Life, ought to have it paid him peculiarly in that Part, which reminds us of appearing soon before him. Not that it is
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our Duty in the least to imagine Distempers worse than they are, to lay Strefs on idle Forebodings, or to despair of Life, even when juster Grounds of Apprehension appear. For *God, who raiseth the Dead*^b, can raise us from the nearest Approach to Death, whenever he will. But yet every Indisposition is a Call from Heaven, and some are very loud ones, to think of Mortality; and to *remember* him, who should never be forgot, *our Creator*^c, from whom we come, and to whom we shall return.

Now the first Principle of all Regard to God is Faith. And it would be well if many, who are far from suspecting themselves of any Tendency towards Atheism, would seriously ask their Hearts, what Proof they give of having in Earnest so much as the Faith of natural Religion; whether they have considered themselves as under the Obligation of paying conscientiously to their Maker the Obedience and the Worship, which Reason requires. But supposing they have; Reason shews to Sinners, (and we are all such) what they have to do, but in Part: and what they have to hope or fear, so very imperfectly, that, however Men may

^b 2 Cor. i. 9.

^c Eccl. xiii. 1.

persuade themselves to think otherwise in the Days of high Spirits and presumptuous Imaginations; yet, when Sickness brings their future Account near to their View, they will find, that nothing could have directed them so rightly through Life as God's written Law; and nothing can support them under the Terrors of Death, like that Covenant-right to Pardon and eternal Happiness, which is there alone offered to Mankind; and even there, on this Condition alone, that they trust, not in their own Righteousness, not in their own Repentance, not in their own Endeavours, not in their own Amendment, for God's Acceptance, but intirely in his Mercy through the Merits of Jesus Christ; and so trust in that, as thankfully to yield themselves up to the Influences of his blessed Spirit, and in this Strength to labour after that universal *Holiness* of Life and Heart, *without which no Man shall see the Lord*^d. Therefore convince yourself without Delay of the Truth and Importance of this gracious Covenant, which, to a thoughtful humble Mind will soon be visible; and if you are convinced, intitle yourself without Delay to a Share in it, and watchfully preserve this

^d Heb. xii. 14.

Foundation from being at any Time undermined ; that in Health and Prosperity you may stand firm against worldly Allurements, and in Sickness and Adversity against Despondence.

There are indeed very good Persons, who, in Illnesses, particularly of some Sorts, are often tempted to partial, or even total Unbelief. And if any seeming Reasons for it be suggested to their Minds, they ought to inquire after, and oppose to them reasonable Answers. But where little or nothing lies at the Bottom but low-spirited Fears that they do not believe at all, or not sufficiently, what their very Sollicitude, and their whole Conduct shews they do ; or Difficulties about abstruse Points, that need not be cleared up, and perhaps, in this World at least, never will or can : the right Way is, to throw them all aside as far as we are able ; to pray to God, that he would free us from Anxiety about them in his good Time ; to be disturbed the least that is possible for us, if the same Scruples and Weaknesses, after some Interval, return, which they are very apt to do ; and, with the Strength that we have remaining, stand by the Judgments made in our better Days : which, if we have been serious and considerate, are much the likeliest
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to be true, and being on the Side of Religion, must be safe; for we may gain by it infinitely, but lose we cannot. And amongst the Doctrines of Religion we should not perplex our Heads with disputable Matters, when we are least of all fit for them, but dwell on such plain acknowledged Points, as may best afford us the Direction or Comfort which we want in our present Circumstances.

Being settled thus on the Ground-work of Faith, our next Concern will be to examine the Suitableness of our past Behaviour to it. Self-examination is a constant Duty, but especially requisite when we have the most immediate Need to know and amend our Condition; besides that possibly it may discover to us some Fault of ours, for which the Hand of God is laid upon us, and so enable us to obtain the Removal of it. An Inquiry, which will shew the best of Men but too much amiss in them, will doubtless be to most a painful Employment; above all, when they have Sufferings enough to bear, besides that of a *wounded Spirit*^c. And why then should we not lighten this Burthen beforehand, by avoiding to act wrong, which is the only sure Way; or,

^c Prov. xviii. 14.

which is the next, by rectifying it instantly? But whatever we have made necessary, we must support; and being awakened to present Remorse, is unspeakably better than going on in a Dream to future Misery. Directions for making this Inquiry must be learnt from the Discourses that professedly treat of it. But the chief are these: to compare the whole of our Actions, Words and Thoughts, as well as we are able, with the Rule of our Duty, conscientiously, and yet coolly; neither accusing ourselves of what we have not done amiss, nor suppressing what we have; neither disturbing our own Peace on Account of mere Infirmities, nor disguising wilful Sins under gentle Appellations; remembering, that God is merciful and good, yet remembering also, that he is just and holy; reflecting, that we are in his Presence, and praying, that he would make us known to ourselves.

After discovering thus how we have been guilty, we must examine also how far we have repented. Now Repentance implies Disapprobation of what we have done ill, and consequently Sorrow for it; without which inward Change, an outward Alteration of our Conduct will avail us nothing. But whether the

the Concern, even of great Sinners, be vehement and passionate, or silent and composed, is of small Moment, provided it be real and deep. Sorrow, that we have acted contrary to our Interest, is a rational Principle; that we have transgressed the Rule of Morals, is a virtuous one; that we have disobeyed our Heavenly Father, is a religious one. And whoever is truly moved by all these Considerations, it will be an useless and a hurtful Nicety for him to disquiet himself about the Proportion in which they are mixed, if together they do but produce the proper Effect. And this Effect may and will be different in different Cases. Our Concern for mere Frailties, if it make us humble and watchful, will be accepted, though it doth not prevent some Relapses into the same Failings. But our Penitence for gross and deliberate Sins must evidence itself by forsaking them, else it hath no Claim to Pardon. And indeed the Repentance, encouraged by so many noble Promises in the New Testament, is that which accompanied the Conversion of Jews and Heathens to Christianity; but the Remission of wilful Offences, committed after professing it, (and we have professed it from our Childhood) will
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be found very sparingly mentioned. For it is expected of Christians to keep the Laws of Christ, else they *receive his Grace in vain*^f. However, there are, God be thanked, Assurances of Mercy given to the worst of us, on returning from our Transgressions. But none are given to Sorrow without Amendment. If any were, the whole Intent of the Gospel would be defeated, and *Christ* be made the *Minister of Sin*^g.

We must not therefore imagine, that a little, or a great deal of Grief in Sickness, if we could be sure of feeling it then, which we cannot, will intitle us to Forgiveness. For the bitterest of such Anguish may have neither Piety nor Virtue in it, but be merely the Concern of a Malefactor, (continuing in his Heart as much so as ever) that he is likely to be punished for his Deeds. Or suppose there be some Convictions of a better Kind, grounded even on Christian Faith; yet when there is no Time for trying what Fruits they will bring forth, and when Multitudes, after the like Convictions, have immediately or soon relapsed into their old Iniquities, what Dependance can there be upon them? God indeed knows,

^f 2 Cor. vi. 9

^g Gal. ii. 17.

if they would, in case of Recovery, be effectual; but he who feels them hath no Means of knowing it. And were he certain that they would, how doth it appear, that when they come so late, they will be accepted? The penitent Thief, whose Pardon is the chief Argument alledged to prove this Point, might possibly repent long before he was taken, might be taken long before he was executed, might have no Knowledge of the Gospel, till he hung with our Saviour upon the Cross; and he exercised there a Faith so circumstanced, as ours cannot be: on all which Accounts there in no Room for a Parallel to be drawn between him and wicked Christians now, who continue obdurate till the Approach of Death.

And what shall we say then concerning them? The mild Spirit of our Religion will not permit us to judge harshly of them; Faithfulness to the Souls of Men will not suffer us to pronounce in their Favour. All we can determine with Certainty therefore is, that such Repentance as they still remain capable of, united with Christian Faith, is the best and only Thing to which they can have Recourse. Right Behaviour then will certainly make their Case in some Degree better; and wrong Be-

haviour, even then, when every Thing conspires to remind them of what they ought to have remembered sooner, must make it unspeakably worse. Their Duty therefore is clear, be their Hopes ever so doubtful; and there is always Room for some Hope whilst Life is preserved. They may have more Time, they may have more Mercy granted them, than they can see Cause to expect. God is not, even in their Case, a cruel Being enraged, but a wise and good one justly displeas'd. Frightening themselves beyond a Capacity of thinking and acting reasonably must do Harm, be their spiritual Condition ever so dangerous. They cannot know it to be desperate, and therefore ought by no Means to give it up. Still, on the other Hand, though God may assure them internally of Pardon and Happiness, yet in general very strong Persuasions of that Kind, in such Circumstances, are greatly to be suspected as enthusiastic, delusive Imaginations: and the modester and less confident Men are, the better grounded is their Prospect. But so extremely uncomfortable a one will it ordinarily prove, that there is great Weight in the Son of *Sirach's* Precept: *Before Judgment examine thyself, and in the Day of Visitation thou*

shalt find Mercy. Humble thyself before thou be sick: in the Time of Sins shew Repentance—and defer not until Death to be justified^h.

The Penitence, left to a Bed of Languishing, ought to be only the more solemn Completion of that which we practised daily in our Health. And most of us have so much to rectify, and all have so much Need to do it well, be it more or less, that we should not fail to take the earliest and surest Time for it; when it will be most acceptable to God, and most advantageous to our own Souls; when there will be least Ground for Doubt and Scruple afterwards, whether we left our Sins, or they left us; whether we acted on ingenuous, or servile Motives. But whatever we have unhappily omitted till Sickness calls, let us then at least set about it instantly; not be ashamed of repenting, or being known to repent, for it is in sinning that the only Shame lies; not be satisfied with feeling, and owning to Men a Sense of our Guilt, as far as it relates to them; but confess to God our Disobedience and Ingratitude to him, with the deeper Contrition, the longer we have neglected it. *Hezekiah's* Prayer indeed hath no Confession of Sin, but

^h Ecclus xviii. 20, 21, 22.

his Thanksgiving afterwards hath a very strong one: *Thou hast cast all my Sins behind thy Back*ⁱ. And therefore, when he pleaded at first, *Remember, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee with a perfect Heart, and done that which is good in thy Sight*^k, we should understand him to mean, that as a King he had been zealous for God's true Religion, to which consequently his Life was of Importance; not that as a Man he had not deserved Death, which all Men have. And if we are convinced in any due Degree what our Deserts have been, we shall intreat the Divine Mercy, not for the Merits, I said it before, and I say it again, not for the Merits of our good Actions, for the best of them are faulty; not for the Sake of our Repentance, which in Strictness undoes nothing that we have done amiss, and therefore (though our natural Power extends no further) cannot intitle us even to Exemption from Punishment, much less to eternal Rewards; but solely through his Satisfaction and Intercession, who died to obtain both for us.

A just Sense of this invaluable Blessing will effectually incline us to join with our thankful

ⁱ Is. xxxviii. 17.

^k Ver. 3.

Humiliations, a zealous Performance of whatever Duties are opposite to our past Sins, and whatever Mortifications are proper to correct our present evil Tendencies. But no useless and fanciful Observances, nor any Austerities, calculated only to give Uneasiness for the Sake of giving it, should ever enter into a Christian's Penitence. For such Things take off the Attention from real Obligations, and fix it on themselves, as Matters of the greatest Moment: whence the punctual Performers of them are tempted to spiritual Pride; and others, who see this great Stress laid on them, are induced either to esteem them without Cause, or to disesteem Religion, falsely supposing it to enjoin them. Therefore the Scripture directs returning Offenders neither to empty Forms, nor to the Rigours of corporal Discipline, any farther than to such occasional Use of Fasting, as may be found beneficial, but *to do justly, and to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with their God*¹. And least of all should the Sick be harrassed with needless Burthens. For they have one already, of no small Weight, laid on them by God himself; I mean the Disease which he hath inflicted, and bearing that as

¹ Mic. vi. 3,

they ought, will seldom fail to be Labour sufficient.

Merely feeling the Pressure of it indeed will do us no Service, without attending properly to him from whom it comes. On the contrary, when God saith, *In vain have I smitten your Children, they received no Correction^m*, it implies, that they were hardened in Wickedness; whereas, when *the Voice of the Lord crieth, the Man of Wisdom will bear the Rod, and who hath appointed itⁿ*. Yet still worse would it be, if, perceiving whence our Sufferings proceed, we should be wrongly affected towards the Author of them; either with their blasphemous Vehemence, of whom the Scripture foretels, *They shall fret themselves, and curse their God, and look upwards^o*; or with his profane Despondency, who said, *This Evil is from the Lord, why should I wait for the Lord any longer^p?* But if we apply to him with humble Confession, and sincere Amendment, like *Ephraim in Jeremiab, Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised; after I was instructed, I smote upon my Thigh, I was ashamed, yea, even confounded^q*: we shall have Cause to say with

^m Jer. ii. 30. ⁿ Mic. vi. 9. ^o Is. viii. 21. ^p 2 Kings vi. 33.
^q Jer. xxxi. 18, 19.

the Psalmist, *It is good for me that I have been in Trouble, that I might learn thy Statutes*^r. We should learn our Duty from God's Mercies, but if these make us forget him, Chastisement is fitly employed to make us recollect him. *I will cause you to pass under the Rod, and bring you into the Bond of the Covenant;—and ye shall remember your Ways, and all your Doings, wherein ye have been defiled:—and ye shall loath yourselves in your own Sight, and know, that I am the Lord*^s. *By this shall the Iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the Fruit to take away his Sins*^t. When therefore God *hideth his Face* from us, and *we are troubled*^u with Uneasiness of Body or Mind, though it may be only *to make us, like the Captain of our Salvation, perfect through Sufferings*^w; yet we shall do well to inquire with Humility, though not with causeless Terror, whether his Purpose is not what the Prophet declares in his Name: *I will go, and return to my Place, till they acknowledge their Offence;—in their Affliction they will seek me early*^x. If on Self-examination we find little or nothing but common Frailties to charge upon ourselves, we shall have abundant Reason

^r Ps. cxix. 71. ^s Ezek. xx. 37, 43, 44. ^t Is. xxvii. 9.

