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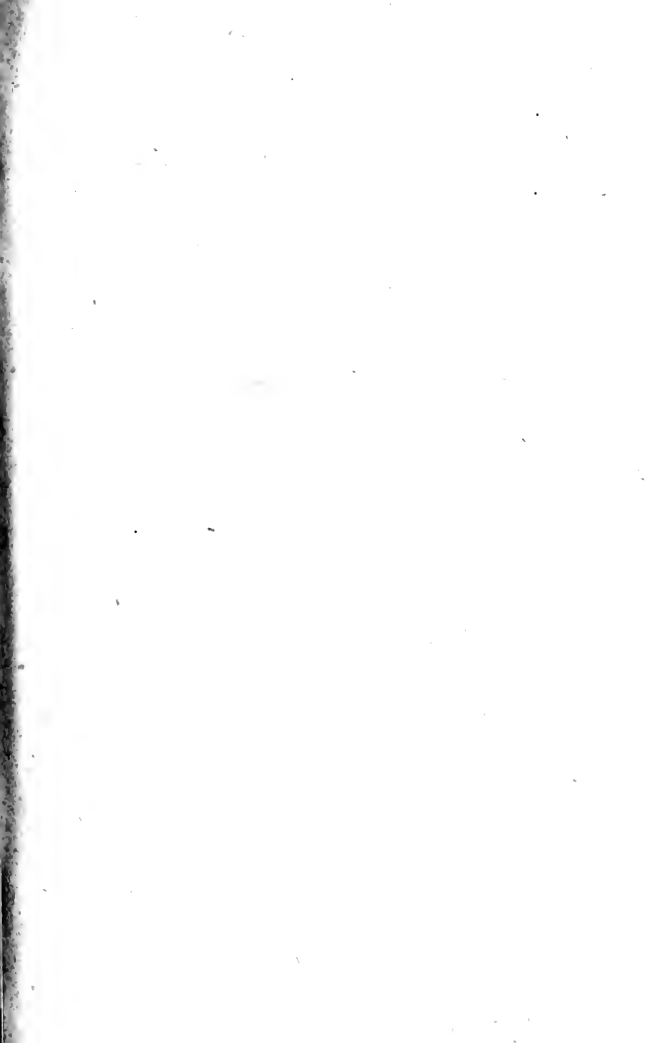
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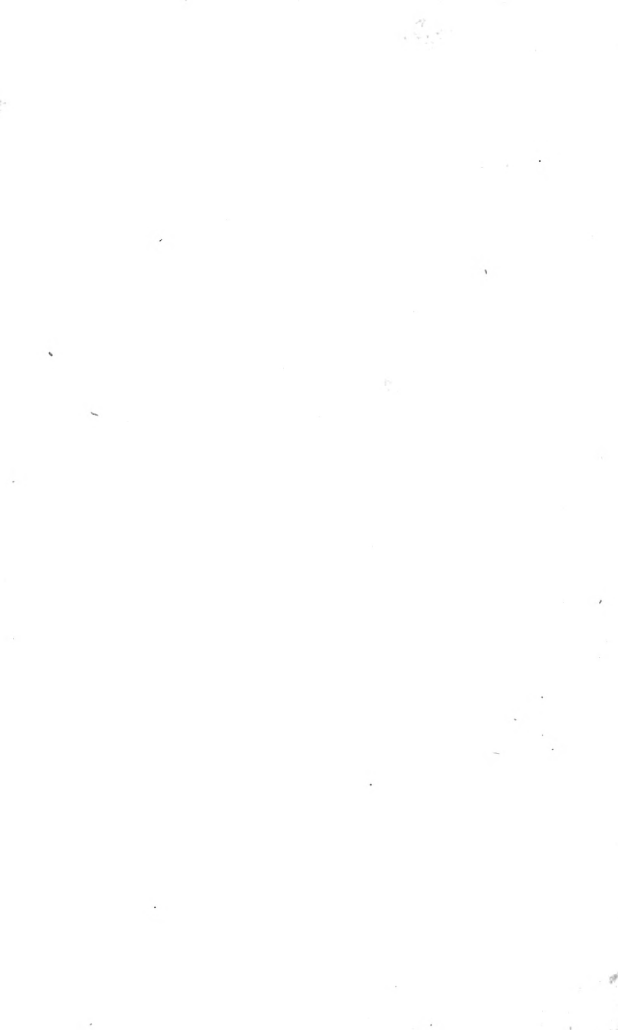
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Ashe, Simeon, d. 1662.

A treatise on divine
contentment





the scene turn, and God puts thee under the
black-rod? Whereas he useth a rod, he might
use a sc

EPISTLE TO THE READER.

ON

DIVINE CONTENTMENT.

✓
BY SIMEON ASHE,

MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL, LONDON.

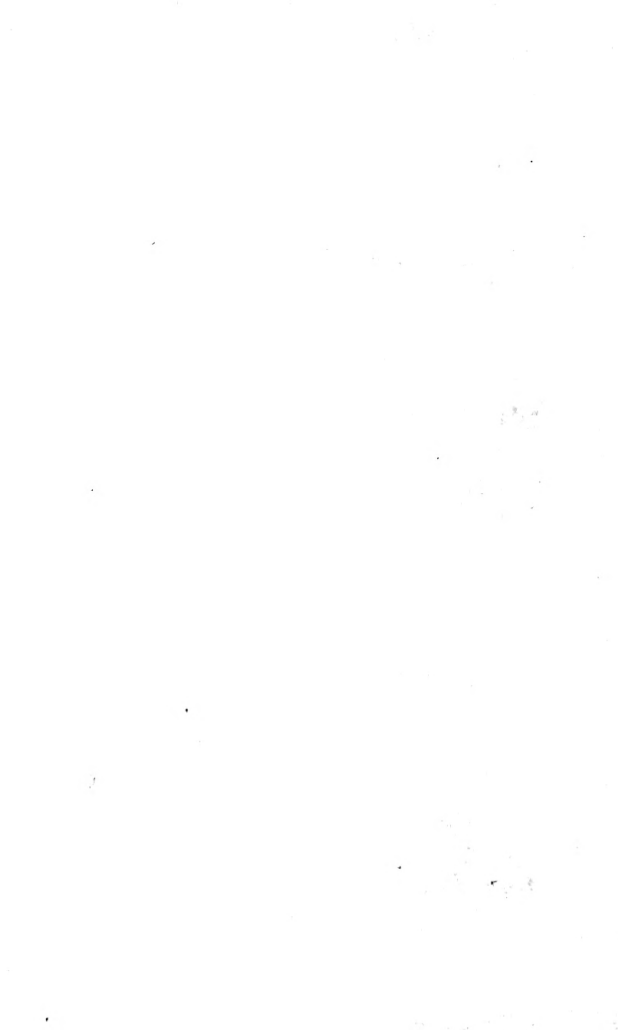
by Thomas Watson

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1841.



the scene turn, and God puts thee under the *black-rod*? Whereas he useth a rod, he might use a ^{SC} " " "

EPISTLE TO THE READER.

CHRISTIAN READER :

Having seriously considered the great dishonour done to Almighty God, as well as the prejudice which doth arise to our own selves, by the sin of discontent—a catholic and epidemical sin—it did at first put me upon the study of this subject. Nor is it inconsistent to handle this next in order to the *Christian Charter*. I showed you before the great things which a believer hath in reversion—*Things to come are his*. And here behold a Christian's holy and gracious deportment in this life, which discovers itself in nothing more eminently than in *Contentment*. Discontent is to the soul, as a disease to the body; it puts out of temper, and doth much hinder its regular and sublime motions heavenward. Discontent is hereditary; and no doubt but it is much augmented by the many sad eclipses and changes that have fallen out of late in the

ed, because sinful. That which shout
us out of love with this sullen distemper, is
the contemplating the beautiful *Queen of Con-
tentment*. For my part, I know not any orna-
ment in religion that doth bespangle a Chris-
tian, or glitter in the eye of God and man,
more than this of contentment ; nor, certainly,
is there any thing wherein all the Christian
virtues do work more harmoniously, or shine
more transparently, than in this orb. Every
grace doth act its part here, and help to keep
the soul in its proper frame. This is the true
philosopher's stone, which turns all into gold—
this is the curious enamel and embroidery of
the heart, which makes Christ's spouse all
glorious within. How should every Christian
be ambitious to wear such a sparkling diamond !
If there be a blessed life before we come at
heaven, it is the contented life. And why not
contented ? *Why art thou wroth, and why is
thy countenance fallen ?* Gen. iv. 6. Man, of
all creatures, hath the least cause to be discon-
tented. Canst thou deserve any thing from
God ? Doth he owe thee any thing ? What, if

the scene turn, and God puts thee under the *black-rod*? Whereas he useth a rod, he might use a scorpion; he might as well destroy thee, as whip thee. Why, then, art thou so querulous? Why dost thou give way to this irrational and unthankful sin of discontent? The good Lord humble his own people from nourishing such a viper in their breast, as doth not only cut out the bowels of their comfort, but spits venom in the face of God himself. Oh, Christian! who art overspread with this *fretting leprosy*, thou carriest the *man of sin* about thee; for thou settest thyself above God, as if thou wert wiser than he, and wouldst saucily prescribe him what condition is best for thee. Oh this *devil of discontent!* which whomsoever it possesseth, it makes his heart a little hell. I know there will not be perfect contentment here in this life. Perfect pleasure is only at *God's right hand*; yet we may begin here to tune our instrument, before we play the sweet lesson of contentment exactly in heaven. I should be glad if this little piece might be like Moses casting the tree into the waters, Exod. xv. 25, to make the uncouth bitter condition of life more sweet and pleasant

to drink of. I have once more adventured into public. This piece I acknowledge to be but a homespun one; some better hand might have made a more curious draught: but, having preached upon the subject, I was earnestly solicited by some of my hearers to publish it; and although it is not dressed in that rich attire of eloquence as it might, yet I am not about poetry or oratory, but divinity. Nor is this intended for fancy, but practice. If I may herein do any service, or cast but a mite into the treasury of the Church's grace, I have my desire. The end of our living is to live to God, and to lift up his name in the world. The Lord add an effectual blessing to this work, and fasten it as a nail in a sure place. He of his mercy make it as spiritual physic, to purge the ill-humour of discontent out of our hearts, that so a crown of honour may be set upon the head of Religion, and the crystal streams of Joy and Peace may ever run in our souls—which is the prayer of him who is desirous to be a faithful orator for thee at the Throne of Grace.

SIMEON ASHE.

From my Study, at St. Stephen's, }
Walbrook, May 3, 1653. }

TO THE
CHRISTIAN READER.

A WORD spoken in due season, how good is it! Prov. xv. 23. *As God* giveth to his creatures their meat in season, Psal. civ. 27, so his faithful stewards provide for his household their portion of meat in due season. Luke xii. 42. And as it is with corporal food, the season addeth much both to the value and usefulness thereof: in like manner it is with food spiritual. In this regard, the brokenness of these times—wherein the bosoms of most people are filled with disquietude, and their mouths with murmurings—may well render this Treatise more acceptable. The seas are not so stormy as men's spirits are tempestuous, tossed to and fro with discontent, Eccles. iii. 11. And now the Lord, who maketh every thing beautiful in his time, hath most seasonably put into thy hand a profitable discourse to calm unquiet hearts. Adam, in Paradise, dashed upon the rock of discontent—which some divines con-

ceive was his first sin. This, with many instances more in Scripture, together with our own sad experience, doth both speak our danger and call for caution. Now godliness is the only sovereign antidote against this spreading disease; and God's grace alone, being settled and exercised in the heart, can cause steadiness in stormy times, Heb. xiii. 9. Whereas contentment ariseth either from the fruition of all comforts, or from a not desiring of some which we have not. True piety doth put a Christian into such a condition: hereby we both possess God, and are taught how to improve Him who is the only satisfying everlasting Portion of his people, Psal. xvi. 5, 6. Matt. viii. 20. Psal. lxxiii. 25, 26. Herein Christ, though poor in this world, greatly rejoiced. "The Lord is the portion of my inheritance; the lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places. Yea, I have a goodly heritage." Upon this account, also, Jacob said—*I have nothing*, Gen. xxxiii. 11; or, as it is in the original, *I have all*. God the Father, and Christ his Son, had sweet satisfaction in each other, when there was no other being, Prov. viii. 30, 31. Therefore such who possess and

improve God, through Christ, cannot possibly be dissatisfied. The Almighty is the God of *all grace*, 1 Pet. v. 10, of *all comforts*, 2 Cor. i. 4, and of *salvation*, Psal. lxxviii. 20; in which respect neither deficiencies or disappointments, losses or crosses, can cause disquieting discontent in that bosom where Faith is commander in chief. The Prophet Habakkuk rejoiced in the "God of his salvation, when the pestilence went before him," Hab. iii. 5, 11, 17, "and burning coals came forth of his feet;" and when he supposed all creature-succours, both for delight and necessity, to be quite removed. This, this is the life which Christians should endeavour, and may attain by the vigorous regular actings of precious faith. This is the gain of contentment, which comes in by godliness, when providences are black and likely to be bloody. Now, "the just shall live by his faith," Hab. ii. 4, Heb. x. 23. That speech of the learned Mr. Gataker is weighty, and well worth remarking—"A contented mind shows a religious heart; and a discontented mind shows an irreligious heart." This likewise was a holy breathing of the Rev. Dr. Hall in his Meditations—"I have somewhat of the best things; I will with

thankfulness enjoy them, and will want the rest with contentment." By attaining and maintaining this frame of heart, we might have much of heaven on this side heaven. Holy contentment maketh them truly rich, whom the oppressing world maketh very poor. Hereby our sweetest morsels shall be well seasoned, and our bitterest portions well sweetened, Prov. xvii. 1. Had we learned to enjoy contentment in Jehovah, who is immutable and all-sufficient, this heavenly frame of spirit would never decay or change in the midst of the most amazing alterations in Church and State with which we are exercised: whereas, because we live alone upon sublunaries, therefore we are apt with Nabal to die upon the nest, 1 Sam. xxv. 37, through dejectedness, upon the approach of imagined danger. When God seeth cause to cut us short of many creature accommodations, faith will moderate our desires after them; assuring the soul, that nothing is withdrawn or withheld which might be really advantageous: and doubtless it is a great piece of happiness upon earth, not to long after that which the Lord is pleased to deny. Indeed, men act rather like Heathens than Christians, when they fret upon some particular inferior

disappointments, notwithstanding God's liberality laid forth upon them in many other respects: as Alexander, the monarch of the world, was discontented, because ivy would not grow in his gardens at Babylon. Diogenes, the Cynic, was herein more wise; who, finding a mouse in his satchel, said, he saw that himself was not so poor, but some were glad of his leavings. Oh, how might we, if we had hearts to improve higher providences, rock our peevish spirits quiet by much stronger arguments! Let us then lay before our eyes the practices of pious men, recorded in Scripture for our imitation, as Jacob, Agur, Paul, &c., Gen. xxviii. 20, Prov. xxx. 8, 1 Tim. vi. 7, and let us charge home upon our consciences divine exhortations, backed with strong reasons, and encouraged with sweet promises. It was the grave counsel of holy Greenham—"Having food and raiment, take the rest as an overplus," Gen. xxxii. 10. Are we not less than the least of God's mercies? Is not God our bountiful Benefactor? Why then do we not rest contented with his liberal allowance? Oh! let us chide our wrangling spirits, and encourage confidence with contentment in God, as blessed David did, Psal. xliii. 4. My pen hath outrun my pur-

pose when I undertook this preface ; but I will no longer, good reader, detain thee in the Porch, wherein I have designed to quicken and to prepare thee to the more fruitful improvement of this seasonable and useful Treatise, wherein the Author has exercised to good purpose both the Christian graces and ministerial gifts with which God hath enriched him. Herein the doctrine of Christian contentment is clearly illustrated, and profitably applied ; the special cases—wherein, through change of providences, discontents are most commonly occasioned—are particularized, and preservatives applied to secure the soul. Although some other worthy divines have been helpful to the church of God by their discourses upon this subject ; yet there is much of peculiar use in this Treatise. The Apostle tells us that some manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. Thy soul-profit is propounded as the Author's end in publishing this piece : and that this end may be accomplished, is the unfeigned desire and hearty prayer of him, who is

Thy Servant in and for CHRIST,

SIMEON ASHE.

May 3, 1653.

A TREATISE
ON
DIVINE CONTENTMENT.

CHAPTER I.

THE INTRODUCTION.

PHIL. iv. 11.—I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

THE inspired Apostle in the former verses of this chapter has left, for our instruction, some useful and heavenly exhortations; among the rest, to be careful for nothing; but, in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request be made known unto God, v. 6. Not to exclude a prudential care; for he that provideth not for his house, hath denied the faith, 1 Tim. v. 8. Nor yet a religious care; for we must give all diligence to

make our calling and election sure, 2 Pet. i. 10. But to exclude all anxious care about the issue and event of things. *Take no thought for your life, what you shall eat ;* and in this sense it should be a Christian's care not to be careful. The word *careful*, in the Greek, comes from a primitive, that signifies, *To cut the heart in pieces ;* a soul-dividing care. Take heed of this. We are bid to *commit our ways unto the Lord*, Psal. xxxvii. 5. The Hebrew word is, *Roll thy way upon the Lord*. It is our work to cast our care on him, 1 Pet. v. 7, but it is God's work to take care. By our immoderacy, we take his work out of his hand.

Care, when it is *eccentric*, either distrustful or distracting, is very dishonourable to God. It takes away his providence, as if he sat in heaven, and minded not what became of things here below ; like a man that makes a clock, and then leaves it go of itself. Immoderate care takes the heart off from better things ; and usually, while we are thinking how we shall do to live, we forget how to die. Care is a spiritual cancer, that doth waste and dispirit, and does no good to the soul. We may sooner, by our care, add a *furlong* to our grief, than a

cubit to our comfort. God doth threaten it as a curse, *They shall eat their bread with carefulness*, Ezek. xii. 19. Better fast, than eat of that bread. *Be careful for nothing.*

Now, lest any one should say—"Yea, Paul, thou preachest that to us which thou hast scarce learned thyself: hast thou learned not to be careful?" The Apostle seems immediately to answer that, in the words of the text—*I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*

Noble sentence! A speech worthy to be engraven upon our hearts and treasured up in our memory for ever. The text doth branch itself into these two general parts.

I. The scholar, *Paul—I have learned.*

II. The lesson—*In every state to be content.*

CHAPTER II.

The first Branch of the Text—The Scholar ; with the first Proposition.

I. BEGIN with the first—I. The scholar, and his proficiency, *I have learned* : out of which I shall observe two things, by way of paraphrase.

1. It is not, “ I may,” but “ I have.” The Apostle doth not say—“ I have *heard*, that in every state I should be content, but I have *learned*.” Observe: “ It is not enough for Christians to hear their duty, but they must learn their duty.”

It is one thing to hear, and another thing to learn ; as it is one thing to eat, and another thing to digest. St. Paul was a practitioner. Christians hear much ; but, it is to be feared, learn little. There were four sorts of ground in the parable, Luke viii. 5, and but one good ground. An emblem of this truth—many *hearers*, but few *learners*. There are two things which keep us from learning.

1. *Slighting what we hear*. Christ is the *Pearl of Price* : when we disesteem this Pearl

we shall never learn either its value, or its virtue. The Gospel is a rare mystery. In one place, it is called the Gospel of Grace; in another, Acts, xx. 24, the Gospel of Glory; because in it, as in a transparent glass, the glory of God is resplendent: but he that hath learned to contemn this mystery, will hardly ever learn to obey it. He that looks upon the things of heaven, as things by the by; and, perhaps, the driving of a trade, or carrying on some politic design, to be of greater importance; this man is in the high road to destruction, and will hardly ever learn the things of his peace. Who will learn that which he thinks is scarce worth learning?

2. *Forgetting what we hear*, Jam. i. 25. If a scholar have his rules laid before him, and he forgets them as fast as he reads them, he will never learn. Aristotle calls the memory the *scribe* of the soul, and Bernard calls it the *stomach* of the soul; because it hath a retentive faculty, and turns heavenly food into nourishment. We have great memories in other things; we remember that which is *vain*. Cyrus could remember the name of every soldier in his large army; we remember *injuries*.

This is to fill a precious cabinet with dung ; but how soon do we forget the sacred truths of God ! We are apt to forget three things : our *faults*, our *friends*, our *instructions*. Many Christians are like sieves. Put a sieve into the water, and it is full ; but take it forth of the water, and it all runs out : so, while they are hearing of a sermon, they remember something ; but, *take the sieve out of the water*—as soon as they are gone out of the church—all is forgotten. *Let these sayings*, saith Christ, *sink down into your ears*, Luke v. 44. In the original, it is—*Put these sayings into your ears* : as a man, that would hide a jewel from being stolen, locks it up safe in his chest. *Let them sink*. The word must not only fall as the dew that wets the leaf, but as rain which soaks to the root of the tree, and makes it fructify. O how often doth Satan, that fowl of the air, pick up the good seed that is sown !

Use. Let me put you upon a serious trial. Some of you have heard much ; you have lived forty, fifty, sixty years, under the blessed trumpet of the Gospel : What have you learned ? You may have heard a thousand sermons, and yet not have learned one. Search your consciences.

I. You have heard much against sin. Are you *hearers*, or are you *scholars*?

How many sermons have you heard against *covetousness*, that it is the *root* on which pride, idolatry and treason, do grow? 2 Tim. ii. 4. One calls it a metropolitan sin: it doth twist a great many sins in with it. There is hardly any sin, but covetousness is a main ingredient in it; and yet you are like the two daughters of the horse-leech, which cry, *Give, give*.

How much have you heard against *rash anger*? That it is a short frenzy, a dry drunkenness; that it rests in the *bosom of fools*; and, upon the least occasion, do your spirits begin to take fire? How much have you heard against *swearing*? It is Christ's express mandate, *Swear not at all*, Matt. v. 34. This sin, of all others, may be termed, The *unfruitful work of darkness*, Eph. v. 11. It is neither sweetened with pleasure, nor enriched with profit, the usual vermilion wherewith Satan doth paint sin. Swearing is forbidden with a *sub-pœna*. While the swearer shoots his oaths, like *flying arrows*, at God, to pierce his glory, God shoots a *flying roll* of curses against him, Zech. v. 2, 3, and do you make your tongue a

rocket, by which you toss oaths as tennis-balls? Do you sport yourselves with oaths, as the Philistines did with Samson, which will at last pull the house about your ears? Alas! how have they learned what sin is, that have not yet learned to leave sin? Doth he know what a viper is, that plays with it?

2. You have heard much of Christ. Have you learned Christ? The Jews, as one saith, carried Christ in their Bibles, but not in their *hearts*, Rom. xiv., their sound *went into all the earth*, Rom. x. 18. The Prophets and Apostles were as trumpets, whose sound went abroad into the world; yet many thousands, who heard the noise of these trumpets, had not learned Christ. *They have not all obeyed*, verse 16.

1. A man may know much of Christ, and yet not learn Christ. The *devils* knew Christ, Matt. viii. 29.

2. A man may preach Christ, and yet not learn Christ: as Judas.

3. A man may profess Christ, and yet not learn Christ. There are many professors in the world that Christ will profess against, Matt. vii. 22, 23.

QUEST. What is it then to learn Christ?

ANSW. 1. To learn Christ is, to be *made like Christ*, when the divine characters of his holiness are engraven upon our hearts. “We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image,” 2 Cor. iii. 18. There is a transformation. A sinner, viewing Christ’s image in the glass of the Gospel, is transformed into that image. Never did any man look upon Christ with a spiritual eye, but went away quite changed. A true saint is a divine landscape, or picture, where all the rare beauties of Christ are lively portrayed and drawn forth. He hath the same spirit, the same judgment, the same will, with Jesus Christ.

2. To learn Christ, is to *believe* him to be *my Lord and my God*, John xx. 28, which is the actual application of Christ to ourselves; and, as it were, the spreading of the sacred medicine of his blood upon our soul. You, that have heard much of Christ, and yet cannot, with an humble adherence, say, *my Jesus and my God*, be not offended if I tell you, the devil can say his creed as well as you.

3. To learn Christ, is to *live to Christ*. When we have Bible-conversations, our lives,

as rich diamonds, cast a sparkling lustre in the church of God, Phil. i. 27, and are, in some sense, parallel with the life of Christ, as the transcript with the original. So much for the first sentiment in the text.

CHAPTER III.

Containing the Second Proposition.

II. THIS word *I have learned*, is a word importing difficulty. It shows how hardly the Apostle came by his contentment of mind. St. Paul did not come naturally by it, but he had learned it. It cost him many a prayer and tear—it was taught him by the Spirit of God.

From whence we may learn that, 2. *Good things are hard to come by*. The business of religion is not so easy as most do imagine. *I have learned*, saith St. Paul. Indeed, you need not learn a man to sin. This is natural, Psal. lviii., and therefore easy : it comes as water out of a spring. It is an easy thing to be wicked : hell will be taken without storm, but matter of religion must be learned. To cut the flesh is easy ; but to prick a vein, and not to cut an artery is hard. The trade of sin needs not to be learned ; but *Divine Contentment* is not achieved without holy industry. *I have learned*.

There are two pregnant reasons why there must be so much study and exercise.

1. Because spiritual things are against nature. Every thing in religion is antipodes to nature. There are, in religion, two things : faith, and practice ; and both are against nature.

1. *Faith*, or matters of faith ; as, for a man to be justified by the righteousness of another ; to become a fool, that he may be wise : to save all, by losing all—this is *against nature*. 2. Matters of *practice*. As, 1. *Self-denial* ; for a man to deny his own *wisdom*, and see himself blind ; his own *will*, and have it melted into the will of God ; plucking out the right eye, beheading and crucifying that sin, which is the *favourite*, and lies nearest to the heart : for a man to be dead to the world ; and, in the midst of want, to abound : for a man to take up the cross, and follow Christ, not only in golden, but bloody paths ; to embrace religion, when it is dressed in its night-clothes, all the jewels of honour and preferment being pulled off. This is *against nature* ; and, therefore, must be learned.

2. *Self-examination* : for a man to take his heart, as a watch, all in pieces ; to set up a spiritual inquisition, or court of conscience, and traverse things in his own soul ; to take David's candle and lanthorn, Psal. cxix. 105, and

search for sin ; nay, as judge, to pass the sentence upon himself, 2 Sam. xxiv. 17. This is *against nature*, and will not easily be attained to without learning. 3. *Self-reformation*. To see a man, as Caleb, *of another spirit*, walking antipodes to himself, the current of his life altered, and running into the channel of religion—this is wholly *against nature*. When a stone ascends, it is not a natural motion, but a violent ; the motion of the soul heavenward, is a violent motion—it must be learned. Flesh and blood is not skilled in these things. Nature can no more cast out Nature, than Satan can cast out Satan.

2. Because spiritual things are *above nature*. There are some things *in nature*, that are hard to find out, as the causes of things, which are not learnt without study. Aristotle, a great philosopher, whom some have called an eagle fallen from the clouds ; yet could not find out the motion of the river Euripus, therefore threw himself into it. What then are divine things, which are in a sphere above nature, and beyond all human conception ? As the Trinity, the Lord's incarnation ; the mystery of faith, to believe against hope ; only God's Spirit can

light our candle here. The Apostle calls these *the deep things of God*, 1 Cor. ii. 10. The Gospel is full of jewels, but they are locked up from sense and reason. The angels in heaven are searching into these sacred depths, 1 Pet. i. 12.

