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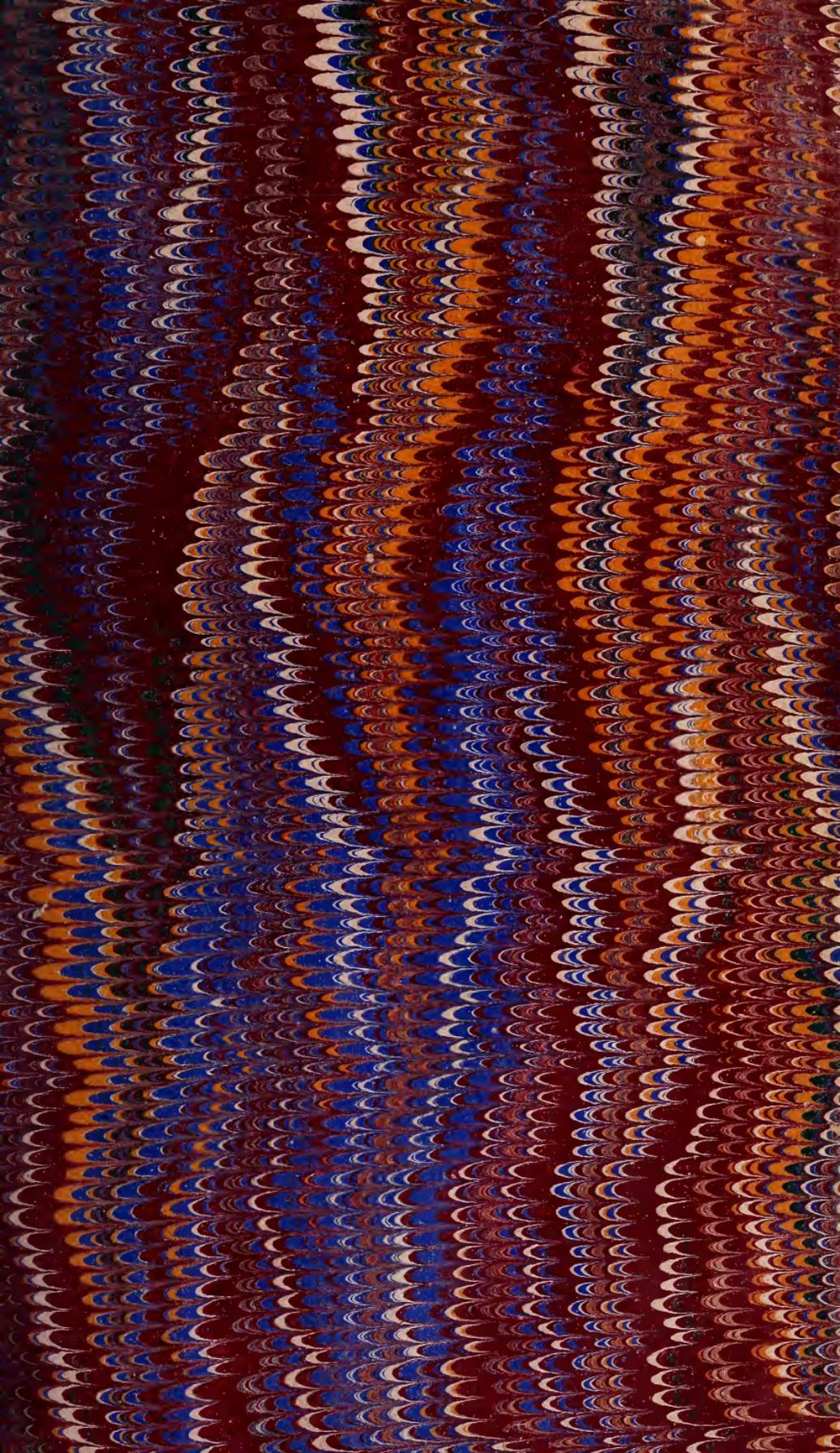
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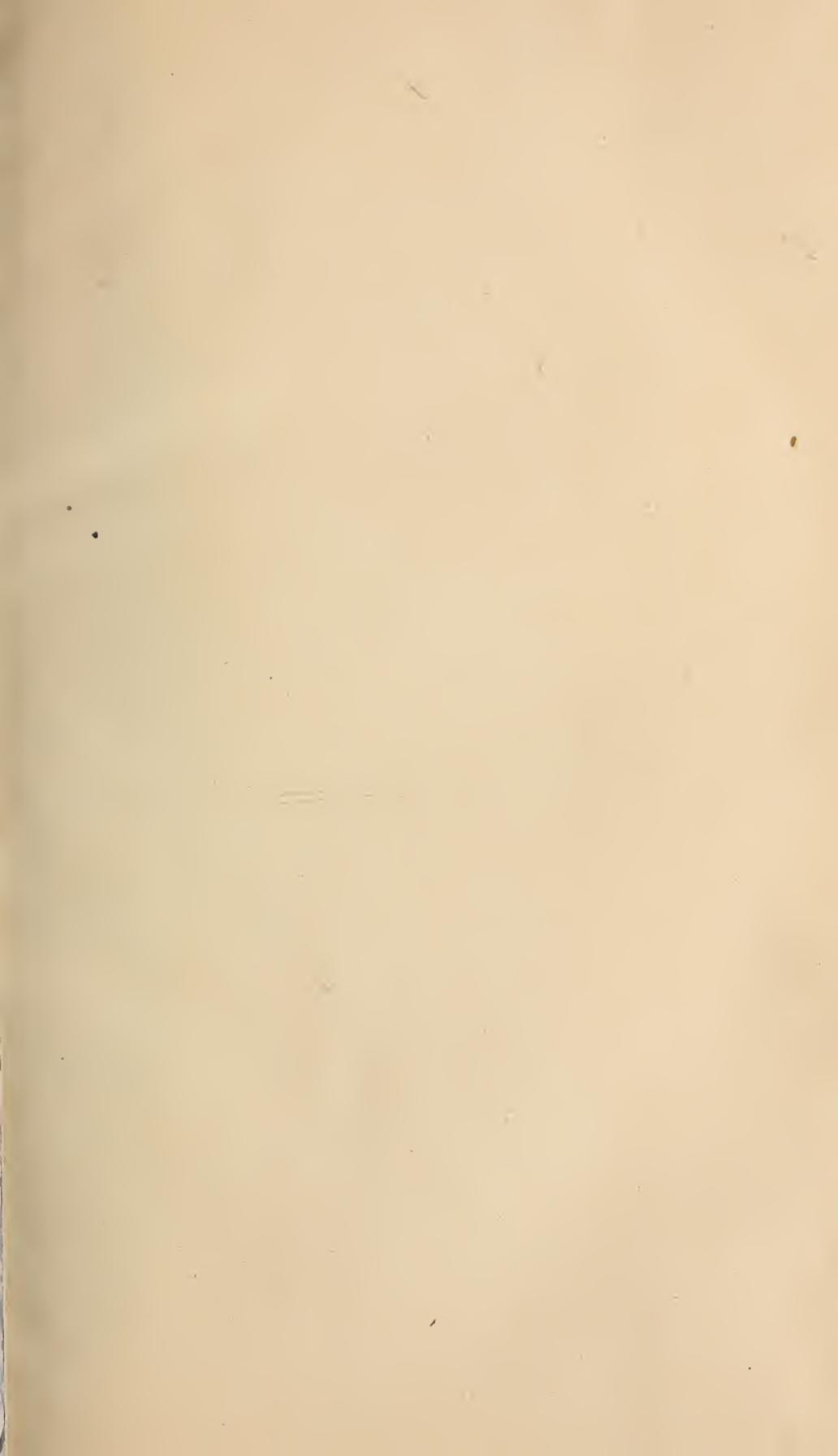