^u Ps. civ. 29.

^w Heb. ii. 10.

^x Hof. v. 15.

to rejoice in all our Tribulations, and be thankful to his preventing Grace. If we discover groffer Failings, our Concern is, to answer the Divine Expectation, as the next Verse directs: *Come, and let us return unto the Lord, for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up*¹. Such Behaviour will procure us the Removal, or Mitigation of our Sufferings at present, if infinite Wisdom sees it best for us. But however this be, it will certainly obtain for us that future Recompence of everlasting Felicity, which the Words, that follow there, naturally express, perhaps with an Allusion to the Time of our Lord's Resurrection, the Foundation and First-fruits of the general one: *After two Days will he revive us, in the third Day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his Sight*².

¹ Hof. vi. 1

² Ver. 2.

S E R M O N X I V .

I S A I A H xxxviii. 1, 2.

In those Days was Hezekiah sick unto Death: and Isaiah the Prophet, the Son of Amoz, came unto him, and said unto him: Thus saith the Lord, set thine House in Order; for thou shalt die, and not live. Then Hezekiah turned his Face towards the Wall, and prayed unto the Lord.

FROM these Words I have propos'd to shew you the Duties of Sick Persons.

- I. Respecting their Fellow-Creatures; expressed by the Direction, *set thine House in Order:*
- II. Respecting more immediately God and their own Souls; intimated in the good King's Behaviour, *Then Hezekiah prayed unto the Lord.*

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The former of these I have finished, and made some Progress in the latter : under which, after setting before you, in general, the Necessity of having Regard to God in our Sickness; I proceeded to the particular Obligations, first of Faith in his Word (giving at the same time Directions to those, who are disquieted by Doubts and Scruples); then of Self-examination in his Presence; then of such Repentance, as our Case requires. And here I insisted largely on the Danger of trusting to a Death-bed Sorrow; and yet the Usefulness of feeling and expressing then, rather than never, a due Concern for our past Sins: which, I observed to you, must always be accompanied with earnest Petitions for Pardon, offered up in the Name of our blessed Redeemer; and for Assistance from the Grace of the holy Spirit; with rational and scriptural, not superstitious, Proofs of our Humiliation; and a hearty Desire to amend and improve under the Discipline of Heaven.

I now go on to remind you farther, that together with these, the Sick ought to be very constant in every other Exercise of private Piety. For as they are cut off from active Life, they have more Leisure for religious
Con-

Contemplation. And as they want all the Improvement and Comfort, which they can have; so they will receive the most of both, by frequent lifting up of their Hearts to *the God of Patience and Consolation*^a, the Giver of all Good, in Addresses carefully suited to their present Condition. But usually, if not always, the right Manner of doing this will be, not to set yourselves Tasks of reading, or meditating, or praying, just so often, or so long; but to observe with Impartiality and Discretion, what really edifies, and what only flattens you; as also, what your Strength and Spirits will permit, without suffering by it. And if there be Need, you should allow other Persons of Skill and Seriousness to judge for you in this Matter; following their Decisions with some Degree of implicit Obedience. And should it prove, that with your best Management you can neither pray to God, nor think of him, with any Thing near the Affection and Fervency, which you find expressed in many good Books, and shewn by many good Christians, when sick; but in a poor, imperfect, broken, languid Manner: bear with yourselves for what you cannot help; and be assured, that

^a Rom. xvi. 5.

your heavenly Father will bear with you, and will accept the Service of which your Weakness is capable, be it ever so small.

Nay further, should your Condition be such as to require a considerable Share of your Hours to be spent in a thoughtless trifling Way; submit to it, as Part of your Duty; and do it without Scruple. Were you indeed to make Amusements your Choice, as the Means of banishing serious Thought, that would be a great and dangerous Sin. To throw away the Time of Sicknes after throwing away that of Health; and imagine it too soon for you to think of Religion, while you are well; and too much for you, when you are ill: is a Method, which must end unhappily. But in the necessary Intervals of Attention to better Things; when, if you were not to spend your Hours thus, you would spend them worse; when your Spirits would sink, and your Patience wear out: then, cheerful Discourses, or any Relaxations, that are innocent, that will revive no wrong Impressions, and excite no blameable Movements of Mind, may be very useful: provided, that if you have indulged them too much before, you firmly bind yourselves now to be wiser for the future, if God

continue your Life; and that you give Earnest of it, by employing no more of your Time thus, than is requisite, in order to employ the rest better. For *miserable Comforters*^b are these Things alone: and wretched Creatures they, who have no other to depend on. Whatever superficial palliative Remedies it may be needful to intermix, the fundamental Support of a pious Mind will ever be that of the Psalmist: *Why art thou so heavy, O my Soul; and why art thou so disquieted within me? O put thy Trust in God*^c.

The Causes of Dejection in Sickness are of many Sorts: but Religion hath a perfect Cure, if suitably applied, for every one of them, as will appear by going through the chief.

Some have so painful a Conviction of their own Guilt, though perhaps by no Means uncommonly great, that they fear it can never obtain Pardon. Yet, by the Influence of God's Grace, they have quitted the more wilful of their Sins long ago, and watch against the rest with constant Care: they have the firmest Belief in general of God's Love to Mankind through Christ, and in their more composed Hours receive much Comfort from their own

^b Job xvi. 2.^c Ps. xliiii. 5, 6.

happy Change. But still at other Times, and especially when they think of their End, as probably approaching, their Hopes are depressed by a Load of Terrors, and tormenting Apprehensions, that they are not qualified to find Mercy of the Lord in that Day^d. Indeed they rather conceive, that more advantageous Thoughts of their Condition would be presumptuous, and increase their Condemnation. But certainly it is no Part of our Duty at all, to think worse of ourselves than the Truth; but a Fault, to be *swallowed up with overmuch Sorrow*^e, when our heavenly Father invites us to Thankfulness and Joy; as doubtless he doth every one, who repents, believes and obeys. In that Case therefore, questioning whether his Goodness extends to us, is doing it an Injury. And often these very Persons are sensible of this; but misled by it into a second Error. They first imagine their Transgressions cannot be forgiven; then have Scruples, whether this Imagination can be forgiven: and thus are miserable successively on each Account, whereas they need not be so on either. For their Distrust is involuntary, mere Infirmary: which God will never impute to them, if they

^d 2 Tim. i. 18.^e 2 Cor. ii. 7.

confess it to him, and strive against it as well as they can; but will hear their Prayers, and grant them Relief in his good Time.

Others are persuaded, that their Sickness is a Judgment, inflicted on them for this or that particular Fault; and they cannot bear the Weight of the Almighty's Anger. But perhaps his Intent is, not to punish, but to warn and preserve, or merely to try, and to improve you. *For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth: and scourgeth every Son, whom he receiveth*^f. Or if he is displeas'd, would not letting you go on unchecked have been a far more dreadful Judgment? He now calls you to repent, and amend: and when you have done that, he may take off his Hand. Or should he extend his Correction even to the Destruction of the *Flesh*, yet by the very Means of that wholesome Severity, your *Spirit may be saved in the Day of the Lord Jesus*^g. Since therefore you have happily avoided the common Extreme, of *despising the chastening of the Lord*, avoid but also the other, of *fainting when you are rebuked of him*^h, and all will be well.

Some again, upon whom Infirmities continue long, make heavy Complaints, that they

^f Heb. xii. 6.

^g 1 Cor. v. 5.

^h Heb. xii. 5.

are become uselefs and good for nothing. But what Need have you to be good for more, than your Maker fees proper? If it be his Will to make you of little Ufe, is there not great Dutifulnefs, and therefore great Reward, in submitting to it? Yet, after all, may not you be of excellent Ufe, by the Example of suffering piously and cheerfully; and by fhewing the World, that Religion can enable you to give up every Thing else? But you had Defigns, it may be, of doing much good; and fhall leave them abortive or imperfect. Why, God will accept your Intention, and complete your Defigns in his own Time and Way; poffibly ftill by your Hands, notwithstanding Appearances. But you are unable, in your prefent Condition, to make any Provision for your Family; perhaps are a Burthen to it: and during your Illnefs, or after your Death, they that belong to you will be deftitute. Why, if this Danger have arifen from any paff Neglect of yours, you have Caufe to be concerned for it; yet no more Caufe to fink under it, than under your other Faults: and may humbly hope, that God will be good to your Relations and Dependents, though you have been deficient. But if you could not help what hath happened, or is likely

likely to happen; commit them cheerfully to him, as you do yourselves; and take Comfort from his own Words: *Leave thy Fatherless Children; I will preserve them alive: and let thy Widows trust in me*ⁱ. All this while, you have been only his Instrument in supporting them: when he lays you aside, he will make Use of some other. And though you may not in the least foresee particularly, what will become of them; yet you well know in general, and let this suffice you, that *a Father of the Fatherless, and a Judge of the Widows, is God in his Holy Habitation*^k. Pray for them therefore earnestly, and take all prudent worldly Measures on their Behalf; but never be anxious about them. And yet, if you cannot avoid being a little so, remember, that some small Excess of kind and laudable Affection is an amiable Failing; and some Defect of Faith in trying Circumstances hath often been chargeable on very sincerely pious Men.

But farther: to many, who are young, it is a heavy Grief in their Sickness, that far from being blessed with Length of Days, they are likely to be cut off in their early Years, without approaching to what they had considered

ⁱ Jer. xlix. 11.^k Pf. lxxviii. 5.

as the common Term of human Life. But frequently such Persons regain by Degrees a comfortable State of Health, and outlast a great Part of their Contemporaries. Or suppose they do not: very few in Proportion arrive at old Age; and perhaps one Half of Mankind leave the World before they attain their full Growth. God knew best, when it was fit you should come into Life: and he knows best also, when and how it is fit you should go out of it. If you are not ready for a Change, it is your own Fault: you must endeavour to become so, as soon and as well as you can; and others must take Warning by you. But if you are prepared, how happy is your Case, as the Book of *Wisdom* describes it! *He pleased God, and was beloved of him: so that, living amongst Sinners, he was translated; yea, speedily was he taken away, lest Wickedness should alter his Understanding, or Deceit beguile his Soul*¹. How you would use a longer Space, or what would befall you in it, you cannot possibly tell: but there have been such Multitudes, to whom dying in their Prime would have been the greatest Felicity, with Respect to this World and the next; that if he, who sees all

¹ *Wisd.* iv. 10, 11.

Things, sees proper to appoint it for any of us ; we have abundant Cause to lay down our Heads quietly, without murmuring.

Still, the Desire of Life is natural ; and, if tempered with due Submission, always innocent, sometimes highly virtuous : for it may be strengthened by Reasons, private or public, of great Moment. And doubtless for such it was, that so much of *Hezekiah's Prayer*, as the Scripture mentions, was plainly intended to plead for his being spared. God may bring us into Danger, only to give us, what we commonly want, a stronger Sense of our Dependence on him : and this End being obtained, he may continue us here, to do him the Service, for which he hath thus qualified us. But when it appears a determined Call to us, to *arise and depart*^m ; however *weak the Flesh* may be, let the *Spirit be willing*ⁿ, and say, *I come, to do thy Will, O God*^o : yet without reckoning a considerable Degree of inward Reluctance, if we should feel it, a Sin ; or even too great a Degree to be either a heinous Offence, or a bad Sign upon the whole. Our blessed Lord himself, who chose to suffer every Thing, which might instruct us, was probably

^m Mic. ii. 10.

ⁿ Matth. xxvi. 41.

^o Heb. x. 7.

on that Account not intirely exempt from Dread of Death: but he was intirely obedient under it; and thus furnished us with the fullest Proof, that Infirmary of Nature is very different from Rebellion of Will, and very consistent with perfect Resignation. Indeed so far as Reason can influence, the virtuous have much more Reason of the two, to fear Life, than Death. The former is beset round with Afflictions and Hazards: the Terrors of going through the latter depend, in a great Measure, to all Appearance, on Imagination. This World, we are sure, hath little Good in it: the next hath every Thing, that we can wish: why should we be unwilling then to make the Exchange? At the Hour of our Departure we are still in the same Hands, in which we have always been. And therefore should we not say, from the Bottom of our Hearts: *Though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no Evil: for thou art with me* ^P?

But some are not so much afraid of dying, as of the painful and wearisome Road, that leads to it. They have suffered already, they think, nearly, if not quite, to the full Extent of their Patience: yet a great deal more Suffering must

come ; and they shall never support it. But remember ; Thousands and Millions, and amongst them, those of the quickest Sensibility and most timorous Dispositions, have born before you as much as you can have to bear : nay, perhaps you have born yourself much more, than remains behind. The same Help from above, that enabled you to support Yesterday, will enable you to support To-day and To-morrow. And in fact, we all of us bear Things very well, which yet we call intolerable ; and commonly go through severer and more tedious Sufferings with as firm and calm a Spirit, as we do lighter and shorter. At least therefore make not yourself miserable before-hand, by drawing frightful Pictures of what may never come ; or however may fall greatly short of what you imagine. And let the worst come ; pray to God, and *look unto Jesus, who endured the Cross*^a ; then set yourself to bear what you can ; and you will find, that you can bear what you need. Pain, when moderate, is nothing terrible ; and when acute, is seldom long. If you recover, you will soon forget all, or think and talk of it with Pleasure : and if you die ; that, to a good

^a Heb. xii. 2.