Use. Let us beg the Spirit of God to teach us : we must be divinely instructed. The eunuch could read, but he could not understand, till *Philip joined himself to his chariot*, Acts viii. 29. God's Spirit must join himself to our chariot ; he must teach, or we cannot learn. *All thy children shall be taught of the Lord*, Isa. liv. 13. A man may read the figure on the dial ; but he cannot tell how the day goes, unless the sun shine upon the dial : we may read the Bible over, but we cannot learn to purpose till the Spirit of God *shines into our hearts*, 2 Cor. iv. 6. Oh, implore this blessed Spirit ! it is God's prerogative-royal to teach. *I am the Lord thy God, that teacheth thee to profit*, Isa. viii. 17. Ministers may *tell* us our lesson, God only can *teach us* : we have lost both our hearing and eye-sight ; therefore are very unfit to learn. Ever since Eve listened to the Serpent, we have been deaf ; and since she looked

on the tree of knowledge, we have been blind : but when God comes to teach, he removes these impediments, Isa. xxxv. 5. We are naturally dead, Eph. ii. 1. Who will go about to teach a dead man ? Yet behold, God undertakes to make dead men to understand mysteries ! God is the grand Teacher. This is the reason the word preached works so differently upon men : two in a pew, the one is wrought upon effectually ; the other lies at the ordinances as a dead child at the breast, and gets no nourishment. What is the reason ? Because the heavenly gale of the Spirit blows upon one, and not upon the other. One hath *the anointing of God, which teacheth him all things*, 1 John ii. 27, the other hath it not. God's Spirit speaks sweetly, and often irresistibly. In that heavenly doxology, none could sing the new song but those who were *sealed in their foreheads*, Rev. xiv. 3. The wicked could not sing it. Those that are skilful in the mysteries of salvation, must have the seal of the Spirit upon them. Let us make this our prayer—" Lord, breathe thy Spirit into thy Word : " and we have a Promise, which may add wings to prayer—" If ye then being evil, know how to give good

gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give his holy Spirit to them that ask him ?” Luke xi. 13.

And thus much for the first part of the text, the *scholar* ; which I intended only as a short gloss or paraphrase.

CHAPTER IV.

The second Branch of the Text—The Lesson itself;
with the Proposition.

II. I COME now to the second, which is the main thing—*The lesson itself: In whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*

Here was a rare piece of learning, indeed! and certainly more to be wondered at in St. Paul, that he knew how to turn himself to every condition, than all the learning in the world besides, which hath been so applauded in former ages by Julius Cæsar, Ptolemy, Xenophon, the great admirers of learning.

The text hath but a few words in it—*In every state be content.* But if that be true, which once Fulgentius said, that the most golden sentence is ever measured by *brevity* and *suavity*, then this is a most accomplished speech; here is a great deal in a little. The text is like a precious jewel, little in *quantity*, but great in *worth* and *value*.

The main proposition I shall insist upon is this, *that a gracious spirit is a contented spirit.*

The doctrine of contentment is very superlative; and till we have learned this, we have not learned to be Christians.

1. It is a *hard lesson*. *The angels* in heaven had not learned it; they were not contented: though their estate was very glorious, yet they were still soaring aloft, and aimed at something higher, Jude i. 6. *The angels which kept not their first estate*; they kept not their estate, because they were not contented with their estate. Our first parents, clothed with the white robe of innocency in Paradise, had not learned to be content: they had aspiring hearts; and, thinking their human nature too low and homespun, would be crowned with the Deity, and be *as gods*. Though they had the (Gen. iii. 5) choice of all the trees in the garden; yet none would content them but the *tree of knowledge*, which they supposed would have been as eye-salve to have made them omniscient. Oh, then, if this lesson were so hard to learn *in innocency*, how hard shall we find it, who are clogged with corruption!

2. It is of *universal extent*—concerns all.

1. It concerns *rich men*. One would think it needless to press those to contentment, whom

God hath blessed with great estates, but rather persuade them to be humble and thankful ; nay, but I say, *Be content*. Rich men have their discontents as well as others ; as appears, 1. When they have a great estate, yet they are discontented that they have no more ; they would make the hundred talents a thousand. A man in wine, the more he drinks, the more he thirsts. Covetousness is a dry dropsy : an earthly heart is like the *grave that is never satisfied*. Therefore I say to you rich men—*Be content*.

2. Rich men, if we may suppose them to be content with their estates, which is very seldom ; yet, though they have *estate* enough, they have not *honour* enough, Prov. xxx. 16 ; if their *barns* are full enough, yet their *turrets* are not high enough. They would be somebody in the world, as Theudas, *who boasted himself to be somebody* ; they never go so cheerfully as when the wind of honour and applause fills their sails ; if this wind be down, they are discontented. One would think Haman had as much as his proud heart could desire ; he was set above all the princes, and advanced upon the pinnacle of honour to be the second man in the kingdom,

Est. iii. 1; yet, in the midst of all his pomp, because Mordecai would not uncover and kneel, he is discontented (verse 2), and full of wrath, (verse 5), and there is no way to assuage this pleurisy of revenge, but by letting all the Jews' blood, and offering them up in sacrifice. The itch of honour is seldom allayed without blood; therefore I say to you rich men—*Be content.*

3. Rich men, if we may suppose them to be content with their honour and magnificent titles, yet they have not always contentment in their *relations*. She that lies in the bosom, may sometimes blow the coals; as Job's wife, who in a pet would have him fall out with God himself—*Curse God, and die.* Sometimes children cause discontent. How oft is it seen, that the mother's milk doth nourish a viper! And he that once sucked her breast, goes about to suck her blood! Parents do often of *grapes* gather thorns, and of *figs* thistles. Children are a sweet-brier: like the rose, which is a fragrant flower; but, as a Basil saith, it hath its prickles. Our relative comforts are not all pure wine, but mixed; they have in them more dregs than spirits, and are like that river Plutarch speaks of, where the waters in the morn-

ing run sweet, but in the evening run bitter. We have no *charter of exemption* granted us in this life; therefore rich men had need be called upon to be contented.

2. The doctrine of contentment concerns poor men. You that do suck so liberally from the breasts of Providence, *be content*; it is a hard lesson, therefore it had need be set upon the sooner. How hard it is, when the livelihood is even gone—a great estate boiled away almost to nothing—then to be content! The means of subsistence is in Scripture called *our life*, because it is the very sinews of life. The woman in the Gospel spent *all her living upon the physicians*, Luke viii. 43, which, in the Greek, implies, that she spent her whole life upon the physicians, because she spent the means by which she should live. It is much, when poverty hath clipped our wings, then to be content; but, though hard, it is excellent: and the Apostle here had learnt, *in every state to be content*.

God hath brought St. Paul into as great variety of conditions, as ever we read of any man, and yet he was content; else, sure, he could never have gone through it with so much

cheerfulness. See into what vicissitudes this blessed Apostle was cast—*We are troubled on every side!* There was the *sadness* of his condition; but, *not distressed*, there was his *content* in that condition. *We are perplexed*; there is his *affliction*: *but not in despair*; there is his *contentment*. And if we read a little further—“In afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults,” &c., 2 Cor. vi. 4, there is his trouble. And behold his content—“As having nothing, yet possessing all things,” verse 10. When the Apostle was driven out of all; yet, in regard of that sweet contentment of mind, which was like music in his soul, he possessed all things. We read a short map or history of his sufferings—“In prisons more frequent, in death oft,” &c. 2 Cor. xi. 23, 24, 25. Yet behold the blessed frame and temper of his spirit—“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”

Which way soever Providence did blow, he had such heavenly skill and dexterity, that he knew how to steer his course. For his outward estate he was indifferent; he could be either on the top of Jacob's Ladder, or the bot-

tom ; he could sing either the dirge or the anthem ; he could be any thing that God would have him. “ I know how to want, and how to abound.” There is a rare pattern for us to imitate ! Paul, in regard of his faith and courage, was like a cedar ; he could not be stirred : but, for his outward condition, he was like a *reed*, bending every way with the wind of Providence. When a prosperous gale did blow upon him, he could bend with that—*I know how to be full* ; and when a boisterous gust of affliction did blow, he could bend in humility with that—*I know how to be hungry*. St. Paul was, as Aristotle speaks, like a *die* that hath four squares ; throw it which way you will, it falls upon a bottom : let God throw the Apostle which way he would, he fell upon this *bottom* of contentment. A contented spirit is like a watch ; though you carry it up and down with you, yet the spring of it is not shaken, nor the wheels out of order, but the watch keeps its perfect motion : so it was with St. Paul ; though God had carried him into various conditions, yet he was not lifted up with the one, nor cast down with the other. The spring of his heart was not broken, the *wheels* of his

affection were not disordered, but kept their constant motion toward Heaven—*still content*. The ship that lies at anchor may sometimes be a little shaken, but never sinks: flesh and blood may have its fears and disquiets, but Grace doth check them. A Christian, having cast anchor in Heaven, his heart never sinks: a gracious spirit is a contented spirit.

This is a rare lesson! Paul did not learn it at the feet of Gamaliel—*I am instructed*, Phil. iv. 11. “I am initiated into this holy mystery:” as if he had said—“I have gotten the *divine art*, I have the secret of it.” God must make us right artists. If we should put some men to an art that they are not skilled in, how unfit would they be for it! Put a husbandman to limning or drawing pictures, what strange work would he make! This is out of his sphere. Take a limner that is exact in laying of colours, and put him to plough, or set him to planting and grafting of trees; this is not his art, he is not skilled in it. Bid a natural man live by faith; and, when all things go cross, *be contented*: you bid him do that he has no skill in; you may as well bid a child guide the stern of a ship. To live contentedly upon God,

in the deficiency of outward comforts, is an art which *flesh and blood hath not revealed*: nay, many of God's own children, who excel in some duties of religion; when they come to this of contentment, how do they stumble! They have scarcely commenced scholars in the school of Christ.

CHAPTER V.

The Resolving of some Questions.

FOR the illustrating of this doctrine, I shall propound these questions :

QUEST. 1. Whether a Christian may not be sensible of his condition, and yet be contented ?

ANSW. Yes ; for else he is not a Saint, but a stoick. Rachel did well to weep for her children—*there was nature* ; but her fault was, she refused to be comforted—*there was discontent*. Christ himself was *sensible*, when he sweat great drops of blood, and said—*Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me*, Matt. xxvi. 39 ; *yet* He was *contented*, and sweetly submitted his will. *Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt*. The Apostle bids us *humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God*, 1 Pet. v. 6, which we cannot do unless we are sensible of it.

QUEST. 2. Whether a Christian may not lay open his grievances to God, and yet be contented ?

ANSW. Yes—*Unto thee have I opened my*

cause, Jer. xx. 12. And *David poured out his complaint before the Lord*, Psal. cxliii. 2. We may cry to God, and desire him to write down all our injuries : shall not the child complain to his Father ? When any burden is upon the spirit, prayer gives vent : it easeth the heart. Hannah's spirit was burdened—*I am*, says she, *a woman of a troubled spirit*, 1 Sam. i. 15. Now, having prayed and wept, she went away, and was no more sad : only here is the difference between a holy complaint, and a discontented complaint ; in the one we complain *to God* ; in the other, we complain *of God*.

QUEST. 3. What is it, properly, that contentment doth exclude ?

ANSW. There are three things which contentment doth banish out of its diocese, and can by no means agree with them.

1. It excludes a *vexatious repining*. This is properly the daughter of Discontent—*I mourn in my complaint*, Psal. lv. 2. He doth not say, “ I murmur in my complaint.” Murmuring is no better than mutiny in the heart ; it is a rising up against God. When the sea is rough and unquiet, it casts forth nothing but foam : when the heart is discontented, it casts forth

the foam of anger, impatience, and sometimes little better than blasphemy. Murmuring is nothing else but the scum which boils off from a discontented heart.

2. It excludes an *uneven discomposure*. When a man saith—"I am in such straits, that I know not how to revolve or get out: I shall be undone!" Head and heart are so taken up, that a man is not fit to pray, or meditate, &c., he is not himself. Just as when an army is routed, one man runs this way, and another that, the army is put into disorder: so a man's thoughts run up and down distracted. Discontent doth dislocate and unjoint the soul; it pulls off the wheels of devotion.

3. It excludes a *childish despondency*; and this is usually consequent upon the other. A man being in a hurry of mind, not knowing which way to extricate or wind himself out of the present trouble, begins to faint and sink under it. For care is to the mind as a burden to the back, it loads the spirits, and with overloading sinks them. A despondent spirit is a discontented spirit.

CHAPTER VI.

Showing the Nature of Contentment.

HAVING answered these questions, I shall, in the next place, come to describe contentment.

It is a sweet temper of spirit, whereby a Christian carries himself in an equal poise in every condition. The nature of this will appear more clear in these three general rules.

1. Contentment is a *divine thing*. It becomes ours, not by *acquisition*, but *infusion*. It is a slip taken off from the Tree of Life, and planted by the Spirit of God in the soul; it is a fruit, that grows not in the garden of philosophy, but is of a heavenly birth: it is, therefore, very observable, that *Contentment* is joined with Godliness, and goes in equipage—"But godliness, with contentment, is great gain," 1 Tim. vi. 6. Contentment being a consequent of godliness, or a companion to it, I call it *divine*, to contradistinguish it from that contentment which a moral man may arrive at. Heathens have seemed to have this contentment; but it was only the shadow and picture

of it; the *beryl*, not the true *diamond*. Theirs was but *civil*, this is *sacred*; theirs was only from principles of *reason*, this of *religion*; theirs was only lighted at Nature's torch, this at the Lamp of Scripture. Reason may a little teach contentment: as thus—"Whatever my condition be, this is that I am born to; and, if I meet with crosses, it is but a catholic misery—all have their share: why, therefore, should I be troubled?" Reason may suggest this; and, indeed, this may be rather *constraint* than *content*: but, to live securely and cheerfully upon God, in the abatement of creature supplies, *religion* can only bring this into the soul's exchequer.

2. Contentment is an *intrinsic* thing. It lies within a man; not in the bark, but the root. Contentment hath both its fountain and stream in the soul. The beam hath not its light from the air. The beams of comfort, which a contented man hath, do not arise from foreign comforts, but from within. As sorrow is seated in the spirit, *the heart knows its own grief*, Prov. xiv. 10; so contentment lies within the soul, and doth not depend upon externals. Hence I gather, that outward troubles

cannot hinder this blessed contentment. It is a spiritual thing, and ariseth from spiritual grounds, viz. *The apprehension of God's love*. When there is a tempest without, there may be music within. A bee may sting through the skin, but it cannot sting to the heart. Outward afflictions cannot sting to a Christian's heart, where contentment lies. Thieves may plunder us of our money and plate, but not of this pearl of contentment, unless we are willing to part with it; for it is locked up in the *cabinet of the heart*. The soul which is possessed of this rich treasure of contentment, is like Noah in the ark, that can sing in the midst of a deluge, or as Paul and Silas in the prison.

3. Contentment is an *habitual thing*. It shines, with a fixed light, in the firmament of the soul. Contentment doth not appear only now and then, as some stars which are seen but seldom, it is a settled temper of the heart: one action doth not denominate it. He is not said to be a liberal man, that gives alms once in his life; a covetous man may do so: but he is said to be liberal, that is *given to liberality*, Rom. xii. 13; that is, who, upon all occasions, is willing to indulge the necessities of the poor

—so he is said to be a contented man, that is given to contentment. It is not *casual*, but *constant*. Aristotle, in his rhetoric, distinguisheth between colours in the face that arise from *passion*, and those which arise from *complexion*. The pale face may look red when it blusheth ; but this is only a passion : he is said properly to be ruddy and sanguine, who is constantly so ; it is his complexion. He is not a contented man, who is so upon an occasion, and perhaps when he is pleased, but who is so constantly ; it is the habit and complexion of his soul.

CHAPTER VII.

Reasons pressing to Holy Contentment.

HAVING opened the nature of contentment, I come next to lay down some reasons or arguments to contentment, which may preponderate with us.

The first is, *God's precept*. It is charged upon as a duty. *Be content with such things as you have*, Heb. xiii. 5. The same God who hath bid us believe, hath bid us be content; if we obey not, we run ourselves into a state of discontent. God's word is a sufficient warrant; it hath *authority* in it, and must be a *sacred spell* to discontent. Be it so, was enough among Pythagoras' scholars—*Be it enacted*, is the royal style. God's words must be the star that guides, and his will the weight that moves our obedience. His word is a law, and hath majesty enough in it to captivate us into obedience: our hearts must not be more unquiet than the raging sea, which at his word is stilled, Matt. viii. 26.

2. The second reason enforcing content-

ment is, *God's promise* ; for *he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*, Heb. xviii. 5, where God hath engaged himself under hand and seal for our necessary provisions. If a king should say to one of his subjects, I will take care for thee ; as long as I have any crown revenues thou shalt be provided for ; if thou art in danger I will secure thee ; if in want I will supply thee ; would not that subject be content ? Behold, God hath here made a promise to the believer, and, as it were, entered into bond for his security. I will never leave thee. Shall not this charm the devil of discontent ? Leave thy fatherless children with me, I will preserve them alive, Jerem. xlix. 11. Methinks I see the godly man on his death-bed much discontented, and hear him complaining, what will become of my wife and children when I am dead and gone. They may come to poverty. God hath made a promise to us that he will not leave us, and hath entailed the promise upon our wife and children ; and will not this satisfy ? True faith will take God's single bond without calling for witnesses.

3. Be content : because our condition in

life is according to the will of God, and he sits at the helm of all his providences, to make them subservient to his own glory and the good of mankind.

Let a Christian often think with himself, who hath placed me here, whether I am in a higher state or lower; not chance or fortune, as the poor blind heathens imagined. No: it is the all-wise God, that hath, by his providence, fixed me in this orb; and we ought to be content in that situation, where he has placed us. Say not such a one hath occasioned this to me. Look not too much at the under wheel. We read in Ezekiel, i. 16, of a wheel within a wheel. God's providence is the cause of the turning of the wheels, and his divine influence is the inner wheel that moves all the rest.

God has a design in all his providences, to make all things work together for good to them that love him. Say then, with David, I was silent because thou Lord didst it, Psalm xxxix. 9. God hath set us in our station, and he hath done it in wisdom, and this should be a counterpoise against our discontent. We fancy such a condition in life good for us; whereas, if we were our own carvers, we should often cut the worst

piece. Lot being put to his choice, did choose Sodom, Gen. xiii. 10, 11, which soon after was burnt with fire. Rachel was very desirous of children. Give me children, said she, or else I die, Gen. xxx. 1, and it cost her her life in bringing forth a child. Abraham was earnest for Ishmael. O that Ishmael may live before thee, Gen. xvii. 18.

But he had little comfort, either of him or his seed : he was born a son of strife ; his hand was against every man, and every man's hand against him. The disciples wept for Christ's leaving the world ; they chose his corporeal presence : whereas it was best for them that Christ should be gone, or else the Comforter would not come, John xvi. 7. David desired the life of his child, and he wept and fasted for it ; but when he saw it was the will of God to take it, he cries out in the language of holy submission, I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me, 2 Sam. xii. 23. We often stand in our own light ; if we should sort or parcel out our own comforts, we should hit upon the wrong. Is it not well for the child, that the parent should choose for it ? Were it left to itself, it would, perhaps, choose a knife to cut

its own fingers. A man in a fit calls for wine, which, if he had it, were little better than poison. It is well for the patient that he is at the physician's appointment. The consideration of God's overruling providence, in all our concerns in life, should work our hearts to holy contentment. The wise God hath ordered our condition. If he sees it better for us to abound, we shall abound; if he sees it better for us to want, we shall want. Be content to be at God's disposal. God sees, in his infinite wisdom, the same condition is not convenient for all. That which is good for one may be bad for another. One season of weather will not serve all men's occasions. One needs sunshine, another rain. One condition of life will not fit every man, no more than one suit of apparel will fit every body. Prosperity is not fit for all, nor yet adversity. If one man be brought low, perhaps he can bear it better. He hath a greater portion of grace, more faith and patience, he can gather grapes of thorns, and pick some comforts out of the cross. Every one cannot do this. Another man is seated in an eminent place of dignity. He is fitter for it. Perhaps it is a place requiring more parts and judgment, which every one

is not capable of. Perhaps he can use his estate better ; he hath a public heart as well as a public place. The all-wise God sees that condition to be bad for one which is good for another. Hence it is, he placeth men in different orbs and spheres, some higher, some lower. One man desires health. God sees sickness better for him. God will work health out of sickness, by bringing the body of sin into a consumption. Another man desires liberty. God sees restraint better ; for he will work his liberty by restraint. When his feet are bound his heart shall be most enlarged. Did we believe this, it would give check to the sinful disputes and cavils of our hearts. Shall I be discontented and murmur at the wise dispensations of God's providence ? Is this to be a child or a rebel ?

CHAPTER VIII.

USE I.

Showing how a Christian may make his Life comfortable.

It shows how a Christian may come to lead a comfortable life, even a heaven upon earth, be the times what they will ; viz. by *Christian contentment*, Prov. xv. 13. The comforts of life doth not stand in having much ; it is Christ's maxim—*Man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he doth possess*, Luke xii. 15, but it is in being contented. Is not the bee as well contented with the feeding on the dew, or sucking from a flower, as the ox that grazeth on the mountains ? Contentment lies within a man, *in the heart* ; and the way to be comfortable is, not by having our barns filled, but our minds quiet. "The contented man," saith Seneca, "is the happy man." Discontent is a fretting humour, which dries the brains, wastes the spirits, corrodes and eats out the comfort of life.—Discontent makes a man that

he doth not *enjoy* what he doth *possess*. A drop or two of vinegar will sour a whole glass of wine. Let a man have the affluence and confluence of worldly comforts, a drop or two of discontent will embitter and poison all. *Comfort* depends upon *Contentment*. Jacob went halting, when the sinew upon the hollow of his thigh shrank ; so when the sinew of contentment begins to shrink, we go halting in our comforts. Contentment is as necessary to keep the life comfortable, as oil is necessary to keep the lamp burning : the clouds of discontent do often drop the showers of tears. Would we have comfort in our lives, be content. Why dost thou complain of thy troubles ? It is not trouble that troubles, but discontent ; it is not the water without the ship, but the water that gets within the leak, which drowns it. It is not outward affliction that can make the life of a Christian sad ; a contented mind would sail above these waters : but, when there's a leak of discontent open, and trouble gets into the heart, then it is disquieted, and sinks.

CHAPTER IX.

USE II.

A Check to the discontented Christian.

HERE is a just reproof to such as are discontented with their condition. This disease is almost epidemical. Some, not content with their callings which God hath set them in, must be a step higher, from the *plough* to the *throne*; who, like the *spider* in the *Proverbs*, will *take hold with their hands, and be in king's palaces*, Prov. xxx. 28. Others exalt themselves to the ministry without thinking on the importance of the work or duly considering the necessity of divine influence, and by thus manifesting the pride of the human heart they take to themselves that honour which belongs to God only; and some there be, who, without regard to future consequences, waste their time and ruin their souls by seeking that honour which comes from man. These do secretly tax the wisdom of God, that he hath not screwed them up in their condition a peg higher. Every man is

complaining that his estate is no better, though he seldom complains that his heart is no better. One man commends this kind of life, another commends that; one man thinks a country-life best, another a city-life. The soldier thinks it best to be a merchant, and the merchant to be a soldier. Men can be content to be any thing but what God will have them. How is it that no man is contented? Very few Christians have learned St. Paul's lesson: neither poor nor rich know how to be content; they can learn any thing but this.

1. If men are poor, they learn to be, 1. *Envious*. They malign those that are above them; another's prosperity is an eye-sore. When God's candle shines upon their neighbour's tabernacle, this light offends them: in the midst of wants, men can in this sense abound; *viz.* in *envy* and *malice*. An *envious* eye is an evil eye. 2. They learn to be *querulous*, still complaining, as if God had dealt hardly with them: they are ever telling of their wants; they want this or that comfort; whereas, their greatest want is a contented spirit. Those that are well enough content with their *sins*, yet are not content with their *condition*.

2. If men are rich, they learn to be *covetous*, thirsting insatiably after the world; and, by an unjust means, scraping it together. *Their right-hand is full of bribes*, as the Psalmist expresseth it, Psal. xxvi. 10. Put a good cause in one scale, and a piece of gold in the other, and the gold weighs heaviest. "There are," saith Solomon, "four things that say, *it is not enough*," Prov. xxx. 15. I may add a fifth, *viz. the heart of a covetous man*: so that neither poor nor rich know how to be content.

Never, certainly, since the creation, did this sin of discontent *reign*, or rather *rage*, more than in our times; never was God more dishonoured. You can hardly speak with any, but the passion of his tongue betrays the discontent of his heart; every one lisps out his trouble, and here even the stammering tongue speaks too free and fluently. If we have not what we desire, God shall not have a good look from us; but presently we are sick of discontent, and ready to die out of humour. If God will not give the people of Israel for their lusts, they bid him take their lives; they must have quails to their manna. Ahab, though a king—and one would think his crown lands

had been sufficient for him—yet is sullen and discontented for want of Naboth's vineyard. Jonah, though a good man and a prophet, yet ready to die in a pet, Jonah iv. 8; and because God killed his gourd—*Kill me too*, said he. Rachel said, *Give me children, or I die*; she had many blessings, if she could have seen them, but wanted this blessing of contentment. God will *supply our wants*, but must he satisfy our *lusts* too? Many are discontented for a very trifle; another hath a better dress, a richer jewel, a newer fashion. Nero, not content with his empire, was troubled that the musicians had more skill in playing than he. How fantastic are some, that pine away in discontent for the want of those things which, if they had, would but render them more ridiculous!

CHAPTER X.

USE III.

A persuasive to Contentment.

It exhorts us to labour for contentment : this is that which doth beautify and bespangle a Christian ; and, as a spiritual embroidery, doth set him off in the eyes of the world.

OBJECT. But methinks I hear some bitterly complaining, and saying to me—" Alas ! how is it possible to be contented ! the Lord *hath made my chain heavy,*" Lam. iii. 7, " he hath cast me into a very sad condition."

ANSW. There is no sin but labours either to hide itself under some mask ; or, if it cannot be concealed, then to vindicate itself by some apology. This sin of discontent I find very witty in its apologies ; which I shall first discover, and then make a reply. We must lay it down for a rule, that Discontent is a *sin*—so that all the pretences and apologies wherewith it labours to justify itself, are but the production of Satan's temptations.

SECTION I.

The first Apology that Discontent makes—answered.

THE first apology which Discontent makes is this—“ I have lost a child.” Paulina, upon the loss of her children, was so possessed with a spirit of sadness, that she had like to have entombed herself in her own discontent. Our love to relations is oftentimes more than our love to *religion*.

ANSW. 1. We must be content, not only when God gives mercies, but when he taketh them away. If we must *in every thing* give thanks, 1 Thes. v. 18, then in nothing be discontented.

2. Perhaps God has taken away the cistern, that he may give you the more of the *spring* ; he hath darkened the star-light, that you may have more sun-light. God intends you shall have more of himself ; and is not he better than *ten sons* ? Look not so much upon a temporal loss, as a spiritual gain : the comforts of the world *run dregs* ; but those which come out of the granary of the Promise are purer and sweeter.

3. Your child was not given, but lent. I

have, saith Hannah, *lent my son to the Lord*, 1 Sam. i. 28. She lent him! The Lord hath but lent him to her. Mercies are not entailed upon us, but lent: what a man lends, he may call for again when he pleases. God hath put out a child to thee awhile to nurse; wilt thou be displeased if he takes his child home again? O be not discontented that a mercy is taken away from you, but rather be thankful that it was lent you so long.

4. Suppose your child was taken from you, either he was good or bad. If he was *rebellious*, you have not so much parted with a child as a burden; you grieve for that which might have been a greater grief to you. If he was *religious*, then remember, he is taken *from the evil to come*, Isaiah lvii. 1, and placed in his centre of felicity. This lower region being full of gross and hurtful vapours, how happy are those who are mounted into the celestial orbs! The righteous *is taken away*—in the original it is, he is *gathered*; a wicked child dying is *cut off*, but the pious child is *gathered*. Even as we see men gather flowers, and candy them, and preserve them by them; so hath God gathered thy child as a sweet flower,

that he may candy it with glory, and preserve it by him for ever. Why then should a Christian be discontented? Why should he weep excessively? *Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me; but weep for yourselves*, Luke xxiii. 28. If we could but hear our children speaking to us out of heaven, they would say—“Weep not for us who are happy; we lie upon a soft pillow, even in the bosom of Christ: *the Prince of Peace* is embracing us, and kissing us with the kisses of his lips. Be not troubled at our preferment: *weep not for us*, but weep for yourselves, who are in a sinful, sorrowful world. You are in the *valley of tears*, but we are on the *mountains of spices*: we are gotten to our harbour, but you are still tossing upon the waves of inconstancy.” O Christian! Be not discontented that thou hast parted with such a child, but rather rejoice that thou hadst such a child to part with; break forth into thankfulness. What an honour is it to a parent to beget such a child, that while he lives, increaseth the joy of the glorified angels: and, when he dies, increaseth the number of the glorified saints! Luke xv. 10.