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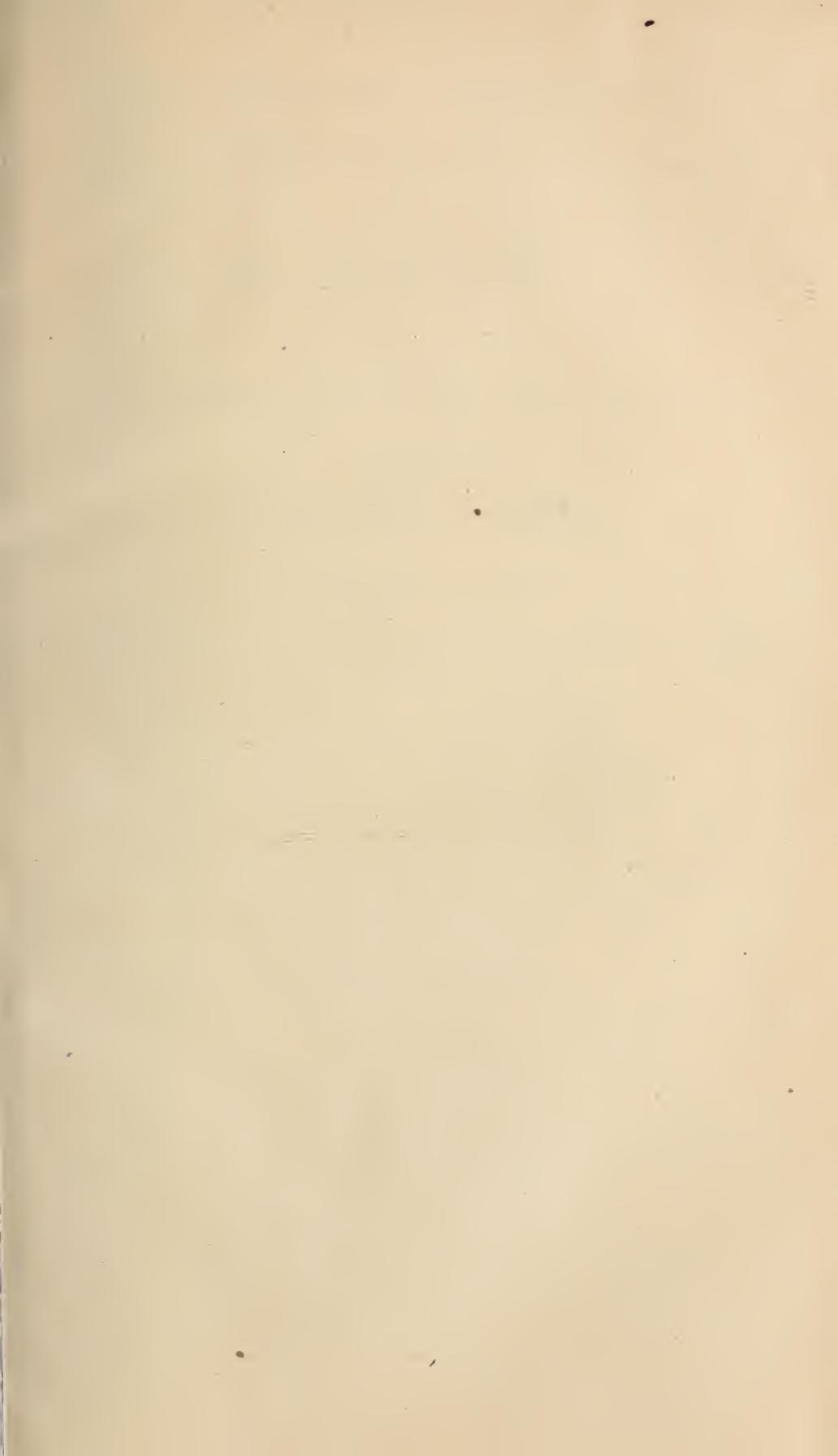
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA













*J. Vaughan B.D.*

COUNSELS OF PRUDENCE.

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A

SERMON,

ON THE

WISDOM OF THE SERPENT

AND THE

INNOCENCE OF THE DOVE;

IN WHICH ARE RECOMMENDED

*General Rules of Prudence; with particular Directions relating to Business  
Conversation, Friendship, & Usefulness.*

FOR THE USE OF YOUNG PEOPLE.

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BY NATHANIEL LARDNER, D. D.

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*First Published in the Year 1737.*

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LIVERPOOL,

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY F. B. WRIGHT,

*No. 4, Swift's Court, Castle Street;*

Sold by David Eaton, No. 187, High Holborn, London; and by the  
Booksellers in general.

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## COUNSELS OF PRUDENCE.

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MATT. X. 16.

*Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.*

THIS advice is found among those directions, which our blessed Lord gave his disciples, when he sent them from him upon a commission in his life-time here on earth.—“These twelve Jesus sent forth, saying: go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.” Matt. x. 5—8.

It is reasonable to conclude, that the disciples received this commission with much pleasure and satisfaction, accounting it a great honor done them; and conceiving at the same time fond expectations of honor and acceptance where-ever they came. They were to carry with them very joyful and desirable tidings, that “the kingdom of heaven was at hand:” they were empowered to confer very great benefits, and were required to do all freely, without receiving any gratuity. The limitation in their commission could not but be a high recommendation of it: the good news was to be published to Jews, and them only, not to Gentiles, nor to Samaritans.

But our Lord thought not fit to dismiss them without some particular counsels and directions, which would be of use to them now, but especially hereafter; when their commission should receive an enlargement, both with regard to the subject matter of their message, and the persons to whom they were to carry it. And he judged it needful to give them some hints of a different reception from what they thought of, and some cautions to be upon their guard; that they might not afford any just ground for miscon-

structions or injurious reflections, nor do any thing that should tend to draw upon themselves a disagreeable treatment. He therefore tells them, "Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves." 'You mean well yourselves, and you think well of others. But I must forewarn you, that many to whom you are going, have selfish and malicious dispositions, and are subtle and artful.' "Be ye therefore wise as Serpents, and harmless as doves." 'Maintaining your present innocence and integrity, decline dangers as much as possible, and take care not to give any ground for reflection upon your conduct.

This advice then of our savior to his disciples, will give me just occasion to recommend some rules and directions of prudent conduct and behavior to those who are entering upon the stage of action in the world. In doing which I shall take this method:

I. I shall represent the nature of prudence.

II. I shall show the necessity, grounds, and reasons of prudence.

III. I intend to lay down some rules and directions concerning a prudent conduct, with regard both to our words and actions.

I. I shall represent the nature of prudence.

In general, it is a discerning and employing the most proper means of obtaining those ends, which we propose to ourselves. He who aims at his own advancement is prudent, if he contrive a good scheme for that purpose, and then put in practice the several parts of it with diligence and discretion. If the end aimed at be the good and welfare of others, in any particular respect; then prudence lies in taking those methods, which are most likely to promote the advantage of those persons, and in doing that in the way least prejudicial to ourselves, and most consistent with our own safety.

It is an important branch of prudence to avoid faults. One false step sometimes ruins, or however greatly embarrasses and retards a good design. Therefore, prudent conduct depends more on great caution and circumspection than great abilities. A bright genius is necessary for producing a fine composition. Courage and presence of mind are needful for a hazardous undertaking; but circumspection alone, such caution as secures against errors and faults, makes up a great part of prudent conduct, by preventing many evils and inconveniences.

Prudence likewise supposeth the maintaining of innocence and integrity. We may not neglect our duty to avoid danger. The principal wisdom is to approve ourselves to God, and it is better to suffer any temporal evil, than incur the Divine displeasure. These disciples of Christ were to go out and preach, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." That was the work assigned them by their Lord and Master, which therefore it was their duty to perform, and they could by no means decline. But they might do it in the way, which would least expose them to inconveniences, and was most likely to secure acceptance to their message and themselves. This is prudence.

We are not, out of a pretence of discretion, to desert the cause of truth. But we are to espouse it with safety, if we can; that is, maintain it in the way least offensive to others, and least dangerous to ourselves.

Nor have we a right from any rules of prudence to use unlawful methods to obtain our end. Our end is supposed to be good, and the means must be so likewise. Thus far of the nature of prudence.

II. I would now show the necessity, grounds, and reasons of prudence. These are chiefly the wickedness and weakness of men. The former is the reason, which our Lord refers to. "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye therefore wise as serpents." It is upon this ground likewise, that St. Paul recommends the practice of prudent caution; "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Eph. iv. 15, 16. Some men are malicious and designing enemies to truth and virtue, and to all that are hearty friends of either. Good men therefore are obliged to be upon their guard, and make use of some methods of defence and security. Others are weak and simple, and therefore liable to be misled and imposed upon by the insinuations of the subtle and malicious.

Nay, if there were no bad men, yet there would be need of a prudent behavior, because some who have not much reflection or experience, are apt to put wrong constructions upon harmless actions.

This leads us somewhat farther into the nature of prudence, and to observe a particular, which could not be so well taken notice of before we had observed this ground and reason of it. For a great part of prudence lies in de-

nying ourselves, so as to keep some way within the limits of virtue. A good man, if all about him were wise and good, might be secure in his innocence alone. It might then be sufficient to mean well, and to pursue directly the good ends he has in view, without doing any harm in the prosecution of them. But now, on account of the weakness of some, he must not only be innocent, but he must also obviate misconstructions and misrepresentations.

We may perceive this in an instance or two. Our Savior directs his disciples, at the eleventh verse of this chapter; "Into whatsoever city or town ye enter, enquire who is worthy, and there abide till ye go thence." This is more particularly expressed in another gospel: "In the same house remain eating and drinking, such things as they give: go not from house to house." Luke x. 7. They had not then in the eastern countries houses of public entertainment. And it was usual for men of good dispositions, such as our Lord terms worthy, to entertain strangers.—The disciples were sent two and two. They were not to make a long abode in any place, and would not be thought burdensome by any that were worthy, or hospitable men. But our Lord charges them *not to go from house to house*, or remove from the place they had first resorted to. This perhaps might be sometimes done very reasonably. But our Lord does now in a manner absolutely restrain his disciples from acting thus, whatever some others might do; that they might not give any the least ground of suspicion, or insinuation, that they were curious about their entertainment.