Person, is the completest Recovery, that is possible. In all Events therefore be composed: and to assist yourself in it, avoid, with the utmost Caution, all intemperate Words and Behaviour: for indulging them will only exasperate your Mind; and checking them will quiet it very much. Yet never condemn yourself for merely natural Expressions of what you feel; (for the most pious Men, in Scripture, have used very strong ones) nor too rigidly for a little Excess in them. A Duty so hard, as undergoing sharp Torments, or continued Wearisomness, may well admit of some Imperfection in the Performance, and yet intitle us, through our merciful Father's Bounty, to a large Recompence. Nor is it criminal in grievous Agonies, tiresome Confinement, Lowness of Spirits, or Weakness of Body, that make us Burthens to ourselves and others, humbly to ask, when no other Hope of Release appears, (if it be God's Will) for that of Death. Only we must do nothing to hasten it; we must use the Means of preserving and supporting Life so long as Nature permits it to last: and we must not be impatient with Heaven, if that be longer than we wish; but meekly suffer on, and faithfully maintain our

Post, until the appointed Hour, when our great Commander shall call us off to Rest.

But besides Resignation in Sicknefs, we owe to God Thankfulness also; for the numerous other Blessings, which we still enjoy; for the Blessing of Health, all the Time that we did enjoy it; for every Interval and Alleviation, every Comfort and Support, which he hath given us since: for we *are not worthy of the least of all his Mercies*^r. Nor have we Cause to be thankful under Sicknefs only, but thankful for it also. Very possibly this may seem Affectation to some, and a *hard Saying*^s to others. But consider: are we not often highly thankful, and with great Cause, for what produces only Pain to us at the Time; as in the Case of any rough Medicine administered or painful Operation performed upon us, Necessity so requiring? Now God is the Physician of our Souls; and Sicknefs is one of his principal Methods of Cure. By this he deadens our immoderate Fondness for Amusements and Pleasures; and removes us out of the way of Temptations to Vanity and Folly. By this he lowers the swelling Vehemence of haughty Spirits; and teaches hard Hearts by

^r Gen. xxxii, 10.

^s John vi. 60.

Experience, that Misery deserves Pity. By this he shews us the Emptiness of the present World, the Nearness and Importance of the next: reminds us of Self-Inquiry and Penitence, Meditation and Prayer: tries and exercises our Faith, our Trust, our Patience: gives us the Opportunity of *offering to him what costs us something*; and by employing us in more laborious Work, secures to us a more ample Reward. The harshest Discipline, that is requisite to procure such Benefits as these to us, (and it is only *if Need be*," that we are afflicted) surely deserves our utmost Gratitude. The more, and more constantly, our Hearts are filled with it; the better and happier we shall be: but if we can arrive no farther, than to be sensible, that we have Reason for Thankfulness; and to exert accordingly some Acts of it from Time to Time upon Recollection; let it excite no Terror in us, but only Endeavours to improve. Nor should we imagine, that there is the least Inconsistence between Thankfulness for the Good intended us by Sickness, and earnest Desires to feel as little of it, and be treated as gently, as our Case will admit. God indeed knows, what inward Strength we shall

¹ 2 Sam. xxiv. 24.

² 1 Pet. i. 6.

have;

have: but we only know what our Weakness is; and ought therefore to pray, that if it be his good Pleasure, our Trial may be moderate.

But whatever it be, we must join our own Care with his Appointments: else all that we go through may be thrown away upon us; and even, in direct Contradiction to his Design, hurt us in the future Life, as well as the present. This whole Matter is beautifully described in the Book of *Job*. *If they be bound in Fetters, and holden in Cords of Affliction; then he sheweth them their Work, and their Transgressions that they have exceeded. He openeth also their Ear to Discipline, and commandeth that they return from Iniquity. If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their Days in Prosperity, and their Years in Pleasures.—But the Hypocrites (or impure) in Heart heap up Wrath: they cry not, when he bindeth them^x. Let us therefore humble ourselves under his Hand^y, whenever he lays it upon us; consider the great End of all his Corrections, and apply our whole Souls to attain it. Perhaps we ought to have practised Retirement and Self-Inspection during our Health, and would not; but*

^x Job xxxvi. 8, 9, 10, 11, 13.

^y 1 Pet. v. 6.

diffipated and lost ourselves in Pursuits and Cares, or Diversions and Trifles. To cure us of this, he confines us to a sick Room, where we must be alone and think. Let us then at length do it to good Purpose; look back to our Conduct in this World, look forward to our Portion in the next; *remember God on our Bed, and meditate on him in the Night-watches*^z. *Stand in Awe, and sin no more; commune with our own Heart in our Chamber, and be still; offer the Sacrifice of Righteousness, and put our Trust in the Lord*^a.

For the better Performance of these and all the Duties of Sickness, and obtaining such a Conclusion of it, as may be most expedient for us, religious Prudence will direct us to join with our own Prayers those of our Fellow-Christians. To unite us more closely in good Will and Affection, our Saviour hath appointed, that our Prayers shall be common; and hath declared, that *where we are gathered together for this Purpose, he is in the Midst of us*^b. Accordingly, when St. Peter was in Danger, *Prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him*^c. And St. James's Injunction

^z Pf. lxxiii. 6. ^a Pf. iv. 4, 5. John v. 14. ^b Matth. xviii. 20.
^c Acts xii. 5.

concerning the Sick is, *pray for one another, that ye may be healed* ^a. Nor certainly ought we to intercede less fervently for the Souls of our Brethren, than their Bodies. Therefore in the ancient Liturgies, Persons dangerously ill were recommended by Name to the Throne of Grace for such Mercies as they needed. And our own hath provided, on behalf of *those especially, for whom our Prayers are desired*, a most comprehensive Request, for *Comfort and Relief according to their several Necessities*, for *Patience under their Sufferings*, for *a happy Issue out of all their Afflictions*. And we shall consult both our Duty and our Interest, by intreating a particular Share, when our Case requires it, in the general Supplications of the Church of Christ.

But then, if it pleases God to restore us, we must, as we have taken every Method of procuring his Mercy, take every Method of acknowledging it. And one is, by suitable Acts of Devotion. Sincere and fervent Thanksgivings at the Time are indispensably necessary: and stated Returns of them, for more remarkable Deliverances, are very becoming and beneficial. But Expressions of Gratitude

^a James v. 16.

in Words alone, however warm, are nothing. We must shew it in our whole Behaviour; zealously keep alive the good Purposes, that we formed in the Time of our Danger; freely own them; sacredly execute them; always remembering, that the most perfect Recovery is but a short Reprieve: else our former Sins, and more, will *enter* into our Souls, *and dwell there*; and *our last State be worse than our first*^c, like that of innumerable poor Wretches, who are gone into Eternity before us: whereas if we *pay our Vows, which we promised with our Lips, and spake with our Mouths, when we were in Trouble*^d; our *chastening shall yield us here the peaceable Fruit of Righteousness*^e; and *our light Affliction, which is but for a Moment, work for us an eternal Weight of Glory*^b.

Thus I have gone through a large Number of Directions to the Sick. But there is no small Danger, that when you are called to the Practice of them, some may be forgotten, some misapplied, and others found so short and imperfect, that perplexing Difficulties how you are to act, or melancholy Doubts what you are to think of your Condition, may

^c Matth. xii. 45.

^d Ps. lxxvi. 12.

^e Heb. xii. 11.

^b 2 Cor. iv. 17.

remain. Now in these Cases it is natural to ask the Opinion of serious and prudent Friends. The more such you have, and the more good Use you make of them, the better. But at least the Ministers of the Gospel are bound to be such to you, as far as they are able, whenever you apply to them. Not only the general Nature of our Office demands it; but we have all made a particular solemn Promise, *to use both public and private Monitions and Exhortations, as well as to the Sick as to the whole; within our Cures, as Need shall require, and Occasion shall be given*¹. Still we would obtrude ourselves on no one: but we must signify to you our Readiness to perform this Promise; and indeed our Apprehensions, that you are often Losers, by not claiming it. What we say to you here, passes with too many for Words of Course, to entertain you for the present half Hour, and be thought of no more. At your own Homes, when you are well, you expect to see us only on the same Footing with other Visitors: and when you are sick, you are unwilling to see us at all. Surely we might be of more Service to you, if you would admit us; and particularly we might be so in your more

¹ Office of ordaining Priests.

considerable, especially in your more lasting, Illness; when for a long Time together *you are shut up, and cannot go into the House of the Lord*^k. We hope you have no Reason to fear, that we shall either artfully *make a Gain of you*^l, or otherwise intermeddle in your worldly Affairs; or indiscreetly augment your Danger by tiring or terrifying you. But if we can preserve you from either vainly terrifying, or fatally deceiving yourselves; can inform, or but remind you, of any Part of your Duty; or merely assist your Patience, and enliven your Hope: both you and we shall have Cause to rejoice.

Doubtless not a few of you can think of every Thing that is proper on such Occasions, both in your own Case and that of others, better than we can suggest it to you. And *would God, that all the Lord's People were Prophets*^m; able to officiate thus to themselves, and those around them. But many are not: and such as are, would surely do well, at fitting Times, were it only for Example's Sake, to observe St. *James's* Rule, which he delivers in general Terms: *Is any sick among you, let him call for the*

^k Jer. xxxvi. 5. ^l 2 Cor. xii. 17, 18. ^m Numb. xi. 29.

*Elders of the Church and let them pray over him*ⁿ: which Prayers were doubtless preceded, or followed, by suitable Exhortations. It is true, he directs them particularly in order to a miraculous Cure of the Sick; and prescribes at the same Time, *anointing with Oil in the Name of the Lord*, which was used in performing such Cures. We will not therefore say, that his Injunction is exactly suited throughout to the present State of Things. But still, though *Gifts of Healing*^o are ceased, and the Ceremony belonging to them is become totally superfluous; it remains notwithstanding a Christian Duty, *in every Thing, by Prayer and Supplication, with Thanksgiving, to let our Requests be made known unto God*^p: and Petitions for the Sick, both public in the Congregation, and private in their Presence, may be of great Efficacy, not only to their spiritual, but their bodily Health. *For the fervent Prayer of a righteous Man availeth much*^q. Therefore in all Ages the Elders of the Church have attended them: and our own Church hath both given Directions, and provided an Office for that Purpose.

Possibly one Part of the Office may seem to have ascribed so high a Power to the Minister,

ⁿ James v. 14.
^q James v. 16.

^o 1 Cor. xii. 9, 28, 30.

^p Phil. iv. 6.

of absolving the Sick from their Sins, as may lead them into great Mistakes. And it is indeed more liable to be so misunderstood, than the earlier Forms, which were expressed in the Manner of a Prayer. But still all Writers on the Subject have agreed, that this Absolution either was intended (which indeed is most probable) only to set Persons free from any ecclesiastical Censures, which they might have incurred: (an Indulgence, granted in every Age of the Church to such as were dangerously ill, on their humble Request; but which is no more pretended to make a Change in their eternal State, than a Pardon from the King is) or, if it means also to declare them restored to the Favour of God, means it only on Supposition of a sincere and thorough Repentance; which being professed by them, it may be charitably presumed, though not certainly known, that it is real; and without which, I beg you all to observe, no Absolution here, granted by whomsoever, or in what Words soever, will do you the least Good hereafter. Accordingly this Form is not appointed ever to be used, but when the Sick have made, by their own Choice, *a special Confession of some weighty Matter, troubling their Consciences, humbly*

bly and heartily desiring, that it may be used for their Consolation. And as this is but seldom requested; and consequently the Absolution seldom pronounced over any one; so whenever it is, it may and ought to be accompanied with such Explanations, as will prevent any wrong Constructions.

But there still remains to be mentioned, on this Occasion, another Act of Piety, receiving the holy Communion: which, though not particularly appointed in Scripture for the Sick, hath from the earliest Times been recommended to them, and practised by them; as a very fit Expression of their thankful Faith in the Merits of Christ's Death; their Hope of a future Resurrection, as Members of his Body; and their being in Charity with every other Member of it, and all Mankind: by the Exercise of which Graces in this Manner, they obtain a Title to such Assistance from above for going happily through their present Time of Trial, as must needs be highly valuable to every serious Mind.

But then, to enjoy the true Benefit of the Ordinances of Christ, and the Prayers and Exhortations of his Ministers, you should desire them whilst you are capable of duly attending

to them, and acting upon the Impressions made by them; not defer them to the last, when they can hardly contribute any Thing either to useful Direction, or well-grounded Comfort; and perhaps may only encourage an Imagination, most pernicious to the Souls of Men, that a few Formalities, in the Conclusion of Life, will atone for spending it ill. If we take Refuge in Religion with a bad Heart unwillingly, it will be of no Service to us: and if we really delight in its Offices, we shall have Recourse to them early; indeed we shall live in the Observance of them always; only repeating them more frequently, and if possible, with more intense Application of Mind, as our Need becomes more urgent. For thus our Strength will increase with our Burthen: and *when our Flesh and our Heart faileth, God shall be the Strength of our Heart, and our Portion for ever* ^r.

^r Pf. lxxiii. 26.

S E R M O N X V .

R O M . xiv . 9 .

