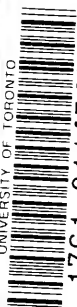


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THE

# WORKS

OF

DR. JOHN TILLOTSON,

LATE

ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

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WITH THE LIFE OF THE AUTHOR,

BY

THO<sup>S</sup>. BIRCH, M. A.

ALSO,

A COPIOUS INDEX, AND THE TEXTS OF SCRIPTURE  
CAREFULLY COMPARED.

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IN TEN VOLUMES.—VOL. II.

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# SERMONS.

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## SERMON IX.

OF THE END OF JUDGMENTS, AND THE REASON OF  
THEIR CONTINUANCE.

*For all this, his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still: for the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of Hosts. ISA. ix. 12, 13.*

IN the former part of the 12th verse, the prophet threatens that Israel should be brought into great distress, and be set upon by enemies on every side; “the Syrians before, and the Philistines behind, and they should devour Israel with open mouth:” and though this was like to be a very sore and dreadful judgment, yet he foretels that this would not stay God’s hand, nor satisfy his anger, because he foresaw that they would still grow worse and continue impenitent. “For all this, his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still: for the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of Hosts.”

In which words, there are these two things very useful at all times; but at this time especially most proper and seasonable for our consideration.

I. The design and intention of God in sending judgment upon a people; and that is, to reclaim them from all their sins, implied in these words: "for the people turneth not to him that smiteth them;" which intimate to us, that this is the end which God aims at in his judgments, to take us off from our sins, and to bring us to himself.

II. The reason of the continuance of God's judgments, because the people were not reclaimed by them. And this is fully expressed in the text, that therefore "God's anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still, because the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them," &c.

Of these two, I crave leave to speak, as plainly and briefly as I can.

I. The design and intention of God in sending judgments upon a people; and that is, to reclaim them from their sins. This indeed is the intention of all God's dispensations towards us in this world. The end of all his mercies and benefits is to take us off from sins, and to oblige and win us to our duty: so the apostle tells us, Rom. ii. 4. that the design of God's goodness and long-suffering, and forbearance towards us, is to lead us to repentance.

And this is the way wherein God delights to deal with us. The way of judgment and severity, is that which he is more averse from, a course which he unwillingly takes with us, and not without some difficulty and reluctance. "He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men:" and were it not that we are such perverse creatures as not to be wrought upon by kindness, so wild as not to be tamed by gentle usage, God would not handle us in any other way. It is our obstinacy and in-

tractableness to the methods of his goodness which constraineth, and almost forceth him against his inclination, to take the rod into his hand, and to chastise us with it. He would draw us with "the cords of love," and "the bands of a man," (as he expresseth himself in the prophet) but we will not follow him: and therefore we provoke him to turn those cords into whips, and to change the gentle methods of his kindness into ways of harshness and severity.

And yet when he comes to take this course with us, he still, like a kind and tender-hearted father, aims at our benefit and advantage. He designs kindness to the sons of men, by all those judgments which do not kill them, and cut them off from the opportunity and possibility of improving them. If he sends evils upon us, it is thereby he may do us some greater good; if he afflicts us, it is not because it is pleasant to him to deal harshly with us, but because it is profitable and necessary for us to be so dealt with: and if at any time he embitters our lives by miseries and sufferings, it is because he is loth to see us perish in pleasant ways, and chooseth rather to be somewhat severe towards us, than suffer us to be utterly undone.

This Moses declares to have been the great end of all the severe providences of God towards the people of Israel in their long wandering in the wilderness, and all the difficulties and hardships they were there exercised withal for the space of forty years, Deut. viii. 15, 16. "Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents and scorpions," &c. "That he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end."

So that the afflicting providences of God are not only apt in their own nature to do us good, but which is a more express argument of the Divine goodness, God intends and aims at this end by them: he does not send judgments upon this theatre of the world for his sport and pastime, nor set on one part of his creation, to bait another for his diversion: he does not, like some of the cruel Roman emperors, take pleasure to exercise men with danger, and to see them play bloody prizes before him.

Nay; he does nothing that is severe, out of humour and passion; as our earthly parents many times do. Indeed, he is angry with us for our sins; but yet so as still to pity our persons; and, when his providence makes use of any sharp and cutting instruments, it is with this merciful design, to let out our corruption: if he cast us into the furnace of affliction, it is that he may refine and purify us from our dross.

So that though the judgments of God be evils in themselves, yet considering the intentions of God in them, they are no real objections against his goodness, but rather arguments for it; as will appear if we consider these three things:

1. That the judgments of God are proper for the cure of a far greater evil of another kind.
2. They are proper for the prevention of far greater evils of the same kind.
3. They are not only proper to these ends, but in many cases very necessary.

First, The judgments of God are very proper for the cure of a far greater evil of another kind; I mean the evil of sin. We take wrong measures of things, when we judge those to be the greatest

evils which afflict our bodies, wound our reputation, and impoverish our estates. For those certainly are far the greatest, which affect our noblest part; which vitiate our understandings, and deprave our wills, and wound and defile our souls. What corrupt humours are to the body, that sin is to the souls of men, their disease and their death.

Now it is very agreeable with the goodness and mercy of the Divine providence, to administer to us whatever is proper for the cure of so great an evil. If we make ourselves sick, that is our own folly, and no fault of the physician; but we are beholden to him if he recover us, though it be by very bitter and unpleasing means. All temporal judgments, which are short of death, are properly medicinal; and if we will but suffer them to have their kindly operation upon us, they will work a cure; and how grievous and distasteful soever they may be for the present, they will prove mercies and blessings in the issue. Upon this account David reckons afflictions among the happy blessings of his life. (Psal. cxix. 71.) "It is good for me (says he) that I have been afflicted." And he gives the reason of it in the same psalm, ver. 67. "Before I was afflicted, I went astray; but now I have learnt thy precepts."

So that though all afflictions are evils in themselves, yet they are good for us, because they discover to us our disease and tend to our cure. They are a sensible argument and conviction to us of the evil and danger of sin. We are commonly such fools as Solomon speaks of, who "make a mock at sin;" and like children, will be playing with the edge of it, till it cut and wound us: we are not sufficiently sensible how great an evil it is, till we come to feel the dismal effects and consequences of it. And, therefore, to rectify our apprehensions concer

ing it, God makes us to suffer by it. Thus Elihu describes to us the happy effect of afflictions upon sinners. (Job xxxvi. 8, 9, 10.) “If they be bound in fetters and held in cords of affliction, then God sheweth them their work, and their transgression that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from their iniquity.” God doth but invite and intreat us by his mercies, but his judgments have a more powerful and commanding voice. When he holds men in the cords of affliction, then he openeth their ear to discipline. In prosperity we are many times incapable of council and instruction; but when we are under God’s correcting hand, then we are fit to be spoken withal.

Secondly, The judgments of God are likewise proper for the preventing of far greater evils of the same kind; I mean, further punishments. In sending of temporal judgments upon sinners, God usually proceeds with them by degrees. First, he lets fly several single shots at them; and if upon these they will take warning and come in, they may prevent the broadsides and volleys of his wrath.

But, the great advantage of all is, that temporal judgments may prove to us the opportunities for preventing the miserable and unspeakable torments of a long eternity. For all judgments which are not final, leaving men a space for repentance, have in them the mercy of a reprieve, which by a serious and timely return to God, may be improved into a pardon.

Besides, that adversity and afflictions do usually dispose men, and put them into a fit temper for repentance; they fix our minds and make us serious, and are apt to awaken us to consideration, and suggest to us such thoughts and meditations as these :



If temporal evils be so grievous, how insupportable then will be the extreme and endless torments of the next life? If in this day of God's grace and patience we sometimes meet with such severity, what may we not look for in the day of vengeance? If these drops of God's wrath, which now and then fall upon sinners in this world, fill them with so much anguish and affliction, how deplorably miserable will those wretches be, upon whom the storms of his fury shall fall? Who would venture to continue in sin, when the greatest miseries and calamities which we feel in this life, are but a small and inconsiderable earnest of those woeful wages, which sinners shall receive in the day of recompense.

Thirdly, The judgments of God are not only proper to these ends, but in many cases very necessary. Our condition many times is such as to require this severe way of proceeding, because no other course that God hath taken, or can take with us, will probably do us good. God does not delight in the miseries and calamities of his creatures, but we put him upon these extremities, or rather his own goodness and wisdom together do prompt and direct him to these harsh and rigorous ways. May be, we have brought ourselves into that dangerous state, and the malignity of our distemper is such, that it is not to be removed without violent physic, and that cannot be administered to us without making us deadly sick. So, that the judgments of God, which are many times abroad in the earth, are nothing else but the wise methods which the great physician of the world uses for the cure of mankind; they are rods of his school and the discipline of his providence, that the "inhabitants of the world may learn righteousness;" they are a merciful invention of heaven, to do men that good which many times nothing else

will, and to work that blessed effect upon us, which neither the wise counsels and admonitions of God's word, nor his milder and gentler dealings with us, can usually attain.

Thus we find in the parable, (Luke xv.) that the providence of God makes use of hunger and extreme necessity to bring home the prodigal; and by him our Saviour represents to us the temper of most sinners: for, till we have spent that stock of mercies which God hath given us, till we come to be pinched with want and are ready to perish, we are not apt to entertain thoughts of returning to our Father.

It may be, there are some sinners which are more tractable and easy to be reduced to goodness, that are not so headstrong and obstinate in their way but that they may be reclaimed by milder and softer means: but there are likewise a great many senseless and outrageous sinners, who are madly and furiously bent upon their own ruin. Now, to treat these fairly, with the allurements of kindness, and the gentle arts of persuasion, would be to no purpose: the only way that is left of dealing with them, is rigour and severity. When sinners are thus beside themselves, something that looks like cruelty, is perhaps the greatest mercy that can be shewn to them: nothing so proper for such persons as a dark room and a spare diet, and severe usage. "A rod for the back of fools," as the wise man speaks.

Thus have I done with the first thing I propounded to speak to, namely—the merciful design and intention of God in sending judgments upon a people, which is to bring them to repentance, and by repentance to prevent their ruin. I proceed to

II. The reason of the continuance of God's judgments—because the people were not reclaimed by them; therefore "his anger is not turned away,

but his hand is stretched out still ;” because “the people turneth not to him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of hosts.”

And how can it be expected it should be otherwise, when incorrigibleness under the judgments of God, is a provocation of so high a nature, a sign of a most depraved and incorrigible temper, and an argument of the greatest obstinacy in evil? Upon this account we find that the Holy Spirit of God, in Scripture, brands Ahaz as a singular and remarkable sort of sinner, (2 Chron. xxviii. 22.) because “in the time of his distress he sinned yet more against the Lord.” The longer Pharoah and the Egyptians resisted the judgments of God, the more still they were hardened, and the more they were plagued. (Lev. xxvi.) 22. After God had there threatened his people with several sore judgments for their sins, he tells them, that if they will not be reformed by all these things, he will punish them seven times more, and after that, seven times more for their sins: and, if in such a case the just God will punish seven times more, we may safely conclude that sins after judgments are seven times greater.

So likewise, Deut. xxviii. after a long and dreadful catalogue of curses there denounced against the people of Israel, in case of their disobedience, God at last threatens them with a foreign enemy that should “distress them in their gates;” and if they would not be reclaimed by all this, he tells them, that he hath still more and greater judgments for them in store. (Ver. 58 and 59.) “If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law, that thou mayest fear this great and glorious name, **THE LORD THY GOD**, then the Lord will make thy plagues wonderful.” If we be of so strange and monstrous a disposition, as to grow worse under judgments, God

will deal with us after an unusual and prodigious manner—he will make our plagues wonderful.

This incorrigible temper the prophets of old everywhere make the great aggravation of the sin of Israel. (Isaiah i. 4, 5.) “Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity;” and, after a great many other expressions, to set forth what heinous sinners they were, he sums up all in this: that they were so far from being reformed by the several judgments of God, which had been inflicted upon them, that they were the worse for correction. “Why should they be stricken any more? they will revolt more and more.” So, likewise, (Hosea vii. 9, 10.) Ephraim, though brought very low, is represented as of the same refractory temper, “Strangers have devoured his strength,” &c. “but they do not return to the Lord, nor seek him for all this.” I will mention but one text more (and methinks it bears but too near a resemblance with our own condition, both in respect of the judgments which have been upon us, and our carriage under them,) Amos iv.—where God upbraids his people several times with this, as the great aggravation of their sins, that they continued impenitent, under all those terrible judgments of God which had been upon them: “I have sent among you (says he,) famine, and then pestilence, and then the sword, and last of all a terrible fire, which had almost utterly consumed them.” (Ver. 11.) “I have overthrown some of you as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning; yet have ye not returned unto me.” And because all these judgments had not been effectual to reclaim them, he tells them, that he was resolved to go on in punishing; and therefore he bids them to expect it and prepare themselves for it. (Ver. 12.) “Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O

Israel; and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." When God hath begun to punish a people, and they are not amended by it, the honour of his justice is concerned to proceed, and not to give over. By every sin that we commit we offend God, but if he smite us, and we stand out against him, then do we contend with him and strive for mastery. And when the sinner is upon these stubborn and insolent terms, then "prepare to meet thy God:" a bitter sarcasm: as if man could be a match for God, and a poor weak creature in any wise able to encounter him, to whom power belongs. There is a severe expression concerning God's dealing with such perverse and obstinate sinners. (Psalm xxviii. 26.) "With the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward;" or, as the words may more properly and conveniently be rendered—with the froward thou wilt wrestle. God will not be outbraved by the sins of men: and, therefore, if we continue impenitent, we have all the reason in the world to expect that God should go on to punish.

But to come nearer to ourselves, and to consider our own case, which is in truth so very bad, that we may almost be afraid to consider it. The wise and good God, like a prudent and indulgent father, hath used all the arts of his providence towards this nation to reclaim us. He hath invited us to him by many blessings, but we would not come:

so (to borrow an apt illustration from a great divine of our own,) we have forced him to deal with us as Absalom did with Joab; he sent one civil message to him after another, but he would not come; at last he set on fire his cornfield to try whether that would bring him: this course God hath taken with us, we would not be persuaded by messages of kindness (by his many

Bishop  
Sanderson.

blessings and favours,) to return to him, and therefore hath he sent amongst us the terrible messengers of his wrath. First, we were engaged in a foreign war, and though God was pleased to give us some considerable success in it, yet it seems our provocations were so great that he was resolved to punish us. He was loth to let us fall into the hands of men, and therefore he took the work into his own hand, and punished us himself, by sending a pestilence among us, the sorest and most destructive that hath befallen this nation for many ages. But we did not upon this return to him, and therefore his fierce anger kindled a fearful fire amongst us, which hath laid the honour of our nation, one of the greatest and richest cities in the world, in the dust ; and that by so sudden and irresistible, so dismal and amazing a devastation, as in all the circumstances of it is scarce to be paralleled in any history.

I doubt not but most of us were mightily affected with this judgment whilst it was upon us. So astonishing a calamity could not but make us open our eyes a little, and awaken us to consideration ; even the rich man in the gospel, though he had all his life-time been immersed in sensuality, yet could not but lift up his eyes when he was in flames.

And surely God expects that such judgments as these should not only rouse us a little for the present, but that they should have a permanent operation and effect upon us, and work a thorough and lasting reformation amongst us ; but yet I am afraid that this dreadful fire hath had no other influence upon us but what it uses to have upon metals, which are only melted by it for the present ; but when the fire is removed they suddenly cool and return to their former hardness.

One would have thought that the sense of such a

calamity as this should have remained longer upon us. Methinks God seemed to say to us after this judgment as he did once to Jerusalem. (Zeph. iii. 7.) "Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction;" but we (like them) have been but the more forward to provoke him (they rose early and corrupted their doings,) we have after all this hardened our hearts from his fear and refused to return. And therefore God is now come to one of his last judgments: "Our enemy distresses us in our gates." God hath begun to let us fall into the hands of men; and by giving our enemies a sudden and fatal advantage upon us, hath smitten us with a breach great as the sea.

These were terrible calamities indeed to come so thick and so swiftly upon us, like desolation, and as a whirlwind. Such a quick succession of judgments, treading almost upon one another's heels, does but too plainly declare that God is highly incensed against us. For surely these are not the wounds of a friend, but the terrible assaults of an enemy. They do not look like the displeasure of a father, but the severity of a judge; not like visitation, but like vengeance.

And besides these more visible judgments upon the nation, we are by a secret curse of God insensibly decayed in our riches and strength. We are, I know not how, strangely impoverished in the midst of plenty, and almost undone by victories. And, which adds to our misery, few among us seem to be sufficiently sensible of it, or to take any notice by what silent steps and imperceptible degrees (like grey hairs and the infirmities of old age,) poverty and weakness are stealing in upon us: so that we may fitly apply to ourselves what the prophet says of Ephraim. (Hosea vii. 9.) "Strangers have devoured

his strength, and he knoweth it not; yea grey hairs are here and there upon him, and yet he knoweth it not."

And our condition as we are a church, is not much better. How is this famous protestant church of ours, which was once the admiration of her friends, and the envy of her enemies, sunk and declined in her glory, and reduced into a very narrow compass? So that she is left like the daughter of Sion. (Isaiah i. 8.) "As a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city:" straitened and hemmed in on all parts, by the impudence of atheism, the insolences of popery, and the turbulence of faction: all which do every day visibly and apace gain ground upon her, and distress her on every side; just as the condition of the Jewish church is described before my text: "The Syrians before, and the Philistines behind—both ready to devour Israel with open mouth."

And surely it is not for nothing that God hath brought us thus low, that he hath sent all these judgments upon us, and that he doth still threaten us with more: the reason is plain, because we are still impenitent: "The people turneth not to him that smiteth them." There hath been almost an universal degeneracy amongst us, and there is still, I fear, a general impenitency; "the people turneth not," &c. Notwithstanding all those dismal calamities which our eyes have seen, wickedness doth still prevail in the nation and overflows it like a mighty deluge, so as to overspread all ranks and orders of men: and not only so, but is grown impudent, and appears "with a whore's forehead:" all kind of modesty seems to have forsaken the sinners of this age.

And is this repentance? to live in filthy and



abominable lusts, to tear the name of God by horrid oaths and imprecations ; to be atheistical and profane, and by an unexampled boldness to turn the word of God itself, and the gravest and most serious matters of religion into raillery? This is not to turn to him that smiteth us, but to turn upon him and smite him again. And yet such crying and clamorous sins as these are almost come to be the garb and fashion of the nation, and to be accounted the wit and gallantry of the age.

And shall not God visit for these things? shall not his soul be avenged on such a nation as this? Yes, he hath visited; and it is for these things that the wrath of God hath been so manifestly revealed from heaven against us. For this cause, misery and destruction have been in our way, and the way of peace have we not known, because there hath been no fear of God before our eyes. Hence it is that "God's anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still; because the people turneth not to him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of hosts."

But do not we seek God? Do we not every day acknowledge our sins to him, and pray that he would have mercy upon us miserable offenders, and grant that we may hereafter live godly, righteous, and sober lives? Do not we seek the Lord of hosts, when we continually beg of him to save and deliver us from the hand of our enemies? Indeed we do thus seek him, but we should first turn to him; otherwise, if we hope our prayers will prevail with God to do us good, we do but trust in lying words. If we go on in our sins our very prayers will become sin, and increase our guilt: for the prayer of the wicked (that is, of one that is resolved to continue so) is an abomination to the Lord. Can we think it reasona-

ble for men to address themselves to God after this manner? “ Lord, though we have no mind to turn to thee, yet we pray thee turn away thine anger from us; though we are resolved not to forsake our sins, yet we make no doubt but that thy mercy will forgive them; give peace in our time, O Lord, that we may pursue our lusts securely and without disturbance: deliver us, we pray thee, from the hands of our enemies, that we may sin against thee without fear, all the days of our lives.” Would it not be horrible impudence and impiety to put any such petitions to God? And yet this, I fear, is the most genuine interpretation of our prayers and lives compared together.

And if this be our case, what can we expect? God may give us peace with our enemies, but then he will find out some other way to punish us: for if we still persist in our atheism and profaneness, in our contempt of God, and of his holy worship, in our scorn and derision of religion, in our abominable lusts and horrid impieties, what can we look for but that God should be angry with us until he have consumed us and there be no escaping? Nothing can be a sadder presage of our ruin, than not to be reformed by those dreadful judgments of God which have been upon us. This was that which brought final destruction upon the Egyptians in the Red Sea, that they had held out so obstinately against so many judgments, and had been hardened under ten plagues. To be impenitent after such severe corrections, is to poison ourselves with that which is intended for our physic, and by a miraculous kind of obstinacy to turn the rods of God into serpents.

And now perhaps some will be apt to say, that these are things fit for men of our profession, because it is our trade and we live by it. Indeed they

are so, things very fit to be said, and withal very fit for every one to consider, who professeth himself a Christian, and who owns the belief of a God, and a providence, and another world. And if they be so, where is the fault? Is it, that there is a peculiar profession of men, whose proper work it is to tell men of their faults, and to persuade them to reform? No, there is no harm in that neither. Is it then that they live by their profession, and yet would be believed? Yes, there lies the force of the objection. To which I shall only at present return this answer, that men do not argue thus in other cases, where yet the reason seems to be the very same. In matters that concern their bodies and estates, the physician and the lawyer are believed, though it is verily thought that they live by their professions, as well as we; why then should men deal so partially and unequally only with their souls? Were we not moved by better principles, and swayed by the arguments and considerations of another world, we might for aught we know, with every whit as much advantage to ourselves, suffer men to be quiet and to sleep on securely in their sins; if we did not believe ourselves, in these matters, what should hinder but that we might with as much gravity and confidence cry Peace, peace, when there is no peace; and flatter men with as much art, and as good a grace, as any of those can do who live delicately, and wear soft clothing?

But we believe the threatenings of God, and therefore do we speak: we know the terrors of the Lord, and therefore we endeavour to persuade men. And, O! that we could persuade them to break off their sins by righteousness, and to turn every one from the evil of his way, and from the violence that is in his hands: and then "who can tell

but God may turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?"

The good God make us all wise to know in this our day the things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes; and grant that we may all turn to him that hath smitten us, by repentance and real reformation of our lives; that God may be pleased to turn away his anger from us, and to stretch out his hand for our deliverance, which we humbly beg of him for the sake of Christ. To whom, with the Father, &c.

## SERMON X.

OF THE DECEITFULNESS AND DANGER OF SIN.

*Exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*—HEB. iii. 13.

AMONG the many considerations which the word of God and our own reason offer to us to discourage us from sin, this is none of the least considerable, that he that once engages in a vicious course is in danger to proceed in it, being insensibly trained on from one degree of wickedness to another; so that the farther he advanceth, his retreat grows more difficult, because he is still pushed on with a greater violence. All error, as well of practice as of judgment, is endless; and when a man is once out of the way, the farther he shall go on the harder he will find it to return into the right way. Therefore, there is great reason why men should be so often cautioned against the beginnings of sin; or if they have been so unhappy as to be engaged in a bad course, why they should be warned to break it off presently and without delay, lest, by degrees, they be hardened in their wickedness, till their case grow desperate and past remedy. And to this purpose is the apostle's advice here in the text: "Exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

From which words I shall

I. Endeavour to represent to you the growing danger of sin, and by what steps and degrees bad habits do insensibly gain upon men, and harden them in an evil course.

II. I shall, from this consideration, take occasion to shew what great reason and need there is to warn men of this danger, and to endeavour to rescue them out of it. And then,

III. I shall apply myself to the duty, here in the text, of exhorting men, with all earnestness and importunity, to resist the beginnings of sin; or if they be already entered upon a wicked course, to make haste out of this dangerous state; “lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”

I. First, I shall endeavour to represent to you the growing danger of sin, and by what steps and degrees bad habits do insensibly gain upon men and harden them in an evil course. All the actions of men, which are not natural, but proceed from deliberation and choice, have something of difficulty in them when we begin to practise them, because, at first, we are rude and unexercised in that way; but after we have practised them awhile they become more easy; and when they are easy, we begin to take pleasure in them; and when they please us we do them frequently, and think we cannot repeat them too often; and, by frequency of acts, a thing grows into a habit; and a confirmed habit is a second kind of nature: and so far as any thing is natural, so far it is necessary, and we can hardly do otherwise; nay, we do it many times when we do not think of it. For, by virtue of an habit, a man's mind or body becomes pliable and inclined to such kind of actions as it is accustomed to, and

does, as it were, stand bent and charged such a way; so that being touched and awakened, by the least occasion, it breaks forth into such or such actions. And this is the natural progress of all habits indifferently considered, whether they be good or bad.

But vicious habits have a greater advantage, and are of a quicker growth. For the corrupt nature of man is a rank soil, to which vice takes easily, and wherein it thrives apace. The mind of man hath need to be prepared for piety and virtue; it must be cultivated to that end, and ordered with great care and pains: but vices are weeds that grow wild, and spring up of themselves. They are, in some sort, natural to the soil, and, therefore, they need not to be planted and watered, it is sufficient if they be neglected and let alone. So that vice having this advantage from our nature, it is no wonder if occasion and temptation easily draw it forth.

But that we may take a more distinct account of the progress of sin, and by what steps vice gains upon men, I shall mark out to you some of the chief and more observable gradations of it.

1. Men begin with lesser sins. No man is perfectly wicked on the sudden. *Sunt quædam* Juven. *vitiorum elementa*; there are certain rudiments of vice, in which men are first entered, and then they proceed by degrees to greater and fouler crimes. For sin hath its infancy and tender age, and its several states of growth. Men are not so totally degenerate but at first they are ashamed when they venture upon a known sin, though it be but small in comparison. Hence it is, that at first men are very solicitous to palliate and hide their faults by excuses; but after they have frequently committed

them, and they grow too visible to be concealed, then they will attempt to defend and maintain them ; and from thence they come, by degrees, to take pleasure in them, and in those that do the same things.

2. After men have been some time initiated in these lesser sins, by the commission of these they are prepared and disposed for greater ; such as lay waste the conscience, and offer more violence to the light and reason of their minds. By degrees, a sinner may grow to be so hardy, as to attempt those crimes which at first he could not have had the thought of committing without horror. Like Hazael, who, when he was told by the prophet Elisha, what barbarous cruelties he should one day be guilty of towards the people of Israel, when he should come to be King of Syria, he abominated the very thought and mention of them ; “ Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing ? ” and yet, for all this, we know he did it afterwards. It is true, indeed, when a sinner is first tempted to the commission of a more gross and notorious sin, his conscience is apt to boggle and start at it ; he doth it with great difficulty and regret ; the terrors of his own mind and the fears of damnation are very troublesome to him : but this trouble wears off by degrees, and that which was at first difficult, does, by frequent practice, and long custom, become tolerable.

3. When a man hath proceeded thus far he begins to put off shame, one of the greatest restraints from sin which God hath laid upon human nature. And when this curb once falls off, there is then but little left to restrain and hold us in. At first setting out upon a vicious course, men are a little nice and



delicate, like young travellers, who at first are offended at every speck of dirt that lights upon them; but after they have been accustomed to it, and have travelled a good while in foul ways, it ceaseth to be troublesome to them to be dashed and bespattered.

4. After this, it is possible, men may come to approve their vices. For if men's judgments do not command their wills and restrain their lusts, it is great odds, in process of time, the vicious inclinations of their wills will put a false bias upon their judgments; and then it is no wonder, if men come to boast of their sins and to glory in their vices, when they are half persuaded that they are generous and commendable qualities. Thus much is certain in experience, that some men have gotten so perfect a habit of some sins, as not to know and take notice many times when they commit them. As in the case of swearing, which some men have so accustomed themselves to, that without any consideration they do of course put an oath or two into every sentence that comes from them. And it hath been observed of some persons, that they have told an untruth so often, and averred it with so much confidence, till at last, forgetting that it was a lie at first, they themselves have, in process of time, believed it to be true.

5. From this pitch of wickedness, men commonly proceed to draw in others, and to make proselytes to their vices. Now this signifies, not only a great approbation of sin, but even a fondness for it, when men are not content to sin upon their own single accounts, but they must turn zealous agents and factors for the devil; become teachers of sin and ministers of unrighteousness, and are factiously

concerned to propagate, together with their atheistical principles, their lewd practices, and to draw followers and disciples after them.

And when they are arrived to this height, it is natural for them to hate reproof, and to resist the means of their recovery; to quarrel against all the remedies that shall be offered to them, and to count those their greatest enemies who have so much courage and kindness, as to deal plainly with them, and to tell them the truth. And then all the wise counsels of God's word, and the most gentle and prudent admonitions in the world, when they are tendered to such persons, serve only to provoke their scorn or their passion. And surely, that man is in a sad case that is so disposed, that in all probability he will turn the most effectual means of his amendment into the occasion of new and greater sins.

But that which renders the condition of such persons much more sad and deplorable is, that all this while God is withdrawing his grace from them. For every degree of sin causeth the Holy Spirit of God with all his blessed motions and assistances to retire farther from them: and, not only so, but the devil (that evil spirit, which the Scripture tells us, "works effectually in the children of disobedience") does, according as men improve in wickedness, get a greater and a more established dominion over them. For, as they who are reclaimed from an evil course, are said in Scripture to be "rescued out of the snare of the devil, and to be turned from the power of Satan unto God;" so, on the other hand, the farther men advance in the ways of sin, so much the farther they depart from God, from under the influence of his grace, and the care of his protection and

providence: and they give the devil (who is not apt to neglect his advantages upon them) greater opportunities every day to gain the firmer possession of them.

And thus, by passing from one degree of sin to another, the sinner becomes hardened in his wickedness, and does insensibly slide into that, in which, without a miraculous grace of God, he is like for ever to continue. For the mind of man, after it hath long been accustomed to evil, and is once grown old in vice, is almost as hard to be rectified, as it is to recover a body bowed down with age to its first straightness. The Scripture speaks of some that “commit sin with greediness,” and “that drink up iniquity as an ox drinketh up water,” with a mighty appetite and thirst, as if they were not able to refrain from it. And to express to us the miserable condition of such persons, it representeth them as perfect slaves to their vices, that have sold themselves to do wickedness, and “are led captive by Satan at his pleasure.” And when men have brought themselves to this pass, they are almost under a fatal necessity of sinning on. I do not believe that God hath absolutely predestinated any man to ruin, but by a long course of wilful sins, men may in a sort predestinate themselves to it, and choose wickedness so long, till it almost becomes necessary, and till they have brought themselves under all imaginable disadvantages of contributing any thing towards their own recovery, being bound in the chains of their own wickedness, and held in the cords of their sins: nay, like Sampson, not only bound by those lusts which they have embraced, but likewise robbed of all their strength, whereby they should break loose from those bonds. God grant that none of

us may ever have the woful experience of it: but I am horribly afraid it is too true, that a sinner may arrive to that confirmed state of impiety, as almost totally to lose his liberty to do better: he may attain to that perfection in vice, as to continue to be a bad man upon the same account that the historian extravagantly says that Cato was virtuous, "*Quia aliter esse non potuit;*"—because he

Vell. Patere. could not be otherwise. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" It is the Scripture comparison, to set forth to us how hard a thing it is for a man to be brought to goodness that hath been long accustomed to do evil. He that is thus deeply engaged and entangled in a bad course, will scarce ever have the heart and resolution to break loose from it, unless he be forced violently out of it by some severe affliction, by a sharp sickness, or by a terrible calamity, or by the present apprehensions of death and the terrors of a future judgment. Nor will these be effectual neither, to change such a person, without an extraordinary degree of God's grace: which, considering the greatness and the continuance of his provocations, he hath very little reason to expect, or hope God should ever bestow upon him. Wretched man! that hast brought thyself into this miserable state, out of which there is but just a possibility left of thy being rescued; that hast neglected thy disease so long, till it is almost too late to apply remedies; that hast provoked God so far and sinned to such a prodigious height, that thou hast reason almost to despair both of his grace and assistance for thy repentance, and of his mercy for thy pardon. I speak not this to discourage even the greatest of sinners from repentance. Though their case be extremely

difficult, yet it is not quite desperate : for those things which seem impossible with men, are possible with God. But I speak it on purpose to stop sinners in their course, and to discourage men from going on in sin, till they be hardened through the deceitfulness of it, and have brought themselves by insensible degrees into that dangerous and difficult state which I have all this while been representing to you. I come now to the

II. Second thing I propounded, which was, from this consideration, to shew what great reason and need there is to warn men of this danger, and to endeavour to rescue them out of it. The apostle directs this precept to all Christians : “ Exhort one another daily, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” That is, lest you be hardened by degrees, and finally ruined. And surely, every man is concerned to do what in him lies to rescue his brother from so imminent a danger. It is every one’s place and duty to endeavour to save those whom he sees ready to perish : much more does it concern those who are peculiarly set apart for this work—I mean the ministers of God’s holy Word, whose proper office and business it is, to exhort and warn every man day and night, who are set as watchmen to the house of Israel, and whose blood, in case any of them miscarry through our neglect, shall be required at our hands. So that if we believe the threatenings of God which we declare to others, if we have any apprehension of the dreadful misery of another world, if we have any sense of our own duty and safety, if we have any pity for perishing souls, we cannot but be very importunate with sinners to look about them, and to consider

their danger, and to bethink themselves seriously of the miserable event and issue of a wicked life: we cannot but be earnest with them to break off their sins, and to give glory to God by repentance, before darkness come and their feet stumble upon the dark mountains. When we are convinced more fully than we can desire, that “misery and destruction are in their ways;” when we plainly see the evil day hasting towards them apace, and “destruction coming upon them like a whirlwind;” heaven above threatening them, “and hell beneath moving herself to meet them at their coming;” can we possibly do less than to warn such persons, “to flee from the wrath which is to come;” and, out of a sad apprehension of the danger that hangs over them, to caution them against it, and endeavour with all our might to rescue them from the misery which is ready to swallow them up? Indeed, one would be apt to think it a very vain thing to dissuade men from being miserable, to use great vehemency of argument to hinder a man from leaping into a pit, or from running into a fire; to take great pains to argue a sick man into a desire of health, and to make a prisoner contented to have his shackles knocked off, and to be set at liberty: one would think all this were perfectly needless: but yet we see in experience, sin is a thing of so stupifying a nature, as to make men insensible of their danger, although it be so near, and so terrible. It is not so with men in other cases: when we labour of any bodily distemper, it is much to find a man that is patient of his disease; but when our souls are mortally sick, that we should be contented with our condition, and fond of our disease, that we should fight with our

physician, and spurn at our remedy ; this surely is the height of distraction, for men to be thus absolutely bent upon their own ruin, and to resolve to make away with themselves for ever. And we who are the messengers of God to men, must be born of the rocks, and have hearts "harder than the nether millstone," if we can patiently look on, and endure to see men perish without using our utmost endeavour to save them. Therefore, I shall, in the

III. Third and last place, apply myself to this work of exhortation—the duty commanded here in the text. And here I shall address myself to two sorts of persons :

1. To persuade those, who are yet innocent of great crimes, to resist the beginnings of sin, lest it gain upon them by degrees.

2. To press and urge those that are already entered upon a wicked course, that they would make haste out of this dangerous state ; lest at last they be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

1. To persuade those who are yet in some measure innocent, to resist the beginnings of sin, lest it gain upon them by degrees. Vice may easily be discouraged at first. It is like a slight disease, which is easy to be cured, but dangerous to be neglected. The first approaches of sin and temptation are usually very modest, but if they be not discountenanced, they will soon grow upon us and make bolder attempts. Every inclination to sin, every compliance with temptation, is a going down the hill. While we keep our standing we may command ourselves ; but if we once put ourselves into vio-

ient motion downward we cannot stop when we please.

*Omne in præcipiti vitium stetit.*-----

All vice stands upon a precipice—and to engage in any sinful course is to run down the hill. And if we once let loose the propensions of our nature, we cannot gather in the reins and govern them as we please; if we give way to presumptuous sins, they will quickly get dominion over us. It is much easier not to begin a bad course than to put a stop to ourselves after we have begun it. *Stulta*

Seneca. *res est nequitiae modus.* It is a fond thing for a man to think to set bounds to himself in any thing that is bad, to resolve to sin in number, weight, and measure, with great temperance and discretion, and government of himself: that he will commit this sin and then give over, entertain but this one temptation, and after that he will shut the door, and admit of no more. Our corrupt hearts, when they are once in motion, are like the raging sea, to which we can set no bounds, nor say to it, “Hitherto shalt thou go, and no farther.” Sin is very cunning and deceitful, and does strangely gain upon men when they once give way to it. It is of a very bewitching nature, and hath strange arts of address and insinuation. The giving way to a small sin does marvellously prepare and dispose a man for a greater. By giving way to one little vice after another, the strongest resolution may be broken. For though it be not to be snapped in sunder at once, yet by this means it is untwisted by degrees, and then it is easy to break it one thread after another. It is scarce



imaginable, of what force one sinful action is to produce more: for sin is very teeming and fruitful; and though there be no blessing annexed to it, yet it does strangely increase and multiply. As there is a connexion of one virtue with another, so vices are linked together, and one sin draws many after it. When the devil tempts a man to commit any wickedness, he does as it were lay a long train of sins, and if the first temptation take, they give fire to one another. Let us then resist the beginnings of sin, because then we have most power, and sin hath least. This is the first.

2. To persuade those who are already engaged in a wicked course, to make haste out of this dangerous state. And there is no other way to get out of it but by repentance; that is, by a real change and reformation of our lives: for herein the nature of true repentance does consist. And without this all the devices which men use to get rid of the guilt of their sins are vain and to no purpose. It is not to be done by a formal confession and absolution, nor by a long pilgrimage, nor by one of those little tickets from Rome which they call indulgences. A wise man would much sooner persuade himself that God would not at all punish the sins of men, than that he would forgive them so easily, and receive great offenders to favour upon such slight terms. Let us not deceive ourselves; there is one plain way to heaven, by sincere repentance and a holy life, and there is no getting thither by tricks. And without this change of our lives, all our sorrow, and fasting, and humiliation for sin, which at this season we make profession of, will signify nothing. There is an excellent passage of the son of Sirach to this purpose; (Ecclus. xxxiv. 25, 26.) "He that

washeth himself after the touching of a dead body, if he toucheth it again what availeth his washing? So it is with a man that fasteth for his sins, and goeth again and doth the same things—who will hear his prayer, or what doth his humbling profit him?” There is this plain difference between trouble for sin and repentance; sorrow only respects sins past, but repentance is chiefly preventive of sins for the future: and God therefore requires that we should be troubled for our sins, that we may resolve to leave them.

And to oblige us to a vigorous and speedy resolution in this matter, let us consider that we have engaged too far already in a bad course; and that every day our retreat will grow more dangerous and difficult; that by our delays we make work for a sadder and longer repentance than that which we do now so studiously decline: let us consider likewise, that our life is concerned in the case; that except we repent and turn, we shall die; and that the evil day may overtake us while we are deliberating whether we should avoid it or not: that vice is so far from being mortified by age, that by every day's continuance in it we increase the power of it; and so much strength as we add to our disease we certainly take from ourselves; and this is a double weakening of us, when we do not only lose our own strength, but the enemy gets it and employs it against us. The deceitfulness of sin appears in nothing more than in keeping men off from this necessary work, and persuading them to hazard all upon the unreasonable hopes of the mercy of God, and the uncertain resolution of a future repentance. I do not think there are any here but do either believe, or at least are vehemently afraid, that there is another

life after this ; and that a wicked life, without repentance, must unavoidably make them miserable in another world ; and that to cast off all to a death-bed repentance, puts things upon a mighty hazard. And they have a great deal of reason to think so : for, alas ! how unfit are most men at such a time for so great and serious a work as repentance is, when they are unfit for the smallest matters : and how hard is it for any man then to be assured of the truth and reality of his repentance, when there is no sufficient opportunity to make trial of the sincerity of it. I deny not the possibility of the thing ; but it is much to be feared, that the repentance of a dying sinner is usually but like the sorrow of a malefactor, when he is ready to be turned off ; he is not troubled that he has offended the law, but he is troubled that he must die. For when death is ready to seize upon the sinner, and he feels himself dropping into destruction, no wonder if then the man's stomach come down, and he be contented to be saved : and seeing he must stay no longer in this world, be desirous to go to heaven rather than hell ; and in order to that, be ready to give some testimonies of his repentance : no wonder if, when the rack is before him, this extort confession from him, and if in hopes of a pardon he make many large promises of amendment, and freely declare his resolution of a new and better life. But then it is the hardest thing in the world to judge, whether any thing of all this that is done under so great a fear and force be real. For a sick man, as he hath lost his appetite to the most pleasant meats and drinks, so likewise his sinful pleasures and fleshly lusts are at the same time nauseous to him, and for the very same reason : for sickness having altered the temper of his body,

he hath not at that time any gust or relish for these things. And now he is resolved against sin, just as a man that hath no stomach is resolved against meat. But if the fit were over, and death would but raise his siege and remove his quarters a little farther from him, it is to be feared that his former appetite would soon return to him, and that he would sin with the same eagerness he did before. Besides, how can we expect that God should accept of our repentance at such a time, when we are conscious to ourselves that we did resolve to put off our repentance till we could sin no longer? Can we think it fit for any man to say thus to God in a dying hour: "Lord, now the world leaves me, I come to thee. I pray thee give me eternal life, who could never afford to give thee one good day of my life: grant that I may live with thee and enjoy thee for ever, who could never endure to think upon thee. I must confess, that I could never be persuaded to leave my sins out of love to thee, but now I repent of them for fear of thee: I am conscious to myself that I would never do any thing for thy sake, but yet I hope thy goodness is such that thou wilt forgive all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of my life, and accept of this forced submission which I now make to thee. I pray thee do not at last frustrate and disappoint me in this design which I have laid, of sinning while I live, and getting to heaven when I die." Surely no man can think it fit to say thus to God: and yet I am afraid this is the true interpretation of many a man's repentance who hath deferred it till he comes to die. I do not speak this to discourage repentance, even at that time. It is always the best thing we can do. But I would by all means discourage men from putting off so neces-

sary a work till then. It is true, indeed, when it is come to this, and a sinner finds himself going out of the world, if he hath been so foolish and so cruel to himself as to put things upon this last hazard, repentance is now the only thing that is left for him to do; this is his last remedy, and the only refuge he has to fly to: and this is that which the minister in this case ought by all means to put the man upon, and earnestly to persuade him to. But when we speak to men in other circumstances, that are well, and in health, we dare not for all the world encourage them to venture their souls upon such an uncertainty. For, to speak the best of it, it is a very dangerous remedy, especially when men have designedly contrived to rob God of the service of their best days, and to put him off with a few unprofitable sighs and tears at the hour of death. I desire to have as large apprehensions of the mercy of God as any man; but, withal, I am very sure that he is the hardest to be imposed upon of any one in the world. And no man that hath any worthy apprehensions of the Deity, can imagine him to be so easy, as to forgive men upon the least word and intimation of their minds, and to have such a fondness for offenders, as would reflect upon the prudence of any magistrate and governor upon earth. God grant that I may sincerely endeavour to live a holy and virtuous life, and may have the comfort of that when I come to die: and that I may never be so unwise as to venture all my hopes of a blessed eternity upon a death-bed repentance.

I will conclude all with those excellent sayings of the son of Sirach: (Ecclus. v. 6, 7; xvi. 11, 12; xviii. 21, 22.) "Say not, God's mercy is great, and he will be pacified for the multitude of my sins.

For mercy and wrath is with him ; he is mighty to forgive, and to pour out displeasure. And as his mercy is great, so are his corrections also. Therefore make no tarrying to turn to the Lord, and put not off from day to day : for suddenly shall the wrath of the Lord come forth, and in thy security thou shalt be destroyed. Humble thyself before thou be sick, and in the time of sins shew repentance. Let nothing hinder thee to pay thy vows in due time, and defer not till death to be justified."

## SERMON XI.

THE HAZARD OF BEING SAVED IN THE CHURCH OF  
ROME.

*But he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.*

1 COR. iii. 15.

THE context is thus, "According to the grace of God, which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon: but let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, every man's work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it; because it shall be revealed by fire, and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is. If any man's work abide, which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burnt, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire."

In these words, the apostle speaks of a sort of persons, who held indeed the foundation of Christianity, but built upon it such doctrines or practices as would not bear the trial; which he expresses to us by wood, hay, and stubble, which are not proof against the fire. Such a person, the apostle tells us, hath brought himself into a very dangerous state, though he would not deny the possibility of his sal-

vation: "He himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire."

That by *fire* here is not meant the fire of purgatory, as some pretend (who would be glad of any shadow of a text of Scripture, to countenance their own dreams), I shall neither trouble you nor myself to manifest; since the participle of similitude (*ὡς*) plainly shews, that the apostle did not intend an escape out of the fire literally, but like to that which men make out of a house or town that is on fire. Especially since very learned persons of the church of Rome do acknowledge that purgatory cannot be concluded from this text; nay, all that Estius contends for, from this place, is, that it cannot be concluded from hence, that there is no purgatory, which we never pretended, but only that this text doth not prove it.

It is very well known that this is a proverbial phrase, used not only in Scripture but in profane authors, to signify—a narrow escape out of a great danger. He shall be saved, yet so as by fire, *διὰ πυρός*, out of the fire. Just as *δι' ὕδατος* is used, 1 Pet. iii. 20, where the apostle, speaking of the eight persons of Noah's family who escaped the flood, *διεσώθησαν δι' ὕδατος*, they escaped out of the water.—So here this phrase is to be rendered in the text, "he himself shall escape, yet so as out of the fire." The like expression you have, Amos iv. 11. "I have plucked them as a firebrand out of the fire." And Jude 23. "Others save with fear, plucking them out of the fire." All which expressions signify the greatness of the danger, and the difficulty of escaping it; as one who, when his house at midnight is set on fire, and being suddenly waked, leaps out of his bed, and runs naked, out of the doors, taking



nothing that is within along with him, but employing his whole care to save his body from the flames, as St. Chrysostom, upon another occasion, expresseth it. And so the Roman orator (who it is likely did not think of purgatory) used <sup>Tully.</sup> this phrase, *Quo ex judicio, velut ex incendio, nudus effugit*: from which judgment or sentence he escaped naked, as it were out of a burning. <sup>Aristides.</sup> And one of the Greek orators tells us, that “to save a man out of the fire, was a common proverbial speech.”

From the words thus explained, the observation that naturally ariseth is this, that men may hold all the fundamentals of Christian religion, and yet may superadd other things whereby they may greatly endanger their salvation. What those things were, which some among the Corinthians built upon the foundation of Christianity, whereby they endangered their salvation, we may probably conjecture, by what the apostle reproveth in this epistle, as the tolerating incestuous marriages, communicating in idol feasts, &c. And especially by the doctrine of the false apostles, who at that time did so much disturb the peace of most Christian churches, and who are so often and so severely reflected upon in this epistle. And what their doctrine was, we have an account, Acts xv. viz. that they imposed upon the Gentile Christians circumcision, and the observation of the Jewish law, teaching, that unless they were circumcised, and kept the law of Moses, they could not be saved. So that they did not only build these doctrines upon Christianity, but they made them equal with the foundation, saying, that unless men believed and practised such things they could not be saved.

In speaking to this observation, I shall reduce my discourse to these two heads:—

I. I shall present to you some doctrines and practices which have been built upon the foundation of Christianity, to the great hazard and danger of men's salvation. And to be plain, I mean particularly the church of Rome.

II. I shall inquire, whether our granting a possibility of salvation (though with great hazard) to those in the communion of the Roman church, and their denying it to us, be a reasonable argument and encouragement to any man to betake himself to that church.

And there is the more reason to consider these things, when so many seducing spirits are so active and busy to pervert men from the truth; and when we see every day so many men and their religion so easily parted. For this reason, these two considerations shall be the subject of the following discourse.

i. First, We will consider some doctrines and practices which the church of Rome hath built upon the foundation of Christianity, to the great hazard and danger of men's salvation. It is not denied, by the most judicious protestants, but that the church of Rome do hold all the articles of the Christian faith, which are necessary to salvation. But that which we charge upon them, as a just ground of our separation from them, is the imposing of new doctrines and practices upon Christians, as necessary to salvation, which were never taught by our Saviour, or his apostles; and which are either directly contrary to the doctrine of Christianity, or too apparently destructive of a good life. And I begin,

1. With their doctrines. And because I have no mind to aggravate lesser matters, I will single out four or five points of doctrine, which they have added to the Christian religion, and which were neither taught by our Saviour and his apostles, nor owned in the first ages of Christianity. And the

First which I shall mention, and which, being once admitted, makes way for as many errors as they please to bring in, is their doctrine of infallibility. And this they are very stiff and peremptory in, though they are not agreed among themselves where this infallibility is seated; whether in the pope alone, or a council alone, or in both together, or in the diffusive body of Christians. But they are sure they have it, though they know not where it is.

And is this no prejudice against it? Can any man think that this privilege was at first conferred upon the church of Rome, and that Christians in all ages did believe it, and had constant recourse to it for determining their differences, and yet that very church, which had enjoyed and used it so long, should now be at a loss where to find it? Nothing could have fallen out more unluckily, than that there should be such differences among them about that, which they pretend to be the only means of ending all differences.

There is not the least intimation in Scripture of this privilege conferred upon the Roman church, nor do the apostles, in all their epistles, ever so much as give the least direction to Christians to appeal to the bishop of Rome for a determination of the many differences, which even in those times happened among them. And it is strange they should be so silent in this matter, when there were so many occasions to speak of it, if our Saviour

had plainly appointed such an infallible judge of controversies for this very end, to decide the differences that should happen among Christians. It is strange that the ancient fathers in their disputes with heretics, should never appeal to this judge; nay, it is strange they should not constantly do it in all their cases, it being so short and expedite a way for the ending of controversies. And this very consideration to a wise man is instead of a thousand arguments to satisfy him, that in those times no such thing was believed in the world.

Now this doctrine of infallibility, if it be not true, is of so much the more pernicious consequence to Christianity, because the conceit of it does confirm them that think they have it in all their other errors; and gives them a pretence of assuming an authority to themselves, to impose their own fancies and mistakes upon the whole Christian world.

2. Their doctrine about repentance, which consists in confessing their sins to the priest; which, if it be accompanied with any degree of contrition, does, upon absolution received from the priest, put them into a state of salvation, though they have lived the most lewd and debauched lives that can be imagined; than which, nothing can be more plainly destructive of a good life. For, if this be true, all the hazard that the most wicked man runs of his salvation, is only the danger of so sudden a death as gives him no space for confession and absolution. A case that happens so rarely, that any man that is strongly addicted to his lusts, will be content to venture his salvation upon this hazard; and all the arguments to a good life will be very insignificant to a man that hath a mind to be wicked, when remission of sins may be had upon such cheap terms.

3. The doctrine of purgatory; by which they mean an estate of temporary punishments after this life, from which men may be released and translated into heaven by the prayers of the living, and the sacrifice of the mass. That this doctrine was not known to the primitive church, nor can be proved from Scripture, we have the free acknowledgment of as learned and eminent men as any of the church; which is to acknowledge, that it is a superstructure upon the Christian religion. And though in one sense it be indeed a building of gold and silver upon the foundation of Christianity, considering the vast revenues which this doctrine (and that of indulgences, which depends upon it) brings into that church; yet, I doubt not, but in the apostle's sense, it will be found to be hay and stubble. But how groundless soever it be, it is too gainful a doctrine to be easily parted withal.

4. The doctrine of transubstantiation. A hard word, but I would to God that were the worst of it; the thing is much more difficult. I have taken some pains to consider other religions that have been in the world, and I must freely declare, that I never yet in any of them met with any article or proposition, imposed upon the belief of men, half so unreasonable and hard to be believed as this is: and yet this, in the Romish church, is esteemed one of the most principal articles of the Christian faith; though there is no more certain foundation for it in Scripture, than for our Saviour's being substantially changed into all those things which are said of him, as that, he is a rock, a vine, a door, and a hundred other things.

But this is not all. This doctrine hath not only no certain foundation in Scripture, but I have a far

heavier charge against it, namely, that it undermines the very foundation of Christianity itself. And surely, nothing ought to be admitted to be a part of the Christian doctrine, which destroys the reason of our belief of the whole. And that this doctrine does so, will appear evidently, if we consider what was the main argument which the apostles used to convince the world of the truth of Christianity; and that was this, "That our blessed Saviour, the author of this doctrine, wrought such and such miracles, and particularly that he rose again from the dead." And this they proved, because they were eye witnesses of his miracles, and had seen him and conversed with him after he was risen from the dead. But what if their senses did deceive them in this matter? then it cannot be denied, but that the main proof of Christianity falls to the ground.

Well! We will now suppose (as the church of Rome does) transubstantiation to have been one principal part of the Christian doctrine which the apostles preached. But if this doctrine be true, then all men's senses are deceived in a plain sensible matter, wherein it is as hard for them to be deceived as in any thing in the world: for two things can hardly be imagined more different, than a little bit of wafer and the whole body of a man. So that the apostles persuading men to believe this doctrine, persuaded them not to trust their senses; and yet the argument which they used to persuade them to this, was built upon the direct contrary principle, that men's senses are to be trusted. For, if they be not, then, notwithstanding all the evidence the apostles offered for the resurrection of our Saviour, he might not be risen, and so the faith of Christians was vain. So that they represent the apostles as

absurd as is possible, viz. going about to persuade men out of their senses, by virtue of an argument, the whole strength whereof depends upon the certainty of sense.

And now the matter is brought to a fair issue: if the testimony of sense be to be relied upon, then transubstantiation is false; if it be not, then no man is sure that Christianity is true. For the utmost assurance that the apostles had of the truth of Christianity, was the testimony of their own senses concerning our Saviour's miracles; and this testimony every man hath against transubstantiation. From whence it plainly follows, that no man (no, not the apostles themselves) had more reason to believe Christianity to be true, than every man hath to believe transubstantiation to be false. And we who did not see our Saviour's miracles (as the apostles did), and have only a credible relation of them, but do see the sacrament, have less evidence of the truth of Christianity, than of the falsehood of transubstantiation.

But cannot God impose upon the senses of men, and represent things to them otherwise than they are? Yes, undoubtedly. And if he hath revealed that he doth this, are we not to believe him? Most certainly. But then we ought to be assured, that he hath made such a revelation; which assurance, no man can have, the certainty of sense being taken away.

I shall press the business a little farther. Supposing the Scripture to be a Divine revelation, and that these words "this is my body," if they be in Scripture, must necessarily be taken in the strict and literal sense; I ask now, what greater evidence any man has, that these words "this is my body," are in

the Bible, than every man has that the bread is not changed in the sacrament? Nay, no man has so much; for we have only the evidence of one sense, that these words are in the Bible; but that the bread is not changed, we have the concurring testimony of several of our senses. In a word, if this be once admitted, that the senses of all men are deceived in one of the most plain, sensible matters that can be, there is no certain means left, either to convey or prove a Divine revelation to men; nor is there any way to confute the grossest impostures in the world: for if the clear evidence of all men's senses be not sufficient for this purpose, let any man, if he can, find a better and more convincing argument.

5. I will instance but one doctrine more: and that shall be, their doctrine of deposing kings in case of heresy, and absolving their subjects from their allegiance to them. And this is not a mere speculative doctrine, but hath been put in practice many a time by the bishops of Rome, as every one knows that is versed in history. For the troubles and confusions which were occasioned by this very thing, make up a good part of the history of several ages.

I hope nobody expects that I should take the pains to shew that this was not the doctrine of our Saviour and his apostles, nor of the primitive Christians. The papists are many of them so far from pretending this, that in some times and places, when it is not seasonable and for their purpose, we have much ado to persuade them, that ever it was their doctrine. But if transubstantiation be their doctrine, this is; for they came both out of the same forge—I mean the council of Lateran, under



Pope Innocent the Third. And if (as they tell us) transubstantiation was then established, so was this. And indeed one would think they were twins, and brought forth at the same time, they are so like one another, both of them so monstrously unreasonable.

II. I come now, in the second place, to consider some practices of the church of Rome, which I am afraid will prove as bad as her doctrines; I shall instance in these five.

1. Their celebrating of their Divine service in an unknown tongue; and that, not only contrary to the practice of the primitive church, and to the great end and design of religious worship, which is the edification of those who are concerned in it (and it is hard to imagine how men can be edified by what they do not understand), but likewise in direct contradiction to St. Paul, who hath no less than a whole chapter, wherein he confutes this practice as fully, and condemns it as plainly, as any thing is condemned in the whole Bible. And they that can have the face to maintain that this practice was not condemned by St. Paul, or that it was allowed and used in the first ages of Christianity, need not be ashamed to set up for the defence of any paradox in the world.

2. The communion in one kind. And that, notwithstanding that even, by their own acknowledgment, our Saviour instituted it in both kinds, and the primitive church administered it in both kinds. This I must acknowledge is no addition to Christianity, but a sacrilegious taking away of an essential part of the sacrament. For the cup is as essential a part of the institution as the bread; and they might as well, and by the same authority, take away the one as the other, and both as well as either.

3. Their worshipping of images. Which practice (notwithstanding all their distinctions about it, which are no other but what the heathens used in the same case) is as point-blank against the second commandment, as a deliberate and malicious killing of a man is against the sixth. But if the case be so plain, a man would think, that at least the teachers and guides of that church should be sensible of it. Why—they are so, and afraid the people should be so too; and therefore, in their ordinary catechisms and manuals of devotion, they leave out the second commandment, and divide the tenth into two, to make up the number, lest, if the common people should know it, their consciences would start at the doing of a thing so directly contrary to the plain command of God.

4. The worshipping of the bread and wine in the eucharist, out of a false and groundless persuasion, that they are substantially changed into the body and blood of Christ. Which, if it be not true (and it hath good fortune if it be, for certainly it is one of the most incredible things in the whole world), then, by the confession of several of their own learned writers, they are guilty of gross idolatry.

5. The worship and invocation of saints and angels; and particularly of the Virgin Mary, which hath now for some ages been a principal part of their religion. Now a man may justly wonder, that so considerable a part of religion as they make this to be, should have no manner of foundation in the Scripture. Does our Saviour any where speak one word concerning the worshipping of her? Nay, does he not take all occasions to restrain all extravagant apprehensions and imaginations concerning honour due to her, as foreseeing the degeneracy of

the church in this thing? When he was told that his mother and brethren were without, "Who," says he, "are my mother and my brethren? He that doth the will of my Father, the same is my mother, my sister, and brother." And when the woman brake forth into that rapture, concerning the blessed mother of our Lord, "Blessed is the womb that bear thee, and the paps that gave thee suck!" our Saviour diverts to another thing, "Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it." Does either our Saviour or his apostles, in all their particular precepts and directions concerning prayer, and the manner of it, and by whom we are to address ourselves to God, give the least intimation of praying to the Virgin Mary, or making use of her mediation? And can any man believe, that if this had been the practice of the church from the beginning, our Saviour and his apostles would have been so silent about so considerable a part of religion; insomuch, that in all the epistles of the apostles, I do not remember that her name is so much as once mentioned? And yet the worship of her is at this day in the church of Rome, and hath been so for several ages, a main part of their public worship; yea, and of their private devotions too; in which it is usual with them to say ten Ave Marias for one Pater-noster; that is, for one prayer they make to Almighty God, they make ten addresses to the blessed Virgin; for that is the proportion observed in their rosaries. He that considers this, and had never seen the Bible, would have been apt to think that there had been more said concerning her in Scripture, than either concerning God or our blessed Saviour; and that the New Testament were full, from one end to the other of

precepts and exhortations to the worshipping of her ; and yet, when all is done, I challenge any man to shew me so much as one sentence in the whole Bible that sounds that way. And there is as little in the Christian writers of the first three hundred years. The truth is, this practice began to creep in among some superstitious people, about the middle of the fourth century; and I remember particularly, that Epiphanius, who lived about that time, calls it the heresy of the women.

And thus I have given you some instances of several doctrines and practices which the church of Rome hath built upon the foundation of Christianity. Much more might have been said of them, but from what hath been said, any man may easily discern how dangerous they are to the salvation of men.

I proceed now, in the second place,

II. To consider, whether our granting a possibility of salvation, though with great hazard, to those in the communion of the Roman church, and their denying it to us, be a sufficient argument and encouragement to any man to quit our church and go to their's. And there is the more need to consider this, because this is the great popular argument wherewith the emissaries and agents of that church are wont to assault our people. "Your church," say they, "grants that a papist may be saved, our's denies that a protestant can be saved; therefore, it is safest to be of our church, in which salvation, by the acknowledgment of both sides, is possible."

For answer to this, I shall endeavour to shew, that this is so far from being a good argument, that it is so intolerably weak and sophistical, that any

considerate man ought to be ashamed to be caught by it. For, either it is good of itself, and sufficient to persuade a man to relinquish our church, and to pass over to their's, without entering into the merits of the cause on either side, and without comparing the doctrines and practices of both the churches together, or it is not. If it be not sufficient of itself to persuade a man to leave our church, without comparing the doctrines on both sides, then it is to no purpose, and there is nothing got by it. For if, upon examination and comparing of doctrines, the one appear to be true and the other false, this alone is a sufficient inducement to any man to cleave to that church where the true doctrine is found; and then there is no need of this argument.

If it be said, that this argument is good in itself, without the examination of the doctrines of both churches, this seems a very strange thing for any man to affirm,—“That it is reason enough to a man to be of any church, whatever her doctrines and practices be, if she do but damn those that differ from her, and if the church that differs from her do but allow a possibility of salvation in her communion.”

But they who use this argument pretend, that it is sufficient of itself; and therefore I shall apply myself to shew, as briefly and plainly as I can, the miserable weakness and insufficiency of it to satisfy any man's conscience or prudence to change his religion. And to this end I shall,

I. Shew the weakness of the principle upon which this argument relies.

II. Give some parallel instances by which it will clearly appear that it concludes false.

III. I shall take notice of some gross absurdities that follow from it.

iv. Shew how unfit it is to work upon those to whom it is propounded. And,

v. How improper it is to be urged by those that make use of it.

i. I shall shew the weakness of the principle upon which this argument relies : and that is this—that whatever different parties in religion agree in, is safest to be chosen. The true consequence of which principle, if it be driven to the head, is to persuade men to forsake Christianity, and to make them take up in the principles of natural religion ; for in these all religions do agree. For if this principle be true, and signify any thing, it is dangerous to embrace any thing wherein the several parties in religion differ ; because, that only is safe and prudent to be chosen wherein all agree. So that this argument, if the foundation of it be good, will persuade farther than those who make use of it desire it should do, for it will not only make men forsake the protestant religion, but popery too ; and, which is much more considerable, Christianity itself.

ii. I will give some parallel instances, by which it will clearly be seen that this argument concludes false. The Donatists denied the baptism of the catholics to be good, but the catholics acknowledged the baptism of the Donatists to be valid. So that both sides were agreed, that the baptism of the Donatists was good ; therefore, the safest way for St. Austin and other catholics (according to this argument) was to be baptized again by the Donatists ; because, by the acknowledgment of both sides, baptism among them was valid.

But to come nearer to the church of Rome. Several in that church hold the personal infallibility of the pope, and the lawfulness of deposing and killing kings for heresy, to be *de fide*, that is, neces-

sary articles of faith, and, consequently, that whoever does not believe them cannot be saved. But a great many papists, though they believe these things to be no matters of faith, yet they think those that hold them may be saved, and they are generally very favourable towards them. But now, according to this argument, they ought all to be of their opinion in these points, because both sides are agreed that they that hold them may be saved; but one side positively says that men cannot be saved if they do not hold them.

But my text furnisheth me with as good an instance to this purpose as can be desired. St. Paul here in the text acknowledgeth the possibility of the salvation of those who built hay and stubble upon the foundation of Christianity; that they might be saved, though with great difficulty, and as it were out of the fire. But now among those builders with hay and stubble, there were those who denied the possibility of St. Paul's salvation, and of those who were of his mind. We are told of some who built the Jewish ceremonies and observances, upon the foundation of Christianity, and said, that unless men were circumcised and kept the law of Moses, they could not be saved. So that by this argument, St. Paul and his followers ought to have gone over to those Judaizing Christians, because it was acknowledged on both sides that they might be saved. But these Judaizing Christians were as uncharitable to St. Paul and other Christians, as the church of Rome is now to us, for they said positively that they could not be saved. But can any man think that St. Paul would have been moved by this argument, to leave a safe and certain way of salvation for that which was only possible, and that with great difficulty and hazard? The argument you see is the

very same, and yet it concludes the wrong way: which plainly shews, that it is a contingent argument, and concludes uncertainly and by chance, and therefore no man ought to be moved by it.

III. I shall take notice of some gross absurdities that follow from it. I shall mention but these two:

1. According to this principle, it is always safest to be on the uncharitable side. And yet uncharitableness is as bad an evidence, either of a true Christian, or a true church, as a man would wish. Charity is one of the most essential marks of Christianity, and what the apostle saith of particular Christians is as true of whole churches, “that though they have all faith, yet if they have not charity they are nothing.”

I grant, that no charity teacheth men to see others damned, and not to tell them the danger of their condition. But it is to be considered, that the damning of men is a very hard thing, and, therefore, whenever we do it the case must be wonderfully plain. And is it so in this matter? They of the church of Rome cannot deny but that we embrace all the doctrines of our Saviour, contained in the Apostles’ Creed, and determined by the four first General Councils; and yet they will not allow this and a good life to put us within a possibility of salvation, because we will not submit to all the innovations they would impose upon us. And yet I think there is scarce any doctrine or practice in difference between them and us, which some or other of their most learned writers have not acknowledged either not to be sufficiently contained in Scripture, or not to have been held and practised by the primitive church: so that nothing can excuse their uncharitableness towards us. And they pay dear for the little advantage they get by this argument, for they



do what in them lies to make themselves no Christians, that they may prove themselves the truer and more Christian church. A medium which we do not desire to make use of.

2. If this argument were good, then by this trick a man may bring over all the world, to agree with him in an error, which another does not account damnable, whatever it be, provided he do but damn all those that do not hold it; and there wants nothing but confidence and uncharitableness to do this. But is there any sense, that another man's boldness and want of charity, should be an argument to move me to be of his opinion? I cannot illustrate this better, than by the difference between a skilful physician and a mountebank. A learned and skilful physician is modest, and speaks justly of things: he says, that such a method of cure which he hath directed is safe; and withal, that that which the mountebank prescribes may possibly do the work, but there is great hazard and danger in it: but the mountebank, who never talks of any thing less than infallible cures (and always the more the mountebank the stronger pretence to infallibility), he is positive that that method which the physician prescribes will destroy the patient, but his receipt is infallible and never fails. Is there any reason in this case, that this man shall carry it merely by his confidence? And yet if this argument be good, the safest way is to reject the physician's advice, and to stick to the mountebank's. For both sides are agreed that there is a possibility of cure in the mountebank's method, but not in the physician's, and so the whole force of the argument lies in the confidence of an ignorant man.

iv. This argument is very unfit to work upon

those to whom it is propounded : for either they believe we say true in this, or not. If they think we do not, they have no reason to be moved by what we say. If they think we do, why do they not take in all that we say in this matter ? Namely, that though it be possible for some in the communion of the Roman church to be saved, yet it is very hazardous : and that they are in a safe condition already in our church. And why then should a bare possibility, accompanied with infinite and apparent hazard, be an argument to any man to run into that danger ?

Lastly. This argument is very improper to be urged by those who make use of it. Half of the strength of it lies in this, that we protestants acknowledge that it is possible a papist may be saved. But why should they lay any stress upon this ? What matter is it what we heretics say, who are so damnably mistaken in all other things ? Methinks, if there were no other reason, yet because we say it, it should seem to them unlikely to be true. But I perceive, when it serves for their purpose, we have some little credit and authority among them.

By this time I hope every one is in some measure satisfied of the weakness of this argument, which is so transparent, that no wise man can honestly use it, and he must have a very odd understanding that can be cheated by it. The truth is, it is a casual and contingent argument, and sometimes it concludes right, and oftener wrong ; and therefore no prudent man can be moved by it, except only in one case, when all things are so equal on both sides, that there is nothing else in the whole world to determine him ; which surely can never happen in matters of religion, necessary to be believed. No man

is so weak, as not to consider in the change of his religion, the merits of the cause itself; as not to examine the doctrines and practices of the churches on both sides; as not to take notice of the confidence and charity of both parties, together with all other things, which ought to move a conscientious and a prudent man: and if, upon inquiry, there appear to be a clear advantage on either side, then this argument is needless and comes too late, because the work is already done without it.

Besides, that the great hazard of salvation in the Roman church (which we declare, upon account of the doctrines and practices which I have mentioned) ought to deter any man much more from that religion, than the acknowledged possibility of salvation in it ought to encourage any man to the embracing of it. Never did any Christian church build so much hay and stubble upon the foundation of Christianity; and, therefore, those that are saved in it, must be saved as it were out of the fire. And though purgatory be not meant in the text, yet it is a doctrine very well suited to their manner of building; for there is need of an *ignis purgatorius*, of a fire to try their work, what it is, and to burn up their hay and stubble. And I have so much charity (and I desire always to have it) as to hope, that a great many among them who live piously, and have been almost inevitably detained in that church, by the prejudice of education and an invincible ignorance, will, upon a general repentance, find mercy with God; and though their works suffer loss, and be burnt, yet they themselves may escape, as out of the fire. But as for those who had the opportunities of coming to the knowledge of the truth, if they continue in the errors of that church, or apostatize from the truth, I think their condition

so far from being safe, that there must be extraordinary favourable circumstances in their case to give a man hopes of their salvation.

I have now done with the two things I propounded to speak to. And I am sorry, that the necessary defence of our religion, against the restless importunities and attempts of our adversaries upon all sorts of persons, hath engaged me to spend so much time in matters of dispute, which I had much rather have employed in another way. Many of you can be my witnesses, that I have constantly made it my business, in this great presence and assembly, to plead against the impieties and wickedness of men, and have endeavoured, by the best arguments I could think of, to gain men over to a firm belief and serious practice of the main things of religion; and I do assure you, I had much rather persuade any one to be a good man, than to be of any party or denomination of Christians whatsoever. For I doubt not but the belief of the ancient creed, provided we entertain nothing that is destructive of it, together with a good life, will certainly save a man; and without this no man can have reasonable hopes of salvation, no, not in an infallible church, if there were any such thing to be found in the world.

I have been, according to my opportunities, not a negligent observer of the genius and humour of the several sects and professions in religion; and upon the whole matter, I do in my conscience believe, the church of England to be the best constituted church this day in the world; and that, as to the main, the doctrine, and government, and worship of it, are excellently framed to make men soberly religious: securing men, on the one hand, from the wild freaks of enthusiasm, and on the other, from the gross

follies of superstition. And our church hath this peculiar advantage, above several professions that we know in the world, that it acknowledgeth a due and just subordination to the civil authority, and hath always been untainted in its loyalty.

And now, shall every trifling consideration be sufficient to move a man to relinquish such a church? There is no greater disparagement to a man's understanding, no greater argument of a light and ungenerous mind, than rashly to change one's religion. Religion is our greatest concernment of all other; and it is not every little argument, no, nor a great noise about infallibility, nothing but very plain and convincing evidence, that should sway a man in this case. But they are utterly inexcusable who make a change of such concernment upon the insinuations of one side only, without ever hearing what can be said for the church they were baptized and brought up in before they leave it. They, that can yield thus easily to the impressions of every one that hath a design and interest to make proselytes, may, at this rate of discretion, change their religion twice a-day, and instead of morning and evening prayer, they may have a morning and evening religion. Therefore, for God's sake, and for our own soul's sake, and for the sake of our reputation, let us consider and shew ourselves men—let us not suffer ourselves to be shaken and carried away with every wind—let us not run ourselves into danger when we may be safe—let us stick to the foundation of religion, the articles of our common belief, and build upon them gold, and silver, and precious stones—I mean the virtues and actions of a good life; and if we would do this, we should not be apt to set such a value upon hay and stubble. If we would sincerely

endeavour to live holy and virtuous lives, we should not need to cast about for a religion which may furnish us with easy and indirect ways to get to heaven.

I will conclude all with the apostle's exhortation, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord."

"Now the God of peace, which brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work, to do his will ; working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

## SERMON XII.

OF THE INWARD PEACE AND PLEASURE WHICH  
ATTENDS RELIGION.

*Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them.*—PSALM CXIX. 165.

IN these words there are two things contained, the description of a good man and the reward of his goodness.

I. The description of a good man : he is said to be one that loves the law of God, that is, that loves to meditate upon it, and to practise it.

II. The reward of his goodness, “ Great peace have they that love thy law.” The word peace is many times used in Scripture in a very large sense, so as to comprehend all kind of happiness ; sometimes it signifies outward peace and quiet, in opposition to war and contention ; and sometimes inward peace and contentment, in opposition to inward trouble and anguish. I understand the text chiefly in this last sense, not wholly excluding either of the other.

My design, at present, from these words, is to recommend religion to men, from the consideration of that inward peace and pleasure which attends it. And surely nothing can be said more to the advantage of religion, in the opinion of considerate men, than this. For the aim of all philosophy, and the great search of wise men, hath been how to attain peace and tranquillity of mind ; and if religion

be able to give this, a greater commendation need not be given to religion.

But before I enter upon this argument, I shall premise two things by way of caution:

First, That these kind of observations are not to be taken too strictly and rigorously, as if they never failed in any one instance. Aristotle observed, long since, that moral and proverbial sayings are understood to be true, generally, and for the most part; and that is all the truth that is to be expected in them: as when Solomon says, "Train up a child in the way wherein he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it:" this is not to be so taken as if no child that is piously educated did ever miscarry afterwards, but that the good education of children is the best way to make good men, and commonly approved to be so by experience. So here, when it is said that "great peace have they that love God's law;" the meaning is, that religion hath generally this effect, though, in some cases, and as to some persons, it may be accidentally hindered.

Secondly, When I say that religion gives peace and tranquillity to our minds, this is chiefly to be understood of a religious state, in which a man is well settled and confirmed, and not of our first entrance into it, for that is more or less troublesome according as we make it. If we begin a religious course betimes, before we have contracted any great guilt, and before the habits of sin be grown strong in us, the work goes on easily without any great conflict or resistance. But the case is otherwise, when a man breaks off from a wicked life, and becomes religious from the direct contrary course in which he hath been long and deeply engaged. In this case,



no man is so unreasonable as to deny, that there is a great deal of sensible trouble and difficulty in the making of this change; but when it is once made, peace and comfort will spring up by degrees, and daily increase as we grow more confirmed and established in a good course.

These two things being premised, I shall now endeavour to shew, that religion gives a man the greatest pleasure and satisfaction of mind, and that there is no true peace, nor any comparable pleasure, to be had in a contrary course. And that from these two heads:—from testimony of Scripture; and from the nature of religion, which is apt to produce peace and tranquillity of mind.

First, From testimony of Scripture. I shall select some of those texts which are more full and express to this purpose. Job xxii. 21, speaking of God, “acquaint thyself now with him and be at peace.” To acquaint ourselves with God, is a phrase of the same importance with, coming to God, and seeking of him, and many other like expressions in Scripture, which signify nothing else but to become religious. Psal. xxxvii. 31, “Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace:” or, as the words are rendered according to the LXX. in our old translation, “keep innocency, take heed to the thing that is right, for that shall bring thee peace at the last.” Prov. iii. 17, where Solomon, speaking of wisdom, which with him is but another name for religion, says, “her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.” Isa. xxxii. 17, “The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.” Matth. xi. 28, 29, “Come unto me all ye that labour and are

heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Now, to come to Christ, is to become his disciples, to believe and practise his doctrine; for so our Saviour explains himself in the next words, "take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, and ye shall find rest for your souls." Rom. ii. 10, "Glory, and honour, and peace to every man that worketh good."

And, on the contrary, the Scripture represents the condition of a sinner to be full of trouble and disquiet. David, though he was a very good man, yet when he had grievously offended God, the anguish of his mind was such as even to disorder and dis-temper his body; Psal. xxxviii. 2, 3, 4, "Thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore; there is no soundness in my flesh, because of thine anger, neither is there any rest in my bones, because of my sin; for mine iniquities are gone over mine head, and as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me." Isa. lvii. 20, 21, "The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt; there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." And Isa. lix. 7, 8, "Miserery and destruction are in their paths, and the way of peace they know not; they have made themselves crooked paths, whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace." Rom. ii. 9, "Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil."

You see how full and express the Scripture is in this matter. I come now, in the

Second place, to give you a more particular account of this from the nature of religion, which is apt to produce peace and tranquillity of mind. And that I shall do in these three particulars:

1. Religion is apt to remove the chief causes of inward trouble and disquiet.

2. It furnisheth us with all the true causes of peace and tranquillity of mind.

3. The reflection upon a religious course of life and all the actions of it, doth afterwards yield great pleasure and satisfaction.

First, Religion is apt to remove the chief causes of inward trouble and disquiet. The chief causes of inward trouble and discontent, are these two—doubting and anxiety of mind, and guilt of conscience. Now religion is apt to free us from both these.

1. From doubting and anxiety of mind. Irreligion and atheism makes a man full of doubts and jealousies, whether he be in the right, and whether, at last, things will not prove quite otherwise than he hath rashly determined. For, though a man endeavour never so much to settle himself in the principles of infidelity, and to persuade his mind that there is no God, and consequently that there are no rewards to be hoped for, nor punishments to be feared in another life; yet he can never attain to a steady and unshaken persuasion of these things: and however he may please himself with witty reasons against the common belief of mankind, and smart repartees to their arguments, and bold and pleasant raillery about these matters; yet I dare say, no man ever set down in a clear and full satisfaction concerning them. For when he hath done all that he can to reason himself out of religion, his conscience ever and anon recoils upon him, and his natural thoughts and apprehensions rise up against his reasonings, and all his wit and subtlety is confuted, and borne down by a secret and strong suspicion, which he can by no means get out of his mind—that things may be otherwise.

And the reason hereof is plain, because all this is an endeavour against nature and those vigorous instincts which God hath planted in the minds of men to the contrary. For, whenever our minds are free and not violently hurried away by passion, nor blinded by prejudice, they do of themselves return to their first and most natural apprehension of things. And this is the reason why, when the atheist falls into any great calamity, and is awakened to an impartial consideration of things, by the apprehension of death and judgment, and despairs of enjoying any longer those pleasures for the sake of which he hath all this while rebelled against religion, his courage presently sinks, and all his arguments fail him, and his case is now too serious to admit of jesting, and at the bottom of his soul he doubts of all that which he asserted with so much confidence, and set so good a face upon before, and can find no ease to his mind but in retreating from his former principles, nor no hopes of consolation for himself, but in acknowledging that God whom he hath denied, and imploring his mercy whom he hath affronted.

This is always the case of these persons when they come to extremity, not to mention the infinite checks and rebukes which their own minds give them upon other occasions: so that it is very seldom that these men have any tolerable enjoyment of themselves, but are forced to run away from themselves into company, and to stupify themselves by intemperance, that they may not feel the fearful twitches and gripings of their own minds.

Whereas, he who entertains the principles of religion, and therein follows his own natural apprehensions and the general voice of mankind, and is not conscious to himself that he knowingly and

wilfully lives contrary to these principles, hath no anxiety in his mind about these things; being verily persuaded they are true, and that he hath all the reason in the world to think so; and if they should prove otherwise (which he hath no other cause to suspect) yet he hath this satisfaction, that he hath taken the wisest course, and hath consulted his own present peace and future security infinitely better than the atheist hath done, in case he should prove to be mistaken. For it is a fatal mistake to think there is no God, if there be one; but a mistake on the other hand hath no future bad consequences depending upon it, nor indeed any great present inconvenience, religion only restraining a man from doing some things, from most of which it is good he should be restrained however; so that, at the worst, the religious man is only mistaken, but the atheist is miserable if he be mistaken; miserable beyond all imagination, and past all remedy.

2. Another, and indeed a principal cause of trouble and discontent to the minds of men, is guilt. Now guilt is a consciousness to ourselves that we have done amiss, and the very thought that we have done amiss is apt to lie very cross in our minds, and to cause great anguish and confusion. Besides that, guilt is always attended with fear, which naturally springs up in the mind of man from a secret apprehension of the mischief and inconvenience that his sin will bring upon him, and of the vengeance that hangs over him from God, and will overtake him either in this world or in the other.

And though the sinner, while he is in full health and prosperity, may make a shift to divert and shake off those fears; yet they frequently return upon him, and upon every little noise of danger, upon the

apprehension of any calamity that comes near him, his guilty mind is presently jealous that it is making towards him, and is particularly levelled against him. For he is sensible that there is a just power above him, to whose indignation he is continually liable, and therefore he is always in fear of him, and how long soever he may have escaped punishment in this world, he cannot but dread the vengeance of the other; and these thoughts are a continual disturbance to his mind, and in the midst of laughter make his heart heavy; and the longer he continues in a wicked course, the more he multiplies the grounds and causes of his fears.

But now religion frees a man from all this torment, either by preventing the cause of it, or directing to the cure; either by preserving us from guilt, or clearing us of it in case we have contracted it. It preserves us from guilt, by keeping us innocent; and in case we have offended, it clears us of it by leading us to repentance, and the amendment of our lives; which is the only way to recover the favour of God and the peace of our own consciences, and to secure us against all apprehension of danger from the Divine justice; though not absolutely from all fear of punishment in this world, yet from that which is the greatest danger of all, the condemnation and torment of the world to come. And by this means a man's mind is settled in perfect peace, religion freeing him from those tormenting fears of the Divine displeasure, which he can upon no other terms rid himself of; whereas the sinner is always sowing the seeds of trouble in his own mind, and laying the foundation of continual discontent to himself.

Secondly, As religion removes the chief grounds of trouble and disquiet, so it ministers to us all the

true causes of peace and tranquillity of mind. Whoever lives according to the rules of religion, lays these three great foundations of peace and comfort to himself:—

1. He is satisfied that in being religious he doth that which is most reasonable.

2. That he secures himself against the greatest mischiefs and dangers by making God his friend.

3. That upon the whole matter he does in all respects most effectually consult and promote his own interest and happiness.

1. He is satisfied that he does that which is most reasonable. And it is no small pleasure to be justified in ourselves, to be satisfied that we are what we ought to be, and do what in reason we ought to do; that which best becomes us, and which, according to the primitive intention of our being, is most natural; for whatever is natural is pleasant. Now the practice of piety towards God, and of every other grace and virtue which religion teacheth us, are things reasonable in themselves, and what God when he made us intended we should do. And a man is then pleased with himself and his own actions, when he doth what he is convinced he ought to do; and is then offended with himself, when he goes against the light of his own mind, by neglecting his duty, or doing contrary to it; for then his conscience checks him, and there is something within him that is uneasy, and puts him into disorder. As when a man eats or drinks any thing that is unwholesome, it offends his stomach, and puts his body into an unnatural and a restless state.

For every thing is then at rest and peace, when it is in that state in which nature intended it to be, and being violently forced out of it, it is never quiet

till it recover again. Now religion, and the practice of its virtues, is the natural state of the soul ; the condition which God designed it. As God made man a reasonable creature, so all the acts of religion are reasonable and suitable to our nature : and our souls are then in health, when we are what the laws of religion require us to be, and do what they command us to do. And as we find an inexpressible ease and pleasure when our body is in its perfect state of health ; and, on the contrary, every distemper causeth pain and uneasiness ; so is it with the soul. When religion governs all our inclinations and actions, and the temper of our minds, and the course of our lives, is conformable to the precepts of it, all is at peace. But when we are otherwise, and live in any vicious practice, how can there be peace ; so long as we act unreasonably, and do those things whereby we necessarily create trouble and disturbance to ourselves ? How can we hope to be at ease, so long as we are in a sick and diseased condition ? Until the corruption that is in us be wrought out, our spirits will be in a perpetual tumult and fermentation ; and it is as impossible for us to enjoy the peace and serenity of our minds, as it is for a sick man to be at ease : the man may use what arts of diversion he will, and change from one place and posture to another ; but still he is restless. because there is that within him which gives him pain and disturbance : “ There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.” Such men may dissemble their condition, and put on the face and appearance of pleasantness and contentment ; but God, who sees all the secrets of men’s hearts, knows it is far otherwise with them : “ There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.”



2. Another ground of peace which the religious man hath, is—that he hath made God his friend. Now friendship is peace and pleasure both; it is mutual love, and that is a double pleasure; and it is hard to say which is the greatest, the pleasure of loving God, or of knowing that he loves us. Now whoever sincerely endeavours to please God, may rest perfectly assured that God hath no displeasure against him; for “the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and his countenance shall behold the upright;” that is, he will be favourable to such persons. As “he hates the workers of iniquity,” so “he takes pleasure in them that fear him, in such as keep his covenant, and remember his commandments to do them.”

And, being assured of his favour, we are secured against the greatest dangers and the greatest fears; and may say with David, “Return then unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee; the Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?” What can reasonably trouble or discontent that man, who hath made his peace with God, and is restored to his favour, who is the best and most powerful friend, and can be the sorest and most dangerous enemy in the whole world?

3. By being religious, we do most effectually consult our own interest and happiness. A great part of religion consists in moderating our appetites and passions, and this naturally tends to the composure of our minds. He that lives piously and virtuously, acts according to reason, and in so doing, maintains the present peace of his own mind; and, not only so, but he lays the foundation of his future happi-

ness to all eternity. For religion gives a man the hopes of eternal life : and all pleasure does not consist in present enjoyment ; there is a mighty pleasure, also, in the firm belief and expectation of a future good ; and if it be a great and lasting good, it will support a man under a great many present evils. If religion be certainly the way to avoid the greatest evils, and to bring us to happiness at last, we may contentedly bear a great many afflictions for its sake. For though all sufferings be grievous, yet it is pleasant to escape great dangers, and to come to the possession of a mighty good, though it be with great difficulty and inconvenience to ourselves. And when we come to heaven (if ever we be so happy as to get thither) it will be a new and a greater pleasure to us, to remember the pains and troubles whereby we were saved and made happy.