It was upon this principle that the apostle Paul went yet farther, and in some places, particularly in Greece, waved his right to a subsistence from those he taught, as he observes to the Corinthians: "If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power, but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ." 1 Cor. ix. 12. Again, ver. 19. "Though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant to all, that I might gain the more." This rule he observed also at Thessalonica: "For ye remember, brethren, our labor and travel: for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God." 1 Thess. ii. 9.

I have now given you a view of the nature of prudence, and the reasons of it.

III. In the next place I am to lay down some rules and directions concerning a prudent conduct, with regard to our words and actions.

This is indeed a work of some niceness and delicacy, and is most properly reserved for men of distinguished characters. There is likewise oftentimes a backwardness in men to pay any deference to directions of this kind, except they are delivered by men of large experience, and of great renown for wisdom. For this reason, as it seems, Solomon in his book of Proverbs, containing excellent rules of virtue and prudence, thought fit to introduce wisdom herself, proclaiming her kind intentions to mankind, and delivering many of those directions, that men might be the better induced to hearken to them. And when he was about to publish some remarks upon the world, and the affairs of men in it; he aggrandises his own character, and sets it off to the best advantage, giving himself the title of the *Preacher*, or *Collector*, Ecc. i. 1. One who had been long and carefully employed in laying up a store of just and useful observations: and who had good opportunities for that purpose, as he was *King in Jerusalem*: affirming likewise, “that he had given his heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: that he had seen all the works that are done under the sun, and that his heart had great experience in wisdom and knowledge.” Ecc. i. 1,—16.

As we have before us for our guidance the observations of those who have been eminent for wisdom, and whose character is well established in the world; it may be presumed, that all these high qualifications are not now requisite for a performance of this nature. And I would hope, that they, for whom the following directions are chiefly intended, are already so wise, or so well disposed at least, as to be willing to hearken to good counsel from any one who means them well. It will be my care to deliver such rules of prudence, as have been approved and recommended, by those who have had a knowledge of the world, and are esteemed good judges of mankind. And I shall generally support the rules laid down by reasons, which if they do not convince, the counsel itself may not be less regarded.

Rules of this sort are very numerous, and have been often given, as many are in the book of Proverbs, without connection or dependence on each other. I shall propose

those I mention in the following methods:—First, I shall observe some general rules of prudence; and then some particular directions relating to business, civil conversation in the world, more intimate friendship and private relations; lastly, usefulness to others.

I. I shall mention some general rules of prudence. The preservation of our integrity in acting strictly according to the rules of religion and virtue, will not be allowed a place among these rules. However, (as has been already shown) it ought to be supposed. Our blessed Lord does not omit the innocence of the dove, when he recommends the wisdom of the serpent. I must therefore again desire it may be observed, that nothing I am about to say is to be understood as inconsistent with integrity; which, though not properly a rule of prudence, is oftentimes of advantage, and is both a mean of security, and adds weight and influence to a man's character. "He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely, but he that perverteth his way shall be known." Prov. x. 9. Again, "In the way of righteousness there is life, and in the path-way thereof there is no death." ch. xii. 28. Moreover, "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day," ch. iv. 18. Though virtuous and upright men should for a while lie in obscurity, they may shine hereafter with a greater lustre. And, which is above all external considerations and advantages of this present world, virtue is of the highest importance to the inward peace of the mind, and our everlasting happiness in the world to come. Supposing then a strict regard to uprightness of heart, and innocence of behavior:

1. The first rule of prudence I lay down is this, that we should endeavor to know ourselves. He that knows not himself may undertake designs he is not fit for, and can never accomplish; in which he must therefore necessarily meet with disappointment. Nor can any man have comfort and satisfaction in an employment that is unsuitable to his temper.

Beside a knowledge of our own genius, temper, and inclination; it is needful that we should be also possessed of a just idea of our outward circumstances and condition, and the relation we bear to persons about us. It is one branch of prudence for a man to behave agreeably to his own particular character. If he mistake that, he will be

guilty of many improprieties. But a just discernment of our own circumstances, and of our relation to other men, will make way for an agreeable and acceptable deportment.

The knowledge of yourselves will prevent conceit on the one hand, and meanness of spirit and conduct on the other. You will readily act with that modest assurance, which becomes your birth, estate, age, station, abilities, skill, and other advantages; without departing from your just right, or assuming more than ought to be reasonably allowed you.

2. Endeavor to know other men. It is a point of charity to hope the best of every man, and of prudence to fear the worst. Not that these are inconsistent. It would be to misrepresent a Christian virtue extremely, to suppose, that it obliged us to trust men without any knowledge of them. We are to hope and suppose of every man, that he is good and honest, till we have some proof to the contrary. This is the judgment of charity. But we are not bound to employ men, or confide in them, till we have some positive evidences of their honesty and capacity for the trust we would commit to them, or the work in which we would employ them.

Some men are unreasonably suspicious and jealous. Because they are bad themselves, or because they have had dealings with some that are so, they have formed a notion that all men are false and unfaithful. This is a wicked extreme. They who are in it are fitly punished for so disadvantageous and unjust an opinion of their fellow-creatures. Such must needs become contemptible themselves. They may be safe, but they can never make any figure in society; it being, I suppose, impossible for one man alone to carry on any important design, or do any thing considerable in any business or profession. There is therefore a necessity of mutual confidence among men.

On the other hand, some good men are apt to think, that all other men are so. This is oftentimes the sentiment likewise of the young and unexperienced. And indeed it must be some uneasiness to those who are innocent and undesigning themselves, to suspect other men, or to withhold trust and confidence from them. But however kind and favorable their apprehensions and inclinations may be, it would certainly be imprudent to trust to all appearances, and give credit to every pretence. The counsel in the text is given by our Lord to his honest, well-meaning disciples, because

he knew there were men in the world of bad dispositions, more than these unexperienced disciples were aware of; "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents." Solomon has an observation to this purpose: "The simple believeth every word, but the prudent looketh well to his goings," Prov. xiv. 15. The confidence placed in men ought to be proportioned to the evidences of their faithfulness and capacity. If any act otherwise, there is danger of shame and disappointment. It must therefore be of great advantage in life to be able to form a true judgment of man.