*For to this End Christ both died and rose and re-
vived, that he might be Lord both of the Dead
and Living.*

THE public Offices of our Church have led us, within a few Months, through most of the principal Transactions of our blessed Redeemer's Life on Earth. We have commemorated his Condescension to take upon him *the Likeness of sinful Flesh*^a, his submitting to *fulfill the Righteousness*^b of the Jewish Law, and his early Manifestation to the Gentile World; his fasting forty Days and Nights, and yielding afterwards to be *tempted in all Points as we are, yet without Sin*^c. Many of his wonderful Works, many of his gracious Instructions, have been rehearsed in

^a Rom. viii. 3.^b Matth. iii. 15.^c Heb. iv. 15.

our Ears; and very lately his most bitter Sufferings and Death represented, as it were, before our Eyes. We have accompanied him, from his Sorrows and Agonies in the Garden, through all the sad Variety of Disgrace and Pain that he underwent, till *he bowed his Head, and gave up the Ghost*^d on the Cross. We have seen his dead Body pierced to the Heart with a Spear, taken down and interred, the Sepulchre closed, sealed up, and guarded; his Disciples, though continuing to honour him, quite in Despair about him: and yet we find him this Day risen again, to die no more.

Surely it is Time we should ask ourselves what was the Meaning of so unparalleled a Transaction, to which the Attention of all Mankind hath been called so solemnly ever since? It could not be merely to move our Compassion with a piteous History, that God sent his Son from Heaven, to live in Wretchedness and die in Torment; nor to fill us with a vain Admiration, that he raised him from the Grave, and hath placed him at his own right Hand. What then was the View and Use of this most extraordinary Dispensation? The Text informs us. *To this End Christ both died and rose*

^d John xix. 30.

and revived; or, as it should be translated, and is elsewhere in the New Testament, *lives again, that he might be Lord both of the Dead and the Living*. Every Thing he did or suffered was ordained to accomplish that merciful and awful Scheme of Providence, our Saviour's universal Dominion over all; to make the Obedient good and happy, and reward the Disobedient according to their Works. This important Doctrine I shall

- I. Explain and prove. Then shew,
- II. Under what Obligations it lays us.

I. Christ indeed, as the eternal Son of the Father, had original Glory and Dominion before the World existed; *was in the Beginning with God, and was God*^e. But the Apostle speaks not here of that Dignity and Power which his divine Nature always possessed, but which his human Nature acquired, by dying and rising and living again. It is true, the former Part of his Life contributed greatly, both by his Doctrine and Example, to set up that Kingdom of Righteousness, over which he was to reign. And even then *the Father had given all Things into his Hand*^f, and committed

^e John i. 1.

^f John iii. 35.

all Judgment to him^z. But this being done in Consideration of his future Sufferings, on them the Foundation of his Authority is laid in Scripture. Thus St. Paul teaches, that, because *being in the Form of God, he was willing to take upon him the Form of a Servant*, an inferior and ministering Nature, as ours is; and then, being found in Fashion as a Man, *humbled himself yet lower unto the Death of the Cross: therefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a Name above every Name*^h. But elsewhere he more determinately grounds his Sovereignty on his Passion alone; *We see Jesus, for the suffering of Death, crowned with Glory and Honour*ⁱ. And justly doth it intitle him to an Authority over us, since it gained him a Property in us. For Sin both subjecting Men by its Guilt, as Debtors and Criminals, to the just Sentence of God, and by its Dominion, as Captives and Slaves, to the unjust Empire of the Devil; our Saviour, by delivering us in each of these Respects, hath obtained a double Right to us. By giving his Life a Ransom to Divine Justice, he hath bought us to himself with the Price of his Blood; so that we are his in Right of Purchase. And having

^z John v. 22.^h Phil. ii. 6—9.ⁱ Heb. ii. 9.

destroyed the Tyranny of the Wicked One over us, by the Holiness of the Precepts which his Death confirmed, and the Efficacy of the Grace which it procured, we are his again in Right of Conquest.

This Authority, thus acquired, his Resurrection openly proclaimed; attesting, not only in general the Truth of his Mission, but in particular the Acceptance of his Sufferings for our Redemption: and consequently his Title to govern us, and his Power to raise us up again according to his Promise, as he had raised himself. Hence, during the Remainder of his Continuance on Earth, he founded and gave Laws to his Church; and being yet more solemnly invested with Fulness of Power on his Ascension to Heaven, he ever lives to rule and protect it. Nor doth his Sovereignty extend over Mankind alone, but the whole Creation. For *God*, as *St. Paul* assures us, *having raised him from the Dead, hath set him at his own Right Hand, far above all Principality and Power and Might and Dominion, and every Name that is named, not only in this World, but also in that which is to come, and hath put all Things under his Feet*^k: *that in the Name of Jesus, as*

^k Eph. i. 20, 21, 22;

he adds in another Place, *every Knee should bow, of Things in Heaven, and Things in Earth, and Things under the Earth; and every Tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord*^l. In these Words he is described, both as the High-Priest and the King of the Universe. His Possession of the former Office is expressed by saying, that *every Knee shall bow in his Name*; for so it should be translated, not *at his Name*, when his Name is mentioned: though that be a Practice, both unexceptionable and reverent. *To bow the Knee* is to pray. So, *Eph. iii. 14. For this Cause I bow my Knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he would grant you to be strengthened by his Spirit in the inner Man.* Therefore to *bow the Knee in the Name of Jesus*, is to pray in his Name, as the Person qualified and appointed to present our Petitions to God, and derive his Blessings upon us. The remaining Part of the Passage declares his Kingly Office: *And every Tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord*; or, as St. John more emphatically styles him, *Lord of Lords, and King of Kings*^m. Nor are Men only, but *all the Angels of God* required to *worship him*ⁿ as such. Created Beings, of how

^l Phil. ii. 10, 11.^m Rev. xvii. 14.ⁿ Heb. i. 6.

exalted Rank soever, can only be *faithful as Servants in the House of God, but Christ as a Son over his House, which himself hath builded* °.

In what Manner he governs the Rest of his Works we are not concerned to inquire. Men he governs, by giving Laws, which every one, who receives the Knowledge of them, is bound to obey, and no one may add to, diminish, or alter; by forming those, who submit to him willingly, into a regular Society, or universal Church, provided with fit Means of Instruction, Discipline, and Grace; by improving them in all Goodness, and strengthening them against all Temptation; by providing, that in the worst of Times *the Gates of Hell shall not prevail* † to abolish true Religion; and gradually bringing on, according to his Promise, that happy Age, when *the Kingdoms of this World shall become the Kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall take to himself his great Power, and shall reign* ‡. But however illustrious his Dominion may then appear, the full Manifestation of it, (for which every other Act of his regal Authority is opening the Way) will be in that Hour, when he shall *come with the holy Angels to sit upon the Throne of his Glory, and all Na-*

° Heb. iii. 3, 5, 6. † Matth. xvi. 18. ‡ Rev. xi. 15, 17.

tions being gathered before him^r, shall sentence the Wicked, both Men and Devils, to everlasting Punishment, but bestow on the Righteous Life eternal. After which, the Ends of this whole Dispensation being now accomplished, he *shall deliver up his Kingdom of Grace to God even the Father*^s, in whose Kingdom of Glory he *shall still reign*, with him and the Holy Spirit, over his Saints and Angels, *for ever and ever*^t.

Such is the Sovereignty over all, which the Son of Man, first died to acquire; and then rising again, lives to exercise. And as it extends through the whole Creation of God, from the Beginning to the Consummation of all Things, no Wonder, if the Reasons and Circumstances of many Particulars in it be incomprehensible to us. Notwithstanding these, as the Main of it appears highly worthy of God, and no Part evidently unworthy, we ought to believe the Whole, on the strong and manifold Attestations which he hath given us of its Truth. The *preaching of Christ crucified* may seem *Foolishness*^u to the Wise in their own Imaginations. But whoever is duly sen-

^r Matth. xvi. 27.—xix. 28.—xxv. 31, 32. ^s 1 Cor. xv. 24.
^t Rev. xi. 15. ^u 1 Cor. i. 23.

sible of his being in a State, where we *know but in part, and see what is nearest to us through a Glass darkly*^w, will be glad to receive, with implicit Faith, that *Wisdom of God in a Mystery, which he hath ordained before the World unto our Glory*^x.

The Foundation of the Christian Scheme, that we are all originally prone to Sin, and actually guilty of it, is but too notorious. Now the Mercy of our heavenly Father, though constantly shewn in a proper Degree to every proper Object, preserves not the faulty from daily experiencing dreadful Consequences of their Faults in this Life, which the sincerest Repentance will not singly prevent. And who can disprove, what the New Testament affirms, and throughout implies, that we should all have experienced yet worse Consequences in the Life to come, had not our blessed Redeemer done and suffered for us the Things he hath? In general, that one Person may, by interposing, and even bearing much, on behalf of others, avert from them great Evils, and procure them great Good, we are very sensible. And supposing us ever so ignorant what Connexion in particular there is between the Suf-

^w 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

^x 1 Cor. ii. 7.

ferings of Christ and our own Salvation; we have no more Cause to complain, than that we cannot learn, by what Steps a Friend hath delivered us from worldly Danger, or by what Efficacy a Medicine hath restored our Health. All that we are concerned in, all that we are to believe and do, we are plainly told. And if we are not told, what God alone is concerned in, the Reasons of his own Counsels; we may well be content, that by this Method we are brought to eternal Felicity, without asking, why rather by this, than any other.

Yet even to that Inquiry some Answer may be returned. The Poverty and Labour, the Injuries and Provocations, the Sorrows and Pains, which our Saviour went through, with so perfect and constant a Greatness and Goodness of Mind, afford the strongest Confirmations of our Faith in his Doctrine, and most powerful Incitements to practise the very hardest of his Precepts. That we are not forgiven, but on the Condition of his undergoing these Things, proves, that God hath an irreconcilable Abhorrence of Sin, and a high Regard to the Honour of his Government: while yet his providing for the Performance of this Condi-
tion

tion proves equally, that he hath the tenderest Compassion for his fallen and helpless Creatures.

Other Footsteps of Wisdom in this wonderful Transaction, an humble Search may undoubtedly trace. But whether many more, and yet weightier Motives to it, may not still remain behind, which perhaps it is impossible, perhaps unfit, for us to see at present, we cannot know, for we are not told. Who would venture to say of the most familiar Object of Sense before him, that its only Uses are those, which he is able to discover? And surely we ought not to have less Modesty in Points, that are so much farther beyond our Reach. We believe, on the Credit of Men like ourselves, many Things to have Influences, that we neither have experienced them to have, nor discern by Reason that they must have. Why then is not God to be trusted, as well as our Fellow-Creatures? And since, in the Affairs of this World, we often walk *not by Sight but by Faith*; what Objection can there be against it in those of another? Especially considering, that we are only a small Portion of the Whole, the Rest of which is almost intirely hid from

us : and cannot even conjecture, what Dependences there may be of one Part on the other ; and much less, what those Dependences may require.

It plainly appears, that Men are by no Means the only Beings interested in our blessed Lord. The Scripture teaches, that, as by *him and for him were created all Things that are in Heaven and are in Earth, visible and invisible, and by him all Things consist* : so by *him also was God pleased, having made Peace through the Blood of his Cross, to reconcile all Things to himself, whether they be Things in Earth, or Things in Heaven*^z : that in the Dispensation of the Fulness of Times, he might gather together in one all Things in Christ ; both which are in Heaven and which are on Earth, even in *him*^a. Such Hints, as these, of a Scheme of Providence amazingly extensive, were not given, either to gratify or excite our Curiosity ; but to admonish us, that, in the religious Administration of the Universe, there are Particulars, not designed to be comprehended by us at present, but by some other Part of the Creation ; Things done *to the Intent*, (as the Apostle elsewhere more explicitly informs us) *that now unto the Principali-*

^z Col. i. 16—20.

^a Eph. i. 10.

ties and Powers in heavenly Places might be made known, by the Church, the manifold Wisdom of God, according to the eternal Purpose, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord^b. Well then may it become us to be modest in judging of a Plan so much too great for us; and to reverence, without expecting to search out fully, that Mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ, wherein, we are expressly told, are hid all the Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge^c. I proceed therefore now,

II. To shew under what Obligations this Dominion of our Saviour lays us. And these are, First to acknowledge, Secondly to obey it.

If the original Relation we bear to our Creator is to be owned and respected; the next we stand in, to our Redeemer, is as justly intitled to our Regard. That one is taught by Nature, the other by Revelation only, makes no Difference. Being equally real, they are equally Grounds of Duty: and Neglect of ei-

^b Eph. iii. 10, 11. "We know not what Need there was to set up a Head and Chieftain, in Opposition to *the Prince of this World, the Prince of the Power of the Air, &c.* whereof there are more than obscure Intimations in Scripture." Locke's Reasonableness of Christianity, p. 530. Vol. II. of his Works.