5. If God hath taken away one of your

children, he hath left you more ; he might have stripped you of all. He took away all Job's comforts, his *estate*, his *children* : and, indeed, his wife was left but as a cross. Satan made a bow of this rib, as Chrysostom speaks, and shot a temptation by her at Job, thinking to have shot him to the heart—*Curse God, and die*, saith she, Job ii. 9. But Job had upon him the breastplate of *integrity* ; and, though his children were taken away, yet not his graces ; still he is content, still he blessed God. O think how many mercies you still enjoy ! Yet our base hearts are more discontented at one loss, than thankful for a hundred mercies.

God hath plucked one bunch of grapes from you ; but how many precious clusters are left behind ?

OBJECT. “But it was my only child, the staff of my age, the seed of my comfort, and the only blossom out of which the honour of an ancient family did grow.”

ANSW. 1. God hath promised you—if you belong to him—a name *better than of sons and daughters*, Isaiah lvi. 6. Is he dead that should have been the monument to have kept up the name of a family ? God hath given you a new

name ; he hath written your name in the book of life. Behold your spiritual heraldry ; here is a name that cannot be cut off.

2. Hath God taken away thy *only child* ? He hath given thee his *only Son* : this is a happy exchange. What needs he complain of losses, that hath Christ ? He is the Father's *brightness*, Heb. i. 3, his *riches*, Col. ii. 9, his *delight*, Psalm xlii. 1. Is there enough in Christ to delight the heart of God ? and is there not enough in him to ravish us with holy delight ? He is *wisdom* to teach us, *righteousness* to acquit us, *sanctification* to adorn us ; he is that royal and princely gift ; he is the *bread of angels*, Psal. lxxviii. 25, the joy and triumph of saints ; he is *all in all*. Why, then, art thou discontented ? Though thy child be lost, yet thou hast him for whom all things are loss.

3. And, lastly, let us blush to think that Nature should seem to outstrip Grace. Pulvillus, a Heathen, when he was about to consecrate a temple to Jupiter, and news was brought to him of the death of his son, would not desist from his enterprise ; but, with much composure of mind, gave order for decent burial.

SECTION II.

The second Apology answered.

THE second apology that Discontent makes, is—"I have a great part of my estate melted away, and trading begins to fail."

God is pleased sometimes to bring his children very low, and cut them short in their estate: it fares with them as with that widow who had nothing in her house save *a pot of oil*, 2 Kings iv. 2. But be content.

1. God hath taken away your estate, but not your portion. This is a sacred paradox. Honour and estate are not part of a Christian's jointure; they are rather *accessories*, than *essentials*, and are extrinsical and foreign; therefore the loss of these cannot denominate a man miserable: still the portion remains—*The Lord is my portion, saith my soul*, Lam. iii. 24. Suppose one were worth a million of money, and he should chance to lose a pin off his sleeve; this is no part of his estate, nor can we say he is undone: the loss of sublunary comforts is not so much to a Christian's portion as the loss of a pin is to a million. *These things shall be added to you*, Matt. vi. 33, they shall be cast in

as overplus. When a man buys a piece of cloth, he hath an inch or two given into the measure. Now, though he lose his inch of cloth, yet he is not undone; for still the whole piece remains. Our outward estate is not so much in regard of the *portion*, as an inch of cloth is to the whole piece; why then should a Christian be discontented, when the title to his spiritual treasure remains? A thief may take away all my money that I have about me, but not my land; still a Christian hath a title to the *land of promise*. Mary hath chosen the better part, *which shall not be taken from her*, Luke x. 42.

2. Perhaps, if thy estate had not been lost, thy soul might have been lost: outward comforts do often quench inward heat. God cannot bestow a jewel upon us, but we fall so in love with it, that we forget him that gave it. What a pity is it that we should commit idolatry with the creature! God is forced sometimes to drain away an estate: the plate and jewels are often cast overboard to save the passenger. Many a man may curse the time that ever he had such an estate; it hath been an enchantment to draw away his heart from God.

Some there are that *will be rich*, and they fall into a *snare*, 1 Tim. vi. 9. Art thou troubled that God hath prevented a snare? Riches are *thorns*, Matt. xiii. 7. Art thou angry that God hath pulled away a thorn from thee? Riches are compared to *thick clay*, Hab. ii. 6. Perhaps thy affections, which are *the feet of the soul*, might have stuck so fast in this golden clay, that they could not have ascended up to heaven. *Be content.* If God stop our outward comforts, it is that the stream of our love may run faster another way.

3. If your estate be small, yet God can bless a little. It is not how much *money* we have, but how much *blessing*. He that often curseth the bags of gold, can bless the *meal in the barrel*, and the *oil in the cruse*. What if thou hast not the full fleshpots? Yet thou hast a promise—*I will bless her provision*, Psal. cxxxi. 75, and then a little goes a great way. Be content, thou hast the dew of a blessing distilled. A *dinner of green herbs*, where love is, is sweet—I may add, where the love of God is. Another may have more estate than you, but more care; more riches, less rest; more revenues, but withal more occasions of expense.

He hath a greater inheritance, yet perhaps God doth not give him *power to eat thereof*, Eccles. vi. 2, he hath the *dominion* of his estate, not the *use*, he holds more, but enjoys less: in a word, thou hast less gold than he, perhaps less guilt.

4. You did never so thrive in your spiritual trade; your heart was never so low, as since your condition was so low; you were never so *poor in Spirit*, never so *rich in Faith*. You did never run the ways of God's *commandments* so fast as since some of your golden weights were taken off. You never had such trading for heaven in all your life. You did never make such adventures upon the promises as since you left off your sea adventures. This is the best kind of merchandise. O, Christian, thou never hadst such incomes of the Spirit, such spring-tides of joy: and what, though weak in estate, if strong in assurance, be content. What you have lost one way, you have gained another.

5. Be your losses what they will in this kind—remember, in every loss there is only a *suffering*: but in every discontent there is a *sin*; and one sin is worse than a thousand sufferings. What! because some of my *revenues*

are gone, shall I part with some of my *righteousness*? Shall my faith and patience go too? Because I do not possess an estate, shall I not therefore possess my own spirit? O learn to be content!

SECTION III.

The third Apology answered.

THE third apology is,—“It is sad with me in my relations; where I should find most comfort, there I have most grief.” This apology or objection brancheth itself into two particulars; whereto I shall give a distinct reply.

1. My children are rebellious. I fear they are running in haste the broad road to destruction. It is sad, indeed, to see a child grow hardened in sin and rebellion; and certainly the pangs of grief which parents feel under such heart-rending trouble, must bow the spirit down. But be content. For consider—

1. You may pick something out of your child's undutifulness: the child's sin is sometimes the parent's sermon. The undutifulness of children to us may be a *memento*, to put us

in mind of our *undutifulness* once to God. Time was when *we* were rebellious children. How long did our hearts stand out as garrisons against God! How long did he parley with us, and beseech us, ere we would yield! He walked in the tenderness of his heart towards us, but we walked in the forwardness of our hearts toward him; and, since grace hath been planted in our souls, how much the wild olive is still in us! How many motions of the Spirit do we daily resist! how many unkindnesses and affronts have we put upon Christ! Let this open a spring of repentance. Look upon your child's rebellion, and mourn for your own rebellion.

2. Though to see him undutiful is your *grief*, yet not always your *sin*. Hath a parent given the child, not only the milk of the breast, but *the sincere milk of the Word*? 1 Pet. ii. 2. Hast thou seasoned his tender years with religious education? Thou canst do no more. Parents can only work knowledge; God must work grace: they can only lay the wood together, it is God must make it burn. A parent can only be a guide to show his child the way to heaven; the Spirit of God must be a loadstone to draw his heart into that way. *Am I*

in God's stead, saith Jacob to Rachel, *who hath withheld the fruit of the womb?* Gen. xxx. 2. Can I give children? So, is a parent, in God's stead, to give grace? Who can help it, if a child, having the light of conscience, Scripture and education, these three torches in his hand, yet runs wilfully into the deep ponds of sin? Weep for thy child, pray for him; but do not sin for him, *by discontent*.

3. Remember grace can change the heart. God can reduce him. He hath promised to *turn the heart of the children to their parents*, Mal. iv. 6, and to open springs of grace in the *desert*, Isa. xxxv. 6. When any child is going full-sail to the devil, God can blow with a contrary wind of his Spirit, and alter his course. When Paul was breathing out persecution against the Saints, and was sailing hellward, God turns him another way. Before, he was going to Damascus; God sends him to Ananias: before a persecutor, now a preacher. Though our children are for the present fallen into the *devil's pound*, God can turn them from the power of Satan, Acts xxvi. 18, and bring them in at the *twelfth* hour. Monica was weeping for her son Augustine; at last God

gave him in, upon prayer ; and he became a famous instrument in the church of God.

2. The second branch of the objection is—
“ But my husband takes ill courses. Where I looked for honey, behold a sting !”

ANSW. It is sad to have the living and the dead tied together ; yet, let not your heart fret with discontent : mourn for his sin, but do not murmur. For—

1. God hath placed you in your relation ; and you cannot be discontented, but you quarrel with God. What, for every cross that befalls us, shall we call the infinite wisdom of God in question ? O the murmuring of our hearts !

The more ungodly your husband, or your relations are, the more holy do you strive to be ; and if they curse and revile you, do you bless and pray for them, Matt. v., and think it not strange concerning those fiery trials which are to try you ; for God, by a divine power, often sustains and preserves his saints, through the hottest fires of persecution ; the devil and wicked men can raise against them, and we should earnestly pray, that the sins of our relations, may be as a spur to our graces, and their

turbulent tempers, be as bellows, to blow up the flame of zeal and devotion in us the more, and let the husband's unkindness be the means of sending the wife more frequent to the throne of grace, and the perverseness of the wife be the means of sending the husband oftener into his closet.

SECTION IV.

The fourth Apology answered.

THE next apology that Discontent makes is—"But my friends have dealt very unkindly with me, and proved false."

ANSW. It is sad, when a friend proves like a *brook in summer*, Job. vi. 15. The traveller, being parched with heat, comes to the brook, hoping to refresh himself; but the brook is dried up: yet be content.

1. You are not alone: others of the saints have been betrayed by friends; and, when they have leaned upon them, they have been as a *foot out of joint*. This was true in the type of David, Psal. lv. 12, 13. "It was not an enemy reproached me; but it was thou, a man,

my equal, my guide, and my acquaintance : we took sweet counsel together.” And, in the antitype Christ, he was betrayed by a friend ; and why should we think it strange to have the same measure dealt unto us as Jesus Christ had ? *The servant is not above his master*, John xiii. 16.

2. A Christian may often read his sin in his punishment. Hath not he dealt treacherously with God ? How oft hath he grieved the Comforter, broken his vows ; and, through unbelief, sided with Satan against God ! How oft hath he abused love ; taking the jewels of God’s mercies, and making a golden calf of them, serving his own lusts ! How oft hath he made the free grace of God, which should have been a bolt to keep out sin, rather a key to open the door to it ! These wounds hath the Lord received in the house of his friends, Zach. xiii. 6. Look upon the unkindness of thy friend, and mourn for thy own unkindness against God. Shall a Christian condemn that in another, which he hath been too often guilty of himself ?

3. Hath thy friend proved treacherous ? Perhaps you did repose too much confidence in

him. If you lay more weight upon a house than the pillars will bear, it must needs break. God saith—Trust ye not in a friend, Micah vii. 5. Perhaps you did put more trust in him, than you did dare to put in God. Friends are as *Venice-glasses*: we may use them; but, if we lean too hard upon them, they will break. Behold matter of humility, but not of sullenness and discontent.

4. You have a Friend in heaven who will never fail you. *There is a Friend*, saith Solomon, *that sticketh closer than a brother*, Prov. xviii. 24. Such a friend is God. He is very studious and inquisitive in our behalf; he hath a debating with himself, a consulting and projecting how he may do us good. He is the *best friend*, which may give contentment in the midst of all the disrespect of friends.

Consider, 1. He is a *loving Friend*. God is love, 1 John iv. 16. He is said sometimes to engrave us on the *palms of his hands*, Isa. xlix. 16, that we may be never out of his eye; and to carry us *in his bosom*, Isa. xl. 11, near to his heart. There is no stop or stint in his love; but, as the river Nile, it overflows all the banks: his love is *far beyond* our

thoughts, as it is above our deserts. O the infinite love of God, in giving the Son of his love to be made *flesh*, which was more than if all the angels had been made *worms*! God, in giving Christ to us, gave his very heart to us. Here is love penciled out in all its glory, and engraven as with the *point of a diamond*! All other love is hatred, in comparison to the love of our Friend.

2. He is a *careful* Friend—*He careth for you*, 1 Peter v. 7.

1. He minds and transacts our business as his own; he accounts his people's interests and concernments as his interest.

2. He provides for us grace, to enrich us; and glory, to ennoble us. It was David's complaint—*No man careth for my soul*, Psal. clxii.

4. A Christian hath a Friend that cares for him.

3. He is a *prudent* Friend, Dan. ii. 20. A friend may sometimes err through ignorance or mistake, and give his friend poison instead of sugar; but *God is wise in heart*, Job ix. 4. He is skilful as well as faithful; he knows what our disease is, and what physic is most proper to apply; he knows what will do us good,

and what wind will be best to carry us to heaven.

4. He is a *faithful* Friend, Deut. vii. 9, 10. And he is faithful, 1, in his promises—*In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, hath promised*, Tit. i. 2, Isai. lxiii. 8. God's people are *children that will not lie*; but God is a God that *cannot lie*. He will not deceive the faith of his people; nay, he cannot. He is called *the Truth*; he can as well cease to be God as cease to be true. The Lord may sometimes change his promise—as when he converts a temporal promise into a spiritual—but he can never *break* his promise.

5. He is a *compassionate Friend*. Hence, in Scripture, we read of *the yearnings of his bowels*, Jer. xxxi. 20. God's friendship is nothing else but compassion; for there is naturally no *affection* in us to desire his friendship, nor any *goodness* in us to deserve it: the loadstone is in himself. When we were full of *sin* he was full of *mercy*; when we were enemies, he sent an embassy of peace: when our hearts were turned back from God, his heart was turned toward us. O the tenderness and sympathy of our Friend in heaven! We our-

selves have some relentings of heart to those who are in misery ; but it is God who begets all the bowels of mercies that are in us ; therefore he is called the *Father of mercies*, 2 Cor. i. 3.

6. He is a *constant Friend*. *His compassions fail not*, Lam. iii. 22. Friends do often, in adversity, drop off as leaves in autumn. These are rather flatterers than friends. Joab was, for a time, faithful to king David's house : he went not after Absalom's treason ; but, within a while, proved false to the crown, and went after the treason of Adonijah, 1 Kings i. 7. God is a friend for ever—*Having loved his own, he loved them to the end*, John xiii. 1. What, though I am despised, yet God loves me : what, though my friends cast me off, yet God loves me. He loves to the end ; and there is no end of that love.

This, methinks, in case of our disquietude and unkindnesses, is enough to charm down our discontent.

SECTION V.

The fifth Apology answered.

THE next apology is—"I am under great

reproaches. Let not this discontent you.
For—

1. It is a sign there is some good in thee. What evil have I done that this bad man commends me? The *applause* of the wicked usually denotes some evil, and their censure imports some good, Psal. xvi. 20. David wept and fasted, and that was *turned to his reproach*, Psal. lxxix. 10. As we must pass to heaven through the pikes of suffering, so likewise through the clouds of reproach.

2. If your reproach be for God, as David's was—*For thy sake I have borne reproach*, Psal. lxxix. 7, then it is rather matter of triumph than dejection. Christ doth not say when you are reproached, *be discontented*, but rejoice, Matt. v. 12. Wear your reproach as a diadem of honour; for now a *Spirit of Glory rests upon you*, 1 Pet. iv. 14. Put your reproaches into the inventory of your riches: so did Moses, Heb. xi. 26. It should be a Christian's ambition to wear his Saviour's livery, though it be sprinkled with blood, and sullied with disgrace.

3. God will do us good by reproach, as David said of Shimei's cursing—"It may be,

the Lord will requite good for his cursing this day," 2 Sam. xvi. 12. This puts us upon searching out sin. A child of God labours to read his sin in every stone of reproach that is cast at him ; besides, now we have an opportunity to exercise patience and humility.

4. Jesus Christ was content to be reproached for us—*He despised the shame of the cross*, Heb. xii. 2. It may amaze us to think, that he who was God could endure to be spit upon, to be crowned with thorns *in a kind of jeer* ; and, when he was ready to bow his head upon the cross, to have the Jews, in scorn, *wag their heads* and say—*He saved others, himself he cannot save* : the shame of the cross was as much as the *blood* of the cross ; his *name* was crucified before his *body*. The sharp arrows of reproach, that the world did shoot at Christ, went deeper into his heart than the spear. His suffering was so ignominious, that, as if the sun did blush to behold it, it withdrew its bright beams, and masked itself with a cloud : and well it might, when the Sun of righteousness was in an eclipse ! All this contumely and reproach did the God of glory *endure*, or rather *despise*, for us. Oh then ! let us be con-

tent to have our names eclipsed for Christ ; let not reproach lie at our heart, but let us bind it as a crown about our head. Alas ! what is reproach ? This is but *small shot* ; how will men stand in the mouth of the cannon ? Those who are discontented at a reproach, will be offended at a fagot.

5. Is not many a man contented to suffer reproach for maintaining his lust ? and shall not we for maintaining the truth ? Some *glory in that which is their shame*, Phil. iii. 19, and shall we be ashamed of that which is our glory ? Be not troubled at these petty things : he, whose heart is once divinely touched with the loadstone of God's Spirit, doth account it his honour to be dishonoured for Christ, Acts xv. 4, and doth as much despise the world's censure, as he doth their praise.

6. We live in an age wherein men dare reproach God himself. The divinity of the Son of God is blasphemously reproached by the Socinian ; the blessed *Bible* is reproached by the anti-Scripturist, as if it were but a *legend of lies*, and every man's faith a fable ; the *Justice* of God is called to the bar of Reason by too many ; the *Wisdom* of God, in his providential actings,

is taxed by the Atheist ; the *Ordinances* of God are decried by the Formalist, as being too heavy a burden for a *free-born* conscience, and too low and carnal for a sublime seraphic Spirit ; the *Ways* of God, which have the majesty of holiness shining in them, are calumniated by the Profane ; the mouths of men are open against God, as if he were a *hard Master*, and the path of Religion too strict and severe. If men cannot give God a good word, shall we be discontented or troubled that they speak hardly of us ? Such as labour to bury the glory of religion, shall we wonder that their throats are *open sepulchres*, Rom. iii. 13, to bury our good name ? Oh ! let us be contented, while we are in God's scouring-house, to have our names sullied a little : the blacker we seem to be here, the brighter shall we shine when God hath set us upon the celestial shelf.

SECTION VI.

The sixth Apology answered.

THE sixth apology that Discontent makes, is disrespect in the world—" I have not that

esteem from men, as is suitable to my quality and graces." And doth this trouble thee? Consider—

1. The world is an unequal judge ; as it is full of *change*, so of *partiality*. The world gives her *respects*, as she doth her *places of preferment*, more by favour, often, than desert. Hast thou the ground of real worth in thee ? That is best worth that is in him that *hath* it ; honour is in him that gives it. Better deserve respect, and not have it, than have it, and not deserve it.

2. Hast thou grace ? God respects thee, and his judgment is best worth prizing. A believer is a person of honour, being *born of God*. Since thou wast *precious* in mine eyes, *thou hast been honourable and I have loved thee*, Isai. xliii. 4. Let the world think what they will of you ; perhaps, in their eyes, you are a *cast-away* : in God's eyes, a *dove*, Can. ii. 14, a *spouse*, Can. v. 1, a *jewel*, Mal. iii. 17 ; others account you the dregs and off-scouring of the world, 1 Cor. iv. 13, but God will give *whole kingdoms for your ransom*, Isai. xliii. 4. Let this content—"No matter with what oblique eyes I am looked upon in the world : if I am

in Christ, God thinks well of me. It is better that God approve, than man applaud. What is a man the better, that his fellow-prisoners commend him, if his Judge condemn him? Oh! labour to keep in with God: prize his love. Let my fellow-subjects frown, I am contented, being a favourite of the King of heaven.”

3. If we are the children of God, we must look for disrespect. A believer is *in* the world, but not *of* the world: we are here in a pilgrim condition, out of our own country; therefore must not look for the respects and acclamations of the world; it is sufficient that we shall have honour in our own country, Heb. xiii. 14. It is dangerous to be the world's favourite.

4. Discontent, arising from disrespect, savours too much of pride; an humble Christian hath a lower opinion of himself than others can have of him. He that is taken up about the thoughts of his sins, and how he hath provoked God, he cries out as Agur—*I am more brutish than any man*, Prov. xxx. 2, and therefore is contented, though he be set *among the dogs of the flock*, Job xxx. 1. Though he be low in the thoughts of others, yet he is thankful, that

he is not laid *in the lowest hell*, Psal. lxxxvi. 13. A proud man sets a high value upon himself; and is angry with others, because they will not come up to his price. Take heed of pride. Oh! had others a window to look into thy breast, as Crates once expressed it, or did thy heart stand where thy face doth, thou wouldst wonder to have so much respect.

SECTION VII.

The seventh Apology answered.

THE next Apology is—"I meet with very great sufferings for the truth." Consider—

1. Your sufferings are not so great as your sins. Put these two in the balance, and see which weighs heaviest: where sin lies heavy, sufferings lie light. A carnal spirit makes more of his sufferings, and less of his sins; he looks upon one at the great end of the perspective; but, upon the other, at the little end of the perspective. The carnal heart cries out—"Take away the *frogs*;" but a gracious heart cries—"Take away the *iniquity*," 2 Sam. xxiv. 10. The one saith—"Never any one

suffered as I have done :” but the other saith—
“ Never any one sinned as I have done,” Micah
vii. 9.

2. Art thou under sufferings? Thou hast an opportunity to show the valour and constancy of thy mind; some of God’s saints would have accounted it a great favour to have been honoured with martyrdom. One said—“ I am in prison, *still* I am in prison.” Thou countest that a trouble, which others would have worn as an ensign of their glory.

3. Even those who have gone only upon moral principles, have shown much constancy and contentment in their sufferings. Curtius, being bravely mounted, and in armour, threw himself into a great gulf, that the city of Rome might, according to the oracle, be delivered from the pestilence; and we, having a divine oracle, *That they who kill the body, cannot hurt the soul*, shall we not, with much constancy and patience, devote ourselves to injuries for religion, and rather suffer for the truth, than the truth suffer for us? The Decii, among the Romans, vowed themselves to death, that their legions and soldiers might be crowned with the honour of the victory. O! what should we be

content to suffer, to make the truth victorious ! Regulus, having sworn that he would return to Carthage, though he knew there was a furnace heating for him there, yet, not daring to infringe his oath, he did adventure to go : we then, who are Christians, having like one of old performed to the Lord, and cannot go back, should rather choose to suffer, than violate our sacred oath. Thus the blessed martyrs, with what courage and cheerfulness did they yield up their souls to God ! and when the fire was set to their bodies, yet their spirits were not at all fired with passion or discontent. Though others hurt the *body*, let them not the *mind*, through discontent. Show, by your heroic courage, that you are above those troubles which you cannot be without.

SECTION VIII.

The eighth Apology answered.

THE next Apology is—The prosperity of the wicked.

ANSW. I confess it is often so, that evil men have the good things, and good men have the

evil things. David, though a good man, stumbled at this, and had like to have fallen, Psal. lxxiii. 2. Well, be contented ; for remember—

1. These are not the only things, nor the best things ; they are mercies without the pale ; these are but acorns, with which God feeds the swine : you, who are believers, have more choice fruit, the *olive*, the *pomegranate*, the fruit which grows on the *true vine*, Jesus Christ ; others have the fat of the earth, you have the dew of heaven ; they have a south land, you have those springs of living water which are clarified with Christ's blood, and sweetened with his love.

2. To see the wicked flourish, is matter rather of *pity* than envy ; it is all the heaven they will have. *Wo to you rich men, for ye have received your consolations*, Luke xi. 24. Hence it was, that David made it his solemn prayer—*Deliver me from the wicked, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure*, Psal. xvii. 14. The words, methinks, are David's litany : from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, *good Lord, deliver me*. When the wicked have eaten of their

dainty dishes, there comes in a sad reckoning, which will spoil all. The world is first *musical*, and then *tragical*: it is sad to reflect there are many who live on the fat of the earth in this life, that will be denied a drop of water to cool their parched tongues, in the world to come. O remember! for every sand of mercy that runs out to the wicked, God puts a drop of wrath into his vial: therefore, as that soldier said to his fellow—"Do you envy me my grapes? They cost me dear; I must die for them." So I say—"Do you envy the wicked?" Alas! their prosperity is like Haman's banquet before his execution. If a man was to be hanged, would one envy to see him walk to the gallows through pleasant fields, and fine galleries, or to see him go up the ladder in cloth of gold? The wicked may flourish in their bravery awhile: but, *when they flourish as the grass, it is that they shall be destroyed for ever*, Psal. xcii. 7. This proud grass shall be mown down. Whatever a sinner enjoys, he hath a curse with it, Mal. ii. 2. And shall we envy? What if poisoned bread be given to dogs! The long furrows in the backs of the godly have a *seed of blessing* in them, when the table of the

wicked becomes a snare, and their honour their ruin.

SECTION IX.

The ninth Apology answered.

II. THE next Apology that Discontent makes for itself, is—*The evils of the times*. “The times are full of heresy and impiety, and this is that which troubles me.” This apology consists of two branches, to which I shall answer after its kind; and—

1. The times are full of heresy. This is indeed sad! when the devil cannot by violence destroy the Church, he endeavours to poison it; when he cannot, with Samson’s fox-tails, set the corn on fire, then he sows tares; as he labours to destroy the peace of the Church, by *division*, so the truth of it by *error*. We may cry out with Seneca—“We live in times wherein there is a sluice open to all novel opinions, and every man’s *opinion* is his *Bible*. Well this may make us mourn; but let us not murmur through discontent.” Consider—

1. Error makes a discovery of men.

1. *Bad men.* Error discovers such as are tainted and corrupt. When the leprosy brake forth in the forehead, then was the leper discovered. Error is a spiritual bastard: the Devil is the father, and Pride the mother. You never knew an erroneous man, but he was a proud man. Now it is good that such men should be laid open; to the intent, first, that God's righteous judgments upon them may be adored, 2 Thes. ii. 12; secondly, that others, who are free, be not infected. If a man have the plague, it is well it breaks forth. For my part, I would avoid a heretic as I would avoid the Devil, for he is sent on his errand. I appeal to you, if there were a tavern in this city, where, under a pretence of selling wine, many hogsheads of poison were to be sold, were it not well that others should know it, that they might not buy? It is good that those who have poisoned opinions should be known, that the people of God may come not near either the scent or taste of that poison.

2. Error is a *touch-stone*, to discover *good men*; it tries the gold: *There must be heresies, that they which are approved may be made manifest*, 1 Cor. xi. 19. Thus our love to Christ,

and zeal for truth, doth appear. God shows who are the living fish, viz. such as swim against the stream; who are the sound sheep, viz. such as feed in the green pastures of the ordinances; who are the doves, viz. such as live in the best air, where the Spirit breathes. God sets a garland of honour upon these—*These are they which came out of great tribulation*, Rev. vii. 14. So these are they that have opposed the errors of the times; these are they that have preserved the virginity of their conscience, who have kept their judgment sound, and their heart soft. God will have a trophy of honour set upon some of the saints; they shall be renowned for their sincerity, being like the cypress, which keeps its greenness and freshness in the winter season.

2. Be not sinfully discontented; for God can make the errors of the Church advantageous to truth. Thus the truths of God have come to be more beaten out and confirmed: as it is in *law*, one man laying a false title to a piece of land, the true title hath, by this means, been the more searched into, and ratified. Some had never so studied to defend the truth by *Scripture*, if others had not endeavoured to overthrow it by

sophistry: all the mists and fogs of error that have risen out of the bottomless pit, have made the glorious Sun of *Truth* to shine so much the brighter. Had not Arius and Sabellius broached those damnable errors, the truth of those questions about the blessed *Trinity* had never been so discussed and defended by Athanasius, Augustine, and others; had not the Devil brought in so much of his *princely darkness*, the champions for truth had never run so fast to Scripture to light their lamps. So that God, who hath a *wheel within a wheel*, overrules these things wisely, and turns them to the best. Truth is a heavenly plant, that settles by shaking.