The knowledge of men, the skill of discerning their talents and dispositions, will be of use not only in business, but also in civil conversation, in the choice of friendships and relations, in designs of usefulness, and indeed in every occasion and occurrence of life. You will thereby know, whom to trust with safety, whom to be free and open with in conversation, whose favor it is your interest to seek, on whom you can bestow your favors and services with a likely prospect of doing some good, or with hopes of grateful returns, if ever you should want them.

3. Watch, and embrace opportunities. This is a rule, which ought to be observed with regard to our words and actions. "There is a season for every thing, and every thing is beautiful in its time." Ecc. iii. 11. "There is a time to speak, and a time to keep silence," says Solomon, ver. 7. Again, "A word spoken in due season, how good it is!" Prov. xv. 23. "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver," ch. xxv. 11.

In all affairs there are some special opportunities which it is a point of wisdom to improve. "He that gathers in summer is a wise son. But he that sleepeth in harvest, is a son that causeth shame," Prov. x. 5. Some opportunities, like that here mentioned by Solomon, are obvious to all. And it must be gross stupidity not to know them, and incorrigible sloth to neglect them. But there are some opportunities, which will be observed and taken by none but those who are discerning and attentive. Every one can see an opportunity, when it is past; but he only who is wise, sees it beforehand, or perceives and embraces it, when present.

4. Advise with those who are able to give you good counsel. "Without counsel purposes are disappointed, but in the multitude of counsellors they are established," Prov.

xv. 22. At least, in all important and difficult cases call in the aid of some friends. "Every purpose is established by counsel, and with good advice make war," ch. xx. 18. It is great presumption in any man to be self-sufficient, and to suppose, that in all cases he can act well by his own skill alone.

As counsel ought to be asked, so there should be a disposition to hearken to it; or at least, to weigh well the reasons that are brought for or against any design. "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkens unto counsel is wise," Prov. xii. 15.

But yet there is need of some discretion in the choice of counsellors. They should be usually the aged and experienced; always, if possible, such as are sincere and disinterested. I scarce need therefore to caution you against advising with your rivals and competitors. If you are so happy as to have parents, to whom you can have recourse, you must be in the right to consult with them in affairs of moment. If you have not this advantage, however, recollect the advices they have given you. Perhaps they have left with you some counsels of prudence, as well as of virtue. When you are forming designs inconsistent with their counsels, give such designs a second consideration, before you take a final resolution. This may be reckoned a point of wisdom, as well as a piece of respect due to those who heartily wished your welfare.

After them, advise with, and hearken to those who are most like them in a sincere and unaffected concern for your true interest. But if any whom you consult, always advise according to your own inclinations, you may be assured they are not your friends. It is not your interest they consult, but their own. So likewise, if any, of whom you honestly ask advice, with an intention to be informed and guided by them, are shy and reserved; though at other times, and upon other occasions, they are open enough, you should remember, not to go to them again. It is not worth the while to reveal your designs to such. It can be of no advantage, and may be attended with some inconvenience.

5. Restrain and govern your affections. This is of great importance to the prudent conduct of life. In all debates, he who is calm and composed, as all are sensible, has a vast advantage over a heated adversary. But I mean not the re-

straint of anger only, or resentment upon a provocation; but a steady government of all the passions, and a calm and composed temper of mind in all occurrences. He who is overset by a cross accident, is lost beyond redress and can never get out of a difficulty, though there still remain several ways of escape and recovery.

Avoid too great eagerness for any earthly thing. Men of violent inclinations are immediately for action. They have no sooner thought of a thing, but they must have it. They are at once passed the state of deliberation within themselves, and of consultation with others. Men who are extremely eager for gain and riches, are not always the most successful. They precipitate all their measures. They can never have an opportunity, because they cannot wait till it offers. Such usually run desperate hazards, and accordingly meet with great losses: Solomon, who has so often spoken of the benefit of diligence, does nevertheless discourage eagerness of spirit and action, as ruinous and destructive.—“The thoughts of the diligent,” says he, “tend only to plenteousness: but of every one that is hasty, only to want,” Prov. xxi. 5.

Then, the men of hasty spirit often plunge themselves into great difficulties, which no after-thought of their own, nor kind assistance of their friends, can extricate them out of. What Solomon says of men subject to intemperate anger, is very likely to be the case of all who have any other ungoverned passion: “A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment: for if thou deliver him, yet thou must do it again.” Prov. xix. 19. If you help them out of one trouble, yet they will soon run themselves into some other. And in another place, the same wise man has given a lively image of the defenceless and deplorable condition of those who are under the government of violent passions: “He that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.” Prov. xxv. 28.

It seems to be for this reason, that men of lesser abilities do often succeed better in business, and indeed in some important affairs, than the more acute and penetrating.—They have slow capacities, but they are abundantly recompensed by the coolness of their passions. They move on with a steady, even pace, without slips or falls; till at length, to the surprise of all who were not very discerning indeed, they distance many, who set out with much more life and vigor.

These are general rules of prudence. They need not be mentioned again. But they ought to be observed upon every particular occasion, and will be of use in all the affairs and actions of life that require prudent conduct and management.

II. I am now to lay down some particular rules of prudence concerning several branches of conduct, and divers circumstances of life. They will concern these four points before-mentioned; business, civil conversation, more intimate friendships and relations, and usefulness to others.

1, Of business I may not presume to give many directions relating to this matter. But I apprehend it to be a point of great prudence, for a man to endeavor to be fully master of his employment. He who is skilful in his calling, and diligently attends to it, and is punctual to his promises and engagements, can seldom fail of encouragement. These may be generally reckoned surer means of success than a large acquaintance, address, importunity, or any other such-like arts of procuring the dealings of men: though these may not be entirely neglected, and may be of use, if they are not too much relied on. Interest is a prevailing principle, and that will dispose men to be concerned with, and employ those who are skilful, diligent, and punctual.

It is also esteemed a point of prudence for men to abide in the employment to which they have been educated, and in which they have once engaged, unless there be some great and particular inconvenience attending it, or some strong and peculiar inducement to another.