So that all these put together are a firm foundation of peace and comfort to a good man. There is a great satisfaction in the very doing of our duty, and acting reasonably, though there may happen to be some present trouble and inconvenience in it. But when we do not only satisfy ourselves in so doing, but likewise please him, whose favour is better than life, and whose frowns are more terrible than death ; when in doing our duty we directly promote our own happiness, and in serving God do most effectually serve our own interest, what can be imagined to minister more peace and pleasure to the mind of man ?

This is the second thing. Religion furnisheth us with all the true causes of peace and tranquillity of mind.

Thirdly, The reflection upon a religious and virtuous course of life, doth afterwards yield a mighty

pleasure and satisfaction. And what can commend religion more to us, than that the remembrance of any pious and virtuous action gives us so much contentment and delight? So that whatever difficulty and reluctancy we may find in the doing of it, to be sure there is peace and satisfaction in the looking back upon it. No man ever reflected upon himself with regret for having done his duty to God or man; for having lived soberly, or righteously, or godly, in this present world. Nay, on the contrary, the conscience of any duty faithfully discharged, the memory of any good we have done, does refresh the soul with a strange kind of pleasure and joy: "Our rejoicing is this (saith St. Paul), the testimony of our consciences, that in all simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world."

But, on the other side, the course of a vicious life, all acts of impiety to God, of malice and injustice to men, of intemperance and excess in reference to ourselves, do certainly leave a sting behind them. And whatever pleasure there may be in the present act of them, the memory of them is so tormenting, that men are glad to use all the arts of diversion to fence off the thoughts of them. One of the greatest troubles in the world to a bad man is to look into himself, and to remember how he hath lived. I appeal to the consciences of men, whether this be not true.

And is not here now a mighty difference between these two courses of life: that when we do any thing that is good, if there be any trouble in it, it is soon over, but the pleasure of it is perpetual; when we do a wicked action the pleasure of it is short and transient, but the trouble and sting of it remains for ever? The reflection upon the good we have done

gives a lasting satisfaction to our minds ; but the remembrance of any evil committed by us leaves a perpetual discontent.

And, which is yet more considerable, a religious and virtuous course of life does then yield most peace and comfort, when we most stand in need of it ; in times of affliction and at the hour of death. When a man falls into any great calamity, there is no comfort in the world like to that of a good conscience : this makes all calm and serene within when there is nothing but clouds and darkness about him. So David observes of the good man, Psal. cxii. 4, “ Unto the upright there ariseth light in darkness.” All the pious and virtuous actions that we do are so many seeds of peace and comfort, sown in our consciences, which will spring up and flourish most in times of outward trouble and distress : “ Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.” And at the hour of death ; “ The righteous hath hopes in his death,” saith Solomon. And what a seasonable refreshment is it to the mind of man, when the pangs of death are ready to take hold of him, and he is just stepping into the other world, to be able to look back with satisfaction upon a religious and well-spent life ? Then, if ever, the comforts of a good man do overflow, and a kind of heaven springs up in his mind, and he rejoiceth in the hopes of the glory of God. And that is a true and solid comfort indeed, which will stand by us in the day of adversity, and stick close to us when we have most need of it.

But with the ungodly it is not so : his guilt lies in wait for him, especially against such times ; and is never more fierce and raging than in the day of distress ; so that according as his troubles without are

multiplied, so are his stings within. And surely affliction is then grievous indeed, when it falls upon a galled and uneasy mind. Were it not for this, outward afflictions might be tolerable; the spirit of a man might bear his infirmities, but a wounded spirit who can bear? But especially at the hour of death, how does the guilt of his wicked life then stare him in the face! What storms and tempests are raised in his soul! which make it like the troubled sea when it cannot rest. When eternity, that fearful and amazing sight, presents itself to his mind, and he feels himself sinking into the regions of darkness, and is every moment in a fearful expectation of meeting with the just reward of his deeds; with what regret does he then remember the sins of his life! and how full of rage and indignation is he against himself for having neglected to know, when he had so many opportunities of knowing them, the things that belong to his peace; and which, because he hath neglected them, are now and likely to be for ever hid from his eyes!

And if this be the true case of the righteous and wicked man, I need not multiply words, but may leave it to any man's thoughts, in which of these conditions he would be. And surely the difference between them is so very plain, that there can be no difficulty in the choice.

But now, though this discourse be very true, yet for the full clearing of this matter, it will be but fair to consider what may be said on the other side; and the rather, because there are several objections which seem to be countenanced from experience, which is enough to overthrow the most plausible speculations. As,

1. That wicked men seem to have a great deal of pleasure and contentment in their vices.

2. That religion imposeth many harsh and grievous things, which seem to be inconsistent with that pleasure and satisfaction I have spoken of.

3. That those who are religious are many times very disconsolate and full of trouble.

To the first, I deny not that wicked men have some pleasure in their vices; but when all things are rightly computed, and just abatements made, it will amount to very little. For it is the lowest and meanest kind of pleasure; it is chiefly the pleasure of our bodies and our senses—of our worst part; the pleasure of the beast, not of the man; that which least becomes us, and which we were least of all made for. Those sensual pleasures which are lawful are much inferior to the least satisfaction of the mind, and when they are unlawful they are always inconsistent with it. And what is a man profited, if to gain a little sensual pleasure he lose the peace of his soul? Can we find in our hearts to call that pleasure which robs us of a far greater and higher satisfaction than it brings? The delights of sense are so far from being the chief pleasure which God designed us, that on the contrary he intended we should take our chief pleasure in the restraining and moderating of our sensual appetites and desires, and in keeping them within the bounds of reason and religion.

And then, it is not a lasting pleasure. Those fits of mirth which wicked men have, how soon are they over? Like a sudden blaze, which, after a little flash and noise, is presently gone. It is the comparison of a very great and experienced man in these

matters; “ Like the crackling of thorns under a pot (saith Solomon), so is the laughter of the fool;” that is, the mirth of the wicked man: it may be loud, but it lasts not.

But, which is most considerable of all, the pleasures of sin bear no proportion to that long and black train of miseries and inconveniences which they draw after them. Many times poverty and reproach, pains and diseases upon our bodies, “ indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil.” So that if these pleasures were greater than they are, a man had better be without them than purchase them at such dear rates.

To the second, that religion imposeth many harsh and grievous things, which seem to be inconsistent with that pleasure and satisfaction I have spoken of: as, the bearing of persecution, repentance and mortification, fasting and abstinence, and many other rigours and severities. As to persecution: this discourse doth not pretend that religion exempts men from outward troubles; but that, when they happen, it supports men under them better than any thing else. As for repentance and mortification: this chiefly concerns our first entrance into religion after a wicked life, which I acknowledged in the beginning of this discourse to be very grievous; but this doth not hinder, but that though religion may be troublesome at first to some persons whose former sins and crimes have made it so, it may be pleasant afterwards when we are accustomed to it. And whatever the trouble of repentance be, it is unavoidable, unless we resolve to be miserable; for except we repent we must perish. Now there is always a rational satisfaction in submitting to a less incon-

venience to remedy and prevent a greater. As for fasting and abstinence, which is many times very helpful and subservient to the ends of religion, there is no such extraordinary trouble in it, if it be discreetly managed, as is worth the speaking of. And as for other rigours and severities, which some pretend religion does impose, I have only this to say, that if men will play the fool, and make religion more troublesome than God hath made it, I cannot help that; and, that this is a false representation of religion, which some in the world have made, as if it did chiefly consist, not in pleasing God, but in displeasing and tormenting ourselves. This is not to paint religion like herself; but rather like one of the furies, with nothing but whips and snakes about her.

To the third, that those who are religious are many times very disconsolate and full of trouble. This, I confess, is a great objection indeed, if religion were the cause of this trouble; but there are other plain causes of it, to which religion rightly understood is not accessory: as, false and mistaken principles in religion; the imperfection of our religion and obedience to God; and a melancholy temper and disposition.—False and mistaken principles in religion. As this for one: that God does not sincerely desire the salvation of men, but hath from all eternity effectually barred the greatest part of mankind from all possibility of attaining that happiness which he offers to them; and every one hath cause to fear that he may be in that number. This were a melancholy consideration indeed, if it were true; but there is no ground either from reason or Scripture to entertain any such thought of God—our destruction is of ourselves; and no man shall be ruined



by any decree of God, who does not ruin himself by his own fault.

Or else, the imperfection of our religion and obedience to God. Some, perhaps, are very devout in serving God, but not so kind and charitable, so just and honest in their dealings with men. No wonder if such persons be disquieted; the natural consciences of men being not more apt to disquiet them for any thing, than for the neglect of those moral duties, which natural light teacheth them. Peace of conscience is the effect of an impartial and universal obedience to the laws of God; and I hope no man will blame religion for that which plainly proceeds from the want of religion.

Or, lastly, a melancholy temper and disposition, which is not from religion, but from our nature and constitution; and, therefore, religion ought not to be charged with it.

And thus I have endeavoured, as briefly and plainly as I could, to represent to you what peace and pleasure, what comfort and satisfaction, religion, rightly understood and sincerely practised, is apt to bring to the minds of men. And I do not know, by what sort of argument, religion can be more effectually recommended to wise and considerate men. For in persuading men to be religious, I do not go about to rob them of any true pleasure and contentment, but to direct them to the very best, nay, indeed, the only way of attaining and securing it.

I speak this in great pity and compassion to those who make it their great design to please themselves, but do grievously mistake the way to it. The direct way is that which I have set before you—a holy and virtuous life, “to deny ungodliness and worldly

lusts, and to live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world." "A good man (saith Solomon) is satisfied from himself:" he hath the pleasure of being wise and acting reasonably; the pleasure of being justified to himself in what he doth, and of being acquitted by the sentence of his own mind. There is a great pleasure in being innocent, because that prevents guilt and trouble; it is pleasant to be virtuous and good, because that is to excel many others; and it is pleasant to grow better, because that is to excel ourselves: nay, it is pleasant even to mortify and subdue our lusts, because that is victory; it is pleasant to command our appetites and passions, and to keep them in due order, within the bounds of reason and religion, because this is a kind of empire—this is to govern. It is naturally pleasant to rule and have power over others, but he is the great and absolute prince who commands himself. This is the kingdom of God within us, a dominion infinitely to be preferred before all the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them. It is the kingdom of God described by the apostle, which consists "in righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." In a word, the pleasure of being good and doing good is the chief happiness of God himself.

But now the wicked man deprives himself of all this pleasure, and creates perpetual discontent to his own mind. O the torments of a guilty conscience! which the sinner feels more or less all his life long. But, alas! thou dost not yet know the worst of it; no, not in this world. What wilt thou do when thou comest to die? What comfort wilt thou then be able to give thyself? or what comfort can any one else give thee, when thy conscience is miserably rent and

torn by those waking furies which will then rage in thy breast, and thou knowest not which way to turn thyself for ease? then, perhaps, at last, the priest is unwillingly sent for, to patch up thy conscience as well as he can, and to appease the cries of it; and to force himself, out of very pity and good-nature, to say, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace." But alas, man! what can we do? what comfort can we give thee, when thine iniquities testify against thee to thy very face? How can there be peace, when thy lusts and debaucheries, thy impieties to God and thy injuries to men, have been so many? How can there be peace, when thy whole life hath been a continued contempt and provocation of Almighty God, and a perpetual violence and affront to the light and reason of thy own mind?

Therefore, whatever temptation there may be in sin at a distance, whatever pleasure in the act and commission of it, yet remember, that it always goes off with trouble, and will be bitterness in the end. Those words of Solomon have a terrible sting in the conclusion of them: "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things, God will bring thee into judgment."

This one thought, which will very often unavoidably break into our minds (that God will bring us into judgment), is enough to dash all our contentment, and to spoil all the pleasure of a sinful life. Never expect to be quiet in thine own mind, and to have the true enjoyment of thyself, till thou livest a virtuous and religious life.

And if this discourse be true (as I am confident I have every man's conscience on my side), I say, if this

be true, let us venture to be wise and happy; that is, to be religious. Let us resolve to break off our sins by repentance, to fear God and keep his commandments, as ever we desire to avoid the unspeakable torments of a guilty mind, and would not be perpetually uneasy to ourselves.

“Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that we may every one of us know and do in this our day the things that belong to our peace before they be hid from our eyes. And the God of peace which brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the everlasting Covenant, make us perfect in every good work, to do his will, working in us always that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

## SERMON XIII.

THE NATURE AND BENEFIT OF CONSIDERATION.

*I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.*—PSAL. cxix. 59.

THE two great causes of the ruin of men, are infidelity and want of consideration. Some do not believe the principles of religion, or at least have by arguing against them rendered them so doubtful to themselves, as to take away the force and efficacy of them: but these are but a very small part of mankind, in comparison of those who perish for want of considering these things. For most men take the principles of religion for granted—that there is a God, and a providence, and a state of rewards and punishments after this life, and never entertained any considerable doubt in their minds to the contrary: but for all this they never attended to the proper and natural consequences of these principles, nor applied them to their own case; they never seriously considered the notorious inconsistency of their lives with this belief, and what manner of persons they ought to be who are verily persuaded of the truth of these things.

For no man that is convinced that there is a God, and considers the necessary and immediate consequences of such a persuasion, can think it safe to affront him by a wicked life: no man that believes the infinite happiness and misery of another world, and considers withal, that one of these shall cer-

tainly be his portion according as he demeans himself in this present life, can think it indifferent what course he takes. Men may thrust away these thoughts, and keep them out of their minds for a long time, but no man that enters into the serious consideration of these matters, can possibly think it a thing indifferent to him whether he be happy or miserable for ever.

So that a great part of the evils of men's lives would be cured, if they would but once lay them to heart; would they but seriously consider the consequences of a wicked life, they would see so plain reason and so urgent a necessity for the reforming of it, that they would not venture to continue any longer in it. This course David took here in the text, and he found the happy success of it: "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies."

In which words are these two things considerable.

I. The course which David here took for the reforming of his life: "I thought on my ways."

II. The success of this course. It produced actual and speedy reformation: "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies; I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments."

These are the two heads of my following discourse, which when I have spoken to, I shall endeavour to persuade myself and you to take the same course which David here did, and God grant that I may have the same effect.

I. We will consider the course which David here took for the reforming of his life: "I thought on my ways;" or, as the words are rendered in our old translation, "I called my own ways to remembrance." And this may either signify a general survey and examination of his life; respecting indifferently the

good or bad actions of it: or else, which is more probable, it may specially refer to the sins and miscarriages of his life: "I thought on my ways," that is, "I called my sins to remembrance." Neither of these senses can be much amiss in order to the effect mentioned in the text—the reformation and amendment of our lives; and, therefore, neither of them can reasonably be excluded, though I shall principally insist upon the latter.

1. This thinking on our ways, may signify a general survey and examination of our lives; respecting indifferently our good and bad actions. For way is a metaphorical word, denoting the course of a man's life and actions. "I thought on my ways;" that is, I examined my life, and called myself to a strict account for the actions of it: I compared them with the law of God, the rule and measure of my duty, and considered how far I had obeyed that law, or offended against it; how much evil I had been guilty of, and how little good I had done, in comparison of what I might and ought to have done: that by this means I might come to understand the true state and condition of my soul; and, discerning how many and great my faults and defects were, I might amend whatever was amiss, and be more careful of my duty for the future.

And it must needs be a thing of excellent use, for men to set apart some particular times for the examination of themselves, that they may know how accounts stand between God and them. Pythagoras (or whoever was the author of those golden verses which pass under his name) doth especially recommend this practice to his scholars, every night before they slept, to call themselves to account for the actions of the day past: inquiring, wherein they

had transgressed, what good they had done that day, or omitted to do. And this, no doubt, is an admirable means to improve men in virtue, a most effectual way to keep our consciences continually waking and tender, and to make us stand in awe of ourselves and afraid to sin, when we know beforehand that we must give so severe an account to ourselves of every action.

And certainly it is a great piece of wisdom to make up our accounts as frequently as we can, that our repentance may in some measure keep pace with the errors and failings of our lives, and that we may not be oppressed and confounded by the insupportable weight of the sins of a whole life falling upon us at once; and that perhaps at the very worst time, when we are sick and weak, and have neither understanding nor leisure to recollect ourselves, and to call our sins distinctly to remembrance, much less to exercise any fit and proper acts of repentance for them. For there is nothing to be done in religion when our reason is once departed from us; then darkness hath overtaken us indeed, and "the night is come, when no man can work." But though we were never so sensible, and should do all that we can at that time; yet, after all this, how it will go with us God alone knows. I am sure it is too much presumption for any man to be confident, that one general and confused act of repentance will serve his turn for the sins of his whole life. Therefore, there is great reason why we should often examine ourselves, both in order to the amendment of our lives, and the ease of our consciences when we come to die.

II. This thinking of our ways, may particularly and specially refer to the sins and miscarriages of



our lives: "I thought on my ways;" that is, I called my sins to remembrance; I took a particular account of the errors of my life, and laid them seriously to heart; I considered all the circumstances and consequences of them, and all other things belonging to them; and reasoning the matter thoroughly with myself, came to a peremptory and fixed resolution of breaking off this wicked course of life, and betaking myself to the obedience of God's laws. And the consideration of our ways, taken in this sense (which seems to be the more probable meaning of the words) may reasonably imply in it, these following particulars:

1. The taking of a particular account of our sins, together with the several circumstances and aggravations of them.

2. A hearty trouble and sorrow for them; "I thought on my ways;" that is, I laid them sadly to heart.

3. A serious consideration of the evil and unreasonableness of a sinful course.

4. A due sense of the fearful and fatal consequences of a wicked life.

5. A full conviction of the necessity of quitting of this course.

6. An apprehension of the possibility of doing this.

1. The taking of a particular account of our sins, together with the several circumstances and aggravations of them.—And to this end we may do well to reflect particularly upon the several stages and periods of our lives, and to recollect, at least, the principal miscarriages belonging to each of them. And the better to enable us hereto, it will be useful to have before our eyes some abridgment,

or summary of the laws of God, containing the chief heads of our duties and sins, of virtues and vices; for this will help to bring many of our faults and neglects to our remembrance, which otherwise perhaps would have been forgotten by us. We should likewise consider the several relations wherein we have stood to others, and how far we have transgressed or failed of our duty in any of these respects.

And, having thus far made up our sad account, we may in a great measure understand the number and greatness of our sins; abating for some particulars, which are slipped out of our memory, and for sins of ignorance; and daily infirmities, which are innumerable. By all which we may see, what vile wretches and grievous offenders we have been; especially if we take into consideration the several heavy circumstances of our sins, which do above measure aggravate them; the heinousness of many of them as to their nature, and the injurious consequences of them to the person, or estate, or reputation of our neighbour; their having been committed against the clear knowledge of our duty, against the frequent checks and convictions of our consciences, telling us when we did them, that we did amiss; against so many motions and suggestions of God's holy Spirit, so many admonitions and reproofs from others; and contrary to our own most serious vows and resolutions, renewed at several times, especially upon the receiving the blessed sacrament, and in times of sickness and distress: and all this, notwithstanding the plainest declarations of God's will to the contrary; notwithstanding the terrors of the Lord and the wrath of God revealed from

heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men; notwithstanding the cruel sufferings of the Son of God for our sins, and the most merciful offers of pardon and reconciliation in his blood. Add to this, the scandal of our wicked lives to our holy religion, the ill example of them to the corrupting and debauching of others, the affront of them to the Divine authority, and the horrible ingratitude of them to the mercy and goodness and patience of God, to which we have such infinite obligations. Thus we should set our sins in order before our eyes, with the several aggravations of them.

2. A hearty trouble and sorrow for sin; "I thought on my ways;" that is, I laid my sins sadly to heart: and, surely, whenever we remember the faults and follies of our lives, we cannot but be inwardly touched and sensibly grieved at the thoughts of them; we cannot but hang down our heads, and smite upon our breasts, and be in pain and heaviness at our very hearts. I know that the tempers of men are different; and, therefore, I do not say that tears are absolutely necessary to repentance, but they do very well become it; and a thorough sense of sin will almost melt the most hard and obdurate disposition, and fetch water out of a very rock. To be sure, the consideration of our ways should cause inward trouble and confusion in our minds. The least we can do, when we have done amiss, is to be sorry for it, to condemn our own folly, and to be full of indignation and displeasure against ourselves for what we have done, and resolve never to do the like again. And let us make sure that our trouble and sorrow for sin have this effect, to make us leave our sins;

and then we shall need to be the less solicitous about the degrees and outward expressions of it.

3. A serious consideration of the evil and unreasonableness of a sinful course.—That sin is the stain and blemish of our natures, the reproach of our reason and understanding, the disease and deformity of our souls, the great enemy of our peace, the cause of all our fears and troubles: that whenever we do a wicked action we go contrary to the clearest dictates of our reason and conscience, to our plain and true interest, and to the strongest ties and obligations of duty and gratitude. And, which renders it yet more unreasonable, sin is a voluntary evil which men wilfully bring upon themselves. Other evils may be forced upon us, whether we will or no; but no man is wicked and vicious but by his own choice. How do we betray our folly and weakness by suffering ourselves to be hurried away by every foolish lust and passion to do things which we know to be prejudicial and hurtful to ourselves; and so base and unworthy in themselves that we are ashamed to do them, not only in the presence of a wise man, but even of a child or a fool? So that if sin were followed with no other punishment besides the guilt of having done a shameful thing, a man would not by intemperance make himself a fool and a beast; one would not be false and unjust, treacherous or unthankful, if for no other reason, yet out of mere greatness and generosity of mind, out of respect to the dignity of his nature, and out of very reverence to his own reason and understanding. For let witty men say what they will in defence of their vices, there are so many natural acknowledgments of the evil and unreasonableness of sin, that the matter is past all denial: men are generally galled

and uneasy at the thoughts of an evil action, both before and after they have committed it; they are ashamed to be taken in a crime, and heartily vexed and provoked whenever they are upbraided with it; and it is very observable, that although the greater part of the world always was bad, and vice hath ever had more servants and followers to cry it up, yet never was there any age so degenerate, in which vice could get the better of virtue in point of general esteem and reputation: even they, whose wills have been most enslaved to sin, could never yet so far bribe and corrupt their understandings, as to make them give full approbation to it.

4. A due sense of the fearful and fatal consequences of a wicked life.—And these are so sad and dreadful, and the danger of them so evident, and so perpetually threatening us, that no temptation can be sufficient to excuse a man to himself and his own reason for venturing upon them. A principal point of wisdom is to look to the end of things; not only to consider the present pleasure and advantage of any thing, but also the ill consequences of it for the future, and to balance them one against the other.

Now sin in its own nature tends to make men miserable. It certainly causes trouble and disquiet of mind: and to a considerate man, that knows how to value the ease and satisfaction of his own mind, there cannot be a greater argument against sin, than to consider that the forsaking of it is the only way to find rest to our souls.

Besides this, every vice is naturally attended with some particular mischief and inconvenience, which makes it even in this life a punishment to itself;

and commonly the providence of God, and his just judgment upon sinners, strikes in to heighten the mischievous consequences of a sinful course. This we have represented in the parable of the prodigal ; his riotous course of life did naturally and of itself bring him to want, but the providence of God likewise concurred to render his condition more miserable ; “ at the same time there arose a mighty famine in the land ;” so that he did not only want wherewithal to supply himself, but was cut off from all hopes of relief from the abundance and superfluity of others. Sin brings many miseries upon us, and God many times sends more and greater than sin brings ; and the farther we go on in a sinful course, the more miseries and the greater difficulties we involve ourselves in.

But all these are but light and inconsiderable in comparison of the dreadful miseries of another world ; to the danger whereof every man that lives a wicked life does every moment expose himself : so that if we could conquer shame, and had stupidity enough to bear the infamy and reproach of our vices, and the upbraidings of our consciences for them, and the temporal mischiefs and inconveniences of them ; though, for the present gratifying of our lusts, we could brook and dispense with all these, yet the consideration of the end and issue of a sinful course is an invincible objection against it, and never to be answered ; though the violence of our sensual appetites and inclinations should be able to bear down all temporal considerations whatsoever, yet, methinks, the interest of our everlasting happiness should lie near our hearts ; the consideration of another world should mightily amaze and startle us ;

the horrors of eternal darkness, and the dismal thoughts of being miserable for ever, should effectually discourage any man from a wicked life. And this danger continually threatens the sinner, and may, if God be not merciful to him, happen to surprise him the next moment. And can we make too much haste to fly from so great and apparent a danger? When will we think of saving ourselves, if not when (for aught we know) we are upon the very brink of ruin, and just ready to drop into destruction?

5. Upon this naturally follows a full conviction of the necessity of quitting this wicked course.—And necessity is always a powerful and over-ruling argument, and doth rather compel than persuade: and, after it is once evident, leaves no place for farther deliberation. And the greater the necessity is, it is still the more cogent argument. For whatever is necessary is so in order to some end, and the greater the end the greater is the necessity of the means, without which that end cannot be obtained. Now the chief and last end of all reasonable creatures is happiness; and, therefore, whatever is necessary in order to that hath the highest degree of rational and moral necessity. We are not capable of happiness until we have left our sins; for “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.”

But though men are convinced of this necessity, yet this doth not always enforce a present change; because men hope they may continue in their sins, and remedy all at last by repentance. But this is so great a hazard, in all respects, that there is no venturing upon it. And in matters of greatest concernment wise men will run no hazards, if they

can help it. David was so sensible of this danger, that he would not defer his repentance and the change of his life for one moment: "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies: I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments." This day, this hour, for aught we know, may be the last opportunity of making our peace with God. Therefore, we should make haste out of this dangerous state, as Lot did out of Sodom, lest fire and brimstone overtake us. He that cannot promise himself the next moment, hath a great deal of reason to seize upon the present opportunity. While we are lingering in our sins, if God be not merciful to us, we shall be consumed. Therefore, make haste, sinner, and escape for thy life, lest evil overtake thee.

6. Lastly. An apprehension of the possibility of making this change.—God, who designed us for happiness at first, and after we had made a forfeiture of it by sin, was pleased to restore us again to the capacity of it by the redemption of our blessed Lord and Saviour, has made nothing necessary to our happiness that is impossible for us to do, either of ourselves, or by the assistance of that grace which he is ready to afford us, if we heartily beg it of him. For that is possible to us which we may do by the assistance of another, if we may have that assistance for asking: and God hath promised to "give his holy Spirit to them that ask him." So that notwithstanding the great corruption and weakness of our natures, since the grace of God, which brings salvation, hath appeared, it is not absolutely out of our power to leave our sins and turn to God: for that may truly be said to be



in our power, which God hath promised to enable us to do, if we be not wanting to ourselves.

So that there is nothing on God's part to hinder this change. He hath solemnly declared, that he sincerely desires it, and that he is ready to assist our good resolutions to this purpose. And most certainly when he tells us, that "he hath no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live;" that "he would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth;" that "he would not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance:" he means plainly as he saith, and doth not speak to us with any private reserve or nice distinction between his secret and revealed will; that is, he doth not decree one thing and declare the contrary. So far is it from this, that if a sinner entertain serious thoughts of returning to God, and do but once move towards him, how ready is he to receive him! This is, in a very lively manner, described to us in the parable of the prodigal son, who, when he was returning home, and was yet a great way off, what haste doth his father make to meet him? "he saw him, and had compassion, and ran." And if there be no impediment on God's part, why should there be any on our's? One would think all the doubt and difficulty should be on the other side,—whether God would be pleased to shew mercy to such great offenders as we have been: but the business doth not stick there. And will we be miserable by our own choice, when the grace of God hath put it into our power to be happy? I have done with the first thing—the course which David here took for the reforming of his life; "I thought on my ways." I proceed to,

II. The success of this course.—It produced actual and speedy reformation. “ I turned my feet unto thy testimonies ; I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.” And if we consider the matter thoroughly, and have but patience to reason out the case with ourselves, and to bring our thoughts and deliberations to some issue, the conclusion must naturally be, the quitting of that evil and dangerous course in which we have lived. For sin and consideration cannot long dwell together. Did but men consider what sin is, they would have so many unanswerable objections against it, such strong fears and jealousies of the miserable issue and event of a wicked life, that they would not dare to continue any longer in it.

I do not say that this change is perfectly made at once. A state of sin and holiness are not like two ways that are just parted by a line, so as a man may step out of the one full into the other ; but they are like two ways that lead to two very distant places, and consequently are at a good distance from one another ; and the farther any man hath travelled in the one, the farther he is from the other ; so that it requires time and pains to pass from the one to the other. It sometimes so happens, that some persons are, by a mighty conviction and resolution, and by a very extraordinary and overpowering degree of God’s grace, almost perfectly reclaimed from their sins at once, and all of a sudden translated “ out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son.” And thus it was with many of the first converts to Christianity ; as their prejudices against the Christian religion were strong and violent, so the holy Spirit of God was pleased to work mightily in them that believed. But in the usual and settled

methods of God's grace, evil habits are mastered and subdued by degrees, and with a great deal of conflict, and many times, after they are routed, they rally and make head again; and it is a great while before the contrary habits of grace and virtue are grown up to any considerable degree of strength and maturity, and before a man comes to that confirmed state of goodness, that he may be said to have conquered and mortified his lusts. But yet this ought not to discourage us. For, so soon as we have seriously begun this change, we are in a good way, and all our endeavours will have the acceptance of good beginnings, and God will be ready to help us; and if we pursue our advantages, we shall every day gain ground, and the work will grow easier upon our hands; and we who moved at first with so much slowness and difficulty, shall, after a while, be enabled to run the ways of God's commandments with pleasure and delight.

I have done with the two things I propounded to speak to from these words—the course here prescribed, and the success of it. And now to persuade men to take this course, I shall offer two or three arguments.

1. That consideration is the proper act of reasonable creatures.—This argument God himself uses, to bring men to a consideration of their evil ways. (Isa. xlvi. 8.) “Remember, and shew yourselves men; bring it again to mind, oh ye transgressors!” To consider our ways and to call our sins to remembrance, is to shew ourselves men. It is the great fault and infelicity of a great many, that they generally live without thinking, and are acted by their present inclinations and appetites, without any consideration of the future consequences of things, and

without fear of any thing but of a present and sensible danger, like brute creatures, who fear no evils but what are in view and just ready to fall upon them; whereas, to a prudent and considerate man, a good or evil, in reversion, is capable of as true an estimation, proportionably to the greatness and distance of it, as if it were really present. And what do we think has God given us our reason and understandings for but to foresee evils at a distance, and to prevent them; to provide for our future security and happiness, to look up to God, our Maker, who hath taught us more than the beasts of the earth, and made us wiser than the fowls of heaven; but to consider what we do, and what we ought to do, and what makes most for our future and lasting interest, and what against it? What can a beast do worse than to act without any consideration and design—than to pursue his present inclination, without any apprehension of true danger? The most dull and stupid of all the brute creatures can hardly exercise less reason than this comes to. So that for a man not to consider his ways is, to the very best intents and purposes, to be without understanding, and like the beasts that perish.

2. This is the end of God's patience and long-suffering toward us—to bring us to consideration; the great design of God's goodness is to lead men to repentance. He winks at the sins of men, that they may repent. He bears long with us, and delays the punishment of our sins, and doth not execute judgment speedily, because he is loth to surprise men into destruction, because he would give them the liberty of second thoughts, time to reflect upon themselves, and to consider what they

have done, and to reason themselves into repentance. "Consider this, all ye that forget God," lest his patience turn into fury, "and he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you."

3. Consideration is that which we must all come to one time or other. Time will come when we shall consider and cannot help it, when we shall not be able to divert our thoughts from those things which we are now so loth to think upon. Our consciences will take their opportunity to bring our ways to remembrance, when some great calamity or affliction is upon us. Thus it was with the prodigal; when he was brought to the very last extremity, and was ready to perish with hunger, then he came to himself. When we come to die, then we shall think of our ways with trouble and vexation enough; and how glad would we then be, that we had time to consider them? And, perhaps, while we are wishing for more time, eternity will swallow us up. To be sure, in the other world, a great part of the misery of wicked men will consist in furious reflections upon themselves, and the evil actions of their lives. It is said of the rich voluptuous man, in the parable, that "in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torment;" as if he had never considered and be-thought himself till that time. But, alas! it will then be too late to consider; for then consideration will do us no good; it will serve to no other purpose but to aggravate our misery, and to multiply our stings, and to give new life and rage to those vultures, which will perpetually prey upon our hearts. But how much a wiser course would it be to consider these things in time, in order to our eternal peace and comfort; to think of them while we may redress them and avoid the dismal conse-

quences of them, than when our case is desperate and past remedy?

And now, what can I say more to persuade every one of us to a consideration of our own ways? We are generally apt to busy ourselves in observing the errors and miscarriages of our neighbours, and are forward to mark and censure the faults and follies of other men; but how few descend into themselves, and turn their eyes inward and say, "What have I done?" It is an excellent saying of Antoninus, the great emperor and philosopher, "No man was ever unhappy for not prying into the actions and conditions of other men; but that man is necessarily unhappy, who doth not observe himself, and consider the state of his own soul."

This is our proper work; and now is a proper season for it, when we pretend to God and men to set apart a solemn time for the examination of ourselves, and for a serious review of our lives, in order to humiliation and repentance, to the reforming and amendment of what is amiss. And though we would venture to dissemble with men, yet let us not dissemble with God also: "For shall not he that pondereth the heart consider it; and he that keepeth the soul, shall he not know it; and shall not he render to every man according to his ways?"

I know it is a very unpleasant work which I am now putting you upon; and, therefore, no wonder that men are generally so backward to it: because it will, of necessity, give some present disturbance to their minds. They whose lives have been very vicious, are so odious a sight, so horrid a spectacle to themselves, that they cannot endure to reflect upon their own ways; of all things in the world they hate consideration, and are ready to say to it, as

the evil spirit did in the gospel to our Saviour, "What have I to do with thee? Art thou come to torment me before the time?" But let not this affright us from it; for whatever trouble it may cause at present, it is the only way to prevent the anguish and the torments of eternity.

The things which I have offered to your consideration are of huge moment and importance. They do not concern your bodies and estates, but that which is more truly yourselves, your immortal souls, the dearest and most durable part of yourselves: and they do not concern us for a little while, but for ever. Let me therefore bespeak your most serious regard to them in the words of Moses to the people of Israel, after he had set the law of God before them, together with the blessings promised to obedience, and the terrible curse threatened to the transgression of it: (Deut. xxxii. 46.) "Set your hearts to the words which I testify to you this day; for it is not a vain thing, because it is your life." Your life, your eternal life and happiness, depends upon it.

And besides a tender regard to yourselves and your own interests, which methinks every man out of a natural desire of being happy, and dread of being miserable, should be forward enough to consider: be pleased likewise to lay to heart the influence of your example upon others. I speak now to a great many persons, the eminence of whose rank and quality renders their example so powerful, as to be able almost to give authority either to virtue or vice. People take their fashions from you, as to the habits of their minds as well as their bodies. So that upon you chiefly depends the ruin or reformation of manners, our hopes or despair of a better world. What way soever you go you are followed by troops. If

you run any sinful or dangerous course, you cannot “perish alone in your iniquity,” but, “thousands will fall by your side and ten thousands at your right hand:” and, on the contrary, it is very much in your power, and I hope in your wills and designs, to be the sovereign restorers of piety and virtue to a degenerate age. It is our part indeed to exhort men to their duty, but it is you that would be the powerful and effectual preachers of righteousness. We may endeavour to make men proselytes to virtue, but you would infallibly draw disciples after you: we may try to persuade, but you could certainly prevail, either to make men good, or to restrain them from being so bad.

Therefore consider your ways, for the sake of others as well as yourselves. Consider what you have done, and then consider what is fit for you to do, and if you do it not, what will be the end of these things. And to help you forward in this work, it is not necessary that I should rip up the vices of the age and set men’s sins in order before them. It is much better that you yourselves should call your own ways to remembrance. We have every one a faithful monitor and witness in our own breasts, who, if we will but hearken to him, will deal impartially with us, and privately tell us the errors of our lives. To this monitor I refer you, and to the grace of God to make these admonitions effectual.

Let us then, every one of us, in the fear of God, “search and try our ways, and turn unto the Lord.” Let us “take to ourselves words, and say” to God with those true penitents in Scripture, “I have sinned, what shall be done unto thee, O thou preserver of men? Behold, I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth, I will abhor my-



self, and repent in dust and ashes." For, "surely it is meet to be said unto God, I will not offend any more; that which I know not teach thou me, and if I have done any iniquity I will do no more. O that there were such an heart in us! O that we were wise, that we understood this, that we would consider our latter end!" And God of his infinite mercy inspire into every one of our hearts this holy and happy resolution, for the sake of our blessed Saviour and Redeemer, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory now and for ever. Amen.

## SERMON XIV.

THE FOLLY AND DANGER OF IRRESOLUTION AND  
DELAYING.

*I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.*—PSALM CXIX. 60.

IN the words immediately going before, you have the course which David took for the reforming of his life, and the success of that course, "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies." A serious reflection upon the past errors and miscarriages of his life, produced the reformation of it. And you have a considerable circumstance added in these words that I have now read to you, that this reformation was speedy and without delay, "I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments." Upon due consideration of his former life, and a full conviction of the necessity of a change, he came to a resolution of a better life, and immediately put this resolution in execution; and to declare how presently and quickly he did it, he expresses it both affirmatively and negatively, after the manner of the Hebrews, who, when they would say a thing with great certainty and emphasis, are wont to express it both ways, "I made haste, and delayed not;" that is, I did with all imaginable speed betake myself to a better course.

And this is the natural effect of consideration; and the true cause why men delay so necessary a work is, because they stifle their reason, and suffer

themselves to be hurried into the embraces of present objects, and do not consider their latter end, and what will be the sad issue and event of a wicked life. For if men would take an impartial view of their lives, and but now and then reflect upon themselves, and lay to heart the miserable and fatal consequences of a sinful course, and think whether it will bring them at last, and that the end of these things will be death and misery; if the carnal and sensual person would but look about him, and consider how many have been ruined in the way that he is in, how many lie "slain and wounded in it, that it is the way to hell, and leads down to the chambers of death," this would certainly give a check to him, and stop him in his course.

For it is not to be imagined, but that that man who hath duly considered what sin is, the shortness of its pleasures, and the eternity of its punishment, should resolve immediately to break off his sins, and to live another kind of life. Would any man be intemperate and walk after the flesh, would any man be unjust and defraud or oppress his neighbour, be profane and live in the contempt of God and religion, or allow himself in any wicked course whatsoever, that considers and believes a judgment to come, and that because of these things the terrible vengeance of God will one day fall upon the children of disobedience? It is not credible that men who apply themselves seriously to the meditation of these matters, should venture to continue in so impudent and dangerous a course, or could, by any temptation whatsoever, be trained on one step farther, in a way that does so certainly and visibly lead to ruin and destruction.

So that my work at this time shall be, to endea-

your to convince men of the monstrous folly and unreasonableness of delaying the reformation and amendment of their lives; and to persuade us to resolve upon it, and having resolved to set about it immediately and without delay; in imitation of the good man here in the text, “ I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.” And to this end, I shall,

First, Consider the reasons and excuses which men pretend for delaying this necessary work, and shew the unreasonableness of them.

Secondly, I shall add some farther considerations to engage us effectually to set about this work speedily and without delay.

I. We will consider a little the reasons and excuses which men pretend for delaying this necessary work; and not only shew the unreasonableness of them, but that they are each of them a strong reason and powerful argument to the contrary.

1. Many pretend that they are abundantly convinced of the great necessity of leaving their sins and betaking themselves to a better course, and they fully intend to do so; only they cannot at present bring themselves to it, but they hope hereafter to be in a better temper and disposition, and then they resolve by God’s grace to set about this work in good earnest, and to go through with it.

I know not whether it be fit to call this a reason; I am sure it is the greatest cheat and delusion that any man can put upon himself. For this plainly shews, that thou dost not intend to do this which thou art convinced is so necessary, but to put it off from day to day. For there is no greater evidence that a man doth not really intend to do a thing, than when notwithstanding he ought upon all ac-

counts and may in all respects better do it at present than hereafter, yet he still puts it off. Whatever thou pretendest, this is a mere shift to get rid of a present trouble. It is like giving good words and making fair promises to a clamorous and importunate creditor, and appointing him to come another day, when the man knows in his conscience that he intends not to pay him, and that he shall be less able to discharge the debt then, than he is at present. Whatever reasons thou hast against reforming thy life now, will still remain, and be in as full force hereafter, nay probably stronger than they are at present. Thou art unwilling now, and so thou wilt be hereafter, and in all likelihood much more unwilling. So that this reason will every day improve upon thy hands, and have so much the more strength by how much the longer thou continuest in thy sins. Thou hast no reason in the world against the present time, but only that it is present; why, when hereafter comes to be present, the reason will be just the same. So that thy present unwillingness is so far from being a just reason against it, that it is a good reason the other way; because thou art unwilling now, and like to be so, nay more so hereafter; if thou intendest to do it at all, thou shouldst set about it immediately, and without delay.

2. Another reason which men pretend for the delaying of this work, is the great difficulty and unpleasantness of it. And it cannot be denied, but that there will be some bitterness and uneasiness in it, proportionably to the growth of evil habits, and the strength of our lusts, and our greater or less progress and continuance in a sinful course: so that we must make account of a sharp conflict, of some pain and trouble in the making of this change, that

it will cost us some pangs and throes, before we be born again. For when nature hath been long bent another way, it is not to be expected that it should be reduced and brought back to its first straightness without pain and violence.

But then it is to be considered, that how difficult and painful soever this work be, it is necessary, and that should over-rule all other considerations whatsoever; that if we will not be at this pains and trouble, we must one time or other endure far greater than those which we now seek to avoid; that it is not so difficult as we imagine, but our fears of it are greater than the trouble will prove; if we were but once resolved upon the work, and seriously engaged in it, the greatest part of the trouble were over; it is like the fear of children to go into the cold water—a faint trial increaseth their fear and apprehension of it, but so soon as they have plunged into it, the trouble is over, and then they wonder why they were so much afraid. The main difficulty and unpleasantness is in our first entrance into religion; it presently grows tolerable, and soon after easy; and after that by degrees so pleasant and delightful, that the man would not for all the world return to his former evil state and condition of life.

We should consider, likewise, what is the true cause of all this trouble and difficulty; it is our long continuance in a sinful course that hath made us so loath to leave it; it is the custom of sinning that renders it so troublesome and uneasy to men to do otherwise; it is the greatness of our guilt, heightened and inflamed by many and repeated provocations, that doth so gall our consciences and fill our souls with so much terror; it is because we have gone so far in an evil way, that our retreat is

become so difficult, and because we have delayed this work so long, that we are now so unwilling to go about it; and, consequently, the longer we delay it the trouble and difficulty of a change will increase daily upon us. And all these considerations are so far from being a good reason for more delays, that they are a strong argument to the contrary. Because the work is difficult now, therefore do not make it more so; and because your delays have increased the difficulty of it, and will do more and more, therefore delay no longer.

3. Another pretended encouragement to these delays is, the great mercy and patience of God. He commonly bears longer with sinners, and therefore there is no such absolute and urgent necessity of a speedy repentance and reformation of our lives. Men have not the face to give this for a reason, but yet for all that it lies at the bottom of many men's hearts: so Solomon tells us, Eccles. viii. 11:—"Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."

But it is not always thus. There are few of us but have seen several instances of God's severity to sinners, and have known several persons surprised by a sudden hand of God, and cut off in the very act of sin, without having the least respite given them, without time or liberty so much as to ask God forgiveness, and to consider either what they had done, or whither they were going. And this may be the case of any sinner, and is so much the more likely to be thy case, because thou dost so boldly presume upon the mercy and patience of God.

But if it were always thus, and thou wert sure to be spared yet a while longer; what can be more un-

reasonable and disingenuous, than to resolve to be evil because God is good; and because he suffers so long, to sin so much longer; and because he affords thee a space of repentance, therefore to delay it and put it off to the last? The proper design of God's goodness is to lead men to repentance, and he never intended his patience for an encouragement to men to continue in their sins, but for an opportunity and an argument to break them off by repentance.

These are the pretended reasons and encouragements to men to delay their repentance, and the reformation of their lives, and you see how groundless and unreasonable they are; which was the first thing I propounded to speak to.

II. I shall add some farther considerations, to engage men effectually to set about this work speedily, and without delay. And because they are many, I shall insist upon those which are most weighty and considerable, without being very curious and solicitous about the method and order of them: for, provided they be but effectual to the end of persuasion, it matters not how inartificially they are ranged and disposed.

1. Consider, that in matters of great and necessary concernment, and which must be done, there is no greater argument of a weak and impotent mind than irresolution; to be undetermined where the case is so plain, and the necessity so urgent; to be always about doing that which we are convinced must be done.

*Victuros agimus semper, nec vivimus unquam.*

We are always intending to live a new life, but can never find a time to set about it. This is as if



a man should put off eating and drinking and sleeping, from one day and night to another, till he have starved and destroyed himself. It seldom falls under any man's deliberation, whether he should live or not, if he can choose; and if he cannot choose, it is in vain to deliberate about it. It is much more absurd to deliberate, whether we should live virtuously or religiously, soberly or righteously in the world; for that upon the matter is to consult whether a man should be happy or not: nature hath determined this for us, and we need not reason about it; and, consequently, we ought not to delay that which we are convinced is so necessary in order to it.

2. Consider that religion is a great and a long work, and asks so much time, that there is none left for the delaying of it. To begin with repentance, which is commonly our first entrance into religion: this alone is a great work, and is not only the business of a sudden thought and resolution, but of execution and action: it is the abandoning of a sinful course, which we cannot leave till we have in some degree mastered our lusts; for so long as they are our masters, like Pharaoh, they will keep us in bondage, and "not let us go to serve the Lord." The habits of sin and vice are not to be plucked up and cast off at once; as they have been long in contracting, so without a miracle it will require a competent time to subdue them and get the victory over them; for they are conquered just by the same degrees, that the habits of grace and virtue grow up and get strength in us.

So that there are several duties to be done in religion, and often to be repeated; many graces and virtues are to be long practised and exer-

cised before the contrary vices will be subdued, and before we arrive to a confirmed and settled state of goodness; such a state as can only give us a clear and comfortable evidence of the sincerity of our resolution and repentance, and of our good condition towards God. We have many lusts to mortify, many passions to govern and bring into order, much good to do, to make what amends and reparation we can for the much evil we have done: we have many things to learn; and many to unlearn, to which we shall be strongly prompted by the corrupt inclinations of our nature, and the remaining power of ill habits and customs: and perhaps we have satisfaction and restitution to make for the many injuries we have done to others, in their persons, or estates, or reputations: in a word, we have a body of sin to put off, which clings close to us and is hard to part with: we have to “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God;” to increase and improve our graces and virtues: to “add to our faith knowledge, and temperance, and patience, and brotherly kindness, and charity; and to abound in all the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God:” we have to be useful to the world, and exemplary to others in a holy and virtuous conversation; our “light is so to shine before men, that others may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven.”

And do we think all this is to be done in an instant, and requires no time? That we may delay and put off to the last, and yet do all this work well enough? Do we think we can do all this in time of sickness and old age, when we are not fit to do any thing; when the spirit of a man can hardly bear the

infirmities of nature, much less a guilty conscience and a wounded spirit? Do we think that when the day hath been idly spent and squandered away by us, that we shall be fit to work when the night and darkness comes? When our understanding is weak, and our memory frail, and our will crooked, and by a long custom of sinning obstinately bent the wrong way, what can we then do in religion? What reasonable or acceptable service can we then perform to God? When our candle is just sinking into the socket, how shall our light so shine before men, that others may see our good works?

Alas! the longest life is no more than sufficient for a man to reform himself in, to repent of the errors of his life, and to amend what is amiss; to put our souls into a good posture and preparation for another world; to train up ourselves for eternity, and to make ourselves meet to be made "partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

3. Consider what a desperate hazard we run by these delays. Every delay of repentance is a venturing the main chance. It is uncertain whether hereafter we shall have time for it; and if we have time, whether we shall have a heart to it, and the assistance of God's grace to go through with it. God indeed hath been graciously pleased to promise pardon to repentance; but he hath no where promised life and leisure, the aids of his grace and holy Spirit, to those who put off their repentance: he hath no where promised acceptance to mere sorrow and trouble for sin, without "fruits meet for repentance," and amendment of life: he hath no where promised to receive them to mercy and favour who only give him good words, and are at last contented to condescend so far to him as to promise to leave

their sins when they can keep them no longer! Many have gone thus far in times of affliction and sickness, as to be awakened to a great sense of their sins, and to be mightily troubled for their wicked lives, and to make solemn promises and professions of becoming better; and yet upon their deliverance and recovery, all hath vanished and come to nothing, and their "righteousness hath been as the morning cloud, and as the early dew which passeth away:" and why should any man, merely upon account of a death-bed repentance, reckon himself in a better condition than those persons who have done as much and gone as far as he? And there is no other difference between them but this, that the repentance of the former was tried, and proved insincere, but the death-bed repentance never came to a trial; and yet for all that God knows whether it was sincere or not, and how it would have proved, if the man had lived longer. Why should any man, for offering up to God the mere refuse and dregs of his life, and the days which himself hath no pleasure in, expect to receive the reward of eternal life and happiness at his hands?

But, though we do not design to delay this work so long, yet ought we to consider that all delays in a matter of this consequence are extremely dangerous; because we put off a business of the greatest concernment to the future, and in so doing put it to the hazard whether ever it shall be done: for the future is as much out of our power to command, as it is to call back the time which is past. Indeed, if we could arrest time and strike off the nimble wheels of his chariot, and like Joshua bid the sun stand still, and make opportunity tarry as long as we had occasion for it; this were something to excuse our delay,

or at least to mitigate or abate the folly and unreasonableness of it: but this we cannot do. It is in our power, under the influence of God's grace and holy Spirit, to amend our lives now, but it is not in our power to live till to-morrow; and who will part with an estate in hand, which he may presently enter upon the possession of, for an uncertain reversion? And yet thus we deal in the great and everlasting concernments of our souls; we trifle away the present opportunities of salvation, and vainly promise to ourselves the future; we let go that which is in our power, and fondly dispose of that which is out of our power, and in the hands of God.

Lay hold then upon the present opportunities, and look upon every action thou dost, and every opportunity of doing any, as possibly thy last; for so it may prove for any thing thou canst tell to the contrary. If a man's life lay at stake and he had but one throw for it, with what care and with what concernment would he manage that action? What thou art doing next, may, for aught thou knowest, be for thy life and for all eternity. So much of thy life is most certainly past, and God knows thou hast yet done little or nothing towards the securing of thy future happiness: it is not certain how much or how little is remaining; therefore, be sure to make the best use of that little which may be left, and wisely to manage the last stake.

4. Seeing the delay of repentance doth mainly rely upon the hopes and encouragement of a future repentance, let us consider a little how unreasonable these hopes are, and how absurd the encouragement is which men take from them. To sin in hopes that hereafter we shall repent, is to do a thing in hopes that we shall one day be mightily ashamed of it;

that we shall one time or other be heartily grieved and troubled that we have done it: it is to do a thing in hopes that we shall afterwards condemn ourselves for it, and wish a thousand times we had never done it; in hopes that we shall be full of horror at the thoughts of what we have done, and shall treasure up so much guilt in our consciences as will make us a terror to ourselves, and be ready to drive us even to despair and distraction. And is this a reasonable hope? Is this a fitting encouragement for a wise man to give to himself, to any action? And yet this is plainly the true meaning of men's going on in their sins, in hopes that hereafter they shall repent of them.

5. If you be still resolved to delay this business, and put it off at present, consider well with yourselves how long you intend to delay it. I hope not to the last, nor till sickness come, and death make his approaches to you. This is next to madness, to venture all upon such an after-game. It is just as if a man should be content to be shipwrecked, in hope that he shall afterwards escape by a plank, and get safe to shore. But I hope none are so unreasonable, yet I fear that many have a mind to put it off to old age, though they do not care to say so. Seneca expostulates excellently with this sort of men: "Who shall insure thy life till that time? Who shall pass his word for thee, that the providence of God will suffer all things to happen and fall out, just as thou hast designed and forecast them? Art thou not ashamed to reserve the relics of thy life for thyself, and set apart only that time to be wise and virtuous in, which is good for nothing? How late is it then to begin to live well, when thy life is almost at an end? What a stupid forgetfulness is it of our

mortality, to put off good resolutions to the fiftieth or sixtieth year of our age, and resolve to begin to do better at that time of life, to which but very few persons have reached.”

But perhaps thou art not altogether so unreasonable, but desirest only to respite this work until the first heat of youth and lust be over, until the cooler and more considerate part of thy life come on : that perhaps thou thinkest may be the fittest and most convenient season. But still we reckon upon uncertainties, for perhaps that season may never be : however, to be sure it is much more in our power, by the assistance of God’s grace, which is never wanting to the sincere endeavours of men, to conquer our lusts now, and to resist the most heady and violent temptations to vice, than either to secure the future time, or to recover that which is once past and gone.

Some seem yet more reasonable, and are content to come lower, and desire only to put it off for a very little while. But why for a little while? Why till to-morrow? To-morrow will be as this day, only with this difference, that thou wilt in all probability be more unwilling and indisposed then.

So that there is no future time which any man can reasonably pitch upon. All delay in this case is dangerous, and as senseless as the expectation of the idiot described by the poet ; who being come to the river side, and intending to pass over, stays until all the water in the river be gone by, and hath left the channel a dry passage for him :

———— at ille

*Labitur, et labetur in omne volubilis ævum.*

But the river runs, and runs, and will run ; and if he should stay a thousand years will never be the nearer

being dry. So that if the man must go over, and there be a necessity for it (as there is for repentance), the only wise resolution to be taken in this case is, to wade or swim over as well as he can, because the matter will never be amended by tarrying.

6. Lastly. Consider what an unspeakable happiness it is, to have our minds settled in that condition, that we may, without fear and amazement, nay with comfort and confidence, expect death and judgment. Death is never far from any of us, and the general judgment of the world may be nearer than we are aware of; for "of that day and hour knoweth no man." And these are two terrible things, and nothing can free us from the terror of them but a good conscience, and a good conscience is only to be had either by innocence, or by repentance and amendment of life. Happy man! who by this means is at peace with God, and with himself; and can think of death and judgment without dread and astonishment. For "the sting of death is sin;" and the terror of the great day only concerns those who have lived wickedly and impenitently, and would not be persuaded, neither by the mercies of God, nor by the fear of his judgments, to repent and turn to him: but if we have truly forsaken our sins, and do sincerely endeavour to live in obedience to the laws and commands of God, the more we think of death and judgment, the greater matter of joy and comfort will these things be to us: for "blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he comes shall find so doing." Let us, therefore, as soon as possibly we can, put ourselves into this posture and preparation, according to that advice of our blessed Saviour: (Luke xii. 35, 36.) "Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord."



And now I hope that enough hath been said to convince men of the great unreasonableness and folly of these delays; nay, I believe that most men are convinced of it by their own thoughts, and that their consciences call them fools a thousand times for it: but, O that I knew what to say that might prevail with men, and effectually persuade them to do that which they are so abundantly convinced is so necessary!

And here I might address myself to the several ages of persons. You that are young, and have hitherto been in a good measure innocent, may prevent the devil, and by an early piety, give God the first possession of your souls; and, by this means, never be put to the trouble of so great and solemn a repentance, having never been deeply engaged in a wicked life: you may do a glorious, I had almost said a meritorious thing, in cleaving steadfastly to God, and resolving to serve him, when you are so importunately courted and so hotly assaulted by the devil and the world. However, you may not live to be old; therefore, upon that consideration, begin the work presently, and make use of the opportunity that is now in your hands.

You that are grown up to ripeness of years, and are in the full vigour of your age, you are to be put in mind, that the heat and inconsiderateness of youth is now past and gone; that reason and consideration are now in their perfection and strength; that this is the very age of prudence and discretion, of wisdom and wariness: so that now is the proper time for you to be serious, and wisely to secure your future happiness.

As for those that are old, they, methinks, should need nobody to admonish them, that it is now high

time for them to begin a new life, and that the time past of their lives is too much to have spent in sin and folly. There is no trifling where men have a great work to do, and but little time to do it in. Your sun is certainly going down, and near its setting; therefore, you should quicken your pace, considering that your journey is never the shorter, because you have but little time to perform it in. Alas! man, thou art just ready to die, and hast thou not yet begun to live? Are thy passions and lusts yet unsubdued, and have they had no other mortification than what age hath given them? It is strange to see how, in the very extremities of old age, many men are as if they had still a thousand years to live; and make no preparation for death, though it dogs them at the heels, and is just come up to them, and ready to give them the fatal stroke.

Therefore let us not put off this necessary work of reforming ourselves, in what part and age of our lives soever we be: "To-day, whilst it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Nay, to-day is with the latest to begin this work; had we been wise we would have begun it sooner. It is God's infinite mercy to us, that it is not quite too late, that the day of God's patience is not quite expired, and the door shut against us. Therefore do not defer your repentance to the next solemn time, to the next occasion of receiving the blessed sacrament: do not say, I will then reform and become a new man, after that I will take leave of my lusts, and sin no more. For let us make what haste we can, we cannot possibly make too much:

——— *properat vivere nemo satis.*

No man makes haste enough to be good, to "cease

to do evil, and learn to do well." Be as quick as we will, life will be too nimble for us, and go on faster than our work does, and death will go nigh to prevent us and surprise us unawares.

Do, do, sinner; abuse and neglect thyself yet a little while longer, until the time of regarding thy soul, and working out thine own salvation, be at an end, and all the opportunities of minding that great concernment be slipped out of thy hands, never to be recovered, never to be called back again; no, not by thy most earnest wishes and desires, by thy most fervent prayers and tears; and thou be brought into the condition of profane Esau, who for once despising the blessing, lost it for ever, "and found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."

To conclude: art thou convinced, that thy eternal happiness depends upon following the advice which hath now been given thee? Why then, do but behave thyself in this case, as thou and all prudent men are wont to do in matters, which thou canst not but acknowledge to be of far less concernment. If a man be travelling to such a place, so soon as he finds himself out of the way, he presently stops and makes towards the right way, and hath no inclination to go wrong any farther; if a man be sick, he will be well presently if he can, and not put it off to the future: most men will gladly take the first opportunity that presents itself, of being rich or great; every man almost catches at the very first offers of a great place, or a good purchase, and secures them presently if he can; lest the opportunity be gone, and another snatch these things from him. Do thou thus so much more in matters so much greater. Return from the error of thy way; be wise, save thyself, as

soon as possibly thou canst. When happiness presents itself to thee, do not turn it off, and bid it come again to-morrow. Perhaps thou mayest never be so fairly offered again, perhaps the day of salvation may not come again to-morrow; nay, perhaps to thee, to-morrow may never come. But if we were sure that happiness would come again, yet why should we put it off? Does any man know how to be safe and happy to-day, and can he find in his heart to tarry until to-morrow?

Now the God of all mercy and patience, give every one of us the wisdom and grace to know and to do, in this our day, the things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes; for the sake of our blessed Saviour and Redeemer, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

## SERMON XV.

THE DISTINGUISHING CHARACTER OF A GOOD AND  
A BAD MAN.

*In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil; whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God.*—1 JOHN iii. 10.

IT is certainly a matter of the greatest consequence to us, both in order to our present peace and future happiness, truly to understand our spiritual state and condition, and whether we belong to God and be his children or not. And it is not so difficult as is commonly imagined to arrive at this knowledge, if we have a mind to it, and will but deal impartially with ourselves; for the text gives us a plain mark and character whereby we may know it. “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil; whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God.”

From which words I shall endeavour, by God’s assistance, to lay men open to themselves, and to represent to every one of us the truth of our condition; and then leave it to the grace of God, and every man’s serious consideration, to make the best use of it.

And it will conduce very much to the clearing of this matter, to consider briefly the occasion of these words. And this will best appear by attending steadfastly to the main scope and design of this epistle. And I think that no man that reads it with attention can doubt but that it is particularly designed against

the impious sect of the Gnostics, who, as the Fathers tell us, sprang from Simon Magus, and pretended to extraordinary knowledge and illumination, from whence they had the name of Gnostics: but notwithstanding this glittering pretence, they did allow themselves in all manner of impious and vicious practices, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, as St. Jude speaks of them. And that St. John aims particularly at this sort of men, is very evident from the frequent and plain allusions throughout this epistle to those names and titles which this sect assumed to themselves: as chap. ii. ver. 4. "He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." And, ver. 9. "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now." Which passages, and many more in this epistle, do plainly refer to the pretences of this sect to more than ordinary knowledge and illumination in the mysteries of religion; notwithstanding they did so notoriously contradict these glorious pretences by the impiety of their lives, and particularly by their hatred and enmity to their fellow Christians. For as the ancient Fathers tell us, they pretended, that whatever they did they could not sin. And this our apostle intimates in the beginning of this epistle: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." And they held it lawful to renounce Christianity to avoid persecution; and, not only so, but also to join with the heathen in persecuting the Christians; which seems to be the reason why the apostle so often taxeth them for hatred to their brethren, and calls them murderers.

Now, to shew the inconsistency of these principles

and practices with Christianity, the apostle useth many arguments, amongst which he particularly insisteth upon this, that nothing is more essential to a disciple of Christ and a child of God (by which titles Christians were commonly known) than to abstain from the practice of all sin and wickedness: ver. 6 of this chap. “Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not; whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him” (whatever knowledge they might pretend to, it was evident they were destitute of the true knowledge of God and his Son Jesus Christ); and, verse 7, “Little children, let no man deceive you; he that doth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous;” and, ver. 8, “He that committeth sin is of the devil;” and, ver. 9, “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin:” let men pretend what they will, wickedness is a plain mark and character of one that belongs to the devil; as, on the contrary, righteousness is an evidence of a child of God; “in this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil,” &c.

I shall briefly explain the words, and then consider the matter contained in them:—

By the children of God, and the children of the devil, are meant good and bad men; it being usual, in the phrase of Scripture, to call persons or things which partake of such a nature or quality, the children of those who are eminently endued with that nature and disposition. Thus they who are of the faith of Abraham, and do the works of Abraham, are called Abraham’s children: in like manner, those who, in their dispositions and actions, imitate God, are called the children of God; and, on the contrary, those that addict themselves to sin and impiety are counted of another race and descent;

they resemble the devil, and belong to him as the chief and head of that faction.

By righteousness is here meant universal goodness and conformity to the law of God, in opposition to sin, which is the transgression of that law.

By being manifest is meant, that hereby good and bad men are really distinguished, so that every one that will examine his condition by this mark, may know of which number he is, and to what party he belongs.

I come now to the main argument contained in the words, which is to give us a certain character and mark of distinction between a good and bad man; *ἐν τούτῳ*, “by this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil; whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God.”

In the management of the following discourse, I shall proceed in this method:—

First, We will consider the character and mark of difference between a good and bad man, which is here laid down, “Whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God.”

Secondly, I shall endeavour to shew, that by this mark every man may, with due care and diligence, come to the knowledge of his spiritual state and condition. “By this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil.”

Thirdly, I shall inquire whence it comes to pass, that, notwithstanding this, so many persons are at so great uncertainty concerning their condition.

I. We will consider the character and mark of difference between a good and bad man, which is here in the text:—“Whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God;” which implies, likewise, on the contrary, that whosoever doth righteousness is of



God. Now, in the strictest sense of this phrase, he only who lives in all the commandments of God blameless can be said to do righteousness: but in this sense there is none that doth righteousness, no, not one; and, consequently, none could be the children of God. But the text supposes some to be so; and, therefore, by doing righteousness the apostle must necessarily be understood to mean something that is short of perfect and unsinning obedience. So that the question is, What doing of righteousness is sufficient to denominate a man a child of God, and to put him into a state of grace and favour with him?

And I do not intend nicely to state this matter. It is not perhaps possible to be done; nothing being more difficult than to determine the very utmost bounds and limits of things, and to tell exactly, and just to a point, where the line of difference between virtue and vice, between the state of a good and a bad man is to be placed: and if it could be done, it would be of no great use; for I take it to be no part of my business to tell men how many faults they may have, and how little goodness, and yet be the children of God: but rather to acquaint them what degrees of holiness and goodness are necessary to give men a clear and comfortable evidence of their good estate towards God, and then to persuade them, in order to their peace and assurance, to endeavour after such degrees.

Wherefore, to state the business so far as is necessary to give men a sufficient knowledge of their condition, I shall briefly consider who they are, that in the apostle's sense may be said to be doers of righteousness, or not doers of it. And because the apostle lays down the rule negatively, I shall, therefore,

In the first place, inquire who they are, that in the apostle's sense may be said not to do righteousness.

1. They that live in the general course of a wicked life, in the practice of great and known sins, as injustice, intemperance, filthy and sensual lusts, profane neglect and contempt of God and religion; so that by the whole course and tenor of their actions, it is plain beyond all denial that "there is no fear of God before their eyes." Concerning these, the case is very evident, that it seems too mild and gentle an expression, to call them not doers of righteousness.

2. They who live in the habitual practice of any one known sin, or in the neglect of any considerable part of their known duty. For any vicious habit denominates a man, and puts him into an evil state.

3. They who are guilty of the single act of a very heinous and notorious crime; as a deliberate act of blasphemy, of murder, perjury, fraud or oppression, or of any other crime of the like enormity. For though ordinarily one single act of sin doth not denominate one a bad man, when the general course of the man's life is contrary; yet the single acts of some sorts of sins are so crying and heinous, and do so stare every man's conscience in the face, that they are justly esteemed to be of equal malignity with vicious habits of an inferior kind; because they do almost necessarily suppose a great deprivation of mind, and a monstrous alienation from God and goodness in the person that deliberately commits them. And they, who are guilty in any of these three degrees now mentioned, are most certainly not doers of righteousness, and consequently it is manifest that they are not the children of God.

In the second place, I shall inquire who they are

that in the apostle's sense may be said to do righteousness. In short, they who in the general course of their lives do keep the commandments of God. And thus the Scripture generally expresseth this matter, by "keeping the commandments of God," and by "having respect to all his commandments;" by "obedience to the gospel of Christ;" by being "holy in all manner of conversation;" by "abstaining from all kind of evil;" by "cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit:" and by "practising holiness in the fear of God:" to which I shall add the description which St. Luke gives us of the righteousness of Zacharias and Elizabeth: (Luke i. 6.) "They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." All which expressions do plainly signify the actual conformity of our lives and actions in the general course and tenor of them, to the laws and commands of God. And this implies these two things: that the tenor of our lives and actions be agreeable to these laws of God; and that these actions be done with a sincere and upright mind; out of regard to God and another world, and not for low and temporal ends.

And I choose rather to describe a righteous man by the actual conformity of the general course of his actions to the law of God, than (as some have done) by a sincere desire or resolution of obedience. For a desire may be sincere for the time it lasts, and yet vanish before it comes to any real effect. And how innocently soever it was intended, it is certainly a great mistake in divinity, and of a very dangerous consequence to the souls of men, to affirm that a desire of grace is grace; and consequently by the same reason, that a desire of obedience is

obedience. A sincere desire, or resolution to be good, is indeed a good beginning, and ought by all means to be cherished and encouraged; but yet, it is far from being the thing desired, or from being accepted for it in the esteem of God: for God never accepts the desire for the deed, but where there is no possibility, no opportunity of doing the thing desired: but if there be, and the thing be not done, there is no reason to imagine that the desire in that case should be accepted, as if the thing were done. For instance, if a man give alms according to his ability, and would give more if he were able; in this case the desire is accepted for the deed, and of this case it is, and no other, the apostle speaks, 2 Cor. viii. 12, "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." That is, God interprets and accepts the charity of men according to the largeness of their hearts, and not according to the straitness of their fortunes: but it is a great mistake to draw a general conclusion from this text, that in all cases God accepts the will for the deed. For though a man sincerely desire and resolve to reform his life (as I doubt not many men often do) but do it not when there is time and opportunity for it, these desires and resolutions are of no account, with God; all this "righteousness is but as the morning cloud, and as the early dew which passeth away." Men are not apt to mistake so grossly in other matters: No man believes hunger to be meat, or thirst to be drink; and yet there is no doubt of the truth and sincerity of these natural desires. No man thinks that covetousness, or a greedy desire to be rich, is an estate; or that ambition, or an insatiable desire of honour is really advancement: just so, and

no otherwise, a desire to be good is righteousness. The apostle's caution, a little before the text, may fitly be applied to this purpose: "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous." Not, but that the best of men do sometimes fall through infirmity, and are betrayed by surprise, and borne down by the violence of temptation; but if the general course of our actions be a "doing of righteousness," the grace of the gospel, in and through the merits of our blessed Saviour, doth accept of this imperfect but sincere obedience.

II. I shall endeavour to shew, that by this mark, every man may with due care and diligence, arrive at the certain knowledge of his spiritual state and condition. "By this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God." By which the apostle means, that this is a real mark of difference betwixt good and bad men, and that whereby they very often manifest themselves to others: especially when the course of their lives is eminently pious and virtuous, or notoriously impious and wicked. But because it doth not so much concern us curiously to inquire into, much less severely to censure, the state of other men, I shall only consider at present how far by this mark and character every man may make a certain judgment of his own good or bad condition.

1. By this character, as I have explained it, he that is a bad man, may certainly know himself to be so, if he will but consider his condition, and do not wilfully deceive and delude himself. As for those who are vicious in the general course of their lives, or have been guilty of the act of some heinous

or notorious sin not yet repented of, their case is so plain for the most part, even to themselves, that they can have no manner of doubt concerning it. Such men stand continually convicted and condemned by the sentence of their own minds: and whenever they reflect upon themselves (which they do as seldom as they can) they are a terror to themselves, and full of amazement and fearful expectation of judgment. Not but that even in so plain a case many men do use great endeavours to cheat themselves, and would be very glad to find out ways to reconcile a wicked life with the hopes of heaven, and to gain the favour, at least the forgiveness of God, without repentance and amendment of their lives. And to this end they are willing to confess their sins, and to undergo any penance that should be imposed upon them, that only excepted, which only can do them good—I mean, real reformation. And when the priest hath absolved them, they would fain believe that God hath forgiven them too; however, they return to their former course, and being strongly addicted to their lusts, between stupidity and foolish hopes, they at last come to this desperate resolution, to venture all upon the absolution of the priest, *et vuleat quantum valere potest*, let it have what effect it can; though I dare say that in their most serious thoughts they are horribly afraid it will do them no good.

And, for those who are sinners of a lesser rate, and perhaps allow themselves only in one kind of vice, they likewise have reason to conclude themselves in a bad condition; especially if they consider, that he who lives in the breach of any one commandment of God, is guilty of all, because he contemns that authority which enacted the whole law. And it is easy

for any man to discern the habit of any sin in himself; as when he frequently commits it, when he takes up no firm resolutions against it, when he useth no competent care to avoid the temptations to it, nor puts forth any vigorous endeavours to break off from it; or, however, still continues in the practice of it. For the customary practice of any known sin, is utterly inconsistent with sincere resolutions and endeavours against it, there being no greater evidence of the insincerity of resolutions and endeavours in any kind, than still to go on to do the contrary to them.

2. By this character, likewise, they that are sincerely good may generally be well assured of their good condition, and that they are the children of God. And there are but two things necessary to evidence this to them; that the general course and tenor of their actions be agreeable to the laws of God; and that they be sincere and upright in those actions. And, both these, every man may sufficiently know concerning himself; for if the laws of God be plain, and lie open to every man's understanding, then it is as easy for every man to know when he obeys God and keeps his commandments, as when he obeys the commands of his father, or his prince, and when he keeps the known laws of the land. And no sensible or considerate man ever had any doubt of this kind; for, if a man can know any thing, he can certainly tell when he keeps or breaks any known law: so that all doubts of this nature are frivolous and idle pretences to cover men's faults, and such as they would be ashamed to allege in any other case.

And a good man may likewise know when he obeys God sincerely. Not but that men often de-

ceive themselves with an opinion, or at least a groundless hope of their own sincerity; but if they will deal fairly with themselves, and use due care and diligence, there are very few cases (if any) wherein they may not know their own sincerity in any act of obedience to God: for what can a man know concerning himself, if not the reality of his own intentions? If a man should in earnest tell me, that he doubted very much whether he had that friendship for me which he made profession of, and that he was afraid that his affection to me was not real and sincere, I confess I should doubt of it too; because I should certainly conclude, that no man could know that matter so well as he himself.

And there is no doubt but whoever hath a hearty kindness for another, and a sincere desire to serve and please him, knows he has it. And, accordingly, good and holy men in Scripture do every where with great confidence and assurance appeal to God concerning the integrity and sincerity of their hearts towards him. Job and David, Hezekiah and Nehemiah in the Old Testament; and in the New, St. Paul, for himself and Timothy, make this solemn profession of their sincerity: (2 Cor. i. 12.) “Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have our conversation in the world.” And I cannot call to mind so much as any one passage in Scripture, from whence it can be collected, that any good man ever doubted of his own sincerity. And, to say the truth, it would not be modesty but impudence in any man to declare that he suspects himself of hypocrisy; good men have always abhorred the thought of it. “Ye have heard of the patience of Job,” and yet



he could not bear to have his integrity questioned. It was a brave and generous speech of his, "Until I die, I will not remove my integrity from me."

And yet it hath so happened, that this is become a very common doubt among religious people; and they have been so unreasonably cherished in it, as to have it made a considerable evidence of a man's sincerity to doubt of it himself. It is indeed said in Scripture, (Jer. xvii. 9.) "That the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" which is true concerning our future intentions and actions: no man knowing how his mind may change hereafter. Little did Hazael think that ever he should do those things which the prophet foretold him. But though this be true in itself, yet it is not the meaning of that text. For the prophet in that chapter plainly makes use of this consideration of the falsehood and deceitfulness of man's heart, as an argument to take off the people of Israel from trusting in the arm of flesh, and in those promises which were made to them of foreign assistance from Egypt: because men may pretend fair, and yet deceive those that rely upon them; for the heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked, and none but God knows whether men's inward intentions be answerable to their outward professions: "for he searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins." And this I verily believe is all that the prophet here intends, that there is a great deal of ~~fraud~~ fraud and deceit in the hearts of bad men, so that no man can rely upon their promises and professions; but God knows the hearts of all men. But now because God alone knows the hearts of all men and the sincerity of their intentions towards one another, doth it from hence follow, that it is a thing either impossible or very

difficult for any man to know the sincerity of his own present intentions and actions? To make any such conclusions were to condemn the generation of God's children, these holy and excellent men in Scripture, Job, and David, and Hezekiah, and St. Paul, who do so frequently appeal to God concerning their own integrity. And surely, when the apostle saith, "No man knows the things of a man, but the spirit of a man which is in him," he plainly supposes that every man is conscious to the motions and intentions of his own mind. I have insisted the longer upon this, that I might from the very foundation destroy an imagination, which is not only untrue in itself, but has likewise been a very great hindrance to the peace and comfort of many good men.

III. Let us inquire whence it comes to pass, that notwithstanding this, so many persons are at so great uncertainty about their spiritual condition. For the clearing of this matter, we will distinctly consider these three things. First, The grounds of the false hopes and confidence of men really bad, concerning their good condition. Secondly, The causeless doubts and jealousies of men really good, concerning their bad condition. And, Thirdly, The just causes of doubting in others. As for the troubles and fears of men who are notoriously bad, and live in the practice of known vices, these do not fall under our consideration: if they be troubled about their condition, it is no more than what they ought to be; and if they be only doubtful of it, it is less than they ought to be. To persons in this condition, there is only counsel to be given to leave their sins, and become better, but no comfort to be administered to them, until first they have followed

that counsel : for, until they reform, if they think themselves to be in a bad condition, they think just as they ought, and as there is great reason, and nobody should go about to persuade them otherwise.

First, then, We will consider the grounds of the false hopes and confidence of men really bad, concerning their good condition. I do not now mean the worst of men, but such as make some show and appearance of goodness. It is very displeasing to men to fall under the hard opinion and censure of others, but the most grievous thing in the world is for a man to be condemned by himself; and, therefore, it is no wonder that men use all manner of shifts to avoid so great an inconvenience as is the ill opinion of a man's self concerning himself and his own condition.

Some, therefore, rely upon the profession of the Christian faith, and their being baptized into it. But this is so far from being any exemption from a good life, that it is the greatest and most solemn obligation to it. Dost thou believe the doctrine of the gospel? Thou, of all men, art inexcusable, if thou allowest thyself in ungodliness and worldly lusts.

Others trust to their external devotion; they frequent the church and serve God constantly, they pray to him and hear his word, and receive the blessed sacrament. But let us not deceive ourselves, God is not mocked. All this is so far from making amends for the impiety of our lives, that, on the contrary, the impiety of our lives spoils all the acceptance of our devotions. "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law (that is, from obeying it), even his prayer shall be an abomination."

Others, who are sensible they are very bad, depend very much upon their repentance, especially if they set solemn times apart for it. And there is no doubt but that a sincere repentance will put a man into a good condition: but then it is to be considered, that no repentance is sincere but that which produceth a real change and reformation in our lives. For we have not repented to purpose if we return again to our sins. It is well thou art, in some measure, sensible of thy miscarriage, but thou art never safe till thou hast forsaken thy sins; thy estate and condition towards God is not changed, till thou hast really altered thyself and the course of thy life.

Others satisfy themselves with the exercise of some particular graces and virtues, justice, and liberality, and charity. And is it not a thousand pities that thy life is not all of a piece, and that all the other parts of it are not answerable to these—that thou shouldest lose the reward of so much real goodness, out of thy fondness to any one vice or lust—that, when thou art not far from the kingdom of God, for lack of one or two things more thou shouldest fall short of it? Hast thou never heard what the Scripture saith, that “he who offends in one point is a transgressor of the whole law?” To make a man a good man, all parts of goodness must concur; but any one way of wickedness is sufficient to denominate a man bad.

Lastly, Some who are very careful of their outward carriage and conversation, but yet are conscious to themselves of great secret faults and vices, when they can find no comfort from themselves, and the testimony of their own consciences, are apt to comfort themselves in the good opinion which per-

haps others have of them. But if we know ourselves to be bad, and our own hearts do condemn us, it is not the good opinion of others, concerning us, which can either alter or better our condition. They may have reason for their charity, and yet thou none for thy confidence. Trust nobody, concerning thyself, rather than thyself, because nobody can know thee so well as thou mayest know thyself.

These, and such as these, are the hopes of the hypocrite, which Job elegantly compares to the spider's web, finely and artificially wrought, but miserably thin and weak; so that we ourselves may see through them, and if we lay the least stress upon them, they will break. They are but pleasant dreams and delusions, which, whenever we are awakened to a serious consideration of our condition, by the apprehensions of approaching death and judgment, will presently vanish and disappear; so the same holy man tells us, (Job. xxvii. 8.) "What is the hope of the hypocrite, when God taketh away his soul?"

Secondly, We will consider, in the next place, the causeless doubts and jealousies of men really good, concerning their bad condition. For as some are prone beyond all reason to delude themselves with vain hopes of their good condition, so others are apt as unreasonably to torment themselves with groundless fears and jealousies, that their estate is bad. And of these doubts there are several occasions, the chief whereof I shall mention, by which we may judge of the rest that are of the like nature.

1. Some are afraid that they are reprobated from all eternity, and therefore they cannot be the children of God. This is so unreasonable, that, if it were not a real cause of trouble to some persons, it did not deserve to be considered. For no man

that sincerely endeavours to please God, and to keep his commandments, hath, from Scripture, the least ground to suspect any latent or secret decree of God against him that shall work his ruin. But whatever the decrees of God be, concerning the eternal state of men, since they are secret to us, they can certainly be no rule either of our duty or comfort. And no man hath reason to think himself rejected of God, either from eternity or in time, that does not find the marks of reprobation in himself—I mean an evil heart and life. By this, indeed, a man may know that he is out of God's favour for the present; but he hath no reason at all, from hence to conclude, that God hath from all eternity and for ever cast him off. That God calls him to repentance, and affords to him the space and means of it, is a much plainer sign, that God is willing and ready to have mercy on him, than any thing else is, or can be, that God hath utterly cast him off. And, therefore, for men to judge of their condition by the decrees of God, which are hid from us, and not by his word, which is near us and in our hearts, is as if a man wandering in the wide sea, in a dark night, when the heaven is all clouded about, should yet resolve to steer his course by the stars which he cannot see, but only guess at, and neglect the compass, which is at hand, and would afford him a much better and more certain direction.

This, therefore, is to be rejected, as a fond and groundless imagination, and which ought to trouble nobody, because nobody doth, nor can, know any thing concerning it. Moses hath long since very well determined this matter: (Dent. xxix. 29.) " Secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but these things which are revealed belong unto us and our

children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

2. Good men are conscious to themselves of many frailties and imperfections ; and, therefore, they are afraid of their condition. But God considers the infirmities of our present state, and expects no other obedience from us, in order to our acceptance with him, but what this state of imperfection is capable of: and, provided the sincere endeavour and general course of our lives be to please him, and keep his commandments, the terms of the gospel are so merciful, that our frailties shall not be imputed to us, so as to affect our main state, and to make us cease to be the children of God. And though we may be guilty of many errors and secret sins, which escape our notice and observation, yet it is not impossible for us to exercise such a repentance for these as will be available for their pardon. For we have to deal with a merciful God, who is pleased to accept of such an obedience, and of such a repentance, as we are capable of performing. Now there is a great difference between those sins which require a particular repentance, before we can hope for the pardon of them (as all great, and deliberate, and presumptuous sins do, which are never committed without our knowledge, and are so far from slipping out of memory, that they are continually flying in our faces, and we cannot forget them if we would), and sins of infirmity, occasioned by surprise and violence of temptation, through ignorance or inadvertency : for a general repentance, such as we every day exercise in our devotions and prayers to God, may suffice for these. I speak not this to hinder any from a more particular repentance of all their known failings, the more particular the better ;

but to remove the groundless fears and jealousies of men, about their main state and condition. And if any ask, how I know, that a general repentance will suffice for these kind of sins? I answer, because more than this, in many cases, is impossible; so that either we must rest satisfied that God will forgive them, upon these terms, or conclude that they shall not be forgiven at all, which is contrary to the whole tenor of the Scriptures; I say, in many cases, more than this is impossible, because sins of ignorance, and those common errors and frailties of human life, which David calls secret sins, are not particularly known to us when they are committed; and, consequently, it is impossible that we should particularly repent of them. And, therefore, in this case, there can be no doubt but that God doth accept of a general repentance, as he did from David, when he made that humble confession and prayer to him, (Psalm xix. 12.) “Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret sins.”

3. They are afraid their obedience is not sincere, because it proceeds many times from fear, and not always out of pure love to God. For answer to this: it is plain from Scripture, that God propounds to men several motives and arguments to obedience—some proper to work upon their fear, as the threatenings of punishment; some upon their hope, as the promises of blessing and reward; others upon their love, as the mercies and forgiveness of God. From whence it is evident he intended they should all work upon us. And, accordingly, the Scripture gives us instances in each kind. Noah, moved with fear, obeyed God in preparing an ark. Moses had respect unto the recompense of reward. Mary Magdalen loved much. And as



it is hard to say, so it is not necessary to determine, just how much influence and no more each of these hath upon us. It is very well if men be reclaimed from their sins and made good by the joint force of all the considerations which God offers to us. To be sure, love is the noblest and most generous principle of obedience, but fear commonly takes the first and fastest hold of us, and in times of violent temptation, is perhaps the best argument to keep, even the best of men, within the bounds of their duty.

4. Another cause of doubting in good men is, from a sense of their imperfect performance of the duties of religion, and of the abatement of their affections towards God at some times. They have many wandering thoughts in prayer and other exercises of devotion, and they cannot, for their life, keep their minds continually intent on what they are about. This we should strive against as much as we can, and that is the utmost we can do; but to cure this wholly is impossible, the infirmity of our nature and the frame of our minds will not admit of it; and, therefore, no man ought to question his sincerity, because he cannot do that which is impossible for men to do.

And then for the abatement of our affections to God and religion at some times, this naturally proceeds from the inconstancy of men's tempers, by reason of which it is not possible that the best of men should be able always to maintain and keep up the same degree of zeal and fervour towards God. But our comfort is, that God doth not measure men's sincerity by the tides of their affections, but by the constant bent of their resolutions and the general tenor of their life and actions.

5. Another cause of these doubts is, that men expect more than ordinary and reasonable assurance of their good condition ; some particular revelation from God, an extraordinary impression upon their minds, to that purpose, which they think the Scripture means by the testimony, and seal, and earnest of the Spirit. God may give this when and to whom he pleases, but I do not find he hath any where promised it. And all that the Scripture means, by those phrases of the testimony, and seal, and earnest of the Spirit, is, to my apprehension, no more but this: that the Holy Spirit which God bestowed upon Christians, in so powerful and sensible a manner, was a seal and earnest of their resurrection to eternal life, according to that plain text, (Rom. viii. 11.) “ If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead, shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.” But, then, who they are that have the Spirit of God, is only to be known by the real fruits and effects of it. If we be led by the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit, and do not fulfil the lusts of the flesh, then the Spirit of God dwelleth in us. But this is very far from an immediate and extraordinary revelation from the Spirit of God to the minds of good men, telling them in particular, that they are the children of God. I know not what peculiar favour God may shew to some, but I know no such thing, nor ever yet met with any wise and good man that did affirm it of himself; and I fear that, in the most of those who pretend to it, it is either mere fancy, or gross delusion.