^c Col. ii. 2, 3.

ther is alike profane. God, the great Ruler of the World, may both administer the Whole of it in such a Form as he thinks fit; and vary the Regulations of each Part, as varying Circumstances require. There can possibly be no more Room to doubt, whether under the general Laws of his moral Kingdom he may form, from Time to Time, particular Institutions of Religion; than whether, under the general Laws of human Society, may be formed particular Institutions of Government. Suppose then a Person were to advance, concerning the latter, what some bold Writers have done concerning the former; were to profess an intire Submission to the mutual Obligations of rational Beings at large, but an utter Contempt of the peculiar Statutes of the Community, in which he lived: should declare, that the Commands of the civil Power were only a Republication of the Law of Nature; that this being absolutely perfect, nothing could be added to it, nothing prescribed, which was not obligatory before such Prescription; and that therefore all Injunctions and Determinations, by national Authority, of what common Reason had not enjoined and determined, were arbitrary, tyrannical and unjust; that public Wisdom, being
always

always the same, must always direct the same Things; and therefore different Orders could never have Force in different Ages or Provinces: would not these Notions be extremely absurd? And surely they are no less absurd in Religion, than social Life. If Men may form themselves with good Cause into particular civil Establishments, God may form them with better Cause into particular religious Establishments, such as that of Christianity. If our earthly Superiors may discern sufficient Ground, as the Condition and Behaviour of their Subjects alter, to put all, or any Part of them, under new Regulations, or grant them new Privileges: much more may *our Father, which is in Heaven*^d, do so with us. If we are bound often to obey the Appointments of human Prudence without knowing the Motives of those Appointments: well may Omniscience claim the most unlimited Compliance. And if, lastly, a dutiful Attachment to the Constitution of our Country be Part of a worthy Character; and wilful Violation of it, Disloyalty to the State: surely the heartiest Zeal for the Ordinances of our better Country is a still more essential Part; and deliberate Contempt of them, Rebellion against God:

^d Matth. vii. 11.

a dreadful Crime always, but singularly heinous and fatal in the present Case; because these Ordinances are calculated throughout solely for our Good, temporal and spiritual, present and future; and nothing else can secure us the same Advantages. The Gospel, besides comprehending, and expressing more clearly, the whole of natural Religion, superadds also, such Assurance of Pardon, such Means of Grace, and such glorious Promises of eternal Bliss to Body and Soul; that little do they consider their own Interest, who would rest their Case, if they could, on the mere Conjectures of unassisted Reason: which, though sufficient to render the Condition of those tolerable, who have no other Guide; yet must be owned, in Comparison, to leave Sinners much room for fear, and afford but small Foundation for lasting Hope. Indeed, with these new Advantages, Christianity brings in some new Precepts also: but none of them burthensome; and all of them conducive to our Happiness, here and hereafter; provided we not only acknowledge the Dominion we are under, but, which is the second and last Point, obey it.

There are few who totally reject Religion: but few also, who receive it thoroughly and effectually.

effectually. Some trusting to the notional Belief and formal Practice of merely revealed Truths and Duties, allow themselves to despise, and occasionally to neglect moral Obligations. This was the great Error of the Jews in our Saviour's Days: as in Truth it hath been of Christians in general ever since: and there cannot be a more pernicious one. But of late, especially in this Nation, great Numbers have fallen into the opposite Error. Professing the highest Value for Morals, they have little or none for Piety. Even that which Nature dictates, they hardly shew any real Concern for: and as absolute a Contempt of the Doctrines and Appointments of Scripture, though it may be all the while they think they believe in Scripture, as they could do, if they denied it. Now very seldom will either the Practice, or even the Notions of Morality, in such Persons, be near so perfect as they should be. For Disregard to God or to any of his Commands, will soon bring on a farther Disregard, both of right Behaviour towards our Fellow-Creatures, and right Government of ourselves: till, acknowledging Virtue to be his Law, we shall acknowledge nothing as Virtue but what we like; leave out all uneasy Restraints, put in all

agreeable Indulgences; and so have an excellent Rule of Life in Pretence, perhaps in Imagination, but in Reality none at all. Or supposing this to be otherwise: yet the Duties we owe, to him who hath made us by the Word of his Power, to him who hath redeemed us from Guilt and Misery by his Blood, to him who is ready to purify us by his perpetual Influences, must be the principal Ties we are under: and did the conscientious Observance of them contribute ever so little, (though indeed it contributes more than any Thing) to the good Order of this World; still it is indispensably necessary to a Purpose of far greater Moment, preparing our Hearts for the Employment and Happiness of the World to come. We strangely mistake our Case, if we measure every Thing, as we are too apt to do, merely by its Influence on the present Life. This whole Scene of Things is a State of Education and Discipline only: we are forming and training up, by the Laws of our Saviour's Kingdom here, to such a Temper and Spirit, as may render us for ever blessed in it hereafter. No wonder, if now, in our Condition of Infancy, we see not the Reason and Use of every Step taken with us. Being
sure

sure we are in kind and good Hands, our Duty and our Wisdom is to give up ourselves intirely to God's Disposal. For we know not what we do, when we presume to slight any Part of what he hath prescribed: only this we know, that *offending in one Point*, is both in reasonable Construction and in probable Consequence, being *guilty of all*^e.

Religion, though ever in Substance the same, hath been proposed to Mankind in different Shapes, as the Reason of Things in different Ages required. Under whichsoever of these Dispensations we had lived, our Business had been, humbly to conform ourselves to it, and carefully to improve ourselves by it, *walking in all the Commandments and Ordinances of the Lord, blameless*^f. But as we are happily reserved to the fullest and clearest, the most rational and amiable Exhibition of Faith and Duty that the World ever saw or will see; we are surely bound to embrace it with peculiar Joy; to obey from the Heart every Injunction of so gracious a Master, as our blessed Redeemer; and, which is the End of all, make such a Progress in real inward Devotion, Benevolence, Purity and Humility, as will bear a due Proportion to the Advantages,

^e James ii. 10.

^f Luke i. 6.

that we enjoy. For it cannot be, that after those Demonstrations of Love, and those Means of Improvement, which God hath given us in his Gospel, he should only expect us to be as good as Heathens: and yet are we not often worse? But in vain do we call ourselves Christians, if Names and Forms be the whole of our Christianity: In vain do we call the holy Jesus Lord, unless, by doing such Things as he commands, we become such as he was. To this therefore, if we have any Sense of Gratitude, the Love of our Saviour must constrain us: to this, if we have any Concern for Happiness, the Fear of our Judge must compel us. For, as the Apostle, just before the Text, hath most truly observed, *none of us liveth to himself, and no Man dieth to himself: for whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord*^g. In both States we are absolutely his Property, and intirely at his Disposal. If we obey him, *we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he will also deny us*^h. Let us therefore always bear in Mind his own awful Words: *I am he, that liveth, and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the Keys of Death and of Hell*ⁱ.

^g Rom. xiv. 7, 8.

^h 2 Tim. ii. 12.

ⁱ Rev. i. 18.

S E R M O N XVI.

A C T S X. 40, 41.

Him God raised up the third Day, and shewed him openly. Not to all the People, but unto Witnesses chosen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the Dead.

THE Resurrection of our blessed Lord being the principal Fact, on which he himself put the Proof of his divine Authority; and being that Fact in particular, of which he especially appointed his Apostles to be Witnesses to Mankind; it concerns the Christian Cause very nearly, that the Evidence of this Point should be undeniable. And accordingly it is obviously plain, that no Impostor would ever have appealed to a Method of trying his Pretensions, that required his being put to Death

before it could decide any thing: and that no Enthusiaſt would ever have conducted himſelf in ſo calm and prudent a Manner, and taught ſo rational a Doctrinè, as our Saviour did. It is equally plain, that his Followers could never be deceived, and imagine their Maſter alive again when he was not. They could not be deceived by their Hopes and Expectations: for they own, they deſpaired of it. They could not be deceived for want of Opportunities to find out the Truth: for they declare, that he appeared a great Number of Times, to ſeveral of them ſingly, to all of them aſſembled, once to the Number of five Hundred, by Day as well as by Night, in very different and diſtant Places, ſometimes unexpectedly, ſometimes by Appointment: that they not only ſaw, but touched and handled him; that he walked and converſed and eat and drank with them; that he gave them theſe Evidences for no leſs than forty Days together; and then was viſibly taken up into the Clouds, before their Eyes. If now it be poſſible for ſo many Perſons to be miſtaken in all this, it is impoſſible for any one to be rationally ſure of any Thing.

It may also be shewn further, that as they were not deceived themselves, so neither did they intend to deceive others in this Matter. There is no Manner of Reason to suspect, that they would have done it, if they could. For supposing them to think he came from God; they might well conclude that God would take Care of his own Cause, and did not need their turning Cheats to serve it. And supposing they now at last thought him a Seducer; what could there be, either honest, or wiser, or more likely, for them to do, than to confess their Mistake; with due Indignation at his having imposed on them so long, and drawn them into such great Inconveniencies and Dangers? But even if they had been desirous to set up an Imposture: they had evidently neither Skill to contrive, nor Courage to attempt, nor Power to execute it. They were comparatively but a Handful of Men in all: and they had very lately had full Experience, that they could neither trust one another, nor themselves: for one of them had betrayed his Master; the most zealous Man amongst them had denied him, and all the rest had forsaken him. The whole Weight of Authority, *Jewish* and *Roman*,

man, was against them, careful to watch them, and (as they saw by the Example before their Eyes) determined not to spare them, if they went on. Then as for the People; they had never opposed the Magistrates in any Part of this Affair; they had furiously joined with them in the last Part; and there was not the least Likelihood now, of their undertaking the Defence of a few unknown and mean Men, who taught a System of Doctrine very unwelcome to their zealous Spirits; and built it on a strange Fact, utterly contradictory to their settled Opinions. For as they had no Notion, that the *Messiah* was to be put to Death: they could have none of his rising again. Surely, in these Circumstances, if his Disciples had acted on worldly Motives, their Point must have been to provide for their own Safety by Flight and Silence: and thus, for ought that appears, they might have been very safe. But if they resolved to pretend a Resurrection; their very first Step must be to get the Body into their Power, that it might not be produced against them: and in this, guarded as it was, they must either have perished, or at least have failed. Or had they succeeded; it must have been notorious, by what Means they had succeeded;

ceeded; and the chief Priests would have been able to give the World some better Account of the Matter, than that absurd one of the Soldiers, affirming, (what they could not know; and durst not have owned, if it had been true) that, while they slept, his Followers came, and stole him away. Or could they possibly have gone thus far undiscovered: still, what Prospect had they before them, by carrying on the same Scheme, which their Lord had done, but to be persecuted and put to Death, as he had been? They were persecuted accordingly: some of them put to Death soon; the rest, after they had been harrassed many Years: yet all persisted in their Testimony to the End of their Lives. Now Men will too commonly renounce what they know to be true, rather than suffer for it: but by no Means chuse to suffer, in this Manner, for what they know to be false. Or however unaccountably obstinate one or two may, by great Chance, happen to be, Numbers will not be so; especially at Times, and Places, remote from each other. And it must be further observed, that not only these Persons continued uniform and unmoveable in their Testimony, but they none of them ever disgraced it, by

any Sort of vicious or interested Behaviour. And, though nothing, but Love of Truth, could induce Men to join with them; and there was every possible Motive besides, against it: yet Multitudes of all Ranks in all Nations did join with them, did suffer with them; did attest their performing the same Miracles with their Master, and enabling others to perform them: and thus they went on, till, with no other Weapons, they and their Successors conquered the World.

All these Things have been frequently and fully proved; few of them denied, no solid Reason alledged for denying any of them: only small Cavils and Difficulties have been raised, here and there: amongst which, one that appears perhaps the most considerable, is grounded on what *St. Peter* mentions in the Text, of his own Accord, that our Saviour after his Resurrection appeared, *not to all the People, but to Witnesses chosen before of God.* Upon this it hath been argued, that selecting only a few Persons, and all those out of his own Party, to be his Witnesses, instead of permitting every one to see him that would, was a very suspicious Method: that he ought to have shewn himself to all the People, for they were all

concerned in the Matter; at least to all the Rulers: for, if he had convinced them; the Testimony of Persons, who had been so much his Enemies, and were of such Weight and Credit, would have satisfied the whole Nation, and of Consequence the whole World. This Objection which may possibly sometimes perplex Believers, as well as afford a Handle for profane Talk to Unbelievers, I shall make it my present Business to answer.

And, in the first Place, it misrepresents the Fact. There is neither the least Proof, nor the least Probability, that any one, who desired to see our Saviour after his Resurrection, was refused it. The Apostles were chosen, not to be the only Persons, that should see him; far from it: but to be the chief Persons, that should go through the World, to testify they had seen him; and to instruct and superintend those, who should believe on him. They were of his Party indeed. But what could make them so? nothing, but his Doctrine and Miracles first: and his Resurrection afterwards. For, though even whilst he lay dead, they honoured him; yet their Faith in him, as the *Messiah*, was almost dead too, till they saw him alive again. If ever so many more had seen
him,

him, and been convinced by it; must not they have become of his Party also? and would that have destroyed their Evidence? If it would, he could not possibly have any Evidence, though he had appeared and convinced the Rulers and the whole City. And if it would not, why were not the Apostles, and other first Christians, good Evidence? For ought we know, many of the five Hundred, to whom he appeared at once, might be convinced by that Appearance, and not before. But however that be, if an Attestation of five Hundred Persons, or a much less Number to any Fact, be not enough, no Number can be. For if so many can, every one of them, either be deceived, or combine to deceive others; ever so many more may also: and then there is an End of human Testimony. Therefore, in all Cases, a competent Quantity of Witnesses to any Action, or Writing, is deemed sufficient; and procuring as many, as could possibly be got, is never required. This indeed was a Case of a very extraordinary Nature. And I hope you have seen, there was Proof of it to a very extraordinary Degree: such Proof, that, had this one Circumstance, of our Saviour's not appearing to all the People, been ever so unaccountable;

countable ; nay, had there been many other strange ones besides ; the direct positive Evidence would have greatly outweighed whatever Suspicions could be raised from them, with any Pretence of Reason : and to more than Suspicions they could not amount.