But by no means hearken to the speeches of those who would draw you off from all employment. Some there are in the world, men of sprightly and aspiring fancies (as they would be thought) who would persuade you that business is below the dignity of rational beings; or however, of all who would shine and be distinguished. You will be justified by Solomon in throwing contempt on such imaginations. "He that is despised, and has a servant, is better than he that honoreth himself, and lacketh bread." Prov. xi. 9. Again, ver. 11. "He that tilleth his land, shall have plenty of bread, but he that followeth vain persons shall have poverty enough."

2. The next thing concerning which I would give some directions is civil conversation. In general, endeavor to act according to your own character, and maintain that suitably

to the persons you meet with, of different abilities, principles, and circumstances.

He is happy in the art of conversation, who can preserve a mean, without being light, or formal; neither too reserved nor too open. Reservedness is disagreeable and offensive; too great openness, in mixed company, with which you are not well acquainted, is often attended with dangerous consequences. It may be a good rule for every man to guard especially against that extreme, which he is most liable to fall into; by which he is in the greatest danger of exposing himself, or offending others. Which is the worst extreme may not be easy to determine. But I think, if we will take the judgment of Solomon, too great openness must be the most inconsistent with prudence. For silence is with him a mark of wisdom, and there is scarce any one thing he has oftener recommended than the government of the tongue; nor any thing he has more plainly and more frequently condemned, than talkativeness. I shall remind you of some of his sayings upon this argument. "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that restraineth his lips is wise." Prov. x. 19. "He that hath knowledge spareth his words: even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise; and he that shutteth his lips, is esteemed a man of understanding." ch. xvii. 27, 28.— "The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright; but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness." ch. xv. 2. "A fool uttereth all his mind, but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards." ch. xxix. 11. "Wisdom resteth in the heart of him that hath understanding; but that which is in the midst of fools is made known." Prov. xiv. 33. "He that keepeth his mouth, keepeth his life; but he that openeth wide his mouth, shall have destruction." ch. xiii. 3. Especially, be cautious what you say of others; and be not too forward in giving characters, either by way of praise, or dispraise.

The only end of conversation is not to entertain, or instruct others. You are likewise to aim at your own improvement, and the increase of your present stock of learning and knowledge. Nor is it necessary, in order to be agreeable, that you should entertain the company with discourse. You may as much oblige some men by patient attention to what they say, as by producing just and new observations of your own. For young persons particularly, silence and modesty must be advantageous qualities in con-

versation. St. James's precept is general: "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak." James i. 19. And if attended to, would lessen the multitude of some men's words, very much to their own benefit, and the improvement of society.

Another rule of prudence relating to this matter, which is also a point of duty, is: "If possible, live peaceably with all men." Rom. xii. 18. Do not needlessly offend, or oblige any. A resolution to please men at all adventures, amidst the present variety of sentiments and affections in the world, would engage us, at seasons, to desert the cause of truth, liberty, and virtue. And therefore our Lord has justly pronounced a woe upon those who are universally applauded, saying: "Woe unto you when all men speak well of you." Luke vi. 26. Such a reputation is rarely to be obtained without a base and criminal indifference for some things very valuable and important to the general interests of mankind. However, do not despise any man, though ever so mean. Malice and hatred are active principles. And, as has been often observed, one enemy may do you more harm than many friends can do you good. Nor is there any man so mean, or so feeble, but he may some time have an opportunity of doing you much good, or much harm.

You are not to be afraid of men, nor too solicitous to please them, nor to stoop to flattery, or meanness, to gain their favor. These are methods neither very virtuous nor very prudent. For they seldom procure lasting esteem or affection. If you gain men's favor by flattery, you can keep it no longer than you are willing to be their slaves, or their tools. But you may endeavor by easy civilities, and real services, to oblige and gain all you can. This we may do, this we ought to do, according to the rules of christianity, good breeding, and prudence.

Choose, as much as may be, the conversation of those who are wiser and more experienced than yourselves. Avoid the company of those who indulge intemperate mirth, and neglect the rules of decency; from whom you can expect no benefit, and from whom you are in danger of receiving a taint to your virtue, or a blot to your reputation. "He that walketh with wise persons," says Solomon, "shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed," Prov. xiii. 20.

3. In the third place, I shall mention some observations concerning more intimate friendships and private relations. It is a rule to choose friends among acquaintance, and not to enter into intimacy with those of whom you have had no trial, because a false friend is the most dangerous enemy. Solomon has a direction relating to this point: "Thine own friend, and thy father's friend forsake not." Pro. xxviii. 10. The meaning is not that we should not desert such, or refuse to assist them when they are in distress; but it is a rule of prudence to choose for friends, or to apply to those, when we are in any trouble or difficulty, whose sincerity and faithfulness have been tried and experienced.

In the choice of friends, it may be prudent to have some regard to equality of age, as well as circumstances, and to an agreement of sentiments and dispositions.

If you are to avoid the conversation of the openly vicious (as was before observed) you are to make friendship only with men of known and approved virtue. Let those be your friends whom God himself loves; the meek, the humble, the peaceable, who abhor strife and contention. Solomon's caution against familiarity with men of a contrary disposition is delivered with some peculiar concern and earnestness: "Make no friendship," says he, "with an angry man, and with a furious man thou shalt not go, lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul." Prov. xxii. 24, 25. You may likewise consider whether they show a good œconomy in their own affairs: what has hitherto been their behavior among their friends and acquaintance, what proofs they have given of fidelity, discretion, candor, generosity. The more good properties meet in your friend, the more entire and comfortable will be your friendship, and the more likely is it to be durable. Happy is the man who has a few friends; true, discreet, generous. But to admit into intimacy, men destitute of all good qualities, who neither have faithfulness nor generosity to stand by you in distresses and afflictions, nor wisdom to direct you in difficulties, would be only to increase the troubles and vexations of life, without abating any of them, or making provision for a perplexed and difficult circumstance.