6. As for the case of melancholy, it is not a reasonable case, and therefore doth not fall under any.

certain rules and directions. They, who are under the power of it, are seldom fit to take that counsel, which alone is fit to be given them, and that is, not to believe themselves concerning themselves, but to trust the judgment of others rather than their own apprehensions. In other cases, every man knows himself best, but a melancholy man is most in the dark as to himself. This cause of trouble and doubting is very much to be pitied, but hard to be removed, unless by physic, or by time, or by chance. One may happen to say something, that may hit the humour of a melancholy man, and satisfy him for the present; but reason must needs signify very little to those persons, the nature of whose distemper it is, to turn every thing that can be said for their comfort into objections against themselves.

Thirdly, But besides those who mistake their condition, either by presuming it to be better, or fearing it to be worse than it is, there are likewise others, who upon good grounds are doubtful of their condition, and have reason to be afraid of it: those, I mean, who have some beginnings of goodness, which yet are very imperfect. They have good resolutions, and do many things well, but they often fall and are frequently pulled back by those evil inclinations and habits, which are yet in a great measure unsubdued in them. These I cannot liken better than to the borderers between two countries, who live in the marches and confines of two powerful kingdoms, both which have a great influence upon them, so that it is hard to say whose subjects they are, and to which prince they belong: thus it is with many in religion; they have pious inclinations, and have made some fair attempts towards goodness; they have begun to refrain from sin, and to

resist the occasions and temptations to it ; but ever and anon they are mastered by their old lusts, and carried off from their best resolutions ; and, perhaps, upon a little consideration, they repent and recover themselves again, and after a while are again entangled and overcome.

Now the case of these persons is really doubtful, both to themselves and others. And the proper direction to be given them, in order to their peace and settlement, is, by all means to encourage them to go on and fortify their resolutions ; to be more vigilant and watchful over themselves, to strive against sin, and to resist it with all their might. And, according to the success of their endeavours in this conflict, the evidence of their good condition will every day clear up and become more manifest ; the more we grow in grace, and the seldomer we fall into sin, and the more even and constant our obedience to God is, so much the greater and fuller satisfaction we shall have of our good estate towards God : “ For the path of the just is as the shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day :” and “ the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.” I shall only make two or three inferences from what hath been discoursed upon this argument, and so conclude.

1. From hence we learn the great danger of sins of omission as well as commission ; “ Whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God.” The mere neglect of any of the great duties of religion, of piety towards God, and of kindness and charity to men, though we be free from the commission of great sins, is enough to cast us out of the favour of God, and to shut us for ever out of his kingdom. “ I was

hungry, and ye gave me no meat; thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; sick and in prison, and ye visited me not; therefore, depart, ye cursed."

2. It is evident from what hath been said, that nothing can be vainer, than for men to live in any course of sin and impiety, and yet to pretend to be the children of God, and to hope for eternal life. The children of God will do the works of God, and whoever hopes to enjoy him hereafter, will endeavour to be like him here; "Every man that hath this hope in him, purifies himself even as He is pure."

3. You see what is the great mark and character of a man's good or bad condition: whosoever doeth righteousness is of God, and "whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God." Here is a plain and sensible evidence, by which every man that will deal honestly with himself, may certainly know his own condition: and then, according as he finds it to be, may take comfort in it, or make haste out of it. And we need not ascend into heaven, nor go down into the deep, to search out the secret counsels and decrees of God; there needs no anxious inquiry whether we be of the number of God's elect: if we daily mortify our lusts, and grow in goodness, and take care to add to our faith and knowledge, temperance, and patience, and charity, and all other Christian graces and virtues, we certainly take the best course in the world to "make our calling and election sure." And, without this, it is impossible that we should have any comfortable and well-grounded assurance of our good condition. This one mark of doing righteousness, is that into which all other signs and characters which are in Scripture given of a good man, are finally resolved; and this answers all those various phrases

which some men would make to be so many several and distinct marks of a child of God : as, whether we have the true knowledge of God and Divine illumination ; for “ hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments :” whether we sincerely love God ; for “ this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments :” and whether God loves us ; “ for the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and his countenance will behold the upright :” whether we be regenerate and born of God ; for “ whosoever is born of God sinneth not :” whether we have the Spirit of God witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God ; “ for as many as have the Spirit of God, are led by the Spirit, and by the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the flesh :” whether we belong to Christ, and have an interest in him or not ; for “ they that are Christ’s, have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts thereof :” in a word, whether the promise of heaven and eternal life belong to us ; for “ without holiness no man shall see the Lord ; but if we have our fruit unto holiness, the end will be everlasting life.” So that you see, at last, the Scripture brings all this to one mark, holiness and obedience to the laws of God, or a vicious and wicked life : “ in this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil ; whosoever doeth not righteousness, is not of God.”

Let us then deal impartially with ourselves, and bring our lives and actions to this trial, and never be at rest till the matter be brought to some issue, and we have made a deliberate judgment of our condition, whether we be the children of God or not : and if, upon a full and fair examination, our consciences give us this testimony, that by the grace of God we have “ denied ungodliness and worldly

lusts, and have lived "soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world," we may take joy and comfort in it; for "if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God;" but if, upon the search and trial of our ways, our case appear clearly to be otherwise, or if we have just cause to doubt of it, let us not venture to continue one moment longer in so uncertain and dangerous a condition. And if we desire to know the way of peace, the Scripture hath set it plainly before us. "Wash ye, make ye clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well." "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Though our case be very bad, yet it is not desperate; this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all men to be embraced, that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners:" and he is still willing to save us, if we be but willing to leave our sins and to serve him in holiness and righteousness the remaining part of our lives. We may yet be "turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God:" we who have ventured so long upon the brink of ruin, may yet, by the infinite mercies of God, and by the power of his grace, be rescued from the base and miserable slavery of the devil and our lusts into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

And thus I have endeavoured, with all the plainness I could, to represent every man to himself, and to let him clearly see what his condition is towards God, and how the case of his soul and of his eter-

nal happiness stands. And I do verily believe, that what I have said in this matter, is the truth of God, to which we ought all gladly to yield and render up ourselves. For, great is truth, and mighty above all things: she is faithful and impartial in her counsels, and though she be not always welcome, yet it is wise to hearken to her; for in great kindness and charity she lets men know their condition and the danger of it, that they may take care to prevent it: “with her is no accepting of persons, and in her judgment there is no unrighteousness.” I will conclude all with that excellent advice of a heathen philosopher: “Make it no longer a matter of

Antonin. dispute what are the marks and signs  
lib. 10. of a good man, but immediately set about it, and endeavour to become such an one.”



## SERMON XVI.

OF THE JOY WHICH IS IN HEAVEN AT THE REPENTANCE OF A SINNER.

*I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance.—*

LUKE XV. 7.

AFTER many attempts made in vain to reclaim sinners from their evil ways, and to bring them to the wisdom of the just, it is hard for us, who are the messengers of God to men, not to sit down in despondence, and at last quite to despair of doing good upon them. But, when I consider the infinite patience of God with sinners, and how long his Spirit strives with them, why should we, we who are sinners ourselves, think much to bear with sinners, and patiently to contend with their obstinacy and perverseness? When I consider, that our blessed Saviour, the great preacher and pattern of righteousness, did not give over the worst of men, nor despair of their recovery: this methinks should make us, who are ambassadors for Christ, unwearied in beseeching men in his stead to be reconciled to God.

And of this we have a famous instance in this chapter: the publicans and sinners, as they had done several times before, came to hear our Saviour: he treated them very kindly, and conversed familiarly with them; at this, the pharisees were displeased and murmured, and this unreasonable murmuring

of their's gave occasion to the three parables in this chapter.

In which our Saviour does at once answer the objection of the pharisees, and give all possible encouragement to the repentance of these great sinners. He answers the pharisees, by letting them plainly see, that he was about the best work in the world, the most acceptable to God, and matter of greatest joy to all the heavenly inhabitants. Instead of a severe reproof of their uncharitableness, he offers that calmly to their consideration, which ought in all reason to convince them, that he was no ways to blame for this familiar conversation of his with sinners, having no other design upon them but to reclaim them from their vices, and to make them fit company for the best of men; that he was a spiritual physician, and therefore his proper work and employment lay among his patients. And then, instead of terrifying these sinners, who seemed to come with a good mind to be instructed by him, he gently insinuates the most winning arguments and the greatest encouragement to repentance; by shewing how ready God was, after all their sins and provocations, to receive them to his grace and favour, provided they did sincerely repent and betake themselves to a better course: and, not only so, but that the repentance of a sinner is a great joy to the great King of the world, and to all that holy and heavenly host that attend upon him.

From which method of our Saviour in treating so great sinners so gently, I cannot but make this observation, for my own use as well as for others; that it is good to give even the greatest of sinners, all the encouragement we can to repentance; and though men have been never so bad, yet, if they have but

this one quality left in them, that they are patient to be instructed, and content to hear good counsel, we should use them kindly and endeavour to recover them by the fairest means; not so much upbraiding them for their having been bad, as encouraging them to become better.

To this purpose our Saviour uttered three parables—of the recovery of a lost sheep; of finding a lost piece of money; of the return of a prodigal son to his father: and though they all aim at the same scope and design, yet our Saviour useth this variety, not only to convey the same thing to several capacities in a more acceptable manner, one similitude happening to hit one person, and another another; but likewise to inculcate so weighty a matter the more upon his hearers, and to fix it more deeply in their minds.

The words which I have read are the moral, or application of the first parable, concerning a man who had a hundred sheep, and having lost one, leaves the ninety and nine to go seek that which was lost; and having found it, with great joy brings it home. By which our Saviour gives us to understand, what joy God and the blessed spirits above take in the conversion of a sinner. “I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance.” Than which nothing could have been more proper, both to silence the uncharitable murmuring of the pharisees against our Saviour for conversing with publicans and sinners, to so good an end, and likewise to encourage sinners to repent: for why should the pharisees be displeased at that which was so great a pleasure to God and the holy angels? and what greater encourage-

ment to repentance than this; that God is not only willing to receive the returning sinner, but that the news of his repentance is entertained in heaven with so much joy, that if it be possible for the blessed inhabitants of that place to have any thing added to their happiness, this will be a new accession to it?

There are three things in the words which require a very careful explication.

I. How we are to understand the joy that is in heaven at the conversion of a sinner.

II. Who are here meant by the just persons that need no repentance.

III. With what reason it is here said, that there is “more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance.”

There is something of difficulty in each of these, which deserve our heedful and attentive consideration.

I. How we are to understand the joy that is in heaven at the repentance of a sinner. And this (as indeed this whole passage of our Saviour’s) we are not to understand too strictly and rigorously, but as spoken in a great measure after the manner of men, and by way of accommodation to our capacity, so far as the persons here spoken of are capable of any addition to their joy and happiness.

As it refers to God, it seems very inconsistent with the happiness and perfection of the Divine nature to suppose him really capable of joy, any more than of grief, or any other passion. Because this would be to imagine some new accession to his pleasure and happiness, which being always infinite, can never have any thing added to it. And, therefore, we are to understand this, as it relates to God, in the same

manner as we do infinite other passages of Scripture, where human passions are ascribed to him, to be spoken by way of condescension and after the language and manner of the sons of men; and to signify only thus much to us, that the conversion of a sinner is a thing highly pleasing and acceptable to God.

As it refers to angels and other blessed spirits, I see no inconvenience why it may not be understood more strictly and literally; that they conceive a new joy at the news of a sinner's repentance, and find a fresh pleasure and delight springing up in their minds, whenever they hear the joyful tidings of a sinner rescued from the slavery of the devil and the danger of eternal damnation; of a new member added to the kingdom of God, that shall be a companion and a sharer with them in that blessedness which they enjoy: there seems to me to be nothing in this repugnant to the nature and happiness of blessed spirits in another world. For it is certain, that there are degrees of happiness among the blessed: from whence it necessarily follows, that some of them may be happier than they are. And it is very probable, since the happiness of angels and good men is but finite, that those who are most happy, do continually receive new additions to their blessedness; and that their felicity is never at a stand, but perpetually growing and improving to all eternity; and, that as their knowledge and love do increase, so likewise the capacity and causes of their happiness are still more and more enlarged and augmented: so that it is reasonable enough to suppose, that there is really joy, among the angels and spirits of just men made perfect, over every sinner that repenteth.

II. Who are here meant by the just persons who need no repentance. That our Saviour in this ex-

pression gives some glance and reflection upon the pharisees (who prided themselves in their own righteousness, and, instead of confessing their sins to God, stood upon their own justification, as if they needed no repentance) is very probable; because this parable was designed to answer their murmurings against him, for conversing with publicans and sinners, and, by the bye, to give a check to those who were so conceited of their own righteousness, as if they had no need of repentance. And this is very suitable to what our Saviour elsewhere says to them upon the like occasion, that "the whole have no need of the physician, but the sick;" that "he came not to call the righteous, but the sinners to repentance." But yet, though our Saviour expresseth himself so as that the pharisees might with reason enough apply it to themselves, that there was more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine of them, who were so conceited of their own righteousness, that they thought they had no need of repentance (for indeed our Saviour delivers himself so as to leave room for such a severe application); yet, I think, there is but little doubt to be made but that he intended something farther; and that, supposing the pharisees were as just as they pretended; and were really righteous men, so as to stand in no need of such a repentance as great sinners do, yet our Saviour affirms, there was more joy in heaven over one penitent sinner, than over ninety and nine such just persons.

But are there any persons in the world so just, as absolutely to stand in need of no repentance? No, there was never any such person in the world, him only excepted who said this, our blessed Saviour, "who had no sin, neither was guile found in his

mouth." And therefore this phrase, of needing no repentance, is to be understood in a qualified sense, and with some allowance; otherwise our blessed Saviour had supposed a case which never was, of a great number of perfectly righteous men. And our Saviour's meaning in this, is sufficiently explained in the last parable of this chapter, concerning the prodigal son; where the prodigal son is the sinner that repented; and his elder brother, who had always observed and obeyed his father, he is the just person who needed no repentance. So that by him our Saviour plainly designs those who, being religiously educated, and brought up in the fear of God, had never broke out into any extravagant and vicious course of life, and so in some sense had no need of repentance, that is, of changing the whole course of their lives, as the prodigal son had. Not but that the best of men are guilty of many faults and infirmities, which they have too much cause to repent of, as our Saviour sufficiently intimates in that parable: for certainly it was no small infirmity in the elder brother to be so envious, and to take so heinously the joyful welcome and entertainment which his prodigal brother at his return found from his father: but yet this single fault and sudden surprise of passion, considering the constant duty which he had paid to his father throughout the course of his life, did not make him such a sinner as to need such a repentance as his brother did, which consisted in a perfect change of the whole course of his life. And of such just persons as these, and of such a repentance as this, it seems very plain that our Saviour intended this discourse.

III. But, the main difficulty of all is, with what reason it is here said that "there is more joy

in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance." Is it not better not to offend, than to sin and repent? Is not innocence better than amendment, and the wisdom of prevention to be preferred before that of remedy? Is it worth the while to do amiss, to make way for repentance? And is not this almost like "sinning that grace may abound?" And if repentance be not better than righteousness; why is there more joy in heaven over the penitent, than over the righteous; nay, over one penitent sinner, than over ninety and nine just persons? Do not the blessed always rejoice most in that which is really best? Here is the difficulty, and it requires some care and consideration clearly to remove it. In order to which be pleased to consider these three things, which I think to be very material to the clearing of it.

1. That the same thing, considered in several respects, may in some respects have the advantage of another thing, and for those reasons be preferred before it, and yet not have the advantage of it absolutely and in all respects. Moral comparisons are not to be exacted to a mathematical strictness and rigour. To this purpose I have observed in a former discourse, that it was long since judiciously noted by Aristotle, that "moral and proverbial speeches are not to be taken too strictly," as if they were universally true and in all cases: it is sufficient if they be true for the most part, and in several respects which are very considerable. And of this nature, are most of the proverbs of Solomon; and whosoever shall go about to make out the truth of them, in all cases, does in my opinion take a very hard task upon himself. But, which is nearer to my



purpose, our Saviour himself in the chapter before my text, and in the moral application of a parable too (namely, that of the unjust steward), useth a proverbial speech just in the same manner: “the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light:” which is only a wise observation that is generally true, and in many respects, but not absolutely and universally. For some men have been as wise and diligent for the glory of God and interests of their souls, as ever any man was for this world, and for the advancement of his temporal interest. Of the like nature is this saying used by our Saviour, probably taken (as our Saviour did many other proverbial speeches) from the Jews, and applied to his own purpose. For there are several sayings of the Jewish masters much to this purpose: as, “great is the dignity of penitents, great is the virtue of them that repent, so that no creature may stand in their rank and order.” And again, “the righteous man may not stand in the same place with those that have repented.” These I confess were very high sayings, but yet very well designed for the encouragement of repentance. And they are not without good reason, as will appear, if we consider these two things:

First, That the greater the difficulty of virtue is, so much the greater is the praise and commendation of it: and not only we ourselves take the more joy and comfort in it, but it is more admirable and delightful to others. Now, it cannot be denied to be much more difficult to break off a vicious habit, than to go on in a good way which we have been trained up in, and always accustomed to. Those that have been well educated, have great cause to thank God, and to acknowledge the care of their parents and

teachers : for piety and goodness are almost infinitely easier to such persons, than to those who have wanted this advantage. It is happy for them they never tasted of unlawful pleasures ; if they had, they would possibly have drunk as deep as others : it is well they never were entangled in a sinful course, nor enslaved to vicious habits, nor “hardened through the deceitfulness of sin ;” if they had, they might possibly never have been recovered out of the snare of the devil. By the happiness of a good education, and the merciful providence of God, a great part of many men’s virtue consists in their ignorance of vice, and their being kept out of the way of great and dangerous temptations ; rather in the good customs they have been bred up to, than in the deliberate choice of their wills ; and rather in the happy preventions of evil, than in their resolute constancy in that which is good. And God, who knows what is in man, and sees to the bottom of every man’s temper and inclination, knows how far this man would have fallen, had he had the temptations of other men, and how irrecoverably perhaps he would have been plunged in an evil course, had he once entered upon it. So that repentance is a very great thing : and though it be the most just, and fit, and reasonable thing in the world ; yet, for all that, it deserves great commendation, because it is for the most part so very hard and difficult. And, therefore, though absolutely speaking, innocence is better than repentance, yet, as the circumstances may be, the virtues of some penitents may be greater than of many just and righteous persons.

Secondly, There is this consideration farther to recommend repentance, that they who are reclaimed from a wicked course are many times more

thoroughly and zealously good afterwards: their trouble and remorse for their sins does quicken and spur them on in the ways of virtue and goodness, and a lively sense of their past errors, is apt to make them more careful and conscientious of their duty, more tender and fearful of offending God, and desirous, if it were possible, to redeem their former miscarriages by their good behaviour for the future. Their love to God is usually more vehement, and burns with a brighter flame; "for to whomsoever much is forgiven they will love much." And they are commonly more zealous for the conversion of others, as being more sensible of the danger sinners are in, and more apt to commiserate their case, remembering that it was once their own condition, and with what difficulty they were rescued from so great a danger. And, for the most part, great penitents are more free from pride and contempt of others, the consideration of what themselves once were being enough to keep them humble all their days. So that penitents are many times more thoroughly and perfectly good, and after their recovery do, in several respects, outstrip and excel those who were never engaged in a vicious course of life: as a broken bone that is well set is sometimes stronger than it was before.

2. It will conduce also very much to the extenuating of this difficulty, to consider, that our Saviour does not here compare repentance with absolute innocence and perfect righteousness, but with the imperfect obedience of good men, who are guilty of many sins and infirmities; but yet, upon account of the general course and tenor of their lives, are, by the mercy and favour of the gospel, esteemed just and righteous persons; and, for the merits and per-

fect obedience of our blessed Saviour, so accepted by God. Now this alters the case very much, and brings the penitent and this sort of righteous persons much nearer to one another; so that in comparing them together, the true penitent may, in some cases, and in some respects, have the advantage of the righteous, and deserve, upon some accounts, to be preferred before him.

3. Which is principally to be considered, for the full clearing of this difficulty: this passage of our Saviour is to be understood as spoken very much after the manner of men, and suitably to the nature of human passions, and the usual occasion of moving them. We are apt to be exceedingly affected with the obtaining of what we did not hope for, and much more with regaining of what we looked upon as lost and desperate. Whatever be the reason of it, such is the nature of man, that we are not so sensibly moved at the continuance of a good which we have long possessed, as at the recovery of it after it was lost and gone from us: and the reasons of a judicious value and esteem, of a settled pleasure and contentment are one thing, and the causes of sudden joy and transport another. A continued course of goodness may, in itself, be more valuable, and yet repentance, after a great fall and long wandering, may be much more moving and surprising. For where things are constant, and keep in the same tenor, they are not apt, in their nature, to give any new and sudden occasion of joy. And this is the reason given in the parable of the prodigal son, where the father tells his eldest son, who was so offended at the joyful reception and welcome of his prodigal brother, that "He had been always with him, and all that he had was his;" that is, he

was sensible of his constant duty and obedience, than which nothing could be more acceptable; and that it had not, nor should not, lose its reward: but the return of his other son, after he had given over all hopes of him, and looked upon his case as desperate, this was a marvellous surprise, and a happiness beyond expectation, which is the proper and natural cause of joy and gladness; and, therefore, he tells him, that “upon such an occasion it was meet that we should make merry and be glad; for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; was lost, and is found.” His elder son’s continuance in his duty was the enjoyment of what he had always had, but the return of his prodigal son was the retrieving of what he had given up for lost, and a kind of resurrection from the dead. And thus our blessed Saviour, to encourage the repentance of sinners, represents God after the manner of men; as if our heavenly Father did conceive such a joy, upon the repentance of a sinner, as earthly parents are wont to do upon the return of a wild and extravagant son to himself and his duty.

Having thus, as briefly and clearly as I could, explained the several difficulties in the text, I shall now deduce some inferences from it, and so conclude.

1. First, That the blessed spirits above have some knowledge of the affairs of men here below, because they are said to rejoice at the conversion of a sinner. This is spoken more particularly of the angels, as appears by comparing what is more generally said in the text, “that there is joy in heaven,” with what is more particularly expressed in the 10th verse, that “there is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repenteth.” Now whether the angels come to this knowledge by vir-

tue of their ministry here below for the good of the elect, and so, in their continual intercourse between heaven and earth, bring to their fellow-servants in heaven the joyful news of the repentance of sinners upon earth; or whether God be pleased, from time to time, to reveal it to them, as a thing extremely welcome and delightful to good spirits, and tending to the increase of their happiness, as it is not very material to inquire, so, perhaps, impossible for us to determine.

However, it cannot from hence be concluded, that the angels or saints in heaven have such an universal knowledge of our condition and affairs, as to be a reasonable ground and warrant to us to pray to them, yea, or to desire them to pray for us; no, though this were done without any solemn circumstances of invocation. For they may very well know some things concerning us, wherein their own comfort and happiness is likewise concerned, and yet be ignorant of all the rest of our affairs. This one thing we are sure they know, because our Saviour hath told us so; but we are sure of no more. And there is neither equal reason for their knowledge of our other concernments, nor is their any revelation in Scripture to that purpose.

2. Secondly, If God and the blessed spirits above rejoice at the conversion of a sinner, so should we too: and not fret and murmur as the pharisees did. This is the temper of the devil, and of very bad men, to regret and envy the good and happiness of others. For it is reasonable to believe, that proportionably to the joy that is in heaven, at the repentance of a sinner, is the grief and vexation of the devil and his instruments, of evil spirits and wicked men. And as the devil delights in destroying souls,

and “ goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour;” so no doubt he is in great rage, and gnashes out of very discontent, when at any time he is frustrated of his hopes, and the prey, which he thought himself sure of, is snatched out of his jaws. And thus we see it is with bad men; they do persecute those that forsake them and their wicked ways, and refuse to go along with them to the same excess of riot.

And this is no where more visible than among those of the church of Rome. How full of wrath and indignation are they against those who, out of pure conviction of the errors and corruptions of their church, come over to our’s? How do they persecute them with slanders and reproaches, and with all the effects of hatred and malice? so that many times they can scarce refrain from doing them a real mischief, even where it is dangerous to themselves to attempt it; as if they envied them the grace of God, and the opportunity of being saved.

I know it is too natural to those of all communions, to be eager and fierce against those that desert them. And yet, supposing they had the truth certainly on their side (which they cannot all have), I see no great reason for this temper and carriage; for why should I cast away my patience and my charity, because another man hath made shipwreck of his faith? But I do not remember any where among mankind to have observed a more implacable malice, a more sincere and hearty ill-will, than they of the church of Rome do constantly express towards those that forsake them; nay, though they give never so modest and reasonable an account of their change, and behave themselves towards their old friends with all the kindness and compassion in

the world ; yet their hatred and indignation against them runs so high, that one may plainly see, they would sooner forgive a man the greatest sins that human nature can be guilty of, and the breach of all the ten commandments, than this one crime of leaving their church ; that is, in truth, of growing wiser and better.

3. Thirdly, The consideration of what hath been said should mightily inflame our zeal, and quicken our industry and diligence for the conversion of sinners. For if the conversion of one soul be worth so much labour and pains, and matter of such joy to the blessed God and good spirits, what pains should not we take in so corrupt and degenerate an age as this of our's, where impenitent sinners do so much abound, and the just are almost failed from among the children of men ?

Our blessed Saviour indeed (according to the extraordinary decency of all his parables) puts the case very charitably, and lays the supposition quite on the other side : if there were but one sinner in the world, or but one of a hundred, yet we should very zealously intend, with all our might, the reduction of this one lost sheep ; and should never be at rest till this single wandering soul were found and saved. But God knows this is not our case, but quite otherwise ; which should quicken our endeavours so much the more, and make us bestir ourselves to the utmost, having always in our minds that admirable saying of St. James, “ He that converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death.” He that knows the value of an immortal soul, and how fearful a thing it is to perish everlastingly, can think no pains too much to take to save a soul from death.



4. Lastly, What an argument and encouragement is here to repentance, even to the greatest of sinners. They, I am sure, stand most in need of it: and though they of all others have the least reason to look for mercy, yet they shall not be refused; though they be like the publicans and heathens among the Jews, who were not only reputed, but many times really were the worst of men; though, like the prodigal son here in the parable, they have run away from their Father, and wasted their estate in lewd and riotous courses; yet, whenever they come to themselves, and are willing to return to their Father, to acknowledge their folly and repent of it, he is ready to receive them; nay, much more ready to receive them than they can be to come to him. For when the prodigal was but coming towards his father, and was yet afar off, the father runs to meet him, and embraceth him with as much kindness as if he had never offended him, and entertains him with more joy than if he had always continued with him.

How does the great God condescend to encourage our repentance, representing himself and all the blessed company of heaven as transported with joy at the conversion of a sinner, and almost setting a greater value upon repentance than even upon innocence itself? And if our heavenly Father, who hath been so infinitely offended, and so highly provoked by us beyond all patience, be so ready, so forward, so glad to receive us, and there be no hindrance, no difficulty, no discouragement, on his part; is it possible, after all this, that we can be such fools and such enemies to ourselves, as to be backward to our own happiness? All of us, the best of us, have too much cause for repentance; and I fear too many of

us stand in need of that repentance intended by our Saviour in the text, which consists in the change of our whole lives.

But I will not upbraid you with your faults, having no design to provoke but only to persuade men. I leave it to every one's conscience to tell him how great a sinner, how grievous an offender he hath been. God knows we take no pleasure in mentioning the sins of men, but only in their amendment; and we would, if it were possible, even without minding them how bad they have been, persuade and encourage them to be better.

It is but a small consideration to tell you how much it would cheer and comfort our hearts, and quicken our zeal and industry for the salvation of souls, to see some fruit of our labours; that all our pains are not lost, and that all the good counsel, that is from hence tendered to you, is not like rain falling upon the rocks, and showers upon the sands.

But I have much greater considerations to offer to you, that your repentance will at once rejoice the heart of God, and angels, and men; that it is a returning to a right mind, and the restoring of you to yourselves, to the ease and peace of your own consciences, and to a capacity of being everlastingly happy; that it is to take pity upon yourselves and your poor immortal souls; and to take due care to prevent that which is to be dreaded above all things—the being miserable for ever. And, last of all, that if you will not repent now, the time will certainly come, and that perhaps in this life, when you shall see the greatest need of repentance, and perhaps, with miserable Esau, find no place for it, though you seek it carefully with tears; when you shall cry, Lord, Lord, and the door shall be shut against you;

and shall seek to enter, "but shall not be able." To be sure in the other world you shall eternally repent to no purpose, and be continually lamenting your wretched condition, without hopes of remedy; for there shall be weeping and wailing without effect, without intermission, and without end.

And what cause have we to thank God that this is not yet our case, that we are yet on this side the pit of destruction, and the gulf of despair? O the infinite patience and boundless goodness of God to sinners! With what clemency hath he spared us, and suffered our manners thus long? And with what kindness and concernment does he still call upon us to leave our sins, and to return to him, as if in so doing we should make him happy, and not ourselves? With what earnest longings and desires doth he wait and wish for our repentance, saying, "O that there was such a heart in them! O that they would hearken unto my voice! When shall it once be?" Thus God is represented in Scripture as patiently attending and listening what effect his admonitions and counsels, his reproofs and threatenings, will have upon sinners: (Jer. viii. 6.) "I hearkened and I heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? Every one turned to his course, as a horse rusheth into the battle."

And is not this our case? God hath long waited for our repentance; and once a year we solemnly pretend to set about it. But many of us, hitherto, I fear, instead of returning to God, have but more blindly and furiously run on in our course, "like the horse that has no understanding;" yea, in this more brutish than the beast, that he rusheth into the battle without any consideration of death or

danger, and destroys himself without a syllogism. But we sinners have reason, and yet are mad; the greatest part of evil doers are sufficiently sensible of the danger of their course, and convinced that eternal misery and ruin will be the end of it; and yet, I know not how, they make a shift upon one pretence or other to discourse and reason themselves into it.

But because "the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword," and comes with a greater weight and force upon the minds of men than any human persuasion whatsoever, I will conclude all with those short and serious counsels and exhortations of God to sinners by his holy prophets:

"Consider, and shew yourselves men, O ye transgressors: be instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee: seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near: repent and turn yourselves from all your transgressions, so iniquity shall not be your ruin."

## SERMON XVII.

OF THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST.

*Wherefore I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men :*

*And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him : but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.—MATTH. xii. 31, 32.*

THE occasion of these words of our blessed Saviour was the blasphemy of the pharisees against that Divine power by which he wrought his miracles, and particularly did cast out devils. Which works of his, though they were wrought by the Spirit of God, yet they obstinately and maliciously imputed them to the power of the devil. Upon which our Saviour takes occasion to declare the danger of this sin, which he calls blaspheming of the Holy Ghost : and tells them, that this was so great a sin above all others, that it is in a peculiar manner unpardonable. “ Wherefore I say unto you,” &c.

For the explaining of these words, and the nature and unpardonableness of this sin, we will inquire into these four things :

First, What is the difference between speaking against the Son of man, and speaking against the Holy Ghost.

Secondly, Wherein the nature of this sin or blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, doth consist.

Thirdly, In what sense this sin is here said to be peculiarly unpardonable. And,

Fourthly, Upon what account it is so.

I. What is the difference between speaking against the Son of man, and speaking against the Holy Ghost. The reason of this inquiry is, because the text plainly puts a great difference between them, though it be not obvious to discern where it lies. For our Saviour tells us, that “whosoever speaks a word against the Son of man it shall be forgiven him, but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost it shall never be forgiven him.” And yet this blasphemy of the pharisees against the Holy Ghost was speaking against the Son of man. For to say he cast out devils by the power of the devil, though it was blaspheming of the Holy Ghost, by whose power he wrought these miracles, yet it was likewise a blaspheming of Christ himself, and was in effect to say, that he was no true prophet, nor did come from God, but was a magician and impostor.

For the removing of this difficulty I shall not need to say, as some learned men have done, that by the Son of man is here to be understood any man, and that our Saviour is not particularly designed by it:—that seems very hard, when our Saviour is so frequently in the Gospel called the Son of man. And especially when St. Luke, reciting these words, does immediately before give him this very title to put the matter out of all doubt; (Luke xii. 8, 9, 10.) “Also I say unto you, whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God; but he that denieth me before men, shall be denied before the angels of God.” Upon

which it follows, “ And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man it shall be forgiven him.” So that in all reason the Son of man is the very same person that had this title given him in the foregoing words, viz. our blessed Saviour. So that I take it for granted, that by speaking against the Son of man is meant here speaking against Christ: and by speaking against him, as it is opposed to speaking against the Holy Ghost, is meant all those reproaches and contumelies which they cast upon our Saviour’s person, without reflecting upon that Divine power which he testified by his miracles. As their reproaching him with the meanness of his birth, “ Is not this the carpenter’s son?” With the place of it (as they supposed), “ out of Galilee ariseth no prophet:” their reflecting upon his life, saying that he was a “ wine-bibber, and a glutton, a friend of publicans and sinners;” with many other calumnies which they maliciously cast upon him.

But by speaking against the Holy Ghost is meant their blaspheming and reproaching that Divine power whereby he wrought his miracles; which, though it did at last likewise reflect upon our Saviour’s person, yet it was an immediate reflection upon the Holy Ghost, and a blaspheming of him; and therefore it is called speaking against the Holy Ghost, by way of distinction or opposition to the other calumnies which they used against our Saviour; which were proper blasphemies and reproaches of his person, but not of the Holy Ghost also, as this was. This seems to me to be the true difference here intended by our Saviour, between speaking against the Son of man, and speaking against the Holy Ghost. Let us, in the

II. Second place, inquire wherein the nature of

this sin or blasphemy against the Holy Ghost doth consist. And the true nature of this sin, though it be so plainly to be gathered from our Saviour's description of it, yet, I know not how, a great many learned men have made a hard shift to mistake it. Some have made it to be final impenitency, because that is unpardonable. But why that, rather than any thing else that is bad, should be called a blaspheming of the Holy Ghost, it is hard to give a reason. Others have placed the nature of it in a wilful and obstinate opposition of the truth; which, though it be a great sin, and included in the sin here spoken of, or a concomitant of it, yet there is great reason to believe, that this is not all that is here meant by it. Others would have it to consist in a malicious opposition of the truth, when men know and are convinced that it is the truth; which is a great sin indeed, if ever any man were guilty of it. But it is a great question whether human nature be capable of it: a man may indeed have sufficient means of conviction, and yet not be convinced; but it is hardly imaginable, that a man should oppose the truth when he is actually convinced that it is the truth. And to mention no more, others think it to consist in a renouncing of the truth for fear of suffering; which made Francis Spira to think that he had committed this sin.

But with all due respect to the judgment of others, I cannot think that any of these is the sin our Saviour here describes: as I shall endeavour plainly to shew, by considering the occasion of our Saviour's mentioning of it, the persons upon whom our Saviour chargeth this sin, and upon what account he chargeth them with it.

At the 22d verse of this chapter there was brought



to our Saviour "one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb, and he healed him." Upon this "the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the Son of David?" that is, the Messiah. The pharisees hearing this, with great bitterness and contempt said, "This fellow doth not cast out devils but by Beelzebub, the prince of devils." Upon this our Saviour represents to them the unreasonableness of this calumny; and that upon these two considerations: 1. That it was very unlikely that the devil should lend him his power to use it against himself. "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation: and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself, how then shall his kingdom stand?" 2. Our Saviour tells them, they might with as much reason attribute all miracles to the devil. There were those among themselves who cast out devils in the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (as Origen, and Tertullian, and Justin Martyr tell us). Of these our Saviour speaks, and asks the pharisees, "by what power they cast them out?" But they acknowledged that these did it by the power of God, and there was no cause, but their malice, why they should not have acknowledged that he did it likewise by the same power: (ver. 27.) "If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore, they shall be your judges;" that is, this may be sufficient to convince you of malice to me: "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you," that is, the Messiah is come, because he wrought these and other miracles to prove that he was the Messiah. And then it follows, "Wherefore I say unto you, all manner of

sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men."

So that the pharisees are the persons charged with this sin or blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. And their blasphemy was plainly this, that when he cast out devils by the Spirit of God, they said he did it by the power of the devil; they maliciously ascribed these works of the Holy Ghost to the devil.

And that this is the ground why our Saviour chargeth them with this sin against the Holy Ghost, is yet more plain from St. Mark: (Mark iii. 28, 29, 30.) "Verily I say unto you, all sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: but he that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost, hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation; because they said he hath an unclean spirit:" that is, because the pharisees charged him to be a magician, and to have a familiar spirit, by whose assistance he did those works; when in truth he did them by the Spirit of God; therefore our Saviour declares them guilty of this sin of blaspheming the Holy Ghost, which should never be forgiven.

So that the nature of this sin did consist in a most malicious opposition to the utmost evidence that could be given to the truth of any religion. Our blessed Saviour, to shew that he was sent by God, and came from him, wrought miracles, such as did plainly evidence a Divine power and presence accompanying him. For in St. Luke he is said to do them by the finger of God: (Luke xi. 20.) "by the finger of God;" that is, to do such things as were undeniable evidences of the Divine power and presence. And this is the utmost testimony that God

ever gave to any person that was sent by him. And the pharisees were eye witnesses of those miracles which our Saviour wrought, so that they could not deny them; yet such was their opposition to him and his doctrine, that, though they saw these things done by him, and could not deny the reality of them, yet rather than they would own him to be the Messiah and his doctrine to come from God, they most maliciously and unreasonably ascribed them to the power of the devil. And this was the blasphemy which they were guilty of against the Holy Ghost. And herein lay the greatness of their sin, in resisting the evidence of those miracles which were so plainly wrought by the Holy Ghost; and which, though themselves saw, yet they maliciously imputed them to the devil, rather than they would be convinced by them. And this is so very plain, that hardly any man, that considers our Saviour's discourse upon this occasion, can otherwise determine the nature of this sin, especially if he do but attend to those remarkable words which I cited before: (Mark iii. 29.) "But he that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation; because they said, he hath an unclean spirit." I come now to the

III. Third thing I propounded, namely, in what sense this sin is here said to be peculiarly unpardonable; for this sin, our Saviour positively affirms to be in this different from all other sins, that it is capable of no pardon: "I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men:" and to shew what he means by the not forgiving of it, he tells us, that eternal punishment shall follow it in the other world. "Who-

soever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall never be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the world to come." Which St. Mark expresseth more plainly, that it shall bring those who are guilty of it to eternal damnation: (Mark iii. 29.) "He that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost, hath never forgiveness, but is liable to eternal damnation." So that when our Saviour says, "it shall never be forgiven, neither in this world nor in the world to come;" he does not intend to insinuate that some sins which are not forgiven in this world may be forgiven in the other; but in these words he either alludes to the opinion of the Jews concerning the effect of the highest excommunication, the sentence whereof they held not to be reversible, neither in this world nor the other; or else the reason of this expression may probably be to meet with a common and false opinion amongst the Jews, which was, that some sins which are not pardoned to men in this life, may by sacrifices be expiated in the other; and therefore he says, it shall never be forgiven, neither in this world nor the other. And St. Mark more plainly, that "those who are guilty of it, shall never have forgiveness, but be liable to eternal damnation." So that our Saviour's meaning seems plainly to be this, that this sin is altogether incapable of forgiveness. I know some have endeavoured to mollify this matter, but I think without sufficient reason. Grotius understands the words comparatively, that any sort of sin shall sooner be forgiven than this against the Holy Ghost; and that our Saviour only intended to express the greatness and heinousness of this sin above others, in which respect the pardon of it would be more diffi-

cult than of any other sin ; but yet that the case of such a person is not absolutely desperate : but if our Saviour had intended to say, that this sin was absolutely unpardonable, I would fain know how could he have expressed the matter in higher and fuller words? Dr. Hammond mollifies the words another way, that this sin shall never be pardoned, but upon a particular repentance for it : as if our Saviour's meaning was, that a general repentance, which was sufficient for sins of ignorance, would not be sufficient in this case, but there must be a particular repentance for it, without which it would never be pardoned. But this is by no means agreeable to the scope of our Saviour's discourse ; because he plainly intends to difference this from all other sort of sins—" I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." But according to this interpretation, our Saviour must mean that all our sins would be forgiven upon a general repentance ; which is not true, for there are many other sins besides sins of ignorance, there are wilful and heinous sins, such as wilful murder and adultery, and blasphemy, (that only excepted which is against the Holy Ghost) and the like gross sins, which all divines hold, shall not be forgiven, but upon a particular repentance. So that this interpretation does not sufficiently difference this sin from all other sorts of sins, which, it is yet very plain, our Saviour intended to do. It remains, then, that these words must in all reason be understood absolutely, that the persons that are guilty of this great sin shall never have it forgiven unto them. And it maybe, this will not seem so harsh, when we have considered, in the

IV. Fourth place, how it comes to pass that this

sin is above all others incapable of pardon ; and that upon these two accounts :

First, Because by this sin men resist their last remedy, and oppose the best and utmost means of their conviction. What can God be imagined to do more to convince a man of a Divine revelation, or of the truth of any doctrine or message that comes from him, than to work miracles to this purpose? And what greater assurance can men have, that miracles are wrought, than to be eye witnesses of them themselves? And if men will resist such evidence, what can God do more for their satisfaction? If, when men see plain miracles wrought, they will say that it is not the power of God that does them, but the power of the devil ; and if, when men see the devils cast out, they will say that the devil conspires against himself ; this is to outface the sun at noon-day, and there is no way left to convince such perverse persons of the truth of any Divine revelation. So that there is no remedy, but such persons must continue in their opposition to the truth. For this is such a sin as does in its own nature shut out and prevent all remedy. And he that thus perversely and maliciously opposeth the truth, must upon the same grounds unavoidably continue in his opposition to it ; because there is nothing left to be done for his conviction, more than is already done. If God should send a person immediately from heaven to him, to convince him of his error, he can give him no greater testimony, that he comes from God, than miracles ; and if, when God enables that person to work these by the power of his Spirit, this man will obstinately impute them to the power of the devil, he defeats all the imaginable means of his own conviction. So that it is no wonder if that sin be un-

pardonable, which resists the last and utmost means which God hath ever yet thought fit to use to bring men to repentance and salvation. And if God were willing to reveal himself, and the way to pardon and salvation to such an one, he doth, by this very temper and disposition, render himself incapable of being satisfied and convinced concerning any Divine revelation.

Secondly, Because this sin is of that high nature, that God is, therefore, justly provoked to withdraw his grace from such persons; and it is probable, resolved so to do: without which grace they will continue impenitent. There is no doubt but God, if he will, can work so powerfully upon the minds of men, by his grace and Spirit, as to convince the most obstinate; and supposing them to be convinced and repent, it cannot be denied but that they would be forgiven. And, therefore, when our Saviour here says they shall not be forgiven, it is reasonable to suppose that he means, that when persons are come to that degree of obstinacy and malice, God will (as justly he may) withdraw his grace from them; his Spirit will not strive with them to overcome their obstinacy, but will leave them to the bias of their own perverse and malicious minds, which will still engage them in a farther opposition of the truth, and finally sink them into perdition. So that, being deserted by God, and for want of the necessary help and aid of his grace (justly withdrawn from them), continuing finally impenitent, they become incapable of forgiveness, both in this world and that which is to come. And there is nothing that can seem harsh or unreasonable in this, to those who grant (as I think all men do), that God may be so provoked by men, as justly to withdraw his

grace from them in this life, that grace which is necessary to their repentance. And surely if any provocation be likely to do it, this cannot be denied to be, of all others, the greatest—obstinately and maliciously to oppose the utmost evidence that God ever gave to the truth of any doctrine revealed by him. And of this the pharisees, who are here charged with this sin against the Holy Ghost, were notoriously guilty, in resisting the clear evidence of our Saviour's miracles.

And thus I have done with the four things I propounded to inquire into from these words; namely, the difference between speaking against the Son of man, and speaking against the Holy Ghost: wherein the nature of this sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost does consist; and, in what sense this sin is said to be unpardonable, and upon what account it is so; namely, because men, by this sin, resist their last remedy, and oppose the best and utmost means of their conviction; and because it may reasonably be supposed, that upon a provocation of this high nature, God may, and is resolved, to withdraw that grace from such persons, which is necessary to their repentance, without which their sin remains for ever unpardonable.

All that now remains is to make this discourse, some way or other, useful to ourselves. And it may very well serve to these two purposes. First, to comfort some very good and pious persons, who are liable to despair out of an apprehension that they have committed this sin. Secondly, to caution others against the approaches to it.

1. First, To comfort some very good and pious persons, who are liable to despair, upon an apprehension that they have committed this great and



unpardonable sin; and consequently are utterly incapable of ever being restored to the mercy and favour of God. And nothing can be more for the comfort of such persons than to understand aright what the nature of this sin was, and wherein the heinousness of it doth consist, which I have endeavoured to manifest. And if this be the nature of it, which I have declared, as it seems very plain that it is, then I cannot see how any person now is likely to be in those circumstances as to be capable of committing it. And being a sin of so heinous nature, and declared by our Saviour to be absolutely unpardonable, there is no reason to extend it beyond the case to which our Saviour applies it; which was the resisting of the evidence of the miracles which were wrought for the truth of Christianity, by those who were eye witnesses of them; that is, by those who had the utmost assurance of them that human nature is capable of. And not only a bare resistance of that evidence, but with a very malicious circumstance, so as to impute those works which were wrought by the Holy Ghost, to the power of the devil. This was the case of the pharisees whom our Saviour chargeth with this sin. And nobody hath warrant to extend this sin any farther than this case; and without good warrant, it would be the most uncharitable thing in the world to extend it any farther. That which comes nearest to it, both in the heinousness of the crime and the unpardonableness of it, is total apostacy from Christianity after the embracing of it, and full conviction of the truth of it. And this the Scripture seems to place, if not in the same rank, yet near to it. And of this the apostle speaks very often in the epistle to the Hebrews, under the name of un-

belief, and sin by way of eminence, as being the great sin that Christians were in danger of falling into, called in that epistle (Heb. xii. 1.) ἡ εὐπερίστατος ἁμαρτία, the sin which Christians, by reason of the circumstances they were then in, were especially subject to; and he parallels it with the case of the Jews in the wilderness, concerning whom “God swore that they should not enter into his rest;” namely, the earthly Canaan which was a type of heaven, chap. iii. ver. 18. And chap. vi. ver. 4, 5, 6, more expressly: “For it is impossible that those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they should fall away, to renew them again to repentance.” Where, by impossible, the least that can be meant is, that it is extremely difficult for such persons to recover themselves by repentance. And it is observable, that those persons are said to have been partakers of the Holy Ghost, by which is meant, that they were endued with a power of miracles by the Holy Ghost, or were under the conviction of them, as having seen them wrought by others. So that this apostacy may be said, in that respect, to be a sin against the Holy Ghost. So, likewise, chap. x. verse 26: “If we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth (that is, if we apostatize from Christianity, after we have embraced the profession of it, as appears plainly from the scope of the apostle’s discourse), there remains no more sacrifice for sin:” which expression declares this sin either to be unpardonable, or something very like it. And, at the 29th verse, those persons are said to “tread under foot the Son of God, and to

do despite unto the Spirit of Grace." Which signifies, that the sin, there spoken of, is more immediately committed against the Holy Spirit of God. St. Peter likewise declares the great danger of this sin: (2 Pet. ii. 20.) "If, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning." St. John, likewise, seems to speak of this sin of apostacy, and to call it "a sin unto death;" discouraging Christians rather from praying for those who were fallen into it; which gives great suspicion that he looked upon it as hardly pardonable: (1 John v. 16.) "If any man see his brother sin a sin not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for those that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death, I do not say that he shall pray for it." Now that by the sin unto death the apostle here means apostacy from the Christian religion to the heathen idolatry, seems extremely probable from what follows: (ver. 18.) "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not, but keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not;" that is, he preserveth himself from idolatry, which the devil had seduced the world into: (ver. 19.) "And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness, ἐν τῷ πονερωῶ, in the wicked one (that is, is under the power of the devil); and we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us understanding to know him that is true;" that is, to distinguish between the true God and idols. And then it follows, "This is the true God and eternal life: little children, keep yourselves from idols." Which last caution is a key to the understanding of all the rest,

and makes it very probable that the sin unto death is apostacy from Christianity unto idolatry ; otherwise, it is hard to imagine how the last clause comes in, “ Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” And this is that sin, which of all others approacheth nearest to this sin against the Holy Ghost, which our Saviour speaks of, and concerning the pardonableness of which the Scripture seems to speak very doubtfully. But if it were of the same unpardonable nature, yet this can be no trouble to those persons I am speaking of, who cannot but know themselves to be far enough from the guilt of this sin.

As for those other sins, which by some are taken to be the sins against the Holy Ghost, they are either such as perhaps no man is capable of committing, as a malicious opposition to the truth, when I am convinced and know it to be the truth ; for this seems to be a contradiction, to know any thing to be the truth, and to believe it to be so, and yet to oppose it ; because the understanding can no more oppose truth as truth, than the will can refuse good as good. Or else, they are such as no man can know he is guilty of in this life, as final impenitency, which supposeth a man to live and die without repentance. Or else, such as I think no good man is incident to ; as, a malicious and perverse opposing of the truth, after sufficient means of conviction. However, none of these are that which the Scripture describes to be the sin against the Holy Ghost, as I have already shewn.

But still there are two things which usually trouble honest and well-meaning persons, but are rather the effects of melancholy than any reasonable ground of trouble. Some think, that every deliberate sin against knowledge, and after conviction,

is the sin against the Holy Ghost. This is acknowledged to be a very great aggravation of sin, and such as calls for a great and particular repentance; but does by no means render a man incapable of forgiveness. Others are troubled with blasphemous thoughts, and those they think to be the sin against the Holy Ghost. But this is generally the mere effect of melancholy, and the persons that are troubled with these black thoughts are no ways consenting to them; but they rise in their minds perfectly against their wills and without any approbation of their's: and, in this case, they are so far from being the unpardonable sin, that I hope, yea, and verily believe, they are no sins at all, but the mere effects of a bodily distemper; and no more imputed to us, than the wild and idle ravings of a man in a frenzy or a fever. And God forbid that the natural effects of a bodily disease should bring guilt upon our souls. So that these persons have reason enough for comfort; but the misery is, their present distemper renders them incapable of it.

2. Secondly. The other use I would make of this discourse is—to caution men against the degrees and approaches of this sin. For if the sin against the Holy Ghost be of such a high nature and so unpardonable, then all approaches to it are very dreadful. Such as are—profane scoffing at religion, and the Holy Spirit of God which dwells in good men: abuse of the Holy Scriptures, which are indited by the Spirit of God: perverse infidelity, notwithstanding all the evidence which we have for the truth of Christianity, and sufficient assurance of the miracles wrought for the confirmation of it, brought down to us by credible history, though we were not eye witnesses of them: obstinacy in a sinful and vicious

course, notwithstanding all the motives and arguments of the gospel to persuade men to repentance : sinning against the clear convictions of our consciences, and the motions and suggestions of God's Holy Spirit to the contrary : malicious opposing of the truth, when the arguments for it are very plain and evident to any impartial and unprejudiced mind, and when he that opposeth the truth hath no clear satisfaction in his own mind to the contrary, but suffers himself to be furiously and headily carried on in his opposition to it. These are all sins of a very high nature, and of the nearest affinity with this great and unpardonable sin, of any that can easily be instanced in. And though God, to encourage the repentance of men, has not declared them unpardonable, yet they are great provocations ; and, if they be long continued in, we know not how soon God may withdraw his grace from us, and suffer us to be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

Be ready then to entertain the truth of God whenever it is fairly propounded to thee, and with such evidence as thou art willing to accept in other matters, where thou hast no prejudice nor interest to the contrary. Do nothing contrary to thy known duty, but be careful in all things to obey the convictions of thine own conscience, and to yield to the good motions and suggestions of God's Holy Spirit, who works secretly upon the minds of men, and inspires us many times gently with good thoughts and inclinations, and is grieved when we do not comply with them ; and, after many repulses, will at last withdraw himself from us, and leave us to be assaulted by the temptations of the devil, and to be hurried away by our own lusts into ruin and perdition.

## SERMON XVIII.

EXAMPLE OF JESUS IN DOING GOOD.

*Who went about doing good.* — ACTS x. 38.

WHEN Almighty God designed the reformation of the world and the restoring of man to the image of God, the pattern after which he was first made, he did not think it enough to give us the most perfect laws of holiness and virtue ; but hath likewise set before us a living pattern, and a familiar example to excite and encourage us, to go before us and shew us the way, and as it were to lead us by the hand in the obedience of those laws. Such is the sovereign authority of God over men, that he might, if he had pleased, have only given us a law written with his own hand, as he did to the people of Israel from Mount Sinai : but such is his goodness, that he hath sent a great ambassador from heaven to us, God manifested in the flesh, to declare and interpret his will and pleasure ; and not only so, but to fulfil that law himself, the observation whereof he requires of us. The bare rules of a good life are a very dead and ineffectual thing in comparison of a living example, which shews us the possibility and practicableness of our duty ; both that it may be done, and how to do it. Religion, indeed, did always consist in an imitation of God, and in our resemblance of those excellences which shine forth in the best and most perfect Being ; but we imitate him now with

much greater ease and advantage, since God was pleased to become man on purpose to shew us how many men may become like to God. And this is one great end for which the Son of God came into the world, and “was made flesh and dwelt among us,” and conversed so long and familiarly with mankind, that in his own person and life he might give us the example of all that holiness and virtue which his laws require of us. And as he was in nothing liker the Son of God than in being and doing good, so is he in nothing a fitter pattern for our imitation than in that excellent character given of him here in the text, that “he went about doing good.”

In which words two things offer themselves to our consideration.

First, Our Saviour’s great work and business in the world, which was to do good : ὅς διήλθεν ἐνεργετῶν, who employed himself in being a benefactor to mankind. This refers more especially to his healing the bodily diseases and infirmities of men. “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power ; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil.” Intimating to us by this instance of his doing good, that he who took so much pains to rescue men’s bodies from the power and possession of the devil, would not let their souls remain under his tyranny. But though the text instanceth only in one particular, yet this general expression of doing good comprehends all those several ways whereby he was beneficial to mankind.

Secondly, Here is his diligence and industry in this work : “He went about doing good ;” he made it the great business and constant employment of



his life. I shall propound to you the pattern of our Saviour in both these particulars.

I. His great work and business in the world was to do good. The most pleasant and delightful, the most happy and glorious work in the world. It is a work of a large extent, and of an universal influence; and comprehends in it all those ways whereby we may be useful and beneficial to one another. And indeed it were pity that so good a thing should be confined within narrow bounds and limits. It reacheth to the souls of men, and to their bodies; and is conversant in all those ways and kinds whereby we may serve the temporal or spiritual good of our neighbour, and promote his present and his future happiness. What our blessed Saviour did in this kind, and we in imitation of him ought to do, I shall reduce to these two heads. First, Doing good to the souls of men, and endeavouring to promote their spiritual and eternal happiness. Secondly, The procuring of their temporal good, and contributing as much as may be to their happiness in this present life.

1. Doing good to the souls of men, and endeavouring to promote their spiritual and eternal happiness by good instruction, and by good example.

First, By good instruction. And under instruction I comprehend all the means of bringing men to the knowledge of their duty, and exciting them to the practice of it; by instructing their ignorance, and removing their prejudices, and rectifying their mistakes, by persuasion and by reproof; and by making lasting provision for the promoting of these ends.

By instructing men's ignorance. And this is a duty which every man owes to another as he hath

opportunity, but especially to those who are under our care and charge, our children and servants and near relations, those over whom we have a special authority, and a more immediate influence. This our blessed Saviour made his great work in the world, to instruct all sorts of persons in the things which concerned the kingdom of God, and to direct them in the way to eternal happiness; by public teaching, and by private conversation, and by taking occasion from the common occurrences of human life, and every object that presented itself to him, to instil good counsel into men, and to raise their minds to the consideration of Divine and heavenly things. And though this was our Saviour's great employment, and is their's more particularly whose office it is to teach others, yet every man hath private opportunities of instructing others, by admonishing them of their duty, and by directing them to the best means and helps of knowledge; such as are books of piety and religion, with which they that are rich may furnish those who are unable to provide for themselves.

And then by removing men's prejudices against the truth, and rectifying their mistakes. This our Saviour found very difficult; the generality of those with whom he had to do being strongly prejudiced against him and his doctrine by false principles, which they had taken in by education, and been trained up to by their teachers. And therefore he used a great deal of meekness in instructing those that opposed themselves, and exercised abundance of patience in bearing with the infirmities of men, and their dulness and slowness of capacity to receive the truth.

And this is great charity, to consider the inveterate

prejudices of men; especially those which are rooted in education, and which men are confirmed in by the reverence they bear to those that have been their teachers. And great allowance is to be given to men in this case, and time to bethink themselves and to consider better. For no man that is in an error thinks he is so; and therefore if we go violently to rend their opinions from them, they will but hold them so much the faster; but if we have patience to unrip them by degrees, they will at last fall in pieces of themselves.

And when this is done, the way is open for counsel and persuasion. And this our Saviour administered in a most powerful and effectual manner, by encouraging men to repentance, and by representing to them the infinite advantages of obeying his laws, and the dreadful and dangerous consequences of breaking them. And these are arguments fit to work upon mankind, because there is something within us that consents to the equity and reasonableness of God's laws. So that whenever we persuade men to their duty, how backward soever they may be to the practice of it, being strongly addicted to a contrary course, yet we have this certain advantage, that we have their consciences and the most inward sense of their minds on our side, bearing witness that what we counsel and persuade them to, is for their good.

And if need be we must add reproof to counsel. This our Saviour did with great freedom, and sometimes with sharpness and severity, according to the condition of the persons he had to deal withal. But because of his great authority, being a teacher immediately sent from God, and of his intimate knowledge of the hearts of men, he is not a pattern to us in all the circumstances of discharging this duty;

which, of any other, requires great prudence and discretion if we intend to do good, the only end to be aimed at in it. For many are fit to be reprov'd whom yet every man is not fit to reprove; and in that case we must get it done by those that are fit; and great regard must be had to the time and other circumstances of doing it, so as it may most probably have its effect.

I will mention but one way of instruction more, and that is by making lasting provision for that purpose: as by founding schools of learning, especially to teach the poor to read, which is the key of knowledge; by building of churches, and endowing them; by buying and giving in impropriations, or the like. These are large and lasting ways of teaching and instructing others, which will continue when we are dead and gone; as it is said of Abel, that being dead he yet speaks. And this our Saviour virtually did by appointing his apostles after he had left the world, to go and teach all nations, and ordering a constant succession of teachers in his church to instruct men in the Christian religion, together with an honourable maintenance for them. This we cannot do in the way that he did, who had all power in heaven and earth; but we may be subservient to this design in the ways that I have mentioned; which I humbly commend to the consideration of those whom God hath blessed with great estates, and made capable of effecting such great works of charity.

Secondly, Another way of doing good to the souls of men is, by good example. And this our blessed Saviour was in the utmost perfection. For he "fulfilled all righteousness, had no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." And this we should endeavour to be, as far as the frailty of our nature and imper-

fection of our present state will suffer. For good example is an unspeakable benefit to mankind, and hath a secret power and influence upon those with whom we converse, to form them into the same disposition and manners. It is a living rule that teacheth men without trouble, and lets them see their faults without open reproof and upbraiding. Besides that, it adds great weight to a man's counsel and persuasion, when we see that he advises nothing but what he does, nor exacts any thing from others from which he himself desires to be excused. As, on the contrary, nothing is more cold and insignificant than good counsel from a bad man, one that does not obey his own precepts, nor follow the advice which he is so forward to give to others.

These are the several ways of doing good to the souls of men, wherein we, who are the disciples of the blessed Jesus, ought in imitation of his example to exercise ourselves according to our several capacities and opportunities. And this is the noblest charity, and the greatest kindness that can be shewn to human nature; it is in the most excellent sense to give eyes to the blind, to set the prisoners at liberty, to rescue men out of the saddest slavery and captivity, and to save souls from death. And it is the most lasting and durable benefit, because it is to do men good to all eternity.

2. The other way of being beneficial to others is, by procuring their temporal good, and contributing to their happiness in this present life. And this, in subordination to our Saviour's great design of bringing men to eternal happiness, was a great part of his business and employment in this world. He went about "healing all manner of sicknesses and dis-

eases," and rescuing the bodies of men from the power and possession of the devil.

And though we cannot be beneficial to men in that miraculous manner that he was, yet we may be so in the use of ordinary means: we may comfort the afflicted, and vindicate the oppressed, and do a great many acts of charity which our Saviour, by reason of his poverty, could not do without a miracle; we may supply the necessities of those that are in want, "feed the hungry, and clothe the naked, and visit the sick," and minister to them such comforts and remedies, as they are not able to provide for themselves; we may take a child that is poor and destitute of all advantages of education, and bring him up in the knowledge and fear of God, and without any great expense put him into a way, wherein, by his diligence and industry, he may arrive to a considerable fortune in the world, and be able afterwards to relieve hundreds of others. Men glory in raising great and magnificent structures, and find a secret pleasure to see sets of their own planting to grow up and flourish; but surely it is a greater and more glorious work to build up a man, to see a youth of our own planting, from the small beginnings and advantages we have given him, to grow up into a considerable fortune, to take root in the world, and to shoot up to such a height, and spread his branches so wide, that we, who first planted him, may ourselves find comfort and shelter under his shadow. We may many times with a small liberality shore up a family that is ready to fall, and struggles under such necessities that it is not able to support itself. And if our minds were as great as sometimes our estates are, we might do great and public works of a

general and lasting advantage, and for which many generations to come might call us blessed. And those who are in the lowest condition may do great good to others by their prayers, if they themselves be as good as they ought. For "the fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." The intercession of those who are in favour with God (as all good men are) are not vain wishes, but many times effectual to procure that good for others which their own endeavours could never have effected and brought about.

I have done with the first thing, the great work and business which our blessed Saviour had to do in the world, and that was to do good. I proceed to the

II. Second thing contained in the text, our Saviour's diligence and industry in this work, "He went about doing good." He made it the great business and constant employment of his life, he travelled from one place to another to seek out opportunities of being useful and beneficial to mankind. And this will fully appear, if we briefly consider these following particulars.

First, How unwearied our blessed Saviour was in doing good. He made it his only business, and spent his whole life in it. He was not only ready to do good to those that came to him and gave him opportunity for it, and besought him to do it, but went himself from one place to another to seek out objects to exercise his charity upon. He went to those who could not, and to those who would not come to him; for so it is written of him, "He came to seek and to save that which was lost." He was contented to spend whole days in this work, to live in a crowd, and to be almost perpetually op-

pressed with company ; and when his disciples were moved at the rudeness of the people in pressing upon him, he rebuked their impatience, and for the pleasure he took in doing good, made nothing of the trouble and inconvenience that attended it.

Secondly, If we consider how much he denied himself in the chief comforts and conveniences of human life, that he might do good to others. He neglected the ordinary refreshments of nature, his meat, and drink, and sleep, that he might attend this work. He was at every body's beck and disposal to do them good. When he was doing cures in one place, he was sent for to another, and he either went or sent healing to them, and did by his word at a distance what he could not come in person to do. Nay, he was willing to deny himself in one of the dearest things in the world—his reputation and good name. He was contented to do good, though he was ill thought of and ill spoken of for it. He would not refuse to do good on the sabbath-day, though he was accounted profane for so doing. He knew how scandalous it was among the Jews to keep company with publicans and sinners, and yet he would not decline so good a work for all the ill words they gave him for it.

Thirdly, If we consider the malicious opposition and sinister construction that his good deeds met withal. Never did so much goodness meet with so much enmity, endure so many affronts and so much contradiction of sinners. This great benefactor of mankind was hated and persecuted as if he had been a public enemy. While he was instructing them in the meekest manner, they were ready to stone him for telling them the truth ; and when the fame of his miracles went abroad, though they were



never so useful and beneficial to mankind, yet upon this very account they conspire against him and seek to take away his life. Whatever he said or did, though never so innocent, never so excellent, had some bad interpretation put upon it, and the great and shining virtues of his life were turned into crimes and matter of accusation. For his casting out of devils, he was called a magician; for his endeavour to reclaim men from their vices, “a friend of publicans and sinners;” for his free and obliging conversation, “a wine-bibber and a glutton.” All the benefits which he did to men, and the blessings which he so liberally shed among the people, were construed to be a design of ambition and popularity, and done with an intention to move the people to sedition, and to make himself a king:—enough to have discouraged the greatest goodness, and to have put a damp upon the most generous mind, and to make it sick and weary of well-doing. For what more grievous, than to have all the good one does ill-interpreted, and the best actions in the world made matter of calumny and reproach?

And then, lastly, if we consider how cheerfully, notwithstanding all this, he persevered and continued in well-doing. It was not only his business, but his delight; “I delight (says he) to do thy will, O my God.” The pleasure which others take in the most natural actions of life, in eating and drinking, when they are hungry, he took in doing good, it was “his meat and drink to do the will of his Father.” He plied this work with so much diligence, as if he had been afraid he should have wanted time for it. “I must work the work of him that sent me, while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work.” And when he was approaching towards the

hardest and most unpleasant part of his service, but of all others the most beneficial to us, I mean his death and sufferings, he was not at ease in his mind till it was done; “How am I straitened (says he) till it be accomplished?” And just before his suffering, with what joy and triumph does he reflect upon the good he had done in his life? “Father, I have glorified thee upon earth, and finished the work which thou hast given me to do.” What a blessed pattern is here of diligence and industry in doing good! how fair and lovely a copy for Christians to write after!

And now that I have set it before you, it will be of excellent use to these two purposes:—to shew us our defects; and to excite us to our duty.

I. To shew us our defects. How does this blessed example upbraid those who live in a direct contradiction to it; who, instead of “going about doing good,” are perpetually intent upon doing mischief; who are wise and active to do evil, but to do good, have no inclination, no understanding? And those likewise who, though they are far from being so bad, yet wholly neglect this blessed work of doing good? They think it very fair to do no evil, to hurt and injure no man; but if preachers will be so unreasonable as to require more, and will never be satisfied till they have persuaded them out of their estate, and to give the poor till they have almost impoverished themselves, they desire to be excused from this importunity. But we are not so unreasonable neither. We desire to put them in mind, that to be charitable according to our power, is an indispensable duty of religion; that we are commanded not only to abstain from evil, but to do good; and that our blessed Saviour hath given us the example of

both; he did not only do no sin, but “ he went about doing good;” and upon this nice point it was, that the young rich man in the gospel and his Saviour parted. He had “kept the commandments from his youth; thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal:” he had been very careful of the negative part of religion; but, when it came to parting with his estate and giving to the poor, this he thought too hard a condition, and upon this he forsook our Saviour, and forfeited the kingdom of heaven. And it is very considerable, and ought to be often and seriously thought upon, that our Saviour, describing to us the day of judgment, represents the great Judge of the world acquitting and condemning men according to the good which they had done, or neglected to do, in ways of mercy and charity; for feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked, and visiting the sick, or for neglecting to do these things: than which nothing can more plainly and effectually declare to us the necessity of doing good, in order to the obtaining eternal happiness.

There are many indeed, who do not altogether neglect the doing of this work, who do yet in a great measure prevent and hinder themselves from doing it as they ought, under a pretence of being employed about other duties and parts of religion. They are so taken up with the exercises of piety and devotion in private and public, with prayer, and reading and hearing sermons, and preparing themselves for the sacrament, that they have scarce any leisure to mind the doing of good and charitable offices to others. Or if they have, they hope God will pardon his servants in this thing, and accept of their piety and devotion instead of all. But they

ought to consider, that when these two parts of religion come in competition, devotion is to give way to charity, mercy being better than sacrifice: that the great end of all the duties of religion, prayer, and reading and hearing the word of God, and receiving the holy sacrament, is to dispose and excite us to do good, to make us more ready and forward to every good work : and that it is the greatest mockery in the world, upon pretence of using the means of religion, to neglect the end of it ; and because we are always preparing ourselves to do good, to think that we are for ever excused from doing any.

Others are taken up in contending for the faith, and spend all their zeal and heat about some controversies in religion ; and therefore they think it but reasonable, that they should be excused from those meaner kind of duties, because they serve God, as they imagine, in a higher and more excellent way : as those who serve the king in his wars, used to be exempted from taxes and offices. But do those men consider upon what kind of duties more especially our blessed Saviour and his apostles lay the great weight and stress of religion? That it is to be meek, and merciful, and peaceable, that our Saviour pronounceth blessedness? That “ pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father, is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction?” That “ the wisdom which is from above, is full of mercy and good works?” That these are the great and weighty things of religion, which, whatever else we do, ought not to be left undone. Do they consider, that a right faith is wholly in order to a good life, and is of no value any farther than it hath an influence upon it? So that whatever other duties we may be obliged to, nothing can excuse us from this. How

much better is it to do good, to be really useful and beneficial to others, and how much more clearly and certainly our duty, than to quarrel about doubtful and uncertain opinions? Were men Christians indeed, they would be so much delighted and taken up with this better work (more acceptable to God, and more profitable to men), that they could not find leisure, or, if they could, they could not find in their hearts to employ all their time and zeal about things which are at so great a distance from the life and heart of religion, as most of those questions are which Christians at this day contend and languish about. Were we possessed with the true spirit of Christianity, these would be but dry, and insipid, and tasteless things to us, in comparison of the blessed employment of doing good in a more real and substantial way. If the sincere love of God and our neighbour were but once thoroughly kindled in our hearts, these pure and heavenly flames would in a great measure extinguish the unchristian heats of dispute and contention; as fires here below are ready to languish and go out, when the sun in his full strength shines upon them.

II. But the hardest part of my task is yet behind, and it is strange it should be so; and that is, to persuade us to the imitation of this blessed example. Let us "go and do likewise; let the same mind be in us that was in Christ Jesus;" let us tread in the steps of the great God and the best man that ever was, our blessed Saviour, who "went about doing good." Methinks the work itself is of that nature, that men should not need to be courted to it by persuasion, nor urged by importunity. The very proposal of the thing, and the pattern which I have set before you, is temptation and allurements enough to

a generous and well-disposed mind. But yet, to inflame you the more to so good a work, be pleased to dwell with me a little upon these following considerations.

First, It is an argument of a great and generous mind, to employ ourselves in doing good, to extend our thoughts and care to the concerns of others, and to use our power and endeavours for their benefit and advantage; because it shews an inclination and desire in us to have others happy as well as ourselves.

Those who are of a narrow and envious spirit, of a mean and sordid disposition, love to contract themselves within themselves, and like the hedgehog, to shoot out their quills at every one who comes near them. They take care of nobody but themselves, and foolishly think their own happiness the greater, because they have it alone and to themselves. But the noblest and most heavenly dispositions think themselves happiest when others share with them in their happiness. Of all beings, God is the farthest removed from envy, and the nearer any creature approacheth to him in blessedness, the farther it is off from this hellish quality and disposition. It is the temper of the devil to grudge happiness to others; he envied that man should be in paradise when he was cast out of heaven.

Other perfections are (as one says) of a more melancholic and solitary disposition, and shine brightest when they are alone, or attained to but by a few; once make them common, and they lose their lustre. But it is the nature of goodness to communicate itself, and the farther it spreads, the more glorious it is; God reckons it as one of his most glorious titles, as the brightest gem in his diadem—"the

Lord mighty to save." He delights not to shew his sovereignty in ruiniug the innocent and destroying helpless creatures ; but in rescuing them out of the jaws of hell and destruction. To the devil belongs the title of the destroyer.

Without this quality of goodness, all other perfections would change their nature, and lose their excellency. Great power and wisdom would be terrible, and raise nothing but dread and suspicion in us : for power without goodness would be tyranny and oppression, and wisdom would become craft and treachery. A being endued with knowledge and power, and yet wanting goodness, would be nothing else but an irresistible evil, and an omnipotent mischief. We admire knowledge, and are afraid of power, and suspect wisdom ; but we can heartily love nothing but goodness, or such perfections as are in conjunction with it. For knowledge and power may be in a nature most contrary to God's ; the devil hath these perfections in an excelling degree. When all is done, nothing argues a great and generous mind but only goodness ; which is a propension and disposition to make others happy, and a readiness to do them all the good offices we can.

Secondly, To do good, is the most pleasant employment in the world. It is natural, and whatever is so, is delightful. We do like ourselves, whenever we relieve the wants and distresses of others. And therefore this virtue, among all other, hath peculiarly entitled itself to the name of humanity. We answer our own nature, and obey our reason, and shew ourselves men, in shewing mercy to the miserable. Whenever we consider the evils and afflictions of others, we do with the greatest reason collect our duty from our nature and inclination, and make our

own wishes, and desires, and expectations from others, a law and rule to ourselves. And this is pleasant to follow our nature, and to gratify the importunate dictates of our own reason. So that the benefits we do to others, are not more welcome to them that receive them, than they are delightful to us that do them. We ease our own nature and bowels whenever we help and relieve those who are in want and necessity. As, on the contrary, no man that hath not divested himself of humanity can be cruel and hard-hearted to others, without feeling some pain in himself. There is no sensual pleasure in the world comparable to the delight and satisfaction that a good man takes in doing good. This Cato in Tully boasts of, as the great comfort and joy of his old age—"that nothing was more pleasant to him than the conscience of a well-spent life, and the remembrance of many benefits and kindnesses done to others." Sensual pleasures are not lasting, but presently vanish and expire; but that is not the worst of them, they leave a sting behind them, as the pleasure goes off,

———*Succedit frigida cura.*

Sadness and melancholy come in the place of it, guilt and trouble and repentance follow it. But the pleasure of doing good remains after a thing is done, the thoughts of it lie easy in our minds, and the reflection upon it afterwards does for ever minister joy and delight to us. In a word, that frame of mind which inclines us to do good is the very temper and disposition of happiness. Solomon, after all his experience of worldly pleasures, pitches at last upon this as the greatest felicity of human life, and the



only good use that is to be made of a prosperous and plentiful fortune: (Eccles. iii. 12.) "I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice and do good in his life." And a greater and a wiser than Solomon hath said, that "it is more blessed to give than to receive."

Thirdly, To employ ourselves in doing good is to imitate the highest excellency and perfection; it is to be like God, who is good and doth good, and to be like him in that which he esteems his greatest glory, and that is, his goodness. It is to be like the Son of God, who, when he took our nature upon him, and lived in the world, "went about doing good." It is to be like the blessed angels, whose great employment is to be ministering spirits for the good of others. To be charitable, and helpful, and beneficial to others, is to be a good angel, and a Saviour, and a God to men. And the example of our blessed Saviour, more especially, is the great pattern which our religion propounds to us. And we have all the reason in the world to be in love with it, because that very goodness which it propounds to our imitation was so beneficial to ourselves: when we ourselves feel and enjoy the happy effects of that good which he did in the world, this should mightily endear the example to us, and make us forward to imitate that love and kindness to which we are indebted for so many blessings, and upon which all our hopes of happiness do depend.

And there is this considerable difference between our Saviour's charity to us and our's to others: he did all purely for our sakes and for our benefit, whereas all the good we do to others is a greater good done to ourselves. They are indeed beholden to us for the kindness we do them, and we to them

for the opportunity of doing it. Every ignorant person that comes in our way, to be instructed by us, every sinner whom we reclaim, every poor man we relieve, is a happy opportunity of doing good to ourselves, and of laying up for ourselves a good treasure against the time which is to come, that we may lay hold on eternal life. By this principle, the best and the happiest man that ever was, governed his life and actions, esteeming it a more blessed thing to give than to receive.

Fourthly, This is one of the greatest and most substantial duties of religion; and, next to the love and honour, which we pay to God himself, the most acceptable service that we can perform to him. It is one half of the law, and next to the first and great command, and very like unto it: like to it in the excellency of its nature, and in the necessity of its obligation. For this commandment we have from him, that "he who loveth God, loveth his brother also." The first commandment excels in the dignity of the object; but the second hath the advantage in the reality of its effects. For our righteousness extendeth not to God, we can do him no real benefit; but our charity to men is really useful and beneficial to them; for which reason, God is contented in many cases, that the external honour and worship, which, by his positive command, he requires of us, should give way to that natural duty of love and mercy which we owe to one another. And to shew how great a value he puts upon charity, he hath made it the great testimony of our love to himself; and for want of it, rejects all other professions of love to him as false and insincere. "If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar. For he that loveth

not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"

Fifthly, This is that which will give us the greatest comfort when we come to die. It will then be no pleasure to men to reflect upon the great estates they have got, and the great places they have been advanced to, because they are leaving these things, and they will stand them in no stead in the other world: "Riches profit not in the day of wrath:" but the conscience of well-doing will refresh our souls even under the very pangs of death. With what contentment does a good man then look upon the good he hath done in this life? And with what confidence doth he look over into the other world, where he hath provided for himself "bags that wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not." For though our estates will not follow us into the other world, our good works will; though we cannot carry our riches along with us, yet we may send them before us to make way for our reception into everlasting habitations. In short, works of mercy and charity will comfort us at the hour of death, and plead for us at the day of judgment, and procure for us, at the hands of a merciful God, a glorious recompence at the resurrection of the just. Which leads me to the

Last consideration I shall offer to you—which is the reward of doing good, both in this world and the other. If we believe God himself, he hath made more particular and encouraging promises to this grace and virtue than to any other.

The advantages of it in this world are many and great. It is the way to derive a lasting blessing upon our estates. Acts of charity are the best deeds of settlement. We gain the prayers and

blessings of those to whom we extend our charity, and it is no small thing to have "the blessing of them that are ready to perish to come upon us." For God "hears the prayers of the destitute, and his ear is open to their cry." Charity is a great security to us in times of evil: and that not only from the special promise and providence of God, which are engaged to preserve from want those that relieve the necessities of others; but likewise from the nature of the thing, which makes way for its own reward in this world. He that is charitable to others provides a supply and retreat for himself in the day of distress; for he provokes mankind by his example to like tenderness towards him, and prudently bespeaks the commiseration of others against it comes to be his turn to stand in need of it. Nothing in this world makes a man more and surer friends than charity and bounty, and such as will stand by us in the greatest troubles and dangers. "For a good man (says the apostle), one would even dare to die." It is excellent counsel of the son of Sirach—"Lay up thy treasure, according to the commandment of the Most High, and it shall bring thee more profit than gold. Shut up thy alms in thy storehouse, and it shall deliver thee from all affliction; it shall fight for thee against thine enemies, better than a mighty shield and strong spear." It hath sometimes happened, that the obligation that men have laid upon others by their charity, hath, in case of danger and extremity, done them more kindness than all the rest of their estate could do for them; and their alms have literally delivered them from death.

But what is all this to the endless and unspeakable happiness of the next life, where the returns of doing good will be vastly great, beyond what we

can now expect or imagine? For God takes all the good we do to others as a debt upon himself, and he hath estate and treasure enough to satisfy the greatest obligations we can lay upon him. So that we have the truth, and goodness, and sufficiency of God for our security, that what we scatter and sow in this kind will grow up to a plentiful harvest in the other world; and that all our pains and expense in doing good for a few days will be recompensed and crowned with the joys and glories of eternity.

## SERMON XIX.

ON THE FIFTH OF NOVEMBER, 1678. BEFORE THE  
HONOURABLE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

*But he turned and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; for the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.*—LUKE ix. 55, 56.

AMONG many other things, which may justly recommend the Christian religion to the approbation of mankind, the intrinsic goodness of it is most apt to make impression upon the minds of serious and considerate men. The miracles of it are the great external evidence and confirmation of its truth and divinity; but the morality of its doctrines and precepts, so agreeable to the best reason and wisest apprehensions of mankind, so admirably fitted for the perfecting of our natures, and the sweetening of the spirits and tempers of men, so friendly to human society, and every way so well calculated for the peace and order of the world; these are the things which our religion glories in, as her crown and excellency. Miracles are apt to awaken and astonish, and by a sensible and overpowering evidence, to bear down the prejudices of infidelity; but there are secret charms in goodness, which take fast hold of the hearts of men, and do insensibly, but effectually command our love and esteem.

And surely nothing can be more proper to the occasion of this day, than a discourse upon this argument; which so directly tends to correct that

unchristian spirit, and mistaken zeal, which hath been the cause of all our troubles and confusions, and had so powerful an influence upon that horrid tragedy which was designed, now near upon four-score years ago, to have been acted as upon this day.

And that we may the better understand the reason of our Saviour's reproof, here in the text, it will be requisite to consider the occasion of this hot and furious zeal which appeared in some of his disciples. And that was this:—Our Saviour was going from Galilee to Jerusalem, and being to pass through a village of Samaria, he sent messengers before him to prepare entertainment for him; but the people of that place would not receive him, because he was going to Jerusalem. The reason whereof was, the difference of religion which then was between the Jews and the Samaritans. Of which I shall give you this brief account.

The Samaritans were originally that colony of the Assyrians which we find, in the Book of Kings, was, upon the captivity of the ten tribes, planted in Samaria by Salmanasser. They were heathens, and worshipped their own idols, till they were so infested with lions, that, for the redress of this mischief, they desired to be instructed in the worship of the God of Israel, hoping, by this means, to appease the anger of the God of the country; and then they worshipped the God of Israel together with their own idols; for so it is said in the history of the kings, that “they feared the Lord, and served their own gods.”

After the tribe of Judah were returned from the captivity of Babylon, and the temple of Jerusalem was rebuilt, all the Jews were obliged, by a solemn covenant, to put away their heathen wives. It hap-

pened that Manasses, a Jewish priest, had married the daughter of Sanballat the Samaritan; and being unwilling to put away his wife, Sanballat excited the Samaritans to build a temple upon Mount Gerizim, near the city of Samaria, in opposition to the temple at Jerusalem, and made Manasses, his son-in-law, priest there.

Upon the building of this new temple there arose a great feud between the Jews and Samaritans, which in process of time grew to so violent a hatred, that they would not so much as shew common civility to one another. And this was the reason why the Samaritans would not receive our Saviour in his journey, because they perceived he was going to worship at Jerusalem.

At this uncivil usage of our Saviour, two of his disciples, James and John, presently take fire, and out of a well-meaning zeal for the honour of their Master, and of the true God, and of Jerusalem the true place of his worship, they are immediately for dispatching out of the way these enemies of God, and Christ, and the true religion; these heretics and schismatics, for so they called one another. And to this end they desire our Saviour to give them power to call for fire from heaven to consume them, as Elias had done in a like case, and that too not far from Samaria; and it is not improbable, that their being so near the place where Elias had done the like before, might prompt them to this request.

Our Saviour, seeing them in this heat, notwithstanding all the reasons they pretended for their passion, and for all they sheltered themselves under the great example of Elias, doth very calmly, but severely, reprove this temper of their's—"Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of: for the Son of



man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

Grotius observes, that these two excellent sentences are left out in a manuscript that is in England. I cannot tell what manuscript he refers to; but if it were a copy written out in the height of popery, no wonder if some zealous transcriber, offended at this passage, struck it out of the gospel, being confident our Saviour would not say any thing that was so directly contrary to the current doctrine and practice of those times. But, thanks be to God, this admirable saying is still preserved, and can never be made use of upon a fitter occasion.

"Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of;" that is, ye own yourselves to be my disciples, but do you consider what spirit now acts and governs you? Not that surely which my doctrine designs to mould and fashion you into, which is not a furious and persecuting and destructive spirit, but mild and gentle and saving: tender of the lives and interests of men, even of those who are our greatest enemies. You ought to consider, that you are not now under the rough and sour dispensation of the law, but the calm and peaceable institution of the gospel; to which the spirit of Elias, though he was a very good man in his time, would be altogether unsuitable. God permitted it then, under that imperfect way of religion; but now under the gospel it would be intolerable; for that designs universal love, and peace, and good-will: and now no difference of religion, no pretence of zeal for God and Christ, can warrant and justify this passionate and fierce, this vindictive and exterminating spirit.

"For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." He says indeed elsewhere,

that he “ was not come to send peace but a sword ;” which we are not to understand of the natural tendency of his religion, but of the accidental event and effect of it, through the malice and perverseness of men. But here he speaks of the proper intention and design of his coming. He came not to kill and destroy, but “ for the healing of the nations ;” for the salvation and redemption of mankind, not only “ from the wrath to come,” but from a great part of the evils and miseries of this life : he came to discountenance all fierceness and rage and cruelty in men, one towards another ; to restrain and subdue that furious and unpeaceable spirit, which is so troublesome to the world, and the cause of so many mischiefs and disorders in it ; and to introduce a religion which consults not only the eternal salvation of men’s souls, but their temporal peace and security, their comfort and happiness in this world.

The words thus explained contain this observation, “ that a revengeful and cruel and destructive spirit is directly contrary to the design and temper of the gospel, and not to be excused upon any pretence of zeal for God and religion.”

In the prosecution of this argument, I shall confine my discourse to these three heads.

First, To shew the opposition of this spirit to the true spirit and design of the Christian religion.