God indeed could have given, no doubt, yet stronger Proof, than we have. But is he obliged to give on all Occasions, or any, the strongest he can ? Doth he give us such, in the most important Affairs of common Life ? Doth he give us such, of his own Existence ? And are we, for want of it, neither to believe any Thing, nor act any way, in respect of this World or another ? Can God be bound to gratify the Fancifulness, the Indolence, the Obstinacy of his Creatures, so as to afford them still more and more Evidence, the more inconsiderate and perverse they are ? Or are not we bound, humbly to seek, thankfully to receive, and carefully to use, what he doth afford us ? We may think indeed, that it had been greater Goodness to afford us further Proofs yet : and so we may think it would, for God to have done a Multitude of other Things, which yet he hath not done : for Instance, to have made us happy, without putting us to any Trial of our

Beha-

Behaviour : yet this World is plainly a State of Trial, in which our present and future Good, or Evil, depends on our Conduct. And why may not our fairness in receiving Evidence be one Thing tried, as well as our Obedience, in acting suitably to it, another ? Now the highest possible Degree of Evidence leaves no room almost for this Trial. And therefore what our Saviour said to St. *Thomas*, was perfectly just : *Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed : blessed are they, that have not seen, and yet have believed* ^a. That Situation gives an Opportunity for honest and candid Minds, to shew themselves such, and be rewarded for it. And if it doth lead captious and unfair ones to shew themselves too, and be punished ; how have they deserved better ?

But particularly, how had the Jews deserved more, or so much, Proof, of our Saviour's Mission, as he had, before his Resurrection, vouchsafed them ? They had seen innumerable Miracles of various Kinds, performed by him : they had seen several Miracles of this very Kind. Still, they had not only refused to acknowledge him, but deliberately rejected, condemned, and put him to Death. Where then

^a John xx. 29.

was their claim to further Favours? If he had forbidden his Apostles to mention his Resurrection to them; and directed them to preach the Gospel only to the Gentiles; had it been unjust? But instead of this, he gave them, notwithstanding, the first Knowledge of it, with the same Evidence for it, that he gave the rest of Mankind. And he had plainly foretold, that he would give them no more: that his Disciples should see him after his Death, and they should not ^b. For indeed his Commission, so far as it related peculiarly to instructing them, was now at an End. The believing *Jews* were to make Part of his Church, in common with the *Gentiles*. The unbelieving ones he had no further especial Concern with, than to inflict on them, unless they repented, that Punishment, which God had decreed. And on what Foundation, after this, could they be intitled to his appearing amongst them? Every Nation, every Person upon Earth, ever since, hath had, and still hath, full as good a Title, and a better, to expect his appearing to them also. For if it were necessary, in order to give the *Jews* sufficient Evidence: it is necessary, in order to give it us.

^b Matth. xxiii. 39. John xiv. 19.

And if they might reasonably hope for it as Matter of Favour, why not we likewise, who live so long after, and, I hope, have not deserved quite so ill?

This Objection therefore proves a great deal too much, and for that Reason proves nothing; even supposing, that our Saviour's public Appearance, after his Death, would have had such happy Effects, as some have pretended. But indeed the Consequences of this, which God alone can know perfectly, (and therefore it might become us to acquiesce in his Judgment) have certainly been considered very imperfectly by these Objectors. For if our blessed Lord had appeared, either to all the People, or to all the Rulers of the People, what is it likely would have followed?

If to all the People: many of them, to be sure, had never seen him before his Resurrection: and therefore could have no Conviction of it from seeing him after. Many had seen him but transiently in a Crowd: some only when he was disfigured with Ill-usage, and stooping under his Cross: probably not a few had mistaken for him the Person, that carried it Part of the Way in his Stead. Even when he was fixed upon it, and lifted up; Distance

would hinder some, and the Change of his Features, by Agonies and Death, would hinder others, from knowing him again with any Certainty. Just as in the Case of the blind Man; one Part would have said, *It is he*; another, *he is like him*^c: but a third perhaps quite the contrary. Every one would have spoken, as their Fancy or Prejudices led them: his Enemies would have magnified and triumphed in the Difference of Persuasions; and no certain Judgment could ever have been formed, unless the many, who know but little of him, had submitted their Opinions to the few, in Comparison, that knew him well: which possibly they would not. But if they had, this would have amounted to very little more, than believing the Testimony of others, without seeing him themselves at all. And whether the Number, then present at *Jerusalem*, of such as were personally acquainted with him, might be greater, or less, than the five Hundred, whom he appeared to at once, we cannot know. But were it much greater; still suppose only, what is very supposable, that some of these had been induced, either then or afterwards, by Promises, or Threatenings, or Punish-

^c John ix. 9.

ments, to deny it was he; what Perplexities must that have raised? And how much wiser was the Method, which God took, of shewing him to such alone, as knew him thoroughly, and he foresaw would testify their Knowledge with Uprightness and Constancy!

If then, to avoid this endless Contradiction, he had appeared to the chief Priests and Elders only: still, several of them, in all Likelihood, either knew him not, or but imperfectly. And had they all known him ever so well: it is far from certain, that, on seeing him, they would have believed in him, after what they had seen, without believing in him. Amongst other Things, they several of them saw *Lazarus* rise, and more had Opportunities of conversing with him after he was risen. Yet they did not believe in *Jesus* for that. They might have ascribed this Miracle, as well as others, to *Beelzebub*: or, as their Successors, down to this Day, absurdly ascribe all of them, to pretended magic Arts. They must indeed have been convinced, that, by some Means or other, he was risen: but that would have made them no Witnesses for him. It appears by their whole Conduct, that they were convinced of it, without seeing him. Not only their bribing
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the Soldiers; but their leaving his Disciples unmolested at first; their bearing so quietly all their Boldness of Speech for some Time afterwards; their suffering *Gamaliel* to express his Doubts, whether this Matter were not of God; their following in Part his Advice, to let them alone, which was founded on those Doubts; instead of prosecuting them to the utmost, as Impostors: in short their whole History, in the Beginning of the *Acts*; and particularly several Things in it, which *St. Luke* doth not seem once to have thought of applying to this Purpose, evidently shew, that the Jewish Rulers well knew, a strict Inquiry would not serve their Turn; and therefore tried, as long as they could, to stifle and conceal what had happened, in Hopes it would gradually be forgotten. Undoubtedly their wiser Way had been, to have owned the Truth, and yielded to it. But they were too wicked to be wise: and so contrived only to be cunning. Our Saviour had declared in strong Terms against them: they had proceeded to the last Extremities against him. Therefore, besides their speculative Prejudices; if he prevailed, all their Authority, they saw, was utterly gone; and their Persons, they probably

imagined, were not safe. So that, hardened as they were, and persuaded it was too late to retreat; laying new Evidence before them would only have increased their Guilt in resisting it: they would have believed nothing they could help; they would have acknowledged nothing at all; but, if Need had required, averred the direct contrary to what their own Eyes had beheld. Probably indeed they were not all profligate alike: some of them would have submitted to our Saviour, if they had seen him: but how do we know, that the same Persons did not, upon the Testimony of others seeing him? For they, whom any Proof would convince, might very well be convinced by such Proof, as that was: and we are expressly told, that a *great Company of the Priests were obedient to the Faith*^d: whose Conviction, and that of thousands more, at *Jerusalem* itself, so very soon after, against their former deep rooted Persuasion, and present Interest, is a strong Confirmation of the Fact asserted by those, who were Witnesses: and, on the Whole, may be full as satisfactory, as if they had been Witnesses themselves.

^d Acts vi. 7.

But supposing that our Saviour's Appearance to them would have converted all the Rulers: undoubtedly this would have had a great, perhaps a general Effect, in that one Nation. But every Nation, and every succeeding Age, was concerned equally in this Matter: and what Effect would it have had upon them? The *Romans* first, would have considered it as a *Jewish* Fraud, concerted amongst themselves, to raise the Credit of their own Religion; and no more have regarded the Miracles of the Apostles amongst their Countrymen, in these Circumstances, than we do those of the Church of *Rome*, pretended to be wrought, where every one is either unwilling, or afraid, to detect them. The Infidels of later Days, who believe nothing of the other Miracles which the Jews believe, would they have believed this, merely because the Jews believed it? Since they cannot even now refrain from ascribing our Religion to Policy and Priest-craft, though all the Jewish Politicians and Priests were zealous against it to the utmost; what would they have said, if both had been for it, on seeing Christ after his Resurrection? Undoubtedly, that they had feigned a Difficulty of being brought over into what they had, in Truth, originally con-

trived ; and, by their Art and Authority, prevented the Discoveries, that else might have been made ; or hushed up those, that actually were made.

Nor would even this have been the worst Consequence yet. Had both the Rulers, and the People received him as the Messiah, on the Evidence of his appearing a second Time alive : still they would have received him, according to their own false Notion of the Messiah, as a temporal Prince ; and been immediately up in Arms to set him on the Throne, whether he would or not. For when he had performed but one Miracle that took with them : he found they were resolved instantly to *make him King by Force*^e ; and he avoided it only by escaping from them. He might indeed, when he was risen again, have plainly told them all their Mistake : but they would either have rejected him once more upon it ; (and then, to what Purpose had they seen him ?) or they would have thought he meant something different from what he seemed to say ; as the Disciples did, when he very plainly foretold his own Death. Even them he could never set thoroughly right in the Article of his

^e John vi. 15.

Kingdom, so long as he remained on Earth: much less the People. They were uneasy under their new Masters: they expected a Deliverer: their Expectations were just then at the Height: and had he shewn himself amongst them, and been acknowledged by them; what could have restrained them, but such a Power, as God never exercises over the Wills of Men; for it would destroy their Freedom, and alter the whole Constitution of the moral World? Therefore, instead of *appearing to all the People*, he did not let his Disciples preach him to any of the People, from his Resurrection till after his Ascension: for had the Body of them been told, and believed, that the Messiah was risen, and still amongst them; of Course they would have been eager in seeking him; and what Rumours and Tumults would this have raised, and what must have been the Consequences? After this, if he had left them, and ascended into Heaven, the Remedy had come too late: the Ferment would have continued; and it is impossible to know, to what Height it might have risen.

But had the Jews been ever so quiet; ever so much convinced by our Saviour, that they ought

ought to remain quiet: yet, when once the *Romans*, who must know their former Notions of the *Messiah*, came to understand, that they all agreed that he was at last come; they would never have believed this Calm to be any thing, but an Artifice, to lull them asleep, till Matters were ripe for a general Insurrection. They would therefore have seized on the leading Men immediately, called in their Forces from the Countries round, and required the whole Nation to renounce their new King. Had they submitted to this, there had been an End of Christianity amongst them. Had they resisted, as in all Probability they would: upon the *Romans* prevailing, what the chief Priests apprehended had certainly come to pass; they would have *taken away their Place and Nation*^f, and the Whole would have been charged on the Doctrine of Christ. If the Jews had prevailed; they would have imagined their Success a full Proof, that the Messiah was yet virtually, though not corporally, amongst them; and proceeded to extend his Dominion as wide as they could: under which Circumstances, the Gospel, in a Manner absolutely contrary to its Nature and

^f John xi. 48.

Genius, must have owed its Progress, if it made any, to Force, not Persuasion; and so have been liable to the same unanswerable Objection, that the Religion of *Mahomet* is now.

Or lastly, supposing what is in the highest Degree unlikely, that neither the Jews had rebelled, nor the *Romans* suspected them, but both had been made such as they ought, by a public Appearance of our Saviour after his Resurrection: undoubtedly this had been very happy for that Age, and perhaps the next or two: but what had been the Case of distant Ages? We, that live in the latter Days, should, by these Means, have lost intirely all that strong and necessary Evidence, for the Truth of his Miracles and History, which arises now from the Impossibility of his primitive Disciples having any Motive to deceive Men, in teaching a Doctrine, for which they suffered, so patiently and cheerfully, Persecution and Death. Christianity would then, in all likelihood, have been considered as a Superstructure of *Roman* Policy, erected, by an artful Emperor, on a Piece of Jewish Enthusiasm, which he found very commodious for
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bringing the World into good Order; particularly into quiet Subjection to its new Master. And the Meekness of Spirit, which our Religion enjoins, and the great Strefs it lays on Obedience to the civil Magistrate, would have been thought a Demonstration, that this, and nothing else, was the real Truth. So that the whole would have seemed by this Method a Contrivance of Man: whereas now it appears plainly the Work of God; affording reasonable Evidence to good Minds; preventing the Harm, that must have followed, if bad ones, continuing such, had joined with them; and turning that Opposition, both of Jews and Heathens, which threatened the Ruin of the Gospel, into a Proof of its Truth, that will support it for ever.

These Considerations are surely sufficient to remove any Doubts of serious and humble Minds on this Head: to convince Objectors, that they do not always see to the Bottom of what they venture to talk about very freely: and to make it probable, that, in other Points, as well as the present, when they come to be thoroughly examined, *the Foolishness of God* will always be found *wiser than Men*^e: which

^e 1 Cor. i. 25.

good Purposes may surely justify dwelling, now and then, somewhat largely on a Subject of less general and practical Use. It is true, the bad Consequences, that might have attended our Saviour's public Appearance after his Death, are several of them only conjectural: but the good ones, imagined likely to flow from it, are so too: and stronger Conjectures are very justly opposed to weaker. Nay were any, or ever so many, of the Reasons, alledged for his Conduct in this Respect, of no Weight at all: yet who knows, what others there may still remain in the endless Treasures of the divine Wisdom, to be discovered hereafter? And what hath so fallible and short-sighted a Creature, as Man, to do; but thankfully to receive whatever Knowledge, be it more or less perfect, his Maker shall vouchsafe to give him; and apply himself with the utmost Care, to act suitably to what he understands; instead of raising Objections and Cavils, out of every Particular, that he is ignorant of? *For the secret Things belong unto the Lord our God: but those Things, which are revealed, belong unto us, and to our*
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Children for ever ; that we may do all the Words of this Law ^h.