3. God raiseth the price of his truth the more; the very shreds and filings of truth are venerable. When there is much counterfeit metal abroad, we prize the true gold the more: the pure wine of truth is never more precious, than when unsound doctrines are broached and vented.

Error makes us more thankful to God for the jewel of truth. When we see another infected with the plague, how thankful are you that God hath freed you from the infection. When you see others have the *leprosy in the*

head, how thankful are we to God that he hath not given us over to believe a lie, and so be damned! It is a good use that may be made even of the errors of the times, when it makes us more humble and thankful, adoring the free grace of God, who hath kept us from drinking of that deadly poison.

2. The second branch of the apology that Discontent makes, is the *impiety of the times*. "I live and converse among the profane. *O that I had wings like a dove, that I might fly away and be at rest,*" Psal. lv. 6.

ANSW. It is indeed sad to be mixed with the wicked. *David beheld the transgressors, and was grieved*, Psal. cxix. 119, 158, and Lot, who was a bright star in a dark night, was *vexed*; or, as the word in the original may bear, *wearied out with the unclean conversation of the wicked*, 2 Pet. ii. 7. The sins of Sodom became as *spears* to pierce his soul. We ought, if there be any spark of divine love in us, to be very sensible of the sins of others, and to have our hearts bleed for them; yet, let us not break forth in murmuring or discontent, knowing that God, in his providence, hath permitted it; and, surely, not without some reasons. For—

1. The Lord makes the wicked a hedge to defend the godly; the wise God often makes those who are *wicked* and *peaceable*, a means to safeguard his people from those who are *wicked* and *cruel*. The king of Babylon kept Jeremiah, and gave special order for his looking to, that he did want nothing, Jer. xxxix. 11, 12. God sometimes makes *brazen sinners* to be *brazen walls* to defend his people.

2. God doth interline and mingle the wicked with the godly, that the godly may be a means to save the wicked. Such is the *beauty of holiness*, that it hath a magnetical force in it, to allure and draw even the wicked. Sometimes God makes a believing husband a means to convert an unbelieving wife; and, on the other hand—*What knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? Or knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?* 1 Cor. vii. 16. The godly, living among the wicked, by their prudent advice and pious example, have won them to the embracing of religion. If there were not some godly among the wicked, how in a probable way, without a miracle, can we imagine that the wicked should be converted? Those who

are now shining saints in heaven, sometimes *served divers lusts*, Tit. iii. 3. — Paul, once a persecutor; Augustine, once a manichee; Luther, once a monk; but, by the severe and holy carriage of the godly, were converted to the faith.

SECTION X.

The tenth Apology answered.

THE next apology that discontent makes is —Lowness of parts and gifts.

“I cannot,” saith the Christian, “discourse with that fluency, nor pray with that elegancy, as others.”

ANSW. 1. *Grace is beyond gifts.* Thou comparest thy grace with another’s gifts—there is a vast difference. Grace, without gifts, is infinitely better than gifts without grace. In religion the *vitals* are best; gifts are extrinſical, and wicked men are sometimes under the common influence of the Spirit; but grace is a more distinguishing work, and is a jewel hung only upon the righteous. Hast thou the *seed of God*, the *holy anointing*? Be content.

1. Thou sayest thou canst not discourse with that fluency as others.

ANSW. Experiments in religion are above notions, and *impressions* beyond *expressions*. Judas, no doubt, could make a learned discourse of Christ; but well fared the woman in the Gospel, that felt virtue coming out of him, Luke viii. 47. A sanctified heart is better than a silver tongue. There is as much difference between gifts and grace, as between a tulip painted on the wall and one growing in the garden.

2. Thou sayest, thou canst not pray with that elegancy as others.

ANSW. Prayer is a matter more of the *heart* than the *head*. In prayer, it is not so much *fluency* prevails as *fervency*, Jam. v. 16, nor is God so much taken with elegancy of speech, as the efficacy of the Spirit. Humility is better than arrogance: here the *mourner* is the *orator*; sighs and groans are the best rhetoric.

2. Be not discontented; for God doth usually proportion a man's parts to the place where he calls him; some are set in a higher sphere, and their situation requires more parts

and abilities ; but the most inferior member is useful in its place, and shall have a power delegated for the discharge of its peculiar office.

SECTION XI.

The eleventh Apology answered.

THE next apology is—*The troubles of the Church*. “ Alas ! my disquiet and discontent is not so much for myself, as the public. The Church of God suffers.”

ANSW. I confess it is sad, and we ought for this *to hang our harp upon the willows*, Psal. cxxxvii. He is a wooden leg in Christ’s body, that is not sensible of the state of the body. As a Christian must not be *proud flesh*, so neither *dead flesh*. When the Church of God suffers, he must sympathize : *Jeremiah wept for the virgin daughter of Sion*, Jer. ix. 1. We must feel our brethren’s hard cords through our soft beds : in music, if one string be touched, all the rest sound. When God strikes upon our brethren, *our bowels must sound as a harp*, Isa. xvi. 11 ; be sensible, but do not give way to discontent. For consider—

1. *God sits at the stern of his Church*, Psal. xlvi. 5. Sometimes it is as a ship tossed upon the waves—*O thou afflicted and tossed!* Isa. liv. 11. But cannot God bring this ship to heaven, though it meet with a storm upon the sea? The ship in the Gospel was tossed, because *sin* was in it; but it was not overwhelmed, because Christ was in it. Christ is in the ship of his Church, fear not sinking: the Church's anchor is cast in heaven. Do not we think God loves his Church, and takes as much care of it as we can? The names of the Twelve Tribes were on Aaron's *breast*; signifying how near to God's heart his people are. They are his *portion*, Deut. xxxii. 9, and shall that be lost? His *glory*, Isa. xlvi. 13, and shall that be finally eclipsed? No, certainly. God can deliver his Church not only *from*, but *by*, opposition. The Church's pangs shall help forward her deliverance.

2. *God hath always propagated religion by sufferings.* The foundation of the Church hath been laid *in blood*; and these sanguine showers have ever made it more fruitful. Cain put the knife to Abel's throat, and ever since the Church's veins have bled; but she is like the

Vine, which by bleeding grows; and like the palm-tree which may have this motto—*per-
cussa resurgit*—the more weight is laid upon it, the higher it riseth. The holiness and patience of the saints under their persecutions, hath much added both to the *growth* and purity of religion. Basil and Tertullian observe of the primitive martyrs, that divers of the heathens, seeing their zeal and constancy, turned Christians. Religion is that *phœnix* which hath always revived and flourished *in the ashes* of holy men. Isaiah was sawn asunder; Peter crucified at Jerusalem with his head downwards; Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, and Polycarp of Smyrna, were both martyred for religion: yet evermore the truth hath been *sealed* by blood, and gloriously dispersed; whereupon Julian did forbear to persecute, not out of piety, but envy; because the Church grew so fast and multiplied, as Nazianzen well observes.

SECTION XII.

The twelfth Apology answered.

THE twelfth Apology that Discontent makes.

for itself, is this—"It is not my trouble that troubles me, but it is my sins that do disquiet and discontent me."

ANSW. Be sure it be so ; do not prevaricate with God and thy own soul. In true mourning for sin, when the present suffering is removed, yet the sorrow is not removed ; but suppose the apology be real, and *sin* is the ground of your discontent, yet I answer, a man's disquiet about sin may be beyond its bounds in these three cases :—

1. When it is *disheartening* ; that is, when it sets up sin above mercy. If Israel had only pored upon their sting, and, not looked up to the *Brazen Serpent*, they had never been healed. That sorrow for sin, which drives us away from God, is not without sin ; for there is more *despair* in it than *remorse* : the soul hath so many tears in its eyes, that it cannot see Christ. Sorrow, as sorrow, doth not save—that were to make a Christ of our tears, but is useful as it is preparatory in the soul—making sin vile, and Christ *precious*. Oh ! look up to the Brazen Serpent, *the Lord Jesus* : a sight of his blood will revive ; the medicine of his *merits* is broader than our sore.

It is Satan's policy, either to keep us from seeing our sins ; or, if we will needs see them, that we may *be swallowed up of sorrow*, 2 Cor. 7, 10. Either he would stupify us, or *affright* us ; either keep the glass of the Law from our eyes, or else pencil out our sins in such crimson colours, that we may sink in the *quicksands* of despair.

2. When sorrow is indisposing, it untunes the heart for prayer, meditation, and holy conference ; it cloisters up the soul. This is not sorrow, but rather sullenness, and doth render a man not so much penitential as sinful.

3. When it is *out of season*, God bids us *rejoice*, and we hang our harps upon the willows ; he bids us trust, and we cast ourselves down, and are brought even to the margin of despair. If Satan cannot keep us from mourning, he will be sure to put us upon it when it is least in season.

When God calls us, in a special manner, to be thankful for mercy, and put on our white robes, then Satan will be putting us into mourning ; and, instead of a *garment of praise*, clothe us with a spirit of heaviness, Isa. lxi. 3, so God loseth the acknowledgment of a mercy, and we the comfort.

If thy sorrow hath tuned and fitted thee for Christ, if it hath raised in thee high prizings of him, strong hungerings after him, sweet delight in him; this is as much as God requires, and a Christian doth but sin to vex and torture himself further upon the wreck of his own discontent.

And thus, I hope, I have answered the most material objections and apologies which this sin of Discontent doth make for itself. I see no reason why a Christian should be discontented, unless for his discontent. Let me, in the next place, propound something which may be both as a loadstone and a whetstone to Contentment,

CHAPTER XI.

Divine Motives to Contentment.

AND so I proceed to the arguments or motives that may quicken to contentment.

SECTION I.

The first argument to Contentment.

1. CONSIDER the excellency of it. Contentment is a flower that doth not grow in every garden ; it teacheth a man how, in the midst of want, to abound. You would think it were excellent if I could prescribe a receipt or antidote against poverty : but, behold, here is that which is more excellent, for a man to want, and yet have enough : this, alone, contentment of spirit brings. Contentment is a remedy against all our troubles, a relief for all our burdens, and a cure for all our cares.

Contentment, though it be not properly a *grace*—it is rather a *disposition of mind*—yet in it there is a happy temperature and mixture of all the graces. It is a most precious com-

pound, which is made up of *faith, patience, meekness, humility and love*, which are the ingredients put into it. Now there are seven rare excellencies in contentment :—

1. A contented Christian carries heaven about him ; for what is heaven but that sweet repose and full contentment that the soul shall have in God ? In contentment there is the first fruits of heaven.

There are two things in a contented spirit which make it like heaven.

1. *God is there.* Something of God is to be seen in that heart. A discontented Christian is like a rough, tempestuous sea ; when the water is rough, you can see nothing there ; but, when it is smooth and serene, then you may behold your face in the water, Prov. xxvii. 19. When the heart rageth through discontent, it is like a rough sea : you can see nothing there unless passion and murmuring ; there is nothing of God, nothing of heaven, in that heart : but, by virtue of contentment, it is like the sea when it is smooth and calm ; there is *a face shining there* ; you may see something of Christ in that heart, a representation of all the graces.

2. *Rest is there.* O what a Sabbath is

kept in a contented heart ! What a heaven ! A contented Christian is like Noah in the ark ; though the ark was tossed with waves, Noah could sit and sing in the ark. The soul, that is gotten into the *ark of contentment*, sits quiet and sails above all the waves of trouble ; he can sing in this spiritual ark. The wheels of the chariot move, but the axle-tree stirs not ; the circumference of the heavens is carried about the earth, but the earth moves not out of his centre. When we meet with motion and change in the creatures round about us, a contented spirit is not stirred or moved out of its centre. The sail of a mill moves with the wind, but the mill itself stands still ; an emblem of contentment. When our outward estate moves with the wind of providence, yet the heart is settled through holy contentment ; and when others are, like quicksilver, shaking and trembling through disquietude, the contented spirit can say as David—*O God, my heart is fixed ! my heart is fixed !* Psal. lvii. 7. What is this but a part of heaven ?

2. Whatever is defective in the creature, is made up in contentment. A Christian may want the comforts that others have, the land

and possessions ; but God hath distilled into his heart that contentment which is far better. In this sense that is true of our Saviour—*He shall have in this life, a hundred fold*, Matt. xix. 29. Perhaps he that ventured all for Christ, never hath his house or land again ; but God gives him a contented spirit ; and this breeds such joy in the soul, as is infinitely sweeter than all his houses and lands, which he left for Christ. It was sad with David, in regard of his outward comforts, he being driven, as some think, from his kingdom ; yet in regard of that sweet contentment which he found in God, he had more comfort than men used to have in time of *harvest and vintage*, Psal. iv. 7. One man hath house and lands to live upon ; another hath nothing, only a small trade, yet even that brings in a livelihood. A Christian may have little in the world ; but he drives the trade of contentment, and so he knows as well how to want as to abound. O the rare art, or rather miracle of contentment ! Wicked men are often disquieted in the enjoyment of all things ; but the contented Christian is well in the want of all things.

QUEST. But how comes a Christian to be contented in the deficiency of outward comforts ?

ANSW. A Christian finds contentment distilled out of the breasts of the promises. He is poor in *purse*, but rich in *promise*. There is one promise brings much sweet contentment into the soul; *They that seek the Lord, shall not want any thing*, Psal. xxxiv. 10. If the thing we desire be good for us, we shall have it; if it be not good, then the not having it is good for us. The resting satisfied with this promise gives contentment.

3. Contentment makes a man in tune to serve God; it oils the wheels of the soul and makes it more soft and nimble; it composeth the heart, and makes it fit for prayer, meditation and praise. How can he, that is in a passion of grief and discontent, *serve God without distraction?* 1 Cor. vii. 35. Contentment doth prepare and tune the heart. First you prepare the violin, and wind up the strings, ere you play a tune. So, when a Christian's heart is wound up to this heavenly frame of contentment, then it is fit for duty. A discontented Christian is like Saul, when the *evil spirit* came upon him. O what jarrings and discords doth he make in prayer! When an army is put into disorder, it is not fit for battle: when the

thoughts are scattered and distracted about the cares of this life, a man is not fit for devotion. Discontent takes the heart wholly off from God and fixeth it upon the present trouble ; so that a man's mind is not upon prayer, but upon his cross.

Discontent doth disjoint the soul ; and it is impossible now that a Christian should go so steadily and cheerfully in God's service. O how lame is his devotion ! The discontented person gives God but half a duty ; his religion is nothing but *bodily exercise*, it wants a soul to animate it. David would not offer that to God which *cost him nothing*, 2 Sam. xxiv. 24 ; where there is too much worldly *care*, there is too little spiritual *cost*, in a duty. The discontented person doth his duties by halves ; he is just like Ephraim, *a cake not turned*, Hosea vii. 8, he is a cake baked on one side ; he gives God the outside, but not the spiritual part : his heart is not in duty ; he is baked on one side, but the other side is dough ; and what profit is there of such raw undigested services ? He that gives God only the skin of worship, what can he expect more than the shell of comfort ? Contentment brings the heart into frame : and then only do we give God the flower and spirit of a

duty, when the soul is composed ; now a Christian hath his heart intent and serious. There are some duties which we cannot perform as we ought without contentment : as—

1. *To rejoice in God.* How can he rejoice that is discontented ? He is fitter for repining than rejoicing.

2. *To be thankful for mercy.* Can a discontented person be thankful ? He can be fretful, but not thankful.

3. *To justify God in his proceedings,* Ezra ix. 13. How can he do this who is discontented with his condition ? He will sooner censure God's wisdom than clear his justice. O then how excellent is *contentment*, which doth prepare, and, as it were, string the heart for duty ! Indeed, contentment doth not only make our duties lively and sweet, but *acceptable*. It is this that puts beauty and worth into them, for contentment settles the soul. Now, as it is with *milk*, when it is always stirring you can make nothing of it ; but let it settle awhile, and then it turns to cream : when the heart is over-much stirred with disquiet and discontent, you can make nothing of these duties ; how thin, how fleeting, and

poor are they ! But, when the heart is once settled by holy contentment, then there is some worth in our duties, then they turn to cream.

4. Contentment is the spiritual *arch* or pillar of the soul ; it fits a man *to bear burdens* : he, whose heart is ready to sink under the least sin, by virtue of this, hath a spirit invincible under sufferings. A contented Christian is like the camomile, the more it is trodden upon, the more it grows ; as physic works diseases out of the body, so doth contentment work trouble out of the heart. Thus it argues—“ If I am under reproach, God can vindicate me ; if I am in want, God can relieve me. *Ye shall not see wind or rain, yet the valley shall be filled with water,*” 2 Kings iii. 17. Thus holy contentment keeps the heart from fainting. In the autumn, when the fruit and leaves are blown off, still there is sap in the root ; when there is an autumn upon our external felicity, and the leaves of our estate drop off, still there is the sap of contentment in the heart ; and a Christian hath life inwardly, when his outward comforts do not blossom. The contented heart is never out of heart. Contentment is a golden shield, that doth beat back discouragements.

Humility is like to the net, which keeps the soul down, when it is rising through passion ; and contentment is the cork which keeps the heart up when it is sinking through discouragement. Contentment is the great under-prop ; it is like the *beam* which bears whatever weight is laid upon it ; nay, it is like a *rock* that breaks the waves.

It is strange to observe the same affliction lying upon two men, how differently they carry themselves under it. The contented Christian is like Samson, that carried away the gates of the city upon his back, Judges xvi. 3 ; he can go away with his cross cheerfully, and make nothing of it ; the other is like Issachar, couching down under his burden, Gen. xlix. 14. The reason is, the one is content, and that breeds courage ; the other discontent, and that breeds fainting. Discontent swells the grief, and grief breaks the heart. When this sacred sinew of contentment begins to shrink, we go limping under our afflictions. We know not what burdens God may exercise us with ; let us, therefore, preserve contentment : as our *contentment*, such will be our *courage*. David, with his five stones and his sling, defied Goliath,

and overcame him. Get but contentment into the sling of your heart, and with his sacred stone you may both defy the world, and conquer it; you may break those afflictions which else will break you.

5. A fifth excellency is—Contentment prevents many *sins* and *temptations*.

1. It prevents many *sins*. Where there wants contentment, there wants no sin; discontentedness with our condition is a sin that doth not go alone, but is like the first link of a chain, which draws all the other links along with it. In particular, there are two things which contentment prevents:—

1. *Impatience*. Discontent and Impatience are two twins; *This evil is of the Lord, why should I wait any longer?* 2 Kings vi. 33; as if God was so tied, that he must give us the mercy just when we desire it. Impatience is no small sin, as will appear if you consider whence it ariseth; as—

1. It is for want of faith. Faith gives a right notion of God; it is an intelligent grace; it believes that God's wisdom tempers, and his

love sweetens, all ingredients; this works patience—*Shall I not drink the cup which my Father hath given me?* Matt. xxvi. 39. Impatience is the daughter of Infidelity. If a patient hath an ill opinion of the physician, and conceits that he comes to poison him, he will take none of his receipts. When we have a prejudice against God, and conceit that he comes to kill us, and undo us, then we storm, and cry out through impatience. We are like a foolish man, (it is Chrysostom's *simile*) that cries out—"Away with the plaster!" though it be in order to a cure. Is it not better that the plaster make us smart a little, than the wound fester and rankle?

2. Impatience is for want of love to God. We will bear his reproofs whom we love, not only patiently, but thankfully. *Love thinks no evil*, 1 Cor. xiii. 5. It puts the fairest and most candid gloss upon the actions of a friend—*Love covers evil*. If it were possible for God in the least manner to err, which were blasphemy to think, love would cover that error. Love takes every thing in the best

sense; it makes us bear any stroke—*It endureth all things*, 1 Cor. xiii. 7; had we love to God, we should have patience.

3. *Impatience* is for want of *humility*. The impatient man was never humbled under the burden of sin: he that studies his sins, the numberless number of them, how they are twisted together, and sadly cemented, is patient, and saith—*I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him*, Micah vii. 9. The greater noise drowns the lesser: when the sea roars, the rivers are still. He that lets his thoughts expatiate about sin is both silent and amazed; he wonders it is no worse with him. How great, then, is this sin of impatience! and how excellent is *Contentment*, which is a counterpoise against this sin! The contented Christian, believing that God doth all in love, is patient, and hath not one word to say, unless to justify God, Psal. li. 4. That is the first sin which contentment prevents.

2. It prevents *murmuring*, a sin which is a degree higher than the other. *Murmuring* is a quarrelling with God, and inveighing

against him—*They speak against God*, Numb. xxi. 5. The murmurer saith, interpretatively, that God hath not dealt well with him, and he hath deserved better from him. The murmurer *chargeth God with folly*. This is the language, or rather *blasphemy*, of a murmuring spirit—God might have been a wiser and a better God! The murmurer is a mutineer. The Israelites are called, in the same text, *murmurers* and *rebels*, Numb. xvii. 10; and is not *rebellion as the sin of witchcraft?* 1 Sam. xv. 23. Thou that art a *murmurer*, art in the account of God as a *witch*, a *sorcerer*, as one that deals with the devil. This is a sin of the first magnitude; murmuring often ends in cursing. Micha's mother fell to cursing when the *talents of silver were taken away*, Judg. xvii. 2. So doth the murmurer, when a part of his estate is taken away. Our *murmuring* is the devil's *music*; this is that sin which God cannot bear—*How long shall I bear with this people that murmur against me?* Numb. xiv. 11. It is a sin which whets the sword against a people; it is a land-destroying sin—*Murmur ye not, as some of them also murmured, and were destroy-*

ed of the destroyer, 1 Cor. x. 10. It is a ripening sin : this, without God's mercy, will hasten destruction. O then, how excellent is contentment, which prevents this sin ! To be contented, and yet murmur, is a solecism. A contented Christian doth acquiesce in his present condition, and doth not murmur, but admire. Herein appears the excellency of contentment ; it is a spiritual antidote against sin.

2. Contentment prevents many temptations. Discontent is a devil that is always tempting. 1. It puts a man upon indirect *means*. He that is poor and discontented will attempt any thing ; he will go to the devil for riches : he that is proud and discontented, will hang himself, as Achitophel did when his council was rejected. Satan takes great advantage of our discontent ; he loves to fish in these troubled waters. Discontent doth both eclipse reason, and weaken faith ; and it is Satan's policy ; he doth usually break over the hedge where it is weakest. Discontent makes a breach in the soul ; and usually at this breach the devil enters by temptation, and storms the soul. How easily can the devil, by his *logic*,

dispute a discontented Christian into sin? He forms such a syllogism as this, "He that is in want, must study self-preservation. But you are now in want, therefore you ought to study self-preservation." Hereupon, to make good his *conclusion*, he tempts to the forbidden fruit, not distinguishing between what is *needful* and what is *lawful*. "What," saith he, "dost thou want a livelihood? Never be such a fool as to starve. Take *the rising side* at a venture, be it good or bad; *eat the bread of deceit, drink the wine of violence.*" Thus you see how the discontented man is a prey to that sad temptation, *to steal and take God's name in vain*, Prov. xxx. 9. Contentment is a shield against temptation; for he that is contented knows as well how to *want* as to *abound*.

He will not sin to get a living: though the *bill of fare* grows short, he is content. He lives, as the birds of the air, upon God's providence: and doubts not but he shall have enough to supply him on his passage to heaven.

4. Discontent tempts a man to *atheism* and *apostacy*. "Sure," saith Discontent, "there is

no God to take care of things here below ! Would he suffer them to be in want, who have *walked mournfully before him ?*" Mal. iii. 14. "Throw off Christ's livery ; desist from any religion." Thus Job's wife, being discontented with her condition, saith to her husband—*Dost thou still retain thy integrity ?* Job ii. 9. As if she had said—"Dost thou not see, Job, what is become of all thy religion ? *Thou fearest God, and eschewest evil ;* and what art thou the better ? See how God turns his hand against thee ; he hath smitten thee in thy body, estate, relations, and *dost thou still retain thy integrity ?* What, still devout ! Still weep and pray before him ! Thou fool ! cast off religion and turn atheist !" Here was a sore temptation that the devil did hand over to Job by his discontented wife ; only his grace, as a golden shield, did ward off the blow from his heart—*Thou speakest as one of the foolish women.* "What profit is it," saith the discontented person, "*to serve the Almighty ?* Those that never trouble themselves about religion, are the most prosperous ; and I, in the meanwhile, suffer want. I might as well give over driving

the trade of religion, if this be all my reward." This is a sore temptation, and oft it prevails. Atheism is the fruit that grows out of the blossom of discontent.

Oh, then, behold the excellency of contentment ! It doth repel this temptation. "If God be mine," saith the contented spirit, "it is enough ; though I have no lands or tenements, his smile makes heaven. *His loves are better than wine. Better is the gleanings of Ephraim, than the vintage of Abiezer,* Judg. viii. 2. I have little in hand, but much in hope ; my livelihood is short, but this is his promise, *even eternal life,* 1 John ii. 25. I am pursued by *malice* ; but better is persecuted godliness than prosperous wickedness." Thus divine contentment is a spiritual antidote both against *sin* and *temptation*.

6. Contentment sweetens every condition. Christ turned the water into wine ; so contentment turns the water of Marah into spiritual wine. "Have I but little ? Yet it is more than I can deserve or challenge. This little I have is in mercy ; it is the fruit of Christ's blood ; it is the legacy of free grace. A small

present, sent from a King, is highly valued. This little I have, is with a good conscience; it is not stolen water; guilt hath not muddied or poisoned it; it runs pure. This *little* is a pledge of more; this bit of bread is an earnest of that bread which I shall eat in the *Kingdom of God*. This little water in the cruse, is an earnest of that heavenly *nectar* which shall be distilled from the *true Vine*. Do I meet with some crosses? My comfort is, if they be heavy, I have not far to go; I shall but carry my cross to Golgotha, and there I shall leave it; my cross is light in regard of the weight of glory. Hath God taken away my comforts from me? It is well the Comforter still abides." Thus *contentment*, as a honey-comb, drops sweetness into every condition. Discontent is a leaven that sours every comfort; it puts aloes and wormwood upon the breast of the creature, it lessens every mercy, it trebles every cross; but the contented spirit sucks sweetness from every flower of Providence; it can make a treacle of poison. *Contentment* is full of *consolation*.

7. Contentment hath this excellency—It is the best *commentator* upon Providence: it

makes a fair interpretation of all God's dealings. Let the providences of God be ever so dark or mysterious, contentment doth ever construe them in the best sense. I may say of it as the Apostle of charity—*It thinks no evil*, 1 Cor. xiii. 5. “Sickness,” saith Contentment, “is God's furnace to refine his gold, and make it sparkle the more; the prison is an oratory, or house of prayer. What if God melts away the creature from me? He saw, perhaps, my heart grew too much in love with it. Had I been long in that fat pasture, I should have surfeited; and the better my estate had been, the worse my soul would have been. God is wise; he hath done this either to prevent some sin, or to exercise some grace.” What a blessed frame of heart is this! A contented Christian is an advocate for God against unbelief and impatience: whereas Discontent takes every thing from God in the worse sense; it doth impeach and censure God. “This evil I feel is but a symptom of greater evils: God is about to undo me. *The Lord hath brought us hither into the wilderness to slay us*,” Numb. xx. 4. The contented soul takes all well; and,

when his condition is ever so bad, he can say—
Yet God is good, Psal. lxxiii. 1.

SECTION II.

The second Argument to Contentment.

THE second argument or motive to contentment, is—A Christian hath that which may make him content.

1. Hath not God given thee Christ? In him there are *unsearchable riches*, Eph. iii. 8. He is such a golden *Mine* of wisdom and grace, that all the saints and angels can never dig to the bottom. As Seneca said to his friend Polybius—*Never complain of thy hard fortune as long as Cæsar is thy friend*. So I say to a believer, Never complain as long as Christ is your friend. He is an enriching pearl, a sparkling diamond: the infinite lustre of his merits makes us shine in God's eyes, Eph. i. 7; in him there is both *fulness* and *sweetness*; he is *goodness inexpressible*. Screw up your thoughts to the highest, stretch them to the utmost period, let

them expatiate to their full latitude and extent ; yet they fall infinitely short of those ineffable and inexhaustible treasures which are locked up in Jesus Christ. And is not here enough to give the soul content ? A Christian that wants *necessaries*, yet, having Christ, he hath *the one thing needful*.