Secondly, The unjustifiableness of it upon any pretence of zeal for God and religion.

Thirdly, To apply this discourse to the occasion of this day.

I. First, I shall shew the opposition of this spirit to the true spirit and design of the Christian religion : that it is directly opposite to the main and fundamental precepts of the gospel, and to the great pat-

terns and examples of our religion, our blessed Saviour, and the primitive Christians.

1. This spirit which our Saviour here reproves in his disciples, is directly opposite to the main and fundamental precepts of the gospel, which command us to "love one another," and "to love all men," even our very enemies; and are so far from permitting us to persecute those who hate us, that they forbid us to hate those who persecute us. They require us to be "merciful, as our Father which is in heaven is merciful;" to be "kind and tender-hearted, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us;" and "to put on, as the elect of God, bowels of mercy, meekness and long-suffering," and to "follow peace with all men," and to "shew all meekness to all men:" and particularly the pastors and governors of the church are especially charged to be of this temper, "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men; apt to teach, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if, peradventure, God will give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth." To all which precepts, and many more that I might reckon up, nothing can be more plainly opposite than inhuman cruelties and persecutions, treacherous conspiracies and bloody massacres, a barbarous inquisition and a holy league to extirpate all that differ from us. And instead of "instructing in meekness those that oppose themselves," to convert men with fire and faggot, and to teach them, as Gideon did the men of Succoth, with briars and thorns; and instead of waiting for their repentance and endeavouring to recover them out of the snare of the devil, to put them quick into his

hands, and to dispatch them to hell as fast as possible. If the precepts of Christianity can be contradicted, surely it cannot be done more grossly and palpably than by such practices.

2. This spirit is likewise directly opposite to the great patterns and examples of our religion, our blessed Saviour and the primitive Christians. It was prophesied of our Saviour, that he should be "the Prince of peace," and should make it one of his great businesses upon earth, to make peace in heaven and earth, to reconcile men to God and to one another, to take up all those feuds, and to extinguish all those animosities that were in the world; to bring to an agreement and a peaceable demeanour one towards another those that were most distant in their tempers and interests; to "make the lamb and the wolf lie down together, that there might be no more destroying nor devouring in all God's holy mountain;" that is, that that cruel and destructive spirit which prevailed before in the world, should then be banished out of all Christian societies.

And in conformity to these predictions, when our Saviour was born into the world, the angels sang that heavenly anthem—"glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and good-will among men." And when he appeared in the world, his whole life and carriage was gentle and peaceable, full of meekness and charity. His great business was to be beneficial to others, to seek and to save that which was lost; "he went about doing good," to the bodies and to the souls of men; his miracles were not destructive to mankind, but healing and charitable. He could, if he had pleased, by his miraculous power, have confounded his enemies, and have thundered out death and destruction against the infidel world, as

his pretended vicar hath since done against heretics. But intending that his religion should be propagated in human ways, that men should be drawn to the profession of it, by the bands of love, and the cords of a man, by the gentle and peaceable methods of reason and persuasion; he gave no example of a furious zeal and religious rage against those who despised his doctrine. It was propounded to men for their great advantage, and they rejected it at their utmost peril. It seemed good to the author of this institution, to compel no man to it by temporal punishments. When he went about making proselytes, he offered violence to no man; only said, "if any man will be my disciple, if any man will come after me." And when his disciples were leaving him, he does not set up an inquisition to torture and punish them for their defection from the faith—only says, "will ye also go away?"

And in imitation of this blessed pattern, the Christian church continued to speak and act for several ages. And this was the language of the holy Fathers, *Lex nova non se vindicat ultore gladio*, "the Christian law doth not avenge itself by the sword." This was then the style of councils, *Nemini ad credendum vim inferre*, "to offer violence to no man to compel him to the faith." I proceed, in the

II. Second place, to shew the unjustifiableness of this spirit upon any pretence whatsoever of zeal for God and religion. No case can be put with circumstances of greater advantage, and more likely to justify this spirit and temper, than the case here in the text. Those against whom the disciples would have "called for fire from heaven," were heretics and schismatics from the true church; they had affronted our Saviour himself in his own

person; the honour of God, and of that religion which he had set up in the world, and of Jerusalem, which he had appointed for the place of his worship, were all concerned in this case: so that if ever it were warrantable to put on this fierce and furious zeal, here was a case that seemed to require it: but even in these circumstances, our Saviour thinks fit to rebuke and discountenance this spirit, “ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.” And he gives such a reason as ought in all differences of religion, how wide soever they be, to deter men from this temper, “for the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them;” that is, this spirit is utterly inconsistent with the great design of Christian religion, and the end of our Saviour’s coming into the world.

And now, what hath the church of Rome to plead for her cruelty to men for the cause of religion, which the disciples might not much better have pleaded for themselves in their case? What hath she to say against those who are the objects of her cruelty and persecution, which would not have held against the Samaritans? Does she practise these severities out of a zeal for truth, and for the honour of God and Christ, and the true religion? Why, upon these very accounts it was, that the disciples would have called for fire from heaven to have destroyed the Samaritans. Is the church of Rome persuaded that those whom she persecutes are heretics and schismatics, and that no punishment can be too great for such offenders? So the disciples were persuaded of the Samaritans: and upon much better grounds: only the disciples had some excuse in their case, which the church of Rome hath not; and that was ignorance; and this apology our Sa-

viour makes for them, “ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of:” they had been bred up in the Jewish religion, which gave some indulgence to this kind of temper, and they were able to cite a great example for themselves; besides, they were then but learners and not thoroughly instructed in the Christian doctrine. But in the church of Rome, whatever the case of particular persons may be, as to the whole church and the governing part of it, this ignorance is wilful and affected, and therefore inexcusable. For the Christian religion, which they profess to embrace, does as plainly teach the contrary as it does any other matter whatsoever: and it is not more evident in the New Testament, that Christ died for sinners, than that Christians should not kill one another for the misbelief of any article of revealed religion; much less for the disbelief of such articles as are invented by men, and imposed as the doctrines of Christ.

You have heard what kind of spirit it is, which our Saviour here reproves in his disciples. It was a furious and destructive spirit, contrary to Christian charity and goodness. But yet this may be said in mitigation of their fault, that they themselves offered no violence to their enemies: they left it to God, and no doubt would have been very glad that he would have manifested his severity upon them, by sending down fire from heaven to have consumed them.

But there is a much worse spirit than this in the world, which is not only contrary to Christianity, but to the common principles of natural religion, and even to humanity itself; which, by falsehood and perfidiousness, by secret plots and conspiracies, or by open sedition and rebellion, by an inquisition

or massacre, by deposing or killing kings, by fire and sword, by the ruin of their country, and betraying it into the hands of foreigners ; and, in a word, by dissolving all the bonds of human society, and subverting the peace and order of the world, that is, by all the wicked ways imaginable, doth incite men to promote and to advance their religion. As if all the world were made for them, and there were not only no other Christians, but no other men besides themselves ; as Babylon of old proudly vaunted, "I am, and there is none besides me:" and as if the God, whom the Christians worship, were not "the God of order, but of confusion:" as if he whom we call the Father of mercies, were delighted with cruelty, and could not have a more pleasing sacrifice offered to him than a massacre, nor put a greater honour upon his priests than to make them judges of an inquisition ; that is, the inventors and decreers of torments for men more righteous and innocent than themselves.

Thus to misrepresent God and religion, is to divest them of all their majesty and glory. For if that of Seneca be true, that *sine bonitate nulla majestas*, "without goodness, there can be no such thing as majesty," then to separate goodness and mercy from God, compassion and charity from religion, is to make the two best things in the world, God and religion, good for nothing.

How much righter apprehensions had the heathens of the Divine nature, which they looked upon as so benign and beneficial to mankind, that, as Tully admirably says, *Dii immortales ad usum hominum fabricati pene videantur*, "the nature of the immortal gods may almost seem to be exactly framed for the benefit and advantage of men." And as for reli-



gion, they always spake of it as of the great band of human society, and the foundation of truth, and fidelity, and justice among men. But when religion once comes to supplant moral righteousness, and to teach men the absurdest things in the world, "to lie for the truth, and to kill men for God's sake:" when it serves to no other purpose, but to be a bond of conspiracy, to inflame the tempers of men to a greater fierceness, and to set a keener edge upon their spirits, and to make them "ten times more the children of wrath and cruelty than they were by nature," then surely it loses its nature, and ceases to be religion; for let any man say worse of atheism and infidelity, if he can. And, for God's sake, what is religion good for, but to reform the manners and dispositions of men, to restrain human nature from violence and cruelty, from falsehood and treachery, from sedition and rebellion? Better it were there were no revealed religion, and that human nature were left to the conduct of its own principles and inclinations, which are much more mild and merciful, much more for the peace and happiness of human society; than to be acted by a religion that inspires men with so wild a fury, and prompts them to commit such outrages; and is continually supplanting government, and undermining the welfare of mankind; in short, such a religion as teaches men to propagate and advance itself by means so evidently contrary to the very nature and end of all religion.

And this, if it be well considered, will appear to be a very convincing way of reasoning, by shewing the last result and consequence of such principles, and of such a train of propositions, to be a most gross and palpable absurdity. For example: we will, at present, admit popery to be the true re-

ligion, and their doctrines of extirpating heretics, of the lawfulness of deposing kings, and subverting government by all the cruel and wicked ways that can be thought of, to be, as in truth they are, the doctrines of this religion. In this case, I would not trouble myself to debate particulars; but if in the gross, and upon the whole matter, it be evident, that such a religion as this is as bad or worse than infidelity and no religion, this is conviction enough to a wise man, and as good as a demonstration, that this is not the true religion, and that it cannot be from God.

How much better teachers of religion were the old heathen philosophers; in all whose books and writings there is not one principle to be found of treachery or rebellion—nothing that gives the least countenance to an assassination or a massacre, to the betraying of one's native country, or the cutting of his neighbour's throat for difference in opinion. I speak it with grief and shame, because the credit of our common Christianity is somewhat concerned in it, that Panætius, and Antipater, and Diogenes the stoic, Tully, and Plutarch, and Seneca, were much honester, and more Christian casuists, than the Jesuits are, or the generality of the casuists of any other order, that I know of, in the church of Rome. I come now, in the

III. Third and last place, to make some application of this discourse.

1. Let not religion suffer for those faults and miscarriages which really proceed from the ignorance of religion, and from the want of it. That, under colour and pretence of religion, very bad things are done, is no argument that religion itself is not good; because the best things are liable to be perverted

and abused to very ill purposes; nay, the corruption of them is commonly the worst—as they say, the richest and noblest wines make the sharpest vinegar. “If the light that is in you (saith our Saviour) be darkness, how great is that darkness?”

2. Let us beware of that church which countenanceth this unchristian spirit, here condemned by our Saviour, and which teaches such doctrines, and warrants such practices as are consonant thereto. You all know, without my saying so, that I mean the church of Rome, in which are taught such doctrines as these, that heretics, that is, all who differ from them in matters of faith, are to be extirpated by fire and sword, which was decreed in the third and fourth Lateran councils, where all Christians are strictly charged to endeavour this to the uttermost of their power, *Sicut reputari cupiunt et haberi fideles*, “as they desire to be esteemed and accounted Christians.” Next, their doctrines of deposing kings, and of absolving their subjects from obedience to them, which were not only universally believed, but practised by the popes and Roman church for several ages. Indeed, this doctrine hath not been, at all times, alike frankly and openly avowed; but it is undoubtedly their’s, and hath frequently been put in execution, though they have not thought it so convenient at all times to make profession of it. It is a certain kind of engine which is to be screwed up or let down as occasion serves; and is commonly kept, like Goliath’s sword, in the sanctuary behind the Ephod, but yet so that the high priest can lend it out upon an extraordinary occasion.

And for practices, consonant to these doctrines, I shall go no farther than the horrid and bloody design of this day. Such a mystery of iniquity as had

been hid from ages and generations ; such a masterpiece of villainy as eye had not seen, nor ear heard, nor ever before entered into the heart of man ; so prodigiously barbarous, both in the substance and circumstances of it, as is not to be paralleled in all the voluminous records of time, from the foundation of the world.

Of late years, our adversaries (for so they have made themselves without any provocation of our's) have almost had the impudence to deny so plain a matter of fact : but I wish they had not taken an effectual course, by fresh conspiracies, of equal or greater horror, to confirm the belief of it with a witness. But I shall not anticipate what will be more proper for another day, but confine myself to the present occasion.

I will not trouble you with the particular narrative of this dark conspiracy, nor the obscure manner of its discovery, which Bellarmine himself acknowledges not to have been without a miracle. Let us thank God that it was so happily discovered and disappointed, as I hope their present design will be, by the same wonderful and merciful providence of God, towards a most unworthy people. And may the lameness and halting of Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, never depart from that order, but be a fate continually attending all their villanous plots and contrivances!

I shall only observe to you, that after the discovery of this plot, the authors of it were not convinced of the evil, but sorry for the miscarriage of it. Sir Everard Digby, whose very original papers and letters are now in my hands, after he was in prison, and knew he must suffer, calls it the best cause ; and was extremely troubled to hear it censured by catholics and priests, contrary to his ex-

pectation, for a great sin: "Let me tell you," says he, "what a grief it is to hear that so much condemned, which I did believe would have been otherwise thought of by catholics." And yet he concludes that letter with these words: "In how full joy should I die, if I could do any thing for the cause which I love more than my life!" And in another letter he says, he could have said something to have mitigated the odium of this business, as to that point, of involving those of his own religion in the common ruin. "I dare not," says he, "take that course that I could, to make it appear less odious; for divers were to have been brought out of danger, who now would rather hurt them than otherwise. I do not think there would have been three worth the saving, that should have been lost." And as to the rest, that were to have been swallowed up in that destruction, he seems not to have the least relenting in his mind about them. All doubts he seems to have looked upon as temptations, and intreats his friends "to pray for the pardoning of his not sufficient striving against temptation since this business was undertook."

Good God! that any thing that is called religion, should so perfectly strip them of all humanity, and transform the mild and gentle race of mankind into such wolves and tigers! that ever a pretended zeal for thy glory should instigate men to dishonour thee at such a rate! It is believed by many, and not without cause, that the pope and his faction are the antichrist. I will say no more than I know in this matter; I am not so sure that it is he that is particularly designed in Scripture by that name, as I am of the main articles of the Christian faith: but, however that be, I challenge antichrist himself,

whoever he be, and whenever he comes, to do worse and wickeder things than these.

But I must remember my text, and take heed of imitating that spirit which is there condemned, whilst I am inveighing against it. And in truth it almost looks uncharitable to speak the truth in these matters, and barely to relate what these men have not blushed to do. I need not, nay, I cannot, aggravate these things; they are too horrible in themselves, even when they are expressed in the softest and gentlest words.

I would not be understood to charge every particular person who is, or hath been, in the Roman communion, with the guilt of these or the like practices; but I must charge their doctrines and principles with them; I must charge the heads of their church, and the prevalent teaching and governing part of it, who are usually the contrivers and abettors, the executioners and applauders of these cursed designs.

I do willingly acknowledge the great piety and charity of several persons, who have lived and died in that communion, as Erasmus, Father Paul, Thuanus, and many others, who had in truth more goodness than the principles of that religion do either incline men to, or allow of. And yet he that considers how universally almost the papists in Ireland were engaged in that massacre, which is still fresh in our memories, will find it very hard to determine how many degrees of innocency and good nature, or of coldness and indifferency in religion, are necessary to overbalance the fury of a blind zeal and a misguided conscience.

I doubt not but papists are made like other men. Nature hath not generally given them such savage

and cruel dispositions, but their religion hath made them so. Whereas true Christianity is not only the best, but the best-natured institution in the world; and so far as any church is departed from good-nature, and become cruel and barbarous, so far is it degenerated from Christianity. I am loath to say it, and yet I am confident it is very true, that many papists would have been excellent persons, and very good men, if their religion had not hindered them; if the doctrines and principles of their church had not perverted and spoiled their natural dispositions.

I speak not this to exasperate you, worthy patriots and the great bulwark of our religion, to any unreasonable or unnecessary, much less unchristian severities against them: no, let us not do like them; let us never do any thing for religion that is contrary to it: but I speak it to awaken your care thus far, that if their priests will always be putting these pernicious principles into the minds of the people, effectual provision may be made, that it may never be in their power again to put them in practice. We have found by experience, that ever since the Reformation they have been continually pecking at the foundations of our peace and religion: when God knows we have been so far from thirsting after their blood, that we did not so much as desire their disquiet, but in order to our own necessary safety, and indeed to their's.

And God be praised for those matchless instances which we are able to give of the generous humanity and Christian temper of the English protestants. After Queen Mary's death, when the protestant religion was restored, Bishop Bonner, notwithstanding all his cruelties and butcheries, was permitted quietly

to live and die among us. And after the treason of this day, nay, at this very time, since the discovery of so barbarous a design, and the highest provocation in the world, by the treacherous murder of one of his majesty's justices of the peace, a very good man, and a most excellent magistrate, who had been active in the discovery of this plot; I say, after all this, and notwithstanding the continued and insupportable insolence of their carriage and behaviour, even upon this occasion, no violence, nay not so much as any incivility, that I ever heard of, hath been offered to any of them. I would to God they would but seriously consider this one difference between our religion and their's, and which of them comes nearest to the wisdom which is from above, which is peaceable, and gentle, and full of mercy. And I do heartily pray, and have good hopes, that upon this occasion God will open their eyes so far, as to convince a great many among them, that that cannot be the true religion which inspires men with such barbarous minds.

I have now done; and if I have been transported upon this argument somewhat beyond my usual temper, the occasion of this day, and our present circumstances, will, I hope, bear me out. I have expressed myself all along with a just sense, and with no unjust severity, concerning these horrid principles and practices; but yet with great pity and tenderness towards those miserably seduced souls, who have been deluded by them, and ensnared in them. And I can truly say, as the Roman orator did of himself upon another occasion, *Me natura misericordem, patria severum, crudelem nec patria nec natura esse voluit.* My nature inclines me to be tender and compassionate; a hearty zeal for our religion, and



concernment for the public welfare of my country, may perhaps have made me a little severe; but neither my natural disposition, nor the temper of the English nation, nor the genius of the protestant, that is, the true Christian religion, will allow me to be cruel.

For the future, let us encourage ourselves in the Lord our God; and commit our cause, and the keeping of our souls to him in well-doing: and, under God, let us leave it to the wisdom and care of his majesty, and his two houses of parliament, to make a lasting provision for the security of our peace and religion against all the secret contrivances and open attempts of these sons of violence. And let us remember those words of David: (Psal. xxxvii. 12, 13, 14, 15.) “The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth: the Lord shall laugh at him, for he seeth that his day is coming. The wicked have drawn out the sword, and bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation: their swords shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken.”

And I hope, considering what God hath heretofore done, and hath now begun to do for us, we may take encouragement to ourselves against all the enemies of our religion, which are confederated against us, in the words of the prophet: (Isa. viii. 9, 10.) “Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces; and give ear all ye of far countries: gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces: gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces: take counsel together, and it shall come to nought: speak the word and it shall not stand. For God is with us.”

And now what remains, but to make our most de-

vout and thankful acknowledgments to Almighty God, for the invaluable blessing of our reformed religion, and for the miraculous deliverance of this day, and for the wonderful discovery of the late horrid and barbarous conspiracy against our prince, our peace, and our religion ?

To Him, therefore, our most gracious and merciful God, our shield, and our rock, and our mighty deliverer : who hath brought us out of the land of Egypt, and out of the house of bondage ; and hath set us free from popish tyranny and superstition, a yoke which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear :

Who hath from time to time delivered us from the bloody and merciless designs of wicked and unreasonable men ; and hath rendered all the plots and contrivances, the mischievous counsels and devices of these worse than heathens, of none effect :

Who did, as upon this day, rescue our king and our princes, our nobles, and the heads of our tribes, the governors of our church, and the judges of the land, from that fearful destruction which was ready to have swallowed them up :

Who still brings to light the hidden things of darkness, and hath hitherto preserved our religion and civil interests to us, in despite of all the malicious and restless attempts of our adversaries :

Unto that great God, who hath done so great things for us, and hath saved us by a mighty salvation : who hath delivered us, and doth deliver us, and, we trust, will deliver us : be glory and honour, thanksgiving and praise, from generation to generation. And let all the people say, Amen.

# DEDICATION

TO THE FOLLOWING SERMON.

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TO MY HONOURED

FRIENDS AND COUNTRYMEN,

Mr. Hugh Frankland,  
Leonard Robinson,  
Abrah. Fothergil,  
William Fairfax,  
Thomas Johnson,  
John Hardesty,

Mr. Gervas Wilcocks,  
George Pickering,  
Edward Duffield,  
John Topham,  
James Longbotham,  
Nathan. Holroyd,

STEWARDS OF THE YORKSHIRE FEAST.

GENTLEMEN,

THIS Sermon, which was first preached, and is now published at your desires, I dedicate to your names, to whose prudence and care the direction and management of this first general meeting of our countrymen was committed; heartily wishing, that it may be some way serviceable to the healing of our unhappy differences, and the restoring of unity and charity among Christians, especially those of the Protestant reformed religion.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your affectionate countryman,  
and humble servant,

JO. TILLOTSON.

## SERMON XX.

[Preached at the First General Meeting of the Gentlemen, and Others, in and near London, born within the County of York.]

*A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another: by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.*—JOHN XIII. 34, 35.

As the Christian religion in general is the best philosophy and most perfect institution of life, containing in it the most entire and complete system of moral rules and precepts that was ever yet extant in the world, so it peculiarly excels in the doctrine of love and charity; earnestly recommending, strictly enjoining, and vehemently and almost perpetually pressing and inculcating the excellency and necessity of this best of graces and virtues; and propounding to us, for our imitation and encouragement, the most lively and heroical example of kindness and charity that ever was, in the life and death of the great founder of our religion, the author and finisher of our faith, Jesus the Son of God.

So that the gospel, as it hath in all other parts of our duty cleared the dimness and obscurity of natural light, and supplied the imperfections of former revelations, so doth it most eminently reign and triumph in this great and blessed virtue of charity, in which all the philosophy and religions that had been before in the world, whether Jewish or Pagan, were so remarkably defective.

With great reason then doth our blessed Saviour call this a new commandment, and assert it to himself as a thing peculiar to his doctrine and religion; considering how imperfectly it had been taught, and how little it had been practised in the world before: “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another: by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.”

I shall reduce my discourse upon these words under these six heads.

First, To inquire in what sense our Saviour calls this commandment, of loving one another, a new commandment.

Secondly, To declare to you the nature of this commandment, by instancing in the chief acts and properties of love.

Thirdly, To consider the degrees and measures of our charity, with regard to the several objects about which it is exercised.

Fourthly, Our obligation to this duty, not only from our Saviour's authority, but likewise from our own nature, and from the reasonableness and excellency of the thing commanded.

Fifthly, The great example which is here propounded to our imitation; “as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.”

Sixthly, and lastly, The place and rank which this precept holds in the Christian religion. Our Saviour makes it the proper badge of a disciple, the distinctive mark and character of our profession: “by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.”

I. In what sense our Saviour calls this commandment, of loving one another, a new commandment;

not that it is absolutely and altogether new, but upon some special accounts; for it is a branch of the ancient and primitive law of nature. Aristotle truly observes, that upon grounds of natural kindred and likeness all men are friends, and kindly disposed towards one another. And it is a known precept of the Jewish religion, to “love our neighbour, as ourselves.”

In some sense, then, it is no new commandment; and so St. John, who was most likely to understand our Saviour’s meaning in this particular (all his preaching and writing being almost nothing else, but an inculcating of this one precept), explains this matter, telling us that in several respects it was, and it was not a new commandment: (1 John ii. 7, 8.) “Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but that which ye had from the beginning,” that is, from ancient times. But then he corrects himself: “Again, *πάλιν*, but yet a new commandment I write unto you.” So that though it was not absolutely new, yet upon divers considerable accounts it was so, and in a peculiar manner proper to the evangelical institution; and is in so express and particular a manner ascribed to the teaching of the Holy Ghost, which was conferred upon Christians by the faith of the gospel, as if they hardly needed any outward instruction and exhortation to that purpose: (1 Thess. iv. 9.) “But as touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you, for ye yourselves are *θεοδιδασκτοι* divinely taught and inspired to love one another.”

This commandment, then, of loving one another, is by our Lord and Saviour so much enlarged as to the object of it, beyond what either the Jews or heathens did understand it to be, extending to all

mankind, and even to our greatest enemies; so greatly advanced and heightened as to the degree of it, even to the laying down of our lives for one another; so effectually taught, so mightily encouraged, so very much urged and insisted upon, that it may very well be called a new commandment. For though it was not altogether unknown to mankind before, yet it was never so taught, so encouraged; never was such an illustrious example given of it, never so much weight and stress laid upon it by any philosophy or religion that was before in the world.

II. I shall endeavour to declare to you the nature of this commandment, or the duty required by it. And that will best be done, by instancing in the chief acts and properties of love and charity. As, humanity and kindness in all our carriage and behaviour towards one another; for love smooths the dispositions of men, so that they are not apt to grate upon one another: next, to rejoice in the good and happiness of one another, and to grieve at their evils and sufferings; for love unites the interests of men, so as to make them affected with what happens to another, as if it were in some sort their own case: then, to contribute as much as in us lies to the happiness of one another, by relieving one another's wants, and redressing their misfortunes: again, tenderness of their good name and reputation; a proneness to interpret all the words and actions of men to the best sense; patience and forbearance towards one another; and when differences happen, to manage them with all possible calmness and kindness, and to be ready to forgive and to be reconciled to one another; to pray one for another; and, if occasion be, at least if the public good of Christianity require it, to be ready to lay down our lives for our

brethren, and to sacrifice ourselves for the furtherance of their salvation.

III. We will consider the degrees and measures of our charity, with regard to the various objects about which it is exercised.

And as to the negative part of this duty, it is to be extended equally towards all. We are not to hate or bear ill-will to any man, or to do him any harm or mischief: love worketh no evil to his neighbour. Thus much charity we are to exercise towards all, without any exception, without any difference.

And as to the positive part of this duty, we should bear an universal good-will to all men, wishing every man's happiness, and praying for it as heartily as for our own; and if we be sincere herein, we shall be ready upon all occasions to procure and promote the welfare of all men. But the outward acts and testimonies of our charity neither can be actually extended to all, nor ought to be to all alike. We do not know the wants of all, and therefore our knowledge of persons, and of their conditions, doth necessarily limit the effects of our charity within a certain compass; and of those we do know, we can but relieve a small part for want of ability. Whence it becomes necessary, that we set some rules to ourselves for the more discreet ordering of our charity, such as these: cases of extremity ought to take place of all other. Obligations of nature, and nearness of relations, seem to challenge the next place. Obligations of kindness, and upon the account of benefits received, may well lay the next claim. And then the household of faith is to be peculiarly considered. And after these, the merit of the persons and all



circumstances belonging to them, are to be weighed and valued: those who labour in an honest calling, but are oppressed with their charge; those who are fallen from a plentiful condition, especially by misfortune and the providence of God, without their own fault; those who have relieved others, and have been eminently charitable and beneficial to mankind: and lastly, those whose visible necessities and infirmities of body and mind, whether by age or accident, do plead for them: all these do challenge our more especial regard and consideration.

IV. We will consider our obligations to this duty, not only from our Saviour's authority, but likewise from our own nature, and from the reasonableness and excellency of the thing commanded. This is the commandment of the Son of God, who came down from heaven with full authority to declare the will of God to us. And this is peculiarly his commandment, which he urgeth upon his disciples so earnestly, and so as if he almost required nothing else in comparison of this, (John xv. 12.) "this is my commandment, that ye love another:" and (ver. 17.) "these things I command you, that ye love one another." As if this were the end of all his precepts, and of his whole doctrine, to bring us to the practice of this duty. And so St. John, the loving and beloved disciple, speaks of it as the great message which the Son of God was to deliver to mankind: (1 John iii. 11.) "this is the message which ye have heard from the beginning, that ye should love one another." And (ver. 23.) "this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment." And (chap. iv. 21.) "this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also."

But, besides the authority of our Saviour, we have a precedent obligation to it from our own nature, and from the reasonableness and excellency of the thing itself. The frame of our nature disposeth us to it, and our inclination to society, in which there can be no pleasure, no advantage, without mutual love and kindness. And equity also calls for it, for that we ourselves wish and expect kindness from others, is conviction enough to us that we owe it to others. The fulfilling of this law is the great perfection of our natures, the advancement and enlargement of our souls, the chief ornament and beauty of a great mind. It makes us like to God, the best and most perfect and happiest being, in that which is the prime excellency and happiness and glory of the Divine nature.

And the advantages of this temper are unspeakable and innumerable. It freeth our souls from those unruly and troublesome and disquieting passions which are the great torment of our spirits; from anger and envy, from malice and revenge, from jealousy and discontent. It makes our minds calm and cheerful, and puts our souls into an easy posture, and into good humour, and maintains us in the possession and enjoyment of ourselves: it preserves men from many mischiefs and inconveniences, to which enmity and ill-will do perpetually expose them: it is apt to make friends, and to gain enemies; and to render every condition either pleasant, or easy, or tolerable to us. So that to love others, is the truest love to ourselves, and doth redound to our own unspeakable benefit and advantage in all respects.

It is a very considerable part of our duty, and almost equalled by our Saviour with the first and great commandment of the law. It is highly ac-

ceptable to God, most beneficial to others, and very comfortable to ourselves. It is the easiest of all duties, and it makes all others easy; the pleasure of it makes the pains to signify nothing, and the delightful reflection upon it afterwards, is a most ample reward of it. It is a duty in every man's power to perform, how strait and indigent soever his fortune and condition be. The poorest man may be as charitable as a prince; he may have as much kindness in his heart, though his hand cannot be so bountiful and munificent. Our Saviour instanceth in the giving of a cup of cold water, as a charity that will be highly accepted and rewarded by God. And one of the most celebrated charities that ever was, how small was it for the matter of it, and yet how great in regard of the mind that gave it? I mean the widow's two mites, which she cast into the treasury: one could hardly give less, and yet none can give more, for she gave all that she had. All these excellencies and advantages of love and charity, which I have briefly recounted, are so many arguments, so many obligations, to the practice of this duty.

V. We will consider the great instance and example which is here propounded to our imitation; "as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." The Son of God's becoming man, his whole life, his bitter death and passion, all that he did, and all that he suffered, was one great and continued proof and evidence of his mighty love to mankind. The greatest instance of love among men, and that too but very rare, is for a man to lay down his life for another, for his friend; but the Son of God died for all mankind, and we were all his enemies. And should we not cheerfully imitate the example of that great love and charity, the effects whereof are so comfort-

able, so beneficial, so happy to every one of us? Had he not loved us, and died for us, we had certainly perished, we had been miserable and undone to all eternity.

And to perpetuate this great example of charity, and that it might be always fresh in our memories, the great sacrament of our religion was on purpose instituted for the commemoration of this great love of the Son of God, in laying down his life, and shedding his precious blood for the wicked and rebellious race of mankind. But I have not time to enlarge upon this noble argument as it deserves.

VI. The last thing to be considered is, the place and rank which this precept and duty holds in the Christian religion. Our blessed Saviour here makes it the proper badge and cognizance of our profession; “by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.” The different sects among the Jews had some peculiar character to distinguish them from one another. The scholars of the several great rabbies among them had some peculiar sayings and opinions, some customs and traditions whereby they were severally known: and so likewise the disciples of John the Baptist were particularly remarkable for their great austerities. In allusion to these distinctions of sects and schools among the Jews, our Saviour fixeth upon this mark and character, whereby his disciples should be known from the disciples of any other institution, —a mighty love and affection to one another.

Other sects were distinguished by little opinions, or by some external rites and observances in religion; but our Saviour pitched upon that which is the most real and substantial, the most large and extensive, the most useful and beneficial, the most

human and the most Divine quality of which we are capable.

This was his great commandment to his disciples, before he left the world ; this was the legacy he left them, and the effect of his last prayers for them ; and for this end, among others, he instituted the sacrament of his blessed body and blood, to be a lively remembrance of his great charity to mankind, and a perpetual bond of love and union amongst his followers.

And the apostles of our Lord and Saviour do upon all occasions recommend this to us, as a principal duty and part of our religion ; telling us, that in Christ Jesus, that is, in the Christian religion, nothing will avail, no not faith itself, unless it be enlivened and inspired by charity ; that love is the end of the commandment, *τέλος τῆς παραγγελίας*, the end of the evangelical declaration, the first “fruit of the Spirit,” the spring and root of all those graces and virtues which concern our duty towards one another : that it is the sum and abridgment, the accomplishment and fulfilling of the whole law : that without this, whatever we pretend to in Christianity, we are nothing, and our religion is vain : that this is the greatest of all graces and virtues, greater than faith and hope ; and of perpetual use and duration. Charity never fails.

And therefore, they exhort above all things to endeavour after it, as the crown of all other virtues : “above all things have fervent charity among yourselves,” saith St. Peter : and St. Paul, having enumerated most other Christian virtues, exhorts us above all, to strive after this—“and above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfection.” This St. John makes one of the most certain

signus of our love to God, and the want of it an undeniable argument of the contrary: "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he who loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" This he declares to be one of the best evidences that we are in a state of grace and salvation; "hereby we know that we are passed from death to life, because we love the brethren."

So that, well might our blessed Saviour choose this for the badge of his disciples, and make it the great precept of the most perfect institution: other things might have served better for pomp and ostentation, and have more gratified the curiosity, or enthusiasm, or superstition of mankind; but there is no quality in the world, which, upon a sober and impartial consideration, is of a more solid and intrinsic value.

And in the first ages of Christianity, the Christians were very eminent for this virtue, and particularly noted for it; *Nobis notam inurit apud quosdam*, "it is a mark and brand set upon us by some," saith Tertullian; and he tells us, that it was proverbially said among the heathen, "Behold how these Christians love one another." Lucian, that great scoffer at all religion, acknowledgeth in behalf of Christians, that this was the great principle which their Master had instilled into them. And Julian, the bitterest enemy that Christianity ever had, could not forbear to propound to the heathen for an example the charity of the Galileans; for so, by way of reproach, he calls the Christians; "who (says he) gave themselves up to humanity and kindness;" which he acknowledgeth to have been very much to the advantage and reputation of our religion: and

in the same letter to Arsacius, the heathen high priest of Galatia, he gives this memorable testimony of the Christians, that their charity was not limited and confined only to themselves, but extended even to their enemies, which could not be said either of the Jews or heathens: his words are these: "It is a shame, that, when the Jews suffer none of their's to beg, and the impious Galileans relieve not only their own, but those also of our religion, that we only should be defective in so necessary a duty" By all which it is evident, that love and charity is not only the great precept of our Saviour, but was, in those first and best times, the general practice of his disciples, and acknowledged by the heathens as a very peculiar and remarkable quality in them.

The application I shall make of this discourse shall be threefold.

1. With relation to the church of Rome.
2. With regard to ourselves who profess the protestant reformed religion.
3. With a more particular respect to the occasion of this meeting.

1. First, With relation to the church of Rome; which we cannot choose but think of, whenever we speak of charity and loving one another; especially having had so late a discovery of their affection to us, and so considerable a testimony of the kindness and charity which they designed towards us: such as may justly make the ears of all that hear to tingle, and render popery execrable and infamous, a frightful and hateful thing to the end of the world.

It is now but too visible how grossly this great commandment of our Saviour is contradicted, not only by the practices of those in that communion, from the pope down to the meanest friar; but, by

the very doctrines and principles, by the genius and spirit of that religion, which is wholly calculated for cruelty and persecution. Where now is that mark of a disciple, so much insisted upon by our Lord and Master, to be found in that church? And yet, what is the Christian church but the society and community of Christ's disciples? Surely in all reason, that which our Lord made the distinctive mark and character of his disciples, should be the principal mark of a true church. Bellarmine reckons up no less than fifteen marks of the true church, all which the church of Rome arrogates to herself alone: but he wisely forgot that which is worth all the rest, and which our Saviour insists upon, as the chief of all other, a sincere love and charity to all Christians: this he knew would by no means agree to his own church.

But for all that it is very reasonable, that churches, as well as particular Christians, should be judged by their charity. The church of Rome would engross all faith to herself: faith in its utmost perfection, to the degree and pitch of infallibility: and they allow nobody in the world, besides themselves, no, though they believe all the articles of the apostles' creed, to have one grain of true faith; because they do not believe upon the authority of their church, which they pretend to be the only foundation of true faith. This is a most arrogant and vain pretence; but admit it were true, yet in the judgment of St. Paul, though they had all faith, if they have not charity, they are nothing.

The greatest wonder of all is this, that they who hate and persecute Christians most, do all this while, the most confidently of all others, pretend to be the disciples of Christ, and will allow none to be so but



themselves. That church, which excommunicates all other Christian churches in the world, and if she could, would extirpate them out of the world, will yet needs assume to herself to be the only Christian church: as if our Saviour had said, "Hereby shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye hate, and excommunicate, and kill one another." What shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue? thou empty and impudent pretence of Christianity?

2. Secondly, With relation to ourselves, who profess the protestant reformed religion. How is this great precept of our Saviour not only shamefully neglected, but plainly violated by us? And that not only by private hatred and ill-will, quarrels and contentions in our civil conversation and intercourse with one another; but, by most unchristian divisions and animosities in that common relation wherein we stand to one another, as brethren, as Christians as protestants.

"Have we not all one Father?" hath not one God created us? And are we not in a more peculiar and eminent manner brethren, being "all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ?" Are we not all members of the same body, and partakers of the same Spirit, and heirs of the same blessed hopes of eternal life?

So that being brethren upon so many accounts, and by so many bonds and endearments, all united one to another, and all travelling towards the same heavenly country, why do we fall out by the way, since we be brethren? Why do we not, as becomes brethren, dwell together in unity? but are so apt to quarrel and break out into heats, to crumble into sects and parties, to divide and separate from one another upon every slight and trifling occasion.

Give me leave a little more fully to expostulate this matter; but very calmly, and in the spirit of meekness, and in the name of our dear Lord, who loved us at such a rate as to die for us, to recommend to you this new commandment of his, that ye love one another: which is almost a new commandment still, and hardly the worse for wearing; so seldom is it put on, and so little hath it been practised among Christians for several ages.

Consider seriously with yourselves; ought not the great matters wherein we are agreed, our union in the doctrines of the Christian religion, and in all the necessary articles of that faith which was once delivered to the saints, in the same sacraments, and in all the substantial parts of God's worship, and in the great duties and virtues of the Christian life, to be of greater force to unite us, than difference in doubtful opinions, and in little rites and circumstances of worship to divide and break us?

Are not the things, about which we differ, in their nature indifferent? that is, things about which there ought to be no difference among wise men? are they not at a great distance from the life and essence of religion, and rather good or bad as they tend to the peace and unity of the church, or are made use of to schism and faction, than either necessary or evil in themselves? And shall little scruples weigh so far with us, as, by breaking the peace of the church about them, to endanger our whole religion? Shall we take one another by the throat for a hundred pence, when our common adversary stands ready to clap upon us an action of ten thousand talents? Can we in good earnest be contented, that, rather than the surplice should not be thrown out, popery should come in; and rather than receive the sacra-

ment in the humble, but indifferent posture of kneeling, to swallow the camel of transubstantiation, and adore the elements of bread and wine for our God and Saviour? and rather than to submit to a set form of prayer, to have the service of God performed in an unknown tongue?

Are we not yet made sensible, at least in this our day, by so clear a demonstration as the providence of God hath lately given us: and had not he been infinitely merciful to us, might have proved the dearest and most dangerous experiment that ever was: I say, are we not yet convinced, what mighty advantages our enemies have made of our divisions, and what a plentiful harvest they have had among us, during our differences, and upon occasion of them: and how near their religion was to have entered in upon us at once, at those wide breaches which we had made for it? And will we still take counsel of our enemies, and choose to follow that course, to which, of all other, they who hate us and seek our ruin, would most certainly advise and direct us? Will we freely offer them that advantage which they would be contented to purchase at any rate?

Let us, after all our sad experience, at last take warning to keep a steadfast eye upon our chief enemy, and not suffer ourselves to be diverted from the consideration and regard of our greatest danger by the petty provocations of our friends; so I choose to call those who dissent from us in lesser matters, because I would fain have them so, and they ought in all reason to be so: but however they behave themselves, we ought not much to mind those who only fling dirt at us, whilst we are sure there are others who fly at our throats, and strike at our very hearts.

Let us learn this wisdom of our enemies, who, though they have many great differences among themselves, yet they have made a shift, at this time, to unite together to destroy us: and shall not we do as much to save ourselves?

———*Fas est et ab hoste doceri.*

It was a principle among the ancient Romans, a brave and a wise people, *donare inimicitias Reipublicæ*, to give up and sacrifice their private enmities and quarrels to the public good, and the safety of the commonwealth. And is it not to every considerate man as clear as the sun at noon-day, that nothing can maintain and support the protestant religion amongst us, and found our church upon a rock; so that, when the rain falls, and the winds blow, and the floods beat upon it, it shall stand firm and unshaken: that nothing can be a bulwark of sufficient force to resist all the arts and attempts of popery, but an established national religion, firmly united and compacted in all the parts of it? Is it not plain to every eye, that little sects and separate congregations can never do it? but will be like a foundation of sand to a weighty building, which, whatever show it may make, cannot stand long, because it wants union at the foundation, and for that reason must necessarily want strength and firmness.

It is not for private persons to undertake in matters of public concernment; but I think we have no cause to doubt, but the governors of our church (notwithstanding all the advantages of authority, and we think of reason too on our side) are persons of that piety and prudence, that for peace sake, and in order to a firm union among protestants, they

would be content, if that would do it, not to insist upon little things; but to yield them up, whether to the infirmity or importunity, or perhaps in some very few things, to the plausible exceptions of those who differ from us.

But then, surely, on the other side, men ought to bring along with them a peaceable disposition, and a mind ready to comply with the church in which they were born and baptized, in all reasonable and lawful things; and desirous upon any terms that are tolerable, to return to the communion of it: a mind free from passion and prejudice, from peevish exceptions, and groundless and endless scruples; not apt to insist upon little cavils and objections, to which the very best things, and the greatest and the clearest truths in the world, are and always will be liable; and whatever they have been heretofore, to be "henceforth no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness of those who lie in wait to deceive."

And if we were thus affected on all hands, we might yet be a happy church and nation; if we would govern ourselves by these rules, and walk according to them, "peace would be upon us, and mercy, and on the Israel of God."

3. Thirdly, I shall conclude all with a few words in relation to the occasion of this present meeting. I have all this while been recommending to you, from the authority and example of our blessed Saviour, and from the nature and reason of the thing itself, this most excellent grace and virtue of charity, in the most proper acts and instances of it: but besides particular acts of charity to be exercised upon emergent occasions, there are likewise charitable

customs which are highly commendable, because they are more certain and constant, of a larger extent, and of a longer continuance—as the meeting of the sons of the clergy, which is now formed and established into a charitable corporation; and the anniversary meetings of those of the several counties of England, who reside, or happen to be in London, for two of the best and noblest ends that can be—the maintaining of friendship, and the promoting of charity. These, and others of the like kind, I call charitable customs, which of late years have very much obtained in this great and famous city; and it cannot but be a great pleasure and satisfaction to all good men, to see so generous, so humane, so Christian a disposition, to prevail and reign so much amongst us.

The strange overflowing of vice and wickedness in our land, and the prodigious increase and impudence of infidelity and impiety, hath of late years boded very ill to us, and brought terrible judgments upon this city and nation, and seems still to threaten us with more and greater: and the greatest comfort I have had, under these sad apprehensions of God's displeasure, hath been this, that though bad men were perhaps never worse in any age, yet the good, who I hope are not a few, were never more truly and substantially good. I do verily believe, there never were, in any time, greater and more real effects of charity; not from a blind superstition, and an ignorant zeal, and a mercenary and arrogant and presumptuous principle of merit, but from a sound knowledge, and a sincere love and obedience to God, or, as the apostle expresseth it, “out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.”

And who, that loves God and religion, can choose but take great contentment to see so general and forward an inclination in people this way? which hath been very much cherished of late years by this sort of meetings; and that to very good purpose and effect, in many charitable contributions disposed in the best and wisest ways; and which, likewise, hath tended very much to the reconciling of the minds of men, and the allaying of those fierce heats and animosities which have been caused by our civil confusions and religious distractions: for there is nothing many times wanting to take away prejudice, and to extinguish hatred and ill-will, but an opportunity for men to see and understand one another, by which they will quickly perceive that they are not such monsters as they have been represented one to another at a distance.

We are, I think, one of the last counties of England that have entered into this friendly and charitable kind of society. Let us make amends for our late setting out, by quickening our pace, so that we may overtake and outstrip those who are gone before us; let not our charity partake of the coldness of our climate, but let us endeavour that it may be equal to the extent of our country; and as we are incomparably the greatest county of England, let it appear that we are so by the largeness and extent of our charity.

“ O Lord, who hast taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing, send thy Holy Ghost, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace, and of all virtues: without which whosoever liveth is counted dead

before thee. Grant this for thy only Son Jesus Christ's sake."

"Now the God of Peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."



## SERMON XXI.

[Preached at Whitehall, April 4, 1679.]

*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.—1 JOHN iv. 1.*

THIS caution and counsel was given upon occasion of the false prophets and teachers that were risen up in the beginning of the Christian church, who endeavoured to seduce men from the true doctrine of the gospel, delivered by the apostles of our Lord and Saviour. And these teaching contrary things, could not both be from God; and therefore St. John calls upon Christians to examine the doctrines and pretences of those new teachers, whether they were from God or not. “Believe not every spirit;” that is, not every one that takes upon him to be inspired and to be a teacher come from God: “but try the spirits;” that is, examine those that make this pretence, whether it be real or not, and examine the doctrines which they bring, because there are many impostors abroad in the world.

This is the plain sense of the words, in which there are contained these four propositions.

First, That men may, and often do, falsely pretend to inspiration. And this is the reason upon which the apostle grounds this exhortation: “because many false prophets are gone out into the world;” therefore we should try who are true, and who are false.

Secondly, We are not to believe every one that

pretends to be inspired, and to teach a Divine doctrine. This follows upon the former, because men may falsely pretend to inspiration; therefore we are not to believe every one that makes this pretence. For any man that hath but confidence enough, and conscience little enough, may pretend to come from God. And if we admit all pretences of this kind, we lie at the mercy of every crafty and confident man to be led by him into what delusions he pleaseth.

Thirdly, Neither are we to reject all that pretend to come from God.—This is sufficiently implied in the text; for when the apostle says, “believe not every spirit,” he supposeth we are to believe some; and when he saith, “try the spirits, whether they be of God,” he supposeth some to be of God, and that those which are so are to be believed. These three observations are so plain, that I need only to name them to make way for the

Fourth, Which I principally designed to insist upon from these words. And that is this: that there is some way to discern mere pretenders to inspiration, from those who are truly and divinely inspired; and this is necessarily implied in the apostle’s bidding us to “try the spirits, whether they are of God.” For it were in vain to make any trial, if there be no way to discern between pretended and real inspiration.

Now the handling of this will give occasion to two very material inquiries, and useful to be resolved.

I. How we may discern between true and counterfeit doctrines: those which really are from God, and those which only pretend to be so.

II. To whom this judgment of discerning doth appertain.

I. How we may discern between true and counter-

feit doctrines and revelations. For the clearing of this I shall lay down these following propositions.

1. That reason is the faculty whereby revelations are to be discerned; or, to use the phrase in the text, it is that whereby we are to judge, what spirits are of God, and what not. For all revelation from God supposeth us to be men, and to be endued with reason; and, therefore, it does not create new faculties in us, but propounds new objects to that faculty which was in us before. Whatever doctrines God reveals to men are propounded to their understandings, and by this faculty we are to examine all doctrines which pretend to be from God, and upon examination to judge whether there be reason to receive them as Divine, or to reject them as impostures.

2. All supernatural revelation supposeth the truth of the principles of natural religion. We must first be assured that there is a God, before we can know that he hath made any revelation of himself: and we must know that his words are true, otherwise there were no sufficient reason to believe the revelations which he makes to us: and we must believe his authority over us, and that he will reward our obedience to his laws, and punish our breach of them; otherwise there would neither be sufficient obligation nor encouragement to obedience. These and many other things are supposed to be true, and naturally known to us, antecedently to all supernatural revelation, otherwise the revelations of God would signify nothing to us, nor be of any force with us.

3. All reasonings about Divine revelations must necessarily be governed by the principles of natural religion; that is, by those apprehensions which men naturally have of the Divine perfections, and

the clear notions of good and evil which are imprinted upon our natures. Because we have no other way to judge what is worthy of God, and credible to be revealed by him, and what not, but by the natural notions which we have of God and of his essential perfections, which, because we know him to be immutable, we have reason to believe he will never contradict. And by these principles, likewise, we are to interpret what God hath revealed; and when any doubt ariseth concerning the meaning of any Divine revelation (as that of the Holy Scriptures) we are to govern ourselves, in the interpretation of it, by what is most agreeable to those natural notions which we have of God, and we have all the reason in the world to reject that sense which is contrary thereto. For instance, when God is represented in Scripture as having a human shape, eyes, ears, and hands, the notions which men naturally have of the Divine nature and perfections do sufficiently direct us to interpret these expressions in a sense worthy of God, and agreeable to his perfections; and, therefore, it is reasonable to understand them as rather spoken to our capacity, and in a figure, than to be literally intended. And this will proportionably hold in many other cases.

4. Nothing ought to be received as a revelation from God which plainly contradicts the principles of natural religion, or overthrows the certainty of them. For instance, it were in vain to pretend a revelation from God, that there is no God, because this is a contradiction in terms.

So likewise to pretend a command from God, that we are to hate and despise him; because it is not credible that God should require any thing of reasonable creatures, so unsuitable to their natures,

and to their obligations to him; besides that such a law as this does tacitly involve a contradiction; because, upon such a supposition, to despise God would be to obey him, and yet to obey him is certainly to honour him. So that, in this case, to honour God and to despise him would be the same thing, and equal contempts of him. In like manner, it would be vain to pretend any revelation from God—that there is no life after this, nor rewards and punishments in another world; because this is contrary to those natural apprehensions which have generally possessed mankind, and would take away the main force and sanction of the Divine laws. The like may be said concerning any pretended revelation from God, which evidently contradicts those natural notions which men have of good and evil; as, that God should command or allow sedition and rebellion, perfidiousness and perjury; because the practice of these would be apparently destructive of the peace and happiness of mankind, and would naturally bring confusion into the world; but God is not the God of confusion but of order, which St. Paul appeals to as a principle naturally known. Upon the same account nothing ought to be entertained as a Divine revelation, which overthrows the certainty of the principles of natural religion; because that would take away the certainty of Divine revelation itself, which supposeth the truth of those principles. For instance, whoever pretends any revelation that brings the providence of God into question, does, by that very thing, make such a revelation questionable. For if God take no care of the world, have no concernment for human affairs, why should we believe that he makes any revelation of his will to

men? And, by this principle, Moses will have false prophets to be tried: (Deut. xiii. 1.) “If there arise among you a prophet, and giveth thee a sign or wonder, and the sign or wonder come to pass whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, and let us serve them, thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet.” And he gives the reason of this, (ver. 5.) “Because he hath spoken unto you to turn you away from the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt.” Here is a case wherein a false prophet is supposed to work a true miracle to give credit to his doctrine (which, in other cases, the Scripture makes the sign of a true prophet); but yet in this case he is to be rejected as an impostor, because the doctrine he teacheth would draw men off from the worship of the true God, who is naturally known, and had manifested himself to the people of Israel in so miraculous a manner, by bringing them out of the land of Egypt. So that a miracle is not enough to give credit to a prophet who teacheth any thing contrary to that natural notion which men have, that there is but one God, who only ought to be worshipped.

5. Nothing ought to be received as a Divine doctrine and revelation, without good evidence that it is so; that is, without some argument sufficient to satisfy a prudent and considerate man. Now (supposing there be nothing in the matter of the revelation that is evidently contrary to the principles of natural religion, nor to any former revelation which hath already received a greater and more solemn attestation from God), miracles are owned by all mankind to be a sufficient testimony to any person, or doctrine, that they are from God. This was the testimony

which God gave to Moses to satisfy the people of Israel that he had sent him: (Exod. iv. 1, 2.) "Moses said, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice; for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee." Upon this God endues him with a power of miracles, to be an evidence to them, "that they may believe that the God of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, hath appeared unto thee." And all along, in the Old Testament, when God sent his prophets to make a new revelation, or upon any strange and extraordinary message, he always gave credit to them by some sign or wonder which they foretold or wrought. And when he sent his Son into the world, he gave testimony to him by innumerable, great, and unquestionable miracles, more and greater than Moses and all the prophets had wrought. And there was great reason for this, because our Saviour came, not only to publish a new religion to the world, but to put an end to that religion which God had instituted before. And now that the gospel hath had the confirmation of such miracles as never were wrought upon any other occasion, no evidence, inferior to this, can in reason control this revelation, or give credit to any thing contrary to it. And, therefore, though the false prophets and antichrists, foretold by our Saviour, did really work miracles, yet they were so inconsiderable, in comparison of our Saviour's, that they deserve no credit in opposition to that revelation which had so clear a testimony given to it from Heaven, by miracles, besides all other concurring arguments to confirm it.

6. And lastly, no argument is sufficient to prove a doctrine or revelation to be from God, which is not clearer and stronger than the difficulties and ob-

jections against it: because all assent is grounded upon evidence, and the strongest clearest evidence always carries it: but where the evidence is equal on both sides, that can produce nothing but a suspense and doubt in the mind, whether the thing be true or not. If Moses had not confuted Pharaoh's magicians, by working miracles which they could not work, they might reasonably have disputed it with him, who had been the true prophet; but when he did works plainly above the power of their magic and the devil to do, then they submitted and acknowledged that there was the finger of God. So likewise, though a person work a miracle (which ordinarily is a good evidence that he is sent by God), yet if the doctrine he brings be plainly contrary to those natural notions which we have of God, this is a better objection against the truth of this doctrine than the other is a proof of it; as is plain in the case which Moses puts, Deut. xiii. which I mentioned before.

Upon the same account, no man can reasonably believe the doctrine of transubstantiation to be revealed by God; because every man hath as great evidence that transubstantiation is false, as any man can pretend to have that God hath revealed any such thing. Suppose transubstantiation to be part of the Christian doctrine, it must have the same confirmation with the whole, and that is miracles: but of all doctrines in the world, it is peculiarly incapable of being proved by a miracle. For, if a miracle were wrought for the proof of it, the very same assurance which a man hath of the truth of the miracle, he hath of the falsehood of the doctrine; that is, the clear evidence of his senses for both. For, that there is a miracle wrought to prove,



that what he sees in the sacrament is not bread, but the body of Christ, he hath only the evidence of his senses; and he hath the very same evidence to prove, that what he sees in the sacrament, is not the body of Christ, but bread. So that here ariseth a new controversy, whether a man should believe his senses giving testimony against the doctrine of transubstantiation, or bearing testimony to the miracle which is wrought to confirm that doctrine; for there is just the same evidence against the truth of the doctrine, which there is for the truth of the miracle. So that the argument for transubstantiation, and the objection against it, do just balance one another; and where the weights in both scales are equal, it is impossible that the one should weigh down the other: and consequently, transubstantiation is not to be proved by a miracle; for that would be, to prove to a man by something that he sees, that he does not see what he sees.

And thus I have endeavoured, as briefly and clearly as I could, to give satisfaction to the first inquiry I propounded, viz. How we may discern between true and counterfeit revelations and doctrines: I proceed now to

II. To whom this judgment of discerning does appertain. Whether to Christians in general, or to some particular person or persons, authorized by God to judge for the rest of mankind, by whose judgment all men are concluded and bound up. And this is an inquiry of no small importance; because it is one of the most fundamental points in difference between us and the church of Rome. And however, in many particular controversies, as concerning transubstantiation, the communion in one kind, the service of God in an unknown tongue,

the business of indulgences, the invocation of saints, the worship of images, they are not able to offer any thing that is fit to move a reasonable and considerate man; yet in this controversy, concerning the judge of controversies, they are not destitute of some specious appearance of reason, which deserves to be weighed and considered. Therefore, that we may examine this matter to the bottom, I shall do these three things:—

1. Lay down some cautions and limitations whereby we may understand how far the generality of Christians are allowed to judge in matters of religion.

2. I shall represent the grounds of this principle.

3. Endeavour to satisfy the main objections of our adversaries against it; and likewise to shew, that there is no such reason and necessity for an universal infallible judge as they pretend.

1. I shall lay down some cautions and limitations, by which we may understand how far the generality of Christians are allowed to judge in matters of religion.

First, Private persons are only to judge for themselves, and not to impose their judgment upon others, as if they had any authority over them. And this is reasonable, because if it were otherwise, a man would deprive others of that liberty which he assumes to himself, and which he can claim upon no other account, but because it belongs to others equally with himself.

Secondly, This liberty of judging, is not so to be understood as to take away the necessity and use of guides and teachers in religion. Nor can this be denied to be a reasonable limitation; because the knowledge of revealed religion, is not a thing born with us, nor ordinarily supernaturally infused

into men ; but is to be learned as other things are. And if it be to be learned, there must be some to teach and instruct others ; and they that will learn, must be modest and humble ; and in those things, of which they are no competent judges, they must give credit to their teachers, and trust their skill : for instance, every unlearned man is to take it upon the credit of those who are skilful, that the Scriptures are truly and faithfully translated ; and for the understanding of obscure texts of Scripture, and more difficult points in religion, he is to rely upon those whose proper business and employment it is to apply themselves to the understanding of these things. For in these cases, every man is not capable of judging himself, and therefore he must necessarily trust others ; and in all other things, he ought to be modest ; and unless it be in plain matters which every man can judge of, he ought rather to distrust himself than his teacher.

And this respect may be given to a teacher, without either supposing him to be infallible, or making an absolute resignation of my judgment to him. A man may be a very able teacher (suppose of the mathematics), and fit to have the respect which is due to a teacher, though he be not infallible in those sciences ; and because infallibility is not necessary to such a teacher, it is neither necessary nor convenient, that I should absolutely resign up my judgment to him. For though I have reason to credit him within the compass of his art, in things which I do not know, I am not therefore bound to believe him in things plainly contrary to what I and all mankind do certainly know. For example : if, upon pretence of his skill in arithmetic, which I am learning of him, he should tell me, that twice two do

no not make four, but five; though I believed him to be the best mathematician in the world, yet I cannot believe him in this thing; nor is there reason I should, because I did not come to learn this of him, but knew as much of that before, as he, or any man else could tell me. The case is the same in matters of religion, in which there are some things so plain, and lie so level to all capacities, that every man is almost equally judge of them: as I shall have occasion further to shew by and by.

Thirdly, Neither doth this liberty of judging exempt men from a due submission and obedience to their teachers and governors. Every man is bound to obey the lawful commands of his governors; and what by public consent and authority is determined and established, ought not to be gainsaid by private persons, but upon very clear evidence of the falsehood, or unlawfulness of it. And this is every man's duty, for the maintaining of order and out of regard to the peace and unity of the church, which is not to be violated upon every scruple and frivolous pretence: and when men are perverse and disobedient, authority is judge, and may restrain and punish them.

Fourthly, Nor do I so far extend this liberty of judging in religion, as to think every man fit to dispute the controversies of religion. A great part of people are ignorant, and of so mean a capacity, as not to be able to judge of the force of a very good argument, much less of the issue of a long dispute; and such persons ought not to engage in disputes of religion; but to beg God's direction, and to rely upon their teachers; and above all, to live up to the plain dictates of natural light, and the clear commands of God's word, and this will be their best

security. And if the providence of God hath placed them under such guides as do seduce them into error, their ignorance is invincible, and God will not condemn them for it, so long as they sincerely endeavour to do the will of God, so far as they know it. And this being the case of many, especially in the church of Rome, where ignorance is so industriously cherished, I have so much charity as to hope well concerning many of them: and seeing that church teaches and enjoins the people to worship images, it is in some sense charitably done of them, not to let them know the second commandment, that they may not be guilty of sinning against so plain a law.

Having premised these cautions, I proceed in the 2d. Place, to represent to you the grounds of this principle of our religion; viz. that we allow private persons to judge for themselves in matters of religion.

First, Because many things in religion, especially those which are most necessary to be believed and practised, are so plain, that every man of ordinary capacity, after competent instruction in matters of religion (which is always to be supposed), can as well judge of them for himself, as any man, or company of men, in the world can judge for him, because in these he hath a plain rule to go by—natural light and clear revelation of Scripture. And this is no new principle of the protestants, but most expressly owned by the ancient Fathers. “Whatever things are necessary, are plain,” saith St. Chrysostom. “All things are plainly contained in Scripture which concern faith and a good life,” saith St. Austin. And nothing can be more reasonable, than that those things which are plain to every man should be left to every man’s judgment: for every man can judge

of what is plain—of evident truth and falsehood, virtue and vice, of doctrine and laws plainly delivered in Scripture, if we believe any thing to be so, which is next to madness to deny. I will refer it to no man's judgment upon earth to determine for me, Whether there be a God or not? Whether murder or perjury be sins? Whether it be not plain in Scripture, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that he became man, and died for us, and rose again? So that there is no need of a judge in these cases; nor can I possibly believe any man to be so absolutely infallible, as not to call his infallibility into question, if he determines any thing contrary to what is plain and evident to all mankind. For if he should determine that there is no God, or that he is not to be worshipped, or that he will not punish and reward men, or, which is the case that Bellarmine puts, that virtue is vice, and vice virtue, he would hereby take away the very foundation of religion; and how can I look upon him any longer as a judge in matters of religion, when there can be no such thing as religion, if he have judged and determined right.

Secondly, The Scripture plainly allows this liberty to particular and private persons to judge for themselves. And for this I need go no farther than my text, which bids men “try the spirits whether they be of God.” I do not think this is spoken only to the pope or a general council, but to Christians in general; for to these the apostle writes. Now, if St. John had believed that God had constituted an infallible judge in his church, to whose sentence and determination all Christians are bound to submit, he ought in all reason to have referred Christians to him, for the trial of spirits, and not have left it to every man's private judgment to examine and to de-

termine these things. But it seems St. Paul was likewise of the same mind; and though he was guided by an infallible Spirit, yet he did not expect that men should blindly submit to his doctrine: nay, so far is he from that, that he commends the Bereans for that very thing for which I dare say the church of Rome would have checked them most severely; namely, for searching the Scriptures to see whether those things which the apostles delivered were so or not. This liberty St. Paul allowed; and though he was inspired by God, yet he treated those whom he taught like men. And, indeed, it were a hard case that a necessity of believing Divine revelations, and rejecting impostures, should be imposed upon Christians; and yet the liberty of judging, whether a doctrine be from God or not, should be taken away from them.

Thirdly, Our adversaries themselves are forced to grant that which in effect is as much as we contend for. For though they deny a liberty of judging in particular points of religion, yet they are forced to grant men a liberty of judging upon the whole. When they of the church of Rome would persuade a Jew or a heathen to become a Christian, or a heretic (as they are pleased to call us) to come over to the communion of their church, and offer arguments to induce them thereunto: they do by this very thing, whether they will or no, make that man judge which is the true church, and the true religion; because it would be ridiculous to persuade a man to turn to their religion, and to urge him with reasons to do so, and yet to deny him the use of his own judgment, whether their reasons be sufficient to move them to make such a change. Now, as the apostle reasons in another case, if men be fit to judge for themselves

in so great and important a matter as the choice of their religion, why should they be thought unworthy to judge in lesser matters? They tell us, indeed, that a man may use his judgment in the choice of his religion; but when he hath once chosen, he is then for ever to resign up his judgment to their church. But what tolerable reason can any man give, why a man should be fit to judge upon the whole, and yet unfit to judge upon particular points? especially if it be considered, that no man can make a discreet judgment of any religion, before he hath examined the particular doctrines of it, and made a judgment concerning them. Is it credible that God should give a man judgment in the most fundamental and important matter of all, viz. to discern the true religion, and the true church, from the false; for no other end, but to enable him to choose once for all to whom he should resign and enslave his judgment for ever? which is just as reasonable as if one should say, that God hath given a man eyes for no other end, but to look out once for all, and to pitch upon a discreet person to lead him about blindfold all the days of his life. I come now to the

3d. Thing I propounded, which is, to answer the main objection of our adversaries against this principle; and likewise to shew that there is no such reason and necessity for an universal infallible judge as they pretend. Now, their great objection is this—If every man may judge for himself, there will be nothing but confusion in religion, there will be no end of controversies: so that an universal infallible judge is necessary; and without this God hath not made sufficient provision for the assurance of men's faith, and for the peace and unity of his church: or, as it is expressed in the canon law, *aliter Do-*



*minus non videretur fuisse discretus*; “otherwise our Lord had not seemed to be discreet.” How plausible soever this objection may appear, I do not despair, but if men will lay aside prejudice, and impartially consider things, to make it abundantly evident, that this ground is not sufficient to found an infallible judge upon. And therefore in answer to it, I desire these following particulars may be considered :

First, That this which they say rather proves what God should have done according to their fancy, than what he hath really and actually done. My text expressly bids Christians to “try the spirits,” which to any man’s sense does imply that they may judge of these matters: but the church of Rome says they may not; because, if this liberty were permitted, God had not ordered things wisely, and for the best, for the peace and unity of his church. But, as the apostle says, in another case, “What art thou, O man, that objectest against God?”

Secondly, If this reasoning be good, we may as well conclude that there is an universal infallible judge set over the whole world in all temporary matters, to whose authority all mankind is bound to submit; because this is as necessary to the peace of the world, as the other is to the peace of the church. And men surely are every whit as apt to be obstinate and perverse about matters of temporal right, as about matters of faith. But it is evident, in fact and experience, that there is no such universal judge appointed by God over the whole world, to decide all cases of temporal right; and for want of him the world is fain to shift as well as it can. But now a very acute and scholastical man, that would argue that God must needs have done whatever he fancies convenient for the world should be done,

might by the very same way of reasoning conclude, the necessity of an universal infallible judge in civil matters as well as in matters of religion: and their *aliter Dominus non videretur fuisse discretus*, “otherwise God hath not seemed to be discreet,” is every whit as cogent and as civil, in the one case as the other.

Thirdly, There is no need of such a judge, to assure men in matters of religion; because men may be sufficiently certain without him. I hope it may be certain and clear enough, that there is a God; and that his providence governs the world: and that there is another life after this, though neither pope nor council had ever declared any thing about these matters. And for revealed doctrines, we may be certain enough of all that is necessary, if it be true which the Fathers tell us, that all things necessary are plainly revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

Fourthly, An infallible judge, if there were one, is no certain way to end controversies, and to preserve the unity of the church; unless it were likewise infallibly certain, that there is such a judge, and who he is. For till men were sure of both these, there would still be a controversy whether there be an infallible judge, and who he is. And if it be true which they tell us, that without an infallible judge controversies cannot be ended, then a controversy concerning an infallible judge can never be ended. And there are two controversies actually on foot; about an infallible judge; one, whether there be an infallible judge or not? which is a controversy between us and the church of Rome: and the other, who this infallible judge is? which is a controversy among themselves, which could never yet be decided: and yet, till it be decided, infallibility, if they

had it, would be of no use to them for the ending of controversies.

Fifthly, There is no such absolute need, as is pretended, of determining all controversies in religion. If men would divest themselves of prejudice and interest, as they ought, in matters of religion, the necessary things of religion are plain enough, and men would generally agree well enough about them; but, if men will suffer themselves to be biassed by these, they would not hearken to an infallible judge, if there were one; or they would find out some way or other to call his infallibility into question. And as for doubtful and lesser matters in religion, charity and mutual forbearance among Christians would make the church as peaceable and happy as perhaps it was ever designed to be in this world, without absolute unity in opinion.

Sixthly, and lastly, Whatever may be the inconveniences of men's judging for themselves in religion, yet, taking this principle with the cautions I have given, I doubt not to make it appear, that the inconveniences are far the least on that side. The present condition of human nature doth not admit of any constitution of things, whether in religion or civil matters, which is free from all kind of exception and inconvenience: that is the best state of things which is liable to the least and fewest. If men be modest and humble, and willing to learn, God hath done that, which is sufficient for the assurance of our faith, and for the peace of his church, without an infallible judge: and if men will not be so, I cannot tell what would be sufficient. I am sure there were heresies and schisms in the apostles' times, when those who governed the church, were certainly guided by an infallible Spirit. God hath appointed

guides and teachers for us in matters of religion, and if we will be contented to be instructed by them in those necessary articles and duties of religion, which are plainly contained in Scripture, and to be counselled and directed by them, in things that are more doubtful and difficult, I do not see why we might not do well enough without any infallible judge or guide.

But still it will be said, who shall judge what things are plain and what doubtful? The answer to this, in my opinion, is not difficult. For if there be any thing plain in religion, every man that hath been duly instructed in the principles of religion can judge of it—or else it is not plain. But there are some things in religion so very plain, that no guide or judge can in reason claim that authority over men, as to oblige them to believe or do the contrary; no, though he pretend to infallibility; no, though he were an apostle, though he were “an angel from heaven.” St. Paul puts the case so high: (Gal. i. 8.) “Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than what you have received, let him be accursed:” which plainly supposeth, that Christians may and can judge, when doctrines are contrary to the gospel. What! not believe an apostle, nor “an angel from heaven,” if he should teach any thing evidently contrary to the plain doctrine of the gospel? If he should determine virtue to be vice, and vice to be virtue? No: not an apostle, nor an angel; because such a doctrine as this would confound and overturn all things in religion. And yet, Bellarmine puts this very case, and says, if the pope should so determine, “we were bound to believe him, unless we would sin against conscience.”

I will conclude this discourse by putting a very

plain and familiar case; by which it will appear, what credit and authority is fit to be given to a guide, and what not. Suppose I came a stranger into England, and landing at Dover, took a guide there to conduct me in my way to York, which I knew before by the map to lie north of Dover: having committed myself to him, if he lead me for two or three days together out of any plain road, and many times over hedge and ditch, I cannot but think it strange, that in a civil and well-inhabited country, there should be no highways from one part of it to another: yet, thus far I submit to him, though not without some regret and impatience. But then, if after this, for two or three days more, he lead me directly south, and with my face full upon the sun at noon-day, and at last bring me back again to Dover Pier, and still bids me follow him: then, certainly, no modesty does oblige a man not to dispute with his guide, and to tell him, surely that can be no way, because it is sea. Now, though he set never so bold a face upon the matter, and tell me with all the gravity and authority in the world, that it is not the sea but dry land, under the species and appearance of water; and that, whatever my eyes tell me, having once committed myself to his guidance, I must not trust my own senses in the case; it being one of the most dangerous sorts of infidelity for a man to believe his own eyes, rather than his faithful and infallible guide: all this moves me not; but I begin to expostulate roundly with him, and to let him understand, that if I must not believe what I see, he is like to be of no farther use to me; because I shall not be able, at this rate, to know whether I have a guide, and whether I follow him or not. In short, I tell him plainly, that when I took him for

my guide, I did not take him to tell me the difference between north and south, between a hedge and a highway, between sea and dry land ; all this I knew before, as well as he or any man else could tell me ; but I took him to conduct and direct me the nearest way to York. And, therefore, after all his impertinent talk, after all his motives of credibility to persuade me to believe him, and all his confident sayings, which he gravely calls demonstrations, I stand stiffly upon the shore, and leave my learned and reverend guide to take his own course, and to dispose of himself as he pleaseth ; but firmly resolve not to follow him. And is any man to be blamed that breaks with his guide upon these terms ?

And this is truly the case, when a man commits himself to the guidance of any person or church : if, by virtue of this authority, they will needs persuade me out of my senses, and not to believe what I see, but what they say ; that virtue is vice, and vice virtue, if they declare them to be so ; and that, because they say they are infallible, I am to receive all their dictates for oracles, though never so evidently false and absurd in the judgment of all mankind : in this case, there is no way to be rid of these unreasonable people, but to desire of them, since one kindness deserves another, and all contradictions are alike easy to be believed, that they would be pleased to believe that infidelity is faith, and that when I absolutely renounce their authority, I do yield a most perfect submission and obedience to it.

Upon the whole matter, all the revelations of God, as well as the laws of men, go upon this presumption, that men are not stark fools ; but that they will consider their interest, and have some regard to the great concernment of their eternal salvation.

And this is as much to secure men from mistake in matters of belief, as God hath afforded to keep men from sin in matters of practice. He hath made no effectual and infallible provision that men shall not sin; and yet it would puzzle any man to give a good reason, why God should take more care to secure men against errors in belief, than against sin and wickedness in their lives.

I shall now only draw three or four inferences from this discourse which I have made, and so conclude.

1. That it is every man's duty, who hath ability and capacity for it, to endeavour to understand the grounds of his religion. For to try doctrines, is to inquire into the grounds and reasons of them; which the better any man understands, the more firmly he will be established in the truth, and be the more resolute in the day of trial, and the better able to withstand the arts and assaults of cunning adversaries and the fierce storms of persecution. And, on the contrary, that man will soon be moved from his steadfastness, who never examined the grounds and reasons of his belief. When it comes to the trial, he that hath but little to say for his religion, will probably neither do nor suffer much for it.

2. That all doctrines are vehemently to be suspected which decline trial, and are so loath to be brought into the light; which will not endure a fair examination, but magisterially require an implicit faith: whereas, truth is bold and full of courage, and loves to appear openly; and is so secure and confident of her own strength as to offer herself to the severest trial and examination. But to deny all liberty of inquiry and judgment, in matters of religion, is the greatest injury and disparagement to truth that can be, and a tacit acknowledgment that

she lies under some disadvantage, and that there is less to be said for her than for error.

I have often wondered why the people in the church of Rome do not suspect their teachers and guides, to have some ill design upon them, when they do so industriously debar them of the means of knowledge, and are so very loath to let them understand what it is that we have to say against their religion. For can any thing in the world be more suspicious, than to persuade men to put out their eyes, upon promise that they will help them to a much better and more faithful guide? If any church, any profession of men, be unwilling their doctrines should be exposed to trial, it is a certain sign they know something in them that is faulty, and which will not endure the light. This is the account which our Saviour gives us in a like case; it was, because men's deeds were evil, that they "loved darkness rather than light." For, "every one that doeth evil hateth the light; neither cometh he to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd: but he that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God."

3. Since reason and Christianity allow this liberty to private persons to judge for themselves in matters of religion, we should use this privilege with much modesty and humility, with great submission and deference to our spiritual rulers and guides, whom God hath appointed in his church. And there is very great need of this caution, since by experience we find this liberty so much abused by many, to the nourishing of pride and self-conceit, of division and faction; and those who are least able to judge, to be frequently the most forward and confident, the most peremptory and perverse: and



instead of demeaning themselves with the submission of learners, to assume to themselves the authority of judges, even in the most doubtful and disputable matters.

The tyranny of the Roman church over the minds and consciences of men, is not to be justified upon any account; but nothing puts so plausible a colour upon it, as the ill use that is too frequently made of this natural privilege of men's judging for themselves in a matter of so infinite concernment, as that of their eternal happiness. But then it is to be considered, that the proper remedy in this case, is not to deprive men of this privilege, but to use the best means to prevent the abuse of it. For though the inconveniences arising from the ill use of it may be very great, yet the mischief on the other hand is intolerable. Religion itself is liable to be abused to very bad purposes, and frequently is so; but it is not therefore best that there should be no religion: and yet this objection, if it be of any force, and pursued home, is every whit as strong against religion itself, as against men's liberty of judging in matters of religion. Nay, I add farther, that no man can judiciously embrace the true religion, unless he be permitted to judge whether that which he embraces be the true religion or not.

4. When upon due trial and examination we are well settled and established in our religion, "let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering;" and not be "like children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, through the sleight of men, and the cunning craftiness of those who lie in wait to deceive." And, above all, let us resolve to live according to the excellent rules and precepts of our holy religion; let us heartily

obey that doctrine which we profess to believe. We, who enjoy the protestant religion, have all the means and advantages of understanding the will of God, free liberty and full scope of inquiring into it; and informing ourselves concerning it: we have all the opportunities we can wish of coming to the knowledge of our duty: the oracles of God lie open to us, and his law is continually before our eyes; "his word is nigh unto us, in our mouths, and in our hearts, (that is, we may read it and meditate upon it) that we may do it:" the key of knowledge is put into our hands, so that if we do not "enter into the kingdom of heaven," it is we ourselves that shut ourselves out. And where there is nothing to hinder us from the knowledge of our duty, there certainly nothing can excuse us from the practice of it. For the end of all knowledge is to direct men in their duty, and effectually to engage them to the performance of it: the great business of religion is, to make men truly good, and to teach them to live well. And if religion have not this effect, it matters not of what church any man lists and enters himself; for most certainly, a bad man can be saved in none. Though a man know the right way to heaven never so well, and be entered into it, yet, if he will not walk therein, he shall never come thither: nay, it will be an aggravation of this man's unhappiness, that he was lost in the way to heaven, and perished in the very road to salvation. But if we will in good earnest apply ourselves to the practice of religion, and the obedience of God's holy laws, his grace will never be wanting to us to so good a purpose.

I have not time to recommend religion to you at large, with all its advantages. I will comprise what I have to say in a few words, and mind them at your

peril. Let that which is our great concernment be our great care, to know the truth and do it, to "fear God and keep his commandments." Considering the reasonableness and reward of piety and virtue, nothing can be wiser; considering the mighty assistance of God's grace, which he is ready to afford us, and the unspeakable satisfaction and delight which is to be had in the doing of our duty, nothing can be easier: nothing will give us that pleasure, while we live; nothing can minister that true and solid comfort to us, when we come to die: there is probably no such way for a man to be happy in this world; to be sure, there is no way but this to escape the intolerable and endless miseries of another world.

"Now God grant that we may all know and do, in this our day, the things that belong to our peace, for his mercies' sake in Jesus Christ: to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory now and for ever. Amen."

# DEDICATION

TO THE FOLLOWING SERMON.

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TO THE

RIGHT WORSHIPFUL, AND MY HONOURED FRIEND,

JOSEPH REEVE, Esq.

HIGH SHERIFF OF THE COUNTY OF SURRY.

SIR,

WHEN I had performed the service which you were pleased to call me to, in the preaching of this Sermon, I had no thoughts of making it more public; and yet, in this also, I was the more easily induced to comply with your desire, because of the suitability of the argument to the age in which we live; wherein, as men have run into the wildest extremities in other things, so particularly in the matter of oaths; some making conscience of taking any oaths at all, and too many none at all of breaking them.

To convince the great mistake of the one extreme, and to check the growing evil and mischief of the other, is the chief design of this discourse. To which I shall be very glad if, by God's blessing, it may prove any ways serviceable.

I am, SIR,

Your very faithful and humble servant,

JO. TILLOTSON.

## SERMON XXII.

[Preached at the Assizes held at Kingston-upon-Thames,  
July 21, 1681.]

### THE LAWFULNESS AND OBLIGATION OF OATHS.

*An oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife.*—HEB. vi. 16.

THE necessity of religion to the support of human society, in nothing appears more evidently than in this—that the obligation of an oath, which is so necessary for the maintenance of peace and justice among men, depends wholly upon the sense and belief of a Deity. For no reason can be imagined why any man, that doth not believe a God, should make the least conscience of an oath, which is nothing else but a solemn appeal to God as a witness of the truth of what we say. So that whoever promotes atheism and infidelity, doth the most destructive thing imaginable to human society, because he takes away the reverence and obligation of oaths; and whenever that is generally cast off, human society must disband, and all things run into disorder. The just sense whereof made David cry out to God with so much earnestness, as if the world had been cracking, and the frame of it ready to break in pieces. (Psal. xii.) “ Help, Lord, for the righteous man ceaseth, and the faithful fail from among the children of men:” intimating, that when faith fails from among men, nothing but a particular and immediate interposition of the Divine Providence can

preserve the world from falling into confusion. And our blessed Saviour gives this as a sign of the end of the world, and the approaching dissolution of all things, when faith and truth shall hardly be found among men: (Luke xviii. 8.) “When the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?” This state of things doth loudly call for his coming to destroy the world, which is even ready to dissolve and fall in pieces of itself, when these bands and pillars of human society do break and fail. And surely never in any age was this sign of the coming of the Son of man more glaring and terrible than in this degenerate age wherein we live, when almost all sorts of men seem to have broke loose from all obligations to faith and truth.

And therefore I do not know any argument more proper and useful to be treated of upon this occasion than of the nature and obligation of an oath, which is the utmost security that one man can give to another of the truth of what he says; the strongest tie of fidelity, the surest ground of judicial proceedings, and the most firm and sacred bond that can be laid upon all that are concerned in the administration of public justice: upon judge, and jury, and witnesses.

And for this reason I have pitched upon these words, in which the apostle declares to us the great use and necessity of oaths among men: “An oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife.” He had said before, that for our greater assurance and comfort, God hath confirmed his promises to us by an oath; condescending herein to deal with us after the manner of men, who, when they would give credit to a doubtful matter, confirm what they say by an oath. And, generally, when any doubt or

controversy ariseth between parties concerning a matter of fact, one side affirming and the other denying, an end is put to this contest by an oath; "An oath for confirmation" being to the man end of all strife. "An oath for confirmation," εἰς βεβαίωσιν, for the greater assurance and establishment of a thing: not that an oath is always a certain and infallible decision of things according to truth and right, but that this is the utmost credit that we can give to any thing, and the last effort of truth and confidence among men: after this we can go no farther; for if the religion of an oath will not oblige men to speak truth, nothing will. This is the utmost security that men can give, and must, therefore, be the final decision of all contest: "An oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife."

Now, from this assertion of the apostle, concerning the great use and end of oaths among men, I shall take occasion,

I. To consider the nature of an oath, and the kinds of it.

II. To shew the great use and even necessity of oaths, in many cases.

III. To vindicate the lawfulness of them where they are necessary.

IV. To shew the sacred obligation of an oath.

I shall be as brief in these as the just handling of them will bear.

I. For the nature of an oath, and the kinds of it. —An oath is an invocation of God, or an appeal to him as a witness of the truth of what we say. So that an oath is a sacred thing, as being an act of religion and an invocation of the name of God; and this, whether the name of God be expressly mentioned in it or not. If a man only say, I swear;

or, I take my oath, that a thing is, or is not, so or so, or that I will, or will not, do such a thing; or if a man answer upon his oath, being adjured and required so to do; or if a man swear by heaven or by earth, or by any other thing that hath relation to God—in all these cases a man doth virtually call God to witness, and in so doing he doth, by consequence, invoke him as a judge and an avenger, in case what he swears be not true: and if this be expressed the oath is a formal imprecation; but whether it be or not, a curse upon ourselves is always implied in case of perjury.

There are two sorts of oaths, assertory and promissory. An assertory oath is when a man affirms or denies, upon oath, a matter of fact, past or present: when he swears that a thing was, or is so, or not so. A promissory oath is a promise confirmed by an oath, which always respects something that is future; and if the promise be made directly and immediately to God, then it is called a vow; if to men, an oath. I proceed to the

II. Thing, which is to shew the great use and even necessity of oaths, in many cases, which is so great, that human society can very hardly, if at all, subsist long without them. Government would many times be very insecure, and for the faithful discharge of offices of great trust, in which the welfare of the public is nearly concerned, it is not possible to find any security equal to that of an oath; because the obligation of that reacheth to the most secret and hidden practices of men, and takes hold of them, in many cases, where the penalty of no human law can have any awe or force upon them; and especially it is (as the civil law expresseth it) *maximum expediendarum litium remedium*, the “best



means of ending controversies." And where men's estates or lives are concerned, no evidence, but what is assured by an oath, will be thought sufficient to decide the matter, so as to give full and general satisfaction to mankind. For in matters of so great concernment, when men have all the assurance that can be had, and not till then, they are contented to sit down and rest satisfied with it. And among all nations an oath hath always been thought the only peremptory and satisfactory way of deciding such controversies.

III. The third thing I proposed was, to vindicate the lawfulness of oaths, where they are necessary. And it is a very strong inducement to believe the lawfulness of them, that the unavoidable condition of human affairs hath made them so necessary. The apostle takes it for granted, that an oath is not only of great use in human affairs, but in many cases of great necessity, to confirm a doubtful thing, and to put an end to controversies which cannot otherwise be decided to the satisfaction of the parties contending: "An oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife." And, indeed, it is hardly imaginable that God should not have left that lawful, which is so evidently necessary to the peace and security of mankind.

But because there is a sect sprung up in our memory, which hath called in question the lawfulness of all oaths, to the great mischief and disturbance of human society, I shall endeavour to search this matter to the bottom, and to manifest how unreasonable and groundless this opinion is. And to this end, I shall,

First, Prove the lawfulness of oaths from the

authority of this text, and from the reasons plainly contained, or strongly implied in it.

Secondly, I shall shew the weakness and insufficiency of the grounds of the contrary opinion, whether from reason or from Scripture; which last they principally rely upon; and if it could be made out from thence, would determine the case.