Let us all therefore learn, not only to believe firmly in Speculation, that our Saviour is risen again ; but in the Faith of his Resurrection to prepare for our own : earnestly praying God, *to raise us from the Death of Sin to the Life of Righteousness ; and diligently seeking those Things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right Hand of God ; that, when he shall appear, we also may appear with him in Glory ⁱ.* After his Crucifixion he appeared on Earth only to a few : but the Day is approaching, when, *behold, he cometh with Clouds, and every Eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him : and all Kindreds of the Earth, that rejected or disobeyed him, shall wail because of him ^k : and shall be punished with everlasting Destruction from the Presence of the Lord and from the Glory of his Power, when he shall come to be glorified in his Saints, and to be admired in all them that believed the Testimony of him in that Day ^l.* For the Lord shall descend from Heaven with a Shout, with the

^h Deut. xxix. 29.

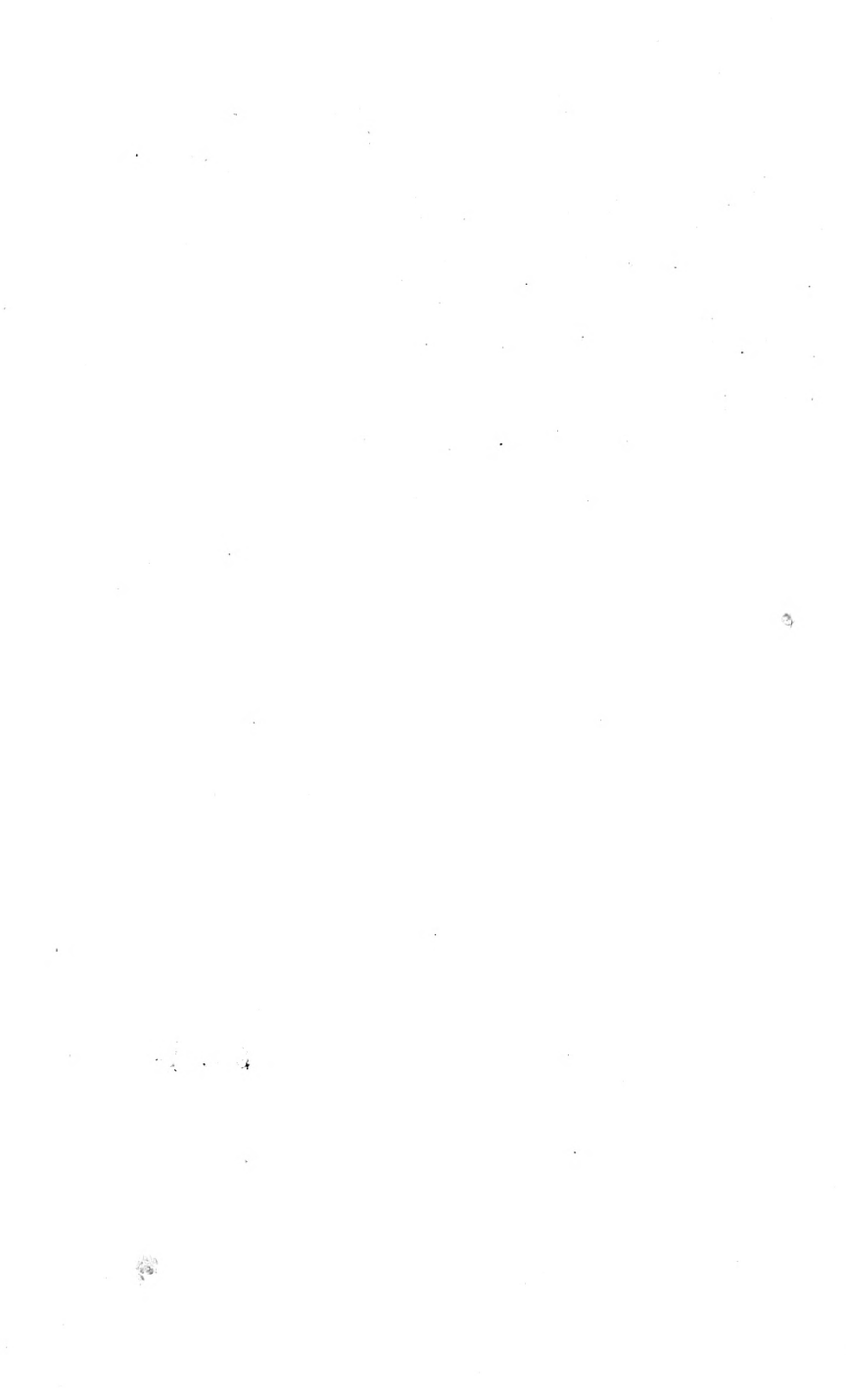
^l 2 Theff. i. 9, 10.

ⁱ Col. iii. 1, 4.

^k Rev. i. 7.

Voice of the Arch-angel and with the Trump of God: and the Dead in Christ shall rise first; and they which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the Clouds, to meet the Lord in the Air, and so shall we be ever with the Lord^m.

^m 1 Theff. iv. 15, 16, 17.



S E R M O N X V I I .

2 COR. V. 20.

Now then we are Embassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's Stead, Be ye reconciled to God.

THE Ministers of the Gospel ought ever to have in their Minds the End of their Office, that they may diligently use the right Means to attain it: and the People under our Care should be no less attentive to it, in order to receive, by co-operating faithfully with us, the Benefits intended to be conveyed to them through our Hands. Now the Nature of our Commission is set forth in the Text: where you have

- I. The Character, in which we act, *Embassadors for Christ*.
 II. The Errand, on which we are sent, to *pray Men that they would be reconciled to God*.

I. Our Character is that of *Embassadors for Christ*, which means *instead of Christ*, as the same Word is translated in the latter Part of the Verse. God sent his Son into the World, as the Messenger of his Covenant; the Person, by whom he notified his gracious Promises, and the Conditions of them, to Mankind. When he ceased to instruct them personally, his Words to his Apostles were, *as the Father hath sent me, even so send I you*^a. Nor did he send the twelve only, but gave to his Church other Pastors and Teachers also, *for the Work of the Ministry, for the edifying of his Body, till we all come unto perfect Men in Christ*^b, and promised to be *with them alway even unto the End of the World*^c. Such therefore the Apostles appointed in every City; deputed them to *work the Work of the Lord, as they themselves did*^d; directed some of these to appoint others^e, as *Feeders of the Flock, under Christ the chief*

^a John xx. 21. ^b Eph. iv. 12, 13. ^c Matth. xxviii. 20.
^d 1 Cor. xvi. 10. ^e 2 Tim. ii. 2. Tit. i. 5.

Shepherd^f; required them to *exhort and rebuke with all Authority*^g, and commanded Christians to *submit to them, as Watchmen over their Souls, who must give Account*^h.

God forbid, that you should have Cause to be alarmed at the highest of these Claims. The same Scripture, on which they are founded, guards against it sufficiently. As to temporal Matters: our Saviour's *Kingdom is not of this World*ⁱ; nor have his Ministers, as such, any peculiar Right to interfere in the Affairs of it. *The Lord indeed hath ordained, that they who preach the Gospel, should live of the Gospel*^k. But what Provision should be made for that Purpose, he hath left entirely to the Conscience and the Prudence of Men. Our Authority of demanding even a Maintenance from the unwilling, and certainly then the further Privileges that any of us enjoy, are derived solely from the voluntary Gift of the civil Power. And as to spiritual Concerns: the very Apostles were bound to teach only what their Master commanded. And they indeed could not mistake any Part of it: but we may; and therefore you are not obliged to believe implicitly what we affirm. So far still as Per-

^f 1 Pet. v. 2, 4.
ⁱ John xvii. 36.

^g Tit. ii. 5.
^k 1 Cor. ix. 14.

^h Heb. xiii. 17.

sons are sensible, that they cannot determine for themselves, they should follow their established Guides, if they have Reason to think them skilful and honest. But to all others we apply as St. *Paul* did: *I speak as to wise Men: judge ye what I say*¹.

Whatever appears true to any Man by his own Reason, or to any Christian by the Word of God, he ought to observe, though no one reminded him of it. And whatever any one else proves to him, though absolutely unauthorized, he is bound to admit. But when God himself, knowing Man's Need and yet unwillingness to be taught, hath expressly ordained a Succession of Persons to execute that Employment: if either we neglect to give, or you to receive Instruction, it is a highly aggravated Contempt of his Authority, and of his Mercy. *We have indeed this Treasure in earthen Vessels*^m: and too often add Sins to our Infirmities, by which we dishonour him we represent, and shall bring down severe Punishment on our own Heads. But still, as in temporal Societies, Officers, though bad and unfit Men, must be duly obeyed, as far as their Commission extends, in Respect to the supreme Power, under

¹ 1 Cor. x. 15.

^m 2 Cor. iv. 7.

which they act; so in the spiritual one of the Church, when you hear the Truths of Religion from the worst of us all, you are to receive them as the Word of God, for such indeed they are, not as the Word of Men. And a Message from him deserves the utmost Honour; let them, who bring it, deserve what they will.

Are you then, careful to regard what we say the more, if there be Reason to think well of us; but as little prejudiced against it as possible, if there be not: or do you slight the Commands of your Maker, when they come by a Person whom you do not esteem, or barely do not like? But if you like him ever so well, attend on him ever so constantly, applaud him ever so highly, and stop there; you have done nothing. It is not Entertainment, it is *the Law*, that you are to *seek at his Mouth: for he is the Messenger of the Lord of Hosts*ⁿ. You are to look beyond us, to the End of our Mission: not to pay us any such Deference, even for that, as may endanger our Humility, lessen our Usefulness, and pervert us into Instruments of Harm instead of Good; but only to excite in your Minds, from a due Veneration of him who

ⁿ Mal. ii. 7.

sends us, a due Attention to what the Text mentions.

II. The Errand he sends us upon. Were that merely to notify a Doctrine ever so strange, short of palpable Absurdity, a Command ever so difficult, a Threatning ever so severe, you would be bound to receive it, on the Authority of proper Credentials, with the most submissive Reverence. X But what is the Message, that his Ministers bring you from him? *Be ye reconciled to God.* Surely a most gracious, but at the same Time a very alarming one. For you will say, are we Enemies to him then? Why doubtless the Expression implies, that possibly we may. And it is our highest Concern to inquire immediately, (if we have not done it) whether we be or not.

By Nature we are Children of Wrath^o: involved in the Mortality, to which our first Parents were condemned; in the Corruption, with which they tainted themselves. We experience both. And God must consider our bad Inclinations, however we came by them, with Dislike as well as Pity: and may justly leave us in this fallen Estate, unless we make Use of the proper Means to be relieved from

^o Eph. ii. 3.

it. What Care then have you taken in this Respect? “*We have been by Baptism regenerate and grafted into the Body of Christ’s Church*”^p: and we have personally ratified since, the Vow then made in our Name.” You have done well: and these Things intitle you, to Assistance from above for amending yourselves, and to eternal Life on Condition of your endeavouring it faithfully. But all Men have broken this Condition by actual Sin. What have you done then to renew your Covenant? Have you lamented your Failings, and redoubled your Watchfulness: or have you tamely given Way to irregular Appetites and Passions? Have you not indeed striven to excuse, to justify, to encourage, to make Provision for them? sometimes perhaps you have resisted them: but from what Principle? From that of Conscience towards God: or of Interest, Convenience, Reputation only? If the latter, they are no religious Motives. If the former, have you resisted in all Sorts of Temptations, and in the main successfully? “No: we must own, we have commonly been overpowered; and are so still.” Why, in Proportion as this is your Case, both Reason and Scripture pro-

^p Office of Baptism.

nounce it a bad one: for *without Holiness, habitual Piety and Virtue, no Man shall see the Lord*⁹. Are you then trying all Methods to increase your Strength: or do you give up the Contest; sometimes perhaps a little grieved; but oftener secretly glad, that you have gotten so specious a Pretence, as that of your Weakness, for living as you like?

But you will say, how are we to increase our Strength? Partly, by representing to yourselves, seriously and frequently, the Baseness and the Danger of sinning against God; by avoiding resolutely the Things and the Persons, that incline you to it; by reading good Books, and hearing good Advice in public and private. Something of all this you have probably done: but whether near so much as you could, ask your own Hearts. Or supposing you have: there is one essential Point wanting. Have you applied to your heavenly Father for his Help? Scripture and Experience prove, that *we are not sufficient of ourselves*¹. Now he is completely able, he is intirely willing, he hath expressly promised, to assist us. But he justly expects, that we should own our Dependence on him, by asking his Aid. And if we

⁹ Heb. xii. 14.

¹ 2 Cor. iii. 5.

are too proud, or too negligent for that, he leaves us to the Consequences. “ Yes: but we have prayed, as well as endeavoured, and all to no Purpose.” But how have you prayed? Only as a Matter of Course perhaps, without much Persuasion, that it would do you any great Good; without inward Penitence and Humiliation; without Attention and Earnestness; or however without due Perseverance. And what can you expect from such Prayers?