2. The soul is exercised and enamelled with the graces of the Spirit ; and is not here enough to give contentment ? Grace is of a divine birth ; it is the new plantation ; it is the flower of the heavenly paradise ; it is the embroidery of the Spirit ; it is *the seed of God*, 1 John iii. 9 ; it is *the sacred unction*, 1 John ii. 27 ; it is Christ's portraiture in the soul ; it is the very foundation on which the superstruction of glory is laid. O ! of what infinite value is Grace ! what a jewel is Faith ! Well may it be called *precious Faith* ! 2 Pet. i. 1. What is love, but a divine spark in the soul ? A soul, beautified with grace, is like a room richly hung with arras or tapestry, or the firmament bespangled with glittering stars. These are the *true riches*, Luke xvi. 11, which cannot stand with the dross of this world.—And is not here enough to

give the soul *contentment*? What are all other things but like the wings of a butterfly, curiously painted? But they defile our fingers. "Earthly riches," saith Augustine, "are full of poverty." So indeed they are. For, 1. They cannot enrich the soul: oftentimes, under silken apparel, there is a threadbare soul. 2. These are corruptible: *riches are not for ever*, Prov. xxvii. 24; as the wise man saith, Heaven is a place where gold and silver will not go. A believer is rich *towards God*, Luke xii. 21. Why, then, art thou discontented? Hath not God given thee that which is better than the world? What if he doth not give thee the box, if he gives thee the jewel? What if he denies thee farthings, if he pays thee in a better coin? He gives thee gold, *viz.* spiritual mercies. What if the *water in the bottle* be spent? Thou hast enough in the fountain. What needs he complain of the world's *emptiness*, that hath God's *fulness*? "The Lord is *my portion*," Psal. xvi. 5, saith David, "then let the lines fall where they will, on a *sick-bed*, or *prison*, I will say, *The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.*"

3. Art thou not heir to all the promises ? Hast thou not a reversion in heaven ? When thou lettest go thy hold of natural life, art thou not sure of eternal life ? Hath not God given thee the Earnest and First-fruits of glory ? Is not here enough to work the heart to contentment ?

What, though some have a fraught
Of cloves, and nutmegs, and in cinnamon sail ?
If thou hast wherewithal to spice a draught,
When grief prevails ;

And, for the future time, art heir
To the Isle of Spices. Is it not fair ?

HERBERT'S POEMS.

SECTION III.

The third Argument to Contentment.

THE third argument is—"Be content ;" for else we confute our own prayers. We pray, *Thy will be done.* It is the will of God that we should be in such a condition ; he hath ordered it, and he sees it best for us : why, then, do we murmur, and are discontented at that which we pray for ? Either we are not in good earnest

in our prayer, which argues *hypocrisy* ; or else we contradict ourselves, which argues *folly*.

SECTION IV.

The fourth Argument to Contentment.

THE fourth argument to contentment is—
“ Because now God hath his end, and Satan misseth of his end.”

1. *God hath his end.* God's end, in all his cross providences, is to bring the heart to submit and be content ; and, indeed, this pleaseth God much : he loves to see his children satisfied with what portion he doth carve and allot them. It contents him to see us contented ; therefore, let us acquiesce in God's providence : now God hath his end.

2. *Satan misseth of his end.* The end why the Devil (though by God's permission) did smite Job, in his body and estate, was to perplex his mind ; he did vex his *body*, on purpose that he might disquiet his *spirit*. He hoped to bring Job into a fit of discontent : and then,

that he would, in a passion, break forth against God ; but Job, being so well contented with his condition, breaks out in humble submission to the will of God, and said, The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord, and thus Satan was disappointed of his hope, Job i. 21. *The Devil shall cast some of you into prison*, Rev. ii. 10. Why doth the Devil throw us into prison ? It is not so much the hurting our body, as the molesting our mind, that he aims at ; he would imprison our contentment, and disturb the regular motion of our souls. This is his design ; it is not so much the putting us into a *prison*, as the putting us into a *passion*, that he attempts ; but, by holy contentment, Satan loseth his prey, he misseth of his end. The Devil hath oft deceived us ; the best way to deceive him is, by being *content* in the midst of *tribulation*, our contentment will discontent Satan. Oh ! let us not gratify our enemy ! Discontent is the Devil's delight : now it is as he would have it ; he loves to warm himself at the fire of our passions. *Repentance* is the joy of the angels, and *discontent* is the joy of the devils. As the Devil

danceth at discord, so he sings at discontent. The fire of our passions makes the Devil a bonfire; it is a kind of heaven to see us torturing ourselves with our own troubles; but, by holy contentment, we frustrate him of his purpose, and do, as it were, put him out of countenance.

SECTION V.

The fifth Argument to Contentment.

THE next argument is—"By contentment a Christian gets a victory over himself. For a man to be able to rule his own spirit, this, of all others, is the most noble conquest, Prov. xvi. 32. Passion denotes weakness: to be discontented, is suitable to *flesh* and *blood*. But to be in every state content; reproached, yet *content*, imprisoned, yet *content*: this is above nature; this is some of that holy valour and chivalry which only a divine spirit is able to infuse. In the midst of the affronts of the world, to be patient; and, in the changes of the world, to have the spirit calmed; this is a conquest worthy in-

deed of the garland of honour. Holy Job, divested and turned out of all, leaving his *scarlet*, and embracing the *dunghill*—a sad catastrophe—yet he had learned contentment. It is said, *He fell upon the ground, and worshipped*, Job i. 20. But the discontented man falls to murmuring, and from murmuring to rebellion. But Job fell down and worshipped. He adored God's justice and holiness—behold the strength of grace! Here was a humble submission, yet a noble conquest; he got the victory over himself. It is no great matter for a man to yield to his own passions; this is easy and natural; but to content himself in denying of himself, this is sacred and divine.

SECTION VI.

The sixth Argument to Contentment.

THE sixth great argument to work the heart to contentment, is the consideration that all God's providences, how cross or trying soever, shall do a believer good: *And we know that*

all things work together for good to them that love God, Rom. viii. 28. Not only *all good things*, but *all evil things*, work for good; and shall we be discontented at that which works for our good?

What if sickness, poverty, reproach, losses and crosses, do unite and muster their force against us. All shall work for good; our *mala-*
dies shall be our *medicines*; and shall we repine at that which shall undoubtedly do us good? *Unto the upright there ariseth light in darkness*, Psal. cxii. 4. Affliction may be baptized, *Marah*; it is bitter, but *physical*. Because this is so full of comfort, and may be a most excellent remedy against discontent, I shall a little expatiate.

QUEST. It will be inquired how the evils of affliction work for good?

ANSW. Several ways.

1. They are *disciplinary*: they teach us. The Psalmist, having very elegantly described the Church's trouble, Psal. lxxiv., prefixed this title to the Psalm—"MASCHIL," which signifies a *Psalm giving instruction*; that which *seals up instruction*, works for good. God puts us

sometimes under the black rod, but it is a rod of discipline—*Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it*, Micah ix. 9. God makes our *adversity* our *university*: affliction is a preacher—*Blow the trumpet in Tekoah*, Jer. vi. 1. The trumpet was to preach to the people, as appears, verse 5. *Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem!* Sometimes God speaks to the minister, to lift up his voice like a trumpet, Isa. lviii. 1; and here he speaks to the trumpet to lift up its voice like a minister. Afflictions teach us—

1. *Humility*. When we become prosperous and proud—*corrections* are God's *corrosives* or powerful medicines, to eat out the proud flesh. Jesus Christ is a lily of the vallies, Cant. ii. 1; he dwells in a humble heart. God brings us into the valley of tears that he may bring us into the valley of humility—*Remembering my affliction, the wormwood and the gall; my soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me*, Lam. iii. 19, 20. When men are grown high, God hath no better way with them than to brew them a cup of wormwood. Afflictions are compared to thorns, Hos. ii. 8. God's thorns are to prick the bladder of pride. Sup-

pose a man runs at another with a sword to kill him, and accidentally strikes on a festering sore, this may do him good, by discharging that which causes pain, and thus God's corrections tend to work out the pride of the heart, and make us humble and contented.

2. Afflictions teach us repentance—*Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised: I repented; and, after I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh, &c.* Jer. xxxi. 18, 19. Repentance is the precious fruit that grows upon the Cross. When the fire is put under the still, the water drops from the roses. Fiery afflictions make the waters of repentance drop and distil from the eyes; and is here any cause of discontent?

3. Afflictions teach us to pray better—*They poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them,* Isa. xxvi. 16. Before, they would say a prayer; now, they poured out a prayer. Jonah was asleep in the ship, but awake and at prayer in the whale's belly. When God puts under the firebrands of affliction, our hearts then boil over the more. God loves to have his children *possessed with a spirit of prayer.*

Never did David, *the sweet singer of Israel*, tune his harp more melodiously ; never did he pray better, than when he was *upon the waters*. Thus afflictions make us patient ; and shall we be discontented at that which is for our good ?

2. Afflictions are to try us, Psal. lxvi. 10, 11. Gold is not the worse for being tried, or corn for being fanned. Affliction is the touchstone of sincerity ; it tries what metal we are made of. Afflictions are God's *fan* and his sieve. It is good that men be known. Some serve God for a *livery* : they are like the fisherman, that makes use of the net only to catch the fish : so they go a fishing with the net of religion only to catch preferment. Affliction discovers these. The Donatists went to the Goths, when the Arians prevailed. Hypocrites will not sail in a storm : true grace holds out in the *winter-season*. That is a *precious faith*, which, like the star, shines brightest in the darkest night. It is good that our graces should be brought to a trial : thus we have the comfort, and the Gospel the honour ; and why then discontented ?

3. Afflictions, when sanctified, prove blessings in disguise. And then they work for

good, because they work out sin; and shall I be discontented at this? What if I have more *trouble*, if I have *less* sin? The brightest day hath its clouds, the purest gold its dross, and the most refined soul hath some lees of corruption. The saints lose nothing in the furnace but what they can well spare, *viz. their dross*: is not this for our good? Why, then, should we murmur? *I am come to send fire on the earth*, Luke xii. 49. Tertullian understands it of the fire of *affliction*. God makes this like the fire of the three children, which burned only their bonds, and set them at liberty in the furnace: so the fire of affliction serves to burn the bonds of iniquity—*By this, therefore, shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the fruit, to take away his sin*, Isa. xxvii. 9. When affliction, or death, comes to a wicked man, it takes away his *soul*; when it comes to a godly man, it only takes away his *sin*: is there then any cause why we should be discontented? God steeps us in the brinish water of affliction, that he may take out our spots. God's people are his husbandry, 1 Cor. iii. 6. The ploughing of the ground kills the weeds, and the har-

rowing of the earth breaks the hard clods : God's ploughing of us by affliction, is to kill the weeds of sin ; his harrowing of us is to break the hard clods of impenitency, that the heart may be the fitter to receive the seed of grace. And if this be all, why should we be discontented ?

4. Afflictions do both exercise and increase grace.

First, They *exercise* grace. Affliction doth breathe our graces : every thing is most in its excellency, when it is most in its exercise. Our grace, though it cannot be dead, yet it may be *asleep*, and hath need of awakening. What a dull thing is the fire, when it is hid in the embers ; or the sun, when it is masked with a cloud ? A sick man is *living*, but not *lively*. Afflictions quicken and excite grace. God doth not love to see grace in the eclipse. Now faith puts forth its purest and most noble acts in times of affliction. God makes *the fall of the leaf the spring* of our graces. What if we are more *passive*, if grace be more active ?

2. Afflictions do *increase* grace. As the wind serves to increase and blow up the flame,

so do the windy blasts of affliction augment and blow up our graces. Grace spends in the furnace ; but it is like the *widow's oil in the cruse*, which did increase by pouring out. The torch, when it is beaten, burns brightest ; so doth grace, when it is exercised by sufferings. Sharp frosts nourish the good corn, so do sharp afflictions grace : some plants grow better in the shade than in the sun, as the *bay* and the *cypress*. The shade of adversity is better for some than the sunshine of prosperity. Naturalists observe, that the colewort thrives better when it is watered with salt-water than with fresh ; so do some thrive better in the salt water of affliction. And shall we be discontented at that which makes us grow and fructify more.

5. These afflictions do bring more of God's immediate presence into the soul. When we are most assaulted, we shall be most assisted — *I will be with him in trouble*, Psal. 15. It cannot be ill with that man, with whom God is, by his powerful presence, supporting, and by his gracious presence, sweetening, the present trial. God will be with us in trouble, not

only to *behold* us, but to *uphold* us ; as he was with Daniel in the *lion's den*, and the three children *in the furnace*. What if we have more trouble than others, if we have more of God with us than others have ? We never have sweeter smiles from God's face than when the world begins to look strange—*Thy statutes have been my songs ; Where ? Not when I was upon the throne, but in the house of my pilgrimage*, Psal. cxix. 54. We read, *The Lord was not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire ; but in the small still voice*, 1 Kings xii. 11. But, in a metaphorical and spiritual sense, when the wind of affliction blows upon a believer, God is in the wind ; when the fire of affliction kindles upon him, God is in the fire, *viz.* to sanctify, to support, to sweeten. If God be with us, the furnace shall be turned into a festival, the prison into a paradise, the earthquake into a joyful dance. Oh ! why should I be discontented, when I have more of God's company ?

6. These evils of affliction are for good, as they bring with them certificates of God's love, and are evidences of his special favour. Afflic-

tion is the saint's livery; it is a badge and cognizance of honour. That the God of glory should look upon a worm, and take so much notice of him as to afflict him rather than lose him, is a high act of favour. God's rod is a sceptre of dignity. Job calls God's afflicting of us, his magnifying of us, Job vii. 17. Some men's prosperity hath been their shame, when other's affliction hath been their crown.

7. These afflictions work for our good, because they work for us a *far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*, 2 Cor. iv. 16. That which works for my glory in heaven, works for my good. We do not read in Scripture that any man's honour and riches do work for him a *weight of glory*, but afflictions do, and shall a man be discontented at that which works for his glory? The heavier the weight of affliction, the heavier the weight of glory; not that our sufferings do merit glory—as some erroneously think—but though they are not the cause of our crown, yet they are the way to it; and God makes us, as he did our Captain, *perfect through sufferings*, Heb. ii. 10. And shall not all this make us contented with our condi-

tion? Oh! I beseech you, look not upon the *evil* of affliction, but the *good*. Afflictions, in Scripture, are called *visitations*, Job vii. 18. This word, which in the Hebrew implies to *visit*, is taken in a *good* sense as well as a *bad*. God's afflictions are but *friendly visits*. Behold here, God's rod is like Aaron's *rod*, blossoming, and Jonathan's *rod*; it hath honey at the end of it. Poverty shall starve our sins: the sickness of the body shall cure a sin-sick soul. O then! instead of murmuring, and being discontented, *bless the Lord*. Hadst thou not met with such a rub in the way, thou mightest have gone to hell, and never stopped.

SECTION VII.

The seventh Argument to Contentment.

THE next argument to contentment is—“Consider the evil of discontent.” Malcontent hath a mixture of grief and anger in it, and both these must needs raise a storm in the soul. Have you not seen the posture of a sick

man? Sometimes he will sit upon his bed, by and by he will lie down; and, when he is down, he is not quiet: first, he turns to one side, and then to the other; he is still restless. This is just the emblem of a discontented spirit: the man is not sick, yet he is never well; sometimes he likes such a condition of life; and when he hath it, yet he is not pleased, he is soon weary; and then another condition of life. This is *an evil under the sun*.

Now the evil of Discontent appears in three things—

1. The sordidness of it; it is unworthy of a Christian.

First, It is unworthy of his profession. It was the saying of an Heathen—"Bear thy condition quietly; know, thou art *a man*." So I say—"Bear thy condition contentedly; know, thou art a *Christian*." Thou professest to live by faith: what, and not content? Faith is a grace that doth *substantiate* things *not seen*, Heb. xi. 1. Faith looks beyond the creature; it feeds upon promises: Faith lives not by *bread alone*. When the water is spent in the *bottle*, Faith knows whither to have re-

course. Now, to see a Christian dejected in the want of visible supplies and recruits, where is Faith? "Oh!" saith one, "my estate in the world is down." Ah! and what is worse, thy faith is down. Wilt thou not be contented, unless God let down the vessel to thee as he did to Peter, wherein were all manner of *beasts of the earth and fowls of the air?* Acts x. 12. Must you have first and second course? This is like Thomas—*Unless I put my finger into the print of the nails, I will not believe,* John xx. 25; so, unless thou hast a sensible feeling of outward comforts, thou wilt not be content. True faith will *trust* God where it cannot *trace* him, and will adventure upon God's *bond*, though it hath nothing in view. You, who are discontented because you have not all you would, let me tell you, either your faith is at a low ebb, or at best but an *embryo*; it is a *weak faith* that must have stilts and crutches to support it; nay, discontent is not only below faith, but below reason. Why are you discontented? Is it because you are dispossessed of such comforts? Well, and have you not reason to guide you? Doth not Rea-

son tell you, that you are but *tenants at will*? And may not God turn you out when he pleases? You hold not your estate *jure*, but *gratis*; not by a juridical right, but upon favour and courtesy.

2. It is unworthy of the *relation* we stand in to God. A Christian is invested with the title and privilege of *Sonship*, Eph. i. 5; he is an heir of the Promise. Oh! consider the lot of free-grace is fallen upon thee; thou art nearly allied to Christ, and of the blood royal; thou art advanced, in some sense, above the angels. *Why then art thou, being the King's son, lean from day to day?* 2 Sam. xiii. 4. Why art thou discontented? O how unworthy is this! as if the heir to some great monarch should go pining up and down, because he may not pick such a flower.

2. Consider the *sinfulness* of it, which appears in three things—

The causes	} of it.
The actings	
The consequences	

1. It is sinful in the *causes*, which are these—

1. *Pride*. He that thinks highly of his desert, usually esteems meanly of his condition. A discontented man is a proud man; he thinks himself better than others; therefore finds fault with the wisdom of God that he is not above others. Thus the thing *formed* saith to him that *formed* it—*Why hast thou made me thus?* Rom. ix. 20. Why am I not higher? Discontents are nothing else but the fermenting and boilings over of pride.

2. The second cause of discontent is *Envy*, which Augustine calls the Sin of the Devil. Satan envied Adam the glory of Paradise, and the robe of innocency: he that envies what his neighbour hath, is never contented with that portion which God's providence doth parcel out to him: thus envy stirs up strife—this made the Plebeian faction so strong among the Romans—so it creates discontent. The envious man looks so much upon the blessings which another enjoys, that he cannot see his own mercies, and so doth continually vex and torture himself. Cain envied that his brother's sacrifice was accepted, and his rejected; hereupon he was discontented, and presently murderous thoughts began to arise in his heart.

3. The third cause is *Covetousness*. This is a radical sin. Whence are vexing lawsuits, but from discontent? And whence is discontent, but from covetousness? *Covetousness* and contentedness cannot dwell in the same heart. *Avarice* is an *heluo*, that is never satisfied. The covetous man is like Behemoth—*Behold, he drinketh up a river: he trusteth that he can draw up Jordan into his mouth*, Job xl. 23. There are four things (saith Solomon) say—*It is not enough*. I may add a fifth—*The heart of a covetous man—he is still craving*. Covetousness is like a wolf in the breast, which is ever feeding; and, because a man is not satisfied, he is never content.

4. The fourth cause of discontent is *Jealousy*; which is sometimes occasioned through melancholy, and sometimes misapprehension. The spirit of jealousy causeth *this evil spirit*. *Jealousy is the rage of a man*, Prov. vi. 34; and oft, this is nothing but suspicion and fancy, yet such as creates real discontent.

5. The fifth cause of discontent is Distrust, which is a great degree of Atheism. The dis-

contented person is ever distrustful. “*The store of provision grows low: I am in these straits and exigencies—can God help me? Can he prepare a table in the wilderness? Sure he cannot. My estate is exhausted, can God recruit me? My friends are gone, can God raise me up more? Sure the arm of his power is shrunk. I am like the dry fleece—can any water come upon this fleece? If the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?*” 2 Kings vii. 2. Thus the *anchor of hope* and the *shield of faith* being cast away, the soul goes pining up and down.

Discontent is nothing else but the *echo* of unbelief; and remember, *distrust* is worse than *distress*.

2. Discontent is evil in the actings of it; which are two—

1. Discontent is joined with a *sullen melancholy*. A Christian, of a right temper, should be ever cheerful in God—*serve the Lord with gladness*, Psal. c. 5. A sign the oil of grace hath been poured into the heart, when *the oil of gladness* shines in the countenance. Cheerfulness credits religion: how

can the discontented person be cheerful? Discontent is a dogged sullen humour; because we have not what we desire, God shall not have a good word or look from us. As the bird in the cage, because she is pent up, and cannot fly in the open air, therefore beats herself against the cage, and is ready to kill herself. Thus that peevish prophet said, *I do well to be angry to the death*, Jonah iv. 5.

2. Discontent is accompanied with Unthankfulness. Because we have not all we desire, we never mind the mercies which we have: we deal with God as the woman of Sarepta did with the prophet. The prophet Elijah had been a means to keep her alive in the famine: for it was for his sake that her meal in the barrel, and her oil in the cruse, failed not; but as soon as ever her son dies, she falls into a passion, and begins to quarrel with the Prophet—*What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? Art thou come to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?* 1 Kings xvii. 18. So ungratefully we deal with God: we can be content to receive mercies from God; but, if he doth cross us in the

least thing, then through discontent we grow touchy and impatient, and are ready to fly upon God. Thus God loseth all his mercies. We read in Scripture of the thank-offering, 2 Chron. xx. 27. The discontented person cuts God short of this; the Lord loseth his *thank-offering*. A discontented Christian repines in the midst of mercies, as Adam, who sinned in the midst of Paradise. Discontent is a spider that sucks the poison of unthankfulness out of the sweetest flower of God's blessings; and, by a devilish chemistry, extracts dross out of the most refined gold. The discontented person thinks every thing he doth for God too much, and every thing God doth for him too little. Oh, what a sin is unthankfulness! It is an accumulative sin. There are many sins bound up in this one sin: it is a voluminous wickedness; and how full of this sin is *discontent*! A discontented Christian, because he hath not all the world, therefore dishonours God with the mercies which he hath. God made Eve out of Adam's rib, to be a *helper*, as the Father speaks; but the Devil made an arrow, of this rib, and shot

Adam to the heart: so doth discontent take the rod of God's mercy, and ungratefully shoot at him: estate and liberty shall be employed against God. Thus it is oftentimes. Behold, then, how Discontent and Ingratitude are interwoven and twisted one within another. Thus discontent is sinful in its actings.

3. It is sinful in its *consequences*; which are these—

1. It makes a man very unlike the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God is a *meek spirit*. The Holy Ghost descended in the likeness of a *dove*, Matt. iii. 16. A dove is the emblem of meekness. A discontented spirit is not a meek spirit.

2. It makes a man like the Devil. The Devil, being swelled with the poison of envy and malice, is never content; just so is the malcontent. The Devil is an unquiet spirit, he is still *walking about*, 1 Pet v. 8; it is his rest to be walking; and herein is the discontented person like him; for he goes up and down vexing himself. *Seeking rest, and finding none*, he is the Devil's picture.

3. Discontent disjoins the soul, it untunes the heart for duty—*Is any man afflicted, let him pray*, Jam. v. 13. But is any man *discontented*; how shall he pray? Discontent is full of wrath and passion: the malcontent cannot lift up pure hands; he lifts up *leprous hands*; he poisons his prayers. Will God accept of a poisoned sacrifice? Chrysostom compares prayers to a fine garland. “Those,” saith he, “that make a garland, their hands had need be clean.” Prayer is a precious garland, the heart that makes it had need be clean. Discontent throws poison in the spring, which was death among the Romans. Discontent puts the heart into a disorder and mutiny, and such a one cannot serve the Lord *without distraction*.

4. Discontent sometimes unfits for the very use of reason. Jonah, in a passion of discontent, spake no better than blasphemy and nonsense—“*I do well*,” said he, “*to be angry to the death*,” Jonah iv. 9. What, to be angry with God, and to die for anger? Sure, he did not know well what he said. When discon-

tent transports, then, like Moses, we speak unadvisedly *with our lips*. This humour doth even suspend the very acts of reason.

5. Discontent doth not only disquiet a man's self, but those who are near him. This evil spirit troubles *families, parishes and kingdoms*. If there be but one string out of tune, it spoils all the music. One discontented spirit makes jarrings and discords among others: it is this ill humour that breeds quarrels and law-suits. Whence is all our *contention*, but for want of *contentment*? From whence come wars and fighting among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts? James iv. 1, in particular, from this lust of discontent? Why did Absalom raise a war against his father, and would have taken off, not only his *crown* but his *head*? Was it not his discontent? Absalom would be king. Why did Ahab stone Naboth? Was it not discontent about the vineyard? O this devil of discontent! Thus you have seen the sinfulness of it.

3. Consider the simplicity of it. I may say as the Psalmist—*Surely they are disquieted in vain*, Psal. ix. 6; which appears thus—

1. Is it not a vain simple thing to be troubled at the loss of that which is in its own nature perishing and changeable? God hath put a vicissitude into the creature; all the world rings changes; and for me to meet with inconstancy here, to lose my friends or my property, to be in a constant fluctuation, is no more than to see a flower wither, or a leaf drop off in autumn. There is an *autumn* upon every comfort, a *fall of the leaf*. Now it is extreme folly to be discontented at the loss of those things which are so, in their own nature, loseable. What Solomon saith of riches, is true of all things under the sun—" *They take wings.*" Noah's dove brought an olive-branch in its mouth; but presently flew out of the ark, and never returned more. Such a comfort brings us honey in its mouth; but it hath wings: and to what purpose should we be troubled, unless we had wings to fly after and overtake it?

2. Discontent is a heart-breaking. *By sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken*, Prov. xv. 13; it takes away the comfort of life. There is none of us but may have mercies if we can see them. Now, because we have not

all we desire, therefore we will lose the comfort of that which we have already. Jonah having his gourd smitten—a withering vanity—was so discontented, that he never thought of his miraculous deliverance out of the whale's belly; he takes no comfort of his life, but wisheth that he might die. What folly is this? We must have all or none; herein we are like children, that throw away the piece which is cut them, because they may have no bigger. Discontent eats out the comforts of life. Besides, it were well if it were seriously weighed how prejudicial this is even to our health; for discontent, as it doth torture the mind, so it doth pine the body; it frets as a moth, and, by wasting the spirits, weakens the vitals. The pleurisy of discontent brings the body into a consumption; and is this not folly?

3. Discontent does not ease us of our burden, but makes the cross heavier. A contented spirit goes cheerfully under its affliction. Discontent makes our grief as insupportable as it is unreasonable. If the leg be well, it can endure a fetter, and not complain; but if the leg be sore, then the fetter troubles. Discontent

of mind is the *sore* that makes the fetters of affliction more grievous. Discontent troubles us more than the trouble itself; it steeps the affliction in wormwood. When Christ was upon the cross the Jews brought him *gall* and *vinegar* to drink, that it might add to his sorrow. Discontent brings to a man in affliction gall and vinegar to drink: this is worse than the affliction itself. Is it not folly for a man to embitter his own cross?

4. Discontent spins out our troubles the longer. A Christian is discontented because he is in want; and therefore he is in want, because he is discontented; he murmurs because he is afflicted, and therefore he is afflicted because he murmurs. Discontent doth delay and adjourn our mercies. God deals herein with us as we use to do with our children; when they are quiet and cheerful they shall have any thing; but if we see them cry and fret then we withhold them. We get nothing from God by our discontent, but we add to our sorrow. The more the child struggles, the more it grieves; and when we struggle with God by our sinful passions, he doubles and

trebles our griefs: God will tame our stubborn hearts. What got Israel by their peevishness? They were within eleven days journey of Canaan, and now they were discontented, and began to murmur; God leads them a march of forty years long in the wilderness. Is it not folly for us to adjourn our own mercies? Thus you have seen the evil of discontent. I have been long upon this argument; but to proceed:—

SECTION VIII.

The eighth Argument to Contentment.