1. I shall prove the lawfulness of oaths from the authority of this text, and the reasons plainly contained, or strongly implied in it.—Because the apostle doth not only speak of the use of oaths among men, without any manner of censure and reproof, but as a commendable custom and practice, and in many cases necessary for the confirmation of doubtful matters, and in order to the final decision of controversies and differences among men. For,

First, He speaks of it as the general practice of mankind, to confirm things by an oath, in order to the ending of differences. And indeed there is nothing that hath more universally obtained in all ages and nations of the world, than which there is not a more certain indication that a thing is agreeable to the law of nature and the best reason of mankind. And that this was no degenerate practice of mankind like that of idolatry, is from hence evident: that when God separated a people to himself, it was practised among them by the holy patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and was afterwards, not only allowed, but in many cases commanded, by the law of Moses, which, had it been a thing evil in itself, and forbidden by the law of nature, would not have been done.

Secondly, Another undeniable argument from the text of the lawfulness of oaths is, that God himself, in condescension to the custom of men, who use to confirm and give credit to what they say by an oath, is represented by the apostle as confirming his promise to us by an oath: (ver. 13.) “When God made the promise to Abraham, because he could swear by none greater, he swear by himself. For men verily swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation, is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath:” which he certainly would not have done, had an oath been unlawful in itself. For that had been to comply with men in an evil practice, and by his own good example to give countenance to it in the highest manner: but though God condescend to represent himself to us after the manner of men, he never does it in any thing that is, in its own nature, evil and sinful.

Thirdly, From the great usefulness of oaths in human affairs, to give credit and confirmation to our word, and to put an end to contestations. Now, that which serves to such excellent purposes, and is so convenient for human society, and for mutual security and confidence among men, ought not easily to be presumed unlawful, till it be plainly proved to be so. And if we consider the nature of an oath, and every thing belonging to it, there is nothing that hath the least appearance of evil in it. There is surely no evil in it, as it is an act of religion; nor, as it is an appeal to God as a witness and avenger in case we swear falsely; nor, as it is a confirmation of a doubtful matter; nor, as it puts an end to strife and controversy. And these are all the essential

ingredients of an oath, and the ends of it ; and they are all so good, that they rather commend it, than give the least colour of ground to condemn it. I proceed in the

Second place, To shew the weakness and insufficiency of the grounds of the contrary opinion, whether from reason or from Scripture.

First, From reason. They say the necessity of an oath is occasioned by the want of truth and fidelity among men ; and that every man ought to demean himself with that faithfulness and integrity as may give credit and confirmation to his word ; and then oaths will be needless. This pretence will be fully answered, if we consider these two things.

1. That in matters of great importance, no other obligation, besides that of an oath, hath been thought sufficient amongst the best and wisest of men, to assert their fidelity to one another. “ Even the best of men (to use the words of a great author) have not trusted the best men without it.” As we see in very remarkable instances, where oaths have passed between those who might be thought to have the greatest confidence in one another: as between Abraham and his old faithful servant Eliezer, concerning the choice of a wife for his son ; between father and son, Jacob and Joseph, concerning the burial of his father in the land of Canaan : between two of the dearest and most intimate friends, David and Jonathan, to assure their friendship to one another ; and it had its effect long after Jonathan’s death, in the saving of Mephibosheth, when reason of state and the security of his throne seemed to move David strongly to the contrary ; for it is expressly said, (2 Sam. xxi. 7.) that David “ spared Mephibosheth, Jonathan’s son, because of the oath

of the Lord that was between them;" implying, that had it not been for his oath, other considerations might probably have prevailed with him to have permitted him to have been cut off with the rest of Saul's children.

2. This reason, which is alleged against oaths among men, is much stronger against God's confirming his promises to us by an oath. For he, who is truth itself, is surely of all other most to be credited upon his bare word, and his oath needless to give confirmation to it; and yet he condescends to add his oath to his word; and therefore that reason is evidently of no force.

Secondly, From Scripture. Our Saviour seems altogether to forbid swearing in any case: (Matth. v. 33, 34.) "Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, thou shalt not forswear thyself; but I say unto you, swear not at all, neither by heaven, &c. But let your communication be yea, yea, and nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these, cometh of evil." And this law, St James recites, (chap. v. ver. 12.) as that which Christians ought to have a very particular and principal regard to: "Above all things, my brethren, swear not;" and he makes the breach of this law a damning sin, "lest ye fall into condemnation." But the authority of our Saviour alone is sufficient, and therefore I shall only consider that text.

And because here lies the main strength of this opinion of the unlawfulness of oaths, it is very fit that this text be fully considered; and that it be made very evident, that it was not our Saviour's meaning by this prohibition wholly to forbid the use of oaths.

But before I enter upon this matter, I will readily

grant, that there is scarce any error whatsoever, that hath a more plausible colour from Scripture, than this; which makes the case of those who are seduced into it the more pitiable: but then it ought to be considered, how much this doctrine of the unlawfulness of oaths reflects upon the Christian religion; since it is so evidently prejudicial both to human society in general, and particularly to those persons that entertain it; neither of which ought rashly to be supposed and taken for granted, concerning any law delivered by our Saviour: because upon these terms it will be very hard for us to vindicate the Divine wisdom of our Saviour's doctrine, and the reasonableness of the Christian religion. Of the inconvenience of this doctrine to human society, I have spoken already. But, besides this, it is very prejudicial to them that hold it. It renders them suspected to government, and in many cases incapable of the common benefits of justice and other privileges of human society, and exposeth them to great penalties, as the constitution of all laws and governments at present is, and it is not easy to imagine how they should be otherwise. And which is very considerable in this matter, it sets those who refuse oaths upon very unequal terms with the rest of mankind, if, where the estates and lives of men are equally concerned, their bare testimonies shall be admitted without an oath, and others shall be obliged to speak upon oath; nothing being more certain in experience than that many men will lie for their interest, when they will not be perjured, God having planted in the natural consciences of men a secret dread of perjury above most other sins. And this inconvenience is so great as to render those who refuse oaths in all cases al-

most intolerable to human society. I speak not this, either to bring them into trouble, or to persuade them to measure truth by their interest ; but, on the other hand, I must needs say, that it is no argument either of a wise or good man to take up any opinion, especially such an one as is greatly to his prejudice, upon slight grounds. And this very consideration, that it is so much to their inconvenience, may justly move them to be very careful in the examination of it.

This being premised, I come now to explain this prohibition of our Saviour ; and, to this purpose, I desire that these three things may be well considered.

First, That several circumstances of these words of our Saviour do manifestly shew, that they ought to be interpreted in a limited sense, as only forbidding swearing in common conversation ; needless and heedless oaths (as one expresseth it,) and in general all voluntary swearing, unless upon some great and weighty cause, in which the glory of God and the good of the souls of men is concerned. For that in such cases a voluntary oath may be lawful, I am induced to believe from the example of St. Paul, who useth it more than once upon such occasions ; of which I shall hereafter give particular instances.

And this was the sense of wise men among the heathen, that men should not swear but upon necessity and great occasion. Thus Eusebius, the philosopher in Stobæus, counsels men : “ Some,” says he, “ advise men to be careful to swear the truth ; but I advise principally that men do not easily swear at all ;” that is, not upon any slight, but only upon weighty occasions. To the same purpose Epictetus : “ Shun oaths wholly, if it be possible ; if not, however, as much as thou canst. And so likewise Simplicius, in his comment upon him : “ We ought

wholly to shun swearing, except upon occasions of great necessity. And Quintilian, among the Romans: *In totum jurare, nisi ubi necesse est, gravi viro parum convenit*; “to swear at all, except where it is necessary, does not well suit with a wise man.”

And that this prohibition of our Saviour’s ought to be understood of oaths in ordinary conversation, appears from the opposition which our Saviour makes, “Swear not at all; but let your communication be yea, yea;” that is, in your ordinary commerce and affairs do not interpose oaths, but say and do. And this is very much confirmed, in that our Saviour does not, under this general prohibition, instance in such oaths as are expressly by the name of God. The reason whereof is this: the Jews thought it unlawful in ordinary communication to swear expressly by the name of God; but lawful to swear by the creatures, as by heaven and earth, &c. So that our Saviour’s meaning is as if he had said, You think you may swear in common conversation, provided you do not swear by the name of God; but I say unto you, let your communication be without oaths, of any kind: you shall not so much as swear by heaven or by earth, because God is virtually invoked in every oath. And unless we suppose this to be our Saviour’s meaning, I do not see what good reason can be given why our Saviour should only forbid them to swear by the creatures, and not much rather by the name of God; such oaths being surely of all others most to be avoided, as being the most direct abuse and profanation of the name of God.

Secondly, It is very considerable to the explaining of this prohibition, that there are like general expressions in other Jewish authors concerning this



very matter, which yet must of necessity be thus limited:—Maimonides, from the ancient rabbies, gives this rule, that “it is best not to swear at all:” and Philo useth almost the same words. And Rabbi Jonathan comes very near our Saviour’s expression, when he says, “The just man will not swear at all; not so much as by the common names of God, nor by his attributes, nor by his works, as by heaven, or the angels, or by the law.” Now it is not imaginable, that these learned Jews should condemn oaths in all cases, when the law of Moses did in many cases expressly require them. And, therefore, they are to be understood of voluntary oaths in ordinary conversation. And that the Jews meant this by not swearing at all, seems to be very plain from a passage in Josephus, who says, that the sect of the Essenes forbad their disciples to swear at all; and yet he tells us, at the same time, that they who were admitted into that sect took an oath to observe the laws and rules of it. So that they who forbad to swear at all, allowed of oaths imposed by the authorities of superiors.

Thirdly, which will peremptorily decide this matter, This prohibition of our Saviour’s cannot be understood to forbid all oaths, without a plain contradiction to the undoubted practice of the primitive Christians, and of the apostles, and even of our Lord himself. Origen and Tertullian tell us, that the Christians refused to swear by the emperor’s genius; not because it was an oath, but because they thought it to be idolatrous. But the same Tertullian says, that the Christians were willing to swear *per salutem imperatoris*, “by the health and safety of the emperor.” Athanasius being accused to Constantius, purged himself by oath, and desired

that his accuser might be put to his oath, *sub attestazione veritatis*, “ by calling the truth to witness : by which form,” says he, “ we Christians are wont to swear.” But, which is more than this, St. Paul, upon weighty occasions, does several times in his epistles call God to witness for the truth of what he says ; which is the very formality of an oath, “ God is my witness ; (Rom. i. 9.) “ As God is true, our word was not yea and nay ;” (2 Cor. i. 13 ; and ver. 23.) “ I call God for a record upon my soul. Before God I lie not ;” (Gal. i. 20.) “ God is my record ;” (Phil. i. 8.) “ God is my witness.” (2 Thess. ii. 5.) These are all unquestionable oaths ; which we cannot imagine St. Paul would have used, had they been directly contrary to our Saviour’s law. And whereas some defend this upon account of his extraordinary inspiration, I cannot possibly see how this mends the matter. For, certainly it is very inconvenient to say, that they who were to teach the precepts of Christ to others, did themselves break them by inspiration.

But I go yet farther, and shall urge an example beyond all exception.

Our Saviour himself (who surely would not be the first example of breaking his own laws) did not refuse to answer upon oath, being called thereto at his trial. So we find Matth. xxvi. 60. “ The high priest said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God ;” that is, he required him to answer this question upon oath. For among the Jews, the form of giving an oath to witnesses and others, was not by tendering a formal oath to them, as the custom is among us, but by adjuring them, that is, requiring them to answer upon oath ; as is plain

from Levit. v. i. "If a man hear the voice of swearing, and is a witness whether he hath seen or known of such a thing; if he do not utter it, then he shall bear his iniquity." If he have heard the voice of swearing, that is, if being adjured or demanded to answer upon oath concerning what he hath seen or heard, he do not utter the truth, he is perjured. Now to this adjuration of the high priest, our Saviour answered, "Thou hast said;" which words are not an avoiding to answer (as some have thought), but a direct answer; as if he had said, It is as thou sayest: it is even so, I am the Son of God. For upon this answer the high priest said, "He hath spoken blasphemy." But, to put the matter beyond all doubt, St. Mark tells us, (Mark xiv. 61.) that he being asked by the high priest, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? He answered, I am." So that, unless we will interpret our Saviour's doctrine contrary to his own practice, we cannot understand him to forbid all oaths, and, consequently, they are not unlawful.

I have been the longer upon this, that I might give clear satisfaction in this matter to those that are willing to receive it.

As for the ceremonies in use among us, in the taking of oaths, it is no just exception against them, that they are not found in Scripture. For this was always matter of liberty; and several nations have used several rites and ceremonies in their oaths. It was the custom of the Grecians to swear, laying their hands upon the altar, *quod sanctissimum jusjurandum est habitum*, saith A. Gellius, "which was looked upon as the most sacred form of swearing." The Romans were wont *Jovem lapidem jurare*; that is, he that swore by Jupiter held a flint stone in his

hand, and flung it violently from him with these words:—*Si sciens fallo, ita me Jupiter bonis omnibus ejiciat ut ego hunc lapidem.* “If I knowingly falsify, God so throw me out of all my possessions as I do this stone.”

In Scripture there are two ceremonies mentioned of swearing:—One, of putting the hand under the thigh of him to whom the oath was made. Thus Eliezer swore to Abraham, (Gen. xxiv.) and Joseph to Jacob. (Gen. xlvii.) The other, was by lifting up the hand to heaven: thus Abraham expresseth the manner of an oath, Gen. xiv. 22. “I have lift up my hand to the most high God.” And thus God, condescending to the manner of men, expresseth himself, Deut. xxxii. 40. “If I lift up my hand to heaven and swear.” In allusion to this custom the Psalmist describes the perjured person, Ps. cxliv. 8. “Whose mouth speaketh vanity; and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood.” And there is not the least intimation in Scripture, that either of these ceremonies were prescribed and appointed by God, but voluntarily instituted and taken up by men. And thus among us the ceremony of swearing is by laying the hand on the holy gospel, and kissing the book; which is both very solemn and significant. And this is the reason why this solemn kind of oath is called a corporal oath, and was anciently so called, because the sign or ceremony of it is performed by some part of the body. And this solemnity is an aggravation of the perjury, because it makes it both more deliberate and more scandalous.

I shall speak but briefly to the

IV. And last particular, viz. The sacred obligation of an oath: because it is a solemn appeal to God as

a witness of the truth of what we say : to God, I say, from whose piercing and all-seeing eye, from whose perfect and infinite knowledge, nothing is or can be hid ; so that there is not a thought in our heart but he sees it, nor a word in our tongue, but he discerns the truth or falsehood of it. Whenever we swear, we appeal to his knowledge, and refer ourselves to his just judgment, who is the powerful patron and protector of right, and the almighty judge and avenger of all falsehood and unrighteousness. So that it is not possible for men to lay a more sacred and solemn obligation upon their consciences than by the religion of an oath. Moses very well expresseth it, by binding our souls with a bond: (Numb. xxx. 2.) “ If a man swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond ; intimating, that he that swears lays the strongest obligation upon himself, and puts his soul in pawn for the truth of what he says. And this obligation no man can violate, but at the utmost peril of the judgment and vengeance of God. For every oath implies a curse upon ourselves in case of perjury, as Plutarch observes. And this was always the sense of mankind concerning the obligation of oaths. *Nullum vinculum ad astringendam fidem majores nostri jurejurando arctius esse voluerunt*, saith Tully : “ Our forefathers had no stricter bond whereby to oblige the faith of men to one another, than that of an oath. To the same purpose is that in the Comedian, *Aliud si scirem, qui, firmare meam apud vos possem fidem, sanctius quam jusjurandum, id pollicerer tibi*. “ If I knew any thing more sacred than an oath, whereby to confirm to you the truth of what I say, I would make use of it.”

I will crave your patience a little longer, whilst by way of inference from this discourse, I represent to

you the great sin of swearing in common conversation, upon trivial and needless occasions, and the heinousness of the sin of perjury.

1. First, The great sin of swearing upon trivial and needless occasions, in common conversation. Because an oath is a solemn thing, and reserved for great occasions, to give confirmation to our word in some weighty matter, and to put an end to controversies which cannot otherwise be peremptorily and satisfactorily decided. And therefore to use oaths upon light occasions, argues great profaneness and irreverence of Almighty God. So Ulpian, the great Roman lawyer observes, *Nonnullos esse faciles ad jurandum contemptu religionis*: that “men’s proneness to swearing comes from a contempt of religion;” than which nothing disposeth men more to atheism and infidelity. Besides, that it doth many times surprise men unawares into perjury; and how can it be otherwise, when men use to interlard all their careless talk with oaths, but that they must often be perjured? And, which is worse, it prepares men for deliberate perjury: for with those who are accustomed to swear upon light occasions, an oath will go off with them more roundly about weightier matters. “From a common custom of swearing (saith Hierocles) men easily slide into perjury; therefore, (says he) if thou wouldst not be perjured, do not use to swear.” And this perhaps is the meaning of St. James, when he cautions Christians so vehemently against common swearing, *ἵνα μὴ εἰς ὑπόκρισιν πέσητε*, (for so some of the best ancient copies read it), “lest ye fall into hypocrisy;” that is, lest ye lie and be perjured, by using yourselves to rash and inconsiderate swearing.

And men expose themselves to this danger to no

purpose; oaths in common discourse being so far from confirming a man's word, that with wise men they much weaken it: for common swearing (if it have any serious meaning at all) argues in a man a perpetual distrust of his own reputation, and is an acknowledgment that he thinks his bare word not to be worthy of credit. And it is so far from adorning and filling a man's discourse, that it makes it look swoln and bloated, and more bold and blustering, than becomes persons of gentle and good breeding. Besides, that it is a great incivility, because it highly offends and grates upon all sober and considerate persons; who cannot be presumed with any manner of ease and patience to hear God affronted, and his great and glorious name so irreverently tost upon every slight occasion.

And it is no excuse to men, that many times they do it ignorantly, and not observing and knowing what they do. For, certainly it is no extenuation of a fault, that a man hath got the habit of it so perfect, that he commits it when he does not think of it. Which consideration should make men oppose the beginnings of this vice, lest it grow into a habit very hard to be left. *Nemo novit, nisi qui expertus est, quam sit difficile consuetudinem jurandi extinguere,* saith St. Austin; "no man knows, but he that hath tried, how hard it is to get rid of this custom of swearing:" but yet it is certain, men may do it by resolution and great care of themselves: for he that can choose whether he will speak or not, can choose whether he will swear or not when he speaks. *Major consuetudo majorem intentionem flagitat;* "the more inveterate a custom is, the greater care should be used to break ourselves of it."

In short, this practice is so contrary to so plain a

precept of our Saviour, and by the breach, whereof we incur so great a danger (as St. James assures us) that it must be a great charity that can find out a way to reconcile a common custom of swearing with a serious belief of the Christian religion; which I would to God those who are concerned would seriously lay to heart; especially, since this sin, of all others, hath the least of temptation to it. Profit or pleasure, there is none in it, nor any thing in men's natural tempers to incite them to it. For, though some men pour out oaths so freely, as if they came naturally from them, yet surely no man is born of a swearing constitution.

All that can be pretended for it, is custom and fashion; but to shew that this is no excuse, it is very observable that it is particularly in the matter of oaths and perjury that the Holy Ghost gives that caution, "thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil."

And, lastly, it deserves to be considered, that this sin is so much the greater, because of the frequent returns of it in those that are accustomed to it. So that although it were but small in itself (as it is not) yet the frequent practice of this sin would quickly mount it to a great score.

2. Secondly, To represent the heinousness of the sin of perjury. But, before I aggravate this crime, it is fit to let men know how many ways they may be guilty of it.

First, When a man asserts upon oath what he knows to be otherwise; or promiseth what he does not intend to perform. In both these cases, the very act of swearing is perjury. And so, likewise, when a man promiseth upon oath to do that which is unlawful for him to do, because this oath is contrary to a former obligation.



Secondly, When a man is uncertain whether what he swears to, be true. This likewise is perjury in the act; though not of the same degree of guilt with the former, because it is not so fully and directly against his knowledge and conscience. For men ought to be certain of the truth of what they assert upon oath, and not to swear at a venture. And, therefore, no man ought positively to swear to the truth of any thing, but what he himself hath seen or heard. This being the highest assurance men are capable of in this world. In like manner, he is guilty of perjury in the same degree, who promiseth upon oath what he is not morally and reasonably certain he shall be able to perform.

Thirdly, They are likewise guilty of perjury, who do not use great plainness and simplicity in oaths; but answer equivocally and doubtfully, or with reservation of something in their minds, thinking thereby to salve the truth of what they say. And we all know who they are that make use of these arts, and maintain them to be lawful, to the infinite scandal of the Christian religion and prejudice of human society, by doing what in them lies to destroy all faith and mutual confidence among men. For what can be a greater affront to God, than to use his name to deceive men? And what can more directly overthrow the great end and use of oaths, which are for confirmation, and to put an end to strife? Whereas by these arts, the thing is left in the same uncertainty it was before, and there is no decision of it. For there is hardly any form of words can be devised so plain, as not to be liable to equivocation: to be sure, a man when he swears may always reserve something in his mind which will quite alter the sense of whatever he can say or

promise upon oath. And this may be laid down for a certain rule, that all departure from the simplicity of an oath is a degree of perjury, and a man is never a wit the less forsworn, because his perjury is a little finer and more artificial than ordinary. And though men think by this device to save themselves harmless from the guilt of so great a sin, they do really increase it, by adding to their iniquity the impudent folly of mocking God and deceiving themselves.

And whereas it is pleaded, in the favour of mental reservation, that the whole proposition, as made up of what is expressed in words, and of that which is reserved in the mind, is true; for instance, if a man being asked upon oath whether he be a priest, shall answer he is not, reserving in his mind that he is not a priest of Bacchus, or some such thing, the whole proposition is true, and then they say a man may swear to that which is true, without danger of perjury: this is of no force, because, though the whole proposition be true, it is deceitful, and contrary to that sincerity which ought to be in an oath; and the end of an oath is hereby likewise defeated, which is to ascertain the truth of what we say; but if a man reserve something in his mind, which alters the truth of what he says, the thing is still as doubtful and uncertain as it was before. Besides, if this be a good reason, a man may swear with reservation in all cases; because the reason equally extends to all cases; for if the truth of the proposition, as made up of what is expressed in words and reserved in the mind, will excuse a man from perjury, then no man can be perjured that swears with reservation: but, this the casuists of the Roman church do not allow, but only in some particular cases, as before an in-

competent judge, or the like; for they see well enough, that if this were allowed, in all cases, it would destroy all faith among men. And, therefore, since the reason extends alike to all cases, it is plain that it is to be allowed in none.

Fourthly, He is guilty of perjury after the act, who having a real intention when he swears, to perform what he promiseth, yet afterwards neglects to do it; not for want of power (for so long as that continues, the obligation ceaseth), but for want of will, and due regard to his oath.

Now that perjury is a most heinous sin, is evident, because it is contrary to so plain and great a law of God; one of the ten words or precepts of the moral law, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain;" thou shalt not bring or apply the name of God to a falsehood; or, as Josephus renders it, "Thou shalt not adjure God to a false thing;" which our Saviour renders yet more plainly: (Matt. v. 33.) "Thou shalt not forswear thyself." For he seems to refer to the third commandment, when he says, "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself," as he had done before to the sixth and seventh, when he says, "It was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not commit adultery." So that the primary, if not the sole intention of this law, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain," is to forbid the great sin of perjury. And I do not remember that in Scripture the phrase of taking God's name in vain, is used in any other sense. And thus it is certainly used: (Prov. xxx. 9.) "Lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of the Lord my God in vain," *i. e.* lest poverty should tempt me to steal, and stealth should engage me in perjury. For

among the Jews an oath was tendered to him that was suspected of theft, as appears from Levit. vi. 2. where it is said, “If any one be guilty of theft, and lieth concerning it, or sweareth falsely; he shall restore all that about which he hath sworn falsely. “Lest I steal, and take the name of the Lord my God in vain;” that is, be perjured, being examined upon oath, concerning a thing stolen. And for this reason the thief and the perjured person are put together: (Zech. v. 4.) where it is said, that “a curse shall enter into the house of the thief, and of him that sweareth falsely by the name of God.” From all which it is very probable, that the whole intention of the third commandment is to forbid this great sin of perjury. To deter men from which, a severe threatening is there added: “for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain;” that is, he will most severely punish such an one. And it is very observable, that there is no threatening added to any other commandment, but to this and the second—intimating to us, that next to idolatry and the worship of a false God, perjury is one of the greatest affronts that can be offered to the Divine Majesty. This is one of those sins that cry so loud to heaven, and quicken the pace of God’s judgments: (Mal. iii. 5.) “I will come near to you in judgment, and be a swift witness against the swearer. For this God threatens utter destruction to the man and his house: (Zech. v. 4.) speaking of the curse that goeth over the face of the whole earth: “God (says he) will bring it forth, and it shall enter into the house of him that sweareth falsely by the name of God, and shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof. It shall remain in the midst

of his house, and shall consume it." This sin, by the secret judgment of God; undermines estates and families to the utter ruin of them. And among the heathen, it was always reckoned one of the greatest crimes, and which they did believe God did not only punish upon the guilty person himself, but upon his family and posterity; and many times upon whole nations, as the prophet also tells us, that "because of oaths the land mourns."

I need not use many words to aggravate this sin; it is certainly a crime of the highest nature: deliberate perjury being directly against a man's knowledge, so that no man can commit it without staring his conscience in the face, which is one of the greatest aggravations of any crimes; and it is equally a sin against both tables, being the highest affront to God, and of most injurious consequence to men. It is an horrible abuse of the name of God, an open contempt of his judgment, and an insolent defiance of his vengeance; and, in respect of men, it is not only a wrong to this or that particular person who suffers by it, but treason against human society, subverting at once the foundations of public peace and justice, and the private security of every man's life and fortune. It is a defeating of the best and last way that the wisdom of men could devise for the decision of doubtful matters. Solomon very fully and elegantly expresseth the destructive nature of this sin: (Prov. xxv. 18.) "A false witness against his neighbour is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow;" intimating, that amongst all the instruments of ruin and mischief that have been devised by mankind, none is of more pernicious consequence to human society than perjury and breach of faith.

It is a pestilence that usually walketh in darkness, and a secret stab and blow, against which, many times, there is no possibility of defence.

And, therefore, it highly concerns those who, upon these and the like occasions, are called upon their oath, whether as jurors or witnesses, to set God before their eyes, and to have his fear in their hearts whenever they come to take an oath; and to govern and discharge their consciences in this matter by known and approved rules, and by the resolutions of pious and wise men, and not by the loose reasonings and resolutions of pamphlets, sent abroad to serve the turns of unpeaceable and ill-minded men (whether atheists, or papists, or others) on purpose to debauch the consciences of men by teaching them to play fast and loose with oaths. And it is a very sad sign of the decay of Christian religion among us, to see so many, who call themselves Christians, to make so little conscience of so great a sin, as even the light of nature would blush and tremble at.

I will conclude all with those excellent sayings of the son of Sirach concerning these two sins, (I have been speaking of) profane swearing and perjury: (Eccclus. xxiii. 9, 10, &c.) "Accustom not thy mouth to swearing; neither use thyself to the naming of the Holy One. A man that useth much swearing, shall be filled with iniquity, and the plague shall never depart from his house. If he shall offend, his sin shall be upon him, and if he acknowledge not his sin, he maketh a double offence. And if he swear falsely, he shall not be innocent, but his house shall be full of calamities." And to represent to us the dreadful nature of this sin of perjury; "there is, (saith he) a word that is clothed about with death,"

meaning a rash and false oath; “there is a word that is clothed about with death, God grant it be not found in the heritage of Jacob; for all such things shall be far from the godly; and they will not wallow in these sins.” From which, God preserve all good men, and make them careful to preserve themselves; as they value the present peace of their own consciences, and the favour of Almighty God in this world and the other, for his mercies’ sake in Jesus Christ, to whom, &c.

# DEDICATION

TO THE FOLLOWING SERMON.

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TO THE RIGHT WORSHIPFUL

**THE PRESIDENT, THE TREASURER,**

AND

THE REST OF THE WORTHY GOVERNORS OF THE HOSPITAL OF  
CHRIST CHURCH, IN LONDON.

WHEN, upon the request of some of the relations and friends of the Reverend Mr. Gouge, deceased, and, to speak the truth, in compliance with mine own inclination to do right to the memory of so good a man, and to set so great an example in the view of all men, I had determined to make this discourse public, I knew not where more fitly to address it than to yourselves, who are the living pattern of the same virtue, and the faithful dispensers and managers of one of the best and greatest charities in the world ; especially since he had a particular relation to you, and was pleased for some years last past, without any other consideration but that of charity, to employ his constant pains in catechising the poor children of your hospital ; wisely considering of how great consequence it was to this city, to have the foundations of religion well laid in the tender years of so many persons as were afterwards to be planted there in several professions ; and from a true humility of mind, being ready to stoop to the meanest office and service to do good.



I have heard from an intimate friend of his, that he would sometimes with great pleasure say, that he had two livings which he would not exchange for two of the greatest in England, meaning Wales and Christ's Hospital. Contrary to common account, he esteemed every advantage of being useful and serviceable to God and men, a rich benefice; and those his best patrons and benefactors, not who did him good, but who gave him the opportunity and means of doing it. To you, therefore, as his patrons, this sermon doth, of right, belong, and to you I humbly dedicate it; heartily beseeching Almighty God, to raise up many by his example, that may serve their generation, according to the will of God, as he did. I am,

Your faithful and humble servant,

JO. TILLOTSON.

## SERMON XXIII.

[Preached at the Funeral of the Reverend Mr. Thomas Gouge, the 4th of November, 1681, at St. Anne's, Blackfriars: with a brief Account of his Life.]

*Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to him.—LUKE XX. 37, 38.*

THE occasion of these words of our blessed Saviour was an objection which the sadducees made against the resurrection, grounded upon a case which had sometimes happened among them, of a woman that had seven brethren successively to her husbands. Upon which case, they put this question to our Saviour: "Whose wife of the seven shall this woman be at the resurrection?" That is, if men live in another world, how shall the controversy between these seven brethren be decided? for they all seem to have an equal claim to this woman, each of them having had her to wife.

The captious question was not easy to be answered by the pharisees, who fancied the enjoyments of the next life to be of the same kind with the sensual pleasures of this world, only greater and more durable. From which tradition of the Jews concerning a sensual paradise, Mahomet seems to have taken the pattern of his: as he did likewise many other things from the Jewish traditions. Now, upon this supposition, that in the next life there

will be marrying and giving in marriage, it was a question not easily satisfied: "Whose wife of the seven" this woman should then be?

But our Saviour clearly avoids the whole force of it, by shewing the different state of men in this world and in the other. "The children of this world (says he) marry and are given in marriage, but they who shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage." And he does not barely and magisterially assert this doctrine, but gives a plain and substantial reason for it; because "they cannot die any more." After men have lived awhile in this world, they are taken away by death, and, therefore, marriage is necessary to maintain a succession of mankind; but in the other world men shall become immortal and live for ever, and then the reason of marriage will wholly cease; for when men can die no more, there will then be no need of any new supplies of mankind.

Our Saviour having thus cleared himself of this objection, by taking away the ground and foundation of it, he produceth an argument for the proof of the resurrection, in the words of my text: "Now that the dead are raised, Moses even shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." That is, when in one of his books God is brought in speaking to him out of the bush, and calling himself by the title of "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." From whence our Saviour infers the resurrection, "Because God is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to him."

My design from these words is, to shew the force and strength of this argument which our Saviour urgeth for the proof of the resurrection. In order whereunto I shall,

First, Consider it as an argument *ad hominem*; and shew the fitness and force of it, to convince those with whom our Saviour disputed.

Secondly, I shall inquire, whether it be more than an argument *ad hominem*. And if it be, wherein the real and absolute force of it doth consist.

And then I shall apply this doctrine of the resurrection to the present occasion.

I. First, We will consider it as an argument *ad hominem*, and shew the fitness and force of it to convince those with whom our Saviour disputed. And this will appear, if we carefully consider these four things :

1. What our Saviour intended directly and immediately to prove by this argument.

2. The extraordinary veneration which the Jews in general had for the writings of Moses, above any other books of the Old Testament.

3. The peculiar notion which the Jews had concerning the use of this phrase or expression—of God's being any one's God.

4. The great respect which the Jews had for these three fathers of their nation, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For each of these make our Saviour's argument more forcible against those with whom he disputed.

1. We will consider what our Saviour intended directly and immediately to prove by this argument. And that was this, That there is another state after this life, wherein men shall be happy or miserable according as they have lived in this

world. And this doth not only suppose the immortality of the soul, but forasmuch as the body is an essential part of man, doth, by consequence, infer the resurrection of the body; because, otherwise, the man would not be happy or miserable in another world. But I cannot see any sufficient ground to believe that our Saviour intended, by this argument, directly and immediately to prove the resurrection of the body, but only by consequence, and as it follows from the admission of a future state, wherein men shall be rewarded or punished. For that reason of our Saviour, that “ God is not a God of the dead, but of the living,” if it did directly prove the resurrection of the body, it would prove that the bodies of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were raised to life again, at or before that time when God spake to Moses, and called himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: but we do not believe this; and, therefore, ought not to suppose, that it was the intention of our Saviour, directly and immediately, to prove the resurrection of the body, but only (as I said before) a future state. And that this was all our Saviour intended, will more plainly appear, if we consider what that error of the sadducees was which our Saviour here confutes. And Josephus, who very well understood the difference of the sects among the Jews, and gives a particular account of them, makes not the least mention of any controversy between the pharisees and the sadducees, about the resurrection of the body. All that he says is this, That the pharisees hold the immortality of the soul, and that there are rewards and punishments in another world; but the sadducees denied all this, and that there was any other state after this life. And this is the very same account

with that which is given of them in the New Testament: (ver. 27, of this chap.) “The sadducees who deny that there is any resurrection.” The meaning of which is more fully declared, Acts xxiii. 8: “The sadducees say, that there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit; but the pharisees confess both.” That is, the sadducees denied that there was any other state of men after this life, and that there was any such thing as an immortal spirit, either angels, or the souls of men surviving their bodies. And, as Dr. Hammond hath judiciously observed, this is the true importance of the word *ἀναστάσις*, viz. a future or another state; unless in such texts where the context does restrain it to the rising again of the body, or where some word that denotes the body, as *σώματος* or *σαρκός*, is added to it.

2. The force of this argument, against those with whom our Saviour disputed, will farther appear, if we consider the great veneration which the Jews in general had for the writings of Moses above any other books of the Old Testament, which they (especially the sadducees) looked upon only as explications and comments upon the law of Moses; but they esteemed nothing as a necessary article of faith, which had not some foundation in the writings of Moses. And this seems to me to be the true reason why our Saviour chose to confute them out of Moses, rather than any other part of the Old Testament; and not, as many learned men have imagined, because the sadducees did not receive any part of the Old Testament, but only the five books of Moses: so that it was in vain to argue against them out of any other. This I know hath been a general opinion, grounded, I think, upon the mistake of a passage in Josephus, who says, “The sad-

ducees only received the written law." But if we carefully consider that passage, we shall find that Josephus doth not there oppose the law to the other books of the Old Testament, which were also written, but to oral tradition. For he says expressly, that "The sadducees only received the written law, but the pharisees, over and besides what was written, received the oral, which they call tradition."

I deny not but that in the later prophets there are more express texts for the proof of a future state, than any that are to be found in the books of Moses; as, (Daniel xii. 2.) "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth, shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." And, indeed, it seems very plain that holy men among the Jews, towards the expiration of the legal dispensation, had still clearer and more express apprehensions concerning a future state, than are to be met with in the writings of Moses, or any of the prophets.

The law given by Moses, did suppose the immortality of the souls of men, and the expectation of another life after this, as principles of religion in some degree naturally known; but made no new and express revelation of those things. Nor was there any occasion for it; the law of Moses being a political law, not intended for the government of mankind, but of one particular nation; and therefore was established, as political laws are, upon temporal promises and threatenings; promising temporal prosperity to the observation of its precepts, and threatening the breach of them with temporal judgments and calamities.

And this I take to be the true reason why arguments fetched from another world are so obscurely

insisted upon under that dispensation; not but that another life after this was always supposed, and was undoubtedly the hope and expectation of good men under the law; but the clear discovery of it was reserved for the times of the Messias. And, therefore, as those times drew on, and the Sun of righteousness was near his rising, the shadows of the night began to be chased away, and men's apprehensions of a future state to clear up; so that in the time of the Maccabees, good men spake with more confidence and assurance of these things.

It is likewise to be considered, that the temporal calamities and sufferings with which the Jews were almost continually harassed from the time of their captivity, had very much weaned good men from the consideration of temporal promises, and awakened their minds to the more serious thoughts of another world. It being natural to men when they are destitute of present comfort, to support themselves with the expectation of better things for the future, and, as the apostle to the Hebrews expresses it, (chap. vi. ver. 18.) "To fly for refuge, to lay hold on the hope that is before them," and to employ their reason to fortify themselves as well as they can in that persuasion.

And this, I doubt not, was the true occasion of those clearer and riper apprehensions of good men concerning a future state, in those times of distress and persecution: it being very agreeable to the wisdom and goodness of the Divine Providence, not to leave his people destitute of sufficient support under great trials and sufferings: and nothing but the hopes of a better life could have borne up the spirits of men under such cruel tortures. And of this we have a most remarkable instance in the history



of the seven brethren in the Maccabees, who, being cruelly tortured and put to death by Antiochus, do most expressly declare their confident expectation of a resurrection to a better life. To which history the apostle certainly refers (Heb. xi. 35.) when he says, "Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection:" where the word which we render "were tortured," is *ἐτυρπανίσθησαν*, which is the very word used in the Maccabees to express the particular kind of torture used upon them; besides that, being offered deliverance, they most resolutely refused to accept of it, with this express declaration, that they hoped for a resurrection to a better life.

But, to return to my purpose: notwithstanding there might be more clear and express texts to this purpose in the ancient prophets, yet our Saviour, knowing how great a regard, not only the sadducees, but all the Jews, had to the authority of Moses, he thought fit to bring his proof of the resurrection out of his writings, as that which was the most likely to convince them.

3. If we consider farther the peculiar notion which the Jews had concerning the use of this phrase or expression, of God's being any one's God. And that was this; that God is no where in Scripture said to be any one's God while he was alive. And, therefore, they tell us, that while Isaac lived, God is not called the God of Isaac, but the "fear of Isaac." As, (Gen. xxxi. 42.) "Except the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me;" and (ver. 53.) "When Laban made a covenant with Jacob, it is said that Laban did swear by the God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, and the God of their fathers, but Jacob swore by

the fear of his father Isaac." I will not warrant this observation to be good, because I certainly know it is not true. For God doth expressly call himself "the God of Isaac," while Isaac was yet alive: (Gen. xxviii. 10.) "I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac." It is sufficient to my purpose, that this was a notion anciently current among the Jews. And therefore our Saviour's argument from this expression must be so much the stronger against them: for if the souls of men be extinguished by death (as the sadducees believed) what did it signify to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to have God called their God, after they were dead? But surely, for God to be any one's God, doth signify some great benefit and advantage, which yet (according to the notion which the Jews had of this phrase) could not respect this life, because, according to them, God is not said to be any one's God till he is dead: but it is thus said of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, after their death, and therefore our Saviour infers very strongly against them, that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, were not extinguished by death, but do still live somewhere; for "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." And then he adds, by way of further explication, "for all live to him." That is, though those good men who are departed this life do not still live to us, here in this world, yet they live to God, and are with him.

4. If we consider the great respect which the Jews had for those three fathers of their nation, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They had an extraordinary opinion of them, and esteemed nothing too great to be thought or said of them. And therefore we find that they looked upon it as a great arrogance for any man to assume any thing to himself

that might seem to set to him above Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. With what indignation did they fly upon our Saviour on this account? (John iv. 12.) “Art thou greater than our father Jacob?” and (chap. viii. ver. 50.) “Art thou greater than our father Abraham? whom makest thou thyself?” Now, they who had so superstitious a veneration for them, would easily believe any thing of privilege to belong to them: so that our Saviour doth with great advantage instance in them, in favour of whom they would be inclined to extend the meaning of any promise to the utmost, and allow it to signify as much as the words could possibly bear. So that it is no wonder that the text tells us, that this argument put the sadducees to silence. They durst not attempt a thing so odious, as to go about to take away any thing of privilege from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And thus I have, as briefly as the matter would bear, endeavoured to shew the fitness and force of this argument, to convince those with whom our Saviour disputed. I come now, in the

II. Second place, to inquire, Whether this be any more than an argument *ad hominem*; and, if it be, wherein the real and absolute force of it doth consist.

I do not think it necessary to believe, that every argument used by our Saviour, or his apostles, is absolutely and in itself conclusive of the matter in debate. For an argument which doth not really prove the thing in question, may yet be a very good argument *ad hominem*; and in some cases more convincing to him with whom we dispute, than that which is a better argument in itself. Now, it is possible, that our Saviour's intention might not be to bring a conclusive proof of the resurrection, but only to confute those who would needs be disput-

ing with him. And to that purpose, an argument *ad hominem*, which proceeded upon grounds which they themselves could not deny, might be very proper and effectual. But although it be not necessary to believe, that this was more than an argument *ad hominem*; yet it is the better to us, if it be absolutely and in itself conclusive of the thing in question. And this, I hope, will sufficiently appear, if we consider these four things :

1. That for God to be any one's God doth signify some very extraordinary blessing and happiness to those persons of whom this is said.

2. If we consider the eminent faith and obedience of the persons to whom this promise is made.

3. Their condition in this world.

4. The general importance of this promise, abstracting from the persons particularly specified and named in it, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

1. If we consider that for God to be any one's God doth signify some very extraordinary blessing and happiness to those persons of whom this is said. It is a big word for God to declare himself to be any one's God; and the least we can imagine to be meant by it, is that God will, in an extraordinary manner, employ his power and wisdom to do him good: that he will concern himself more for the happiness of those whose God he declares himself to be, than for others.

2. If we consider the eminent faith and obedience of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Abraham left his country in obedience to God, not knowing whither he was to go. And, which is one of the most unparalleled and strange instances of faith and obedience that can be almost imagined, he was willing to have sacrificed his only son at the com-

mand of God. Isaac and Jacob were also very good men, and devout worshippers of the true God, when almost the whole world was sunk into idolatry and all manner of impiety. Now what can we imagine, but that the good God did design some extraordinary reward to such faithful servants of his? especially if we consider, that he intended this gracious declaration of his concerning them, for a standing encouragement to all those who, in after ages, should follow the faith, and tread in the steps of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

3. If we consider the condition of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in this world. The Scripture tells us, that "they were pilgrims and strangers upon the earth," had no fixed and settled habitation, but were forced to wander from one kingdom and country to another; that they were exposed to many hazards and difficulties, to great troubles and afflictions in this world; so that there was no such peculiar happiness befel them, in this life, above the common rate of men, as may seem to fill up the big words of this promise, that God would be their God. For so far as the Scripture history informs us, and farther we cannot know of this matter, Esau was as prosperous as Jacob: and Jacob had a great many more troubles and afflictions in this life than Esau had. But surely when God calls himself "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," this signifies that God intended some very peculiar blessing and advantage to them above others: which, seeing they did not enjoy in this world, it is very reasonable to believe, that one time or other this gracious declaration and promise of God was made good to them.

And, therefore, the apostle to the Hebrews, (chap. xi.) from this very expression of God's being

said to be the God of Abraham and others, argues that some extraordinary happiness was reserved for them in another world: and that, upon this very ground I am now speaking of, namely, because the condition of Abraham and some others, was not such in this world as might seem to answer the fullness of this promise. "All these," says he, "died in the faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims upon the earth." From whence he reasons very strongly, that these good men might reasonably expect something better than any thing that had befallen them in this world. "For they," says he, "that say such things, declare plainly that they seek a country;" which at the 16th verse he calls a "better country, that is a heavenly." "They that say such things," that is, they who acknowledge themselves to be strangers and pilgrims in the earth, and yet pretend that God hath promised to be their God, declare plainly that they expect some reward beyond this life. From all which he concludes, "Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, because he hath prepared for them a city;" intimating, that if no happiness had remained for these good men in another world, this promise of God's being their God would shamefully have fallen short of what it seemed to import, viz. some extraordinary reward and blessing worthy of God to bestow; something more certain and lasting, than any of the enjoyments of this world: which, since God had abundantly performed to them in the happiness of another life, his promise to them was made good to the full, and he needed not be "ashamed to be called their God." But if

nothing beyond this life had been reserved for them, that saying of old Jacob, towards the conclusion of his life, "few and evil have the days of the years of my life been," would have been an eternal reflection upon the truth and faithfulness of Him who had so often called himself the God of Jacob.

But now, because to all this it may be said, that this promise seems to have been made good to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in this world; for was not God the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, when he took such a particular and extraordinary care of them, and protected them from the manifold dangers they were exposed to by such a special and immediate providence, "suffering no one to do them harm, but rebuking even kings for their sakes?" Was not he Abraham's God when he blessed him so miraculously with a son in his old age, and with so considerable an estate to leave to him? Was not that saying of Jacob a great acknowledgment of the gracious providence of God towards him, "With my staff passed I over this Jordan, and now I am become two hands?" And though it must needs be a very cutting affliction to him to lose his son Joseph, as he thought he had done, yet that was more than recompensed to him in Joseph's strange advancement in Egypt, whereby God put into his hands the opportunity of saving his father and his whole family alive. And was not God the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in making them fathers of so numerous an offspring, as afterwards became a great nation: and in giving them a fruitful land, and bringing them to the quiet possession of it by such a series of wonderful miracles? What need then is there of extending this promise to another world? Doth it not seem abundantly made good in those great

blessings which God bestowed upon them whilst they lived, and afterwards upon their posterity in this world? And does not this agree well enough with the first and most obvious sense of these words, “ I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ;” that is, I am he that was their God while they were alive, and am still the God of their posterity for their sakes? I say, because the three former considerations are liable to this objection, which seems wholly to take off the force of this argument; therefore, for the full clearing of this matter, I will add one consideration more.

4thly, then, we will consider the general importance of this promise, abstracting from the particular persons specified and named in it, viz. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and that is, that God will make a wide and plain difference between good and bad men; he will be so the God of good men as he is not of the wicked: and some time or other put every good man into a better and happier condition than any wicked man: so that the general importance of this promise is finally resolved into the equity and justice of the Divine Providence.

And unless we suppose another life after this, it will certainly be very hard, and I think impossible, to reconcile the history of the Old Testament, and the common appearances of things in this world, with the justice and goodness of God’s providence.

It cannot be denied, but that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and several good men in the Old Testament, had many signal testimonies of the Divine favour vouchsafed to them in this world: but we read likewise of several wicked men that had as large a share of temporal blessings. It is very true that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had great estates,



and were petty princes : but Pharaoh was a mighty prince in comparison of them ; and the kingdom of Egypt, which probably was the first and chief seat of idolatry, was at the same time one of the most potent and flourishing kingdoms in the world : and was blessed with a prodigious plenty, whereby they were furnished with store of corn, when good Jacob and his family had like to have perished by famine. It is true, Joseph was advanced to great power in Egypt, and thereby had the opportunity of saving his father's house, by settling them and feeding them in Egypt : but then it is to be considered again, that this cost them very dear, and their coming thither was the occasion of a long and cruel bondage to Jacob's posterity, so that we see that these good men had no such blessings, but what were common with them to many others that were wicked : and the blessings which God bestowed upon them, had great abatements by the intermixture of many and sore afflictions.

It seems then upon the whole matter, to be very plain, that the providences of God in this world towards good men are so contrived, that it may sufficiently appear, to those who wisely consider the works of God, that they are not neglected by him ; and yet that these outward blessings are so promiscuously dispensed, that no man can certainly be concluded to be a good man from any happiness he enjoys in this life ; and the prosperity of good men is usually on purpose so shadowed and mixed with afflictions, as may justly raise their hopes to the expectation of a more perfect happiness and better reward, than any they meet with in this world.

And, if so, then the general importance of this promise, that "God will be the God" of good men,

must necessarily signify something beyond this world: because in this world there is not that clear difference universally made between good and bad men which the justice of the Divine Providence doth require, and which seems to be intended, in the general sense of this promise. For if this promise (though personally made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) be intended, as the Scripture tells us it was, for a standing encouragement to good men in all ages, then it must contain in it this general truth, —that God will some time or other plentifully reward every good man; that is, he will do something far better for him, than for any wicked man: but if there be no life after this, it is impossible to reconcile this sense of it with the course of God's providence, and with the history of the Bible.

And to make this out fully, and at once, I will only produce that single instance of Abel and Cain. Abel offered to God “a more excellent sacrifice than Cain,” and he “had this testimony that he pleased God;” which was in effect to declare, that God was the God of Abel, and not of Cain: so that by virtue of the general importance of this promise, it might justly be expected, that Abel's condition should have been much better than Cain's: but if there be no happiness after this life, Abel's was evidently much worse. For upon this very account, that he pleased God better, he was killed by Cain, who had offered to God a slight and contemptuous offering. And Cain lived a long time after, and grew great, and built cities. Now supposing there were no other life after this, this must have been a most horrible example to all ages, from the beginning of the world to the end of it, and have made men for ever afraid to please God upon such hard

terms ; when they were sure of no other reward for so doing, but to be oppressed and slain by the hands of the wicked. So that if this were really the case, it would puzzle all the wit and reason of mankind to vindicate the equity and justice of the Divine providence, and to rescue it out of the hands of this terrible objection.

And thus have I, as briefly as I could, endeavoured to clear to you the force of this argument used by our Saviour for the proof of the resurrection. And have the longer insisted upon it, because at first appearance it seems to be but a very obscure and remote argument; and yet so much the more necessary to be cleared, because this in all probability was that very text upon which the Jews in our Saviour's time grounded their belief of a future state, in opposition to the error of the sadducees; and which they called by way of eminency "the promise made of God unto the fathers." As will plainly appear, if we consider what St. Paul says to this purpose; when he appeals so often to the pharisees for his agreement with them in this article of the resurrection, and likewise in the ground of it from "the promise made of God unto the fathers." (Acts xxiv. 14, 15.) "But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets; and have hope towards God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead." From whence it is clear, that they both grounded their hope of the resurrection upon something "written in the law and the prophets;" and what that was, he expresseth more particular, (chap. xxvi. ver. 6, 7.) "And now I stand, and am judged

for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers; unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come." By "the promise made of God unto the fathers," he means some promise made by God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; for so St. Luke more than once, in his history of the Acts, explains this phrase of the God of their fathers: (Acts iii. 13.) "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers;" and (chap. vii. ver. 32.) "I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Now what was the great and famous promise which God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Was it not this, of being their God? So that it was this very promise upon which St. Paul tells us the Jews grounded their hope of a future state, because they understood it necessarily to signify some blessing and happiness beyond this life:

And now having, I hope, sufficiently cleared this matter, I shall make some improvement of this doctrine of a future state, and that to these three purposes.

1. To raise our minds above this world, and the enjoyments of this present life. Were but men thoroughly convinced of this plain and certain truth, that there is a vast difference between time and eternity, between a few years and everlasting ages: would we but represent to ourselves what thoughts and apprehensions dying persons have of this world; how vain and empty a thing it appears to them, how like a pageant and a shadow it looks, as it passeth away from them, methinks none of these things could be a sufficient temptation to any man to forget God and his soul; but notwithstanding all the delights and pleasures of sense, we should be strangely intent

upon the concernments of another world, and almost wholly taken up with the thoughts of that vast eternity which we are ready to launch into. For what is there in this world, this waste and howling wilderness, this rude and barbarous country which we are put to pass through, which should detain our affections here, and take off our thoughts from our everlasting habitation ; from that better and that heavenly country, where we hope to live and be happy for ever?

If we settle our affections upon the enjoyments of this present life, so as to be extremely pleased and transported with them, and to say in our hearts, "It is good for us to be here ;" if we be excessively grieved or discontented for the want or loss of them, and if we look upon our present state in this world any otherwise than as a preparation and passage to a better life ; it is a sign that our faith and hope of the happiness of another life is but very weak and faint, and that we do not heartily and in good earnest believe what we pretend to do concerning these things. For did we steadfastly believe and were we thoroughly persuaded of what our religion so plainly declares to us concerning the unspeakable and endless happiness of good men in another world, our affections would sit more loose to this world, and our hopes would raise our hearts as much above these present and sensible things, as the heavens are above the earth ; we should value nothing here below, but as it serves for our present support and passage, or may be made a means to secure and increase our future felicity.

2. The consideration of another life should quicken our preparation for that blessed state which remains for us in the other world. This life is a state

of probation and trial. This world is God's school, where immortal spirits clothed with flesh are trained and bred up for eternity. And then certainly it is not an indifferent thing, and a matter of slight concernment to us, how we live and demean ourselves in this world; whether we indulge ourselves in ungodliness and worldly lusts, or live soberly and righteously, and godly in this present world: no, it is a matter of infinite moment, as much as our souls and all eternity are worth. Let us not deceive ourselves; "For as we sow, so shall we reap: if we sow to the flesh, we shall of the flesh reap corruption; but if we sow to the spirit, we shall of the spirit reap everlasting life. Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. The righteous hath hopes in his death. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace."

But the ungodly are not so; whoever hath lived a wicked and vicious life, feels strange throes and pangs in his conscience when he comes to be cast upon a sick-bed. "The wicked is like the troubled sea (saith the prophet) when it cannot rest;" full of trouble and confusion, especially in a dying hour. It is death to such a man to look back upon his life, and a hell to him to think of eternity. When his guilty and trembling soul is ready to leave his body, and just stepping into the other world, what horror and amazement do then seize upon him? what a rage doth such a man feel in his breast, when he seriously considers, that he hath been so great a fool as, for the false and imperfect pleasure of a few days, to make himself miserable for ever?

3. Let the consideration of that unspeakable reward which God hath promised to good men at

the resurrection, encourage us to obedience and a holy life. We serve a great Prince who is able to promote us to honour; a most gracious Master who will not let the least service we do for him pass unrewarded. This is the inference which the apostle makes from his large discourse of the doctrine of the resurrection: (1 Cor. xv. 58.) "Wherefore my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord." Nothing will make death more welcome to us, than a constant course of service and obedience to God. "Sleep (saith Solomon) is sweet to the labouring man:" so after a great diligence and industry in "working out our own salvation," and (as it is said of David) "serving our generation according to the will of God," how pleasant will it be to fall asleep? And, as an useful and well-spent life will make our death to be sweet, so our resurrection to be glorious. Whatever acts of piety we do to God, or of charity to men; whatever we lay out upon the poor, and afflicted, and necessitous, will all be considered by God in the day of recompences, and most plentifully rewarded to us.

And, surely, no consideration ought to be more prevalent to persuade us to alms-deeds and charity to the poor, than that of a resurrection to another life. Besides the promises of this life, which are made to works of charity, (and there is not any grace or virtue whatsoever, which hath so many and so great promises of temporal blessings made to it in Scripture as this grace of charity;) I say, besides the promises of this life, the great promise of eternal life is in Scripture in a more especial manner entailed upon it. (Luke xii. 33.) "Give alms, (saith

our Saviour,) provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not;" and, (chap. xvi. ver. 9.) "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye shall fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." And, (1 Tim. vi. 17, 18, 19.) "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded," &c. "that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life:" the word θεμέλιος, which our translation renders "foundation," according to the common use of it, seems in this place to have a more peculiar notion, and to signify the security that is given by pledge, or by an instrument or obligation of contract for the performance of covenants. For besides that the phrase of "laying up in store," or "treasuring up a foundation," seems to be a very odd jumbling of metaphors; this very word θεμέλιος almost necessarily requires this notion as it is used by the same apostle in his second Epistle to Timothy, (chap. ii. ver. 19.) where it is said, "The foundation of God stands sure, having this seal," &c. a seal being very improper to strengthen a foundation, but very fit to confirm a covenant. And then surely it ought to be rendered—The covenant of God remains firm, having this seal. And so likewise in the forementioned text, the sense will be much more easy and current if we render it thus—Treasuring up, or providing for themselves a good security or pledge against the time to come. I add pledge, because that anciently was the common way of security for things lent: besides that the apostle seems plainly to allude to that passage, (Tobit iv. 8,



9.) "If thou hast abundance, give alms accordingly," &c. "for thou layest up a good treasure for thyself against the day of necessity, (θέμα γὰρ ἀγαθὸν θησαυρίζεις,) for thou treasurest up for thyself a good pledge;" to which this of the apostle exactly answers ἀποθησαυρίζοντας ἑαυτοῖς θεμέλιον καλόν, "treasuring up, or providing for themselves a good pledge or security," &c. The sense however is plain, that the charity of alms is one of the best ways of securing our future happiness.

And yet further to encourage us to abound in works of charity, the Scripture tells us, that proportionably to the degrees of our charity shall be the degrees of our reward; upon this consideration, the apostle exhorts the Corinthians to be liberal in their charity: (2 Cor. ix. 6.) "He that soweth sparingly, shall reap sparingly, but he that soweth bountifully, shall reap bountifully." So that whatever we lay out in this kind, is to the greatest advantage, and upon the best security; two considerations which use to be very prevalent with rich men to lay out their money.

We certainly do it to the greatest advantage; because God will consider the very smallest thing that any of us do in this kind. He that shall give so much as "a cup of cold water to a disciple, in the name of a disciple, shall not lose his reward;" these last words "shall not lose his reward," are a μείωσις, and signify much more than they seem to speak, viz. that he shall have a very great reward, infinitely beyond the value of what he hath done.

And we do it likewise upon the best security; so Solomon assures us: (Prov. xix. 17.) "He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth to the Lord, and that which he hath given, he will pay him again:" and we may be confident of our security where God is

surety; nay, he tells us, that in this case he looks upon himself as principal, and that whatever we do in ways of mercy and charity to the poor, he takes as done to himself. So our Lord hath told us, (Matth. xxv. 40.) and we shall hear the same from him again out of his own mouth, when he shall appear in his majesty to judge the world, “Then the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

And, on the other side, the Scripture no where passeth a more severe doom upon any sort of persons, than upon those who have no bowels of compassion towards their brethren in distress. That is a fearful sentence indeed, which the apostle pronounceth upon such persons: (James ii. 13.) “He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy.” And this our Saviour represents to us in a most solemn manner, in that lively description which he makes of the judgment of the great day, (Matth. xxv. 31, &c.) “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory; and before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats. And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world. For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison,

and ye came unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat," &c. "and these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal." And if this be, as most certainly it is, a true and proper representation of the process of that day, then the great matter of inquiry will be, what works of charity and mercy have been done or neglected by us, and accordingly a sentence of eternal happiness or misery will be passed upon us: I was hungry, did ye feed me, or did ye not? I was naked, did ye clothe me, or did you not? I was sick and in prison, did ye visit me, or did ye not? Not but that all the good or evil of our lives, in what kind soever, shall then be brought to account; but that our Saviour did choose to instance particularly, and only in things of this nature, should, methinks, make a mighty impression upon us, and be a powerful consideration to oblige us to have a very peculiar regard to works of mercy and charity, and to make sure to abound in this grace; that when we shall appear before the great Judge of the world, we may find that mercy from him, which we have shewed to others, and which we shall all undoubtedly stand in need of in that day.

And, among all our acts of charity, those which are done upon least probability and foresight of their meeting with any recompence in this world, either by way of real requital, or of fame and reputation, as they are of all other most acceptable to God, so they will certainly have the most ample reward in another world. So our Lord hath assured us, and accordingly adviseth us: (Luke xiv. 12, 13,

14). "When thou makest a feast, invite not the rich, because they will recompense thee again: but call the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind, for they cannot recompense thee, but thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." If we be religious for worldly ends, and serve God and do good to men, only in contemplation of some temporal advantage, we take up with present payment, and cut ourselves short of our future reward: of such, saith our Lord, "Verily I say unto you, they have their reward:" they are their own security, and have taken care to satisfy themselves, and therefore are to expect nothing from God. But let us who call ourselves Christians do something for God, for which we have no hopes to be recompensed in this world, that we may shew that we trust God, and take his word, and dare venture upon the security of the next world, and that recompense which shall be made at the resurrection of the just.

And how great and glorious that shall be, our Saviour tells us immediately before my text: "They that shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, they can die no more, but they are equal to the angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection." If then we be heirs of such glorious hopes, and believe that he who is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, will also be our God; let us live as it becomes the candidates of heaven, and the children of the resurrection, and such as verily believe another life after this, and hope one day to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God.

And now that I have represented to you what encouragement there is to well-doing, and particularly

to works of charity, from the consideration of the blessed reward we shall certainly meet with at the resurrection of the just; I shall crave your patience a little longer, whilst I propose to you one of the fairest examples of this kind which either this or perhaps any other age could easily present us withal: I mean our deceased brother to whom we are now paying our last solemn respects, the Reverend Mr. Thomas Gouge; the worthy son of a reverend and learned divine of this city, Dr. William Gouge; who was minister of this parish of Blackfriars six and forty years; he died in 1653, and still lives in the memory of many here present.

I must confess that I am no friend to funeral panegyrics, where there is nothing of extraordinary worth and merit in the party commended to give occasion and foundation for them: in such cases, as praises are not due to the dead, so they may be of ill consequence to the living: not only by bringing those of our profession that make a practice of it under the suspicion of officious and mercenary flattery, but likewise by encouraging men to hope that they also may be well spoken of, and even sainted when they are dead, though they should have done little or no good in their life: but yet, on the other hand, to commend those excellent persons, the virtues of whose lives have been bright and exemplary, is not only a piece of justice due to the dead, but an act of great charity to the living, setting a pattern of well-doing before our eyes, very apt and powerful to incite and encourage us to "go and do likewise."

Upon both these considerations, first to do right to the memory of so good a man, and then in hopes that the example may prove fruitful and have a considerable effect upon others to beget the like good-

ness and charity in them, I shall endeavour, in as narrow compass as may be, to give you the just character of this truly pious and charitable man; and by setting his life in a true light to recommend, with all the advantage I can, so excellent a pattern to your imitation.

He was born at Bow, near Stratford, in the county of Middlesex, the 19th day of September, 1605. He was bred at Eton School, and from thence chosen to King's College in Cambridge, being about twenty years of age, in the year 1626. After he had finished the course of his studies, and taken his degrees, he left the university and his fellowship, being presented to the living of Colsdon, near Croydon in Surry, where he continued about two or three years; and from thence was removed to St. Sepulchre's in London, in the year 1638: and the year after, thinking fit to change his condition, matched into a very worthy and ancient family, marrying one of the daughters of Sir Robert Darcy.

Being thus settled in this large and populous parish, he did with great solitude and pains discharge all the parts of a vigilant and faithful minister, for about the space of twenty-four years. For besides his constant and weekly labour of preaching, he was very diligent and charitable in visiting the sick, and ministering not only spiritual counsel and comfort to them, but likewise liberal relief to the wants and necessities of those that were poor, and destitute of means to help themselves in that condition. He did also every morning throughout the year catechise in the church, especially the poorer sort, who were generally most ignorant; and to encourage them to come thither to be instructed by him, he did once a week distribute money among them, not upon a

certain day, but changing it on purpose as he thought good, that he might thereby oblige them to be constantly present; these were chiefly the more aged poor, who being past labour had leisure enough to attend upon this exercise. As for the other sort of poor, who were able to work for their living, he set them at work upon his own charge, buying flax and hemp for them to spin, and what they spun he took off their hands, paying them for their work, and then got it wrought into cloth, and sold it as he could, chiefly among his friends, himself bearing the whole loss. And this was a very wise and well-chosen way of charity, and in the good effect of it a much greater charity than if he had given these very persons freely and for nothing so much as they earned by their work; because by this means he took many off from begging, and thereby rescued them at once from two of the most dangerous temptations of this world, idleness and poverty; and by degrees reclaimed them to a virtuous and industrious course of life, which enabled them afterwards to live without being beholden to the charity of others.

And this course, so happily devised and begun by Mr. Gouge in his own parish, was I think that which gave the first hint to that worthy and useful citizen Mr. Thomas Firmin, of a much larger design, which hath been prosecuted by him for some years with that vigour and good success in this city, that many hundreds of poor children, and others who lived idle before, unprofitable both to themselves and the public, are continually maintained at work, and taught to earn their own livelihood much in the same way: he being, by the generous assistance and charity of many worthy and well-disposed persons of all ranks, enabled to bear the unavoidable loss

and charge of so vast an undertaking ; and by his own forward inclination to charity, and his unwearyed diligence and activity, extraordinarily fitted to sustain and go through the incredible pains of it.

But to return to our deceased friend ; concerning whom I must content myself to pass over many things worthy to be remembered of him, and to speak only of those virtues of his which were more eminent and remarkable.

Of his piety towards God, which is the necessary foundation of all other graces and virtues, I shall only say this, that it was great and exemplary, but yet very still and quiet without stir and noise, and much more in substance and reality, than in show and ostentation ; and did not consist in censuring and finding fault with others, but in the due care and government of his own life and actions, and in exercising himself continually to have “a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men ;” in which he was a proficient, that even after a long acquaintance and familiar conversation with him, it was not easy to observe any thing that might deserve blame.

He particularly excelled in the more peculiar virtues of conversation, in modesty, humility, meekness, cheerfulness, and in kindness and charity towards all men.

So great was his modesty, that it never appeared either by word or action that he put any value upon himself. This I have often observed in him, that the charities which were procured chiefly by his application and industry, when he had occasion to give an account of them, he would rather impute to any one who had but the least hand and part in the obtaining of them, than assume any thing of it to



himself. Another instance of his modesty was, that when he had quitted his living of St. Sepulchre's, upon some dissatisfaction about the terms of conformity, he willingly forbore preaching, saying there was no need of him here in London, where there were so many worthy ministers, and that he thought he might do as much or more good in another way which could give no offence. Only in the latter years of his life, being better satisfied in some things he had doubted of before, he had licence from some of the bishops to preach in Wales in his progress; which he was the more willing to do, because in some places he saw great need of it, and he thought he might do it with greater advantage among the poor people, who were the more likely to regard his instructions, being recommended by his great charity so well known to them, and of which they had so long had the experience and benefit. But where there was no such need, he was very well contented to hear others persuade men to goodness, and to practise it himself.

He was clothed with humility, and had in a most eminent degree that ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which, St. Peter says, "is in the sight of God of great price:" so that there was not the least appearance either of pride or passion in any of his words or actions. He was not only free from anger and bitterness, but from all affected gravity and moroseness. His conversation was affable and pleasant; he had a wonderful serenity of mind and evenness of temper, visible in his very countenance; he was hardly ever merry, but never melancholy, or sad; and for any thing I could discern, after a long and intimate acquaintance with

him, he was upon all occasions and accidents perpetually the same; always cheerful, and always kind; of a disposition ready to embrace and oblige all men; allowing others to differ from him, even in opinions that were very dear to him; and provided men did but "fear God and work righteousness," he loved them heartily, how distant soever from him in judgment about things less necessary; in all which he is very worthy to be a pattern for men of all persuasions whatsoever.

But that virtue which of all other shone brightest in him, and was his most proper and peculiar character, was his cheerful and unwearied diligence in acts of pious charity. In this he left far behind him all that ever I knew, and, as I said before, had a singular sagacity and prudence in devising the most effectual ways of doing good, and in managing and disposing his charity to the best purposes, and to the greatest extent; always, if it were possible, making it to serve some end of piety and religion, as the instruction of poor children in the principles of religion, and furnishing grown persons that were ignorant with the Bible and other good books; strictly obliging those to whom he gave them to a diligent reading of them, and when he had opportunity, exacting of them an account how they had profited by them.

In his occasional alms to the poor, in which he was very free and bountiful, the relief he gave them was always mingled with good counsel, and as great a tenderness and compassion for their souls as bodies: which very often attained the good effect it was likely to have, the one making way for the other with so much advantage, and men being very apt to follow the good advice of those who give

them in hand so sensible a pledge and testimony of their good-will to them.

This kind of charity must needs be very expensive to him, but he had a plentiful estate settled upon him, and left him by his father, and he laid it out as liberally in the most prudent and effectual ways of charity he could think of, and upon such persons as, all circumstances considered, he judged to be the fittest and most proper objects of it.

For about nine or ten years last past he did, as is well known to many here present, almost wholly apply his charity to Wales, because there he judged was most occasion for it: and because this was a very great work, he did not only lay out upon it whatever he could spare out of his own estate, but employed his whole time and pains to excite and engage the charity of others for his assistance in it.

And in this he had two excellent designs: one, to have poor children brought up to read and write, and to be carefully instructed in the principles of religion; the other, to furnish persons of grown age, the poor especially, with the necessary helps and means of knowledge, as the Bible and other books of piety and devotion, in their own language; to which end he procured the Church Catechism, the Practice of Piety, and that best of books, the Whole Duty of Man, besides several other pious and useful treatises, some of them to be translated into the Welsh tongue, and great numbers of all of them to be printed, and sent down to the chief towns in Wales, to be sold at easy rates to those that were able to buy them, and to be freely given to those that were not.

And in both these designs, through the blessing of God upon his unwearied endeavours, he found

very great success. For by the large and bountiful contributions, which, chiefly by his industry and prudent application, were obtained from charitable persons of all ranks and conditions, from the nobility and gentry of Wales, and the neighbouring counties, and several of that quality in and about London; from divers of the right reverend bishops, and of the clergy; and from that perpetual fountain of charity the City of London, led on and encouraged by the most bountiful example of the right honourable the Lord Mayor and the Court of Aldermen; to all which he constantly added two-thirds of his own estate, which, as I have been credibly informed, was two hundred pounds a-year; I say, by all these together, there were every year eight hundred, sometimes a thousand poor children educated, as I said before; and by this example, several of the most considerable towns of Wales were excited to bring up, at their own charge, the like number of poor children, in the like manner, and under his inspection and care.

He likewise gave very great numbers of the books above-mentioned, both in the Welsh and English tongues, to the poorer sort, so many as were unable to buy them, and willing to read them. But, which was the greatest work of all, and amounted indeed to a mighty charge, he procured a new and very fair impression of the Bible and Liturgy of the church of England in the Welsh tongue (the former impression being spent, and hardly twenty of them to be had in all London,) to the number of eight thousand; one thousand whereof were freely given to the poor, and the rest sent to the principal cities and towns in Wales to be sold to the rich at very reasonable and low rates, viz. at four shillings a-piece,

well bound and clasped; which was much cheaper than any English Bible was ever sold that was of so fair a print and paper: a work of that charge, that it was not likely to have been done any other way; and for which this age, and perhaps the next, will have great cause to thank God on his behalf.

In these good works he employed all his time and care and pains, and his whole heart was in them; so that he was very little affected with any thing else, and seldom either minded or knew any thing of the strange occurrences of this troublesome and busy age, such as I think are hardly to be paralleled in any other. Or if he did mind them, he scarce ever spoke any thing about them. For this was the business he laid to heart, and knowing it to be so much and so certainly the will of his heavenly Father, it was his meat and drink to be doing of it: and the good success he had in it was a continual feast to him, and gave him a perpetual serenity both of mind and countenance. His great love and zeal for this work made all the pains and difficulties of it seem nothing to him: he would rise early and sit up late, and continued the same diligence and industry to the last, though he was in the threescore and seventeenth year of his age. And that he might manage the distribution of this great charity with his own hands, and see the good effect of it with his own eyes, he always once, but usually twice a year, at his own charge travelled over a great part of Wales, none of the best countries to travel in: but for the love of God and men he endured all that, together with the extremity of heat and cold (which in their several seasons are both very great there), not only with patience, but with pleasure. So that, all things considered,

there have not, since the primitive times of Christianity, been many among the sons of men to whom that glorious character of the Son of God might be better applied, that "he went about doing good." And Wales may as worthily boast of this truly apostolical man, as of their famous St. David, who was also very probably a good man, as those times of ignorance and superstition went. But his goodness is so disguised by their fabulous legends and stories which give us the account of him, that it is not easy to discover it. Indeed, ridiculous miracles in abundance are reported of him; as, that upon occasion of a great number of people resorting from all parts to hear him preach, for the greater advantage of his being heard, a mountain all on a sudden rose up miraculously under his feet, and his voice was extended to that degree, that he might be distinctly heard for two or three miles round about. Such fantastical miracles as this make up a great part of his history. And admitting all these to be true (which a wise man would be loath to do) our departed friend had that which is much greater, and more excellent than all these, a fervent charity to God and men; which is more than to speak (as they would make us believe St. David did) "with the tongue of men and angels," more than to raise or remove mountains.

And now methinks it is pity so good a design so happily prosecuted should fall and die with this good man. And it is now under deliberation, if possible, still to continue and carry it on, and a very worthy and charitable person pitched upon for that purpose, who is willing to undertake that part which he that is gone performed so well: but this will depend upon the continuance of the former

charities, and the concurrence of those worthy and well-disposed persons in Wales to contribute their part as formerly: which I persuade myself they will cheerfully do.

I will add but one thing more concerning our deceased brother, that though he meddled not at all in our present heats and differences as a party, having much better things to mind; yet, as a looker-on, he did very sadly lament them, and for several of the last years of his life he continued in the communion of our church, and, as he himself told me, thought himself obliged in conscience so to do.

He died in the seventy-seventh year of his age, October 29, 1681. It so pleased God that his death was very sudden; and so sudden, that in all probability he himself hardly perceived it when it happened, for he died in his sleep; so that we may say of him, as is said of David—"After he had served his generation according to the will of God," he fell asleep.

I confess that a sudden death is generally undesirable, and, therefore, with reason, we pray against it; because so very few are sufficiently prepared for it. But to him, the constant employment of whose life was the best preparation for death that was possible, no death could be sudden; nay, it was rather a favour and blessing to him, because by how much the more sudden so much the more easy; as if God had designed to bring the reward of the great pains of his life in an easy death. And, indeed, it was rather a translation than a death; and saving that his body was left behind, what was said of Enoch may not unfitly be applied to this pious and good man, with respect to the suddenness of the change—"He walked with God, and was not, for God took him."

And God grant that we who survive may all of us sincerely endeavour to tread in the steps of his exemplary piety and charity; of his labour of love, his unwearied diligence and patient continuance in doing good, that we may meet with that encouraging commendation which he had already received from the mouth of our Lord—"Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you always that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever. Amen.



## SERMON XXIV.

[Preached at the funeral of the Reverend Benjamin Whichcot, D.D.  
May 24, 1683.]

*Wherefore we are always confident, knowing that  
whilst we are at home, in the body, we are absent  
from the Lord.—2 COR. v. 6.*

THESE words contain one of the chief grounds of encouragement which the Christian religion gives us against the fear of death. For our clearer understanding of them it will be requisite to consider the context, looking back as far as the beginning of the chapter, where the apostle pursues the argument of the foregoing chapter, which was to comfort and encourage Christians under their afflictions and sufferings, from this consideration, that these did but prepare the way for a greater and more glorious reward: “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” And suppose the worst, that these sufferings should extend to death, there is comfort for us likewise, in this case, (ver. 1, of this chapter,) “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God,” &c. “If our earthly house of this tabernacle;” he calls our body an earthly house, and that we may not look upon it as a certain abode and fixed habitation, he doth, by way of correction of himself, add, that it is but a tabernacle or tent which must shortly be taken down; and when it is, “we shall have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

This is a description of our heavenly habitation, in opposition to our earthly house or tabernacle ; it is “ a building of God,” not like those houses or tabernacles which men build, and which are liable to decay and dissolution, to be taken down, or to fall down of themselves, for such are those houses of clay which we dwell in, “ whose foundations are in the dust,” but a habitation prepared by God himself, “ a house not made with hands ;” that which is the immediate work of God, being in Scripture opposed to that which is made with hands, and effected by human concurrence, and by natural means ; and being the immediate work of God, as it is excellent, so it is lasting and durable, which no earthly thing is : “ eternal in the heavens,” that is, eternal and heavenly.

“ For in this we groan earnestly ;” that is, while we are in this body we groan by reason of the pressures and afflictions of it. “ Desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven, if so be that, being clothed, we shall not be found naked.” “ Desiring to be clothed upon ;” that is, we could wish not to put off these bodies, not to be stripped of them by death, but to be of the number of those who, at the coming of our Lord, without the putting off these bodies, shall be changed and clothed upon with their house which is from heaven, and without dying be invested with those spiritual, and glorious, and heavenly bodies which men shall have at the resurrection.

This, I doubt not, is the apostle’s meaning in these words ; in which he speaks according to a common opinion among the disciples, grounded (as St. John tells us) upon a mistake of our Saviour’s words concerning him, “ If I will that he tarry till I come :” upon which St. John tells us, that “ there went a

saying among the brethren, that that disciple should not die;" that is, that he should live till Christ's coming to judgment, and then be changed; and, consequently, that Christ would come to judgment before the end of that age. Suitable to this common opinion among Christians, the apostle here says, "In this we groan earnestly, desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven, if so be that, being clothed, we shall not be found naked." It hath puzzled interpreters what to make of this passage, and well it might; for whatever be meant by being clothed, how can they that are clothed be found naked? But I think it is very clear that our translators have not the true sense of this passage, *Ἔγχε καὶ ἐνδυσάμενοι, οὐ γυμνοὶ ἐρεθησόμεθα*, which is most naturally rendered thus, "If so be we shall be found clothed, and not naked;" that is, if the coming of Christ shall find us in the body and not divested of it; if at Christ's coming to judgment, we shall be found alive and not dead. And then the sense of the whole is very clear and current; we are desirous to be clothed upon with our house from heaven (that is, with our spiritual and immortal bodies), if so be it shall so happen that at the coming of Christ we shall be found alive in these bodies, and not stripped of them before by death. And then it follows, "For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burthened (that is, with the afflictions and pressures of this life); not that we would be unclothed (that is, not that we desire by death to be divested of these bodies), but clothed upon (that is, if God see it good we had rather be found alive, and changed, and, without putting off these bodies, have immortality as it were superinduced), that so mortality might be swallowed up of life." The plain sense is, that he

rather desires (if it may be) to be of the number of those who shall be found alive at the coming of Christ, and have this mortal and corruptible body while they are clothed with it, changed into a spiritual and incorruptible body, without the pain and terror of dying: of which immediate translation into heaven, without the painful divorce of soul and body by death, Enoch and Elias were examples in the Old Testament.

It follows, (ver. 5.) “ Now he that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God :” that is, it is he who hath fitted and prepared us for this glorious change: “ who also hath given us the earnest of the Spirit.” The Spirit is frequently in Scripture called the witness, and seal, and earnest of our future happiness, and blessed resurrection or change of these vile and earthly bodies into spiritual and heavenly bodies. For as the resurrection of Christ from the dead, by the power of the Holy Ghost, is the great proof and evidence of immortality; so the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelling in us, is the pledge and earnest of our resurrection to an immortal life.

From all which the apostle concludes in the words of the text, “ Therefore we are always confident;” that is, we are always of good courage against the fear of death, “ knowing that whilst we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord,” ἐν τῷ σώματι ἐνδημοῦντες, which may better be rendered, whilst we converse or sojourn in the body, than whilst we are at home; because the design of the apostle is to shew, that the body is not our house but our tabernacle; and that whilst we are in the body we are not at home, but pilgrims and strangers. And this notion the heathens had of our present life and condition in this world. *Ex vita discedo* (saith

Tully) *tanquam ex hospitio non tanquam ex domo; commorandi enim natura diversorium nobis, non habitandi locum dedit.* “We go out of this life as it were from an inn, and not from our home; nature having designed it to us a place to sojourn but not to dwell in.”

“We are absent from the Lord;” that is, we are detained from the blessed sight and enjoyment of God, and kept out of the possession of that happiness which makes heaven.

So that the apostle makes an immediate opposition between our continuance in the body and our blissful enjoyment of God; and lays it down for a certain truth, that whilst we remain in the body we are detained from our happiness, and that so soon as ever we leave the body we shall be admitted into it, “knowing that whilst we converse in the body we are absent from the Lord.” And, (ver. 8.) “We are willing rather to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord;” intimating, that so soon as we quit these bodies we shall be admitted to the blessed sight and enjoyment of God.

My design from this text is to draw some useful corollaries, or conclusions, from this assertion of the apostle, “That whilst we are in these bodies we are detained from our happiness; and that so soon as ever we depart out of them we shall be admitted to the possession and enjoyment of it.” And they are these,

1. This assertion shews us the vanity and falsehood of that opinion, or rather dream, concerning the sleep of the soul from the time of death till the general resurrection. This is chiefly grounded upon that frequent metaphor in Scripture by which death is resembled to sleep, and those that are dead are said to be fallen asleep. But this metaphor is no

where in Scripture, that I know of, applied to the soul, but to the body resting in the grave in order to its being awakened and raised up at the resurrection. And thus it is frequently used with express reference to the body, (Dan. xii. 2.) "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake." (Matth. xxvii. 52.) "And the graves were opened, and many bodies of saints which slept arose." (Acts xiii. 36.) "David after he had served his own generation by the will of God fell on sleep, and was laid to his fathers, and saw corruption;" which surely can no otherwise be understood than of his body. (1 Cor. xv. 20.) "Now is Christ risen from the dead and became the first-fruits of them that slept;" that is, the resurrection of his body is the earnest and assurance that ours also shall be raised. And, (ver. 51.) "We shall not all sleep, but shall all be changed;" where the apostle certainly speaks both of the death and change of these corruptible bodies. (1 Thessal. iv. 14.) "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that sleep in Jesus shall God bring with him:" that is, the bodies of those that died in the Lord shall be raised, and accompany him at his coming. So that it is the body which is said in Scripture to sleep, and not the soul. For that is utterly inconsistent with the apostle's assertion here in the text, that "while we are in the body we are absent from the Lord," and that so soon as we depart out of the body we shall be present with the Lord. For surely to be with the Lord must signify a state of happiness, which sleep is not, but only of inactivity: besides, that the apostle's argument would be very flat, and it would be but a cold encouragement against the fear of death, that so soon as we are

dead we shall fall asleep and become insensible. But the apostle useth it as an argument why we should be willing to die as soon as God pleaseth, and the sooner the better; because so soon as we quit these bodies we shall be present with the Lord, that is, admitted to the blissful sight and enjoyment of him; and, while we abide in the body we are detained from our happiness: but if our souls shall sleep as well as our bodies till the general resurrection, it is all one whether we continue in the body or not, as to any happiness we shall enjoy in the mean time, which is directly contrary to the main scope of the apostle's argument.

2. This assertion of the apostle's doth perfectly conclude against the feigned purgatory of the church of Rome; which supposeth the far greater number of true and faithful Christians, of those who die in the Lord, and have obtained eternal redemption by him from hell, not to pass immediately into a state of happiness, but to be detained in the suburbs of hell in extremity of torment (equal to that of hell for degree, though not for duration) till their souls be purged, and the guilt of temporal punishments, which they are liable to, be some way or other paid off and discharged. They suppose indeed some very few holy persons (especially those who suffer martyrdom) to be so perfect at their departure out of the body as to pass immediately into heaven, because they need no purgation; but most Christians they suppose to die so imperfect that they stand in need of being purged; and according to the degree of their imperfection are to be detained a shorter or a longer time in purgatory.

But now, besides that there is no text in Scripture

from whence any such state can probably be concluded (as is acknowledged by many learned men of the church of Rome) and even that text which they have most insisted upon ("they shall be saved, yet so as by fire") is given up by them as insufficient to conclude the thing: Estius is very glad to get off it, by saying there is nothing in it against purgatory: Why? Nobody pretends that: but we might reasonably expect that there should be something for it in a text which hath been so often produced and urged by them for the proof of it. I say, besides that there is nothing in Scripture for purgatory, there are a great many things against it, and utterly inconsistent with it. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, which was designed to represent to us the different states of good and bad men in another world, there is not the least intimation of purgatory, but that good men pass immediately into a state of happiness, and bad men into a place of torment. And St. John (Rev. xiv. 13.) pronounceth all that die in the Lord happy, because "they rest from their labours; which they cannot be said to do, who are in a state of great anguish and torment, as those are supposed to be who are in purgatory.

But, above all, this reasoning of St. Paul is utterly inconsistent with any imagination of such a state. For he encourageth all Christians in general against the fear of death from the consideration of that happy state they should immediately pass into, by being admitted into the presence of God; which surely is not purgatory. "We are of good courage, (says he) and willing rather to be absent from the body:" and great reason we should be so, if so soon as we leave the body we are present with the Lord. But no man sure would be glad to leave



the body to go into a place of exquisite and extreme torment, which they tell us is the case of most Christians when they die. And what can be more unreasonable, than to make the apostle to use an argument to comfort all Christians against the fear of death, which concerns but very few in comparison? so that if the apostle's reasoning be good, that while we are in this life we are detained from our happiness, and so soon as we depart this life we pass immediately into it, and therefore death is desirable to all good men: I say, if this reasoning be good, it is very clear that St. Paul knew nothing of the doctrine now taught in the church of Rome concerning purgatory; because that is utterly inconsistent with what he expressly asserts in this chapter, and quite takes away the force of his whole argument.

3. To encourage us against the fear of death. And this is the conclusion which the apostle makes from this consideration. "Therefore (says he) we are of good courage, knowing that whilst we converse in the body we are absent from the Lord." There is in us a natural love of life, and a natural horror and dread of death; so that our spirits are apt to shrink at the thoughts of the approach of it. But this fear may very much be mitigated, and even overruled by reason and the considerations of religion. For death is not so dreadful in itself, as with regard to the consequences of it: and those will be as we are, comfortable and happy to the good, but dismal and miserable to the wicked. So that the only true antidote against the fear of death is the hopes of a better life; and the only firm ground of these hopes is the mercy of God in Jesus Christ, upon our due preparation for another world by repentance and a

holy life : “ For the sting of death is sin ;” and when that is taken away the terror and bitterness of death is past : and then death is so far from being dreadful, that in reason it is extremely desirable ; because it lets us into a better state, such as only deserves the name of life. *Hi vivunt qui ex corporum vinculis tanquam è carcere evolaverunt : vestra vero quæ dicitur vita, mors est.* “ They truly live (could a heathen say) who have made their escape out of this prison of the body ; but that which men commonly call life is rather death than life.” To live indeed is to be well and to be happy, and that we shall never be till we are got beyond the grave.