Solomon, who was sensible of the blessing of a true friend, and has described the advantages and the offices of friendship, has also represented the disappointment and vexation of misplaced confidence. Concerning the advan-

tages of friendship he speaks in this manner: "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." Prov. xvii. 17. Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, for he has not another to lift him up." Again, "if two lie together, then they have heat; but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not easily broken." Ecc. iv. 9,—12. But then he has observed likewise, by way of caution and admonition: "Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble, is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint." Prov. xxv. 19.

When you have adopted any into intimacy and friendship, they are in a great measure upon a level with relations. Though they differ somewhat, I shall speak of them jointly, to avoid prolixity.

There are here two things principally to be aimed at: one is, that friendships and alliances be preserved without open ruptures: the other is, that while there remains an outward show of friendship, or alliance subsist: there may be a real harmony, and a mutual exchange of affections and services.

In the first place, it is of great importance, that friendships and alliances, once contracted, should be preserved without open ruptures. For, though you have right on your side, yet, breaches between friends, or relatives, are seldom without scandal to both parties. But if you escape that, you will not avoid all uneasiness in yourselves. A distant strangeness, or open variance, after mutual endearments, will be grievous to men of kind and generous dispositions. The other end is the preservation of real harmony.

In order to secure both these ends, several things are of great use. It is an observation of Solomon relating to this point: "A man that hath friends must show himself friendly." Prov. xviii. 24. You must not admit a selfish temper, You are to be concerned for your friend's interest, as well as your own.

As perfection is not to be found on earth, you are to be prepared and disposed to overlook some faults. You are not to know every thing which you see or hear. "He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter, separateth very friends." Prov. xvii. 9.

“A fool’s wrath is presently known; but a prudent man covereth shame.” Prov. xii. 16. If any difference happen, drop it again as soon as you recover your temper. “The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water. therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with,” ch. xvii. 14. You are not to break with a friend for a small matter.

The better to secure the lasting love and good will of your friends, aim not barely at the preservation of a real affection for them, and the performance of real services; but consult likewise the manner of performing benefits. You think this worthy of your regard in order to gain a friendship; why should you not also for preserving, or cherishing it?

Indeed, all good offices should be done in an obliging manner; and friendly actions are to be improved by friendly words. There is a polite piece of advice in the book of Ecclesiasticus: “My son, blemish not thy good deeds; neither use uncomfortable words, when thou givest any thing. Shall not the dew assuage the heat? So is a word better than a gift. Lo, is not a word better than a gift? But both are with a gracious man,” Ecc. xviii. 15, 16, 17.

Trespass not too far on the goodness and affection of the kindest and most loving friend or relative by too frequent contradictions, especially in matters of small moment; or by too keen, or too frequent jests, or by any seeming neglect, or a rude familiarity; but whilst you use the openness, freedom and confidence of a friend; oblige yourselves to the same, or very near the same outward forms of civility and respect with which you receive a stranger. This must be of some importance, because few men can persuade themselves, that they are really beloved, when they seem to be despised.

4. The last thing to be spoken of is usefulness to others. Though I am giving rules and directions chiefly to young people, who are but setting out in the world; yet I think it not proper to omit entirely this matter, there being few good and innocent persons, however young, who have not also some generosity; and they are apt to be forming designs of usefulness to other men, as well as of advancement for themselves.

There are two branches of usefulness; one concerning the interest of civil society, the other the interest of truth

and religion, or the temporal, and the spiritual good and welfare of men.

One branch of usefulness is serving the interest of civil society. For this every man may be concerned, having first carefully informed himself about it, that he may make a true judgment wherein it consists. You should manifest a steady regard to the public welfare upon every occasion that requires your assistance: showing that you are not to be imposed upon by false pretences, and that your integrity is inviolable; that you will not for a little present profit, nor for all your own personal share in the world, sell, or betray the welfare of the public, and of mankind in general. If you maintain this steadiness in the way suitable to your station, it will procure you weight and influence. I suppose this may be more advisable, than to imitate those, who out of a forward zeal for the public have been so far transported as to leave their proper station, and set upon reforming the world, hoping to root out at once all abuses and corruptions. From some things that have already happened in the world, in almost every age and part of it, one may safely foretel, what will be the issue of such an undertaking. You will be baffled, and then despised. Possibly, Solomon has an eye to such attempts as these, when he says, "Be not righteous over-much, neither make thyself over-wise: why shouldst thou destroy thyself?" Ecc. vii. 16.

It is a regular and becoming deportment in a man's own proper station, which is most likely to give him weight and authority. Go on therefore by a just discharge of all the duties of your condition, to lay up a stock of reputation and influence. To do this will be great prudence, and to improve it as occasions offer, or to hazard and lay it all out for the good of the public, in a case of emergency, will be both prudent and generous.

The other branch of usefulness is promoting the interest of truth and religion. There are three or four rules to be observed here, which may be collected from some directions, and the example of our blessed Lord and his apostles. "Cast not your pearls before swine: if they persecute you in one city, flee into another: instruct men as they are able to bear it, use mildness of speech, and meekness of behavior."

These rules partly regard our own safety, and partly

the best way of obtaining the end aimed at. For as every good man ought to have a zeal for the happiness of others, and particularly for promoting truth and virtue; so it is a point of prudence to pursue such good ends in the use of those means, which are most likely to obtain them, and with as little danger or damage to ourselves as may be.

The first is a rule delivered by our Saviour; "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." Matt. vii. 6. There is a rule of like import in the Proverbs: "Speak not in the ear of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of thy words." Prov. xxiii. 9. This too is partly the design of that direction, which St. Paul gives to Timothy: describing some men that had a "form of godliness, denying the power of it; from such," says he, "turn away." 2 Tim. iii. 5. Leave them, as men whom you have no prospect of doing any good to. Our Lord himself observed this rule; for he rarely addressed himself directly to the Pharisees, but rather taught the people: and his disciples afterwards having made a tender of the gospel to the Jews, when they rejected it, went from them to the Gentiles." Acts xiii. 46.

The true character of those men who are not the subjects of instruction is this: they "trust in themselves, that they are righteous, and despise others," Luke xviii. 9. Again, "their heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should be converted and healed." Matt. xiii. 15.