THE next argument or motive to Contentment is this—Why is not a man content with the competency which he hath? Perhaps, if he had more, he would be less content; covetousness is a dry drunkenness. The world is such, that the more we *have* the more we *crave*; it cannot fill the heart of man. When the fire burns, how do you quench it? Not by putting oil to the flame, or laying on more wood, but

by withdrawing the fuel. When the appetite is inflamed after riches, how may a man be satisfied? Not by having just what he desires, but by withdrawing the *fuel*, &c., moderating and lessening his desires. He that is contented hath enough. A man, in a fever or dropsy, thirsts; how do you satisfy him? Not by giving him liquid things which will inflame his thirst the more; but by removing the cause, and so curing his distemper. The way for a man to be contented is not by raising his estate higher, but by bringing his heart lower.

SECTION IX.

The ninth Argument to Contentment.

THE next argument to contentment is—*The shortness of life*. “It is but a *vapour*,” saith James, Jam. iv. 14; life is a wheel ever running. The poets painted Time with wings, to show the volubility and swiftness of it. Job compares it to a swift *post*, Job ix. 25—our life rides post—’tis but a day, not a year. It is

indeed like a day : infancy is, as it were, the day-break ; youth is the sun-rising ; full growth is the sun in the meridian ; old age is the sun-setting. Sickness is the evening, then comes the night of death. How quick is the day of life spent ! Oftentimes this sun goes down at noon-day : life ends before the evening of old-age comes ; nay, sometimes the sun of life sets presently after sun-rising. Quickly after the dawning of infancy, the night of death approaches. Oh, how short is the life of man ! The consideration of the brevity of life may work the heart to contentment. Remember thou art to be here but a day ; thou hast but a short way to go, and what needs a long provision for a short journey ? If a traveller have but enough to bring him to his journey's end, he desires no more. We have but a day to live, and perhaps we may be in the twelfth hour of the day ; why, if God gives us but enough to bear our charges till night, it is sufficient. Let us be content. If a man take a lease of a house or farm but for two or three days, and he should fall a building and planting, would he not be judged very indiscreet ?

So when we have but a short time here, and death calls us presently off the stage, to thirst immoderately after the world, and pull down our souls to build up an estate, is it not extreme folly? Therefore, as Esau said once, in a *profane sense*, concerning his birthright—“*Lo! I am at the point to die, and what profit shall this birthright do to me?*” So let a Christian say, in a *religious sense*—“*Lo! I am even at the point of death; my grave is going to be made, and what good will the world do me? If I have but enough till sun-setting, I am content.*”

SECTION X.

The tenth Argument to Contentment.

THE tenth argument or motive to Contentment, is—“Consider seriously the nature of a prosperous condition.” There are, in a prosperous estate, three things—

1. *More trouble.* Many who have abundance of all things to enjoy, yet have not so much content and sweetness in their lives, as

some that go to their hard labour. Sad, solicitous thoughts, do often attend a prosperous condition: *care* is as an evil spirit which haunts a rich man, and will not suffer him to be quiet. When his chest is full of gold, his heart is full of care, either how to *manage*, or how to *increase*, or how to *secure*, what he hath gotten. Oh, the troubles and perplexities that do wait upon prosperity! The world's high-seats are very uneasy; sunshine is pleasant, but sometimes it scorcheth with its heat; the bee gives honey, but sometimes it stings: prosperity hath its sweetness, and also its sting. *Competency, with Contentment, is far more eligible.* Never did Jacob sleep better than when he had the heavens for his canopy, and a hard stone for his pillow. A large voluminous estate is but like a long trailing garment, which is more troublesome than useful.

2. In a prosperous condition there is more danger; and that two ways—

First, In respect of a man's self. The rich man's *table is oft his snare*; he is ready to engulf himself too deep in these sweet

waters. In this sense it is hard to know how to *abound*. It must be a strong brain that bears heady wine; he had need have much wisdom and grace that knows how to bear a high condition: either he is ready to kill himself with care, or surfeit himself with luscious delights. Oh, the hazard of *honour*, the danger of dignity! Pride, Security and Rebellion, are the three worms of plenty, Deut. xxxii. 15. The pastures of prosperity are rank and surfeiting. How soon are we broken upon the soft pillow of ease! Prosperity is often a *trumpet* that sounds a *retreat*; it calls men off from the pursuit of religion. The sun of prosperity oft dulls, and puts out the fire of zeal. How many souls hath the *pleurisy of abundance* killed? They that *will be rich* fall into snares, 1 Tim. vi. 10. The world is bird-lime to our feet; it is full of *golden sands*, but they are *quicksands*. Prosperity, like smooth Jacob, will supplant and betray; a great estate, without much vigilancy, will be a thief to rob us of heaven; such as are upon the pinnacle of honour, are in most danger of falling.

A lower estate is less hazardous. The little pinnace rides safe by the shore; when the gallant ship, advancing with its mast and top-sail, is cast away. Adam, in Paradise, was overcome, when Job on the dunghill was a conqueror. Samson fell asleep on Delilah's lap; some have fallen so fast asleep on the lap of ease and plenty, that they have never waked till they have been in hell. The world's *fawning* is worse than its *frowning*; and it is more to be feared when it smiles, than when it thunders. Prosperity, in Scripture, is compared to a candle—*When his candle shined upon my head*, Job xxix. 3. How many have burnt their wings about this candle! The corn, being over-ripe, shakes; and fruit, when it mellows, begins to rot: when men do mellow with the sun of prosperity, commonly their souls begin to rot in sin. *How hard is it for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of Heaven!* Luke xviii. 24. His golden weights keep him from ascending up *the hill of God*; and shall we not be content, though we are placed in a lower orb? What if we are not in so much bravery and gallantry as others? We are not so much in

danger : if we want the honour of the world, the temptations will follow. Oh, the abundance of danger that is in abundance ! We see, by common experience, that *lunatics*, when the moon is declining, and in the wane, are sober enough ; but, when it is in the full, they are more wild and exorbitant. When men's estates are in the wane, they are more serious about their souls, more humble ; but when it is the *full of the moon*, and they have abundance, then their hearts begin to swell with pride and covetousness, and are scarcely sensible of their danger. Those that write concerning the several *climates*, observe, that such as live in the northern parts of the world, if you bring them into the south part, they lose their appetites and die quickly ; but those that live in the more southern hot climates, bring them into the north, and their appetites mend, and they are long lived. Give me leave to apply it : bring a man from the cold starving climate of poverty, into the hot southern climate of prosperity, and he begins to lose his appetite for good things, he grows weak, and a thousand to one if all his religion doth not die ; but bring a Christian

from the south to the north, from a rich flourishing estate into a declining low condition, let him come into a more cold and hungry air, and then his stomach mends, he hath better appetite after heavenly things, he hungers more after Christ, he thirsts more for grace, he eats more at one meal of the Bread of Life than at six before. This man is now like to live and hold out in his religion. Be content then with a morsel ; if you have but enough to serve you on your road to heaven, it sufficeth.

2. A prosperous condition is dangerous in regard of others ; a great estate for the most part draws envy to it, Gen. xxvi. 12, 13, 14. When David was a Shepherd he was quiet, but when he was advanced to a courtier he was pursued by his enemies. Envy cannot endure a superior. An envious man knows not how to live, but upon the ruins of his neighbour ; he raiseth himself higher by bringing others lower. Prosperity is an eyesore to many. Such sheep as have most wool are soonest fleeced. The barren tree grows peaceably ; no man meddles with the ash or willow ; but the apple-tree and the damson shall have many rude suitors.

Oh, then, be content to carry a lesser sail ! He that hath less *revenues*, hath less *envy* ; such as bear the fairest frontispiece, and make the greatest show in the world, are the fittest for envy and malice to shoot at.

3. A prosperous condition hath in it a greater reckoning : every man must be responsible for his talents. Thou that hast great possessions in the world, dost thou trade thy estate for God's glory ? Art thou *rich in good works* ? Grace makes a *private person a common good*. Dost thou disburse thy money for public uses ? It is lawful—in this sense—to put out our money to use. Oh, let us all remember, an estate is a *depositum* ! We are but stewards, and our Lord and Master will ere long say—*Give an account of your stewardship*. The greater our estate, the greater *our charge* ; the more our revenues, the more our reckonings. You that have a lesser mill going in the world, be content ; God will expect less from you, where he hath sowed more sparingly.

SECTION XI.

The eleventh Argument to Contentment.

THE eleventh argument is the example of those who have been eminent for contentment. *Examples* are usually more forcible than *precepts*. Abraham being called out to hot service, and such as was against flesh and blood, was content. God bids him offer up his son Isaac, Gen. xxii. 2. This was a great work. Isaac was the son of his old age, the son of his love, and the son of the promise: Christ, the Messiah, was to come of his line—*In Isaac shall thy seed be blessed*; so that, to offer up *Isaac*, seemed not only to oppose Abraham's reason, but his *faith* too; for if Isaac die, the world, for aught he knew, must be without a Mediator. Besides, if Isaac be sacrificed, was there no other hand to do it but Abraham's? Must the father needs be the executioner? Must he that was the instrument of giving Isaac his being, be the instrument of taking it away? Yet Abraham doth not dispute or hesitate, but believes against *hope*, and

is content with God's prescription. So when God called him to *leave his country*, Heb. xi. 1, he was content. Some would have argued thus—"What, leave all my friends, my native soil, my brave situation, and go turn pilgrim? Abraham is content: besides Abraham went blindfold—*He knew not whither he went*, verse 8. God held him in suspense: he must go wander, he knows not where; and when he doth come to the place God had laid out for him, he knows not what oppositions he shall meet with there—the world doth seldom cast a favourable aspect upon strangers, Gen. xxxii. 16—yet he is content, and obeys. *He sojourned in the Land of Promise*, Heb. xi. 9. Behold a little his pilgrimage. First, he goes to Charan, a city in Mesopotamia; when he had sojourned there awhile, his father dies; then he removes to Sichem, then to Bethlehem, in Canaan; there a famine ariseth; *then* he went down to Egypt; after that he returned into Canaan; when he came there—it is true he had a promise, but he found nothing to answer his expectation—he had not there one foot of land, but was an exile. In this time

of his sojourning, he buried his wife ; and, as for his dwellings, he had no sumptuous buildings, but led his life in poor cottages. All this was enough to have broken any man's heart. Abraham might think thus with himself—"Is this the land I must possess? Here is no probability of any good: *all these things are against me.*" Well, is he discontented? No. God saith to him—"Abraham, go, leave thy country." And this word was enough to lead him all the world over: he is presently upon his march. Here was a man that had learned to be content. But let us descend a little lower to heathen Zeno—of whom Seneca speaks—who had once been very rich; hearing of a shipwreck, and that all his goods were drowned at sea—"Fortune," saith he—he spake in a heathen dialect—"has dealt well with me, and would have me now to study philosophy." He was content to change his course of life, to leave off being a merchant, and turn philosopher. And if a heathen said thus, shall not a Christian much more say, when the world is drained from him—"God would have me leave off following the world,

and study Christ more, and how to get to heaven." Do I see a heathen contented, and a Christian disquieted? How did Heathens vilify those things which Christians magnify? Though they knew not God, or what true happiness meant, yet would speak very sublimely of a *Numen* or Deity, and of the life to come, as Aristotle and Plato; and for those Elysian delights which they did but fancy, they undervalued and contemned the things here below. It was the doctrine they taught their scholars, and which some of them practised, *that men should strive to be contented with a little*; they were willing to make an exchange; to have less good, and more learning; and shall not we be content then to have less of the world, so we may have more of Christ? May not Christians blush to see Heathens content with a little, so much as would recruit nature, and to see themselves so transported with the love of earthly things; that if they begin a little to abate, and the *stock of provisions* grows short, they murmur, and are like Micah—*Have ye taken away my gods, and do ye ask me what I ail?* Judges xviii. 24. Have heathens gone

so far in contentment? And is it not sad for us to come short of them that came short of heaven? These heroes of their time, how did they embrace death itself! Socrates died in prison; Hercules was burnt alive; Cato—whom Seneca calls the lively image and portraiture of virtue—thrust through with a sword; but how bravely, and with what contentment of spirit, did they die! “Shall I,” said Seneca, “weep for Cato, or Regulus, or the rest of those worthies that died with so much valour and patience?” Cross providences did not make them to alter their countenances, and do I see a Christian appalled and amazed? Death did not affright them; and doth it distract us? Did the spring-head of Nature rise so high? and shall not grace, like the *waters of the sanctuary*, rise higher? We that pretend to live by faith, may we not go to school to them who had no other pilot but reason to guide them? Nay, let me come a step lower, to creatures void of reason: we see every creature is contented with its allowance; the beasts with their provender, the birds with their nests, they live only upon providence; and shall we make

ourselves below them? Let a Christian go to school to the ox and the ass to learn contentment; we think we never have enough, and are still laying up: the fowls of the air do not lay up, *they reap not, nor gather into barns*, Matt. vi. 26; it is an argument which Christ brings, to make Christians contented with their condition. The birds do not lay up, yet they are provided for and are contented. "*Are ye not,*" saith Christ, "*much better than they?*" But if you are discontented, are ye not much worse than they? Let these examples quicken and encourage us to be content.

SECTION XII.

The twelfth argument to Contentment.

THE twelfth argument to contentment is—
"Whatever change or trouble a child of God meets with, it is all the hell he shall have." Whatever eclipse may be upon his name, or estate I may say of it as Athanasius of his banishment, it is a little cloud which will soon

be blown over ; and when the storm is past our troubles end.

Death begins a wicked man's hell, but it puts an end to a godly man's pain. Think with thyself—"What if I endure those fiery trials now, they are only intended to take away my dross." Indeed, if all our sufferings end in death, we may rejoice in the midst of them as the apostle did. What is the cup of affliction to the cup of salvation ? Lazarus could not get a crum ; he was so diseased, that the dogs took pity on him, and—as if they had been his physicians—*licked his sores*. This was but a short affliction ; the angels quickly fetched him out of it. If all our sorrows be in this life, and in the midst of them we may have the love of God ; then it is no more pain but *paradise*. Deep as the pit of sorrow may appear to us now, we shall soon see the bottom of it ; it is but skin deep, it cannot touch the soul, and we may see to the end of it : it is of a short duration. After a wet night of affliction comes a bright morning of the resurrection ; if our lives be short, our trials cannot be long. As our riches take wings and fly, so do our sufferings ; then let us be contented.

SECTION XIII.

The thirteenth Argument to Contentment.

THE last argument to Contentment in this —“ To have a competency, and to want contentment, proves the want of grace.” For a man to have such a craving appetite, that the more he eats, the more he craves, you will say is a sad calamity. But what shall we say of the man whose craving thirst for money can never be quenched, and whose hungerings after riches cannot be satisfied? The apostle tells us plainly that such a one is an idolater, and the cry of such is like the horse leech,— Give, Give. But God saith they shall eat and never have enough. Hosea iv. 1. The throat of a malicious man is an open *sepulchre*, Rom. iii. 13; so is the heart of a covetous man. Covetousness is not only a *sin*, but the *punishment* of a sin. There is a secret curse upon a covetous person; he shall thirst and thirst, and never be satisfied—He that loveth silver, shall not be satisfied with silver, Eccl. v. 10; and is not this a curse? What was it but a severe

judgment upon the people of Judah? *Ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink*, Hag. i. 6. Oh! let us take heed of this *plague*. Did Esau say to his brother, "I have abundance, my brother," Gen. xxxiii. 9; or, as we translate it, *I have enough?* and shall not a Christian say so much more? It is sad that our heart should be so dead to heavenly things, and as a sponge to suck in earthly. Let all that hath been said work our minds to holy contentment.

CHAPTER XII.

Three things inserted by way of Caution.

IN the next place, I come to lay down some necessary cautions. Though, I say, a man should be contented in every estate, yet there are three estates in which he must not be contented—

1. He must not be contented in a *natural estate*; here he must learn not to be content. A sinner, in his natural state, is under the wrath of God, John, iii. 36; and shall he be content, when that dreadful vial is going to be poured out? Is it nothing to be under the scorchings of Divine fury?—Who can dwell with everlasting burnings? A sinner, as a sinner, is under the power of Satan, Acts xxvi. 18, and shall he in this estate be contented? Who would be contented to stay in the enemy's quarters? While we sleep in the lap of sin, the Devil doth to us as the Philistines did to Samson, cut the lock of our strength, and put out our eyes, 2 Cor. iv. 4. Be not content, O sinner! in this estate. For a man to be in debt body and soul, and in fear every hour to be arrested and carried prisoner to hell, shall he now be content? No. Here I preach against contentment. May you be enabled to seek deliverance from such a condition! I would hasten you out of it as the angels hastened Lot out of Sodom, Gen. xix. 15. There is a smell of the fire and brimstone upon you. The longer a man stays in his sins the more sin doth

strengthen, Heb. iii. 13. It is hard to get out of sin when the heart, as a garrison, is victualled and fortified. A young plant is easily removed; but, when the tree is once rooted, there is no stirring it. Thou, who art rooted in thy pride, unbelief, and impenitency, it will cost thee many a sad pull ere thou art plucked out of thy *natural estate*, Jer. vi. 16. It is a hard thing to have a brazen face and a broken heart. *He travaileth with iniquity*, Psal. vii. 14. Be assured, the longer you travail with your sins, the more and the sharper pangs you must expect in the *new-birth*. Oh, be not contented with your natural estate! David saith—*Why art thou disquieted, O my soul?* Psal. xliii. 5. But a sinner should say to himself—“*Why art thou not disquieted, O my soul? Why is it that thou layest afflictions so to heart, and canst not lay thy sins to heart?*” It is a mercy when we are disquieted about sin. A man had better be at the trouble of setting a bone, than to be lame and in pain all his life. Blessed is that trouble that brings the soul to Christ. It is one of the worst sights in the world to see a bad conscience quiet; of the two, better is a fever

than a lethargy. I wonder to see a man in his natural estate content! What, contented to go to hell!

2. Though, in regard of externals, a man should be in every state content, yet he must not be content in such a condition wherein God is apparently dishonoured. If a man's trade be such that he can hardly use it but he must trespass upon God's commands—and so *makes a trade of sin*—he must not content himself in such a condition. God never called any man to such a calling as is sinful: a man in this case had better knock off and desist; better lose some of his gain, that he may lessen some of his guilt. So for servants that live in a *profane family*—the very suburbs of hell—where the name of God is not called upon, unless when it is taken in vain; they are not to content themselves in such a place, they are to come *out of the tents of these sinners*; there is a double danger in living among the profane—

1. Lest we come to be infected with the poison of their ill example. Joseph, living in Pharaoh's court, had learned to *swear by the life*

of *Pharaoh*, Gen. xlii. 15. We are prone to such an example: men take in deeper impressions by the *eye*, than by the *ear*. Dives was a bad pattern; and he had many brethren, who seeing him sin, trod just in his steps—"Therefore," saith he, "I pray thee, send him to my father's house; for I have five brethren, that he may testify to them, that they come not into this place of torment," Luke xvi. 27, 28. Dives knew which way they went; it is easy to catch a disease from another, but not to catch health. The bad will sooner *corrupt* the good, than the good will *convert* the bad. Take an equal quantity and proportion, so much sweet wine, with so much sour vinegar; the vinegar will sooner sour the wine, than the wine will sweeten the vinegar. Sin is compared to the *plague*, 1 Kings viii. 37, and to *leaven*, 1 Cor. v. 7, to show of what a spreading nature it is. A bad master makes a bad servant. Jacob's cattle, by looking on the rods which were speckled and ring-straked, conceived like the rods: we do as we see others before us, especially *above* us. If the head be sick, the other parts of the body are distempered. If the sun shine not upon the

mountains, it must needs set in the valleys. We pray—*Lead us not into temptation*; and do we lead ourselves into temptation? Lot was the world's miracle, who kept himself fresh in Sodom's salt water.

2. By living in an evil family, we are liable to incur their punishment—*Pour out thy wrath upon the families that call not upon thy name*, Jer. xiii. 25. For want of pouring out prayer, the wrath of God was ready to be poured out. It is dangerous living in the *tents of Kedar*. When God sends his *flying roll*, written within and without with curses, it *enters into the house of the thief and perjurer, and it consumes the timber and the stones thereof*, Zach. v. 4. Is it not of sad consequence to live in a profane perjured family, when the sin of the governor pulls his house about his ears? If the stone and timber be destroyed, how shall the servant escape? And suppose God send not a *temporal roll* of curses in the family, there is a *spiritual roll*, and that is worse, Prov. iii. 33. Be not content to live where religion dies. *Salute the brethren, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house*, Col. iv. 15. The house of the

godly is a *little church* ; the house of the wicked a *little hell*, Prov. vii. 27. Oh, incorporate yourselves into a religious family : the house of a good man is perfumed with a blessing, Prov. iii. 33. When the holy oil of grace is poured on the head, the *savour* of this ointment sweetly diffuseth itself, and the *virtue* of it runs down upon the skirts of the family. Pious examples are very magnetical and forcible. Seneca said to his sister—"Though I leave you not wealth, yet I will leave you a good example." Let us ingraft ourselves among the saints : by being often among the spices, we come to smell of them.

3. The third caution is—Though in every condition we must be content, yet we are not to content ourselves with a *little grace*. Grace is the *best blessing*. Though we should be contented with a competency of estate, yet not with a small portion of grace. It was the end of Christ's ascension to heaven, *to give gifts* : and the end of those gifts, *that we may grow up into him who is the head, Christ*, Eph. iv. 15. Where the apostle distinguisheth between our *being* in Christ, and our *growing* in him,

our ingrafting and our flourishing. Be not content with a morsel of religion.

It is not enough that there be *life*, but there must be *fruit*. Barrenness in the Law was accounted a curse. The further we are from fruit, the nearer we are to cursing, Heb. vi. 8. It is a sad thing when men are fruitful only *in the unfruitful works of darkness*. Be not content with a drachm or two of grace! Oh, covet more grace! never think thou hast enough. We are bid *covet the best things*, 1 Cor. xii. 31. It is a heavenly ambition when we desire to be high in God's favour; a blessed contention, when all the strife is, who shall be the most holy. St. Paul, though he was content with a little of the world, yet not with a little grace; he *reached forward and pressed towards the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*, Phil. iii. 14. A true Christian is a *wonder*; he is the most contented, and yet the least satisfied: he is contented with a morsel of bread, and a little water in the cruse, yet never satisfied with a little grace; he doth pant and breathe after more. This is his prayer—
“ Lord, more conformity to Christ, more com-

munion with Christ." He would fain have Christ's image more lively pictured upon his soul. True grace is always progressive : as the saints are called *lamps* and *stars* in regard of their *light*, so *trees of righteousness*, Isai. lxi. 3, for their growth ; they are indeed like the trees of life, bringing forth several sorts of fruit.

A true Christian grows, 1, in *beauty*.—Grace is the best complexion of the soul ; it is at the first plantation like Rachel, fair to look upon ; but still, the more it lives, the more it sends forth its rays of beauty. Abraham's faith was at first beautiful ; but at last it did shine in its orient colours, and grew so illustrious, that God himself was in love with it, and makes his faith a pattern to all believers.

2. A true Christian grows in sweetness. A poisonous weed may grow as much as the hysop, or rosemary ; the poppy in the field as the corn ; the crab, as the pearmain : but the one hath a harsh, sour taste ; the other mellows as it grows. So a hypocrite may grow in outward dimensions as much as a child of God ; he may pray as much, profess as much ; but he

grows only in magnitude, he brings forth sour grapes, his duties are leavened with pride ; the other ripens as he grows ; he grows in love, humility, faith, which do mellow and sweeten his duties, and make them come off with a better relish. The believer grows as a flower : he casts a fragrancy and perfume.

3. A true Christian grows in *strength* ; he grows still more *rooted* and *settled*. The more the tree grows, the more it spreads its root in the earth, Col ii. 7. A Christian, who is a plant of the heavenly Jerusalem, the longer he grows, the more he incorporates into Christ, and sucks spiritual juice and sap from him ; he is a dwarf in regard of humility, but a giant in regard of strength. He is strong to do duties, to bear burdens and to resist temptations,

4. He grows vigorous in the *exercise of his grace* ; he hath not only oil in his lamp, but his lamp burning and shining. Grace is active and dexterous. Christ's vines do flourish, Cant vi. 11 ; hence we read of a *lively hope*, 1 Pet i. 3, and a *fervent love*, 1 Pet i 22 ; here is the activity of grace. In-

deed, sometimes grace is as a sleepy habit in the soul, like sap in the vine, not exerting its vigour ; which may be occasioned through spiritual sloth, or by reason of falling into some sin ; but this is only for a while : the *spring* of grace will come, the *flowers will appear*, and the *fig tree put forth her green figs*. The fresh gales of the Spirit do sweetly revive and refocillate grace. The Church of Christ, whose heart was a *garden*, and her graces as precious *spices*, prays for the heavenly breathings of the Spirit, that her sacred spices might flow out, Cant iv. 16.

5. A true Christian grows both in the kind and in the degree of grace. To his spiritual *living* he gets an augmentation ; he adds to *faith, virtue* ; to *virtue, knowledge* ; to *knowledge, temperance, &c.* 2 Pet i. 5, 6. Here is grace growing in the *kind* ; and he goes on *from faith to faith*, Rom i. 17 ; there is grace growing in the *degree*. *We are bound to give thanks to God for you, brethren, because your faith groweth exceedingly*, 2 Thess. i. 3, it increaseth over and above. And the apostle speaks of those spirit-

ual plants which were laden with Gospel fruit, Phil. i. 11. A Christian is compared to the vine—an emblem of fruitfulness—he must bear full clusters : we are bid to perfect that which is *lacking in our faith*, 1 Thess. iii. 10. A Christian must never be so old as to be past bearing ; he brings forth *fruit in his old age*, Psal. xcii. 14. A heaven-born plant is ever growing : he never thinks he grows enough ; he is not content unless he adds every day one cubit to his spiritual stature. We must not be content just with so much grace as will keep life and soul together ; a drachm or two must not suffice, but we must be still increasing *with the increase of God*, Col. ii. 19. We had need renew our strength as the *eagle*, Isa. xl. 31. Our sins are renewed, our wants are renewed, our temptations are renewed, and shall not our *strength* be renewed ? Oh, be not content with the first appearance of grace ! grace in its infancy and minority. You look for degrees of glory, be you Christians of Degrees. Though a believer should be contented with a morsel in his estate, yet not with a morsel in religion. A Christian of the right breed la-

bours still to excel himself, and come near unto that holiness in God, who is the original, the pattern, and antitype of all holiness.

CHAPTER XIII.

USE IV.

Showing how a Christian may know whether he hath learned this divine lesson of Art.

THUS having laid down these three Cautions, I proceed in the next place to a Use of Trial. 4. How may a Christian know that he hath learned this lesson of contentment? I shall lay down some characters by which you shall know it—

1. A contented spirit is a *silent spirit*. He hath not one word to say against God. I was *dumb*, or *silent*, because *thou, Lord, didst it*, Psal. xxxix. 2. Contentment silenceth all dispute—*He sitteth alone, and keepeth silence*, Lam. iii. 28. There is a sinful silence, when God is dishonoured, his truth wounded, and men hold their peace: this silence is a loud sin; and there is a *holy* silence, when the soul sits down quiet and content with its condition. When Samuel tells Eli that heavy

message from God, that he would *judge his house, and that the iniquity of his family should not be purged away with sacrifice for ever*, 1 Sam. iii. 13, doth Eli murmur or dispute? No; he hath not one word to say against God—*It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good*, verse 18. A discontented spirit saith, as Pharaoh—“*Who is the Lord?*” Why should I suffer all this? Why should I be brought into this low condition? *Who is the Lord?* But a gracious heart saith as Eli—“*It is the Lord; let him do what he will with me.*” When Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, had offered up *strange fire*, and *fire went from the Lord and devoured them*, Lev. x. 1; is Aaron now in a passion of discontent? No; *Aaron held his peace*, verse 3. A contented spirit is never angry, unless with himself, for having hard thoughts of God. When Jonah said, *I do well to be angry*: this was not a contented spirit, it did not become a prophet.