4. This consideration should comfort us under the loss and death of friends, which certainly is one of the greatest grievances and troubles of human life. For if they be fit for God, and go to him when they die, they are infinitely happier than it was possible for them to have been in this world ; and the trouble of their absence from us is fully balanced by their being present with the Lord. For why should we lament the end of that life which we are assured is the beginning of immortality ? One reason of our trouble for the loss of friends is because we loved them : but it is no sign of our love to them to grudge and repine at their happiness. But we hoped to have enjoyed them longer ; be it so, yet why should we be troubled that they are happier sooner than we expected ? but they are parted from us, and the thought of this is grievous ; but yet the consideration of their being parted for a while is not near so sad, as the hopes of a happy meeting again, never to be parted any more is comfortable and joyful. So that the greater our love to them was, the less should be our grief for them, when we consider that they

are happy and that they are safe; past all storms, all the troubles and temptations of this life, and out of the reach of all harm and danger for ever. But though the reason of our duty in this case be very plain, yet the practice of it is very difficult; and when all is said, natural affection will have its course; and even after our judgment is satisfied it will require some time to still and quiet our passions.

5. This consideration should wean us from the love of life; and make us not only contented, but willing and glad to leave this world whenever it shall please God to call us out of it. This inference the apostle makes, (ver. 8.) “We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord.” Though there were no state of immortality after this life, yet methinks we should not desire to live always in this world. *Habet natura* (says Tully) *ut aliarum rerum, sic vivendi modum*: “as nature hath set bounds and measures to other things, so likewise to life;” of which men should know when they have enough, and not covet so much of it till they be tired and cloyed with it. If there were no other inconvenience in a long life, this is a great one, that in a long course of time we unavoidably see a great many things which we would not; our own misfortunes and the calamities of others; public confusions and distractions; the loss of friends and relations, or which is worse, their misery; or which is worst of all, their miscarriage; especially a very infirm and tedious old age is very undesirable; for who would desire to live long uneasy to himself, and troublesome to others? It is time for us to be willing to die, when we cannot live with the good-will even of our friends, when those who ought to love us best think much that we live

so long, and can hardly forbear to give us broad signs that they are weary of our company: In such a case, a man would almost be contented to die out of civility, and not choose to make any long stay where he sees that his company is not acceptable. If we think we can be welcome to a better place, and to a more delightful society, why should we desire to thrust ourselves any longer upon an ill-natured world, upon those who have much ado to refrain from telling us that our room is better than our company.

Some, indeed, have a very happy and vigorous old age, and the taper of life burns clear in them to the last; their understandings are good, their memories and senses tolerable, their humour pleasant, and their conversation acceptable, and their relations kind and respectful to them. But this is a rare felicity, and which seldom happens but to those who have lived wisely and virtuously, and by a religious and regular course of life have preserved some of their best spirits to the last, and have not by vice and extravagance drawn off life to the dregs, and left nothing to be enjoyed but infirmities and ill-humours, guilt and repentance; but, on the contrary, have prudently laid up some considerable comforts and supports for themselves against this gloomy day; having stored their minds with wisdom and knowledge, and taken care to secure to themselves the comfortable reflections of an useful and well-spent life, and the favour and loving-kindness of God, which is better than life itself. But, generally, the extremities of old age are very peevish and querulous, and a declining and falling back to the weak and helpless condition of infancy and childhood. And yet less care is commonly taken to please aged per-

sons, and less kindness shewn to them (unless it be in expectation of receiving greater from them) than to children; because these are cherished in hopes, the others in despair of their growing better. So that if God see it good, it is not desirable to live to try nature, and the kindness and good-will of our relations to the utmost.

Nay, there is reason enough why we should be well contented to die in any age of our life. If we are young we have tasted the best of it; if in our middle age, we have not only enjoyed all that is desirable of life, but almost all that is tolerable; if we are old, we are come to the dregs of it, and do but see the same things over and over again, and continually with less pleasure.

Especially if we consider the happiness from which we are all this while detained. This life is but our infancy and childhood in comparison of the manly pleasures and enjoyments of the other state. And why should we wish to be always children; and to linger here below, to play the fools yet a little longer? In this sense, that high expression of the poet is true,

——— *Dii celant homines, ut vivere durent,*  
*Quàm sit dulce mori*———

“ The gods conceal from men the sweetness of dying, to make them patient and contented to live.”

This life is wholly in order to the other. Do but make sure to live well and there is no need of living long. To the purpose of preparation for another world, the best life is the longest. Some live a great pace, and by continual diligence and industry in serving God and doing good, do really dispatch

more of the business of life in a few years, than others do in a whole age; who go such a sauntering pace towards heaven, as if they were in no haste to get thither. But if we were always prepared we should rejoice at the prospect of our end; as those who have been long tost at sea are overjoyed at the sight of land.

I have now done with my text, but have another subject to speak of; that excellent man, in whose place I now stand, whom we all knew, and whom all that knew him well did highly esteem and reverence. He was born in Shropshire, of a worthy and ancient family, the 11th of March, 1609; was the sixth son of his father, and being bred up to learning, and very capable of it, was sent to the University of Cambridge, and planted there in Emanuel College, where he was chosen fellow, and was an excellent tutor and instructor of youth, and bred up many persons of quality, and others who afterwards proved useful and eminent; as many perhaps as any tutor of that time.

About the age of four or five and thirty he was made provost of King's College; where he was a most vigilant and prudent governor, a great encourager of learning and good order, and by his careful and wise management of the estate of the College, brought it into a very flourishing condition, and left it so.

It cannot be denied (nor am I much concerned to dissemble it) that here he possessed another man's place, who by the iniquity of the times was wrongfully ejected; I mean Dr. Collins, the famous learned divinity professor of that University: during whose life (and he lived many years after) by the free consent of the College there were two shares out

of the common dividend allotted to the provost, one whereof was constantly paid to Dr. Collins, as if he had been still provost. To this Dr. Whichcot did not only give his consent (without which the thing could not have been done) but was very forward for the doing of it, though hereby he did not only considerably lessen his own profit, but likewise incur no small censure and hazard as the times then were. And lest this had not been kindness enough to that worthy person, whose place he possessed, in his last will, he left his son, Sir John Collins, a legacy of one hundred pounds.

And, as he was not wanting either in respect or real kindness to the rightful owner, so neither did he stoop to do any thing unworthy to obtain that place; for he never took the covenant: and, not only so, but by the particular friendship and interest which he had in some of the chief visitors, he prevailed to have the greatest part of the fellows of that College exempted from that imposition, and preserved them in their places by that means. And to the fellows that were ejected by the visitors, he likewise freely consented that their full dividend for that year should be paid them, even after they were ejected. Among these was the reverend and ingenious Dr. Charles Mason; upon whom, after he was ejected, the College did confer a good living, which then fell in their gift, with the consent of the provost, who, knowing him to be a worthy man, was contented to run the hazard of the displeasure of those times.

So that I hope none will be hard upon him, that he was contented upon such terms to be in a capacity to do good in bad times.

For, besides his care of the College, he had a very

great and good influence upon the university in general. Every Lord's day in the afternoon, for almost twenty years together, he preached in Trinity Church, where he had a great number, not only of the young scholars, but of those of greater standing and best repute for learning in the University, his constant and attentive auditors; and in those wild and unsettled times contributed more to the forming of the students of that University to a sober sense of religion than any man in that age.

After he left Cambridge, he came to London, and was chosen minister of Blackfriars, where he continued till the dreadful fire; and then retired himself to a donative he had at Milton, near Cambridge; where he preached constantly, and relieved the poor, and had their children taught to read at his own charge, and made up differences among the neighbours. Here he staid, till by the promotion of the Reverend Dr. Wilkins, his predecessor in this place, to the bishopric of Chester, he was by his interest and recommendation presented to this Church. But, during the building of it, upon the invitation of the court of aldermen, in the mayoralty of Sir William Turner, he preached before that honourable audience at Guild-hall Chapel, every Sunday in the afternoon with great acceptance and approbation, for about the space of seven years.

When his church was built, he bestowed his pains here twice a week, where he had the general love and respect of his parish; and a very considerable and judicious auditory, though not very numerous, by reason of the weakness of his voice in his declining age.

It pleased God to bless him, as with a plentiful estate, so with a charitable mind; which yet was not



so well known to many, because in the disposal of his charity, he very much affected secrecy. He frequently bestowed his alms (as I am informed by those who best knew) on poor house-keepers disabled by agé or sickness to support themselves, thinking those to be the most proper objects of it. He was rather frugal in expense upon himself, that so he might have wherewithal to relieve the necessities of others.

And he was not only charitable in his life, but in a very bountiful manner at his death; bequeathing in pious and charitable legacies to the value of a thousand pounds. To the library of the University of Cambridge, fifty pounds; and of King's College, one hundred pounds; and of Emanuel College, twenty pounds: to which College he had been a considerable benefactor before; having founded there several scholarships to the value of a thousand pounds, out of a charity, with the disposal whereof he was intrusted, and which not without great difficulty and pains he at last recovered.

To the poor of the several places, where his estate lay, and where he had been minister, he gave above one hundred pounds.

Among those who had been his servants, or were so at his death, he disposed in annuities and legacies in money, to the value of above three hundred pounds.

To other charitable uses, and among the poorer of his relations, above three hundred pounds.

To every one of his tenants he left a legacy according to the proportion of the estate they held, by way of remembrance of him; and to one of them that was gone much behind, he remitted in his will seventy pounds. And as became his great

goodness, he was ever a remarkably kind landlord, forgiving his tenants, and always making abatements to them for hard years, or any other accidental losses that happened to them.

I must not omit the wise provision he made in his will to prevent law-suits among the legatees, by appointing two or three persons of greatest prudence and authority among his relations final arbitrators of all differences that should arise.

Having given this account of his last will, I come now to the sad part of all; sad, I mean to us, but happiest to him. A little before Easter last, he went down to Cambridge; where, upon taking a great cold, he fell into a distemper, which in a few days put a period to his life. He died in the house of his ancient and most learned friend, Dr. Cudworth, Master of Christ's College. During his sickness, he had a constant calmness and serenity of mind; and under all his bodily weakness, possess his soul in great patience. After the Prayers for the Visitation of the Sick (which he said were excellent prayers) had been used, he was put in mind of receiving the Sacrament; to which he answered, that he most readily embraced the proposals: and, after he had received it, said to Dr. Cudworth, "I heartily thank you for this most Christian office: I thank you for putting me in mind of receiving this Sacrament:" adding this pious ejaculation: "the Lord fulfil all his declarations and promises, and pardon all my weaknesses and imperfections." He disclaimed all merit in himself, and declared that whatever he was, he was through the grace and goodness of God in Jesus Christ. He expressed likewise great dislike of the principles of separation, and said—He was the more desirous to receive the Sacrament, that he

might declare his full communion with the church of Christ all the world over. He disclaimed popery, and as things of near affinity with it, or rather parts of it, "all superstition and usurpation upon the consciences of men."

He thanked God, that he had no pain in his body, nor disquiet in his mind.

Towards his last, he seemed rather unwilling to be detained any longer in this state; not for any pains he felt in himself, but for the trouble he gave his friends: saying to one of them who had with great care attended him all along in his sickness, "My dear friend, thou who hast taken a great deal of pains to uphold a crazy body, but it will not do; I pray thee, give me no more cordials; for why shouldest thou keep me any longer out of that happy state to which I am going? I thank God I hope in his mercy, that it shall be well with me."

And herein, God was pleased particularly to answer those devout and well-weighed petitions of his, which he frequently used in his prayer before sermon, which I shall set down in his own words, and I doubt not, those that were his constant hearers, do well remember them. "And superadd this, O Lord, to all the grace and favour which thou hast shewn us all along in life, not to remove us hence but with all advantage for eternity, when we shall be in a due preparation of mind, in a holy constitution of soul, in a perfect renunciation of the guise of this mad and sinful world, when we shall be entirely resigned up to thee, when we shall have clear acts of faith in God by Jesus Christ, high and reverential thoughts of thee in our minds, enlarged and inflamed affections toward thee, &c. And whensoever we shall come to leave this world, which will be when

thou shalt appoint (for the issues of life and death are in thy hands), afford us such a mighty power and presence of thy good Spirit, that we may have solid consolation in believing, and avoid all consternation of mind, all doubtfulness and uncertainty concerning our everlasting condition, and at length depart in the faith of God's elect," &c. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace."

Thus you have the short history of the life and death of this eminent person; whose just character cannot be given in few words, and time will not allow me to use many. To be able to describe him aright it were necessary one should be like him, for which reason I must content myself with a very imperfect draught of him.

I shall not insist upon his exemplary piety and devotion towards God, of which his whole life was one continued testimony. Nor will I praise his profound learning, for which he was justly had in so great reputation. The moral improvements of his mind, a godlike temper and disposition (as he was wont to call it) he chiefly valued and aspired after; that universal charity and goodness which he did continually preach and practise.

His conversation was exceeding kind and affable, grave and winning, prudent and profitable. He was slow to declare his judgment, and modest in delivering it. Never passionate, never peremptory; so far from imposing upon others, that he was rather apt to yield. And though he had a most profound and well-poised judgment, yet was he of all men I ever knew the most patient to hear others differ from him, and the most easy to be convinced when good reason was offered; and, which is seldom seen,

more apt to be favourable to another man's reason than his own.

Studious and inquisitive men commonly at such an age (at forty or fifty at the utmost), have fixed and settled their judgments in most points, and as it were made their last understanding ; supposing they have thought, or read, or heard what can be said on all sides of things ; and, after that, they grow positive and impatient of contradiction, thinking it a disparagement to them to alter their judgment. But our deceased friend was so wise, as to be willing to learn to the last; knowing that no man can grow wiser without some change of his mind, without gaining some knowledge which he had not, or correcting some error which he had before.

He had attained so perfect a mastery of his passions, that for the latter and greatest part of his life he was hardly ever seen to be transported with anger ; and as he was extremely careful not to provoke any man, so not to be provoked by any ; using to say, " If I provoke a man he is the worse for my company, and if I suffer myself to be provoked by him I shall be the worse for his."

He very seldom reprov'd any person in company otherwise than by silence, or some sign of uneasiness, or some very soft and gentle word ; which yet from the respect men generally bore to him did often prove effectual. For he understood human nature very well, and how to apply himself to it in the most easy and effectual ways.

He was a great encourager and kind director of young divines ; and one of the most candid hearers of sermons I think that ever was ; so that though all men did mightily reverence his judgment, yet no man had reason to fear his censure. He never

spake well of himself, nor ill of others : making good that saying of Pansa in Tully, *Neminem alterius, qui suæ confideret virtuti, invidere* ; that “no man is apt to envy the worth and virtues of another, that hath any of his own to trust to.”

In a word, he had all those virtues, and in a high degree, which an excellent temper, great consideration, long care and watchfulness over himself, together with the assistance of God’s grace (which he continually implored, and mightily relied upon) are apt to produce. Particularly he excelled in the virtues of conversation, humanity and gentleness, and humility ; a prudent and peaceable and reconciling temper. And God knows we could very ill at this time have spared such a man ; and have lost from among us as it were so much balm for the healing of the nation, which is now so miserably rent and torn by those wounds which we madly give ourselves. But since God has thought good to deprive us of him, let his virtues live in our memory, and his example in our lives. Let us endeavour to be what he was, and we shall one day be what he now is, of blessed memory on earth and happy for ever in heaven.

And now methinks the consideration of the argument I have been upon, and of that great example that is before us, should raise our minds above this world, and fix them upon the glory and happiness of the other. Let us then begin heaven here, in the frame and temper of our minds, in our heavenly affections and conversation ; in due preparation for, and in earnest desires and breathings after, that blessed state which we firmly believe and assuredly hope to be one day possessed of ; when we shall be removed out of this sink of sin and sorrows into the

regions of bliss and immortality: where we shall meet all those worthy and excellent persons who are gone before us, and whose conversation was so delightful to us in this world; and will be much more so to us in the other; when the spirits of just men shall be made perfect, and shall be quit of all those infirmities which did attend and lessen them in this mortal state; when we shall meet again with our dear brother, and all those good men whom we knew in this world, and with the saints and excellent persons of all ages, to enjoy their blessed friendship and society for ever, in the presence of the blessed God, where is “fulness of joy, at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore.”

In a firm persuasion of this happy state let every one of us say with David, and with the same ardency of affection that he did, “As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God; my soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; O when shall I come and appear before God?” That so the life which we now live in this world may be a patient continuance in well doing, in a joyful expectation of the blessed hope and the glorious appearance of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; to whom with the Father and Holy Ghost be all honour and glory, now and for ever.

Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make us perfect in every good work to do his will, working in us always that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

## SERMON XXV.

A PERSUASIVE TO FREQUENT COMMUNION.

*For as oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.—But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup.—1 COR. xi. 26, 27, 28.*

MY design in this argument is from the consideration of the nature of this sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and of the perpetual use of it to the end of the world, to awaken men to a sense of their duty, and the great obligation that lies upon them to the more frequent receiving of it. And there is the greater need to make men sensible of their duty in this particular, because in this last age, by the unwary discourse of some concerning the nature of this sacrament and the danger of receiving it unworthily, such doubts and fears have been raised in the minds of men, as utterly to deter many, and in a great measure to discourage almost the generality of Christians from the use of it; to the great prejudice and danger of men's souls, and the visible abatement of piety, by the gross neglect of so excellent a means of our growth and improvement in it; and to the mighty scandal of our religion, by the general disuse and contempt of so plain and solemn an institution of our blessed Lord and Saviour.



Therefore I shall take occasion, as briefly and clearly as I can, to treat of these four points.

First, Of the perpetuity of this institution; this the apostle signifies when he saith, that by eating this bread, and drinking this cup, we “do shew the Lord’s death till he come.”

Secondly, Of the obligation that lies upon all Christians to a frequent observance of this institution: this is signified in that expression of the apostle, “as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup:” which expression considered and compared together with the practice of the primitive church does imply an obligation upon Christians to the frequent receiving of this sacrament.

Thirdly, I shall endeavour to satisfy the objections and scruples which have been raised in the minds of men, and particularly of many devout and sincere Christians, to their great discouragement from their receiving this sacrament, at least so frequently as they ought: which objections are chiefly grounded upon what the apostle says: “Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord,” and doth eat and drink damnation to himself.

Fourthly, What preparation of ourselves is necessary in order to our worthy receiving of this sacrament: which will give me occasion to explain the apostle’s meaning in those words,—“but let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.”

I. For the perpetuity of this institution, implied in those words,—“for as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew forth the Lord’s death till he come.” In the three verses immedi-

ately before, the apostle particularly declares the institution of this sacrament, with the manner and circumstances of it, as he had received it not only by the hands of the apostles, but as the words seem rather to intimate, by immediate revelation from our Lord himself. (Ver. 23.) “ For I have received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you : that the Lord Jesus in the same night that he was betrayed took bread : and when he had given thanks he brake it, and said, Take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you ; this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the New Testament in my blood : this do as often as ye shall drink it in remembrance of me.” So that the institution is in these words, “ This do in remembrance of me.” In which words our Lord commands his disciples after his death to repeat these occasions of taking, and breaking, and eating the bread, and of drinking of the cup, by way of solemn commemoration of him. Now whether this was to be done by them once only, or oftener ; and whether by the disciples only during their lives, or by all Christians afterwards in all successive ages of the church, is not so certain merely from the force of these words, “ do this in remembrance of me :” but what the apostle adds puts the matter out of all doubt, that the institution of this sacrament was intended, not only for the apostles, and for that age, but for all Christians, and for all ages of the christian church ; “ for as often as ye eat of this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come :” that is, until the time of his second coming, which will be at the end of the world. So that this sacrament was designed to be a standing commemoration of the death

and passion of our Lord till he should come to judgment; and, consequently, the obligation that lies upon Christians to the observation of it is perpetual, and shall never cease to the end of the world.

So that it is a vain conceit and mere dream of the enthusiasts concerning the *seculum spiritus sancti*, the age and dispensation of the Holy Ghost, when, as they suppose, all human teaching shall cease, and all external ordinances and institutions in religion shall vanish, and there shall be no farther use of them. Whereas it is very plain from the New Testament, that prayer, and outward teaching, and the use of the two sacraments, were intended to continue among Christians in all ages. As for prayer, (besides our natural obligation to this duty, if there were no revealed religion) we are by our Saviour particularly exhorted to watch and pray with regard to the day of judgment, and in consideration of the uncertainty of the time when it shall be: and therefore this will always be a duty incumbent upon Christians till the day of judgment, because it is prescribed as one of the best ways of preparation for it. That outward teaching likewise and baptism were intended to be perpetual is no less plain, because Christ hath expressly promised to be with the teachers of his church in the use of these ordinances to the end of the world. (Matth. xxviii. 19, 20.) "Go and disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: and lo I am with you always to the end of the world." Not only to the end of that particular age, but to the end of the gospel age, and the consummation of all ages, as the phrase clearly imports. And it is as plain from this text, that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper was intended for a perpetual insti-

tution in the christian church, till the second coming of Christ, viz. his coming to judgment : because St. Paul tells, that by these sacramental signs the death of Christ is to be represented and commemorated till he comes. “Do this in remembrance of me : for as oft as ye eat of this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come.”

And if this be the end and use of this sacrament, to be a solemn remembrance of the death and sufferings of our Lord during his absence from us, that is, till his coming to judgment, then this sacrament will never be out of date till the second coming of our Lord. The consideration whereof should mightily strengthen and encourage our faith in the hope of eternal life so often as we partake of this sacrament : since our Lord hath left it to us as a memorial of himself till he come to translate his church into heaven, and as a sure pledge that he will come again at the end of the world, and invest us in that glory which he is now gone before to prepare for us. So that as often as we approach the table of the Lord, we should comfort ourselves with the thoughts of that blessed time when we shall eat and drink with him in his kingdom, and shall be admitted to the great feast of the Lamb, and to eternal communion with God the judge of all, and with our blessed and glorified Redeemer, and the holy angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect.

And the same consideration should likewise make us afraid to receive this sacrament unworthily, without due preparation for it, and without worthy effects of it upon our hearts and lives ; because of that dreadful sentence of condemnation which at the second coming of our Lord shall be passed upon those, who by the profanation of this solemn insti-

tution trample under foot the Son of God, and condemn the blood of the covenant; that covenant of grace and mercy which God hath ratified with mankind by the blood of his Son. The apostle tells us that, "he that, eateth and drinketh unworthily is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, and eateth and drinketh damnation to himself." This indeed is spoken of temporal judgment (as I shall shew in the latter part of this discourse), but the apostle likewise supposeth, that if these temporal judgments had not their effect to bring men to repentance, but they still persisted in the profanation of this holy sacrament, they should at last be condemned with the world. For as he that partaketh worthily of this sacrament, confirms his interest in the promises of the gospel, and his title to eternal life; so he that receives this sacrament unworthily, that is, without due reverence, and without fruits meet for it; nay, on the contrary, continues to live in sin whilst he commemorates the death of Christ, who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, this man aggravates and seals his own damnation, because he is guilty of the body and blood of Christ, not only by the contempt of it, but by renewing in some sort the cause of his sufferings, and as it were "crucifying to himself afresh the Lord of life and glory, and putting him to an open shame." And when the great Judge of the world shall appear and pass final sentence upon men, such obstinate and impenitent wretches as could not be wrought upon by the remembrance of the dearest love of their dying Lord, nor be engaged to leave their sins by all the ties and obligations of this holy sacrament, shall have their portion with Pilate and Judas, with the chief priests and soldiers, who were the

betrayers and murderers of the Lord of life and glory; and shall be dealt withal as those who are in some sort guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. Which severe threatening ought not to discourage men from the sacrament, but to deter all those from their sins who think of engaging themselves to God by so solemn and holy a covenant. It is by no means a sufficient reason to make men fly from the sacrament, but certainly one of the most powerful arguments in the world to make men forsake their sins; as I shall shew more fully under the third head of this discourse.

II. The obligation that lies upon all Christians to the frequent observance and practice of this institution. For though it be not necessarily implied in these words, “as oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup;” yet if we compare these words of the apostle with the usage and practice of Christians at that time, which was to communicate in this holy sacrament so often as they solemnly met together to worship God, they plainly suppose and recommend to us the frequent use of this sacrament, or rather imply an obligation upon Christians to embrace all opportunities of receiving it. For the sense and meaning of any law or institution is best understood by the general practice which follows immediately upon it.

And to convince men of their obligation hereunto, and to engage them to a suitable practice, I shall now endeavour with all the plainness and force of persuasion I can; and, so much the more, because the neglect of it among Christians is grown so general, and a great many persons from a superstitious awe and reverence of this sacrament are by degrees fallen into a profane neglect and contempt of it.

I shall briefly mention a threefold obligation lying upon all Christians to frequent communion in this holy sacrament; each of them sufficient of itself, but all of them together of the greatest force imaginable to engage us hereunto.

1. We are obliged in point of indispensable duty, and in obedience to a plain precept and most solemn institution of our blessed Saviour, that great lawgiver, "who is able to save and to destroy," as St. James calls him; he hath bid us do this. And St. Paul, who declares nothing in this matter but what he tells us he received from the Lord, admonisheth us to do it often. Now for any man that professeth himself a Christian, to live in the open and continued contempt or neglect of a plain law and institution of Christ is utterly inconsistent with such a profession. To such our Lord may say as he did to the Jews, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" How far the ignorance of this institution, or the mistakes which men have been led into about it, may extenuate this neglect is another consideration. But after we know our Lord's will in this particular, and have the law plainly laid before us, there is no cloke for our sin. For nothing can excuse the wilful neglect of a plain institution from a downright contempt of our Saviour's authority.

2. We are likewise obliged hereunto in point of interest. The benefits which we expect to be derived and assured to us by this sacrament are all the blessings of the new covenant, the forgiveness of our sins, the grace and assistance of God's holy Spirit to enable us to perform the conditions of this covenant required on our part; and the comforts of God's holy Spirit to encourage us in well doing, and to support us under sufferings; and the glorious re-

ward of eternal life. So that in neglecting this sacrament we neglect our own interest and happiness, we forsake our own mercies, and judge ourselves unworthy of all the blessings of the gospel, and deprive ourselves of one of the best means and advantages of confirming and conveying these blessings to us. So that if we had not a due sense of our duty, the consideration of our own interest should oblige us not to neglect so excellent and so effectual a means of promoting our own comfort and happiness.

3. We are likewise particularly obliged in point of gratitude to the careful observance of this institution. This was the particular thing our Lord gave in charge when he was going to lay down his life for us: "Do this in remembrance of me." Men use religiously to observe the charge of a dying friend, and unless it be very difficult and unreasonable, to do what he desires; but this is the charge of our best friend (nay, of the greatest friend and benefactor of all mankind), when he was preparing himself to die in our stead, and to offer up himself a sacrifice for us; to undergo the most grievous pains and sufferings for our sakes, and to yield up himself to the worst of temporal deaths, that he might deliver us from the bitter pains of eternal death. And can we deny him any thing he asks of us, who was going to do all this for us? Can we deny him this? So little grievous and burdensome in itself, so infinitely beneficial to us? Had such a friend and in such circumstances bid us do some great thing, would we not have done it? How much more when he hath only said, "Do this in remembrance of me;" when he hath only commended to us one of the most natural and delightful actions, as a fit representation and memorial of his wonder-



ful love to us, and of his cruel sufferings for our sakes; when he hath only enjoined us, in a thankful commemoration of his goodness, to meet at his table, and to remember what he hath done for us, to look upon him whom we have pierced, and to resolve to grieve and wound him no more? Can we without the most horrible ingratitude neglect this dying charge of our sovereign and our Saviour, the great friend and lover of souls; a command so reasonable, so easy, so full of blessings and benefits to the faithful observers of it?

One would think it were no difficult matter to convince men of their duty in this particular, and of the necessity of observing so plain an institution of our Lord, that it were no hard thing to persuade men to their interest, and to be willing to partake of those great and manifold blessings which all Christians believe to be promised and made good to the frequent and worthy receivers of this sacrament. Where then lies the difficulty? What should be the cause of all this backwardness which we see in men to so plain, so necessary, and so beneficial a duty? The truth is, men have been greatly discouraged from this sacrament by the unwary pressing and inculcating of two great truths; the danger of the unworthy receiving of this holy sacrament, and the necessity of a due preparation for it. Which brings me to the

III. Third particular I proposed, which was, to endeavour to satisfy the objections and scruples which have been raised in the minds of men, and particularly of many devout and sincere Christians, to their great discouragement from the receiving of this sacrament, at least so frequently as they ought. And these objections I told you, are chiefly grounded upon what the apostle says at the 27th verse.

“Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.” And again, (ver. 29.) “He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself.” Upon the mistake and misapplication of these texts have been grounded two objections of great force to discourage men from this sacrament, which I shall endeavour with all the tenderness and clearness I can to remove. First, That the danger of unworthy receiving being so very great, it seems the safest way not to receive at all. Secondly, That so much preparation and worthiness being required, in order to our worthy receiving, the more timorous sort of devout Christians can never think themselves duly enough qualified for so sacred an action.

Object. 1. 1. That the danger of unworthy receiving being so very great, it seems the safest way wholly to refrain from this sacrament, and not receive it at all. But this objection is evidently of no force, if there be (as most certainly there is) as great or greater danger on the other hand, viz. in the neglect of this duty: and so though the danger of unworthy receiving be avoided by not receiving, yet the danger of neglecting and contemning a plain institution of Christ is not thereby avoided. Surely they in the parable that refused to come to the marriage-feast of the king's son, and made light of that gracious invitation, were at least as faulty as he who came without a wedding garment. And we find in the conclusion of the parable, that as he was severely punished for his disrespect, so they were destroyed for their disobedience. Nay, of the two it is a greater sign of contempt wholly to neglect the sacrament, than to partake of it without some due

qualification. The greatest indisposition that can be for this holy sacrament is one's being a bad man, and he may be as bad, and is more likely to continue so, who wilfully neglects this sacrament, than he that comes to it with any degree of reverence and preparation, though much less than he ought: and surely it is very hard for men to come to so solemn an ordinance without some kind of religious awe upon their spirits, and without some good thoughts and resolutions, at least, for the present. If a man that lives in any known wickedness of life do before he receive the sacrament set himself seriously to be humbled for his sins, and to repent of them, and to beg God's grace and assistance against them; and, after the receiving of it, does continue for some time in these good resolutions, though after a while he may possibly relapse into the same sins again; this is some kind of restraint to a wicked life: and these good moods and fits of repentance and reformation are much better than a constant and uninterrupted course of sin: even this righteousness, which is "but as the morning-cloud and the early dew," which so soon passeth away, is better than none.

And, indeed, scarce any man can think of coming to the sacrament, but he will by this consideration be excited to some good purposes, and put upon some sort of endeavour to amend and reform his life; and though he be very much under the bondage and power of evil habits, if he do with any competent degree of sincerity (and it is his own fault if he do not) make use of this excellent means and instrument for the mortifying and subduing of his lusts and for the obtaining of God's grace and assistance, it may please God, by the use of these means, so to abate the force and power of his lusts,

and to imprint such considerations upon his mind, in the receiving of his holy sacrament, and preparing himself for it, that he may at last break off his wicked course, and become a good man.

But, on the other hand, as to those who neglect this sacrament, there is hardly any thing left to restrain them from the greatest enormities of life, and to give a check to them in their evil course: nothing but the penalty of human laws, which men may avoid and yet be wicked enough. Heretofore men used to be restrained from great and scandalous vices by shame and fear of disgrace, and would abstain from many sins out of regard to their honour and reputation among men: but men have hardened their faces in this degenerate age, and those gentle restraints of modesty which governed and kept men in order heretofore signify nothing now-a-days: blushing is out of fashion, and shame is ceased from among the children of men.

But the sacrament did always use to lay some kind of restraint upon the worst of men: and if it did not wholly reform them, it would at least have some good effect upon them for a time: if it did not make men good, yet it would make them resolve to be so, and leave some good thoughts and impressions upon their minds.

So that I doubt not but it hath been a thing of very bad consequence, to discourage men so much from the sacrament, as the way hath been of late years: and that many men who were under some kind of check before, since they have been driven away from the sacrament, have quite let loose the reins, and prostituted themselves to all manner of impiety and vice. And among the many ill effects of our past confusions, this is none of the least, that

in many congregations of this kingdom, Christians were generally disused and deterred from the sacrament, upon a pretence that they were unfit for it: and, being so, they must necessarily incur the danger of unworthy receiving; and therefore they had better wholly to abstain from it. By which it came to pass that in very many places this great and solemn institution of the Christian religion was almost quite forgotten, as if it had been no part of it; and the remembrance of Christ's death even lost among Christians: so that many congregations in England might justly have taken up the complaint of the woman at our Saviour's sepulchre, "they have taken away our Lord, and we know not where they have laid him."

But surely men did not well consider what they did, nor what the consequences of it would be, when they did so earnestly dissuade men from the sacrament. It is true, indeed, the danger of unworthy receiving is great; but the proper inference and conclusion from hence is not, that men should upon this consideration be deterred from the sacrament, but that they should be affrighted from their sins, and from that wicked course of life, which is an habitual indisposition and unworthiness. St. Paul indeed (as I observed before) truly represents, and very much aggravates, the danger of the unworthy receiving this sacrament; but he did not deter the Corinthians from it, because they had sometimes come to it without due reverence, but exhorts them to mend what had been amiss, and come better prepared and disposed for the future. And therefore after that terrible declaration in the text, "whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, is guilty of the

body and blood of the Lord," he does not add, therefore let Christians take heed of coming to the sacrament; but, let them come prepared and with due reverence, not as to a common meal, but to a solemn participation of the body and blood of Christ: "but let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup."

For, if this be a good reason to abstain from the sacrament, for fear of performing so sacred an action in an undue manner, it were best for a bad man to lay aside all religion, and to give over the exercise of all the duties of piety, of prayer, of reading and hearing the word of God; because there is a proportionable danger in the unworthy and unprofitable use of any of these. "The prayer of the wicked (that is, of one that resolves to continue so) is an abomination to the Lord." And our Saviour gives us the same caution concerning hearing the word of God; "take heed how you hear." And St. Paul tells us, that to those who are not reformed by the doctrine of the gospel, it is "the savour of death;" that is, deadly and damnable to such persons.

But now will any man from hence argue, that it is best for a wicked man not to pray, nor to hear or read the word of God, lest by so doing he should endanger and aggravate his condemnation? And yet there is as much reason from this consideration to persuade men to give over praying and attending to God's word, as to lay aside the use of the sacrament. And it is every whit as true, that he that prays unworthily, and hears the word of God unworthily, that is, without fruit and benefit, is guilty of a great contempt of God and of our blessed Saviour; and by his indevout prayers and

unfruitful hearing of God's word does further and aggravate his own damnation: I say this is every whit as true, as he that eats and drinks the sacrament unworthily, is guilty of a high contempt of Christ, and eats and drinks his own judgment; so that the danger of the unworthy performing this so sacred an action, is no otherwise a reason to any man to abstain from the sacrament, than it is an argument to him to cast off all religion. He that unworthily useth or performs any part of religion is in an evil and dangerous condition: but he that casts off all religion plungeth himself into a most desperate state, and does certainly damn himself to avoid the danger of damnation: because he that casts off all religion throws off all the means whereby he should be reclaimed and brought into a better state. I cannot more fitly illustrate this matter than by this plain similitude: he that eats and drinks intemperately endangers his health and his life; but he that to avoid this danger will not eat at all, I need not tell you what will certainly become of him in a very short space.

There are some conscientious persons who abstain from the sacrament upon an apprehension that the sins which they shall commit afterwards are unpardonable. But this is a great mistake; our Saviour having so plainly declared, that all manner of sin shall be forgiven men except the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost; such as was that of the pharisees, who, as our Saviour tells us, blasphemed the Holy Ghost, in ascribing those great miracles which they saw him work, and which he really wrought by the Spirit of God, to the power of the devil. Indeed to sin deliberately, after so solemn an engagement to the contrary, is a

great aggravation of sin, but not such as to make it unpardonable. But the neglect of the sacrament is not the way to prevent these sins ; but, on the contrary, the constant receiving of it, with the best preparation we can, is one of the most effectual means to prevent sin for the future, and to obtain the assistance of God's grace to that end : and if we fall into sin afterwards, we may be renewed by repentance ; “ for we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is the propitiation for our sins,” and as such, is in a very lively and affecting manner exhibited to us in this blessed sacrament of his body broken, and his blood shed for the remission of our sins. Can we think that the primitive Christians, who so frequently received this holy sacrament, did never after the receiving of it fall into any deliberate sin? Undoubtedly, many of them did ; but far be it from us to think that such sins were unpardonable, and that so many good men should, because of their careful and conscientious observance of our Lord's institution, unavoidably fall into condemnation.

To draw to a conclusion of this matter: such groundless fears and jealousies as these may be a sign of a good meaning, but they are certainly a sign of an injudicious mind. For if we stand upon these scruples, no man perhaps was ever so worthily prepared to draw near to God in any duty of religion, but there was still some defect or other in the disposition of his mind, and the degree of his preparation. But if we prepare ourselves as well as we can, this is all God expects. And for our fears of falling into sin afterwards, there is this plain answer to be given to it ; that the danger of falling into sin is not prevented by neglecting the sacrament, but increased : because a powerful and probable means of preserv-



ing men from sin is neglected. And why should not every sincere Christian, by the receiving of this sacrament, and renewing his covenant with God, rather hope to be confirmed in goodness, and to receive farther assistances of God's grace and Holy Spirit to strengthen him against sin, and to enable him to subdue it; than trouble himself with fears which are either without ground, or, if they are not, are no sufficient reason to keep any man from the sacrament? We cannot surely entertain so unworthy a thought of God and our blessed Saviour, as to imagine that he did institute the sacrament, not for the furtherance of our salvation, but as a snare, and an occasion of our ruin and damnation. This were to pervert the gracious design of God, and to turn the cup of salvation into a cup of deadly poison to the souls of men.

All then that can reasonably be inferred from the danger of unworthy receiving is, that upon this consideration, men should be quickened to come to the sacrament with a due preparation of mind, and so much the more to fortify their resolutions of living suitably to that holy covenant which they solemnly renew every time they receive this holy sacrament. This consideration ought to convince us of the absolute necessity of a good life, but not to deter us from the use of any means which may contribute to make us good. Therefore (as a learned divine says very well) this sacrament can be neglected by none but those who do not understand it, but those who are unwilling to be tied to their duty, and are afraid of being engaged to use their best diligence to keep the commandments of Christ: and such persons have no reason to fear being in a worse condition, since they are already in so bad a state. And thus

much may suffice for answer to the first objection concerning the great danger of unworthy receiving this holy sacrament. I proceed to the

Object. 2. **Second Objection, which was this; That** so much preparation and worthiness being required to our worthy receiving, the more timorous sort of Christians can never think themselves duly enough qualified for so sacred an action.

For a full answer to this objection, I shall endeavour briefly to clear these three things. First, That every degree of imperfection in our preparation for this sacrament, is not a sufficient reason for men to refrain from it. Secondly, That a total want of a due preparation, not only in the degree, but in the main and substance of it, though it render us unfit at present to receive this sacrament, yet it does by no means excuse our neglect of it. Thirdly, That the proper inference and conclusion from the total want of a due preparation, is not to cast off all thoughts of receiving the sacrament, but immediately to set upon the work of preparation, that so we may be fit to receive it. And if I can clearly make out these three things, I hope this objection is fully answered.

1. That every degree of imperfection in our preparation for this sacrament is not a sufficient reason for men to abstain from it: for then, no man should ever receive it. For who is every way worthy, and, in all degrees and respects duly qualified to approach the presence of God in any of the duties of his worship and service? Who can wash his hands in innocency, that so he may be perfectly fit to approach God's altar? "There is not a man on earth, that lives and sins not." The graces of the best men are imperfect; and every imperfection in grace and goodness is an imperfection in the disposition and

preparation of our minds for this holy sacrament: but if we do heartily repent of our sins, and sincerely resolve to obey and perform the terms of the gospel, and of that covenant which we entered into by baptism, and are going solemnly to renew and confirm by our receiving of this sacrament, we are at least in some degree, and in the main, qualified to partake of this holy sacrament; and the way for us to be more fit, is to receive this sacrament frequently, that by this spiritual food of God's appointing, by "this living bread which comes down from heaven," our souls may be nourished in goodness, and new strength and virtue may be continually derived to us for the purifying of our hearts, and enabling us to run the ways of God's commandments with more constancy and delight. For the way to grow in grace and to be "strengthened with all might in the inner man," and to "abound in all the fruits of righteousness which by Christ Jesus are to the praise and glory of God," is with care and conscience to use those means which God hath appointed for this end: and if we will neglect the use of these means, it is to no purpose for us to pray to God for his grace and assistance. We may tire ourselves with our devotions, and fill heaven with vain complaints, and yet by all this importunity, obtain nothing at God's hand; like lazy beggars that are always complaining and always asking, but will not work, will do nothing to help themselves and better their condition, and therefore are never like to move the pity and compassion of others. If we expect God's grace and assistance, we must work out our own salvation in the careful use of all those means which God hath appointed to that end. That excellent degree of goodness which men would have

to fit them for the sacrament, is not to be had but by the use of it. And therefore it is a preposterous thing for men to insist upon having the end before they will use the means that may further them in the obtaining of it.

2. The total want of a due preparation, not only in the degree, but in the main and substance of it, though it render us unfit at present to receive this sacrament, yet does it by no means excuse our neglect of it. One fault may draw on another, but can never excuse it. It is our great fault that we are wholly unprepared, and no man can claim any benefit by his fault, or plead it in excuse or extenuation of this neglect. A total want of preparation and an absolute unworthiness is impenitency in an evil course, a resolution to continue a bad man, not to quit his lusts and to break off that wicked course he hath lived in; but is this any excuse for the neglect of our duty, that we will not fit ourselves for the doing of it with benefit and advantage to ourselves? A father commands his son to ask him blessing every day, and is ready to give it him; but so long as he is undutiful to him in his other actions, and lives in open disobedience, forbids him to come in his sight. He excuseth himself from asking his father's blessing, because he is undutiful in other things, and resolves to continue so. This is just the case of neglecting the duty God requires, and the blessings he offers to us in the sacrament, because we have made ourselves incapable of so performing the one as to receive the other, and are resolved to continue so. We will not do our duty in other things, and then plead that we are unfit and unworthy to do it in this particular of the sacrament.

3. The proper inference and conclusion from a

total want of due preparation for the sacrament, is not to cast off all thoughts of receiving it, but immediately to set about the work of preparation, that so we may be fit to receive it. For if this be true, that they who are absolutely unprepared ought not to receive the sacrament, nor can do it with any benefit; nay, by doing it in such a manner, render their condition much worse—this is a most forcible argument to repentance and amendment of life: there is nothing reasonable in this case, but immediately to resolve upon a better course, that so we may be meet partakers of those holy mysteries, and may no longer provoke God's wrath against us by the wilful neglect of so great and necessary a duty of the Christian religion. And we do wilfully neglect it, so long as we do wilfully refuse to fit and qualify ourselves for the due and worthy performance of it. Let us view the thing in a like case; a pardon is graciously offered to a rebel, he declines to accept it, and modestly excuseth himself, because he is not worthy of it. And why is he not worthy? because he resolves to be a rebel, and then his pardon will do him no good, but be an aggravation of his crime. Very true: and it will be no less an aggravation that he refuseth it for such a reason, and under a pretence of modesty, does the most imprudent thing in the world. This is just the case, and in this case there is but one thing reasonable to be done, and that is, for a man to make himself capable of the benefit as soon as he can, and thankfully to accept of it; but to excuse himself from accepting of the benefit offered, because he is not worthy of it, nor fit for it, nor ever intends to be so, is as if a man should desire to be excused from being happy because he is resolved to play the fool and to be miserable. So that whe-

ther our want of preparation be total, or only to some degree, it is every way unreasonable: if it be in the degree only, it ought not to hinder us from receiving the sacrament; if it be total, it ought to put us immediately upon removing the impediment, by making such preparation as is necessary to the due and worthy receiving of it. And this brings me to the

4. Fourth and last thing I proposed, viz. What preparation of ourselves is necessary in order to the worthy receiving of this sacrament. Which I told you would give me occasion to explain the apostle's meaning in the last part of the text: "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup." I think it very clear, from the occasion and circumstances of the apostle's discourse concerning the sacrament, that he does not intend the examination of our state, whether we be Christians or not, and sincerely resolve to continue so; and consequently that he does not here speak of our habitual preparation by the resolution of a good life. This he takes for granted, that they were Christians, and resolved to continue and persevere in the Christian profession; but he speaks of their actual fitness and worthiness at that time when they came to receive the Lord's Supper. And for the clearing of this matter, we must consider what it was that gave occasion to this discourse. At the 20th verse of this chapter, he sharply reproveth their irreverent and unsuitable carriage at the Lord's Supper—they came to it very disorderly, "one before another." It was the custom of Christians to meet at their feast of charity, in which they did communicate with great sobriety and temperance; and when that was ended, they celebrated the sacra-

ment of the Lord's Supper. Now, among the Corinthians, this order was broken; the rich met, and excluded the poor from this common feast. And after an irregular feast (one before another eating his own supper as he came) they went to the sacrament in great disorder—one was hungry, having eaten nothing at all; others were drunk, having eaten intemperately; and the poor were despised and neglected. This the apostle condemns as a great profanation of that solemn institution of the sacrament; at the participation whereof they behaved themselves with as little reverence as if they had been met at a common supper or feast. And this he calls "not discerning the Lord's body," making no difference in their behaviour between the sacrament and a common meal: which irreverent and contemptuous carriage of theirs he calls, "eating and drinking unworthily;" for which he pronounceth them "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord," which were represented and commemorated in their "eating of that bread and drinking of that cup." By which irreverent and contemptuous usage of the body and blood of our Lord, he tells them, that they did incur the judgment of God, which he calls "eating and drinking their own judgment." For that the word *κρίσις*, which our translators render "damnation," does not here signify eternal condemnation, but a temporal judgment and chastisement in order to the prevention of eternal condemnation, is evident from what follows: "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself:" and then he says, "For this cause, many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep:" that is, for this irreverence of theirs, God hath sent among them several diseases, of which many have died.

And then he adds, "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged."—"If we would judge ourselves:" whether this be meant of the public censures of the church, or our private censuring of ourselves, in order to our future amendment and reformation, is not certain. If of the latter, which I think most probable, then judging here is much the same with examining ourselves. (Ver. 28.) And then the apostle's meaning is, that if we would censure and examine ourselves, so as to be more careful for the future, we should escape the judgment of God in these temporal punishments. "But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world."—"But when we are judged;" that is, when by neglecting thus to judge ourselves, we provoke God to judge us, "we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world;" that is, he inflicts these temporal judgments upon us to prevent our eternal condemnation: which plainly shews, the judgment spoken of, is not eternal condemnation. And then he concludes, "Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry for one another. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home, that ye come not together unto judgment;" where the apostle plainly shews, both what was the crime of unworthy receiving, and the punishment of it. Their crime was, the irreverent and disorderly participation of the sacrament; and their punishment was, those temporal judgments, which God inflicted upon them for this their contempt of the sacrament.

Now this being, I think, very plain; we are proportionably to understand the precept of examination of ourselves, before we "eat of that bread and drink of that cup. But let a man examine him-



self;" that is, consider well with himself what a sacred action he is going about, and what behaviour becomes him when he is celebrating this sacrament instituted by our Lord in memorial of his body and blood, that is, of his death and passion: and if heretofore he have been guilty of any disorder or irreverence (such as the apostle here taxeth them withal) let him censure and judge himself for it, be sensible of, and sorry for his fault, and be careful to avoid it for the future; and having thus examined himself, "let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup." This, I think, is the plain sense of the apostle's discourse; and that, if we attend to the scope and circumstances of it, it cannot well have any other meaning.

But some will say, is this all the preparation that is required to our worthy receiving of the sacrament, that we take care not to come drunk to it, nor to be guilty of any irreverence and disorder in the celebration of it? I answer, in short, this was the particular unworthiness with which the apostle taxeth the Corinthians; and which he warns them to amend, as they desire to escape the judgments of God, such as they had already felt for this irreverent carriage of theirs, so unsuitable to the holy sacrament. He finds no other fault with them at present in this matter, though any other sort of irreverence will proportionably expose men to the like punishment. He says nothing here of their habitual preparation, by the sincere purpose and resolution of a good life answerable to the rules of the Christian religion: this we may suppose he took for granted. However it concerns the sacrament no more than it does prayer, or any other religious duty. Not, but that it is very true that none but those who do heartily em-

brace the Christian religion, and are sincerely resolved to frame their lives according to the holy rules and precepts of it, are fit to communicate in this solemn acknowledgment and profession of it. So that it is a practice very much to be countenanced and encouraged, because it is of great use for Christians by way of preparation for the sacrament to examine themselves in a larger sense than in all probability the apostle here intended: I mean, to examine our past lives and the actions of them, in order to a sincere repentance of all our errors and miscarriages; and to fix us in the steady purpose and resolution of a better life; particularly, when we expect to have the forgiveness of our sins sealed to us, we should lay aside all enmity and thoughts of revenge, and heartily forgive those that have offended us, and put in practice that universal love and charity which is represented to us by this holy communion. And to this purpose, we are earnestly exhorted in the public office of the Communion, by way of due preparation and disposition for it, to “repent us truly of our sins past, to amend our lives, and to be in perfect charity with all men, that so we may be meet partakers of those holy mysteries.”

And, because this work of examining ourselves concerning our state and condition, and of exercising repentance towards God and charity towards men, is incumbent upon us as we are Christians, and can never be put in practice more seasonably, and with greater advantage than when we are meditating of this sacrament; therefore, besides our habitual preparation by repentance and the constant endeavours of a holy life, it is a very pious and commendable custom in Christians before their coming to the sacrament to set apart some particular time

for this work of examination. But how much time every person should allot to this purpose, is matter of prudence; and as it need not, so neither indeed can it be precisely determined. Some have greater reason to spend more time upon this work than others; I mean those whose accounts are heavier, because they have long run upon the score, and neglected themselves; and some also have more leisure and freedom for it, by reason of their easy condition and circumstances in the world; and therefore are obliged to allow a greater portion of time for the exercises of piety and devotion. In general, no man ought to do a work of so great moment and concernment slightly and perfunctorily. And in this, as in all other actions, the end is principally to be regarded. Now the end of examining ourselves is to understand our state and condition, and to reform whatever we find amiss in ourselves. And provided this end be obtained, the circumstances of the means are less considerable: whether more or less time be allowed to this work, it matters not so much, as to make sure that the work be thoroughly done.

And I do on purpose speak thus cautiously in this matter, because some pious persons do perhaps err on the stricter hand, and are a little superstitious on that side; insomuch, that unless they can gain so much time to set apart for a solemn preparation, they will refrain from the sacrament at that time; though otherwise they be habitually prepared. This I doubt not proceeds from a pious mind; but as the apostle says in another case about the sacrament, "shall I praise them in this? I praise them not." For provided there be no wilful neglect of due preparation, it is much better to come so prepared as

we can, nay I think it is our duty so to do, rather than to abstain upon this punctilio. For when all is done, the best preparation for the sacrament is the general care and endeavour of a good life: and he that is thus prepared may receive at any time when opportunity is offered, though he had no particular foresight of that opportunity. And I think in that case such a one shall do much better to receive than to refrain; because he is habitually prepared for the sacrament, though he had no time to make such actual preparation as he desired. And if this were not allowable, how could ministers communicate with sick persons at all times, or persuade others to do it many times upon very short and sudden warning?

And indeed we cannot imagine that the primitive Christians, who received the sacrament so frequently, that for aught appears to the contrary they judged it as essential and necessary a part of their public worship as any other part of it whatsoever, even as their hymns and prayers, and reading and interpreting the word of God: I say, we cannot well conceive how they who celebrated it so constantly, could allot any more time for a solemn preparation for it, than they did for any other part of Divine worship: and, consequently, that the apostle, when he bids the Corinthians examine themselves, could mean no more than that considering the nature and ends of this institution they should come to it with great reverence; and, reflecting upon their former miscarriages in this matter, should be careful upon his admonition to avoid them for the future, and to amend what had been amiss: which to do, requires rather resolution and care than any longer time of preparation.

I speak this, that devout persons may not be entangled in an apprehension of a greater necessity than really there is of a long and solemn preparation every time they receive the sacrament. The great necessity that lies upon men is to live as becomes Christians, and then they can never be absolutely unprepared. Nay, I think this to be a very good preparation; and I see not why men should not be very well satisfied with it, unless they intend to make the same use of the sacrament that many of the papists do of confession and absolution, which is, to quit with God once or twice a year, that so they may begin to sin again upon a new score.

But because the examination of ourselves is a thing so very useful, and the time which men are wont to set apart for their preparation for the sacrament is so advantageous an opportunity for the practice of it; therefore I cannot but very much commend those who take this occasion to search and try their ways, and to call themselves to a more solemn account of their actions. Because this ought to be done some time, and I know no fitter time for it than this. And perhaps some would never find them to recollect themselves and to take the condition of their souls into serious consideration, were it not upon this solemn occasion.

The sum of what I have said is this: that supposing a person to be habitually prepared by a religious disposition of mind and the general course of a good life, this more solemn actual preparation is not always necessary; and it is better when there is an opportunity to receive without it, than not to receive at all. But the greater our actual preparation is, the better. For no man can examine himself too often, and understand the state of his soul too well,

and exercise repentance, and renew the resolutions of a good life too frequently. And there is perhaps no fitter opportunity for the doing of all this, than when we approach the Lord's table, there to commemorate his death, and to renew our covenant with him to live as becomes the gospel.

All the reflection I shall now make upon this discourse, shall be from the consideration of what has been said earnestly to excite all that profess and call themselves Christians to a due preparation of themselves for this holy sacrament, and a frequent participation of it according to the intention of our Lord and Saviour in the institution of it, and the undoubted practice of Christians in the primitive and best times, when men had more devotion and fewer scruples about their duty.

If we do in good earnest believe that this sacrament was instituted by our Lord in remembrance of his dying love, we cannot but have a very high value and esteem for it upon that account. Methinks so often as we read in the institution of it those words of our dear Lord, "Do this in remembrance of me," and consider what he who said them did for us, this dying charge of our best friend should stick with us, and make a strong impression upon our minds: especially if we add to these, those other words of his, not long before his death, "Greater love than this hath no man, that a man lay down his life for his friend; ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." It is a wonderful love which he hath expressed to us, and worthy to be had in perpetual remembrance. And all that he expects from us, by way of thankful acknowledgment, is, to celebrate the remembrance of it by the frequent participation of this blessed sacrament. And shall

this charge, laid upon us by him who laid down his life for us, lay no obligation upon us to the solemn remembrance of that unparalleled kindness which is the fountain of so many blessings and benefits to us? It is a sign that we have no great sense of the benefit when we are so unmindful of our Benefactor as to forget him days without number. The obligation he hath laid upon us is so vastly great, not only beyond all requital, but beyond all expression, that if he had commanded us some very grievous thing we ought with all the readiness and cheerfulness in the world to have done it; how much more when he hath imposed upon us so easy a commandment, a thing of no burden, but of immense benefit? When he hath only said to us, "Eat, O friends, and drink, O beloved?" When he only invites us to his table, to the best and most delicious feast that we can partake of on this side heaven?

If we seriously believe the great blessings which are there exhibited to us, and ready to be conferred upon us, we should be so far from neglecting them, that we should heartily thank God for every opportunity he offers to us of being made partakers of such benefits. When such a price is put into our hands, shall we want hearts to make use of it? Methinks we should long with David (who saw but a shadow of these blessings) to be satisfied with the good things of God's house, and to draw near his altar; and should cry out with him, "O when shall I come and appear before thee? My soul longeth, yea even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord, and my flesh crieth out for the living God." And if we had a just esteem of things, we should account it the greatest infelicity and judgment in the world to be

debarred of this privilege, which yet we do deliberately and frequently deprive ourselves of.

We exclaim against the church of Rome with great impatience, and with a very just indignation, for robbing the people of half this blessed sacrament, and taking from them the cup of blessing, the cup of salvation; and yet we can patiently endure for some months, nay years, to exclude ourselves wholly from it. If no such great benefits and blessings belong to it, why do we complain of them for hindering us of any part of it? But, if there do, why do we by our own neglect deprive ourselves of the whole?

In vain do we bemoan the decay of our graces, and our slow progress and improvement in Christianity, whilst we wilfully despise the best means of our growth in goodness. Well do we deserve that God should send leanness into our souls, and make them to consume and pine away in perpetual doubting and trouble, if, when God himself doth spread so bountiful a table for us, and set before us the bread of life, we will not come and feed upon it with joy and thankfulness.



## SERMON XXVI.

### A DISCOURSE AGAINST TRANSUBSTANTIATION.

CONCERNING the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, one of the two great positive institutions of the Christian religion, there are two main points of difference between us and the church of Rome. One about the doctrine of transubstantiation, in which they think, but are not certain, that they have the Scripture and the words of our Saviour on their side: the other, about the administration of this sacrament to the people in both kinds; in which we are sure that we have the Scripture and our Saviour's institution on our side, and that so plainly, that our adversaries themselves do not deny it.

Of the first of these I shall now treat, and endeavour to shew against the church of Rome, that in this sacrament there is no substantial change made of the elements of bread and wine into the natural body and blood of Christ; that body, which was born of the Virgin Mary, and suffered upon the cross; for so they explain that hard word transubstantiation.

Before I engage in this argument, I cannot but observe, what an unreasonable task we are put upon, by the bold confidence of our adversaries, to dispute a matter of sense; which is one of those things about which Aristotle hath long since pronounced there ought to be no dispute.

It might well seem strange if any man should

write a book to prove that an egg is not an elephant, and that a musket-bullet is not a pike. It is every whit as hard a case, to be put to maintain, by a long discourse, that what we see, and handle, and taste to be bread, is bread, and not the body of a man; and what we see and taste to be wine, is wine, and not blood; and if this evidence may not pass for sufficient, without any farther proof, I do not see why any man, that hath confidence enough to do so, may not deny any thing to be what all the world sees it is; or affirm any thing to be what all the world sees it is not: and this without all possibility of being further confuted. So that the business of transubstantiation is not a controversy of Scripture against Scripture, or of reason against reason, but of downright impudence against the plain meaning of Scripture, and all the sense and reason of mankind.

It is a most self-evident falsehood, and there is no doctrine or proposition in the world that is of itself more evidently true, than transubstantiation is evidently false; and yet if it were possible to be true, it would be the most ill-natured and pernicious truth in the world, because it would suffer nothing else to be true. It is like the Roman Catholic church, which will needs be the whole Christian church, and will allow no other society of Christians to be any part of it. So transubstantiation, if it be true at all, it is all truth, and nothing else is true; for it cannot be true unless our senses, and the senses of all mankind, be deceived about their proper objects; and if this be true and certain, then nothing else can be so: for if we be not certain of what we see, we can be certain of nothing.

And yet, notwithstanding all this, there are a

company of men in the world so abandoned and given up by God to the efficacy of delusion, as in good earnest to believe this gross and palpable error, and to impose the belief of it upon the Christian world, under no less penalties than a temporal death and eternal damnation. And, therefore, to undeceive, if possible, these deluded souls, it will be necessary to examine the pretended grounds of so false a doctrine, and to lay open the monstrous absurdity of it.

And in the handling of this argument, I shall proceed in this plain method.

I. I shall consider the pretended grounds and reasons of the church of Rome for this doctrine.

II. I shall produce our objections against it. And if I can shew that there is no tolerable ground for it, and that there are invincible objections against it, then every man is not only in reason excused from believing this doctrine, but hath great cause to believe the contrary.

First, I will consider the pretended grounds and reasons of the church of Rome for this doctrine, which must be one or more of these five: either, 1st, The authority of Scripture. Or, 2dly, The perpetual belief of this doctrine in the Christian church, as an evidence that they always understood and interpreted our Saviour's words, "This is my body," in this sense. Or, 3dly, The authority of the present church to make and declare new articles of faith. Or, 4thly, The absolute necessity of such a change as this in the sacrament, to the comfort and benefit of those who receive this sacrament. Or, 5thly, To magnify the power of the priest in being able to work so great a miracle,

1st, They pretend for this doctrine the authority of Scripture in those words of our Saviour, "This is my body." Now to shew the insufficiency of this pretence I shall endeavour to make good these two things.

1. That there is no necessity of understanding those words of our Saviour in the sense of transubstantiation.

2. That there is a great deal of reason, nay, that it is very absurd and unreasonable, not to understand them otherwise.

1. That there is no necessity to understand those words of our Saviour in the sense of transubstantiation.—If there be any, it must be from one of these two reasons: either because there are no figurative expressions in Scripture, which I think no man ever yet said; or else, because a sacrament admits of no figures; which would be very absurd for any man to say, since it is of the very nature of a sacrament to represent and exhibit some invisible grace and benefit by an outward sign and figure; and especially since it cannot be denied, but that in the institution of this very sacrament our Saviour useth figurative expressions, and several words which cannot be taken strictly and literally. When he gave the cup, he said, "This cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins." Where first the cup is put for the wine contained in the cup; or else, if the words be literally taken, so as to signify a substantial change, it is not of the wine but of the cup; and that, not into the blood of Christ, but into the New Testament, or new covenant, in his blood. Besides, that his blood is said then to

be shed, and his body to be broken, which was not till his passion, which followed the institution and first celebration of this sacrament.

But that there is no necessity to understand our Saviour's words in the sense of transubstantiation, I will take the plain concession of a great number of the most learned writers of the church of Rome in this controversy. Bellarmine,\* Suarez,† and Vasquez,‡ do acknowledge Scotus, the great schoolman, to have said, that this doctrine cannot be evidently proved from Scripture; and Bellarmine grants this not to be improbable; and Suarez and Vasquez acknowledge Durandus|| to have said as much. Ocham,§ another famous schoolman, says expressly, that "the doctrine which holds the substance of the bread and wine to remain after consecration, is neither repugnant to reason nor Scripture. Petrus ab Alliaco, Cardinal of Cambray,¶ says plainly, that "the doctrine of the substance of bread and wine remaining after consecration is more easy and free from absurdity, more rational, and no ways repugnant to the authority of Scripture;" nay more, that for the other doctrine, viz. of transubstantiation, "there is no evidence in Scripture." Gabriel Biel,\*\* another great schoolman and divine, of their church, freely declares, that "as to any thing expressed in the canon of the Scriptures, a man may believe, that the substance of bread and wine doth remain after the words of consecration;" and, therefore, he resolves the belief of transubstantiation into some other revelation besides Scripture, which he supposeth the church

\* De Euch. l. 3. c. 23.

† In 3 dis. 49. Qu. 75. Sect. 2.

‡ In 3 part. disp. 180. Qu. 75. art. 2. c. 15.

|| In Sent. l. 4. dist. 11. Q. 1. n. 15.

§ In 4. Sent. Q. 5. et Quodl. 4. Q. 3.

¶ In 4. Sent. Q. 6. art. 2

\*\* In Canon. Miss. Lect. 40.

had about it. Cardinal Cajetan\* confesseth, that “the Gospel doth no where express that the bread is changed into the body of Christ: that we have this from the authority of the church;” nay, he goes farther, that “there is nothing in the Gospel which enforceth any man to understand these words of Christ, ‘this is my body,’ in a proper and not in a metaphorical sense; but the church having understood them in a proper sense, they are to be so explained;” which words in the Roman edition of Cajetan are expunged, by order of Pope Pius V.†

† *Ægid. Conic. de Sacram. Q. 75. art. 1. n. 13.* Cardinal Contarenus,‡ and Melchior Canus,§ one of the best and most judicious writers that church ever had, reckon this doctrine among those which are not so expressly found in Scripture. I will add but one more of great authority in the church, and a reputed martyr, Fisher,|| bishop of Rochester, who ingenuously confesseth that, in the words of the institution, “there is not one word from whence the true presence of the flesh and blood of Christ in our mass can be proved:” so that we need not much contend that this doctrine hath no certain foundation in Scripture, when this is so fully and frankly acknowledged by our adversaries themselves.

2. If there be no necessity of understanding our Saviour’s words in the sense of transubstantiation, I am sure there is a great deal of reason to understand them otherwise. Whether we consider the like expressions in Scripture: as where our Saviour says, He is the door and the true vine (which the church of Rome would mightily have triumphed in, had it been said This is my true body.) And so,

\* In Aquin. 3.  
Part. Qu. 75.  
art. 1.

† *Ægid. Conic. de Sacram. Q. 75. art. 1. n. 13.*

‡ *De Sacram. 1. 2. c. 3.*

§ *Loc. Theolog. l. 3. c. 3.*

|| *Contra Captiv. Babylon, c. 10. n. 2.*

likewise, where the church is said to be Christ's body; and the rock, which followed the Israelites, to be Christ. (1 Cor. x. 4.) "They drank of that rock which followed them, and that rock was Christ." All which, and innumerable more like expressions in Scripture, every man understands in a figurative, and not in a strictly literal and absurd sense. And it is very well known, that in the Hebrew language things are commonly said to be that which they do signify and represent; and there is not in that language a more proper and usual way of expressing a thing to signify so and so, than to say that it is so and so. Thus Joseph expounding Pharaoh's dream to him (Gen. xli. 26.) says, "The seven good kine are seven years, and the seven good ears of corn are seven years;" that is, they signified or represented seven years of plenty; and so Pharaoh understood him, and so would any man of sense understand the like expressions: nor do I believe that any sensible man, who had never heard of transubstantiation being grounded upon these words of our Saviour, "This is my body," would upon reading the institution of the sacrament in the gospel ever have imagined any such thing to be meant by our Saviour in those words; but would have understood his meaning to have been—This bread signifies my body, this cup signifies my blood; and this which you see me now do, do ye hereafter for a memorial of me: but surely it would never have entered into any man's mind to have thought that our Saviour did literally hold himself in his hand, and give away himself from himself with his own hands. Or whether we compare these words of our Saviour with the ancient form of the passover used by the Jews from Ezra's time, as Justin Mar-

\* Dialog. cum  
Tryp. p. 297. E-  
dit. Paris. 1639.

tyr\* tells us, *τοῦτο τὸ πάσχα ὁ σωτὴρ ἡμῶν καὶ ἡ καταφυγὴ ἡμῶν*, “this passover is our Saviour and our refuge:” not that they believed the pascal lamb to be substantially changed either into God their Saviour who delivered them out of the land of Egypt, or into the Messiah the Saviour whom they expected, and who was signified by it: but this lamb which they did eat did represent to them, and put them in mind of, that salvation which God wrought for their fathers in Egypt, when by the slaying of a lamb, and sprinkling the blood of it upon their doors, their first-born were passed over and spared; and did likewise foreshew the salvation of the Messiah, the Lamb of God, that was to take away the sins of the world.

And nothing is more common in all languages than to give the name of the thing signified to the sign: as the delivery of a deed or writing under hand and seal is called a conveyance, or making over of such an estate, and it is really so; not the delivery of mere wax and parchment, but the conveyance of a real estate, as truly and really, to all effects and purposes of law, as if the very material houses and lands themselves could be and were actually delivered into my hands: in like manner the names of the things themselves made over to us in the new covenant of the gospel between God and man, are given to the signs or seals of that covenant. By baptism Christians are said to be made partakers of the Holy Ghost. (Heb. vi. 4.) And by the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper we are said to communicate, or to be made partakers of the body of Christ which was broken, and of his blood, which was shed for us, that is, of the real benefits of his death and passion. And thus St. Paul speaks of this sa-



crament: (1 Cor. x. 16.) “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” But still it is bread, and he still calls it so: (ver. 17.) “For we being many, are one bread and one body; for we are partakers of that one bread.” The church of Rome might, if they pleased, as well argue from hence, that all Christians are substantially changed first into bread, and then into the natural body of Christ, by their participation of this sacrament, because they are said thereby to be one bread and one body. And the same apostle in the next chapter, after he had spoken of the consecration of the elements, still calls them the bread and the cup, in three verses together. “As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup. (ver. 26.) Whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily. (ver. 27.) But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.” (ver. 28.) And our Saviour himself, when he had said, “This is my blood of the New Testament,” immediately adds, “But I say unto you, Matth. xxvi. 29. I will not henceforth drink of this fruit of the vine, until I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom;” that is, not till after his resurrection, which was the first step of his exaltation into the kingdom given him by his Father, when the Scripture tells us he did eat and drink with his disciples. But that which I observed from our Saviour’s words is, that after the consecration of the cup, and the delivering of it to his disciples to drink of it, he tells them, that he would thenceforth drink no more of that fruit of the vine, which he had now drank with them, till after his resurrection. From whence it is

plain, that it was the fruit of the vine, real wine, which our Saviour drank of, and communicated to his disciples in the sacrament.

Besides, if we consider that he celebrated this sacrament before his passion, it is impossible these words should be understood literally of the natural body and blood of Christ; because it was his body broken and his blood shed, which he gave to his disciples; which, if we understand literally of his natural body broken and his blood shed, then these words, This is my body which is broken, and this is my blood which is shed, could not be true, because his body was then whole and unbroken, and his blood not then shed; nor could it be a propitiatory sacrifice (as they affirm this sacrament to be) unless they will say, that propitiation was made before Christ suffered: and it is likewise impossible that the disciples should understand these words literally, because they not only plainly saw that what he gave them was bread and wine, but they saw likewise as plainly that it was not his body which was given, but his body which gave that which was given; not his body broken and his blood shed, because they saw him alive at that very time, and beheld his body whole and unpierced; and therefore they could not understand these words literally: if they did, can we imagine that the disciples, who upon all other occasions were so full of questions and objections, should make no difficulty of this matter? nor so much as ask our Saviour, How can these things be? that they should not tell him, we see this to be bread, and that to be wine, and we see thy body to be distinct from both; we see thy body not broken, and thy blood not shed?

From all which it must needs be very evident to

any man that will impartially consider things, how little reason there is to understand those words of our Saviour, This is my body, and this is my blood, in the sense of transubstantiation; nay, on the contrary, that there is very great reason and an evident necessity to understand them otherwise. I proceed to shew,

2dly. That this doctrine is not grounded upon the perpetual belief of the Christian church, which the church of Rome vainly pretends as an evidence that the church did always understand and interpret our Saviour's words in this sense.

To manifest the groundlessness of this pretence, I shall, 1. Shew by plain testimony of the fathers in several ages, that this doctrine was not the belief of the ancient Christian church. 2. I shall shew the time and occasion of its coming in, and by what degrees it grew up and was established in the Roman church. 3. I shall answer their great pretended demonstration, that this always was and must have been the constant belief of the Christian church.

1. I shall shew by plain testimonies of the fathers in several ages, for above five hundred years after Christ, that this doctrine was not the belief of the ancient Christian church. I deny not but that the fathers do, and that with great reason, very much magnify the wonderful mystery and efficacy of this sacrament, and frequently speak of a great supernatural change made by the Divine benediction; which we also readily acknowledge. They say, indeed, that the elements of bread and wine do by the Divine blessing become to us the body and blood of Christ: but they likewise say, that the names of the things signified are given to the signs; that the bread and wine do still remain in their proper nature and sub-

stance, and that they are turned into the substance of our bodies: that the body of Christ in the sacrament is not his natural body, but the sign and figure of it; not that body which was crucified, nor that blood which was shed upon the cross; and that it is impious to understand the eating of the flesh of the Son of Man, and drinking his blood literally: all which are directly opposite to the doctrine of transubstantiation, and utterly inconsistent with it. I will select but some few testimonies of many things which I might bring to this purpose.

I begin with Justin Martyr, who says expressly, \* Apol. 2. p. 98. Edit. Paris. 1636. that\* our blood and flesh are nourished by the conversion of that food which we receive in the eucharist: but that cannot be the natural body and blood of Christ; for no man will say that that is converted into the nourishment of our bodies.

The second is † Irenæus, who, speaking of this † Lib. 4. c. 24. sacrament, says, that “the bread which is from the earth, receiving the Divine invocation, is now no longer common bread, but the eucharist (or sacrament), consisting of two things—the one earthly, the other heavenly.” He says it is no longer common bread; but, after invocation or consecration, it becomes the sacrament, that is, bread sanctified, consisting of two things—an earthly and an heavenly; the earthly thing is bread, and the heavenly is the Divine blessing, which by the invocation or consecration is added ‡ Lib. 5. c. 2. to it. And ‡ elsewhere he hath this passage: “When therefore the cup that is mixed, (that is, of wine and water) and the bread that is broken, receives the word of God, it

becomes the eucharist of the blood and body of Christ, of which the substance of our flesh is increased, and consists;" but if that which we receive in the sacrament do nourish our bodies, it must be bread and wine, and not the natural body and blood of Christ. There is another remarkable testimony of Irenæus; which though it be not now extant in those works of his which remain, yet hath been preserved by \*Oecumenius, \* Com. in 1 Pet. and it is this: "When (says he) the c. 3.

Greeks had taken some servants of the Christian Catechumeni, (that is; such as had not been admitted to the sacrament) and afterwards urged them by violence to tell them some of the secrets of the Christians, these servants having nothing to say that might gratify those who offered violence to them, except only, that they heard from their masters, that the Divine communion was the blood and body of Christ, they thinking that it was really blood and flesh, declared as much to those that questioned them." The Greeks taking this as if it were really done by the Christians, discovered it to others of the Greeks; who hereupon put Sanctus and Blandina to the torture to make them confess it. To whom Blandina boldly answered, "How could they endure to do this, who by way of exercise (or abstinence) do not eat that flesh which may lawfully be eaten?" By which it appears that this which they would have charged upon Christians, as if they had literally eaten the flesh and blood of Christ in the sacrament, was a false accusation which these martyrs denied, saying, they were so far from that, that they for their part did not eat any flesh at all.

The next is Tertullian, who proves against

Marcion the heretic, that the body of our Saviour was not a mere phantasm and appearance, but a real body, because the sacrament is a figure and image of his body; and if there be an image of his body he must have a real body, otherwise the sacrament would be an image of an image. His words are these: \* “The bread which our Saviour took and distributed to his disciples, he made his own body, saying, This is my body, that is, the image or figure of my body. But it could not have been the figure of his body, if there had not been a true and real body.”

And arguing against the sceptics who denied the certainty of sense, he useth this argument: that if we question our senses, we may doubt whether our blessed Saviour were not deceived in what he heard, and saw, and touched. † “He might (says he) be deceived in the voice from heaven, in the smell of the ointment with which he was anointed against his burial, and in the taste of the wine which he consecrated in remembrance of his blood.” So that it seems we are to trust our senses, even in the matter of the sacrament: and if that be true, the doctrine of transubstantiation is certainly false.

Origen in ‡ his comment on Matth. xv. speaking of the sacrament, hath this passage: † Edit. Huetii. “That food which is sanctified by the word of God and prayer; as to that of it which is material, goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught,” which none surely will say of the body of Christ. And afterwards he adds, by way of explication, “It is not the matter of the bread, but the words which are spoken over it, which profiteth him that worthily eateth the Lord; and this (he

\* Advers. Marcionem, l. 4. p. 571. Edit. Rigal. Paris. 1634.

† Lib. de Anima, p. 319.

‡ Edit. Huetii.

says) he had spoken concerning the typical and symbolical body." So that the matter of bread remaineth in the sacrament, and this Origen calls the typical and symbolical body of Christ; and it is not the natural body of Christ which is there eaten; for the food eaten in the sacrament, as to that of it which is material, goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught. This testimony is so very plain in the cause, that Sextus Senensis suspects this place of Origen was depraved by the heretics. Cardinal Perron is contented to allow it to be Origen's, but rejects his testimony, because he was accused of heresy by some of the fathers, and says he talks like a heretic in this place. So that with much ado this testimony is yielded to us. The same father, in his \* Homilies upon Leviticus, speaks thus: "There is also in the New Testament a letter which kills him who doth not spiritually understand those things which are said; for if we take according to the letter that which is said, *Except ye eat my flesh, and drink my blood, this letter kills.*" And this is also a killing testimony, and not to be answered but in Cardinal Perron's way, by saying he talks like a heretic.

\* Cap. 10.

St. Cyprian hath a whole epistle † to Cecilius, against those who gave the communion in water only without wine mingled with it; and his main argument against them is this: that the blood of Christ with which we are redeemed and quickened cannot seem to be in the cup, when there is no wine in the cup by which the blood of Christ is represented: and afterwards he says, that "contrary to the evangelical and apostolical doctrine, water was in some places offered (or given) in the Lord's cup, which (says he) alone cannot

† Ep. 65.

express (or represent) the blood of Christ." And, lastly, he tells us, that "by water the people is understood, by wine the blood of Christ is shewn (or represented); but when in the cup water is mingled with wine, the people is united to Christ." So that, according to this argument, wine in the sacramental cup is no otherwise changed into the blood of Christ, than the water mixed with it is changed into the people, which are said to be united to Christ.

I omit many others, and pass to St. Austin in the fourth age after Christ. And I the rather insist upon his testimony, because of his eminent esteem and authority in the Latin church; and he also calls the elements of the sacrament, the figure and sign of Christ's body and blood. In his book against Adamantus the Manichee we have this expression:

"Our Lord did not doubt to say, This is my body, when he gave the sign of his body."\*

\* Aug. tom. 6. p. 187. Edit. Basil. 1596.

And in his explication on the third Psalm, speaking of Judas, whom our Lord admitted to his last supper, "in which (says he †) he commended and delivered to his disciples the figure of his body;" language which would now be censured

† Enarrat in Psal. tom. 8. p. 16.

for heresy in the church of Rome. Indeed, he was never accused of heresy, as Cardinal Perron says Origen was, but he talks as like one as Origen himself. And in his comment on the ninety-eighth Psalm, speaking of the offence which the disciples took at that saying of our Saviour, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood," &c. he brings in our Saviour speaking thus

to them, ‡ "Ye must understand spiritually, what I have said unto you: you are not to eat this body which ye see, and to

‡ Id. tom. 9. p. 1105.



drink that blood which shall be shed by those that shall crucify me. I have commended a certain sacrament to you, which being spiritually understood, will give you life." What more opposite to the doctrine of transubstantiation, than that the disciples were not to eat that body of Christ which they saw, nor to drink that blood which was shed upon the cross; but that all this was to be understood spiritually, and according to the nature of a sacrament? for that body (he tells us) is not here, but in heaven, in his comment upon these words, "Me ye have not always." \* "He speaks (says he) \* Id Tract. 50. of the presence of his body: ye shall in Joan. have me according to my providence, according to majesty and invisible grace; but according to the flesh which the Word assumed, according to that, which was born of the Virgin Mary, ye shall not have me: therefore, because he conversed with his disciples forty days, he is ascended up into heaven, and is not here."

In his 23d Epistle; \* "If the sacra- \* Id. Tom. 2. ment (says he) had not some resemblance p. 93. of those things whereof they are sacraments, they would not be sacraments at all: but from this resemblance, they take for the most part the names of the things which they represent. Therefore, as the sacrament of the body of Christ is in some manner or sense Christ's body, and the sacrament of his blood is the blood of Christ; so the sacrament of faith (meaning baptism) is faith." Upon which words of St. Austin, there is this remarkable gloss in their own canon law. \* "The heavenly \* De Consecrat. sacrament, which truly represents the dist. 2 Hoc est. flesh of Christ, is called the body of Christ; but improperly: whence it is said, that after a manner,

but not according to the truth of the thing, but the mystery of the thing, signified; so that the meaning is, it is called the body of Christ, that is, it signifies the body of Christ." And if this be St. Austin's meaning, I am sure no protestant can speak more plainly against transubstantiation. And in the ancient canon of the mass, before it was changed in compliance with this new doctrine, it is expressly called "a sacrament, a sign, an image, and a figure of Christ's body." To which I will add, that remarkable passage of St. Austin, cited by Gratian,

\*De Consecrat. dist. 2 Sect. Utrum. \* "That as we receive the similitude of his death in baptism, so we may also receive the likeness of his flesh and blood; that so neither may truth be wanting in the sacrament, nor pagans have occasion to make us ridiculous for drinking the blood of one that was slain."

I will mention but one testimony more of this father, but so clear a one, as it is impossible any man in his wits that had believed transubstantiation could have uttered. It is in his treatise,

\* Lib. 3. tom. 3. p. 53.

\* *De Doctrina Christiana*; where laying down several rules for the right understanding of Scripture, he gives this for one. "If (says he) the speech be a precept, forbidding some heinous wickedness or crime, or commanding us to do good, it is not figurative; but if it seem to command any heinous wickedness or crime, or to forbid that which is profitable or beneficial to others, it is figurative. For example, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you; this seems to command a heinous wickedness and crime, therefore it is a figure; commanding us to communicate of the passion of our Lord, and with delight and advantage to lay up in our me-

mory, that his flesh was crucified and wounded for us." So that, according to St. Austin's best skill in interpreting Scripture, "the literal eating of the flesh of Christ, and drinking his blood, would have been a great impiety;" and therefore the expression is to be understood figuratively; not as Cardinal Perron would have it, only in opposition to the eating of his flesh and blood in the gross appearance of flesh and blood, but to the real eating of his natural body and blood under any appearance whatsoever: for St. Austin doth not say, this is a figurative speech, wherein we are commanded really to feed upon the natural body and blood of Christ under the species of bread and wine, as the Cardinal would understand him; for then the speech would be literal and not figurative: but he says, "this is a figurative speech, wherein we are commanded spiritually to feed upon the remembrance of his passion."

To these I will add but three or four testimonies more in the two following ages.

The first shall be of Theodoret, who, speaking of that prophecy\* of Jacob concerning our Saviour, "he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes, hath these words: † "As we call the mystical fruit of the vine, (that is, the wine in the sacrament) after the consecration the blood of the Lord, so he (viz. Jacob) calls the blood of the true vine (viz. of Christ) the blood of the grape:" but the blood of Christ is not literally and properly, but only figuratively the blood of the grape, in the same sense as he is said to be the true vine; and therefore the wine in the sacrament, after consecration, is in like manner not literally and properly, but figuratively, the blood of Christ. And he explains this afterwards, saying,

\* Gen. xlix. 11.

† Dialog. 1.

that "our Saviour changed the names, and gave to his body the name of the symbol or sign, and to that symbol or sign the name of his body: thus when he had called himself the vine, he called the symbol or sign, his blood;" so that in the same sense that he called himself the vine, he called the wine, which is the symbol of his blood, his blood: for, says he, "he would have those who partake of the Divine mysteries, not to attend to the nature of the things which are seen, but by the change of names to believe the change which is made by grace; for he who called that, which by nature is a body, wheat and bread, and again likewise called himself the vine, he honoured the symbols with the name of his body and blood; not changing nature, but adding grace to nature." Where you see he says expressly, that when he called the symbols or elements of the sacrament, viz. bread and wine, his body and blood, he made no change in the nature of the things, only added grace to nature; that is, by the Divine grace and blessing he raised them to a spiritual and supernatural virtue and efficacy.

The second is of the same Theodoret, in his second dialogue, between a catholic, under the name of Orthodoxus, and a heretic, under the name of Eranistes; who, maintaining that the humanity of Christ was changed into the substance of the Divinity (which was the heresy of Eutyches) he illustrates the matter by this similitude. "As (says he) the symbols of the Lord's body and blood are one thing before the invocation of the priest, but after the invocation are changed and become another thing; so the body of our Lord, after his ascension, is changed into the Divine substance." But, what says the catholic Orthodoxus to this? why, he talks

just like one of Cardinal Perron's heretics : "Thou art (says he) caught in thine own net, because the mystical symbols after consecration do not pass out of their own nature ; for they remain in their former substance, figure, and appearance, and may be seen and handled even as before." He does not only deny the outward figure and appearance of the symbols to be changed, but the nature and substance of them, even in the proper and strictest sense of the word substance ; and it was necessary so to do, otherwise he had given a pertinent answer to the similitude urged against him.

The next is one of their own popes, Gelasius, who brings the same instance against the Eutychi-ans : \* "Surely (says he) the sacraments Biblioth. Pat. tom. 4. which we receive of the body and blood of our Lord are a Divine thing, so that by them we are made partakers of a Divine nature, and yet it ceaseth not to be the substance or nature of bread and wine ; and certainly the image and resemblance of Christ's body and blood are celebrated in the action of the mysteries ;" that is, in the sacrament. To make this instance of any force against the Euty-chians, who held that the body of Christ upon his ascension, ceased, and was changed into the substance of his Divinity, it was necessary to deny that there was any substantial change in the sacrament of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. So that here is an infallible authority, one of their own popes, expressly against transubstantiation.