But supposing, that you are satisfied with yourselves on these Heads, what Plea have you made to God for his Pardon and Help? “ That of his infinite Mercy.” But his Mercy flows to Mankind in a particular Channel. *God was in Christ reconciling the World to himself*, as the Verse before the Text teaches. Have you then applied through him? Persons ignorant of him indeed cannot: and the Judge of all will undoubtedly consider their Case with Equity. But if you, to whom he is revealed, seek to be reconciled without him, it is resolving not to be reconciled at all. “ No: we have prayed in his Name constantly.” But hath it been with any inward Sense of what he hath done for you, and is to you; with any real Faith and Trust in his Atonement
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and Grace, disclaiming all Merit of your own; with any fixed and active Resolution to *take his Yoke upon you*^s, and observe his Appointments in order to attain his Likeness? Possibly you will plead, that such Faith and Resolution are not in your Power: *they are the Gift of God*^s, as appears from Scripture: and therefore it is none of your Fault, if you have them not. But it is in your Power to yield to *his Spirit* when he *strives with you*^u, to dwell on his Convictions of your Sins and your Danger, to cherish Desires of what you want, to endeavour at what you are commanded, to use the Means which the Gospel prescribes. If you have done thus, go on to do it, and you will infallibly succeed. If not, this is the Method, which, *as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's Stead*, to take, that ye may *be reconciled to God*. Whilst you neglect it, you can be no other than his Enemies: and think with yourselves, we beg you, in the next Place, how joyless, how terrible a Situation that must be.

He is infinitely wise: and therefore knows what is best for us. He is infinitely good: and therefore his Directions point it out to us. He

^s Matth. xi. 29.

^u Eph. ii. 8.

^v Gen. vi. 3.

is perfectly just and holy: and therefore loves right and abhors wrong Behaviour. His Power is irresistible, and therefore he can reward or punish to the utmost: his Veracity is unquestionable, and therefore he will reward or punish eternally. What can we then promise ourselves by Disobedience to him: what may we not promise ourselves by Obedience? Our worldly Enjoyments, at best, are low and uncertain; our Sufferings many and severe; our Comforts and Supports under them poor and few; a very great Part of our Time is spent meanly and contemptibly, if not insipidly and tediously. What a Situation is this, if we are to take it for our all, without God and without Hope! We are strangely apt indeed to flatter ourselves daily with Prospects of this and that Pleasure and Advantage soon to come. But if we look back, what very great and lasting Satisfaction hath the highest and the happiest of us ever had: and what better Ground is there to expect any in the Remainder of our Days? Undoubtedly we have enough to be thankful for, and much more than we have deserved. But is it enough to rest in, and desire nothing farther? Shall we feel ourselves persuaded, on cool Reflexion at the

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the Close of Life, that going round and round the Circle of our present Amusements and Pursuits, in the Manner that we have done, and being disappointed continually by every one of them in its Turn, is all the Good that a rational Soul needs with; especially while heavenly and eternal Bliss lies within our View and within our Reach? This would be a groveling Way of thinking indeed. But suppose our Days are cut short in the Middle, or the Beginning: suppose our Gratifications are peculiarly few; or our Distresses peculiarly heavy: still shall we aim at nothing better? At least, shall we not guard against something unspeakably worse? For consider; God is our Maker and Lord: this intitles him to our faithful Service. He is our Benefactor by all that he hath given, and all that he is ready to give us: this demands our most affectionate Gratitude. And if we deny him either, he will and must shew to the whole Creation which he governs, that they who sin, shall, unless they apply for Pardon in the Manner directed by him, suffer in Proportion. Now they do not suffer thus here: and therefore they will hereafter. Are you then contented, rather than be reconciled to God, besides losing the Promise of his Favour,

your, to undergo, first the Terrors, then the Torments of his future Displeasure, such as his Word hath described them? Think a little of this. What should induce you to it?

If Love of sensual Gratifications tempt you to disobey him: irregular ones will almost always end, and commonly soon, even in present Misery. If worldly Interest: both forbidden Methods, and immoderate Desires of promoting it will entangle you in Perplexities, disquiet you with Solitude, and stain you with Dishonour: you will often miss your Aim, and never be long satisfied with obtaining it. If Resentment or any Species of Malice bials you, this is being habitually and exquisitely wretched, only for the Chance of an occasional Joy in Mischief, that will make you almost as hateful to Man as to God. Or could any of these Things afford you a Delight ever so unmixed, how very quick is the whole Scene of them passing away! Doth Pride then rule within you, and represent Submission to your Creator, as beneath you? But do you not obey and honour your earthly Superiors? Do you not expect your Inferiors to shew every appointed, every customary Mark of Honour and Obedience to you; and even an implicit

Compliance

Compliance with your Directions? Why then is not the Author and absolute Disposer of your Being, worthy of the most unreserved Duty, the most respectful Homage; and where is the Meanness of paying it?

But you are apprehensive perhaps of being despised and ridiculed for your Piety and Virtue. But shall you not be approved and applauded by the Wise and Good, by many of the Bad themselves, by the Judge of all and his holy Angels at the great Day? But, it may be, you have Doubts about Religion: and therefore you do not set heartily to practise it. Seek for Information properly then, and hearken to it fairly. Practise conscientiously what you cannot doubt of: keep to the safer Side, where you do doubt: make sure, that no sinful Inclination prejudices you: be content, though you do not see every Thing, if you see enough to direct your Steps; and you will soon discern, which Way is best to take. But you are afraid of not persevering: or though you should, of not succeeding. Try however at least. Honest Endeavours, if they do no more, will alleviate your Guilt. But by continuing them, you must gain some Ground: and should you fall after that, and seem to lose it; you may rise again,
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and learn Skill from your Defeats to obtain at last the Victory. Using the prescribed Means, you have God's Promise for it: and how small soever your own Strength may be, his hath no Bounds.

Why doubtless, you will say, he can do every Thing: but you have been a great Sinner; and you know not how to think he will either help or even forgive you. And certain it is, that you have not deserved it: nor can you, of yourself, be sure of it. But still common Reason gives you some Hope. You are frail: he is good: his Forbearance is a Degree of Forgiveness. Repenting, Confessing, Striving, must render your Condition better, than a contrary Behaviour would. How much indeed, he himself alone can tell. And therefore, if you want further Encouragement, as well you may, look into his holy Word. There he hath granted *Knowledge of Salvation to his People, by the Remission of their Sins, through the tender Mercy of our God, whereby the Day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give Light to them that sit in Darknes and the Shadow of Death, to guide our Feet into the Way of Peace**. Nay our offended Benefactor and Lawgiver and

* Luke i. 77, 78, 79.

Judge, not only permits, but *befeeches you to be reconciled*. Nor hath he sent this Request by a common Messenger, but by his only Son, *who had Glory with him before the World was* *, *who in the Beginning was with God, and was God* †. Nor hath he sent him, barely to make a Publication of it, from Heaven, and return: but to take upon him our Nature, bear the Inconveniences of a low Condition of Life, suffer Indignities, Persecution and Death; to reconcile forgiving Goodness with Justice and Wisdom; to notify, to prove, to conquer Prejudices against, the blessed Union of these Attributes. Nor even, after all this, hath he left Men to remember his gracious Invitation or forget it, as they please: but established a perpetual Succession of Persons, authorized and commanded to repeat it, weekly and daily, in publick and in private, to every Age, every Nation, every Sinner; and enforce it by the strongest Motives, that can affect the human Heart; but especially that most engaging one, which follows the Text: *Be ye reconciled to God; for he hath made him to be Sin for us, who knew no Sin, that we might be made the Righteousness of God in Him.*

* John xvii. 5.

† John i. 1.

So astonishing a Method, we may be sure, had never been taken, had not God, who knows best, seen our Case was too bad for less powerful Remedies. And the Goodness of our heavenly Father in appointing this, of his Son in submitting to it, of his holy Spirit in applying it to our diseased Hearts, is, as the Apostle justly expresses himself, *a Love that passeth Knowledge*^z. That thus much should be done for any Offenders, is beyond all Imagination: yet it is done for the very worst. But then all this Mercy is conditional: its final Effect depends on ourselves. And *how shall we escape, if we neglect so great Salvation, thus obtained for us: which at first began to be spoken by the Lord, was confirmed by them that heard him*^a; and is offered to you, and pressed upon you continually by his Ministers, who act for him, represent him, and beseech you in his Stead? Every Step, taken for your Recovery, aggravates your Guilt, if it be taken in vain. And there remaineth no more Sacrifice for Sins^b, no other Ministry of Reconciliation^c, if you omit to be reconciled by this.

“ But, you will say, we hope we are at Peace with God.” If you hope it on good Grounds,

^z Eph. iii. 19. ^a Heb. ii. 3. ^b Heb. x. 26. ^c 2 Cor. v. 18.

his Name be praised. But what Grounds have you? “ We attend his Worship: we live regular Lives: few, if any, of our Neighbours, better.” But do you attend all the Ordinances of his Worship, and constantly; and, to the best of your Power, with your Minds, as well as your Bodies? Are your Lives regular in every Thing, and no wrong Inclinations, either of Flesh or Spirit, indulged? Think a while of this. What your Neighbours are, you know but imperfectly; and it concerns you but little: both they and you shall be condemned, if you are not what you ought. Possibly enough you stand well in the Estimation of Men: but are you faultless in the Eyes of God? Certainly not. For *in his Sight shall no Man living be justified*^d. Every Deed, every Word, every Thought, hath its Failure and Guilt belonging to it. Are you then convinced of your fallen and lost Condition, of the Imperfection, the Insufficiency, the Sinfulness of what is best in you; deeply humble, on this Account, before *the High and lofty One that inhabiteth Eternity, whose Name is Holy*^e; sensible of your Need of his Pardon and Grace; thankful Believers in the Satisfaction of his

^d Pf. cxliii. 2.

^e H. lvii. 15.

Son, in the sanctifying Influences of his Spirit? Do you accordingly pray to him daily in private, from the Bottom of your Soul; examine diligently your outward Behaviour, your inward Movements of Heart, as in his Presence; yield up yourselves to his Will, and make it your great Aim to serve and please him: not only in Acts of Faith and Devotion, (though indispensable and most important Duties) but in a Conduct of Benevolence and Equity, of Mildness, Usefulness and Bounty to all your Fellow-Creatures; in Lowliness of Mind, in Chastity, Sobriety and Temperance? Have you considered well, not merely what your own very fallible, and perhaps very partial, Reasonings suggest to you, but what his Word requires of you? Are you honestly careful to observe all its Rules: and do you find produced in yourselves by them, a Spirit of Love and Duty to God; and a Desire, superior to all others, of enjoying a spiritual Happiness for ever with him? What is the Answer of your Consciences to these Questions?

If an unfavourable one; do not despair, be it ever so much so: for we have an high Priest, *able to save to the uttermost them that come to God by him*^f. But lose not a Moment's Time: press

^f Heb. vii. 25.

home your Convictions on your Souls; beg his Intercession, plead his Merits, follow his Directions, *acquaint yourselves with him, and be at Peace*^z. If it be a doubtful Answer: can you bear to continue in Doubt concerning your great, your eternal Interest; impatient as you are apt to be of Uncertainty in very small Matters? That would be a bad Sign indeed. “But how shall we remove the Doubt?” Not by perplexing yourselves with Guesſes in the Dark; but by removing the Cause. Whatever you find amiss, after praying to God for Pardon and Strength, set immediately to amend; and in Proportion to your Progress, you will have the only true Ground of Comfort. For *hereby know we, that we know him, if we keep his Commandments*^h. Whoever doth so, though imperfectly, yet sincerely and humbly, hath nothing to fear: whoever doth not, hath nothing to hope. Strong Feelings of joyful Assurance may be given to the Pious from above, as a present Reward: and strong Feelings of vain Presumption may lead on the Wicked, secure and triumphant, to their final Destruction. Very reasonable Terrors, from Consciousness of their Guilt, may torment the Bad before-

^z Job xxii. 21.

^h 1 John ii. 3.

hand: and very unreasonable ones, from Constitution, or the Suggestions of Satan, may assault the Good. Therefore we are to judge of our Condition by none of these Things; but by the Scripture Rule, fairly interpreted: *Little Children, let no Man deceive you: he that doth Righteousness is righteous: he that committeth Sin, is of the Devil*ⁱ.

If then Obedience to the Gospel is the Principle, by which you designedly and habitually govern your Lives: Thank God for it, take Comfort in it, and be happy, whatever befalls you in this World. But still remember, that every Degree of Sin remaining is a Degree of Enmity remaining: and who then hath not Need *to be reconciled* more completely? St. Paul had already told the Persons, to whom he speaks in the Text, that *his Hope of them was stedfast; knowing, that as they were Partakers of the Sufferings of Christ, they should be Partakers of his Consolation also*^k. But notwithstanding this, he continues to beseech them, *Be ye reconciled to God*. If we see into ourselves at all, the best of us must see, that there are many Things in us, which we cannot approve. If we have any due Sense of his Goodness to

ⁱ 1 John iii. 7, 8.

^k 2 Cor. i. 7.

us, and of Love to him in Return; we shall earnestly wish and labour to be more pleasing to him, and more like him. If we have any Experience of what is true Happiness here, or any Ambition of a high Rank in Happiness hereafter, we shall surely reflect, that both depend on our Improvements in pure Religion and genuine Virtue. If we have any right Apprehension of the Dangers, that surround us, we must foresee, that unless we press forward, we shall be driven back and fall: but the further we advance, on the surer Ground we shall stand. And if we have any just Zeal for the Glory of our blessed Redeemer; we shall deeply lament, that our Failings have so frequently given others Occasion to *blaspheme that worthy Name, whereby we are called*¹; and shall use our utmost Endeavours to adorn the Doctrine of God our Saviour in all Things^m: which that we may accordingly, he of his infinite Mercy grant: to whom be all Honour and Praise, now and for ever. *Amen.*

¹ James ii. 7.

^m Tit. ii. 10.