2. A contented spirit *is a cheerful spirit*. Contentment is something more than *patience*; for *patience* denotes only submission, contentment denotes *cheerfulness*. A contented Chris-

tian is more than passive; he doth not only *bear the cross*, but *take up the cross*, Matt. xvi. 24. He looks upon God as a wise God; and, whatever he doth, it is in order to a cure; hence the contented Christian is cheerful; and, with the apostle, *takes pleasure in infirmities, distresses, &c.* 2 Cor. xii. 10. He doth not only submit to God's dealings, but rejoice in them; he doth not only say—"Just is the Lord in all that is befallen me;" but "*Good is the Lord.*" This is to be contented. A sullen melancholy is hateful. It is said, God loves a *cheerful giver*, 2 Cor. ix. 7, and God loves a *cheerful liver*. We are bid, in Scripture, not to be *careful*; but we are nowhere bid not to be *cheerful*. He that is contented with his condition, doth not abate of his spiritual joy; and, indeed, he hath that within him which is the ground of cheerfulness; he carries a pardon sealed in his heart, Matt. ix. 2.

3. A contented spirit is a *thankful spirit*, Job i. 21. This is a degree above the other—*In every thing giving thanks*, 1 Thes. ii. 5. A gracious heart spies mercy in every condition, therefore hath his heart screwed up to

thankfulness: others will bless God for prosperity, he blesseth him for affliction. Thus he reasons with himself—"Am I in want? God sees it better for me to want, than to abound. God is now dieting of me, he sees it better for my spiritual health sometimes to be kept fasting:" therefore he doth not only submit, but is thankful. Discontent is ever complaining of his condition; the contented spirit is ever giving thanks. Oh, what height of grace is this! A contented heart is a *temple*, where the praises of God are sung forth; not a *sepulchre*, wherein they are buried. A contented Christian, in the greatest straits, hath his heart enlarged, and dilated in thankfulness. He oft contemplates God's love in the dispensations of his providence, and in the displays of his grace towards him; he sees that he is a *monument* of mercy, therefore desires to be a *pattern* of praise. There is always gratulatory music in a contented soul: the Spirit of grace works in the heart like new wine; which, under the heaviest pressures of sorrow, will have a vent open for thankfulness. This is to be content.

4. He that is content, no condition comes

amiss to him ; so it is in the *text*—*in whatsoever state I am, &c.* A contented Christian can turn himself to any thing, either want, or abound. The people of Israel knew neither how to abound, nor yet how to want ; when they were in want, they murmured—*Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?* Psal. lxxviii. 19. And when they eat and were filled, then they lifted up the heel. Paul knew how to manage every condition : he could be either a note higher, or lower ; and in this sense, he could be any thing or he could be nothing ; he could do any thing that God would have him. If he were in prosperity, he knew how to be thankful ; if in adversity, he knew how to be patient ; he was neither lifted up with the one, nor cast down with the other. He could carry a greater sail or lesser : thus a contented Christian knows how to turn himself to any condition. We have those who can be contented in *some conditions*, but not in every condition : they can be content in a wealthy estate, when they have the streams of milk and honey ; while God's candle shines upon their head, now they are content ; but if the wind turn, and be

against them, then they are discontented. While they have a silver crutch to lean upon, they are contented; but if God breaks this crutch, then they are discontented: but Paul had learned, in every state, to carry himself with equanimity of mind. Others could be content with their affliction, so God would give them leave to pick and choose. They could be content to bear *such* a cross; they could better endure sickness than poverty; or bear loss of estate, than loss of children: if they might have such a man's cross, they could be content; any condition but the present. This is not to be content. A contented Christian does not go to choose his cross, but leaves God to choose for him; he is content, both for the *kind* and for the *duration*. A contented spirit saith—"Let God apply what medicine he pleaseth, and let it lie on as long as it will; I know, when it hath done its cure, and eaten the venom of sin out of my heart, God will take it off again." In a word, a contented Christian, being sweetly captivated under the authority of God's word, desires to be wholly at God's disposal, and is willing to live in that sphere

and climate where God has set him ; and, if at any time he hath been an instrument of doing noble and brave service to the public, he knows he is but a *rational tool*, a servant to authority, and is content to return to his former private condition of life. Cincinnatus, after he had done worthily, and purchased to himself great fame in his dictatorship, did, notwithstanding, afterwards voluntarily return to till and manure his four acres of ground. Thus should it be with Christians, professing *godliness with contentment*. Having served Mars, not daring to offend Jupiter ; lest otherwise they discover only to the world a *brutish valour* ; being so untamed and headstrong, that when they have conquered others, yet they are not able to rule their own spirits.

5. He that is contented with his condition, to rid himself out of trouble, will not run himself into sin. I deny not but a Christian may lawfully seek to change his condition : so far as God's providence doth go before, he may follow ; but when men will not follow providence, but run before it, as he said—*This evil is of the Lord, why should I wait any longer ?*

2 Kings vi. 33. If God doth not open the door by his providence, they will break it open, and wind themselves out of affliction by sin, bringing their souls into trouble by bringing their estates out of trouble: this is far from holy contentment; this is unbelief broken out into rebellion. A contented Christian is willing to wait God's leisure, and will not stir till God opens a door. As Paul said in another case—*They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? Nay, verily, but let them come themselves, and fetch us out,* Acts xvi. 37. So, with reverence, saith the contented Christian—"God hath cast me into this condition; and, though it be sad and troublesome, yet I will not stir till God, by a clear providence, fetch me out." Thus those brave-spirited Christians, Heb. xi. 35, *accepted not deliverance*; that is, upon base, dishonourable terms. They would rather stay in prison, than purchase their liberty by carnal compliance. Estius observes concerning them. They might not only have had their enlargement, but been raised to honour, and put into offices of trust; yet the

honour of religion was dearer to them than either liberty or honour. A contented Christian will not remove, till, as the Israelites, he see a *pillar of cloud and fire* going before him — *It is good that a man should both hope, and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord*, Lam. iii. 26. It is good to stay God's leisure; and not to extricate ourselves out of trouble, till we see the Star of God's providence pointing out a way to us.

CHAPTER XIV.

USE V.

Containing a Christian Directory, or Rules about Contentment.

I PROCEED now to a Use of Direction, to show Christians how they may attain to this Divine Art of Contentment. Certainly it is feasible, others of God's saints have reached to it. St. Paul here had it; and what do we think of those we read of in the little book of martyrs, Heb xi., who had trials of cruel mockings and scourgings, they wandered about in deserts and caves, clothed with sheep-skins and with goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted and tormented, yet they were contented! So that it is possible for us to possess it! And here I shall lay down some Rules for Holy Contentment.

SECTION I.

RULE I.

Advancement of Faith is necessary.

ALL our disquietnesses do issue immediately from unbelief. It is this that raiseth the storm of discontent in the heart. Oh, set faith at work! It is the property of faith to silence our doubtings, to scatter our fears, to still the heart when the passions are up. Faith works the heart to a sweet serene composure; it is not having food and raiment, but having faith, which will make us content. Faith chides down passion; when Reason begins to swim, let Faith swim.

QUEST. How doth faith work contentment?

ANSW. 1. Faith shows the soul, that whatever its trials are, yet it is from the hand of a kind Father: it is indeed a bitter cup; but *shall I not drink the cup which my Father hath given me to drink?* John xviii. 11. It is love to my soul; God *corrects* with the same love

that he *crowns* me. God is now training me up for heaven ; he carves me, to make me a polished pillar fit to stand in the heavenly mansion. These sufferings bring forth patience, humility, even the peaceable fruits of righteousness, Heb xii. 11. And if God can bring such sweet fruit out of a sour stock, let Him graft me where he please. Thus faith brings the heart to holy contentment.

2. Faith sucks the honey of contentment out of the hive of the Promise. Christ is the Vine, the promises are the clusters of grapes that grow upon this Vine ; and Faith presseth the sweet vine of contentment out of these spiritual clusters of the promises. I will show you but one cluster—The Lord will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly, Psal. lxxxiv. 11 ; here is enough for faith to live upon. The Promise is the flower out of which Faith distils the spirits and quintessence of divine contentment. In a word, Faith carries up the soul, and makes it aspire after more noble and generous delights than earth affords, and to live in the world above the world. Would you

lead contented lives, live up to the height of your faith.

SECTION II.

RULE II.

Breathe after Assurance.

OH, let us get the interest cleared between God and our own souls! Interest is a word much in use; a pleasing word: interest in great friends, interest-money. Oh, if there be an interest worth looking after, it is an interest between God and the soul. Labour to say with Thomas, *my Lord and my God*. To be without money and without friends, and without God too, Eph. ii. 12, is sad; but he whose faith doth flourish into assurance, that can say, with St. Paul, *I know in whom I have believed*, 2 Tim. i. 12;—be assured that man hath enough to give his heart contentment. When a man's debts are paid, and he can go abroad without fear of arresting, what contentment is this! Oh, let your title be

cleared! if God be ours, whatever we want in the creature is infinitely made up in him. Do I want bread? I have Christ, the Bread of Life. Am I under defilement? His blood is like the trees of the sanctuary; not only for meat, but medicine, Ezek. xlvii. 12. If any thing in the world is worth labouring for, it is to get sound evidences that God is ours. If this be once cleared, what can come amiss? No matter what storms I meet with, so that I know where to put in for harbour. He that hath God to be his God, is so well contented with his condition, that he doth not much care whether he hath any thing else. To rest in a condition where a Christian cannot say God is his God, is a matter of *fear*: and if he can say so truly, and yet is not contented, is matter of *shame*. David *encouraged himself in the Lord his God*, although it was sad with him, 1 Sam. xxx. 62. Ziklag was burnt, his wives taken captive, he lost all, and had like to have lost his soldiers' hearts too—for they *spake of stoning him*—yet he had the ground of contentment within him, viz. *an interest in God*; and this was a pillar of supportment to

his spirit. He that knows *God is his*, and all that is in God is *for his good* ; if this doth not satisfy, I know nothing will.

SECTION III.

RULE III.

Pray for a humble Spirit.

THE humble man is the contented man : if his estate be low, his heart is lower than his estate ; therefore he is contented. If his esteem is the world below, he that is little in his own eyes will not be much troubled to be little in the eyes of others. He hath a meaner opinion of himself, than others can have of him. The humble man studies his own unworthiness ; he looks upon himself as *less than the least* of God's mercies, Gen. xxxii. 10, and then a *little* will content him. He cries out with Paul, that he is *the chief of sinners*, 1 Tim. i. 15, therefore doth not murmur, but admire : he doth not say his comforts are small, but his sins are great. He thinks it a mercy he is out

of hell ; therefore is contented. He doth not go to carve out a more happy condition to himself ; he knows the worst piece God cuts him is better than he deserves. A proud man is never contented ; he is one that hath a high opinion of himself ; therefore, under small blessings is disdainful, under small crosses impatient. The humble spirit is the contented spirit ; if his cross be light, he reckons it in the inventory of his mercies ; if it be heavy, yet takes it upon his knees, knowing that when his estate is bad, it is to make him the better. Where you lay humility for the foundation, contentment will be the superstructure, and Christ the topstone.

SECTION IV.

RULE IV.

Keep a clear Conscience. 1 Tim. iii. 9.

CONTENTMENT is the *manna* that is laid up in the ark of a good conscience. Oh, take heed of indulging in any sin ! It is as natural

for guilt to breed disquietude, as for the earth to breed worms. Sin lies like Jonah in the ship, it raises a tempest. If dust or motes be gotten into the eye, they make the eye water, and cause a soreness in it; if the eye be clear, then it is free from that soreness. If sin be gotten into the conscience, which is as the eye of the soul, then grief and disquiet breed there: but keep the eye of conscience clear, and all is well. What Solomon saith of a good stomach, I may say of a *good conscience*; Prov. xxvii. 7: *To the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet*; so to a good conscience every bitter thing is sweet; it can pick contentment out of the *Cross*. A good conscience turns the waters of Marah into wine. Would you have a quiet heart? Get a smiling conscience. I wonder not to hear Paul say, he was in every state content; when he could make that triumph—*I have lived in all good conscience unto this day*, Acts xxiii. 1. When once a man's reckonings are clear, it must needs let in abundance of contentment into the heart. A good conscience can suck contentment out of the bitterest drug: under slanders

—*This is our rejoicing, the testimony of our conscience*, 2 Cor. i. 12. In case of imprisonment, Paul had his prison-songs, and could play the sweet lesson of contentment when his feet were in the stocks, Acts, xvi. 24. Augustine calls it the paradise of a good conscience; and, if it be so, then in prison we may be in paradise. When the times are troublesome, a good conscience makes a calm: if conscience be clear, what though the days be cloudy? Is it not a contentment to have a friend always at hand to speak a good word for us? Such a friend is a clear conscience. A good conscience, is like David's *harp*, it drives away the evil spirit of discontent. When thoughts begin to arise, and the heart is disquieted, conscience saith to a man, as the king did to Nehemiah: *Why is thy countenance sad?* Neh. ii. 2. So saith conscience, "Hast not thou the *seed of God in thee?* Art thou not an *heir of the Promise?* Hast not thou a treasure that thou canst never be plundered of? Why is thy countenance sad?" Oh, keep conscience clear, and you shall never want contentment! For a man to keep the *pipes* of his body, the

veins and arteries, free from colds and obstructions, is the best way to maintain health; so to keep conscience clear, and to preserve it from the obstructions of guilt, is the best way to maintain contentment. First, conscience is pure, and then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. James iii. 7.

SECTION V.

RULE V.

Learn to deny yourselves.

Look well to your affections, bridle them in. Do two things—

- { 1. Mortify your desires.
- { 2. Moderate your delights.

1. *Mortify your desires.* We must not be of the Dragon's temper, who, they say, is so thirsty, that no water will quench his thirst—*Mortify, therefore, your inordinate affection,* Col. iii. 5. In the Greek, it is, your *evil affec-*

tion ; to show that our desires, when they are inordinate, are *evil*. Crucify your desires, be as dead men : a dead man hath no appetite.

QUEST. How should a Christian martyr his desires ?

ANSW. 1. Get a right judgment of the things here below ; they are mean, beggarly things—*Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not*, for riches make themselves wings and fly away ? Prov. xxiii. 5. Thy appetite must be guided by reason ; the affections are the feet of the soul : therefore they must follow the judgment, not lead it.

2. Often seriously meditate of mortality. Death will soon crop those flowers which we delight in, and pull down the fabric of those bodies which we so much delight to garnish and beautify. Think, when you are locking up your money in your chest, you shall shortly be screwed up in your coffin.

Moderate your delights. Set not your hearts too much upon any creature, Psal. lxix. 20. What we over-love, we shall over-grieve. Rachel set her heart too much upon her children ; and, when she had lost them, she lost

herself too : such a vein of grief was opened as could not be stanchèd—*She refused to be comforted.* Here was discontent. When we let any creature lie too near our heart, when God pulls away that comfort, a piece of our heart is rent away with it. Too much fondness ends in frowardness. Those that would be content in the want of mercy, must be moderate in their enjoyment. Jonathan dipped the rod in honey, he did not trust in it. Let us take heed of ingulping ourselves in pleasure : better have a spare diet, than, by having too much to be surfeited.

SECTION VI.

RULE VI.

Pray for a Foretaste of Heaven in your Heart.

SPIRITUAL things satisfy : the more of heaven is in us, the less earth will content. He that hath once tasted the love of God, his thirst is much quenched towards sublunary things, the joys of God's Spirit are heart-filling and

heart-cheering joys ; he that hath these, hath heaven begun in him, Rom. xiv. 17 ; and shall we not be content to be in heaven ?—*Seek the things that are above*, Col. iii. 1 ; fly aloft in your affections, thirst after the graces and comforts of the Spirit. The eagle, that flies above in the air, fears not the stinging of the serpent ; the serpent creeps on his belly, and stings only such creatures as go upon the earth.

Discontent is a serpent that stings only an earthly heart. A heavenly soul, that with the eagle flies aloft, finds abundantly enough in God to give contentment, and is not stung with the cares and disquiets of the world.

SECTION VII.

RULE VII.

Look not so much on the dark side of your Condition
as on the light.

God doth chequer his providences, white and black, as the pillar of cloud had its light side and dark. Look on the light side of thy

estate : who looks on the back side of a landscape ? Suppose thou art cast in a law-suit, there is the *dark side* ; yet thou hast some land left, there is the *light side*. Thou hast sickness in thy body, there is the *dark side* ; but grace in thy soul, there is the light side. Thou hast a child taken away, there is the dark side ; thy husband lives, there is the light side. God's providences in this life are various, represented by those speckled horses among the myrtle-trees, which were the red and white, Zach. i. 8. Mercies and afflictions are interwoven : God doth speckle his work. " Oh !" saith one, " I want such a comfort ;" but weigh all thy mercies in the balance, and that will make thee content. If a man did want a finger, would he be so discontented for the loss of that, as not to be thankful for all the other parts and joints of the body ? Look on the light side of your condition, and then all your discontents will easily disband : do not pore upon your losses, but ponder upon your mercies. What ! wouldst thou have no cross at all ? Why should one man think to have all good things, when himself is good but in part ? Canst thou expect

to have no evil about thee while thou hast so much evil in thee? If thou art not fully sanctified in this life; thou wilt not be fully satisfied? Never look for perfection of contentment till there be perfection of grace.

SECTION VIII.

RULE VIII.

Consider in what a posture we stand here in the World.

1. WE are in a military condition, we are soldiers, 2 Tim. ii. 3; now a soldier endures hardships. What, though he hath not his stately house, his rich furniture, his soft bed, his full table, yet he must not complain; he can lie on straw as well as on down; he minds not his lodging: but his thoughts run upon dividing the spoil, and the garland of honour that shall be set upon his head; and, for the hope of this, is content to run any hazard, endure any hardship. Were it not absurd to hear him complain that he wants such provision, and is fain to lie out in the fields? A Chris-

tian is a military person ; he fights the Lord's battles, he is Christ's ensign-bearer. Now, what though he endures hard fare, and the bullets fly about ? He fights for an incorruptible crown, and therefore should be content.

2. We are pilgrims and travellers. A man that is in a strange country is contented with any diet or usage ; he is glad of any thing ; though he hath not that respect or attendance that he looks for at home, nor is capable of the privileges and immunities of that place, he is content ; he knows, when he comes into his own country, he hath lands to inherit, and there he shall have honour and respect. So it is with a child of God ; he is in a pilgrim condition—"I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were," Psal. xxxix. 12. Therefore, let a Christian be content : he is in the world, but not of the world ; he is born of God, and is a citizen of the new Jerusalem, Heb. xii. 10 ; therefore, though "he hunger and thirst, and have no certain dwelling place," 1 Cor. iv. 11, yet he must be content ; it will be better when he comes into his own country.

3. We are beggars ; we beg at heaven's gate—*Give us this day our daily bread.* We live upon God's alms ; therefore must be content with any thing. A beggar must not pick and choose, he is contented with the refuse. Oh ! why dost thou murmur that art a beggar, and art fed out of the alms-basket of God's providence ?

SECTION IX.

RULE IX.

Let not your Hopes depend upon outward Things.

LEAN not upon sandy pillars. We oft build our comforts upon such a friend or estate, and when that prop is removed, all our joy is gone, and our hearts begin either to fail or fret. A lame man leans on his crutches ; and, if they break, he is undone. Let not thy contentment go upon crutches, which may soon fail ; the ground of contentment must be within thyself. The word, in the Greek, which is used for contentment, signifies self-sufficiency.

A Christian hath that from within that is able to support him, such strength of faith and *good hope through grace*, as bears up his heart in the deficiency of all outward comforts. The philosophers of old, when their estates were gone, yet could take contentment in the goods of the mind, their learning and virtue; and shall not a believer much more in the grace of the Spirit, that rich enamel and embroidery of the soul? Say, with thyself—"If friends leave me, if riches take wings, yet I have that within which comforts me, viz. a heavenly treasure; when the blossoms of my estate are blown off, still there is the sap of contentment in the root of my heart; I have still an interest in God, and that interest cannot be broken off." Oh! never place your felicity in these dull and beggarly things here below.

SECTION X.

RULE X.

Let us often compare our Condition.

QUEST. How shall I compare myself?

ANS. Make this five-fold comparison.

1. Let us compare our condition and our desert together ; if we have not what we desire, we have more than we deserve. For our mercies, we have deserved less ; for our afflictions, we have deserved more.

First, In regard to our mercies, we have deserved less. What can we deserve ?—*Can man be profitable to the Almighty?* We live upon free grace. Alexander gave a great gift to one of his subjects. The man, being much taken with it—“ This,” saith he, “ is more than I am worthy of !” —“ I do not give thee this,” saith the king, “ because thou art worthy of it, but I give a gift like Alexander.” Whatever we have is not merit, but bounty ; the least bit of bread is more than God owes us ; we can bring fagots to our own burning, but not one flower to the garland of our salvation : he that hath the least mercy will die in God’s debt.

Secondly, In regard of our afflictions, we have deserved more. *Thou hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve,* Ezra ix. 13. Is our condition sad ? We have deserved it should it be worse. Hath God taken away our estate from us ? He might have taken away

Christ from us. Hath he thrown us into prison? He might have thrown us into hell. He can destroy us as easy as to save us. This should make us contented.

2. Let us compare our condition with others, and this will make us content. We look at them who are above us; let us look at them who are below us. We see one in his silks, another in his sackcloth; one hath the waters of a full cup wrung out to him, another is mingling his drink with tears. How many pale faces do we behold, whom not sickness, but want, hath brought into a consumption! Think of this, and be content. It is worse with them, who perhaps deserve better than we, and are higher in God's favour. Am I in prison? Was not Daniel in a worse place, viz. the lion's den? Do I live in a mean cottage? Look on them who are banished from their houses. We read of the primitive saints, *that they wandered up and down in sheep-skins and goat-skins, of whom the world was not worthy*, Heb. xi. 37. Hast thou a gentle fit of an ague? Look on them who are tormented with the stone and gout, &c. Others of God's

children have had greater afflictions, and have borne them better than we. Daniel fed upon pulse, and drank water, yet was fairer than they who ate of the king's portion, Dan. i. 15. Some Christians, who have been in a lower condition, that have fed upon pulse and water, have looked better, viz. been more patient and contented, than we who enjoy abundance. Do others rejoice in affliction, and do we repine? Can they take up their cross, and walk cheerfully under it? And do we, under a lighter cross, murmur?

3. Let us compare our condition with Christ's upon earth. What a poor, mean condition, was he pleased to be in for us? He was contented with any thing. *For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet, for your sakes, he became poor,* 2 Cor. viii. 9. He could have brought down a house from heaven with him, or challenged the high places of the earth: but he was contented to be in the *wine-press*, that we might not lay under the weight of Almighty wrath; and to live poor, that we might die rich. The manger was his cradle, the cobwebs his canopy;

he, who is now preparing mansions for us in heaven, had none for himself on earth, *he had nowhere to lay his head.* Christ came in the form of a beggar; who, *being in the form of God, took upon him the form of a servant,* Phil. ii. 7. We read not of any sums of money he had; when he wanted money, he was fain to work a miracle for it, Matt. xvii. 27. Jesus Christ was in a low condition; he was never high, but when he was lifted up upon the cross, and that was his humility; he was content to live poor, and die despised. Oh, compare your condition with Christ's!

4. Let us compare our condition with what it was once, and this will make us content.

First, Let us compare our *spiritual estate* with what it was once. What were we when we lay in our blood? We were heirs apparent to hell, having no right to pluck one leaf from the Tree of the Promises; it was a *Christless* and *hopeless* condition, Eph. ii. 12. But now hath God delivered us from the curse and condemnation of his righteous Law: he hath taken you out of the wild olive of nature, and engrafted you into Christ, making you living

branches of that living Vine ; he hath not only caused the light to shine *upon* you, but *into* you, 2 Cor. iv. 6, and hath interested you in all the privileges of sonship. Is not this enough to make the soul content ?

Secondly, Let us compare our *temporal estate* with what it was once. Alas ! we had nothing when we stepped out of the womb—*For we brought nothing with us into the world*, 1 Tim. vi. 7. If we have not that which we desire, we have more than we did bring with us ; we brought nothing with us *but sin*. Other creatures bring something with them into the world ; the lamb brings wool, the silk-worm silk, &c., but we brought nothing with us. What if our condition at present be low ? It is better than it was once ; therefore, having food and raiment, let us be content. Whatever we have, God in his providence hath provided it for us ; and, if we lose all, yet we have as much as we brought with us. This was that which made Job content—*Naked came I out of my mother's womb*, Job i. 21 ; as if he had said—“ Though God hath taken away all from me, yet why should I murmur ? I am as rich now

as I was when I came into the world ; I have as much left as I brought with me : naked came I hither and naked shall I return ; therefore, blessed be the name of the Lord.”

5. Let us compare our condition with what it shall be shortly. There is a time shortly coming, when, if we had all the riches of India, they would do us no good : we must die, and can carry nothing with us. So saith the apostle—“ *It is certain we can carry nothing out of the world,*” 1 Tim. vi. 7 ; therefore it follows—“ *Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content,*” verse 8. Open the rich man’s grave, and see what is there ; you may find the miser’s bones, but not his riches : were we to live for ever here, or could we carry our riches into another world, then indeed we might be discontented, when we look upon our empty bags. But it is not so : God may presently seal a warrant for death to apprehend us ; and, when we die, we cannot carry our estate with us. Honour and riches descend not into the grave, why then are we troubled at our outward condition ? Why do we disguise ourselves with discontent ? Oh ! lay up a stock of grace, be rich in faith

and good works, then riches will follow us, Rev. xiv. 13. No other coin but grace will pass current in heaven; silver and gold will not go there. Labour to be rich towards God; and, as for other things, be not solicitous—*We shall carry nothing with us*, Luke xii. 21.

SECTION XI.

RULE XI.

Do not bring your condition to your mind, but bring your mind to your condition.

THE way for a Christian to be contented is, not by raising his estate higher, but by bringing his spirit lower; not by making his barns wider, but his heart narrower. One man, a whole lordship or manor will not content him; another is satisfied with a few acres of land. What is the difference? The one studies to satisfy curiosity, the other necessity; the one thinks what he may have, the other thinks what he may spare.

SECTION XII.

RULE XII.

Study the Vanity of the Creature.

It matters not whether we have more or less of these things; they have vanity written upon the frontispiece of them all. The world is like a shadow that declineth: it is delightful, but deceitful; it promiseth us more than it fulfils:

Pleasure while we pursue it flies,
And fancied bliss deludes our eyes.

And it fails us when we have most need of it. All the world rings changes, and is constant only in its disappointments: what then, if we have less of that which is at best but voluble and fluid? The world is as full of mutation as motion; and, what if God cuts us short in sublunaries? The more a man hath to do with the world, the more he hath to do with vanity. The world may be compared to ice, which is smooth, but slippery; or to the Egyptian tem-

ples, without very beautiful and sumptuous ; but within, nothing to be seen but the image of an ape. Every creature saith, concerning satisfaction, it is not in me. The world is not a filling, but a flying comfort. It is like a game at tennis : Providence bandies her golden balls, first to one and then to another. Why are we discontented at the loss of these things, but because we expect that from them which is not, and refuse that in them which we ought not ? *Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd*, Jon. iv. 6. What a vanity was it ? Is it much to see a withered gourd smitten ? or, to see the moon dressing itself in a new shape and figure ?

SECTION XIII.

RULE XIII.

Get Fancy regulated.

It is the fancy which raiseth the price of things above their real worth. What is the reason one tulip is worth five pounds, another

perhaps, not worth one shilling? Fancy raiseth the price; the difference is rather imaginary than real: so, why it should be better to have thousands than hundreds is because men fancy it so. If we could fancy a lower condition better, as having less care in it, and less account, it would be far more eligible. The water that springs out of the rock, drinks as sweet as if it came out of a golden chalice; things are as we fancy them. Ever since the Fall, the fancy is distempered—*God saw that the imagination of the thoughts of the heart were evil*, Gen. vi. 5. Fancy looks through wrong spectacles; pray that God will sanctify your fancy; a lower condition would content, if the mind and fancy were set right. Diogenes preferred his cynical life before Alexander's royalty; he fancied his little cloister best. Fabricius, a poor man, yet despised the gold of King Pyrrhus.

Could we cure a distempered fancy, we might soon conquer a discontented heart.

SECTION XIV.

RULE XIV.

Consider how little will suffice Nature.

THE body is but a small continent, and is easily recruited. Christ hath taught us to pray for our daily bread. Nature is content with a little. “Not to thirst, nor to starve, is enough,” saith Gregory Nazianzen.—“Meat and drink are a Christian’s riches,” saith St. Hierom. And the Apostle saith—“*Having food and raiment, let us be content.*”

The stomach is sooner filled than the eye. How quickly would a man be content, if he would study rather to satisfy his hunger than his humour.