The last testimony I shall produce, is of Facundus, an African bishop, who lived in the 6th century. Upon occasion of justifying an expression of one who had said that "Christ also received the adoption of sons," he reasons thus : \* "Christ \* Facund. p. 144. edit. Par. 1676. youchsafed to receive the sacrament of

adoption, both when he was circumcised and baptized: and the sacrament of adoption may be called adoption, as the sacrament of his body and blood, which is in the consecrated bread and cup, is by us called his body and blood: not that the bread (says he) is properly his body and the cup his blood, but because they contain in them the mysteries of his body and blood: hence also our Lord himself called the blessed bread and cup, which he gave to his disciples, his body and blood." Can any man after this believe that it was then, and had ever been, the universal and received doctrine of the Christian church, that the bread and wine in the sacrament are substantially changed into the proper and natural body and blood of Christ.

By these plain testimonies which I have produced, and I might have brought a great many more to the same purpose, it is I think evident, beyond all denial, that transubstantiation has not been the perpetual belief of the Christian church. And this likewise is acknowledged by many great and learned men of the Roman Church. \*Scotus acknowledges, that this doctrine was not always thought necessary to be believed, but that the necessity of believing it was consequent to that declaration of the church made in the council of Lateran under Pope Innocent III. And \*Durandus freely discovers his inclination "to have believed the contrary, if the church had not by that determination obliged men to believe it." \*Toustal, bishop of Durham, also yields, that before the Lateran council, men were at liberty as to the manner of Christ's presence in the sacrament. And \*Erasmus, who lived and died in the communion of the Roman church, and than whom

In sent. l. 4.  
dist. 11. Q. 3.

In sent. l. 4.  
dist. 11. Q. 1 n.  
15.

De Euchar.  
l. 1. p. 146.

\* 1 Epist. ad  
Corinth. c. 7.  
citante etiam

no man was better read in the ancient fathers, doth confess that it was "late before

Salmerone, tom. 9. Tract. 16. p. 108.

the church defined transubstantiation, unknown to the ancients both name and thing." And

\*Alphonsus à Castro says plainly, that

\* De Hares. l. 8.

"concerning the transubstantiation of the bread into the body of Christ, there is seldom any mention in the ancient writers." And who can imagine that these learned men would have granted the ancient church and fathers to have been so much strangers to this doctrine, had they thought it to have been the perpetual belief of the church? I shall now, in the

Second place, Give an account of the particular time and occasion of the coming in of this doctrine, and by what steps and degrees it grew up and was advanced into an article of faith in the Romish church. The doctrine of the corporeal presence of Christ was first started upon occasion of the dispute about the worship of images, in opposition whereto the Synod of Constantinople, about the year 750, did argue thus: that our Lord having left us no other image of himself but the sacrament, in which the substance of bread is the image of his body, we ought to make no other image of our Lord. In answer to this argument the second council of Nice, in the year 787, did declare, that the sacrament after consecration is not the image and antitype of Christ's body and blood, but is properly his body and blood. So that the corporeal presence of the body of Christ in the sacrament, was first brought in to support the stupid worship of images: and indeed it could never have come in upon a more proper occasion, nor have been applied to a fitter purpose.

And here I cannot but take notice how well this agrees with \* Bellarmine's observation, that "none of the ancients who wrote of

\* De Euchar. l. 1. c. 1.

heresies, hath put this error (viz. of denying transubstantiation) in his catalogue; nor did any of the ancients dispute against this error for the first 600 years." Which is very true, because there could be no occasion then to dispute against those who denied transubstantiation, since, as I have shewn, this doctrine was not in being, unless among the Eutychian heretics, for the first 600 years and

\* De Euchar.

l. 1. c. 1.

more. But \* Bellarmine goes on and tells us, that "the first who called in question the truth of the body of the Lord in the eucharist were the *Iconomachi* (the opposers of images, after the year 700, in the council of Constantinople; for these said there was one image of Christ instituted by Christ himself, viz. the bread and wine in the eucharist, which represents the body and blood of Christ: wherefore from that time the Greek writers often admonish us that the eucharist is not the figure or image of the body of the Lord, but his true body, as appears from the seventh Synod;" which agrees most exactly with the account which I have given of the first rise of this doctrine, which began with the corporeal presence of Christ in the sacrament, and afterwards proceeded to transubstantiation.

And as this was the first occasion of introducing this doctrine among the Greeks, so in the Latin or Roman church Pascasius Radbertus, first a monk, and afterwards Abbot of Corbey, was the first broacher of it, in the year 818.

And for this, besides the evidence of history, we have the acknowledgment of two very eminent persons in the church of Rome, Bellarmine and Sirmondus, who do in effect confess that this Pascasius was the first who wrote to purpose upon this argu-



ment. \* Bellarmine in these words, "This author was the first who hath seriously and copiously written concerning the truth of Christ's body and blood in the eucharist:" and † Sirmondus in these: "He so explained the genuine sense of the catholic church, that he opened the way to the rest who afterwards in great numbers wrote upon the same argument:" but though Sirmondus is pleased to say that he only first explained the sense of the catholic church in this point, yet it is very plain from the records of that age, which are left to us, that this was the first time that this doctrine was broached in the Latin church; and it met with great opposition in that age, as I shall have occasion hereafter to shew. For Rabanus Maurus, archbishop of Mentz, about the year 847, reciting the very words of Pascasius, wherein he had delivered this doctrine, hath this remarkable passage concerning the novelty of it: \* "Some (says he) of late not having a right opinion concerning the sacrament of the body and blood of our Lord have said; that this is the body and blood of our Lord, which was born of the Virgin Mary, and in which our Lord suffered upon the cross, and rose from the dead: which error (says he) we have opposed with all our might." From whence it is plain, by the testimony of one of the greatest and most learned bishops of that age, and of eminent reputation for piety, that what is now the very doctrine of the church of Rome concerning the sacrament, was then esteemed an error broached by some particular persons, but was far from being the generally-received doctrine of that age. Can any one think it possible that so eminent a person in the church, both for piety and learning, could

\* De Scriptor.  
Eccles.

† In vita Pas-  
casii.

\* Epist. ad Heri-  
baldum, c. 33.

have condemned this doctrine as an error and a novelty, had it been the general doctrine of the Christian church, not only in that, but in all former ages; and no censure passed upon him for that which is now the great burning article in the church of Rome, and esteemed by them one of the greatest and most pernicious heresies?

Afterwards in the year 1059, when Berengarius in France and Germany had raised a fresh opposition against this doctrine, he was compelled to recant it by Pope Nicholas and the council at Rome,

in these words: \* “That the bread and wine which are set upon the altar, after the consecration, are not only the sacrament, but the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; and are sensibly, not only in the sacrament, but in

truth, handled and broken by the hands of the priest, and ground or bruised by the teeth of the faithful.” But it seems the Pope and his council were not then skilful enough to express themselves rightly in this matter; for the gloss upon the canon

law says expressly, † “That unless we understand these words of Berengarius (that is, in truth, of the Pope and his council) in a sound sense, we shall fall into a greater heresy than that of Berengarius: for we do not make parts of the body of Christ.” The meaning of which gloss I cannot imagine, unless it be this: that the body of Christ, though it be in truth broken, yet it is not broken into parts, (for we do not make parts of the body of Christ) but into wholes: now this new way of breaking a body, not into parts, but into wholes, (which in good earnest is the doctrine of the church of Rome) though to them that are able to

\* Gratian. de Consecrat. distinct. 2. Lanfranc. de corp. et sang. Domini, c. 5. Guitmund. de Sacram. Algar. de Sacram. l. 1. c. 19.

† Glos. Decret. de Consecrat. dist. 2. in cap. Ego Berengarius.

believe transubstantiation it may for any thing I know appear to be sound sense, yet to us that cannot believe so, it appears to be solid nonsense.

About twenty years after, in the year 1079, Pope Gregory VII. began to be sensible of this absurdity; and therefore in another council at Rome made Berengarius to recant in another form, viz. \* “That the bread and wine, which are placed upon the altar, are substantially \* Waldens. to. 1. c. 13. changed into the true and proper and quickening flesh and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and after consecration are the true body of Christ, which was born of the Virgin, and which being offered for the salvation of the world did hang upon the cross, and sits at the right hand of the Father.”

So that from the first starting of this doctrine in the second council of Nice, in the year 787, till the council under Pope Gregory VII. in the year 1079, it was almost three hundred years that this doctrine was contested, and before this mishapen monster of transubstantiation could be licked into that form in which it is now settled and established in the church of Rome. Here then is a plain account of the first rise of this doctrine, and of the several steps whereby it was advanced by the church of Rome into an article of faith. I come now in the

Third place, To answer the great pretended demonstration of the impossibility that this doctrine, if it had been new, should ever have come in in any age, and been received in the church: and consequently it must of necessity have been the perpetual belief of the churches in all ages: for if it had not always been the doctrine of the church, whenever it had attempted first to come in, there would have

been a great stir and bustle about it, and the whole Christian world would have rose up in opposition to it. But we can shew no such time when it first came in, and when any such opposition was made to it, and therefore it was always the doctrine of the church. This demonstration Monsieur Arnauld, a very learned man in France, pretends to be unanswerable: whether it be so or not I shall briefly examine. And,

First, We do assign a punctual and very likely time of the first rise of this doctrine, about the beginning of the ninth age; though it did not take firm root, nor was fully settled and established till towards the end of the eleventh. And this was the most likely time of all other, from the beginning of Christianity, for so gross an error to appear; it being, by the confession and consent of their own historians, the most dark and dismal time that ever happened to the Christian church, both for ignorance and superstition and vice. It came in together with idolatry, and was made use of to support it: a fit prop and companion for it. And, indeed, what tares might not the enemy have sown in so dark and long a night; when so considerable a part of the Christian world was lulled asleep in profound ignorance and superstition? And this agrees very well with the account which our Saviour himself gives in the parable of the tares, of the springing up of errors and corruptions in the field of the church.

\* Matth. xiii. 24. While the men slept, the enemy did his work in the night, so that when they were awake they wondered how and whence the tares came; but being sure they were there, and that they were not sown at first, they concluded the enemy had done it.

Secondly, I have shewn, likewise, that there was

considerable opposition made to this error at its first coming in. The general ignorance and gross superstition of that age rendered the generality of people more quiet and secure, and disposed them to receive any thing that came under a pretence of mystery in religion, and of a greater reverence and devotion to the sacrament, and that seemed any way to countenance the worship of images, for which at that time they were zealously concerned. But notwithstanding the security and passive temper of the people, the men most eminent for piety and learning in that time made great resistance against it. I have already named Rabanus, archbishop of Mentz, who opposed it as an error lately sprung up, and which had then gained but upon some few persons. To whom I may add Heribaldus, bishop of Auxerres in France, Jo. Scotus, Erigena, and Ratramus, commonly known by the name of Bertram, who at the same time were employed by the Emperor Charles the Bald to oppose this growing error, and wrote learnedly against it. And these were the eminent men for learning in that time. And because Monsieur Arnauld will not be satisfied unless there were some stir and bustle about it, Bertram, in his preface to his book, tells us, "that they who according to their several opinions talked differently about the mystery of Christ's body and blood were divided by no small schism."

Thirdly, Though for a more clear and satisfactory answer to this pretended demonstration, I have been contented to untie this knot, yet I could without all these pains have cut it. For suppose this doctrine had silently come in, and without opposition, so that we could not assign the particular time and occasion of its first rise; yet if it be evi-

dent from the records of former ages, for above five hundred years together, that this was not the ancient belief of the church ; and plain, also, that this doctrine was afterwards received in the Roman church, though we could not tell how, and when it came in, yet it would be the wildest and most extravagant thing in the world to set up a pretended demonstration of reason against plain experience and matter of fact. This is just Zeno's demonstration of the impossibility of motion against Diogenes walking before his eyes. For this is to undertake to prove that impossible to have been, which most certainly was. Just thus the servants in the parable might have demonstrated, that the tares were wheat, because they were sure none but good seed was sown at first, and no man could give any account of the punctual time when any tares were sown, or by whom : and if an enemy had come to do it, he must needs have met with great resistance and opposition ; but no such resistance was made, and therefore there could be no tares in the field, but that which they called tares was certainly good wheat. At the same rate a man might demonstrate that our King, his Majesty of Great Britain, is not returned into England, nor restored to his crown ; because there being so great and powerful an army possessed of his lands, and therefore obliged by interest to keep him out, it was impossible he should ever come in without a great deal of fighting and bloodshed : but there was no such thing, therefore he is not returned and restored to his crown. And by the like kind of demonstration one might prove that the Turks did not invade Christendom last year, and besiege Vienna ; because if he had, the Most Christian King, who

had the greatest army in Christendom in a readiness, would certainly have employed it against him; but Monsieur Arnauld certainly knows no such thing was done: and therefore, according to his way of demonstration, the matter of fact, so commonly reported and believed, concerning the Turks invasion of Christendom and besieging Vienna last year, was a perfect mistake. But a man may demonstrate till his head and heart ache, before he shall ever be able to prove that which certainly is, or was, never to have been. For of all sorts of impossibles nothing is more evidently so, than to make that which hath been not to have been. All the reason in the world is too weak to cope with so tough and obstinate a difficulty. And I have often wondered how a man of Monsieur Arnauld's great wit and sharp judgment could prevail with himself to engage in so bad and baffled a cause; or could think to defend it with so wooden a dagger as his demonstration of reason against certain experience and matter of fact: a thing, if it be possible, of equal absurdity with what he pretends to demonstrate, transubstantiation itself. I proceed to the

Third pretended ground of this doctrine of transubstantiation; and that is, The infallible authority of the present church to make and declare new articles of faith. And this in truth is the ground into which the most of the learned men of their church did heretofore, and many do still, resolve their belief of this doctrine; and, as I have already shewn, do plainly say, that they see no sufficient reason, either from Scripture or tradition, for the belief of it; and that they should have believed the contrary, had not the determination of the church obliged them otherwise.

But if this doctrine be obtruded upon the world merely by virtue of the authority of the Roman church, and the declaration of the council under Pope Gregory the VIIth, or of the Lateran council under Innocent IIIId, then it is a plain innovation in the Christian doctrine, and a new article of faith imposed upon the Christian world. And if any church hath this power, the Christian faith may be enlarged and changed as often as men please; and that which is no part of our Saviour's doctrine, nay, any thing, though ever so absurd and unreasonable, may become an article of faith, obliging all Christians to the belief of it, whenever the church of Rome shall think to stamp her authority upon it: which would make Christianity a most uncertain and endless thing.

The fourth pretended ground of this doctrine is, The necessity of such a change as this in the sacrament, to the comfort and benefit of those who receive it. But there is no colour for this, if the thing be rightly considered: because the comfort and benefit of the sacrament depend upon the blessing annexed to the institution. And as water in baptism, without any substantial change made in that element, may, by the Divine blessing accompanying the institution, be effectual to the washing away of sin, and spiritual regeneration; so there can no reason in the world be given why the elements of bread and wine in the Lord's Supper may not, by the same Divine blessing accompanying this institution, make the worthy receivers partakers of all the spiritual comfort and benefit designed to us thereby, without any substantial change made in those elements, since our Lord hath told us, that "Verily the flesh profiteth nothing." So that if we



could do so odd and strange a thing as to eat the very natural flesh and drink the blood of our Lord, I do not see of what greater advantage it would be to us, than what we may have by partaking of the symbols of his body and blood as he hath appointed in remembrance of him. For the spiritual efficacy of the sacrament doth not depend upon the nature of the thing received, supposing we receive what our Lord appointed, and receive it with a right preparation and disposition of mind; but upon the supernatural blessing that goes along with it, and makes it effectual to those spiritual ends for which it was appointed.

The fifth and last pretended ground of this doctrine is, To magnify the power of the priest in being able to work so great a miracle. And this with great pride and pomp is often urged by them as a transcendent instance of the Divine wisdom, to find out so admirable a way to raise the power and reverence of the priest, that he should be able every day, and as often as he pleases, by repeating a few words, to work so miraculous a change, and (as they love most absurdly and blasphemously to speak) to make God himself.

But this is to pretend to a power above that of God himself; for he did not, nor cannot make himself, nor do any thing that implies a contradiction, as transubstantiation evidently does in their pretending to make God. For to make that which already is, and make that now which always was, is not only vain and trifling if it could be done, but impossible, because it implies a contradiction.

And what if after all, transubstantiation, if it were possible, and actually wrought by the priest, would yet be no miracle: for there are two things

necessary to a miracle—that there be a supernatural effect wrought, and that this effect be evident to sense. So that though a supernatural effect be wrought, yet if it be not evident to sense, it is to all the ends and purposes of a miracle as if it were not ; and can be no testimony or proof of any thing, because itself stands in need of another miracle to give testimony to it, and to prove that it was wrought. And neither in Scripture, nor in profane authors, nor in common use of speech, is any thing called a miracle but what falls under the notice of our senses : a miracle being nothing else but a supernatural effect evident to sense, the great end and design whereof is to be a sensible proof and conviction to us of something that we do not see.

And for want of this condition, transubstantiation, if it were true, would be no miracle. It would be indeed very supernatural, but for all that it would not be a sign or miracle : for a sign or miracle is always a thing sensible, otherwise it could be no sign. Now that such a change as is pretended in transubstantiation should really be wrought, and yet there should be no sign and appearance of it, is a thing very wonderful, but not to sense ; for our senses perceive no change, the bread and wine in the sacrament to all our senses remaining just as they were before : and that a thing should remain to all appearance just as it was, hath nothing at all of wonder in it : we wonder indeed when we see a strange thing done, but no man wonders when he sees nothing done. So that transubstantiation, if they will needs have it a miracle, is such a miracle as any man may work that hath but the confidence to face men down that he works it, and the fortune to be believed : and though the church of Rome

may magnify their priests, upon account of this miracle, which they say they can work every day and every hour, yet I cannot understand the reason of it; for when this great work (as they call it) is done, there is nothing more appears to be done than if there were no miracle. Now such a miracle as to all appearance is no miracle, I see no reason why a protestant minister, as well as a popish priest, may not work as often as he pleases; or if he can but have the patience to let it alone, it will work itself. For surely nothing in the world is easier than to let a thing be as it is, and by speaking a few words over it, to make it just what it was before. Every man, every day, may work ten thousand such miracles.

And thus I have dispatched the first part of my discourse, which was to consider the pretended grounds and reasons of the church of Rome for this doctrine, and to shew the weakness and insufficiency of them. I come in the

II. Second place, To produce our objections against it. Which will be of so much the greater force, because I have already shewn this doctrine to be destitute of all Divine warrant and authority, and of any other sort of ground sufficient in reason to justify it. So that I do not now object against a doctrine which has a fair probability of Divine revelation on its side, for that would weigh down all objections, which did not plainly overthrow the probability and credit of its Divine revelation; but I object against a doctrine by the mere will and tyranny of men imposed upon the belief of Christians, without any evidence of Scripture, and against all the evidence of reason and sense.

The objection I shall reduce to these two heads. First, The infinite scandal of this doctrine to the

Christian religion. And, secondly, The monstrous and insupportable absurdity of it.

First, The infinite scandal of this doctrine to the Christian religion. And that upon these four accounts: 1. Of the stupidity of this doctrine. 2. The real barbarousness of this sacrament and rite of our religion, upon supposition of the truth of this doctrine. 3. Of the cruel and bloody consequences of it. 4. Of the danger of idolatry; which they are certainly guilty of, if this doctrine be not true.

1. Upon account of the stupidity of this doctrine. I remember that Tully, who was a man of very good sense, instanceth in the conceit of eating God as the extremity of madness, and so stupid an apprehension as he thought no man was ever guilty

\* De Nat. De-  
orum, l. 3.

of. \* “When we call (says he) the fruits of the earth Ceres, and wine Bacchus, we use but the common language; but do you think any man so mad as to believe that which he eats to be God?” It seems he could not believe that so extravagant a folly had ever entered into the mind of man. It is a very severe saying of Averroes, the Arabian philosopher, (who lived after this doctrine was entertained among Christians) and ought to make the church of Rome blush, if she can:

“I have travelled † (says he) over the world, and have found divers sects; but so sottish a sect or law I never found, as is the sect of the Christians; because with their own teeth they devour their God whom they worship.” It was great stupidity in the people of Israel to say, “Come let us make us gods;” but it was civilly said of them, “Let us make us gods that may go before us,” in comparison of the church

† Dionys. Car-  
thus, in 4 dist.  
10. art. 1.

of Rome, who say, "Let us make a god that we may eat him." So that upon the whole matter I cannot but wonder that they should choose thus to expose faith to the contempt of all that are endued with reason. And, to speak the plain truth, the Christian religion was never so horribly exposed to the scorn of atheists and infidels, as it hath been by this most absurd and senseless doctrine. But thus it was foretold,\* that  
 "the man of sin should come with power 2 Thess. ii. 10.  
 and signs, and lying miracles, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness," with all the legerdemain and juggling tricks of falsehood and imposture; amongst which this of transubstantiation, which they call a miracle, and we a cheat, is one of the chief: and in all probability those common juggling words of hocus-pocus, are nothing else but a corruption of *hoc est corpus*, by way of ridiculous imitation of the priests of the church of Rome in their trick of transubstantiation. Into such contempt by this foolish doctrine, and pretended miracle of theirs, have they brought the most sacred and venerable mystery of our religion.

2. It is very scandalous likewise upon account of the real barbarousness of this sacrament and rite of our religion, upon supposition of the truth of this doctrine. Literally to eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and to drink his blood, St. Augustin, as I have shewed before, declares to be a great impiety. And the impiety and barbarousness of the thing is not in truth extenuated, but only the appearance of it, by its being done under the species of bread and wine: for the thing they acknowledge is really done, and they believe that they verily eat and drink the natural flesh and blood of

Christ. And what can any man do more unworthily towards his friend? How can he possibly use him more barbarously, than to feast upon his living flesh and blood? It is one of the greatest wonders in the world, that it should ever enter into the minds of men to put upon our Saviour's words, so easily capable of a more convenient sense, and so necessarily requiring it, a meaning so plainly contrary to reason and sense, and even to humanity itself. Had the ancient Christians owned any such doctrine, we should have heard it from the adversaries of our religion in every page of their writings; and they would have desired no greater advantage against the Christians, than to have been able to hit them in the teeth with their feasting upon the natural flesh and blood of their Lord, and their God, and their best friend. What endless triumphs would they have made upon this subject? And with what confidence would they have set the cruelty used by Christians in their sacrament, against their god Saturn's eating his own children, and all the cruel and bloody rites of their idolatry? But that no such thing was then objected by the heathens to the Christians, is to a wise man instead of a thousand demonstrations that no such doctrine was then believed.

3. It is scandalous also upon account of the cruel and bloody consequences of this doctrine; so contrary to the plain laws of Christianity, and to one great end and design of this sacrament, which is to unite Christians in the most perfect love and charity to one another: whereas this doctrine hath been the occasion of the most barbarous and bloody tragedies that ever were acted in the world. For this hath been in the church of Rome the great

burning article: and as absurd and unreasonable as it is, more Christians have been murdered for the denial of it, than perhaps for all the other articles of their religion. And I think it may generally pass for a true observation, that all sects are commonly most hot and furious for those things for which there is least reason; for what men want of reason for their opinions, they usually supply and make up in rage. And it was no more than needed to use this severity upon this occasion; for nothing but the cruel fear of death could in probability have driven so great a part of mankind into the acknowledgment of so unreasonable and senseless a doctrine.

O blessed Saviour! thou best friend and greatest lover of mankind, who can imagine thou didst ever intend that men should kill one another for not being able to believe contrary to their senses; for being unwilling to think, that thou shouldst make one of the most horrid and barbarous things that can be imagined, a main duty and principal mystery of thy religion; for not flattering the pride and presumption of the priest, who says he can make God, and for not complying with the folly and stupidity of the people, who are made to believe that they can eat him?

4. Upon account of the danger of idolatry; which they are certainly guilty of, if this doctrine be not true, and such a change as they pretend be not made in the sacrament; for if it be not, then they worship a creature instead of the Creator, God blessed for ever. But such a change I have shewn to be impossible; or, if it could be, yet they can never be certain that it is, and consequently are always in danger of idolatry: and that they

can never be certain that such a change is made, is evident; because, according to the express determination of the council of Trent, that depends upon the mind and intention of the priest, which cannot certainly be known but by revelation, which is not pretended in this case. And if they be mistaken in this change, through the knavery or crossness of the priest, who will not make God, but when he thinks fit, they must not think to excuse themselves from idolatry, because they intended to worship God, and not a creature; for so the Persians might be excused from idolatry in worshipping the sun, because they intend to worship God, and not a creature; and so indeed we may excuse all the idolatry that ever was in the world, which is nothing else but a mistake of the Deity, and upon that mistake, a worshipping of something as God, which is not God.

Secondly, Besides the infinite scandal of this doctrine upon the accounts I have mentioned, the monstrous absurdities of it, make it insupportable to any religion. I am very well assured of the grounds of religion in general, and of the Christian religion in particular; and yet I cannot see that the foundations of any revealed religion, are strong enough to bear the weight of so many and so great absurdities as this doctrine of transubstantiation would load it withal. And, to make this evident, I shall not insist upon those gross contradictions, of the same body being in so many several places at once; of our Saviour's giving away himself with his own hands, to every one of his disciples, and yet still keeping himself to himself; and a thousand more of the like nature: but, to shew the absurdity of this doctrine, I shall only ask these few questions.

1. Whether any man have, or ever had, greater



evidence of the truth of any Divine revelation than every man hath of the falsehood of transubstantiation? Infidelity were hardly possible to men, if all men had the same evidence for the Christian religion which they have against transubstantiation; that is, the clear and irresistible evidence of sense. He that can once be brought to contradict or deny his senses, is at an end of certainty; for what can a man be certain of, if he be not certain of what he sees? In some circumstances, our senses may deceive us, but no faculty deceives us so little and so seldom: and when our senses do deceive us, even that error is not to be corrected without the help of our senses.

2. Supposing this doctrine had been delivered in Scripture in the very same words that is decreed in the council of Trent, by what clearer evidence or stronger argument could any man prove to me that such words were in the Bible, than I can prove to him that bread and wine, after consecration, are bread and wine still? He could but appeal to my eyes to prove such words to be in the Bible, and with the same reason and justice might I appeal to several of his senses to prove to him that the bread and wine after consecration are bread and wine still.

3. Whether it be reasonable to imagine, that God should make that a part of the Christian religion which shakes the main external evidence and confirmation of the whole? I mean the miracles which were wrought by our Saviour and his apostles, the assurance whereof did at first depend upon the certainty of sense: for if the senses of those who say they saw them, were deceived, then there might be no miracles wrought; and consequently, it may justly be doubted whether that kind of confirmation

which God hath given to the Christian religion would be strong enough to prove it, supposing transubstantiation to be a part of it: because every man hath as great evidence, that transubstantiation is false, as he hath that the Christian religion is true. Suppose then transubstantiation to be part of the Christian doctrine, it must have the same confirmation with the whole, and that is miracles: but of all doctrines in the world, it is peculiarly incapable of being proved by a miracle. For if a miracle were wrought for the proof of it, the very same assurance which any man hath of the truth of the miracle, he hath of the falsehood of the doctrine; that is, the clear evidence of his senses. For that there is a miracle wrought to prove that what he sees in the sacrament, is not bread, but the body of Christ, there is only the evidence of sense; and there is the very same evidence to prove, that what he sees in the sacrament, is not the body of Christ, but bread. So that here would arise a new controversy, whether a man should rather believe his senses giving testimony against the doctrine of transubstantiation, or bearing witness to a miracle, wrought to confirm that doctrine; there being the very same evidence against the truth of the doctrine, which there is for the truth of the miracle: and then the argument for transubstantiation, and the objection against it, would just balance one another; and consequently transubstantiation is not to be proved by a miracle, because that would be to prove to a man, by something that he sees, that he doth not see what he sees. And if there were no other evidence that transubstantiation is no part of the Christian doctrine, this would be sufficient, that what proves the one, does as much overthrow the other; and that miracles,

which are certainly the best and highest external proof of Christianity, are the worst proof in the world of transubstantiation, unless a man can renounce his senses at the same time that he relies upon them. For a man cannot believe a miracle without relying upon sense, nor transubstantiation, without renouncing it. So that, never were any two things so ill coupled together as the doctrine of Christianity and that of transubstantiation, because they draw several ways, and are ready to strangle one another: for the main evidence of the Christian doctrine, which is miracles, is resolved into the certainty of sense, but this evidence is clear and point blank against transubstantiation.

4. And lastly, I would ask what we are to think of the argument which our Saviour used to convince his disciples after his resurrection, that his body was really risen, and that they were not deluded by a ghost or apparition? Is it a necessary and conclusive argument or not? “And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled; and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.” But now, if we suppose with the church of Rome, the doctrine of transubstantiation to be true, and that he had instructed his disciples in it just before his death, strange thoughts might justly have arisen in their hearts, and they might have said to him—Lord, it is but a few days ago since thou didst teach us not to believe our senses, but directly contrary to what we saw, viz. that the bread which thou gavest us in the sacrament, though we saw and handled it, and tasted it to be bread, yet was not bread, but thine own natural body; and now thou appealest to our

Luke xxiv.  
38, 39.

senses to prove that this is thy body which we now see. If seeing and handling be an unquestionable evidence, that things are what they appear to our senses, then we were deceived before in the sacrament; and if they be not, then we are not sure now that this is thy body which we now see and handle, but it may be perhaps bread under the appearance of flesh and bones; just as in the sacrament, that which we saw and handled, and tasted to be bread, was thy flesh and bones under the form and appearance of bread. Now upon this supposition, it would have been a hard matter to have quieted the thoughts of his disciples: for if the argument which our Saviour used, did certainly prove to them, that what they saw and handled, was his body, his very natural flesh and bones, because they saw and handled them, (which it were impious to deny) it would as strongly prove, that what they saw and received before in the sacrament, was not the natural body and blood of Christ, but real bread and wine: and consequently, that according to our Saviour's arguing after his resurrection, they had no reason to believe transubstantiation before. For that very argument, by which our Saviour proves the reality of his body after his resurrection, doth as strongly prove the reality of bread and wine after consecration. But our Saviour's argument was most infallibly good and true, and therefore the doctrine of transubstantiation is undoubtedly false.

Upon the whole matter, I shall only say this, that some other points between us and the church of Rome are managed by some kind of wit and subtlety, but this of transubstantiation is carried out by mere dint of impudence, and facing down of mankind.

And of this the more discerning persons of that

church are of late grown so sensible, that they would now be glad to be rid of this odious and ridiculous doctrine. But the council of Trent hath rivetted it so fast into their religion, and made it so necessary and essential a point of their belief, that they cannot now part with it if they would; it is like a millstone hung about the neck of popery, which will sink it at the last.

And though some of their greatest wits, and Cardinal Perron, and of late Monsieur Arnauld, have undertaken the defence of it in great volumes; yet it is an absurdity of that monstrous and massy weight, that no human authority or wit is able to support it. It will make the very pillars of St. Peter's crack, and requires more volumes to make it good than would fill the Vatican.

And now I would apply myself to the poor deluded people of that church, if they were either permitted by their priests, or durst venture without their leave, to look into their religion, and to examine the doctrines of it. Consider and shew yourselves men. Do not suffer yourselves any longer to be led blindfold, and by an implicit faith in your priests, into the belief of nonsense and contradiction. Think it enough and too much to let them rook you out of your money, for pretended pardons and counterfeit relics; but let not the authority of any priest or church persuade you out of your senses. Credulity is certainly a fault as well as infidelity: and he who said, "Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed;" hath no where said, Blessed are they that have seen, and yet have not believed; much less, Blessed are they that believe directly contrary to what they see.

To conclude this discourse. By what hath been

said upon this argument it will appear with how little truth and reason, and regard to the interest of our common Christianity, it is so often said by our adversaries, that there are as good arguments for the belief of transubstantiation as of the doctrine of the trinity: when they themselves do acknowledge with us that the doctrine of the trinity is grounded upon the Scriptures, and that according to the interpretation of them by the consent of the ancient fathers: but their doctrine of transubstantiation I have plainly shewn to have no such ground, and that this is acknowledged by very many learned men of their own church. And this doctrine of theirs being first plainly proved by us to be destitute of all Divine warrant and authority, our objections against it from the manifold contradictions of it to reason and sense, are so many demonstrations of the falsehood of it. Against all which they have nothing to put in the opposite scale but the infallibility of their church, for which there is even less colour of proof from Scripture than for transubstantiation itself. But so fond are they of their own innovations and errors, that rather than the dictates of their church, how groundless and absurd soever, should be called in question; rather than not have their will of us in imposing upon us what they please, they will overthrow any article of the Christian faith, and shake the very foundations of our common religion: a clear evidence that the church of Rome is not the true mother, since she can be so well contented that Christianity should be destroyed, rather than the point in question should be decided against her.

## SERMON XXVII.

THE PROTESTANT RELIGION VINDICATED FROM THE  
CHARGE OF SINGULARITY AND NOVELTY.

[Preached before the King at Whitehall, April 2d, 1680.]

*If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you  
this day whom you will serve.—JOSH. xxiv. 15.*

THESE are the words of Joshua; who, after he had brought the people of Israel through many difficulties and hazards into the quiet possession of the promised land, like a good prince and father of his country, was very solicitous, before his death, to lay the firmest foundation he could devise of the future happiness and prosperity of that people, in whose present settlement he had, by the blessing of God, been so successful an instrument.

And because he knew no means so effectual to this end, as to confirm them in the religion and worship of the true God, who had by so remarkable and miraculous a providence planted them in that good land; he summons the people together, and represents to them all those considerations that might engage them and their posterity for ever to continue in the true religion. He tells them what God had already done for them, and what he had promised to do more, if they would be faithful to him: and, on the other hand, what fearful calamities he had threatened, and would certainly bring upon them, in case they should transgress his covenant, and go

and serve other gods. And, after many arguments to this purpose, he concludes with this earnest exhortation at the 14th verse: "Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord."

And, to give the greater weight and force to this exhortation, he does by a very eloquent kind of insinuation as it were once more set them at liberty, and leave them to their own election: it being the nature of man to stick more steadfastly to that which is not violently imposed, but is our own free and deliberate choice: "And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom you will serve."

Which words offer to our consideration these following observations:

1. It is here supposed that a nation must be of some religion or other. Joshua does not put this to their choice, but takes it for granted.

2. That though religion be a matter of choice, yet it is neither a thing indifferent in itself, nor to a good governor, what religion his people are of. Joshua does not put it to them as if it were an indifferent matter, whether they served God or idols; he had sufficiently declared before which of these was to be preferred.

3. That true religion may have several prejudices and objections against it: "if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord;" intimating that, upon some accounts, and to some persons, it may appear so.

4. That the true religion hath those real advantages on its side, that it may safely be referred to any considerate man's choice. And this seems to be the true reason why Joshua refers it to them.



Not that he thought the thing indifferent, but because he was fully satisfied that the truth and goodness of the one above the other was so evident, that there was no danger that any prudent man should make a wrong choice. “If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom you will serve;” intimating that, the plain difference of the things in competition would direct them what to choose.

5. The example of princes and governors hath a very great influence upon the people in matters of religion. This I collect from the context; and Joshua was sensible of it; and, therefore, though he firmly believed the true religion to have those advantages that would certainly recommend it to every impartial man’s judgment, yet knowing that the multitude are easily imposed upon and led into error, he thought fit to incline and determine them by his own example, and by declaring his own peremptory resolution in the case. “Choose you this day whom you will serve: as for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Laws are a good security to religion; but the example of governors is a living law, which secretly overrules the minds of men, and bends them to a compliance with it.

———*Non sic inflectere sensus  
Humanos edicta valent, ut vita regentis.*

The lives and actions of princes have usually a greater sway upon the minds of the people than their laws.

All these observations are, I think, very natural, and very considerable. I shall not be able to speak to them all; but shall proceed so far as the time and your patience will give me leave.

First, It is here supposed that a nation must be of some religion or other. Joshua does not put it to their choice whether they will worship any deity at all: that had been too wild and extravagant a supposition, and which it is likely, in those days, had never entered into any man's mind. But he takes it for granted that all people will be of some religion; and then offers it to their consideration, which they will pitch upon: "Choose you this day whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served," &c.

Religion is a thing to which men are not only formed by education and custom; but, as Tully says, *Quo omnes duce natura vehimur*. It is that to which we are all carried by a natural inclination, which is the true reason why some religion or other hath so universally prevailed in all ages and places of the world.

The temporal felicity of men, and the ends of government, can very hardly, if at all, be attained without religion. Take away this, and all obligations of conscience cease; and where there is no obligation of conscience, all security of truth, and justice, and mutual confidence among men is at an end. For why should I repose confidence in that man, why should I take his word, or believe his promise, or put any of my interests and concernments into his power, who hath no other restraint upon him but that of human laws, and is at liberty, in his own mind and principles, to do whatever he judgeth to be expedient for his interest, provided he can but do it without danger to himself? So that declared atheism and infidelity doth justly bring men under a jealousy and suspicion with all mankind; and every wise man hath reason to be on his guard

against those from whom he hath no cause to expect more justice, and truth, and equity in their dealings than he can compel them to by the mere dint and force of laws. For, by declaring themselves free from all other obligations, they give us fair warning what we are to expect at their hands, and how far we may trust them. Religion is the strongest band of human society, and so necessary to the welfare and happiness of mankind, as it could not have been more, if we could suppose the being of God himself to have been purposely designed and contrived for the benefit and advantage of men; so that very well may it be taken for granted, that a nation must be of some religion or other.

Secondly, Though religion be a matter of our choice, yet it is neither a thing indifferent in itself, nor to a good governor, what religion his people are of.—Notwithstanding the supposition of the text, Joshua doth not leave them at liberty, whether they will serve God or idols; but by a very rhetorical scheme of speech endeavours to engage them more firmly to the worship of the true God.

To countenance and support the true religion, and to take care that the people be instructed in it, and that none be permitted to debauch and seduce men from it, properly belongs to the civil magistrate. This power the kings of Israel always exercised, not only with allowance, but with great approbation and commendation from God himself. And the case is not altered since Christianity; the better the religion is, the better it deserves the countenance and support of the civil authority. And this power of the civil magistrates, in matters of religion, was never called in question, but by the enthusiasts of these latter times; and yet, among these, every

father and master of a family claims this power over his children and servants, at the same time that they deny it to the magistrate over his subjects. But I would fain know where the difference lies. Hath a master of a family more power over those under his government than the magistrate hath? No man ever pretended it; nay, so far is it from that, that the natural authority of a father may be, and often is, limited and restrained by the laws of the civil magistrate. And why then may not a magistrate exercise the same power over his subjects in matters of religion, which every master challengeth to himself in his own family? that is, to establish the true worship of God, in such manner and with such circumstances as he thinks best, and to permit none to affront it, or to seduce from it those that are under his care. And, to prevent all misunderstandings in this matter, I do not hereby ascribe any thing to the magistrate that can possibly give him any pretence of right to reject God's true religion, or to declare what he pleases to be so, and what books he pleases to be canonical and the word of God, and consequently to make a false religion so current by the stamp of his authority, as to oblige his subjects to the profession of it; because he who acknowledgeth himself to derive all his authority from God, can pretend to none against him. But if a false religion be established by law, the case here is the same as in all other laws that are sinful in the matter of them, but yet made by a lawful authority; in this case, the subject is not bound to profess a false religion, but patiently to suffer for the constant profession of the true.

And, to speak freely in this matter, I cannot think (till I be better informed, which I am always

ready to be) that any pretence of conscience warrants any man, that is not extraordinarily commissioned, as the apostles and first publishers of the gospel were, and cannot justify that commission by miracles as they did, to affront the established religion of a nation (though it be false) and openly to draw men off from the profession of it, in contempt of the magistrate and the law. All that persons of a different religion can, in such a case, reasonably pretend to, is to enjoy the private liberty and exercise of their own conscience and religion; for which they ought to be very thankful, and to forbear the open making of proselytes to their own religion (though they be ever so sure that they are in the right), till they have either an extraordinary commission from God to that purpose, or the providence of God make way for it by the permission or connivance of the magistrate. Not but that every man hath a right to publish and propagate the true religion, and to declare it against a false one; but there is no obligation upon any man to attempt this to no purpose, and when without a miracle it can have no other effect but the loss of his own life; unless we have an immediate command and commission from God to this purpose, and be endued with a power of miracles, as a public seal and testimony of that commission: which was the case of the apostles, who after they had received an immediate commission, were not to enter upon the execution of it, but to "stay at Jerusalem till they were endued with power from on high." In this case a man is to abide all hazards, and may reasonably expect both extraordinary assistance and success, as the apostles had; and even a miraculous protection till his work be done; and,

after that, if he be called to suffer martyrdom, a supernatural support under those sufferings.

And that they are guilty, however, of gross hypocrisy who pretend a further obligation of conscience in this matter, I shall give this plain demonstration, which relies upon concessions generally made on all hands, and by all parties. No protestant (that I know of) holds himself obliged to go and preach up his religion, and make converts in Spain or Italy; nor do either the protestant ministers or popish priests think themselves bound in conscience to preach the gospel in Turkey, to confute the Alcoran, and to convert the Mahometans. And what is the reason? Because of the severity of the inquisition in popish countries, and of the laws in Turkey. But doth the danger then alter the obligation of conscience? No, certainly; but it makes men throw off the false pretence and disguise of it: but where there is a real obligation of conscience, danger should not deter men from their duty, as it did not the apostles; which shews their case to be different from ours, and that probably this matter was stated right at first. So that whatever is pretended, this is certain; that the priests and Jesuits of the church of Rome have, in truth, no more obligation of conscience to make converts here in England than in Sweden or Turkey; where it seems the evident danger of the attempt hath, for these many years, given them a perfect discharge from their duty. I shall join the

Third and fourth observations together. That though the true religion may have several prejudices and objections against it, yet upon examination there will be found those real advantages on its side, that it may safely be referred to any consider-

ate man's choice : " if It seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom you will serve." ---" If it seem evil unto you ;" intimating, to some persons, and upon some accounts, it may appear so. But when the matter is truly represented, the choice is not difficult, nor requires any longer deliberation. "Choose you this day whom you will serve:" Let but the cause be fully and impartially heard, and a wise man may determine himself upon the spot, and give his verdict without ever going from the bar.

The true religion hath always lain under some prejudices with partial and inconsiderate men; which commonly spring from one of these two causes, either the prepossessions of a contrary religion, or the contrariety of the true religion to the vicious inclinations and practices of men, which usually lies at the bottom of all prejudice against religion. Religion is an enemy to men's beloved lusts, and therefore they are enemies to religion. I begin with the first, which is as much as I shall be able to compass at this time.

1. The prepossessions of a false religion ; which commonly pretends two advantages on its side—antiquity and universality; and is wont to object to the true religion—novelty and singularity. And both these are intimated both before and after the text: "Put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt: and choose you this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell." Idolatry was the religion of their fathers, and had spread itself over the greatest and most ancient nations of the world, and the most famous for learning and arts, the Chaldeans and

Egyptians; and was the religion of the Amorites, and the nations round about them. So that Joshua represents the heathen religion with all its strength and advantage, and does not dissemble its confident pretence to antiquity and universality, whereby they would also insinuate the novelty and singularity of the worship of the God of Israel. And it is very well worthy our observation, that one or both of these have always been the exceptions of false religions (especially of idolatry and superstition) against the true religion. The ancient idolaters of the world pretended their religion to be ancient and universal, that their fathers served these gods, and that the worship of the God of Israel was a plain innovation upon the ancient and catholic religion of the world, and that the very first rise and original of it was within the memory of their fathers: and no doubt they were almost perpetually upon the Jews with that pert question, Where was your religion before Abraham? And telling them, that it was the religion of a very small part and corner of the world, confined within a little territory: but the great nations of the world, the Egyptians and Chaldeans, famous for all kind of knowledge and wisdom, and indeed all the nations round about them, worshipped other gods; and therefore it was an intolerable arrogance and singularity in them, to condemn their fathers and all the world, to be of a religion different from all other nations, and thereby to separate themselves and make a schism from the rest of mankind.

And when the gospel appeared in the world, which the apostle to the Hebrews (to prevent the scandal of that word) calls the time of reformation, the Jews and heathen still renewed the same objec-



tions against Christianity. The Jews urged against it, not the ancient Scriptures and the true word of God, but that which they pretended to be of much greater authority, the unwritten word, the ancient and constant traditions of their church; and branded this new religion with the name of heresy: "After the way (saith St. Paul) that you call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things that are written in the law and in the prophets." By which we see, that they of the church of Rome were not the first who called it heresy to reject human traditions, and to make the Scriptures the rule of faith: this was done long before by their reverend predecessors, the scribes and pharisees.

And the gentiles, they pretended against it both antiquity and universality, the constant belief and practice of all ages, and almost all places in the world: *Sequimur majores nostros qui feliciter secuti sunt suos*, says Symmachus; "We follow our forefathers, who happily followed theirs:" but you bring in a new religion, never known nor heard of in the world before.

And when the Christian religion was most miserably depraved and corrupted, in that dismal night of ignorance which overspread these western parts of the world, about the ninth and tenth centuries; and many pernicious doctrines and superstitious practices were introduced, to the woeful defacing of the Christian religion, and making it quite another thing from what our Saviour had left it; and these corruptions and abuses had continued for several ages; no sooner was a reformation attempted, but the church of Rome make the same outcry of novelty and singularity: and though we have substantially answered it a thousand times, yet we cannot

obtain of them to forbear that threadbare question, Where was your religion before Luther?

I shall therefore apply myself to answer these two exceptions with all the brevity and clearness I can: and I doubt not to make it appear, that as to the point of universality (though that be no-wise necessary to justify the truth of any religion) ours is not inferior to theirs, if we take in the Christians of all ages, and of all parts of the world: and as to the point of antiquity, that our faith and the doctrines of our religion have clearly the advantage of theirs; all our faith being unquestionably ancient, theirs not so.

1. As to the point of universality, which they of the church of Rome, I know not for what reason, will needs make an inseparable property and mark of the true church. And they never flout at the Protestant religion with so good a grace among the ignorant people, as when they are bragging of their numbers, and despising poor protestancy because embraced by so few. This pestilent northern history (as of late they scornfully call it) is entertained it seems only in this cold and cloudy corner of the world, by a company of dull stupid people, that can neither penetrate into the proofs nor the possibility of transubstantiation; whereas, to the more refined southern wits, all these difficult and obscure points are as clear as the sun at noon-day.

But to speak to the thing itself. If number be necessary to prove the truth and goodness of any religion, ours upon inquiry will be found not so inconsiderable as our adversaries would make it: those of the reformed religion, according to the most exact calculations that have been made by learned men, being esteemed not much unequal in number

to those of the Romish persuasion. But then if we take in the ancient Christian church, whose faith was the same with ours, and other Christian churches at this day, which altogether are vastly greater and more numerous than the Roman church, and which agree with us, several of them in very considerable doctrines and practices in dispute between us and the church of Rome, and all of them in disclaiming that fundamental point of the Roman religion, and sum of Christianity (as Bellarmine calls it); I mean the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome over all Christians and churches in the world, then the number on our side will be much greater than on theirs.

But we will not stand upon this advantage with them. Suppose we were by much the fewer: so hath the true church of God often been, without any the least prejudice to the truth of their religion. What think we of the church in Abraham's time, which for aught we know was confined to one family and one small kingdom, that of Melchisedec, king of Salem? What think we of it in Moses's time, when confined to one people wandering in a wilderness? What of it in Elijah's time, when besides the two tribes that worshipped at Jerusalem, there were in the other ten but seven thousand that had not bowed their knee to Baal? What in our Saviour's time, when the whole Christian church consisted of twelve apostles, and seventy disciples, and some few followers beside? How would Bellarmine have despised this little flock, because it wanted one or two of his goodliest marks of the true church—universality and splendour? And what think we of the Christian church in the height of Arianism and Pelagianism, when a great part of Christendom was

overrun with these errors, and the number of the orthodox was inconsiderable in comparison of the heretics.

But what need I to urge these instances? As if the truth of a religion were to be estimated and carried by the major vote; which as it can be an argument to none but fools, so I dare say no honest and wise man ever made use of it for a solid proof of the truth and goodness of any church or religion. If multitude be an argument that men are in the right, in vain then hath the Scripture said, “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil:” for if this argument be of any force, the greater number never go wrong.

2. As to the point of antiquity. This is not always a certain mark of the true religion. For surely there was a time when Christianity began and was a new profession, and then both Judaism and Paganism had certainly the advantage of it in point of antiquity. But the proper question in this case, is, which is the true ancient Christian faith—that of the church of Rome or our’s? And, to make this matter plain, it is to be considered, that a great part of the Roman faith is the same with our’s: as namely, the articles of the apostle’s creed, as explained by the first four general councils. And these make up our whole faith, so far as concerns matters of mere and simple belief, that are of absolute necessity to salvation. And in this faith of our’s, there is nothing wanting that can be shewn in any ancient creed of the Christian church. And thus far our faith, and their’s of the Roman church, are undoubtedly of equal antiquity; that is, as ancient as Christianity itself.

All the question is, as to the matters in difference

between us. The principal whereof, are the twelve new articles of the creed of Pope Pius IV. concerning the sacrifice of the mass, transubstantiation, the communion in one kind only, purgatory, &c. not one of which is to be found in any ancient creed, or confession of faith generally allowed in the Christian church. The antiquity of these we deny, and affirm them to be innovations; and have particularly proved them to be so, not only to the answering, but almost to the silencing of our adversaries.

And as for the negative articles of the protestant religion, in opposition to the errors and corruptions of the Romish faith, these are by accident become a part of our faith and religion, occasioned by their errors; as the renouncing of the doctrines of Arianism became part of the catholic religion, after the rise of that heresy.

So that the case is plainly this: we believe and teach all that is contained in the creeds of the ancient Christian church, and was by them esteemed necessary to salvation; and this is our religion. But now the church of Rome hath innovated in the Christian religion, and made several additions to it; and greatly corrupted it, both in the doctrines and practices of it: and these additions and corruptions are their religion, as it is distinct from our's; and both because they are corruptions and novelties, we have rejected them; and our rejection of these, is our Reformation; and our Reformation we grant (if this will do them any good) not to be so ancient as their corruptions; all reformation necessarily supposing corruptions and errors to have been before it.

And now we are at a little better leisure to answer that captious question of their's, Where was your religion before Luther? Wherever Christianity was;

in some places more pure, in others more corrupted; but especially in these western parts of Christendom, overgrown for several ages with manifold errors and corruptions, which the Reformation hath happily cut off, and cast away. So that, though our Reformation was as late as Luther, our religion is as ancient as Christianity itself. For when the additions, which the church of Rome had made to the ancient Christian faith, and their innovations in practice are pared off, that which remains of their religion, is our's; and this they cannot deny to be every tittle of it the ancient Christianity.

And what other answer than this could the Jews have given to the like question, if it had been put to them by the ancient idolaters of the world, Where was your religion before Abraham? but the very same in substance which we now give to the church of Rome? That for many ages the worship of the one true God had been corrupted, and the worship of idols had prevailed in a great part of the world; that Abraham was raised up by God to reform religion, and to reduce the worship of God to its first institution: in the doing whereof, he necessarily separated himself and his family from the communion of those idolaters. So that though the Reformation which Abraham began, was new, yet his religion was truly ancient; as old as that of Noah, and Enoch, and Adam. Which is the same in substance that we say, and with the same and equal reason.

And if they will still complain of the newness of our Reformation, so do we too, and are heartily sorry it began no sooner; but, however, better late than never. Besides, it ought to be considered, that this objection of novelty lies against all reformation whatsoever, though ever so necessary, and though things

be ever so much amiss : and it is in effect to say, that if things be once bad, they must never be better, but must always remain as they are ; for they cannot be better, without being reformed, and a reformation must begin some time, and whenever it begins, it is certainly new. So that if a real reformation be made, the thing justifies itself ; and no objection of novelty ought to take place against that which upon all accounts was so fit and necessary to be done. And if they of the church of Rome would but speak their mind out in this matter, they are not so much displeas'd at the reformation which we have made, because it is new, as because it is a reformation. It was the humour of Babylon of old (as the prophet tells us) that she would not be healed ; and this is still the temper of the church of Rome, they hate to be reformed ; and rather than acknowledge themselves to have been once in an error, they will continue in it for ever. And this is that which at first made, and still continues, the breach and separation between us ; of which we are nowise guilty who have only reformed what was amiss, but they who obstinately persist in their errors, and will needs impose them upon us, and will not let us be of their communion, unless we will say they are no errors.

II. The other prejudice against the true religion is, the contrariety of it to the vicious inclinations and practices of men.

It is too heavy a yoke, and lays too great a restraint upon human nature. And this is that which in truth lies at the bottom of all objections against religion—"Men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil."

But this argument will require a discourse by it-

self; and therefore I shall not now enter upon it; only crave your patience a little longer, whilst I make some reflections upon what hath been already delivered.

You see what are the exceptions which idolatry and superstition have always made, and do at this day still make, against the true religion; and how slight and insignificant they are.

But do we then charge the church of Rome with idolatry? Our church most certainly does so, and hath always done it from the beginning of the Reformation; in her homilies, and liturgy, and canons, and in the writings of her best and ablest champions. And though I have, as impartially as I could, considered what hath been said on both sides in this controversy; yet I must confess, I could never yet see any tolerable defence made by them against this heavy charge. And they themselves acknowledge themselves to be greatly under the suspicion of it, by saying (as Cardinal Perron and others do) that the primitive Christians for some ages did neither worship images, nor pray to saints, for fear of being thought to approach too near the heathen idolatry: and, which is yet more, divers of their most learned men do confess, that if transubstantiation be not true, they are as gross idolaters as any in the world. And I hope they do not expect it from us, that in compliment to them, and to acquit them from the charge of idolatry, we should presently deny our senses, and believe transubstantiation; and if we do not believe this, they grant we have reason to charge them with idolatry.

But we own them to be a true church; which they cannot be, if they be guilty of idolatry. This they often urge us withal, and there seems at first sight-



to be something in it; and for that reason I shall endeavour to give so clear and satisfactory an answer to it, as that we may never more be troubled with it.

The truth is, we would fain hope, because they still retain the essentials of Christianity, and profess to believe all the articles of the Christian faith, that, notwithstanding their corruptions, they may still retain the true essence of a church; as a man may be truly and really a man, though he may have the plague upon him; and for that reason be fit to be avoided by all that wish well to themselves. But if this will not do, we cannot help it. Therefore, to push the matter home, are they sure that this is a firm and good consequence, That if they be idolaters, they cannot be a true church? Then let them look to it. It is they, I take it, that are concerned to prove themselves a true church, and not we to prove it for them. And if they will not understand it of themselves, it is fit they should be told that there is a great difference between concessions of charity and of necessity, and that a very different use ought to be made of them. We are willing to think the best of them; but if they dislike our charity in this point, nothing against the hair: if they will forgive us this injury, we will not offend them any more: but rather than have any farther difference with them about this matter, we will, for quietness' sake, compound it thus: that, till they can clearly acquit themselves of being idolaters, they shall never more against their wills be esteemed a true church.

And now to draw to a conclusion.

“If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord,” and to worship him only; to pray to him alone, and that

only in the name and mediation of Jesus Christ, as he hath given us commandment; "Because there is but one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus:" "If it seem evil unto you," to have the liberty to serve God in a language you can understand, and to have the free use of the Holy Scriptures, "which are able to make men wise unto salvation;" and to have the sacraments of our religion entirely administered to us, as our Lord did institute and appoint:

And, on the other hand, if it seem good to us, to put our necks once more under that yoke which our fathers were not able to bear: if it be really a preferment to a prince to hold the pope's stirrup, and a privilege to be deposed by him at his pleasure, and a courtesy to be killed at his command: if to pray without understanding, and to obey without reason, and to believe against sense; if ignorance, and implicit faith, and an inquisition, be in good earnest such charming and desirable things—then, welcome popery! which, wherever thou comest, dost infallibly bring all these wonderful privileges and blessings along with thee.

But the question is not now about the choice but the change of our religion, after we have been so long settled in the quiet possession and enjoyment of it. Men are very loath to change even a false religion: "Hath a nation changed their gods, which yet are no gods?" And surely there is much more reason why we should be tenacious of the truth, and hold fast that which is good.

We have the best religion in the world, the very same which the Son of God revealed, which the apostles planted and confirmed by miracles, and which the noble army of martyrs sealed with their

blood; and we have retrenched from it all false doctrines and superstitious practices, which have been added since. And I think we may without immodesty say, that upon the plain square of Scripture and reason, of the tradition and practice of the first and best ages of the Christian church, we have fully justified our religion; and made it evident to the world, that our adversaries are put to very hard shifts, and upon a perpetual disadvantage, in the defence of their's.

I wish it were as easy for us to justify our lives as our religion. I do not mean in comparison of our adversaries (for that, as bad as we are, I hope we are yet able to do), but in comparison of the rules of our holy religion, from which we are infinitely swerved; which I would to God we all did seriously consider and lay to heart: I say, in comparison of the rules of our holy religion, which “teach us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world, in expectation of the blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ;” to whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, &c.

## SERMON XXVIII.

### OBJECTIONS AGAINST THE TRUE RELIGION ANSWERED.

*And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom you will serve.—JOSH. xxiv. 15.*

THESE words, as I have already declared in the former discourse, are the last counsel and advice which Joshua gave to the people of Israel, after he had safely conducted them into the land of Canaan. And that he might the more effectually persuade them to continue steadfast in the worship of the true God, by an eloquent kind of insinuation, he doth, as it were, once more set them at liberty, and leave them to their own choice: “If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom you will serve.”

The plain sense of which words may be resolved into this proposition: That, notwithstanding all the prejudices and objections against the true religion, yet it hath those real advantages on its side, that it may safely be referred to any impartial and considerate man's choice—“If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord;” intimating, that to some persons, and upon some accounts, it may seem so; but when the matter is thoroughly examined, the resolution and choice cannot be difficult, nor require any long deliberation, “Choose you this day whom you will serve.”

The true religion hath always lain under some prejudices with partial and inconsiderate men, arising chiefly from these two causes: the prepossessions of a false religion, and the contrariety of the true religion to the inclinations of men, and the uneasiness of it in point of practice.

First, From the prepossessions of a false religion, which hath always been wont to lay claim to antiquity and universality, and to charge the true religion with novelty and singularity. And both these are intimated before the text: "Put away the gods whom your fathers served on the other side of the flood and in Egypt, and choose you this day whom you will serve." It was pretended that the worship of idols was the ancient religion of the world, of those great nations, the Egyptians and Chaldeans, and of all the nations round about them. But this hath already been considered at large.

Secondly, There is another sort of prejudices against religion, more apt to stick with men of better sense and reason; and this arises principally from the contrariety of the true religion to the inclinations of men, and the uneasiness of it in point of practice. It is pretended that religion is a heavy yoke, and lays too great a restraint upon human nature, and that the laws of it bear too hard upon the general inclinations of mankind.

I shall not at present meddle with the speculative objections against religion, upon account of the pretended unreasonableness of many things in point of belief; because the contrariety of the true religion to the inclinations of men, and the uneasiness of it in point of practice, is that which in truth lies at the bottom of atheism and infidelity, and raises all

that animosity which is in the minds of bad men against religion, and exasperates them to oppose it with all their wit and malice. "Men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." And if this prejudice were but once removed, and men were in some measure reconciled to the practice of religion, the speculative objections against it would almost vanish of themselves; for there wants little else to enable a man to answer them, but a willingness of mind to have them answered, and that we have no interest and inclination to the contrary. And, therefore, I shall at present wholly apply myself to remove this prejudice against religion, from the contrariety of it to the inclinations of men, and the uneasiness of it in point of practice.

And there are two parts of this objection:

1st, That a great part of the laws of religion do thwart the natural inclinations of men, which may reasonably be supposed to be from God. And,

2dly, That all of them together are a heavy yoke, and do lay too great a restraint upon human nature, intrrenching too much upon the pleasures and liberty of it.

I. That a great part of the laws of religion do thwart the natural inclinations of men, which may reasonably be supposed to be from God. So that God seems to have set our nature and our duty at variance, to have given us appetites and inclinations one way, and laws another: which, if it were true, must needs render the practice of religion very grievous and uneasy.

The force of this objection is very smartly expressed in those celebrated verses of a noble poet of our own, which are so frequently in the mouths

of many who are thought to bear no good-will to religion :—

O wearisome condition of humanity!  
 Born under one law, to another bound ;  
 Vainly begot, and yet forbidden vanity ;  
 Created sick, commanded to be sound.  
 If nature did not take delight in blood,  
 She would have made more easy ways to good.

So that this objection would fain charge the sins of men upon God ; first, upon account of the evil inclinations of our nature ; and then of the contrariety of our duty to those inclinations. And from the beginning man hath always been apt to lay the blame of his faults where it can least lie—upon goodness and perfection itself. The very first sin that ever man was guilty of, he endeavoured to throw upon God. “ The woman whom thou gavest me (saith Adam), she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.” And his posterity are still apt to excuse themselves the same way. But to return a particular answer to this objection.

1. We will acknowledge so much of it as is true ; that there is a great degeneracy and corruption of human nature, from what it was originally framed when it came out of God’s hands ; of which the Scripture gives us this account, that it was occasioned by the voluntary transgression of a plain and easy command given by God to our first parents. And this weakness, contracted by the fall of our first parents, naturally descends upon us their posterity, and visibly discovers itself in our inclinations to evil, and impotence to that which is good.

And of this the heathen philosophers, from the

light of nature, and their own experience and observation of themselves and others, were very sensible, that human nature was very much declined from its primitive rectitude, and sunk into a weak and drooping and sickly state, which they called a *πτερόροφύησις*, the moulting of the wings of the soul: but yet they were so just and reasonable, as not to charge this upon God, but upon some corruption and impurity contracted by the soul in a former state, before its union with the body. For the descent of the soul into these gross earthly bodies, they looked upon as partly the punishment of faults committed in a former state, and partly as the opportunity of a new trial, in order to its purgation and recovery. And this was the best account they were able to give of this matter, without the light of Divine revelation.

So that the degeneracy of human nature is universally acknowledged, and God acquitted from being the cause of it: but, however, the posterity of Adam do all partake of the weakness contracted by his fall, and do still labour under the miseries and inconveniences of it. But then this degeneracy is not total. For though our faculties be much weakened and disordered, yet they are not destroyed; nor wholly perverted. Our natural judgment and conscience doth still dictate to us what is good, and what we ought to do; and the impressions of the natural law, as to the great lines of our duty, are still legible upon our hearts. So that the law written in God's word is not contrary to the law written upon our hearts. And, therefore, it is not truly said, "That we are born under one law, and bound to another;" but the great disorder is, that our inferior faculties, our sensitive appetite



and passions, are broke loose, and have got head of our reason, and are upon all occasions apt to rebel against it: but our judgment still dictates the very same things which the law of God doth enjoin.

It is likewise very visible, that the sad effects of this degeneracy do not appear equally and alike in all; whether from the better or worse temper of our bodies, or from some other more secret cause, I shall not determine, because I know not: but that there is a difference, is evident. For though a proneness to evil, and some seeds of it be in all, yet we may plainly discover in many very early and forward inclinations to some kinds of virtue and goodness: which, being cultivated by education, may, under the ordinary influence of God's grace, be carried on with great ease to great perfection.

And there are others who are not so strongly bent to that which is evil, but that, by good instruction and example in their tender years, they may be swayed the other way, and without great difficulty formed to goodness.

There are some indeed (which is the hardest case) in whom there do very early appear strong propensities and inclinations to evil, especially to some particular kinds of vice: but the case of these is not desperate; though greater attention and care, and a much more prudent management, is required in the education of such persons, to correct their evil tempers, and by degrees to bend their inclinations the right way: and if the seeds of piety and virtue be but carefully sown at first, very much may be done by this means, even in the most depraved natures, towards the altering and changing of them; however, to the checking and controlling of their vicious

inclinations. And if these persons when they come to riper years, would pursue these advantages of education, and take some pains with themselves, and earnestly seek the assistance of God's grace, I doubt not but even these persons by degrees might at last get the mastery of their unhappy tempers.

For next to the being and perfections of God, and the immortality of our own souls, there is no principle of religion that I do more firmly believe than this, that God hath that love for men, that if we do heartily beg his assistance, and be not wanting to ourselves, he will afford it to every one of us in proportion to our need of it; that he is always beforehand with us, and prevents every man with the gracious offers of his help. And I doubt not but many very perverse natures have thus been reclaimed. For God, who is the lover of souls (as the son of Sirach calls him), though he may put some men under some difficult circumstances of becoming better than others, yet he leaves no man under a fatal necessity of being wicked, and perishing everlastingly. He tenderly considers every man's case and circumstances, and it is we that pull destruction upon ourselves with the works of our own hands: but as sure as God is good and just, no man in the world is ruined for want of having sufficient help and aid afforded to him by God for his recovery.

2. It is likewise to be considered, that God did not design to create man in the full possession of happiness at first, but to train him up to it, by the trial of his obedience. But there could be no trial of our obedience without some difficulty in our duty; either by reason of powerful temptations

from without, or of cross and perverse inclinations from within.

Our first parents, in their state of innocency, had only their trial of temptation without; to which they yielded and were overcome; having only natural power to have resisted the temptation, without any aid of supernatural grace: and that weakness to good and proneness to evil, which they by wilful transgression contracted, is naturally derived to us; and we necessarily partake of the bitterness and impurity of the fountain from whence we spring. So that we now labour under a double difficulty; being assaulted by temptations from without, and incited by evil inclinations from within: but then, to balance these, we have a double advantage, that a greater reward is proposed to us, than for aught we know would have been conferred on our first parents had they continued innocent; and that we are endued with a supernatural power to conflict with these difficulties. So that, according to the merciful dispensation of God, all this conflict between our inclination and our duty does only serve to give a fairer opportunity for the fitting trial of our obedience, and for the more glorious reward of it.

3. God hath provided an universal remedy for this degeneracy and weakness of human nature: so that what we lost by the first Adam, is abundantly repaired to us by the second. This St. Paul tells us at large: (Rom. v.) "That as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; so the grace of God hath abounded to all men by Jesus Christ:" and that to such a degree, as effectually to counter-vail the ill effects of original sin, and really to enable men, if they be not wanting to themselves, to master and subdue all the bad inclinations of nature,

even in those who seem to be naturally most corrupt and depraved.

And if this be true, we may without any reflection upon God acknowledge, that though he did not at first create man sick and weak, yet he having made himself so, his posterity are born so. But then God hath not left us helpless in this weak and miserable state, into which by wilful transgression mankind is fallen : but, as he commands us to be sound, so he affords us sufficient aids of his grace by Jesus Christ for our recovery.

And though there is a law in our members warring against the law of our minds, and captivating us to the law of sin and death ; *i. e.* though our sensitive appetites and passions are apt to rebel against the reason of our minds and the dictates of our natural conscience, yet every Christian may say with St. Paul, “ Thanks be to God, who hath given us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ ;” *i. e.* hath not left us destitute of a sufficient aid and strength to enable us to conquer the rebellious motions of sin, by the powerful assistance of that grace which is so plentifully offered to us in the gospel. And this is the case of all those who live under the gospel. As for others, as their case is best known to God, so we have no reason to doubt, but that his infinite goodness and mercy takes that care of them which becomes a merciful Creator : though both the measures and the methods of his mercy towards them, are secret and unknown to us.

4. The hardest contest between man’s inclination and duty, is in those who have wilfully contracted vicious habits, and by that means rendered their duty much more difficult to themselves : having greatly improved the evil inclinations of nature by wicked

practice and custom. For the Scripture plainly supposeth men may debauch even corrupt nature, and make themselves tenfold more the children of wrath and of the devil, than they were by nature.

This is a case sadly to be deplored, but yet not utterly to be despaired of. And therefore those who, by a long progress in an evil course, are plunged into this sad condition, ought to consider that they are not to be rescued out of it by an ordinary resolution, and a common grace of God. Their case plainly requires an extraordinary remedy. For he that is deeply engaged in vice is like a man laid fast in a bog, who, by a faint and lazy struggling to get out, does but spend his strength to no purpose, and sinks himself the deeper into it: the only way is, by a resolute and vigorous effort, to spring out, if possible, at once. And therefore, in this case, to a vigorous resolution there must be joined an earnest application to God for his powerful grace and assistance, to help us out of this miserable state. And if we be truly sensible of the desperate danger of our condition, this pressing necessity of our case will be apt to inspire us with a mighty resolution. For power and necessity are neighbours, and never dwell far asunder. When men are sorely urged and pressed, they find a power in themselves which they thought they had not: like a coward driven up to a wall, who, in the extremity of distress and despair, will fight terribly and perform wonders: or like a man lame of the gout, who, being assaulted by a present and terrible danger, forgets his disease, and will find his legs rather than lose his life.

And in this, I do not speak above the rate of human nature, and what men thoroughly roused and awakened to a sense of their danger, by a mighty reso-

lution may morally do, through that Divine grace and assistance which is ever ready to be afforded to well-resolved minds, and such as are sincerely bent to return to God and their duty. More than this I cannot say for the encouragement of those who have proceeded far in an evil course: and they who have made their case so very desperate, ought to be very thankful to God that there is any remedy left for them.

5. From all that hath been said, it evidently appears, how malicious a suggestion it is, that God seeks the destruction of men, and hath made his laws on purpose so difficult and cross to our inclinations, that he might have an advantage to ruin us for our disobedience to them. Alas! we are so absolutely under the power of God, and so unable to withstand it, that he may destroy us when he pleaseth, without seeking pretences for it: "For who hath resisted his will?" If goodness were not his nature, he hath power enough to bear out whatever he hath a mind to do to us. But our destruction is plainly of ourselves, and God is free from the blood of all men. And he hath not made the way to eternal life so difficult to any of us, with a design to make us miserable; but that we, by a vigorous resolution, and unwearied diligence, and a patient continuance in well-doing, might win and wear a more glorious crown, and be fit to receive a more ample reward from his bounty and goodness: yea, in some sense, I may say, from his justice: "For God is not unrighteous to forget our work and labour of love." He will fully consider all the pains that any of us take in his service, and all the difficulties that we struggle with out of love to God and goodness. So that this objection, from the

clashing of our duty with our inclination, is I hope fully answered: since God hath provided so powerful and effectual a remedy against our natural impotency and infirmity, by the grace of the gospel.

And though to those who have wilfully contracted vicious habits, a religious and virtuous course of life be very difficult, yet the main difficulty lies in our first entrance upon it; and when that is over, the ways of goodness are as easy as it is fit any thing should be that is so excellent, and that hath the encouragement of so glorious a reward. Custom will reconcile men almost to any thing; but there are those charms in the ways of wisdom and virtue, that a little acquaintance and conversation with them will soon make them more delightful than any other course. And who will grudge any pains and trouble to bring himself into so safe and happy a condition? After we have tried both courses, of religion and profaneness, of virtue and vice, we shall certainly find, that nothing is so wise, so easy, and so comfortable, as to be virtuous and good, and always to do that which we are inwardly convinced we ought to do. Nor would I desire more of any man in this matter, than to follow the soberest convictions of his own mind, and to do that which upon the most serious consideration at all times, in prosperity and affliction, in sickness and health, in the time of life and at the hour of death, he judgeth wisest and safest for him to do. I proceed to the

II. Second branch of the objection, That the laws of religion (and particularly of the Christian religion) are a heavy yoke, laying too great a restraint upon human nature, and intrenching too much upon the pleasures and liberty of it.

There was, I confess, some pretence for this ob-

jection against the Jewish religion ; which, by the multitude of its positive institutions, and external observances, must needs have been very burthensome. And the same objection lies against the church of Rome, who (as they have handled Christianity) by the unreasonable number of their needless and senseless ceremonies, have made the yoke of Christ heavier than that of Moses, and the gospel a more carnal commandment than the law. So that Christianity is lost among them in the trappings and accoutrements of it; with which, instead of adorning religion, they have strangely disguised it, and quite stifled it in the crowd of external rites and ceremonies.

But the pure Christian religion, as it was delivered by our Saviour, hath hardly any thing in it that is positive ; except the two sacraments, which are not very troublesome neither, but very much for our comfort and advantage, because they convey and confirm to us the great blessings and privileges of our religion. In other things Christianity hath hardly imposed any other laws upon us but what are enacted in our natures, or are agreeable to the prime and fundamental laws of it; nothing but what every man's reason either dictates to him to be necessary, or approves as highly fit and reasonable.

But we do most grossly mistake the nature of pleasure and liberty, if we promise them to ourselves in any evil and wicked course. For, upon due search and trial, it will be found, that true pleasure and perfect freedom are nowhere to be found but in the practice of virtue, and in the service of God. The laws of religion do not abridge us of any pleasure that a wise man can desire, and safely enjoy ; I mean without a greater



evil and trouble consequent upon it. The pleasure of commanding our appetite, and governing our passions, by the rules of reason (which are the laws of God), is infinitely to be preferred before any sensual pleasure whatsoever: because it is the pleasure of wisdom and discretion; and gives us the satisfaction of having done that which is the best and fittest for reasonable creatures to do. Who would not rather choose to govern himself as Scipio did, amidst all the temptations and opportunities of sensual pleasure, which his power and victories presented to him, than to wallow in all the delights of sense?

Nothing is more certain in reason and experience, than that every inordinate appetite and affection is a punishment to itself; and is perpetually crossing its own pleasure, and defeating its own satisfaction, by overshooting the mark it aims at. For instance, intemperance in eating and drinking, instead of delighting and satisfying nature, doth but load and cloy it; and instead of quenching a natural thirst, which it is extremely pleasant to do, creates an unnatural one, which is troublesome and endless. The pleasure of revenge, as soon as it is executed, turns into grief and pity, guilt and remorse, and a thousand melancholy wishes, that we had restrained ourselves from so unreasonable an act. And the same is as evident in other sensual excesses, not so fit to be described. We may trust Epicurus for this, that there can be no true pleasure without temperance in the use of pleasure. And God and reason have set us no other bounds concerning the use of sensual pleasures, but that we take care not to be injurious to ourselves, or others, in the kind or degree of them. And it is very

visible, that all sensual excess is naturally attended with a double inconvenience: as it goes beyond the limits of nature, it begets bodily pains and diseases: as it transgresseth the rules of reason and religion, it breeds guilt and remorse in the mind. And these are, beyond comparison, the two greatest evils in this world—a diseased body, and a discontented mind. And in this I am sure I speak to the inward feeling and experience of men; and say nothing but what every vicious man finds, and hath a more lively sense of, than is to be expressed by words.

When all is done, there is no pleasure comparable to that of innocency, and freedom from the stings of a guilty conscience; this is a pure and spiritual pleasure, much above any sensual delight. And yet among all the delights of sense, that of health (which is the natural consequent of a sober, and chaste, and regular life) is a sensual pleasure far beyond that of any vice; for it is the life of life, and that which gives a grateful relish to all our other enjoyments. It is not indeed so violent and transporting a pleasure; but it is pure, and even, and lasting, and has no guilt and regret, no sorrow and trouble in it, or after it: which is a worm that infallibly breeds in all vicious and unlawful pleasures, and makes them to be bitterness in the end.

All the ways of sin are so beset with thorns and difficulties on every side, there are so many unanswerable objections against vice, from the unreasonableness and ugliness of it, from the remorse that attends it, from the endless misery that follows it, that none but the rash and inconsiderate can obtain leave of themselves to commit it. It is the daughter of inadvertency, and blindness, and folly;

and the mother of guilt, and repentance, and woe. There is no pleasure that will hold out and abide with us to the last, but that of innocency and well-doing. All sin is folly; and, as Seneca truly says, *Omnis stultitia laborat fastidio sui*; “All folly soon grows sick and weary of itself.” The pleasure of it is slight and superficial, but the trouble and remorse of it pierceth our very hearts.

And then as to the other part of the objection—That religion restrains us of our liberty; the contrary is most evidently true, that sin and vice are the greatest slavery. For he is truly a slave, who is not at liberty to follow his own judgment, and to do those things which he is inwardly convinced it is best for him to do; but is subject to the unreasonable commands, and the tyrannical power and violence of his lusts and passions: so that he is not master of himself, but other lords have got dominion over him; and he is perfectly at their beck and command. One vice or passion bids him go, and he goes; another, come, and he comes; and a third, do this, and he doth it. The man is at perpetual variance with his own mind, and continually committing the things which he condemns in himself. And it is all one, whether a man be subject to the will and humour of another person, or to his own lusts and passions. Only this of the two is the worse; because the tyrant is at home, and always ready at hand to domineer over him; he is got within him, and so much the harder to be vanquished and overcome.

But the service of God, and obedience to his laws is perfect liberty: because the law of God requires nothing of us, but what is recommended to us by our own reason, and from the benefit and

advantage of doing it ; nothing but what is much more for our own interest to do it, than it can be for God's to command it. And if in some things God exacts obedience of us more indispensably, and under severer penalties, it is because those things are in their nature more necessary to our felicity. And how could God possibly have dealt more graciously and kindly with us, than to oblige us most strictly to that which is most evidently for our good ; and to make such laws for us, as, if we live in obedience to them, will infallibly make us happy ? so that taking all things into consideration, the interest of our bodies and our souls, of the present and the future, of this world and the other, religion is the most reasonable and wise, the most comfortable and compendious course, that any man can take in order to his own happiness.

The consideration whereof ought to be a mighty endearment of our duty to us, and a most prevalent argument with us to yield a ready and cheerful obedience to the laws of God ; which are in truth so many acts of grace and favour to mankind, the real privileges of our nature, and the proper means and causes of our happiness : and do restrain us from nothing but from doing mischief to ourselves, from playing the fools, and making ourselves miserable.

And, therefore, instead of opposing religion, upon pretence of the unreasonable restraints of it, we ought to thank God heartily, that he hath laid so strict an obligation upon us, to regard and pursue our true interest ; and hath been pleased to take that care of us, as to set bounds to our loose and wild appetites by our duty ; and in giving us rules to live by, hath no ways complied with our incou-

siderate and foolish inclinations, to our real harm and prejudice : but hath made those things necessary for us to do, which in all respects are best for us ; and which, if we were perfectly left to our own liberty, ought in all reason to be our free and first choice : and hath made the folly and inconvenience of sin so grossly palpable, that every man may see it beforehand that will but consider, and at the beginning of a bad course, look to the end of it ; and they that will not consider, shall be forced from woful experience at last to acknowledge it, when they find the dismal effects, and mischievous consequences of their vices, still meeting them at one turn or other.

And now, by all that hath been said upon this argument, I hope we are satisfied that religion is no such intolerable yoke ; and that upon a due and full consideration of things, it cannot seem evil unto any of us to serve the Lord : nay, on the contrary, that it is absolutely necessary, both to our present peace, and our future felicity : and that a religious and virtuous life is not only upon all accounts the most prudent, but after we are entered upon it, and accustomed to it, the most pleasant course that any man can take ; and however inconsiderate men may complain of the restraints of religion, that it is not one jot more our duty, than it is our privilege and our happiness.

And I cannot think, that upon sober consideration, any man could see reason to thank God to be released from any of his laws, or to have had the contrary to them enjoined. Let us suppose that the laws of God had been just the reverse of what they now are ; that he had commanded us, under severe penalties, to deal falsely and fraudu-

lently with our neighbours; to demean ourselves ungratefully to our best friends and benefactors; to be drunk every day, and to pursue sensual pleasures to the endangering of our health and life: how should we have complained of the unreasonableness of these laws, and have murmured at the slavery of such intolerable impositions? And yet now that God hath commanded us the contrary, things every way agreeable to our reason and interest, we are not pleased neither. What will content us? As our Saviour expostulates in a like case, "Whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children playing in the market-place, and calling unto their companions, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned, and ye have not lamented." This is perfectly childish, to be pleased with nothing; neither to like this nor the contrary. We are not contented with the laws of God as they are, and yet the contrary to them we should have esteemed the greatest grievance in the world.

And if this be true, that the laws of God, how contrary soever to our vicious inclinations, are really calculated for our benefit and advantage, it would almost be an affront to wise and considerate men to importune them to their interest; and with great earnestness to persuade them to that which in all respects is so visibly for their advantage. "Choose you therefore this day whom you will serve;" God, or your lusts. And take up a speedy resolution in a matter of so great and pressing a concernment; "Choose you this day."

Where there is great hazard in the doing of a thing, it is good to deliberate long before we undertake it: but where the thing is not only safe but beneficial, and not only hugely beneficial, but highly

necessary; when our life and our happiness depends upon it, and all the danger lies in the delay of it; there we cannot be too sudden in our resolution; nor too speedy in the execution of it. That which is evidently safe, needs no deliberation; and that which is absolutely necessary, will admit of none.

Therefore resolve upon it out of hand; "To-day, whilst it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin:" in the days of your youth and health; for "that is the acceptable time," that is "the day of salvation;" before the evil day comes, and you be driven to it by the terrible apprehension and approach of death, when men fly to God only for fear of his wrath. For the greatest atheists and infidels, when they come to die (if they have any of that reason left, which they have used so ill), have commonly right opinions about God and religion. For then the confidence as well as the comfort of atheism leaves them, as the devil uses to do witches when they are in distress. Then, with Nebuchadnezzar, when they are recovered from being beasts, they look up to Heaven, and their understanding returns to them; then they believe a God, and cannot help it; they believe, and tremble at the thoughts of him. Thus Lucretius, one of their great authors, observes, that when men are in distress,

*Acrius advertunt animos ad religionem.*

The thoughts of religion are then more quick and pungent upon their minds.

*Nam veræ voces tum demum pectore ab imo  
Eliciuntur, et eripitur persona, manet res.*

Men's words then come from the bottom of their

hearts; the mask is taken off, and things then appear as in truth they are.

But then perhaps it may be too late to make this choice; nay, then it can hardly be choice, but necessity. Men do not then choose to serve the Lord, but they are urged and forced to it by their fears. They have served their lusts all their life long, and now they would fain serve themselves of God at the hour of death. They have done what they can, by their insolent contempt and defiance of the Almighty, to make themselves miserable; and now that they can stand out no longer against him, they are contented at last to be beholden to him to make them happy. The mercies of God are vast and boundless; but yet, methinks it is too great a presumption in all reason, for men to design beforehand, to make the mercy of God the sanctuary and retreat of a sinful life.

To draw then to a conclusion of this discourse. If safety, or pleasure, or liberty, or wisdom, or virtue, or even happiness itself, have any temptation in them, religion hath all these baits and allurements. What Tully says of philosophy, is much more true of the Christian religion, the wisdom and philosophy which is from above; *Nunquam satis laudari poterit, cui qui pareat, omne tempus ætatis sine molestia degere possit.* “We can never praise it enough, since whoever lives according to the rules of it, may pass the whole age of his life (I may add, his whole duration, this life and the other) without trouble.”

Philosophy hath given us several plausible rules for the attaining of peace and tranquillity of mind, but they fall very much short of bringing men to it. The very best of them fail us upon the greatest occasions. But the Christian religion hath effectually



done all that which philosophy pretended to, and aimed at. The precepts and promises of the Holy Scriptures are every way sufficient for our comfort, and for our instruction in righteousness; to correct all the errors, and to bear us up under all the evils and adversities of human life; especially that holy and heavenly doctrine which is contained in the admirable sermons of our Saviour, *Quem cum legimus, quem philosophum non contemnimus?* “Whose excellent discourses when we read, what philosopher do we not despise?” None of the philosophers could, upon sure grounds, give that encouragement to their scholars which our Saviour does to his disciples; “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, and ye shall find rest to your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

This is the advantage of the Christian religion sincerely believed and practised, that it gives perfect rest and tranquillity to the mind of man; it frees us from the guilt of an evil conscience, and from the power of our lusts, and from the slavish fear of death, and of the vengeance of another world. It builds our comfort upon a rock, which will abide all storms, and remain unshaken in every condition, and will last and hold out for ever: “He that heareth these sayings of mine, and doth them (saith our Lord), I will liken him to a wise man, who built his house upon a rock.”

In short, religion makes the life of man a wise design, regular and constant to itself; because it unites all our resolutions and actions in one great end; whereas, without religion, the life of man is a wild, and fluttering, and inconsistent thing, without any certain scope and design. The vicious man lives at random, and acts by chance: for he that walks by

no rule, can carry on no settled and steady design. It would pity a man's heart to see how hard such men are put to it for diversion, and what a burden time is to them; and how solicitous they are to devise ways, not to spend it, but to squander it away. For their great grievance is consideration, and to be obliged to be intent upon any thing that is serious. They hurry from one vanity and folly to another; and plunge themselves into drink, not to quench their thirst, but their guilt; and are beholden to every vain man, and to every trifling occasion, that can but help to take time off their hands. Wretched and inconsiderate men! who have so vast a work before them, the happiness of all eternity to take care of, and provide for, and yet are at a loss how to employ their time! so that irreligion and vice makes life an extravagant and unnatural thing, because it perverts and overthrows the natural course and order of things. For instance; according to nature, men labour to get an estate, to free themselves from temptations to rapine and injury; and that they may have wherewithal to supply their own wants, and to relieve the needs of others. But now the covetous man heaps up riches, not to enjoy them, but to have them; and starves himself in the midst of plenty, and most unnaturally cheats and robs himself of that, which is his own; and makes a hard shift to be as poor and miserable with a great estate, as any man can be without it. According to the design of nature, men should eat and drink that they may live; but the voluptuous man only lives that he may eat and drink. Nature, in all sensual enjoyments, designs pleasure, which may certainly be had within the limits of virtue: but vice rashly pursues pleasure into the enemy's quarters; and

never stops, till the sinner be surrounded and seized upon by pain and torment.