SECTION XV.

RULE XV.

Consider that the present condition is best for us, because it is the appointment of God.

FLESH and blood is not a competent judge. Surfeited stomachs are for banqueting stuff;

but a man, that regards his health, is rather for solid food. Vain men fancy such a condition best, and would flourish in their bravery; whereas a wise Christian hath his will melted into God's will, and thinks it best to be at his disposal. God is wise: he knows whether we need food or physic; and, if we could acquiesce in Providence, the quarrel would soon be at an end. Oh, what a strange creature would man be, if he were what he could wish himself! Be content to be at God's allowance. God knows which is the fittest pasture to put his sheep in: sometimes a more barren ground doth well; whereas rank pasture may rot. Do I meet with such a cross? God shows me what the world is: he hath no better way to wean me, than by putting me to a step-mother. Doth God stint me in my allowance? He is now dieting me. Do I meet with losses? It is that God may keep me from being lost. Every cross wind shall, at last, blow me to the right port. Did we believe that condition best which God doth parcel out to us, we should cheerfully submit, and say—The lines are fallen in pleasant places.

SECTION XVI.

RULE XVI.

[Do not too much indulge the Flesh.

WE are commanded to make no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lust thereof. The Flesh is a worse enemy than the Devil; it is a bosom traitor: an enemy within is worse. If there were no Devil to tempt, the flesh would be another Eve to tempt to the forbidden fruit. Oh, take heed of giving way to it! Whence is all our discontent, but from the fleshly part? The flesh puts us upon the immoderate pursuit of the world; it consults for ease and plenty; and, if it be not satisfied, then discontents begin to arise. Oh, let it not have the reins! Martyr the flesh. In spiritual things, the flesh is a sluggard; in secular things, an horseleech, crying—"Give, give." The flesh is an enemy to suffering; it will sooner make a man a courtier than a martyr. Oh, keep it under! Put its neck under Christ's yoke: stretch and nail it to his cross: never let a Christian look for contentment in his spirit, till he hath mortified the flesh.

SECTION XVII.

RULE XVII.

Meditate much on the Glory which shall be Revealed.

THERE are great things laid up in heaven. Though it be sad for the present, yet let us be contented, for it will shortly be better ; it is but a little while, and we shall be with Christ, bathing our souls in the fountain of his love : we shall never complain of want or injuries any more ; our cross may be heavy, but one sight of Christ will make us forget all our former sorrows. There are two things which should give contentment—

1. That God will make us able to bear our troubles ; 1 Cor. x. 13. “ God,” saith Chrysostom, “ seemeth with us like a lutanist, who will not let the strings of his lute be too slack, lest it spoil the music ; nor will he suffer them to be too hard stretched or screwed up, lest they break.” So doth God deal with us, he will not let us have too much prosperity, lest this spoil the music of prayer and repentance ; nor yet too much adversity, lest the spirit *fail be-*

fore him, and the souls which he hath made, Isai. lvii. 16.

2. When we have suffered a *while*, 1 Pet. v. 1. we shall be perfected in glory ; the cross shall be our ladder, by which we shall climb up to heaven. Be then content, and the scene will alter. God will ere long turn our water into wine : the hope of this is enough to drive away all distempers from *the heart*. Blessed be God, it will be better—*We have no continuing city here*, Heb. xiii. and xiv. ; therefore our afflictions cannot continue. A wise man looks still to the end—*The end of the just man is peace*, Psal. xxxvii. 37. Methinks the smoothness of the end should make amends for the ruggedness of the way. O eternity ! eternity ! think often of the *kingdom prepared*. David was advanced from the sheep-fold to the throne. First, he held his *shepherd's staff*, and shortly after, the *royal sceptre*. God's people may be put to hard services here ; but God hath chosen them to be *kings*, to sit upon the throne with the Lord Jesus. This, being weighed in the balance of Faith, would be an excellent means to bring the heart to contentment.

SECTION XVIII.

RULE XVIII.

Be much in Prayer.

THE last rule for contentment is—*Be much in Prayer*. Beg of God, that he will work our hearts to this blessed frame. *Is any man afflicted? let him pray*, Jam. v. 13. So, is any man discontented? let him pray. Prayer gives vent. The opening of a vein lets out the bad blood: when the heart is filled with sorrow and disquiet, prayer gives ease to the mind. The key of prayer, oiled with tears, unlocks the heart of all its discontents. Prayer is an holy spell or charm, to drive away trouble; prayer is the unbosoming of the soul, the unloading of all our cares on God's breast; and this ushers in sweet contentment. When there is any burden upon our spirits, by opening our mind to a friend, we find our heart greatly eased and quieted. It is not our *strong resolutions*, but our *strong requests*, to God, which must give the heart ease in trouble. By prayer the strength of Christ is brought into the soul;

and where that is, a man is able to go through any condition. Paul could be in every state content : but, that you may not think he was able to do this of himself, he tells you, that though he could want and abound, and *do all things*, yet it was *through Christ strengthening him*, Phil. iv. 13. It is the child that writes, but it is the scrivener guides his hand. St. Paul arrived at the hardest duty in religion, viz. *contentment* ; but the Spirit was his *pilot*, and Christ his *strength* ; and this strength was ushered in by holy prayer. Prayer is a powerful orator. Prayer is an *orator* with God, and a preventative against sin. The best way is to pray down discontent. What Luther saith of *concupiscence*, I may say of *discontent* ; prayer is a sacred leech, to suck the venom and swelling of this passion. Prayer composeth the heart, and brings it into tune. Hath God deprived you of many comforts ? Bless God that he left you the spirit of prayer.

SECTION XIX.

USE VI.

Comfort to the contented Christian.

THE last use is of comfort, or an encouraging word to the contented Christian. If there be an heaven upon earth, thou hast it. O Christian! thou mayest insult over thy troubles; and, with the Leviathan, laugh at the shaking of the spear, Job, xli. 29. What shall I say? Thou art a crown to thy profession; thou dost hold it out to all the world, that there is virtue enough in religion to give the soul contentment. Thou showest height of grace. When grace is *crowning*, it is not so much for us to be content; but when grace is *conflicting*, and meets with crosses and losses, temptations and pains, now to be content—this is a glorious thing indeed!

To a contented Christian I shall say two things for a farewell—

First, God is exceedingly taken with such a frame of heart. God saith of a contented Christian, as David once said of Goliath's sword

—*There is none like that ; give it me, 1 Sam. xxi. 9.* If you would please God, and be *men of his heart*, be contented. It is said that Rebecca made Isaac savoury meat, such as her husband loved ; would you give to God that which he loves, bring him that of contentment. The musician hath many lessons to play, but he hath one above all the rest ; there are many lessons of holy music that delight God ; the lessons of repentance, humility and patience. But this lesson of contentment is the sweetest lesson that a believer can play. But God hates a froward spirit.

Secondly, the contented Christian shall be no loser. What lost Job by his patience ? God gave him three times as much as he had before. What lost Abraham by his contentment ? He was content to leave his country at God's call ; the Lord makes a covenant with him, that he would be *his God* for ever, Gen. xvii. He changeth his name ; thou shalt no more be called Abram, but Abraham, the Father of many nations. God makes his seed as the stars of heaven ; nay, honours him with this title—*The Father of the Faithful*, Gen.

xviii. 17. The Lord makes known his secrets to him—*Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I will do?* God settles a rich inheritance upon him; that land which was a type of heaven, and afterwards translated him into the blessed Paradise. God will be sure to reward the contented Christian. As our Saviour said in another case to Nathaniel—*Because I said I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these,* John, i. 50. So I say—Art thou contented, O Christian! with a little? Thou shalt see greater things than these; God will distill the sweet influences of his love into thy soul; he will raise thee up friends: he will bless the oil in thy cruise; and, when that is done, he will crown thee with an eternal enjoyment of himself; he will give thee heaven, where thou shalt have as much contentment as thy soul can possibly thirst after.

Lastly, For the comfort and encouragement of all true Christians, I would recommend the following useful and important instructions, on the great blessings and advantages derived from Christian communion and church fellowship.

SOCIAL RELIGION.

THE highest and sweetest of all human fellowship, out of heaven, is the fellowship of a gospel church formed after the model of the Holy Scriptures: the ordinances of God's house, and the means of grace in general, are calculated to draw the hearts of a multitude to one centre; where, being all attracted by one object, and all attentive to one subject, all informed from one fountain of light, all supplied from one fountain of mercy and grace, and all filled with delight from one fountain of everlasting and infinite love, their hearts and sentiments coalesce at once, and they become, though many, as it were but one. On this account, a name and a place in God's house is said to be better than the dearest and most honourable fruits of mere natural life, 'sons and daughters;' because the enjoyments and true honours arising from fellowship with the people of God are superior to those which spring from any other branch of social life on earth.

If this be true, how highly unlovely is it

for any Christian, who deserves that honourable name, to make light of that divinely constituted relation! The Scripture speaks of believers being added to the church daily, and explains this in another place, by the following unequivocal and expressive sentence: 'They first gave themselves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.' Their uniting with the church of Christ was not an act of their own free choice, which they might perform if they pleased, or omit without any just blame; but it is expressly declared to be by the will of God that they so gave themselves up to one another, having first, by Divine Grace, been enabled to give themselves up to the Lord.—Some believers say, when asked why they live without the enjoyment of church fellowship, seeing they have a right thereto; 'We belong to the church of Christ at large already, inasmuch as we are members of his body mystical, and are by Divine Grace vitally united to our Head.' So did those believers above mentioned; for they could not have given themselves to the Lord, had they not received divine life from him with whom is the fountain of life. Indeed,

those who are not vitally united to Christ by a living and fruitful faith (which is the gift of God) have no right either to the honours or benefits of church fellowship. We have an awful proof of this truth in the case of Simon Magus, and in the divine and sudden vengeance which overtook Ananias and Sapphira, in the very covert of their own hypocrisy. But, to answer the above objection, when a real believer makes use of it to excuse his neglect of church fellowship; give me leave, my dear fellow Christian, whoever you are, to say, your reasoning on this point is just as good as if a nobleman's son, in disguise and from home, should say, 'I know I am a son and heir of such a noble family; and therefore I neither wish to be so esteemed by others, nor to enjoy the honours and privileges of my father's house.' Wise men of every description praise consistency of character and conduct; but where is the consistency of loving Christ and Christians, and yet not openly and fully professing to love either?

'Is it not consistent,' some may ask, 'to continue under that profession in which we were brought up by our parents, or other

friends, without inquiring very nicely into the merits of it; especially seeing many good and worthy Christians in our day do the same, and are well accounted of?’

It may be consistent with the state of wilful darkness (which all men who hear and obey not the gospel are declared by the word of God to be in) to suspend inquiry into that true source of divine intelligence, the Sacred Scriptures, for fear of discovering unwelcome truth there; but how it can be consistent with ‘old things being passed away, and all becoming new,’ to look to old things for a light to walk in the Lord’s new way by, it would require a considerable degree of invention to explain. My advice to inquiring Christians on this subject, is, whether in the parlour, from the pulpit, or from the press; ‘Examine the new Testament closely for yourselves: take your Lord’s advice in this, as well as in all other things, relative to religion: call no man father; for one is your Father, which is in heaven.’

Error needs a great deal of defending, to keep it from sinking into oblivion; a great deal of equivocation, to hide its certain and natural consequences from being detected by honest

inquiry ; and a great deal of learning and rhetoric to plead its cause :—but, in order to embrace truth, we need only light to see it by, and an heart to love it.

Has not he who is the Truth itself said, ‘ By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another ? And how can Christians better express their love to each other, or better manifest it to the surrounding world, than by living in a constant attention to all the endearing ties of church fellowship ; to renounce the world, and put on Christ ; to unite ourselves openly to them, whom we have good reason to esteem obedient followers of the Lamb of God ; to sit with them at the same table, and commemorate the dying love of Jesus as the one fountain of our spiritual life ; yea, to feed all at once by faith on his broken body, and view his precious blood as the rich wine that animates our immortal spirits ; to consider ourselves as redeemed by the same Almighty Friend, and to walk together in communion of heart on our way to the same everlasting home, are surely uniting and endearing ordinances. As those who be-

long to the same family can with propriety be more free one with another than such as are only on a visit ; so Christians united in church fellowship can, by virtue of their professional relation to each other, with far greater propriety exhort, rebuke, admonish, and even, by their animating mutual example, provoke one another to love and good works ; than *they* can obey those relative precepts, who, though they are brethren, have made no mutual profession of *their* divine kindred to each other. ‘The righteous,’ says the Psalmist, ‘shall flourish like the palm-trees ;’ and they are said to grow best when planted thick together. Heaven is all society, and all union ; and why should not the church on earth be as much like heaven as possible ? Yea, it is even said of the primitive church on earth, that ‘the whole multitude of the disciples were of one heart and of one soul.’

As trees often transplanted, even if they live, grow little, and bear little fruit ; so, for the most part, rambling Christians, although really the children of God, are far from being equally useful or happy with those that belong

to lively and well-ordered churches ; for they neither abide long enough under one ministry to imbibe the spirit of it, and form clear and connected ideas of doctrine : nor perceive the beauty of its influence on the practice and social conduct of those who are instructed by it. And, even supposing such to have talents for usefulness to others, before those talents are ripened into just esteem among one people, the subject of them is transplanted into a distant and different soil, where he must strike root into new connexions before he can either know or be known to any good purpose.

Besides, a well ordered church affords a Christian such near views of the best examples for imitation, as casual society can seldom boast of: should it be objected here, ' that there are instances of the nearest, most intimate, and frequent fellowship amongst some who belong not to any particular church ;' it could be easily proved, that church fellowship can be no bar to such intimacy, but is rather the nursery where such social plants thrive best ; and, being of course more looked after, bear the richest fruit. The force of example

is far from being small even in spiritual things. *Imitation* is an essential quality of human nature, whether considered in its depraved or renewed state. The apostle speaks of 'provoking one another to love and to good works;' and again, it is said of Christ himself, that he has left us 'an example that we should follow his steps.'

'Look and be like;' might perhaps serve as a proverb to all ranks and descriptions of mankind. We sometimes even insensibly imitate that in others, by being much with them, which on reflection we disapprove. Hence, how striking the propriety, beauty and utility of that exhortation with promise, 'Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord; touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and I will be your father, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.' This last mentioned scripture naturally suggests the idea of another beautiful feature in a church of Christ; namely, that it is to a Christian as his *home*. He visits elsewhere, but he dwells in the church. Yea, our Covenant God and Father calls Zion his

dwelling place ; and where should sons and daughters dwell but in their Father's house.

As the pious Watts sings,

Here would I find a settled rest,
While others go and come :
No more a stranger or a guest,
But like a child at home.

The necessary blessings which support and render life comfortable, as food, rest and society, are all sweetened to us by being enjoyed at home. The writer of this can witness, for one, that a spiritual home is a HOME indeed ; having enjoyed, for many years, that great blessing in one of the liveliest and largest of our gospel churches ; which, may the great Head of the Church continue to bless and succeed for many years to come ! To this, I know, I shall have many readers that will say, Amen. Come then, dear fellow Christians, or go, whichever suits you best, and, obeying his commands who is King in Zion, unite with some church on earth in that holy and intimate fellowship which needs only to be interrupted by the Messenger, the welcome Messenger, who brings our dismissal to the church triumphant. I speak from happy experience, as well as with

the word of God quite on my side, in highly and warmly recommending social religion ; and therefore, cannot but hope, in dependence on the Lord, that I shall meet with some success.

Social religion is the nurse of all the graces of the Holy Spirit in the souls of believers ; and those who have been most under her care can witness, with me, that she is not a dry nurse. Is it not a pity that, in this one point, the fellowship of saints on earth one with another does not more resemble that of the church triumphant ? We have infallible testimony, that the saints in heaven are members of Christ's mystical body, and as such we love them ; but we cannot convey our ideas of divine things to them, nor receive from them any account of the felicity, or manner of their blissful state, that is reserved for us, till we are as they. So we have credible testimony that the members of the several churches to which we belong are Christians, and, as far as we believe it, we rejoice with them in the common salvation ; but we have few means among us, as churches, whereby we can convey our ideas of divine things freely to each other, so as to enjoy literal fellowship. Yet, as there can be no wound in

Zion, but there is balm in Gilead suited to heal it; let those who are convinced of the truth of these observations, apply to the great Physician of souls, requesting him, who alone has sufficient skill and power, to send health and cure to all his churches.

The instruction and establishment of the members of Christ's mystical body in the knowledge and experience of all that pertains to his spiritual kingdom, especially in the knowledge of Christ himself, his near and vital relation to them, and all the benefits and blessings which flow to them through the channel of his mediation—the oneness of their interests, as different members of one head—their unity of heart, frequent fellowship one with another as the means of keeping alive and increasing that unity—their observance of the Redeemer's positive institutions, and obedience to all the moral precepts in his word; I conceive to be the great ends which should be constantly kept in view, in the use of all the means of grace. Frequent heart-fellowship, and much delight in each other, are the beauties of church order. 'By this,' saith our Lord, 'shall all men know

that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.'

The fellowship of the church, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, appears to have been maintained by the love of Christ shed abroad in their hearts; and made known, by much delight in each other's company, and free communication both of things temporal and spiritual one with another. Paul, in all his Epistles to the churches, keeps these things in view in a way of positive precept.

It has been, and will perhaps still be, objected by many, when such doctrine as this is advanced, "That the Lord's people in general have not time or opportunity for frequent social interviews; and that such things are apt to break in upon the order of families!" But these objections, if closely examined, will be found to be excuses, rather than reasons. What calling is there which ought to take the lead of our heavenly calling? What is the advantage of laying up earthly treasures, compared with that of increasing in the wisdom which cometh from above? And what the order of private families to the order of the great family

of heaven, the church of Christ. "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob."

I take the liberty of stating here a few reasons for frequent and intimate social worship. 1st. Christians were all involved in one sad state of depravity and condemnation ; and they are all called by divine grace to look to one object for life and eternal salvation. That one object of their hope, being so highly exalted, every one may look to him by faith, at once, without the least occasion of jealousy or interruption from each other ; any more than there is for an individual to conclude, that the light of the sun is not his, because every one is at liberty to enjoy the same blessing. 2d. The Redeemer paid one price for the ransom of all his people. The same Almighty Spirit makes Jesus, as a complete Saviour, manifest to them all ; and, as they are all saved and sanctified in one way, so they are all going to one everlasting home.

3d. Jesus loved his church, even to death ; and has left it this commandment, "Love one another, as I have loved you. He that hath

my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me ; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father ; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you ; continue ye in my love, John xiv. 9." And again, " This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." It appears that, from this word the apostle drew his reason for saying, " We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." The apostle says, " Love is the fulfilling of the law." From these and many other scriptures, it is plain that love is the substance of all practical and experimental religion : and from the nature of divine love in the heart of a Christian, it is evident, that *Social Religion* is its heaven upon earth. Men are made for society ; and without the presence and mutual enjoyment of each other, would be comparatively miserable. But the delight which springs from Christian fellowship is peculiarly exquisite, as well as peculiarly lasting. Its foundation, its author, its nature, its motive, and its end, all

conspire to render it incomparable and inexpressible. If these things are true, why have not the members of churches, in the present day, more knowledge of, and fellowship with one another? Oh that such a query were started by the Holy Spirit himself in the heart of every individual of that description; Suppose such a plain and honest inquiry were even to become universal among Christians, would not the answer be something like this? Tradition has set his foot on the heel of revealed truth; and has, by this means, so trodden off the shoes of the preparation of the gospel of peace, from the feet of the saints, that they cannot walk in the paths of social love so well as they were wont to do. If any one ask, why we worship in public, during such and such hours on the Lord's day? It is enough that we can answer, Custom and our own convenience have inclined us to the observance of those hours. But should any one seriously inquire of us why we have few, if any, means of intimate and actual fellowship one with another, as children of the same family? what a pity is it that we are equally obliged to answer in this case as in that, Custom, and our own convenience, have inclined

us to the neglect of these. Was this the manner of the primitive Christians? No. "They continued daily from house to house in fellowship, and breaking of bread, and in prayer, Acts ii. 26." Religion was their one concern; and, in attending to that one concern, though in number they were so many thousands, they were but one.

As for the usefulness of those meetings of the Lord's people, commonly called experience and conference meetings; I believe it is known, wherever they are judiciously and zealously attended to; and this is perhaps as much as can be said of any other means. In the former of these meetings, the Lord's people are found saying to their brethren, as David did; 'Come, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.' Many are the advantages attending this lovely conduct; the various devices of Satan to entangle and perplex the minds of believers are exposed; the influence of earthly things on the mind is confessed, and mutually lamented before the Lord; the frequent deliverances the saints experience in times of trouble are recorded, to the manifest honour of their great Deliverer; the faithful-

ness of a covenant God in answering prayer, and honouring them that honour him, is abundantly testified; the power of the cross of Christ to crucify sin in the heart is declared; the usefulness and suitableness of the preached word is acknowledged; love is increased; faith is strengthened; hope is enlarged; and a fore-taste of Heaven itself is often experienced on earth. Even when the people come together with their hearts comparatively cold, reciprocal and free communication is often like the striking together of a cold flint and cold steel, and there comes out fire; as, saith the wise man, 'Iron sharpeneth iron; so doth the countenance of a man his friend.' Prov. xxvii. 17.

In the latter of these, called conference meetings, the light which the Lord is pleased to cast on his own word, while his people are reading it from day to day, is set forth for mutual edification with much advantage; while he that exhorteth, according to the apostle's advice, waits on exhortation.

The holy scriptures are a mine of spiritual truth; and as the Divine Spirit is the only in-

fallible expositor of them, and opens them to whom he will, the utter neglect of conference meetings seems to have in it the nature of quenching the Spirit in the hearts of the saints. On this subject I beg leave to recommend to the serious consideration of those who have in any measure the conducting of church affairs in their hands, Rom. xii. 3—8. 1 Cor. xii. and Eph. iv. I humbly conceive that no impartial Christian, whom God has favoured with the gift of discerning truth for the benefit of others, can deliberately examine those, and many other portions of God's word, and yet believe the neglect of conference meetings, especially in large churches where there are gifted members, to be an innocent thing.

So great is the loss which the churches sustain by the neglect of these things, and so great would naturally be the mutual advantage of reviving their use; that whoever may be the honoured instrument of so good a work, may be justly called, in the language of prophecy, 'The repairer of the breach; the restorer of paths to dwell in.' Isa. lviii. 12.

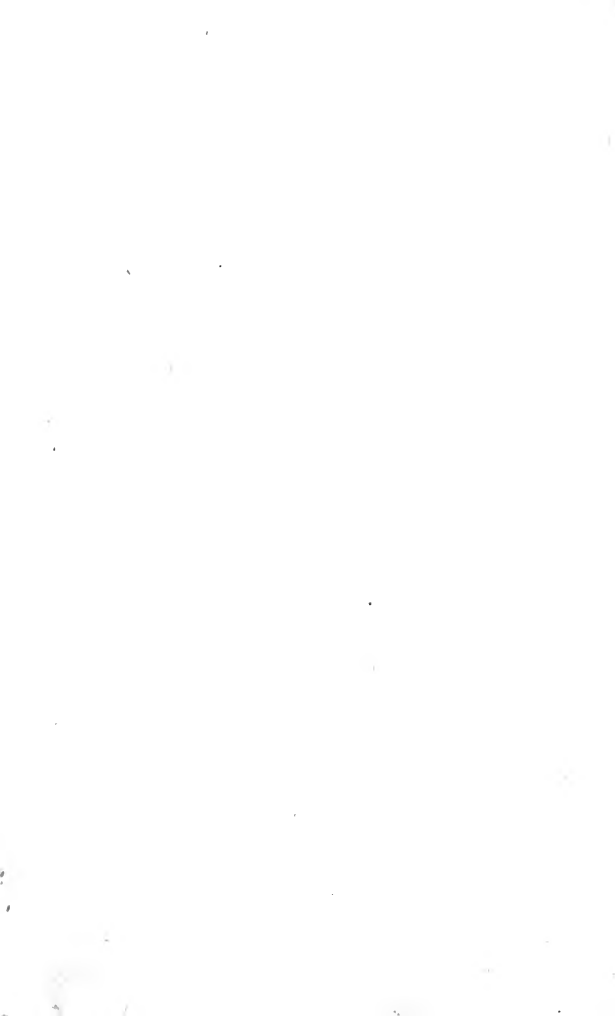
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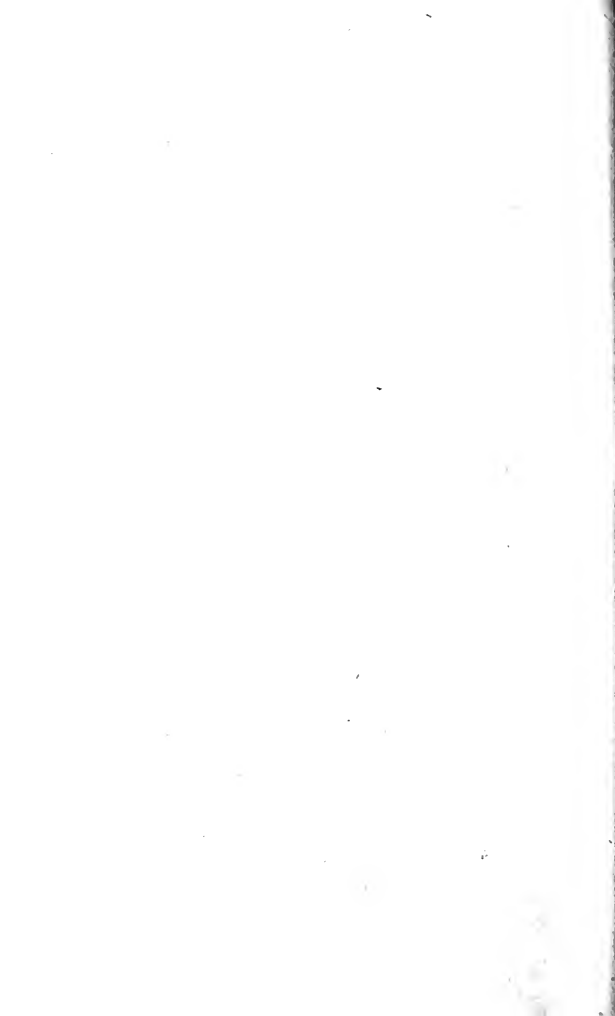
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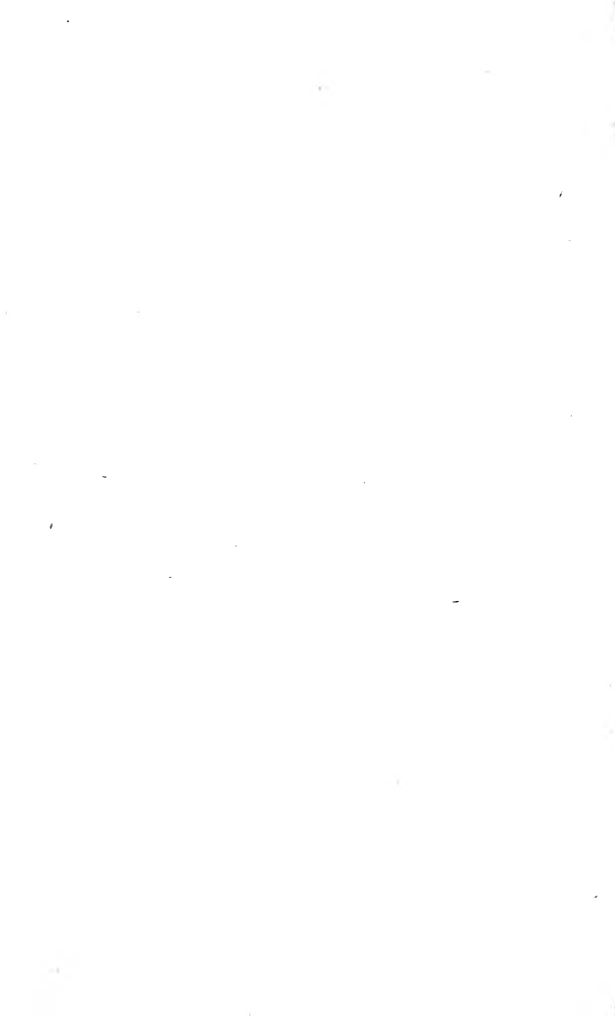
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