So that take away God and religion, and men live to no purpose; without proposing any worthy and considerable end of life to themselves. Whereas the fear of God, and the care of our immortal souls, fixeth us upon one great design, to which our whole life, and all the actions of it are ultimately referred : *Ubi unus Deus colitur* (saith Lactantius) *ibi vita, et omnis actus, ad unum caput, et ad unam summam refertur* ; When we acknowledge God as the author of our being, as our sovereign and our judge, our end and our happiness is then fixed ; and we can have but one reasonable design, and that is, by endeavouring to please God, to gain his favour and protection in this world, and to arrive at the blissful enjoyment of him in the other : “ In whose presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore.” To Him, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, dominion and power, now and for ever. Amen.

## SERMON XXIX.

OF THE DIFFICULTY OF REFORMING VICIOUS  
HABITS.

*Can the Æthiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil.*—JEREMIAH xiii. 23.

CONSIDERING the great difficulty of reclaiming those who are far gone in an evil course, it is no more than needs to use all sorts of arguments to this purpose: from the consideration of the evil of sin, and of the goodness of God, and his wonderful patience and long-suffering towards us, in the midst of our infinite provocations; from his great mercy and pity declared to us in all those gracious means and methods which he useth for our recovery; and from his readiness and forwardness, after all our rebellions, to receive us upon our repentance, and to be perfectly reconciled to us, as if we had never offended him; and from the final issue and event of a wicked life, the dismal and endless miseries of another world, into which we shall inevitably fall, except we repent in time, and return to a better mind; and, lastly, from the danger of being hardened in an evil course, past all remedy and hopes of repentance.

And yet I am very sensible, that to discourse to men of the impossibility, or at least the extreme difficulty of rescuing themselves out of this miserable state seems to be an odd and cross kind of argument, and more apt to drive people to despair, than to gain them to repentance.

But since the Spirit of God is pleased to make use of it to this purpose, we may safely rely upon infinite wisdom for the fitness of it to awaken sinners to a sense of their condition, in order to their recovery. For here in the text, after terrible threatenings of captivity and desolation to the people of the Jews, who were extremely wicked and degenerate, through an universal depravation of manners in all ranks of men, from the highest to the lowest, so that they seemed to stand upon the brink of ruin, and to be fatally devoted to it; to add to the terror and force of these threatenings, God, by his prophet, represents to them the infinite danger and extreme difficulty of their case, to see if he could startle them by telling them into what a desperate condition they had plunged themselves; being, by a long custom of sinning, so far engaged in an evil course, that they had almost cut off themselves from a possibility of retreat; so that the difficulty of their change seemed next to a natural impossibility. “Can the Æthiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil.”

The expression is very high, and it is to be hoped somewhat hyperbolical, and above the just meaning of the words. Which are, I think, only designed to signify to us the extreme difficulty of making this change; which is therefore resembled to a natural impossibility, as coming very near it, though not altogether up to it.

And that this expression is to be mitigated, will appear more than propable, by considering some other like passages of Scripture. As, where our Saviour compares the difficulty of a rich man's salvation to that which is naturally impossible—viz. to

a camel's passing through the eye of a needle: nay, he pitcheth his expression higher, and doth not only make it a thing of equal, but of greater difficulty—“I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” And yet, when he comes to explain this to his disciples, he tells them that he only meant that the thing was very difficult:—“How hard is it for those that have riches to be saved?” and that it was not absolutely impossible, but speaking according to human probability: “With men this is impossible, but not with God.”

And thus also it is reasonable to understand that severe passage of the apostle: (Heb. vi. 4.) “It is impossible for them that were once enlightened, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance.” “It is impossible;” that is, it is very difficult.

In like manner we are to understand this high expression in the text, “Can the Æthiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil;” that is, this moral change of men, settled and fixed in bad habits, is almost as difficult as the other.

From the words thus explained two things will properly fall under our consideration.

First, The great difficulty of reforming vicious habits, or of changing a bad course, to those who have been deeply engaged in it, and long accustomed to it.

Secondly, Notwithstanding the great difficulty of the thing, what ground of hope, and encouragement there is left that it may be done. So that notwithstanding the appearing harshness of the text, the result of my discourse will be, not to discourage any, how bad soever, from attempting this change, but to put them upon it, and to persuade them to

it: and to remove out of the way that which may seem to be one of the strongest objections against all endeavours of men very bad, to become better.

I. First, The great difficulty of reforming vicious habits, or of changing a bad course, to those who have been deeply engaged in it, and long accustomed to it. And this difficulty ariseth, partly from the general nature of habits, indifferently considered, whether they be good, or bad, or indifferent; partly from the particular nature of evil and vicious habits; and partly from the natural and judicial consequences of a great progress and long continuance in an evil course. By the consideration of these three particulars, the extreme difficulty of this change, together with the true causes and reasons of it, will fully appear.

1. If we consider the nature of all habits, whether good, or bad, or indifferent, the custom and frequent practice of any thing begets in us a facility and easiness in doing it. It bends the powers of our soul, and turns the stream and current of our animal spirits such a way, and gives all our faculties a tendency and pliability to such a sort of actions. And when we have long stood bent one way, we grow settled and confirmed in it; and cannot, without great force and violence, be restored to our former state and condition. For the perfection of any habit, whether good or bad, induceth a kind of necessity of acting accordingly. A rooted habit becomes a governing principle, and bears almost an equal sway in us with that which is natural. It is a kind of a new nature superinduced, and even as hard to be expelled, as some things which are primitively and originally natural. When we bend a thing at first, it will endeavour to restore itself;

but it may be held bent so long till it will continue so of itself, and grow crooked; and then it may require more force and violence to reduce it to its former straightness, than we used to make it crooked at first. This is the nature of all habits; the farther we proceed, the more we are confirmed in them: and that which at first we did voluntarily, by degrees becomes so natural and necessary, that it is almost impossible for us to do otherwise. This is plainly seen in the experience of every day, in things good and bad, both in lesser and greater matters.

2. This difficulty ariseth more especially from the particular nature of evil and vicious habits. These, because they are suitable to our corrupt nature, and conspire with the inclinations of it, are likely to be of a much quicker growth and improvement, and in a shorter space, and with less care and endeavour, to arrive at maturity and strength, than the habits of grace and goodness. Considering the propension of our depraved nature, the progress of virtue and goodness is up the hill, in which we not only move hardly and heavily, but are easily rolled back: but by wickedness and vice we move downwards; which, as it is much quicker and easier, so it is harder for us to stop in that course, and infinitely more difficult to return from it.

Not but that at first a sinner hath some considerable checks and restraints upon him, and meets with several rubs and difficulties in his way; the shame and unreasonableness of his vices, and the trouble and disquiet which they create to him: but he breaks loose from these restraints, and gets over these difficulties by degrees; and the faster and farther he advanceth in an evil course, the less trouble



still they give him, till at last they almost quite lose their force, and give him little or no disturbance.

Shame also is a great restraint upon sinners at first, but that soon falls off: and when men have once lost their innocence, their modesty is not like to be long troublesome to them. For impudence comes on with vice, and grows up with it. Lesser vices do not banish all shame and modesty, but great and abominable crimes harden men's foreheads, and make them shameless. "Were they ashamed (saith the prophet) when they committed abomination? nay, they were not ashamed, neither could they blush." When men have the heart to do a very bad thing, they seldom want the face to bear it out.

And as for the unreasonableness of vice, though nothing in the world be more evident to a free and impartial judgment, and the sinner himself discerns it clearly enough at his first setting out in a wicked course ;

———*Video meliora, proboque,  
Deteriora sequor :*

He offends against the light of his own mind, and does wickedly when he knows better : yet after he hath continued for some time in this course, and is heartily engaged in it, his foolish heart is darkened, and the notions of good and evil are obscured and confounded, and things appear to him in a false and imperfect light : his lusts do at once blind and bias his understanding ; and his judgment by degrees goes over to his inclinations : and he cannot think that there should be so much reason against those things, for which he hath so strong an affection. He is now engaged in a party, and factiously con-

cerned to maintain it, and to make the best of it; and, to that end, he bends all his wits to advance such principles as are fittest to justify his wicked practices; and in all debates plainly favours that side of the question, which will give the greatest countenance and encouragement to them. When men are corrupt, and do abominable works, they say in their hearts, There is no God; that is, they would fain think so. And every thing serves for an argument to a willing mind; and every little objection appears strong and considerable, which makes against that which men are loath should be true. Not that any man ever satisfied himself in the principles of infidelity, or was able to arrive to a steady and unshaken persuasion of the truth of them, so as not vehemently to doubt and fear the contrary. However, by this means, many men, though they cannot fully comfort, yet they make a shift to cheat themselves; to still their consciences, and lay them asleep for a time, so as not to receive any great and frequent disturbance in their course, from the checks and rebukes of their own minds. And when these restraints are removed, the work of iniquity goes on amain, being favoured both by wind and tide.

3. The difficulty of this change ariseth likewise from the natural and judicial consequences of a great progress and long continuance in an evil course. My meaning is, that inveterate evil habits do, partly from their own nature, and partly from the just judgment and permission of God, put men under several disadvantages of moving effectually towards their own recovery.

By a long custom of sinning men's consciences grow brawny, and "seared as it were with a hot iron;"

and by being often trampled upon, they become hard as the beaten road. So that, unless it be upon some extraordinary occasion, they are seldom awakened to a sense of their guilt. And when men's hearts are thus hard, the best counsels make but little impression upon them. For they are steeled against reproof, and impenetrable to good advice; which is therefore seldom offered to them, even by those that wish them well, because they know it to be both unacceptable, and unlikely to prevail. It requires a great deal of good-nature in a very bad man, to be able patiently to bear to be told of his faults.

Besides that, habitual wickedness is naturally apt to banish consideration, to weaken our resolution, and to discourage our hopes, both of God's grace and assistance, and of his mercy and forgiveness, which are the best means and encouragement to repentance.

Sin is a great enemy to consideration; and especially when men are deeply plunged into it, their condition is so very bad, that they are loath to think of it, and to search into it. A vicious man is a very deformed sight, and to none more than to himself; and therefore he loves to turn his eyes another way, and to divert them as much as he can from looking upon himself. He is afraid to be alone, lest his own mind should arrest him, and his conscience should take the opportunity to call him to an account. And if at any time his own thoughts meet him, and he cannot avoid consideration, he is ready to say as Ahab did to Elijah, "Hast thou found me, O my enemy?" and is as glad to shake it off, as a man is to get rid of a creditor, whom, because he knows not how to satisfy, he cares not to speak with him. Considera-

tion is the great troubler and disturber of men in an evil course, because it would represent to them the plain truth of their case; and therefore they do all they can to keep it off: as those who have improvidently managed their affairs, and been ill husbands of their estates, are loath to make up their accounts, lest by that means they should be forced to understand the worst of their condition.

Or if consideration happen to take them at an advantage, and they are so hard pressed by it that they cannot escape the sight of their own condition, yet they find themselves so miserably entangled and hampered in an evil course, and bound so fast in the chains of their own wickedness, that they know not how to get loose. Sin is the saddest slavery in the world; it breaks and sinks men's spirits, and makes them so base and servile, that they have not the courage to rescue themselves. No sort of slaves are so poor-spirited, as they who are in bondage to their lusts. Their power is gone, or if they have any left, they have not the heart to make use of it. And though they see and feel their misery, yet they choose rather to sit down in it, and tamely to submit to it, than to make any resolute attempt for their liberty. What the prophet says of whoredom and wine, is proportionably true of other vices—"they take away the heart." Every lust that we entertain deals with us as Delilah did with Sampson, not only robs us of our strength, but leaves us fast bound: so that if at any time we be awakened to a sense of our condition, and try to rescue ourselves from it, we find that our strength is departed from us, and that we are not able to break loose.

And as long custom and continuance in sin deprives us of our strength, so it discourageth our

hopes, both of God's grace and assistance, and of his mercy and forgiveness. For why should men expect the continuance of that grace which they have so often received in vain? After so many provocations, how can we look the offended majesty of God in the face? How can we lift up our eyes to heaven, with any hopes of mercy and forgiveness there? Despair doth almost naturally spring from an evil conscience; and when men are thoroughly awakened to a sense of sin, and of the infinite evil of it, as they cannot easily forgive themselves, so they can hardly believe that there is goodness enough any where to forgive them.

But besides these disadvantages, which are natural and consequent upon a vicious course; by the just judgment of God his Spirit is withdrawn from them, and they are given up to their own hearts' lusts, to commit all iniquity with greediness. And then there is hardly any thing left, either to restrain them in their evil course, or to recover them out of it.

And not only so, but by the just permission of God, as men grow worse and more wicked, the devil hath a nearer access to them, and a more immediate power over them. So the Scripture tells us, that wicked men are led captive by Satan at his pleasure, and that the evil one works and acts in the children of disobedience: they are as it were possessed and inspired by him. And what can be expected from this cruel and malicious enemy of mankind, but that he will continually be pushing them on from one wickedness to another, till he drive them first into despair, and then, if God permit him, into eternal perdition?

And what a forlorn state is this! When men are thus forsaken of God, and left without check,

blindly and headily to follow the sway of their own tempers, and the bent of their own corrupt hearts; when they are continually exposed to temptations, strongly inviting them to evil; and God lets the devil loose upon them, to manage those temptations with his utmost skill, and to practise all his arts and wiles upon them! In these circumstances men almost infallibly run into sin, as sure as men wander in the dark, and are in danger of falling in slippery places, and of being entangled, when they continually walk in the midst of snares cunningly laid for them. It is not in men, thus disabled and entangled, to order their own steps, and to restrain their inclinations and passions in the presence of a powerful temptation. At the best, we need God's direction to guide us, his continual grace to uphold us, and to guard and preserve us from evil; and much more do we stand in need of it, when we have brought ourselves into these wretched circumstances: but then, alas! how little reason have we to hope for it!

Blind and miserable men! that in despite of all the merciful warnings of God's word and providence, will run themselves into this desperate state, and never think of returning to a better mind, till their retreat is difficult, almost to an impossibility. I proceed to the

II. Second head of my discourse, which was to shew, that the case of these persons, though it be extremely difficult, is not quite desperate; but, after all, there is some ground of hope and encouragement left, that they may yet be reclaimed and brought to goodness. Indeed, humanly speaking, and according to all appearance and probability, the thing seems to be very hopeless, and next to an

impossibility ; but yet what our Saviour says concerning the difficulty of a rich man's salvation, will reach also to this case, though much more difficult—“Those things which are impossible with men, are possible with God.”

And this will appear, if we consider, that even in the worst of men, there is something left which tends to reclaim them, to awaken them to consideration, and to urge and encourage them to a vigorous resolution of a better course: and this, accompanied with a powerful assistance of God's grace, which when sincerely sought, is never to be despaired of, may prove effectual to bring back even the greatest of sinners.

1. There is left, even in the worst of men, a natural sense of the evil and unreasonableness of sin; which can hardly be ever totally extinguished in human nature. For though the habits of great vices are very apt to harden and stupify men, so that they have seldom a just sense of their evil ways, yet these persons are sometimes under strong convictions, and their consciences do severely check and rebuke them for their faults. They are also, by fits, under great apprehension of the danger of their condition, and that the course which they are in, if they continue in it, will prove fatal to them, and ruin them at last; especially, when their consciences are thoroughly awakened by some great affliction, or the near approach of death, and a lively sense of another world. And the apprehension of a mighty danger, will make men to look about them, and to use the best means to avoid it.

2. Very bad men, when they have any thoughts of becoming better, are apt to conceive some good

hopes of God's grace and mercy. For though they find all the causes and reasons of despair in themselves, yet the consideration of the boundless goodness and compassions of God (how undeserved soever on their part) is apt to kindle some sparks of hope, even in the most desponding mind. His wonderful patience, in the midst of our manifold provocations, cannot but be a good sign to us, that he hath no mind that we should perish, but rather that we should come to repentance; and if we do repent, we are assured by his promise, that we shall be forgiven. "He that confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall have mercy. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

3. Who knows what men thoroughly roused and startled may resolve, and do? And a mighty resolution will break through difficulties which seem insuperable. Though we be weak and pitiful creatures, yet nature, when it is mightily irritated and stirred, will do strange things. The resolutions of men upon the brink of despair, have been of an incredible force: and the soul of man in nothing more discovers its Divine power and original, than in that spring which is in it, whereby it recovers itself when it is mightily urged and pressed. There is a sort of resolution which is in a manner invincible, and hardly any difficulty can resist it, or stand before it.

Of this there have been great instances in several kinds. Some by an obstinate resolution, and taking incredible pains with themselves, have mastered great natural vices and defects. As Socrates and Demosthenes, who almost exceeded all mankind in those two things for which by nature they seemed



to be least made, and most unfit. One in governing of his passions, and the other in the mighty force and power of his eloquence.

Some that by intemperance have brought themselves to a dropsy, which hath just set them upon the brink of the grave, by a bold and steady purpose to abstain wholly from drink for a long time together, have rescued themselves from the jaws of death.

Some that had almost ruined themselves by a careless and dissolute life, and having run themselves out of their estates into debt, and being cast into prison, have there taken up a manly resolution to retrieve and recover themselves; and, by the indefatigable labour and study of some years in that uncomfortable retreat, have mastered the knowledge and skill of one of the most difficult professions, in which they have afterwards proved great and eminent.

And some in the full career of a wicked course, have by a sudden thought and resolution, raised in them and assisted by a mighty grace of God, taken up presently, and made an immediate change from great wickedness and impiety of life, to a very exemplary degree of goodness and virtue.

The two great encouragements to virtue which Pythagoras gave to his scholars were these; and they were worthy of so great a philosopher: First, Choose always the best course of life, and custom will soon make it the most pleasant. The other was this, that—Power and necessity are neighbours, and never dwell far from one another. When men are pressed by a great necessity, when nature is spurred up and urged to the utmost, men discover in themselves a power which they thought they had

not, and find at last that they can do that which at first they despaired of ever being able to do.

4. The grace and assistance of God, when sincerely sought, is never to be despaired of. So that if we do but heartily and in good earnest resolve upon a better course, and implore the help of God's grace to this purpose, no degree of it that is necessary shall be wanting to us: and here is our chief ground of hope. For we are weak and unstable as water; and when we have taken up good resolutions, do easily start from them. So that fresh supplies, and a continued assistance of God's grace, are necessary to keep up the first warmth and vigour of our resolutions, till they prove effectual and victorious. And this grace God hath promised he will not deny us, when we are thus disposed for it; that he "will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask it;" that "he will not quench the smoking flax, nor break the bruised reed, until he bring forth judgment unto victory."

All that now remains is to apply this to ourselves: and we are all concerned in it: for we shall all find ourselves comprehended under one of these three heads. Either we are of the number of those few happy persons, who, by the influence and advantage of a good education, were never engaged in a bad course: or, of those who have been drawn into vice, but are not yet far gone in it: or, of those who have been long accustomed to an evil course, and are grown old and stiff in it.

1. The first of these have great cause to thank God for this singular felicity, that they were never ensnared and entangled in vicious habits, that they have not had the trial of their own weakness under this miserable slavery, that they never knew what it

was to be out of their own power, to have lost their liberty and government of themselves. When we hear of the miserable servitude of the poor Christians in Turkey, we are apt, as there is great reason, to pity them, and to think what a blessing of God it is to us that we are not in their condition: and yet that slavery is not comparable to this, either for the sad nature, or the dismal consequences of it; or for the difficulty of being released from it. And let such persons, who have been thus happy, never to have been engaged in an evil course, preserve their innocency with great tenderness and care, as the greatest jewel in the world. No man knows what he does, and what a foundation of trouble he lays to himself, when he forfeits his innocency, and breaks the peace of his own mind; when he yields to a temptation, and makes the first step into a bad course. He little thinks whither his lusts may hurry him, and what a monster they may make of him before they have done with him.

2. Those who have been seduced, but are not yet deeply engaged in an evil course; let them make a speedy retreat, lest they put it for ever out of their power to return. Perhaps their feet only are yet ensnared, but their hands are at liberty, and they have some power left, whereby with an ordinary grace of God they may loose and rescue themselves. But after a while their hands may be manacled, and all their power may be gone; and when they are thus bound hand and foot, they are just prepared, and in danger every moment, to be cast into utter darkness.

3. As for those, who are gone very far, and are grown old in vice, who can forbear to lament over them? for they are a sad spectacle indeed, and the truest object of pity in the world. And yet their

recovery is not utterly to be despaired of; for “with God it is possible.” The Spirit of God, which hath withdrawn himself, or rather hath been driven away by them, may yet be persuaded to return, and to undertake them once more, if they would but seriously resolve upon a change, and heartily beg God’s assistance to that purpose. If we would take up a mighty resolution, we might hope that God will afford a miraculous grace to second it, and make it effectual to our recovery. Even in this perverse and degenerate age in which we live, God hath not been wanting to give some miraculous instances of his grace and mercy to sinners, and those perhaps equal to any of those we meet with in Scripture, of Manasses, or Mary Magdalen, or the penitent thief; both for the greatness of the offenders, and the miracle of their change: to the end that none might despair, and, for want of the encouragement of an example equal to their own case, be disheartened from so noble an enterprise. I am loath to put you in mind how bad some have been, who yet have been snatched as firebrands out of the fire; and that in so strange a manner, that it would even amaze a man to think of the wonder of their recovery: those who have sunk themselves into the very depth of infidelity and wickedness, have by a mighty hand and outstretched arm of God been plucked out of this horrible pit: and will we still stand it out with God, when such great leaders have given up the cause, and have surrendered and yielded up themselves willing captives to the grace of God? that omnipotent grace of God, which can easily subdue the stoutest heart of man, by letting in so strong a light upon our minds, and pouring such terrible convictions into our consciences, that we can find no ease but in turning to God.

I hope there are none here so bad, as to need all the encouragement to repentance, which such examples might give them: encouragement, I say, to repentance; for surely these examples can encourage no man to venture any farther in a wicked course: they are so very rare, and like the instances of those, who have been brought back to life after the sentence of death seemed to have been fully executed upon them.

But perhaps some will not believe that there have been such examples; or, if there have, they impute all this either to a disturbed imagination, or to the faint and low spirits of men under great bodily weakness, or to their natural cowardice and fear; or to I know not what foolish and fantastical design, of completing and finishing a wicked life with an hypocritical death. Nothing surely is easier than to put some bad construction upon the best things, and so slur even repentance itself, and almost dash it out of countenance by some bold, and perhaps witty saying about it. But, oh that men were wise! "Oh that men were wise! that they understood, and would but consider their latter end!" Come, let us neither trifle nor dissemble in this matter: I dare say every man's conscience is convinced, that they who have led very ill lives, have so much reason for repentance, that we may easily believe it to be real. However, of all things in the world, let us not make a mock of repentance; that which must be our last sanctuary and refuge, and which we must all come to before we die, or "it had been better for us we had never been born." Therefore, let my counsel be acceptable to you, "Break off your sins by repentance," and "your iniquities by righteousness:" and that instantly, and without delay; "lest any of

you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." If we have been enslaved but a little to a vicious course, we shall find it a task difficult enough to assert our own liberty, to "break those bonds asunder, and to cast these cords from us:" but if we have been long under this bondage, we have done so much to undo ourselves, and to make our case desperate, that it is God's infinite mercy to us that there is yet hope. Therefore, "Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, and your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and while you look for light, he turn it into darkness and the shadow of death." I will conclude with that encouraging invitation, even to the greatest of sinners, to repentance, from the mouth of God himself: (Isaiah lv.) "Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live; seek the Lord while he may be found; and call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

To him let us apply ourselves, and humbly beseech him, "who is mighty to save," that he would stretch forth the right hand of his power for our deliverance from this miserable and cruel bondage of our lusts: and that as "the rain cometh down from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it to bring forth and bud;" so he would grant, that "his word may not return void, but accomplish his pleasure, and prosper in the thing to which he sent it;" for his mercy's sake in Jesus Christ; to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

## SERMON XXX.

THE NECESSITY OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE  
HOLY SCRIPTURES.

*Woe unto you scribes and pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; and ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.—MATTH. xxiii. 13.*

THE scribes, so often mentioned in the gospel, were the great doctors among the Jews, the teachers and interpreters of the law of God. And because many of them were of the sect of the pharisees, which above all others pretended to skill and knowledge in the law, therefore it is that our blessed Saviour does so often put the scribes and pharisees together. And these were the men of chief authority in the Jewish church; who equalled their own unwritten word and traditions with the law of God: nay, our Saviour tells us, “They made all the commandments of God of none effect by their traditions.” They did in effect assume to themselves infallibility; and all that opposed and contradicted them, they branded with the odious name of heretics. Against these our Saviour denounceth this woe here in the text, “Woe unto you scribes and pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of God against men,” &c.

All the difficulty in these words is, what is here meant by shutting “up the kingdom of heaven against men:” St. Luke expresseth it more plainly,

“Ye have taken away the key of knowledge, ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.” By putting these two expressions together, we shall the more easily come at the meaning of the text, “Ye have taken away the key of knowledge, and have shut up the kingdom of heaven against men.” The metaphor of the key of knowledge is, undoubtedly, an allusion to that known custom among the Jews in the admission of their doctors. For to whomsoever they gave authority to interpret the law and the prophets, they were solemnly admitted into that office by delivering to them a key and a table-book. So that by the key of knowledge, is here meant the interpretation and understanding of the Scriptures; and by taking away the key of knowledge, not only that they arrogated to themselves alone the understanding of the Scriptures, but likewise that they had conveyed away this key of knowledge, and, as it were, hid it out of the way, neither using it themselves as they ought, nor suffering others to make use of it.

And thus they “shut the kingdom of heaven against men;” which is very fitly said of those who have locked the door against them that were going in, and have taken away the key. By all which it appears, that the plain meaning of our Saviour in these metaphorical expressions is, that the scribes and teachers of the law, under a pretence of interpreting the Scriptures, had perverted them, and kept the true knowledge of them from the people: especially those prophecies of the Old Testament which concerned the Messias. And by this means the kingdom of heaven was shut against men: and they not only rejected the truth themselves, but by keeping men in ignorance of the true meaning of the Scrip-



tures, they hindered many from embracing our Saviour's doctrine, and entering into the kingdom of heaven, who were otherwise well enough disposed for it.

Having thus explained the words, I shall, from the main scope and design of them, observe to you these two things.

I. The necessity of the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, in order to our eternal salvation. It is called by our Saviour the key of knowledge; that which lets men into the kingdom of heaven.

II. The great and inexcusable fault of those who deprive the people of the knowledge of the Scriptures. They "shut the kingdom of heaven against men," and do what in them lies to hinder their eternal salvation; and therefore our Saviour denounceth so heavy a woe against them.

I shall speak briefly to these two observations; and then apply them to those who are principally concerned in them.

I. First, I observe hence the necessity of the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, in order to our eternal salvation. This is by our Saviour called the key of knowledge, that which lets men into the kingdom of heaven.

Knowledge is necessary to religion: it is necessary to the being of it; and necessary to the life and practice of it. "Without faith (says the apostle) it is impossible to please God:" because faith is an act of the understanding, and does necessarily suppose some knowledge and apprehension of what we believe. To all acts of religion there is necessarily required some acts of the understanding; so that without knowledge there can be no devotion in the service of God, no obedience to his laws. Religion begins in the understanding, and from thence de-

scends upon the heart and life. “If ye know these things (says our Saviour), happy are ye if ye do them.” We must first know God, before we can worship him; and understand what is his will, before we can do it.

This is so very evident, that one would think there needed no discourse about it. And yet there are some in the world that cry up ignorance as the mother of devotion. And to shew that we do not wrong them in this matter, Mr. Rushworth in his Dialogues (a book in great vogue among the papists here in England), does expressly reckon up ignorance among the parents of religion. And can any thing be said more absurdly, and more to the disparagement of religion, than to derive the pedigree of the most excellent thing in the world from so obscure and ignoble an original? and to make that which the Scripture calls the beginning of wisdom, and the excellency of knowledge, to be the offspring of ignorance, and a child of darkness? Ignorance indeed may be the cause of wonder and admiration, and the mother of folly and superstition: but surely religion is of a nobler extraction, and is the issue and result of the best wisdom and knowledge; and descends from above, from the Giver of every good and perfect gift, even the Father of lights.

And as knowledge in general is necessary to religion, so more particularly the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures is necessary to our eternal salvation: because these are the great and standing revelation of God to mankind; wherein the nature of God, and his will concerning our duty, and the terms and conditions of our eternal happiness in another world, are fully and plainly declared to us.

The Scriptures are the word of God; and from

whence can we learn the will of God so well as from his own mouth? They are the great instrument of our salvation; and should not every man be acquainted with that which alone can perfectly instruct him what he must believe, and what he must do that he may be saved? This is the testimony which the Scripture gives of itself, that it is “able to make men wise unto salvation:” and is it not very fit that every man should have this wisdom, and in order thereunto the free use of that book from whence this wisdom is to be learned?

II. Secondly, I observe the great and inexcusable fault of those who keep men in ignorance of religion, and take away from them so excellent and necessary a means of Divine knowledge as the Holy Scriptures are. This our Saviour calls “taking away the key of knowledge, and shutting the kingdom of heaven against men.” That is, doing what in them lies to render it impossible for men to be saved. For this he denounceth a terrible woe against the teachers of the Jewish church: though they did not proceed so far as to deprive men of the use of the Holy Scriptures, but only of the right knowledge and understanding of them. This alone is a horrible impiety, to lead men into a false sense and interpretation of Scripture, but much greater to forbid them the reading of it. This is to stop knowledge at the very fountain head; and not only to lead men into error, but to take away from them all possibility of rectifying their mistakes. And can there be a greater sacrilege, than to rob men of the word of God, the best means in the world of acquainting them with the will of God and their duty, and the way to eternal happiness? To keep the people in ignorance of that which is necessary to save them, is

to judge them unworthy of eternal life, and to declare it does not belong to them, and maliciously to contrive the eternal ruin and destruction of their souls.

To lock up the Scriptures and the service of God from the people in an unknown tongue, what is this but in effect to forbid men to know God, and to serve him; to render them incapable of knowing what is the good and acceptable will of God; of joining in his worship, or performing any part of it, or receiving any benefit or edification from it? And what is, if this be not, “to shut the kingdom of heaven against men?” This is so outrageous a cruelty to the souls of men, that it is not to be excused upon any pretence whatsoever: this is to take the surest and most effectual way in the world to destroy those for whom Christ died, and directly to thwart the great design of God our Saviour, who would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. Men may miscarry with their knowledge, but they are sure to perish for want of it.

The best things in the world have their inconveniences attending them, and are liable to be abused; but surely men are not to be ruined and damned for fear of abusing their knowledge, or for the prevention of any other inconvenience whatsoever. Besides, this is to cross the very end of the Scriptures, and the design of God in inspiring men to write them. Can any man think that God should send this great light of his word into the world, for the priests to hide it under a bushel; and not rather that it should be set up to the greatest advantage for the enlightening of the world? St. Paul tells us, (Rom. xv. 4.) “That whatsoever things were written, were written for our learning, that we through pa-

tience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." And, (2 Tim. iii. 16.) that "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God; and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." And if the Scriptures were written for these ends, can any man have the face to pretend, that they do not concern the people as well as their teachers? Nay, St. Paul expressly tells the church of Rome, that they were written for their learning, however it happens that they are now permitted to make use of them. Are the Scriptures so useful and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness? And why may they not be used by the people for those ends for which they were given? It is true, indeed, they are fit for the most knowing and learned, and sufficient to make the man of God perfect, and thoroughly furnished to every good work, as the apostle there tells us. But does this exclude their being profitable also to the people, who may reasonably be presumed to stand much more in need of all means and helps of instruction than their teachers? And though there be many difficulties and obscurities in the Scriptures, enough to exercise the skill and wit of the learned, yet they are not therefore either useless or dangerous to the people. The ancient fathers of the church were of another mind. St. Chrysostom tells us, that "Whatever things are necessary, are manifest in the Scriptures." And St. Austin, that "All things are plain in the Scripture, which concern faith, and a good life; and that those things which are necessary to the salvation of men, are not so hard to be come at; but that as to those things which the Scripture plainly contains, it speaks without disguise, like a familiar friend, to the heart

of the learned and unlearned." And upon these, and such like considerations, the fathers did everywhere in their orations and homilies, charge and exhort the people to be conversant in the Holy Scriptures, to read them daily, and diligently, and attentively. And I challenge our adversaries to shew me where any of the ancient fathers do discourage the people from reading the Scriptures, much less forbid them so to do. So that they who do it now have no cloak for their sin: and they who pretend so confidently to antiquity in other cases, are by the evidence of truth forced to acknowledge that it is against them in this. Though they have ten thousand schoolmen on their side, yet have they not one father, nor the least pretence of Scripture, or rag of antiquity, to cover their nakedness in this point.

With great reason then does our Saviour denounce so heavy a woe against such teachers. Of old, in the like case, God, by his prophet, severely threatens the priests of the Jewish church, for not instructing the people in the knowledge of God: (Hosea iv. 6.) "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee; thou shalt be no more a priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children." God, you see, lays the ruin of so many souls at their doors, and will require their blood at their hands. So many as perish for want of knowledge, and eternally miscarry, by being deprived of the necessary means of salvation, their destruction shall be charged upon those who "have taken away the key of knowledge, and shut the kingdom of heaven against men."

And it is just with God to punish such persons,

not only as the occasion, but as the authors of their ruin. For who can judge otherwise, but that they who deprive men of the necessary means to any end, do purposely design to hinder them of attaining that end? And whatever may be pretended in this case, to deprive men of the Holy Scriptures, and to keep them ignorant of the service of God, and yet while they do so, to make a show of an earnest desire of their salvation, is just such a mockery, as if one of you that is a master should tell his apprentice, how much you desire he should thrive in the world, and be a rich man, but all the while keep him ignorant of his trade, in order to his being rich; and, with the strictest care imaginable, conceal from him the best means of learning, that whereby alone he is likely to thrive and get an estate. “Woe unto you scribes and pharisees, hypocrites!”

By what has been discoursed upon this argument, you will easily perceive where the application is like to fall. For the woe denounced by our Saviour here in the text against the scribes and pharisees, falls every whit as heavy upon the pastors and teachers of the Roman church. They have taken away the key of knowledge with a witness; not only depriving the people of the right understanding of the Scriptures, but of the very use of them: as if they were so afraid they should understand them, that they dare not suffer them so much as to be acquainted with them.

This tyranny that church hath exercised over those of her communion for several hundreds of years. It grew upon them indeed by degrees: for as, by the inundation of barbarous nations upon the Roman empire, the Romans lost their language by

degrees, so the governors of that church still kept up the Scriptures and the service of God in the Latin tongue; which at last was wholly unknown to the common people. And about the ninth and tenth centuries, when by the general consent of all their own historians, gross darkness and ignorance covered this part of the world, the pope and the priests took away the key of knowledge, and did (as I may say) put it under the door for several ages; till the Reformation fetched it out again, and rubbed off the rust of it.

And I profess seriously, that hardly any thing in the world was ever to me more astonishing, than this uncharitable and cruel usage of the people in the church of Rome. And I cannot tell which to wonder at most, the insolence of their governors, in imposing upon men this senseless way of serving God, or the patience, shall I call it, or rather stupidity of the people in enduring to be so intolerably abused. Why should reasonable creatures be treated at this rude and barbarous rate? as if they were unworthy to be acquainted with the will of God; and as if that which every man ought to do, were not fit for every man to know: as if the common people had only bodies to be present at the service of God, but no souls; or as if they were all distracted and out of their wits, and it were a dangerous thing to let in the light upon them.

But to speak more distinctly. There are two things we charge them withal, and which they are not able to deny. Their performing the public service of God in an unknown tongue; and depriving the people of the use of the Scriptures. And I shall first tell you what we have to say against these things, and then consider what they pretend for them.



1. As to their performing the service of God in a tongue unknown to the people. And I begin with St. Paul, who, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, hath a whole chapter on purpose to shew the unreasonableness of this thing, and how contrary it is to the edification of Christians. His discourse is so plain and so well known, that I shall not particularly insist upon it. Erasmus, in his annotations upon this chapter, breaks out (as well he might) into admiration at the practice of the church of Rome in his time. *Hac in re mirum, quam mutata sit ecclesiae consuetudo*: “It is wonderful (says he) how the custom of the church is altered in this matter. St. Paul had rather speak five words with understanding, and so as to teach others, than ten thousand in an unknown tongue.” Why does the church doubt to follow so great an authority, or rather, how dares she dissent from it?

As for the practice of the ancient church, let Origen bear witness. “The Grecians (saith he) in their prayers use the Greek, and the Romans the Latin tongue; and so every one according to his language prayeth unto God, and praiseth him as he is able.”

And not only in Origen’s time, but for more than the first six hundred years, the service of God was always performed in a known tongue. And this the learned men of their own church do not deny. And Cardinal Cajetan (as Cassander tells us) said it was much better this custom were restored; and being reproved for saying so, he said he learned it from St. Paul. And Bellarmine himself confesseth, that the Armenians, Egyptians, Ethiopians, Russians, and others, do use their own language in their liturgies at this day.

But it is otherwise now in the church of Rome, and hath been for several ages. And it seems they lay great stress upon it, not only as a thing of great use, but necessity. For Pope Gregory the VII. forbids the Prince of Bohemia, to permit to the people the celebration of Divine offices in the Sclavonian tongue; and commands him to oppose them herein with all his forces. It seems he thought it a cause worthy the fighting for; and that it were much better the people should be killed, than suffered to understand their prayers.

But let us reason this matter a little calmly with them. Is it necessary for men to understand any thing they do in religion? And is not prayer one of the most solemn parts of religion? And why then should not men understand their prayers as well as any thing else they do in religion? Is it good that people should understand their private prayers? that (we thank them) they allow, and why not public as well? Is there less of religion in public prayers? Is God less honoured by them? or are we not as capable of being edified, and of having our hearts and affections moved and excited by them? Where then lies the difference? The more I consider it, the more I am at a loss, what tolerable reason any man can give why people should not understand their public devotions as well as their private. If men cannot heartily and devoutly pray alone without understanding what they ask of God, no more (say I) can they heartily and devoutly join in the public prayers which are made by the priest, without understanding what they are. If it be enough for the priest to understand them, why should not the priest only be present at them? unless the people do not meet to worship God, but

only to wait upon the priest. But by saying the priest understands them, it seems better somebody should understand them than not; and why is not that which is good for the priest good for the people?

So that the true state of the controversy is, whether it be fit that the people should be edified in the service of God; and whether it be fit the church should order things contrary to edification? For it is plain that the service of God in an unknown tongue is useless and unprofitable to the people; nay, it is evidently no public service of God, when the priest only understands it. For how can they be said to be public prayers, if the people do not join in them? And how can they join in that they do not understand? and to what purpose are lessons of Scripture read, if people are to learn nothing by them? And how should they learn when they do not understand? This is as if one should pretend to teach a man Greek by reading in lectures every day out of an Arabic and Persian book, of which he understands not one syllable.

2. As to their depriving the people of the use of the Holy Scriptures. Our blessed Saviour exhorts the Jews to "search the Scriptures;" and St. Paul chargeth the Christians, that "the word of God should dwell richly in them;" and the ancient fathers of the church do most frequently and earnestly recommend to the people the reading and study of the Scriptures: how comes the case now to be so altered? Sure the word of God is not changed; that certainly abides and continues the same for ever.

I shall by-and-by examine what the church of Rome pretends in excuse of this sacrilege. In the meantime, I do not see what considerable objections can be made against the people's reading of the Scriptures, which would not have held as well

against the writing and publishing of them at first in a language understood by the people: as the Old Testament was by the Jews, and the epistles of the apostles by the churches to whom they were written, and the gospels both by Jews and Greeks. Were there no difficulties and obscurities then in the Scriptures, capable of being wrested by the unstable and unlearned? Were not people then liable to error, and was there no danger of heresy in those times? And yet these are their great objections against putting the Scriptures into the hands of the people. Which is just like their arguing against giving the cup to the laity, from the inconveniency of their beards, lest some of the consecrated wine should be spilt upon them; as if errors and beards were inconveniences lately sprung up in the world, and which mankind were not liable to in the first ages of Christianity.

But if there were the same dangers and inconveniences in all ages, this reason makes against the publishing of the Scriptures to the people at first, as much as against permitting them the use of them now. And in truth all these objections are against the Scripture itself; and that which the church of Rome would find fault with if they durst, is, that there should be any such book in the world, and that it should be in anybody's hands, learned or unlearned; for if it be dangerous to any, none are so capable of doing mischief with it as men of wit and learning. So that at the bottom, if they would speak out, the quarrel is against the Scriptures themselves. This is too evident by the counsel given to Pope-Julius III. by the bishops met at Bononia to consult about the establishment of the Roman see; where, among other things, they gave this as their last advice, and as the greatest and weightiest of

all, "That by all means as little of the gospel as might be, especially in the vulgar tongue, should be read to the people; and that little which was in the mass ought to be sufficient; neither should it be permitted to any mortal to read more. For so long (say they) as men were contented with that little, all things went well with them; but quite otherwise since more was commonly read." And speaking of the Scripture, they gave this remarkable testimony and commendation of it: "This, in short, is that book which, above all others, hath raised those tempests and whirlwinds, which we were almost carried away with. And, in truth, if any one diligently considers it, and compares it with what is done in our church, he will find them very contrary to each other, and our doctrine not only to be very different from it, but repugnant to it." If this be the case, they do, like the rest of the children of this world, prudently enough in their generation: can we blame them for being against the Scriptures, when the Scriptures are acknowledged to be so clearly against them? But surely nobody that considereth these things would be of that church, which is brought, by the undeniable evidence of the things themselves, to this shameful confession, that several of their doctrines and practices are very contrary to the word of God.

Much more might have been said against the practice of the church of Rome, in these two particulars, but this is sufficient.

I shall, in the second place, consider, what is pretended for them. And indeed what can be pretended in justification of so contumelious an affront to mankind, so great a tyranny and cruelty to the souls of men? Hath God forbidden the people to look into the Scriptures? No, quite the contrary. Was

it the practice of the ancient church to lay this restraint upon men; or to celebrate the service of God in an unknown tongue? Our adversaries themselves have not the face to pretend this. I shall truly represent the substance of what they say on these two points.

I. As to the service of God in an unknown tongue, they say these four things for themselves.

1. That the people do exercise a general devotion, and come with an intention to serve God, and that is accepted, though they do not particularly understand the prayers that are made, and the lessons that are read.

But is this all that is intended in the service of God? Does not St. Paul expressly require more? that the understanding of the people should be edified by the particular service that is performed? And if what is done be not particularly understood, he tells us the people are not edified, nor can say Amen to the prayers and thanksgivings that are put up to God; and that any man that should come in, and find people serving of God in this unprofitable and unreasonable manner, would conclude that they were mad.

And if there be any general devotion in the people, it is because in general they understand what they are about: and why may they not as well understand the particular service that is performed, that so they might exercise a particular devotion? So that they are devout no farther than they understand; and, consequently, as to what they do not understand, had every whit as good be absent.

2. They say, the prayers are to God, and he understands them; and that is enough. But what harm were it, if all they that pray understood them also? Or, indeed, how can men pray to God without

understanding what they ask of him? Is not prayer a part of the Christian worship? And is not that a reasonable service? And is any service reasonable, that is not directed by our understandings, and accompanied with our hearts and affections?

But then, what say they to the lessons and exhortations of Scripture, which are likewise read to the people in an unknown tongue? Are these directed to God, or the people only? And are they not designed by God for their instruction; and read either to that purpose or to none? And is it possible to instruct men by what they do not understand? This is a new and wonderful way of teaching, by concealing from the people the things which they should learn. Is it not all one, as to all purposes of edification, as if the Scriptures were not read, or any thing else in the place of them? as they many times do their legends, which the wiser sort among them do not believe when they read them. For all things are alike to them that understand none; as all things are of a colour in the dark. Ignorance knows no difference of things; it is only knowledge that can distinguish.

3. They say that some do, at least in some measure, understand the particular prayers. If they do, that is no thanks to them. It is by accident if they are more knowing than the rest: and more than the church either desires or intends. For if they desired it, they might order their service so, as every man might understand it.

4. They say that it is convenient, that God should be served and worshipped in the same language all the world over. Convenient for whom? For God, or for the people? Not for God, surely. For he un-

derstands all other languages as well as Latin, and for any thing we know to the contrary likes them as well. And certainly, it cannot be so convenient for the people, because they generally understand no language but their own ; and it is very inconvenient they should not understand what they do in the service of God. But perhaps they mean that it is convenient for the Roman church to have it so ; because this will look like an argument that they are the catholic or universal church, when the language which was originally their's, shall be the universal language in which all nations shall serve God ; and by this means also, they may bring all nations to be of their religion, and yet make them never the wiser ; and this is a very great convenience, because knowledge is a troublesome thing, and ignorance very quiet and peaceable, rendering men fit to be governed, and unfit to dispute.

II. As to their depriving the people of the Scriptures, the sum of what they say may be reduced to these three heads.

1. That the church can give leave to men to read the Scriptures. But this not without great trouble and difficulty ; there must be a licence for it under the hand of the bishop or inquisitor, by the advice of the priest or confessor, concerning the fitness of the person that desires this privilege ; and we may be sure, they will think none fit, but those of whom they have the greatest confidence and security : and whoever presumes to do it otherwise, is to be denied absolution, which is, as much as in them lies, to damn men for presuming to read the word of God without their leave.

And, whatever they may allow here in England, where they hold their people upon more slippery



terms, yet this privilege is very rarely granted where they are in full possession of their power, and have the people perfectly under their yoke.

2. They tell us they instruct the people otherwise. This indeed were something if they did it to purpose; but generally they do it very sparingly and slightly. Their sermons are commonly made up of feigned stories and miracles of saints, and exhortations to the worship of them (and especially of the blessed Virgin), and of their images and relics. And for the truth of this, I appeal to the innumerable volumes of their sermons and postils in print; which I suppose are none of the worst. I am sure Erasmus says, that in his time, in several countries, the people did scarce once in half a year, hear a profitable sermon to exhort them to true piety. Indeed they allow the people some catechisms and manuals of devotion; and yet in many of them, they have the conscience and the confidence to steal away the second commandment in the face of the eighth.

But to bring the matter to a point, if those helps of instruction are agreeable to the Scriptures, why are they so afraid the people should read them? If they are not, why do they deceive and delude them?

3. They say that people are apt to wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction, and that the promiscuous use of them hath been the great occasion of heresies. It cannot be denied to be the condition of the very best things in the world, that they are liable to be abused: health, and light, and liberty, as well as knowledge. But must all these be therefore taken away? This very inconvenience of people's wresting the Scriptures to their own ruin, St. Peter takes notice of in his days; but he does not therefore forbid men the reading of them, as his

more prudent successors have done since. Suppose the reading of the Scriptures hath been the occasion of heresies; were there ever more than in the first ages of Christianity? and yet neither the apostles nor their successors ever prescribed this remedy. But are they in earnest? must not men know the truth for fear of falling into error? because men may possibly miss their way at noon-day, must they never travel but in the night, when they are sure to lose it?

And when all is done, this is not true—that heresies have sprung from this cause. They have generally been broached by the learned, from whom the Scriptures neither were, nor could be concealed. And for this I appeal to the history and experience of all ages. I am well assured, the ancient fathers were of another mind. St. Chrysostom says, “If men would be conversant in the Scriptures, and attend to them, they would not only not fall into errors themselves, but rescue those that are deceived:” and that “the Scriptures would instruct men both in right opinions and a good life.” And St. Hierome more expressly to our purpose, “That infinite evils arise from the ignorance of the Scriptures; and that from that cause the most part of heresies have come.”

But if what they say were true, is not this to lay the blame of all the ancient heresies upon the ill management of things by our Saviour and his apostles, and the holy fathers of the church for so many ages, and their imprudent dispensing of the Scriptures to the people? This indeed is to charge the matter home; and yet this consequence is unavoidable. For the church of Rome cannot justify the piety and prudence of their present practices without accusing all these.

But the thing which they mainly rely upon, as to both these practices, is this: That though these things were otherwise in the apostles' time, and in the ancient church, yet the church hath power to alter them according to the exigence and circumstances of time. I have purposely reserved this for the last place, because it is their last refuge; and if this fail them, they are gone.

To shew the weakness of this pretence, we will, if they please, take it for granted, that the governors of the church have in no age more power than the apostles had in their's. Now St. Paul tells us, (2 Cor. x. 8.) that the authority which the apostles had given them from the Lord, was only for edification, but not for destruction: and the same St. Paul makes it the business of a whole chapter to shew, that the performing the public service of God, and particularly praying in an unknown tongue, are contrary to edification; from which premises the conclusion is plain, that the apostles themselves had no authority to appoint the service of God to be performed in an unknown tongue; and surely, it is arrogance for the church in any age to pretend greater authority than the apostles had.

This is the sum of what our adversaries say in justification of themselves in these points. And there is no doubt, but that men of wit and confidence will always make a shift to say something for any thing; and some way or other blanch over the blackest and most absurd things in the world. But I leave it to the judgment of mankind, whether any thing be more unreasonable than to tell men in effect, that it is fit they should understand as little of religion as is possible; that God hath published a very dangerous book, with which it is not safe for the people to be familiarly acquainted; that our blessed

Saviour and his apostles, and the ancient Christian church for more than six hundred years, were not wise managers of religion, nor prudent dispensers of the Scriptures; but like fond and foolish fathers, put a knife and a sword into the hands of their children, with which they might easily have foreseen what mischief they would do to themselves and others. And who would not choose to be of such a church, which is provided of such excellent and effectual means of ignorance, such wise and infallible methods for the prevention of knowledge in the people, and such variety of close shutters to keep out the light?

I have chosen to insist upon this argument, because it is so very plain, that the most ordinary capacity may judge of this usage and dealing with the souls of men; which is so very gross, that every man must needs be sensible of it: because it toucheth men in the common rights of human nature, which belong to them as much as the light of heaven, and the air we breathe in.

It requires no subtlety of wit, no skill in antiquity to understand these controversies between us and the church of Rome. For there are no fathers to be pretended on both sides in these questions: they yield we have antiquity on our's: and we refer it to the common sense of mankind, which church, that of Rome or our's, hath all the right and reason in the world on her side in these debates? And, who they are that tyrannize over Christians, the governors of their church, or our's? who use the people like sons and freemen, and who like slaves? who feed the flock of Christ committed to them, and who take the children's bread from them? who they are that, when their children ask bread, for bread give them a stone, and for an egg, a serpent? I mean the legends of their saints, instead of the Holy Scrip-

tures, which are able to make men “wise unto salvation:” and who are they that lie most justly under the suspicion of errors and corruptions, they who bring their doctrine and practices into the open light, and are willing to have them tried by the true touchstone, the word of God; or they who shun the light, and decline all manner of trial and examination? and who are most likely to carry on a worldly design, they who drive a trade of such mighty gain and advantage under pretence of religion, and make such markets of the ignorance and sins of the people; or, we whom malice itself cannot charge with serving any worldly design by any allowed doctrine or practice of our religion? for we make no money of the mistakes of the people, nor do we fill their heads with vain fears of new places of torment, to make them willing to empty their purses in a vainer hope of being delivered out of them. We do not, like them, pretend a mighty bank and treasure of merits in the church, which they sell to the people for ready money, giving them bills of exchange from the pope to purgatory; when they who grant them have no reason to believe they will avail them, or be accepted in the other world.

For our parts, we have no reason to fear that our people should understand religion too well: we could wish with Moses, “That all the Lord’s people were prophets:” we should be heartily glad the people would read the Holy Scriptures more diligently, being sufficiently assured that it is their own fault if they learn any thing but what is good from thence: we have no doctrines or practices contrary to Scripture, and consequently no occasion to keep it close from the sight of the people, or to hide any of the commandments of God from them: we leave these mean arts to those who stand in need of them.

In a word, there is nothing which God hath said to men, which we desire should be concealed from them; nay, we are willing the people should examine what we teach, and bring all our doctrines to the law and to the testimony; that if they be not according to this rule, they may neither believe them nor us. It is only things false and adulterate, which shun the light and fear the touchstone. We have that security of the truth of our religion, and of the agreeableness of it to the word of God, that honest confidence of the goodness of our cause, that we do not forbid the people to read the best books our adversaries can write against it.

And now let any impartial man judge whether this be not a better argument of a good cause, to leave men at liberty to try the grounds of their religion, than the courses which are taken in the church of Rome, to awe men with an inquisition; and, as much as possible, to keep the common people in ignorance, not only of what their late adversaries, the protestants, but their chief and ancient adversary, the Scriptures, have to say against them.

A man had need of more than common security of the skill and integrity of those to whom he perfectly resigns his understanding; this is too great a trust to be reposed in human frailty, and too strong a temptation to others to impose upon us, to abuse our blindness, and to make their own ends of our voluntary ignorance and easy credulity. This is such a folly, as if a rich man should make his physician his heir; which is to tempt him either to destroy him, or to let him die, for his own interest. So he that trusts the care of his soul with other men, and at the same time by irrecoverable deed settles his understanding upon them, lays too great a temptation before them to seduce and damn him for their own ends.

And now to reflect a little upon ourselves. What cause have we to bless God, who are so happily rescued from that more than Egyptian darkness and bondage, wherein this nation was detained for several ages! who are delivered out of the hands of those cruel task-masters, who required brick without straw; that men should be religious without competent understanding, and work out their own salvation while they denied them the means of all others the most necessary to it; who are so uncharitable as to allow us no salvation out of their church, and yet so unreasonable as to deny us the very best means of salvation when we are in it.

Our forefathers thought it a mighty privilege to have the word of God restored to them, and the public prayers and service of God celebrated in a known tongue. Let us use this inestimable privilege with great modesty and humility; not to the nourishing of pride and self-conceit, of division and faction; but, as the apostle exhorts, "Let the word of God dwell richly in you, in all wisdom; and let the peace of God rule in your hearts, unto which ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful."

It concerns us mightily (with which admonition I shall conclude) both for the honour and support of our religion, to be at better union among ourselves, and not to divide about lesser things; and so demean ourselves, as to take from our adversaries all those pretences whereby they would justify themselves, or at least extenuate the guilt of that heavy charge, which falls every whit as justly upon them as ever it did upon the scribes and pharisees,—Of taking away the key of knowledge, and shutting the kingdom of heaven against men, neither going in themselves, nor suffering those that are entering to go in."

## SERMON XXXI.

### THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS.

[Preached before Her Royal Highness the Princess Anne of Denmark, at Tunbridge-Wells, September the 2d, 1688.]

*Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish, &c.—MATTHEW XXV. 1, 2, &c.*

MY design at present is to explain this parable, and to make such observations upon it, as seem most naturally, and without squeezing the parable, to spring from it: and then to make some application of it to ourselves.

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins:” by the kingdom of heaven is meant the state and condition of things under the gospel; by the ten virgins, those who embraced the profession of it, which is here represented by their taking their lamps, and going forth to meet the bridegroom: in allusion to the ancient custom of marriages, in which the bridegroom was wont to lead home his bride in the night, by the light of lamps or torches.

But this profession was not in all equally firm and fruitful; and therefore those who persevered and continued steadfast in this profession, notwithstanding all the temptations and allurements of the world, and all the fierce storms and assaults of per-



secution to which this profession was exposed ; and being thus firmly rooted in it ; did bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, and abound in the graces and virtues of a good life ; these are the wise virgins : but those who either deserted this profession, or did not bring forth fruits answerable to it, are the foolish virgins.

And that this is the true difference between them will appear, if we consider how the parable represents them: (ver. 3, 4.) “They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.” So that they both took their lamps, and both lighted them, and therefore must both be supposed to have some oil in their lamps, at first, as appears from verse 8, where the foolish virgins said unto the wise, “Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out.” They had it seems some oil in their lamps at first, which kept them lighted for a little while, but had taken no care for a future supply. And therefore the difference between the wise and foolish virgins did not, as some have imagined, consist in this, that the wise virgins had oil, but the foolish had none ; but in this, that the foolish had taken no care for a farther supply, after the oil which was at first put into their lamps was spent, as the wise had done ; who, besides the oil that was in their lamps, carried likewise a reserve in some other vessel ; for a continual supply of the lamp, as there should be occasion: “the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.”

Now the meaning of all this is, That they who are represented by the wise virgins had not only embraced the profession of the Christian religion, as the foolish virgins also had done, for they both had their lamps lighted ; but they likewise persevered in that profession, and brought forth fruits

answerable to it. For by oil in their lamps, and the first lighting of them, which was common to them both, is meant that solemn profession of faith and repentance which all Christians make in baptism: by that farther supply of oil, which the wise virgins only took care to provide, is signified our constancy and perseverance in this profession, together with the fruits of the Spirit, and the improvement of the grace received in baptism by the practice and exercise of all the graces and virtues of a good life, whereby men are fitted and prepared for death and judgment, which are here represented to us by the coming of the bridegroom.

This being plainly the main scope and intention of the parable, I shall explain the rest of it, as there shall be occasion, under the several observations which I shall raise from the several parts of it. And they shall be these:

First, I observe the charitable decorum which our blessed Saviour keeps in this, as well as in the rest of his parables; as if he would fain suppose and hope, that among those who enjoy the gospel, and make profession of it, the number of them that are truly good, is equal to those that are bad. For our blessed Saviour here represents the whole number of the professors of Christianity by ten virgins, the half whereof the parable seems to suppose to be truly and really good, and to persevere in goodness to the end: (ver. 1, 2.) “Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom: and five of them were wise, and five were foolish.”

Secondly, I observe, how very common it is for men to neglect this great concernment of their souls, viz. a due preparation for another world; and how willing men are to deceive themselves herein, and to

depend upon any thing else, how groundless and unreasonable soever, rather than to take pains to be really good and fit for heaven. And this is in a very lively manner represented to us in the description of the foolish virgins, who had provided no supply of oil in their vessels, and when the bridegroom was coming would have furnished themselves by borrowing or buying of others, (ver. 8, 9, 10.)

Thirdly, I observe, that even the better sort of Christians are not careful and watchful as they ought to prepare themselves for death and judgment: "Whilst the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept;" even the wise virgins as well as the foolish.

Fourthly, I observe further, how little is to be done by us, to any good purpose, in this great work of preparation, when it is deferred and put off to the last. Thus the foolish virgins did, and what a sad confusion and hurry they were in we may see: (ver. 6, 7, 8, 9.) "And at midnight there was a cry made. Behold! the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him." At midnight; the most dismal and unseasonable time of all other: "Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps: and the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out: but the wise answered, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you; but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves." And how ineffectual all that they could do at that time proved to be, we find: (ver. 10, 11, 12.) "And whilst they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut. Afterwards came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us: but he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not."

Fifthly, I observe, that there is no such thing as works of supererogation, that no man can do more than needs, and is his duty to do, by way of preparation for another world. For when the foolish virgins would have begged of the wise some oil for their lamps, the wise answered, "Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you." It was only the foolish virgins that had entertained this foolish conceit, that there might be an overplus of grace and merit in others sufficient to supply their want: but the wise knew not of any that they had to spare, but supposed all that they had little enough to qualify them for the reward of eternal life; not so, say they, μήποτε, lest at any time, lest when there should be need and occasion, all that we have done, or could do, should prove little enough for ourselves.

Sixthly and lastly, I observe, that if we could suppose any persons to be so overgood, as to have more grace and goodness than needs to qualify them for the reward of eternal life, yet there is no assigning and transferring of this overplus of grace and virtue from one man to another. For we see (ver. 9, 10.) that all the ways which they could think of, of borrowing or buying oil of others, did all prove ineffectual; because the thing is in its own nature impracticable, that one sinner should be in a condition to merit for another.

All these observations seem to have some fair and probable foundation in some part or other of this parable; and most of them, I am sure, are agreeable to the main scope and intention of the whole. I shall speak to them severally, and as briefly as I can.

First, I observe the charitable decorum which our blessed Saviour keeps in this, as well as in the rest of his parables: as if he would fain suppose and hope, that among those who enjoy the gospel, and

make profession of it, the number of those who make a firm and sincere profession of it, and persevere in goodness to the end, is equal to the number of those who do not make good their profession, or who fall off from it.

I shall not be long upon this, because I lay the least stress upon it of all the rest. I shall only take notice, that our blessed Saviour in this parable represents the whole number of the professors of Christianity by ten virgins, the half of which the parable seems to suppose to have sincerely embraced the Christian profession, and to have persevered therein to the last; “The kingdom of heaven shall be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom; and five of them were wise, and five were foolish.”

And this decorum our blessed Saviour seems carefully to observe in his other parables; as in the parable of the prodigal (Luke xv.), where, for one son that left his father, and took riotous courses, there was another that stayed always with him, and continued constant to his duty. And in the parable of the ten talents, which immediately follows that of the ten virgins, two are supposed to improve the talents committed to them, for one that made no improvement of his. He that had five talents committed to him, made them five more, and he that had two, gained other two; and only he that had but one talent, hid it in the earth, and made no improvement of it. And, in the parable which I am now upon, the number of the professors of Christianity, who took care to fit and prepare themselves for the coming of the bridegroom, is supposed equal to the number of those who did not.

And whether this be particularly intended in the parable or not it may however be thus far in-

structive to us, that we should be so far from lessening the number of true Christians, and from confining the church of Christ within a narrow compass, so as to exclude out of its communion the far greatest part of the professors of Christianity; that, on the contrary, we should enlarge the kingdom of Christ, as much as we can, and extend our charity to all churches and Christians, of what denomination soever, as far as regard to truth, and to the foundations of the Christian religion, will permit us to believe and hope well of them; and rather be contented to err a little on the favourable and charitable part, than to be mistaken on the censorious and damning side.

And for this reason, perhaps, it is, that our blessed Saviour thought fit to frame his parables with so remarkable a bias to the charitable side: partly to instruct us to extend our charity towards all Christian churches, and professors of the Christian religion, and our good hopes concerning them, as far as with reason we can; and partly to reprove the uncharitableness of the Jews, who positively excluded all the rest of mankind, besides themselves, from all hopes of salvation. An odious temper, which, to the infinite scandal of the Christian name and profession, hath prevailed upon some Christians to that notorious degree, as not only to shut out all the reformed part of the western church, almost equal in number to themselves, from all hopes of salvation, under the notion of heretics; but likewise to un-church all the other churches of the Christian world, which are of much greater extent and number than themselves, that do not own subjection to the bishop of Rome; and this they do by declaring it to be of necessity to salvation for every creature to be subject to the Roman bishop. And this su-

premacý of the bishop of Rome over all Christian churches, Bellarmine calls the sum of the Christian religion. So that the Roman communion is plainly founded in schism, that is, in the most unchristian and uncharitable principle that can be, namely, That they are the only true church of Christ, out of which none can be saved; which was the very schism of the Donatists. And in this they are so positive, that the learned men in that church, in their disputes and writings, are much more inclinable to believe the salvation of heathens to be possible, than of any of those Christians, whom they are pleased to call heretics. The faith of the church of Rome is certainly none of the best; but of one of the greatest and most essential virtues of the Christian religion, I mean charity, I doubt they have the least share of any Christian church this day in the world.

Secondly, I observe, not from any particular circumstance, but from the main scope and design of this parable, how very apt a great part of Christians are to neglect this great concernment of their souls, viz. a careful and due preparation for another world; and how willing they are to deceive themselves in this matter, and to depend upon any thing else, how groundless and unreasonable soever, rather than to take the pains to be really good and fit for heaven. And this is in a very lively manner represented to us in the description of the foolish virgins, who had provided no supply of oil in their vessels, and when the bridegroom was coming would have furnished themselves by borrowing or buying of others, (ver. 8, 9, 10.) They contented themselves with having their lamps lighted at their first setting out to meet the bridegroom, that is, with their being admitted

into the profession of Christianity by baptism, but either were not steadfast in this profession, or were not careful to adorn it with the graces and virtues of a good life.

And the true reason why men are so very apt to deceive themselves in this matter, and are so hardly brought to those things wherein religion mainly consists, I mean the fruits of the Spirit, and the practice of real goodness; I say, the true reason of this is, because they are extremely desirous to reconcile, if it were possible, the hopes of eternal happiness in another world, with a liberty to live as they list in this present world: they are loath to be at the trouble and drudgery of mortifying their lusts, and governing their passions, and bridling their tongues, and practising all those duties which are comprehended in those two great commandments of the love of God, and of our neighbour; they would fain gain the favour of God, and make their calling and election sure, by some easier way than by giving all diligence to add to their faith and knowledge the graces and virtues of a good life.

For the plain truth of the matter is, men had rather that religion should be any thing than what indeed it is, viz. the thwarting and crossing of their vicious inclinations, the curing of their evil and corrupt affections, the due care and government of their unruly appetites and passions, the sincere endeavour, and the constant practice of holiness and virtue in their lives; and, therefore, they had much rather have something that might handsomely palliate and excuse their evil inclinations and practices, than to be obliged to retrench and renounce them; and rather than amend and reform their wicked lives, they would be contented to make an honour-



able amends and compensation to Almighty God in some other way.

This hath been the way and folly of mankind in all ages, to defeat the great end and design of religion, and to thrust it by, by substituting something else in the place of it, which, as they think, may serve the turn as well, having the appearance of as much devotion and respect towards God, and really costing them more money and pains, than that which God requires of them. Men have ever been apt thus to impose upon themselves, and to please themselves with a conceit of pleasing God full as well, or better, by some other way than that which he hath prescribed and appointed for them.

By this means, and upon this false principle, religion hath ever been apt to degenerate, both among Jews and Christians, into external and little observances, and into a great zeal for lesser things, with a total neglect of the greater and weightier matters of religion; and, in a word, into infinite superstitions of one kind or other, and an arrogant conceit of the extraordinary righteousness and merit of these things; in which some have proceeded to that height, as if they could drive a strict bargain with God for eternal life and happiness; and have treated him in so insolent a manner, by their doctrine of the merit of their devotions and good works, as if God were as much beholden to them for their service and obedience, as they are to him for the reward of them; which they are not afraid to say they may challenge at God's hand, as of right and justice belonging to them.

Nay, so far have they carried this doctrine in the church of Rome, as not only to pretend to merit eternal life for themselves, but likewise to do a

great deal more, for the benefit and advantage of others, who have not righteousness and goodness enough of their own: which was the silly conceit of the foolish virgins here in the parable, as I shall have occasion to shew more fully by-and-by.

And it is no great wonder, that such easy ways of religion and pleasing God, are very grateful to the corrupt nature of man; and that men who are resolved to continue in an evil course, are glad to be of a church which will assure salvation to men upon such terms: the great difficulty is, for men to believe that things which are so apparently absurd and unreasonable can be true; and to persuade themselves, that they can impose upon God by such pretences of service and obedience, as no wise prince or father upon earth is to be deluded withal by his subjects or children. We ought to have worthier thoughts of God, and to consider that he is a great King, and will be obeyed and served by his creatures in his own way, and make them happy upon his own terms; and that obedience to what he commands, is better and more acceptable to him, than any other sacrifice that we can offer, which he hath not required at our hands: and likewise, that he is infinitely wise and good; and therefore, that the laws, which he hath given us to live by, are much more likely and certain means of our happiness, than any inventions and devices of our own.

Thirdly, I observe, that even the better and more considerate sort of Christians are not so careful and watchful as they ought to be, to prepare themselves for death and judgment; "Whilst the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept." Even the disciples of our Saviour, whilst he was yet personally present with them, and after a particular charge

given them from his own mouth—" Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation ;" yet did not keep that guard upon themselves as to watch with him for one hour: " In many things," says St. James, " we offend all ;" even the best of us : and who is there that doth not, some time or other, remit of his vigilancy and care, so as to give the devil an advantage, and to lie open to temptation, for want of a continual guard upon himself? But then the difference between the wise and foolish virgins was this, that though they both slept, yet the wise did not let their lamps go out ; they neither quitted their profession, nor did they extinguish it by a bad life ; and though when the bridegroom came suddenly upon them, they were not so actually prepared to meet him by a continual vigilancy, yet they were habitually prepared by the good disposition of their minds, and the general course of a holy life. Their lamps might burn dim for want of continual trimming, but they had oil in their vessels to supply their lamps, which the foolish virgins had taken no care to provide. But surely the greatest wisdom of all is to maintain a continual watchfulness, that so we may not be surprised by the coming of the bridegroom, and be in a confusion when death or judgment shall overtake us. And blessed are those servants, and wise indeed, whose lamps always burn bright, and whom the bridegroom, when he comes, shall find watching, and in a fit posture and preparation to meet him.

Fourthly, I observe likewise, how little is to be done by us, to any good purpose, in this great work of preparation, when it is deferred and put off to the last. And thus the foolish virgins did: but what a sad confusion and hurry they were in at the

sudden coming of the bridegroom, when they were not only asleep, but when, after they were awakened, they found themselves altogether unprovided of that which was necessary to trim their lamps, and to put them in a posture to meet the bridegroom—when they wanted that which was necessary at that very instant, but could not be provided in an instant—I say, what a tumult and confusion they were in, being thus surprised, the parable represents to us at large: (ver. 6, 7, 8, 9.) “And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold! the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps (that is, they went about it as well as they could); and the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out.”

“At midnight there was a cry made;” that is, at the most dismal and unseasonable time of all other; when they were fast asleep, and suddenly awakened in great terror; when they could not on the sudden recollect themselves, and consider what to do; when the summons was so very short, that they had neither time to consider what was fit to be done, nor time to do it in.

And such is the case of those who put off their repentance and preparation of another world, till they are surprised by death and judgment; for it comes all to one in the issue, which of them it be. The parable indeed seems more particularly to point at our Lord’s coming to judgment, but the case is much the same as to those who are surprised by sudden death; such as gives them but little, or not sufficient time for so great a work: because such as death leaves them, judgment will certainly find them.

And what a miserable confusion must they needs be in, who are thus surprised either by the one or the other? How unfit should we be, if the general judgment of the world should come upon us on the sudden, to meet that great Judge at his coming, if we have made no preparation for it before that time? What shall we then be able to do, in that great and universal consternation; when the “Son of man shall appear in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory;” when “the sun shall be darkened, and the moon turned into blood, and all the powers of heaven shall be shaken:” when all nature shall feel such violent pangs and convulsions, and the whole world shall be in a combustion, flaming and cracking about our ears: when the “heavens shall be shrivelled up as a scroll when it is rolled together,” and the earth shall be tossed from its centre, “and every mountain and island shall be removed?” What thoughts can the wisest men then have about them, in the midst of so much noise and terror? Or if they could have any, what time will there then be to put them in execution? when they shall see the angel, “that standeth upon the sea, and upon the earth, lifting up his hand to heaven, and swearing by him that liveth for ever and ever, that time shall be no longer;” as this dreadful day is described, Rev. x. 5, 6. and chap. vi. 15. where sinners are represented at the appearance of this great Judge, not as flying to God in hopes of mercy, but as flying from him in utter despair of finding mercy with him: “The kings of the earth, and the great men, and the mighty men, and the rich men, and the great captains, hid themselves in the dens, and in the rocks of the earth; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him

that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?" The biggest and the boldest sinners that ever were upon earth, shall then flee from the face of him, whom they have so often blasphemed and denied; and shall so far despair of finding mercy with him in that day, who would sue to him for it no sooner, that they shall address themselves to the mountains and rocks, as being more pitiful and exorable than he, "To hide them from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb."—"From the wrath of the Lamb," to signify unto us, that nothing is more terrible than meekness and patience, when they are thoroughly provoked, and turned into fury.

In such dreadful confusion shall all impenitent sinners be, when they shall be surprised by that great and terrible day of the Lord: and the case of a dying sinner, who would take no care in the time of his life and health to make preparation for another world, is not much more hopeful and comfortable.

For, alas! how little is it that a sick and dying man can do in such a strait of time; in the midst of so much pain and weakness of body, and of such confusion and amazement of mind! With what heart can he set about so great a work, for which there is so little time? With what face can he apply himself to God in this extremity, whom he hath so disdainfully neglected all the days of his life? And how can he have the confidence to hope, that God will hear his cries, and regard his tears, that are forced from him in this day of his necessity? when he is conscious to himself, that in that long day of God's grace and patience, he turned a deaf

ear to all his merciful invitations, and rejected the counsel of God against himself? In a word, how can he, who would not know, in that his day, the things which belonged to his peace, expect any other but that they should now be for ever hid from his eyes, which are ready to be closed in utter darkness?

I will not pronounce any thing concerning the impossibility of a death-bed repentance: but I am sure that it is very difficult, and I believe very rare. We have but one example, that I know of, in the whole Bible, of the repentance of a dying sinner; I mean that of the penitent thief upon the cross: and the circumstances of his case are so peculiar and extraordinary, that I cannot see that it affords any ground of hope and encouragement to men in ordinary cases. We are not like to suffer in the company of the Son of God, and of the Saviour of the world; and if we could do so, it is not certain that we should behave ourselves towards him so well as the penitent thief did, and make so very good an end of so very bad a life.

And the parable in the text is so far from giving any encouragement to a death-bed repentance and preparation, that it rather represents their case as desperate, who put off their preparation to that time. How ineffectual all that the foolish virgins could do at that time did in the conclusion prove, is set forth to us at large in the parable; they wanted oil, but could neither borrow nor buy it: they would then fain have had it, and ran about to get it; but it was not to be obtained, neither by en-  
Ver. 8, 9, 10,  
11, 12.  
 treaty nor for money. First they apply  
 themselves to the wise virgins, for a share in the  
 overplus of their graces and virtues:  
Ver. 6.  
 “The foolish said unto the wise, Give us

of your oil, for our lamps are gone out; but the wise answered, Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you." The wise virgins, it seems, knew of none they had to spare: and then they are represented as ironically sending the foolish virgins to some famous market where this oil was pretended to

Ver. 9. be sold; "Go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves." And as dying

and desperate persons are apt to catch at every twig, and when they can see no hopes of being saved, are apt to believe every one that will give them any;

so these foolish virgins follow the advice;

Ver. 10. "And whilst they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut: and afterwards came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us; but he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not."

You see how little, or rather no encouragement at all there is, from any the least circumstance in this parable, for those who have delayed their preparation for another world, till they be overtaken by death or judgment, to hope by any thing that they can do, by any importunity which they can then use, to gain admission into heaven. Let those consider this with fear and trembling, who forget God, and neglect religion all their lifetime, and yet feed themselves with vain hopes by some device or other to be admitted into heaven at last.

Fifthly, I observe, that there is no such thing as works of supererogation; that is, that no man can do more than needs, and than is his duty to do, by way of preparation for another world. For when

Ver. 8. the foolish virgins would have begged of the wise some oil for their lamps—

"The wise answered, Not so, lest there be not enough



for us and you." It was only the foolish virgins, who, in the time of their extremity, and when they were conscious that they wanted that which was absolutely necessary to qualify them for admission into heaven, had entertained this idle conceit—That there might be an overplus of grace and merit in others sufficient to supply their want: but the wise knew not of any they had to spare, but supposed all that they had done, or could possibly do, to be little enough to qualify them for the glorious reward of eternal life: Not so, say they, μήποτε, lest at any time, that is, lest when there should be need and occasion, all that we have done, or could do, should be little enough for ourselves: and in this point they had been plainly instructed by the bridegroom himself. "But ye when ye have done all, say, we are unprofitable servants, and have done nothing but what was our duty to do."

Ver. 9.

And yet this conceit of the foolish virgins, as absurd as it is, hath been taken up in good earnest by a grave matron, who gives out herself to be the mother and mistress of all churches, and the only infallible oracle of truth—I mean the church of Rome, whose avowed doctrine it is, That there are some persons so excellently good that they may do more than needs for their own salvation: and therefore, when they have done as much for themselves, as in strict duty they are bound to do, and thereby have paid down a full and valuable consideration for heaven, and as much as in equal justice between God and man it is worth; that then they may go to work again for their friends, and begin a new score; and from that time forwards may put the surplusage of their good works as a debt upon God, to be laid up in the public treasury of the church, as so many bills of credit, which the pope by his pardons and

indulgences may dispense, and place to whose account he pleases: and out of this bank, which is kept at Rome, those who never took care to have any righteousness of their own, may be supplied at reasonable rates.

To which they have added a further supply of grace, if there should be any need of it, by the sacrament of extreme unction, never heard of in the Christian church for many ages; but devised, as it were on purpose, to furnish such foolish virgins with oil, as are here described in the parable.

And thus by one device or other they have enervated the Christian religion to that degree, that it hath almost quite lost its true virtue and efficacy upon the hearts and lives of men: and instead of the real fruits of goodness and righteousness, it produceth little else but superstition and folly; or if it produce any real virtues, yet even the virtue of those virtues is in a great measure spoiled by their arrogant pretences of merit and supererogation, and is rendered insignificant to themselves by their insolent carriage and behaviour towards God.

Sixthly and lastly, If we could suppose any person to be so overgrown with goodness, as to have more than needs to qualify them for the reward of eternal life; yet can there be no assigning and transferring of this overplus of grace and virtue from one man to another. For we see that all the ways that could be thought on of begging, or borrowing, or buying oil of others, did all prove ineffectual; because the thing is in its own nature impracticable, that one sinner, who owes all that he hath, and much more, to God, should have any thing to spare wherewithal to merit for another.

Indeed our blessed Saviour hath merited for us all the reward of eternal life, upon the condition of

faith and repentance and obedience : but the infinite merit of his obedience and sufferings will be of no benefit and advantage to us, if we ourselves be not really and inherently righteous. So St. John tells us, and warns us to beware of the contrary conceit ; “ Little children, let no man deceive you, he that doth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.”

If we do sincerely endeavour to please God, and to keep his commandments in the general course of a holy and virtuous life, the merit of Christ's perfect obedience and sufferings will be available with God for the acceptance of our sincere though but imperfect obedience. But if we take no care to be righteous and good ourselves, the perfect righteousness of Christ will do us no good ; much less the imperfect righteousness of any other man who is a sinner himself. And the holiest man that ever was upon earth, can no more assign and make over his righteousness, or repentance, or any part of either, to another that wants it, than a man can bequeath his wisdom or learning to his heir or his friend : no more than a sick man can be restored to health by virtue of the physic which another man hath taken.

Let no man therefore think of being good by a deputy, that cannot be contented to be happy, and to be saved the same way, that is to go to hell, and to be tormented there in person, and to go to heaven, and be admitted into that place of bliss only by proxy. So that these good works with a hard name, and the making over the merit of them to others, have no manner of foundation either in Scripture or reason, but are all mere fancy and fiction in divinity.

The inference from all this shall be the application which our Saviour makes of this parable—“ Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor

the hour wherein the Son of man cometh ;” as if he had said, the design of this parable is to instruct us, that we ought to be continually vigilant, and always upon our guard, and in a constant readiness and preparation to meet the bridegroom ; because we know not the time of his coming to judgment, nor yet, which will be of the same consequence and concernment to us, do any of us know the precise time of our own death. Either of these may happen at any time, and come when we least expect them. And, therefore, we should make the best and speediest provision that we can for another world, and should be continually upon our watch, and trimming our lamps, that we may not be surprised by either of these ; neither by our own particular death, nor by the general judgment of the world ; “ Because the Son of man will come in a day when we look not for him, and at an hour when we are not aware.”

More particularly, we should take up a present and effectual resolution not to delay our repentance, and the reformation of our lives, that we may not have that great work to do, when we are not fit to do any thing ; no, not to dispose of our temporal concernments, much less to prepare for eternity, and to do that in a few moments, which ought to have been the care and endeavour of our whole lives ; that we may not be forced to huddle up an imperfect, and I fear an insignificant repentance ; and to do that in great haste and confusion, which certainly does require our wisest and most deliberate thoughts, and all the consideration in the world.

And we should provide store of oil in our vessels, wherewith to supply our lamps, that they may burn bright to the last : I mean, we should improve the grace which we receive in baptism, by abounding

in the fruits of the Spirit, and in all the substantial virtues of a good life; that so “an entrance may be ministered to us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

By this means, when we are called to meet the bridegroom, we shall not be put to those miserable and sharking shifts which the foolish virgins were driven to, of begging, or borrowing, or buying oil; which will all fail us, when we come to depend upon them; and though the dying man may make a hard shift to support himself with these false comforts for a little while, yet when the short delusion is over, which will be as soon as ever he is stepped into the other world, he will, to his everlasting confusion and trouble, find the door of heaven shut against him; and that, notwithstanding all his vast treasure of pardons and indulgences, which have cost him so much and are worth so little, he “shall never see the kingdom of God.”

And, lastly, we should take great care that we do not extinguish our lamps by quitting the profession of our holy religion upon any temptation of advantage, or for fear of any loss or suffering whatsoever. This occasion will call for all our faith and patience, all our courage and constancy.

*Nunc animis opus, Ænea, nunc pectore firmo.*

When it comes to this trial, we had need to “gird up the loins of our minds,” to summon 1 Pet. i. 13. all our forces, and to “put on the whole armour of God, that we may be able to stand fast in an evil day, and when we have done all to stand.”

And now, my brethren, to use the words of St. Peter, “I testify unto you, that this is 1 Pet. v. 12. the true grace of God wherein ye stand.”

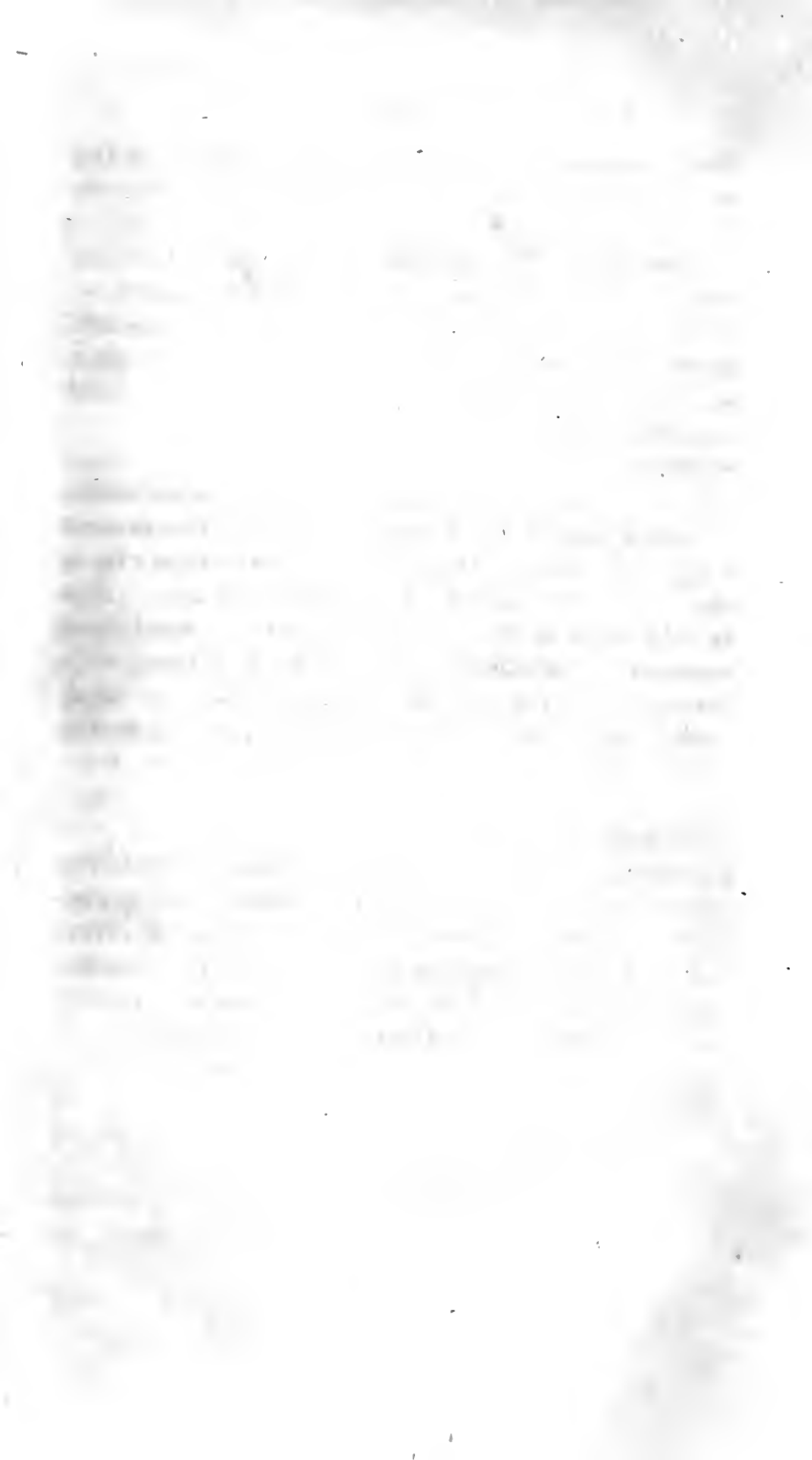
The Protestant reformed religion, which we in this nation profess, is the very gospel of Christ, the true ancient Christianity.

And, for God's sake, since in this hour of temptation, when our religion is in so apparent hazard, we pretend to love it to that degree, as to be contented to part with any thing for it, let us resolve to practise it; and to testify our love to it, in the same way that our Saviour would have us shew our love to him, by keeping his commandments.

I will conclude all with the apostle's exhortation, so very proper for this purpose, and to this present time, "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ;" that is, chiefly and above all take care to lead lives suitable to the Christian religion: and then, as it follows, "Stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel; and in nothing terrified by your adversaries, which to them is an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God."

Now unto him that is able to establish you in the gospel, and to keep you from falling; and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy; to the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

END OF VOL. II.











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