These are not to be instructed. Nor would they admit a direct address and application to be made to them. You may warn others against them, you may weep over them, you may pray for them, but you cannot teach them. It is a dangerous thing to offer them any service to enlighten them. If they are not under some external restraints, *they turn again and rend you*. If therefore upon trial you meet with men of this character and disposition, you are to retreat as well as you can. The most that can be thought of is to wait for a better opportunity.

However, our blessed Lord gives this charge to his disciples: "What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light; and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the house top," Matt. x. 27. Proclaim the doctrine you

have heard from me publicly wherever you go, and do all that lies in your power to recommend it to all men. And it must be owned, that they who have an opportunity of applying it to great numbers of men, either by discourse or writing, have a vast advantage; and they are bound by their fidelity to Christ, and by all that is dear and sacred in truth, religion, and virtue, to improve this advantage to the utmost of their ability. If they scatter abroad the principles of religion some will fall upon good ground, whence may be expected a plentiful harvest.

The second rule relating to this matter is, "If they persecute you in one city, flee into another," Matt. x. 23.—You may decline the heat of men's rage and displeasure, and reserve yourselves for better times, or for more teachable and better disposed persons. Of the first believers after our Lord's ascension, it is said: "And at that time there was a great persecution against the church that was at Jerusalem, and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles," Acts viii. 1. It is likely, the apostles had some special directions from the Holy Ghost not to depart from Jerusalem, and they there enjoyed accordingly a special protection: but the rest of the believers left Jerusalem for the present, and shifted for themselves, as they could, in other parts. Nay, we afterwards find the apostles also observing this rule. Peter having been delivered out of prison by an angel, after he had been put in custody by Herod, "departed and went to another place," Acts xii. 17. Of Paul and Barnabas it is related, that when at Iconium, "there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews, to use them despitefully; they were aware of it, and fled into Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lies round about." chap. xiv. 5, 6.

Thirdly, teach men as they are able to bear it. So did our blessed Lord. Says the evangelist: "and with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it." Mark iv. 33. So he taught the disciples also, delivering some things with some obscurity, because they were not able to bear a plain and full revelation of them: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." John xiv. 12. This may be the fault of men, that they are not able to hear every truth plainly spoken: but yet there must be some compliance

and condescension in this respect. "And I, brethren," says St. Paul to the Corinthians, "could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ Jesus. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat, for hitherto ye were not able to bear it." 1 Cor. iii. 1, 2. You must therefore, as the apostles did, "become all things to all men, that by all means you may save some." 1 Cor. ix. 22. You are not to depart from your own integrity, nor your proper character, but so far as can be done consistent with these, you are to suit your instructions to men's abilities and conditions.

Fourthly, in this work use great mildness of speech, and meekness of behavior. You are not to provoke any that are teachable by reflecting on their want of understanding, nor to suffer your zeal to degenerate into rudeness. It has been observed by some, that the apostles of Christ were eminent examples of an excellent decorum in their discourses, and in their whole behavior. And among other directions to Timothy, St. Paul has not failed to recommend particularly meekness of behavior, as the most likely method of reclaiming men from their errors. "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle to all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing them that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth," 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25. That you may gain men to truth and virtue, apply the strongest arguments to their reason and conscience, without a contemptuous treatment of their persons or prejudices.

These gentle methods of reformation will be generally preferred by good men, and may be reckoned the most probable means of conviction: but I do not deny, that some faults and follies of men may fitly be ridiculed: and some men may be rebuked sharply by proper persons, and with all authority. All which is no more than putting in practice the direction of Solomon: "Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit." Prov. xxvi. 5.

I have now set before you some general rules of prudence, and some particular directions concerning divers branches of conduct. But you are not to suppose, that prudence is to be learned by rules only. It is rather a habit, which must be gained by observation, action, and experience. Suffer not yourselves to be embarrassed and

perplexed with a great multitude and variety of rules, nor be over solicitous about a proper decorum: for too great anxiety always spoils the performance. In a word, be but fully master of your own character, and possessed of an habitual desire of pleasing, together with a modest persuasion that you shall do well, and you will do so.

There can be no occasion for me to add a particular recommendation for the study of prudence, having before shown the necessity, and the grounds and reasons of it.—The text itself demonstrates the lawfulness and experience of prudent conduct. Nor can any be altogether insensible of the importance of it to success in life. Virtue, learning, the knowledge of arts and sciences, are like diamonds, they have an intrinsic value; but must be set and polished before they are fit for show or use. Though divers other natural and acquired accomplishments may procure affection and esteem, it is discretion only that can preserve them.

I am not apprehensive of any abuse of the directions here laid down. They have no tendency to make men selfish or cunning. They are designed for the young and inexperienced; as likewise for the honest, the good-natured, and the generous, of any age and condition. Though you should be simple, they who are designing will practice their arts of subtlety and mischief. By a prudent behavior you will not encourage their evil practices, but only secure yourselves against them, and be better qualified for success and usefulness in the world.

After all, you are not to depend upon your own care and prudence, but to recommend yourselves and your honest well-laid designs to the divine protection and blessing. It has been seen by those who have diligently observed human counsels and events, “that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill, but time and chance happeneth to them all.” Ecc. ix. 11. As all human affairs are liable to accidents and disasters, a firm persuasion, and serious regard to the overruling providence of God, which is not limited by the present scene of things, cannot but contribute to your happiness, by preparing your minds for all events, and enabling you to bear afflictions and disappointments with patience.

It may likewise be one good foundation of happiness, to admit but moderate affections for the great things of this

world. If you are truly religious, you may be content with a little, and will manage that well. Without a great estate, by frugal and prudent conduct, you may have enough for yourselves, and your immediate dependents; and be able to do good to others also. Happy had it been for some men, as well as for the public, if from the very first, and all their days, they had rather aimed to be wise and good, than rich or great. Finally, if you do good for the sake of doing good, which is a noble principle; and with a view to future rewards, which are incomparably great and certain: you will not be much concerned, though you miss of present rewards, which you know to be but trifles, and never were your principal aim.

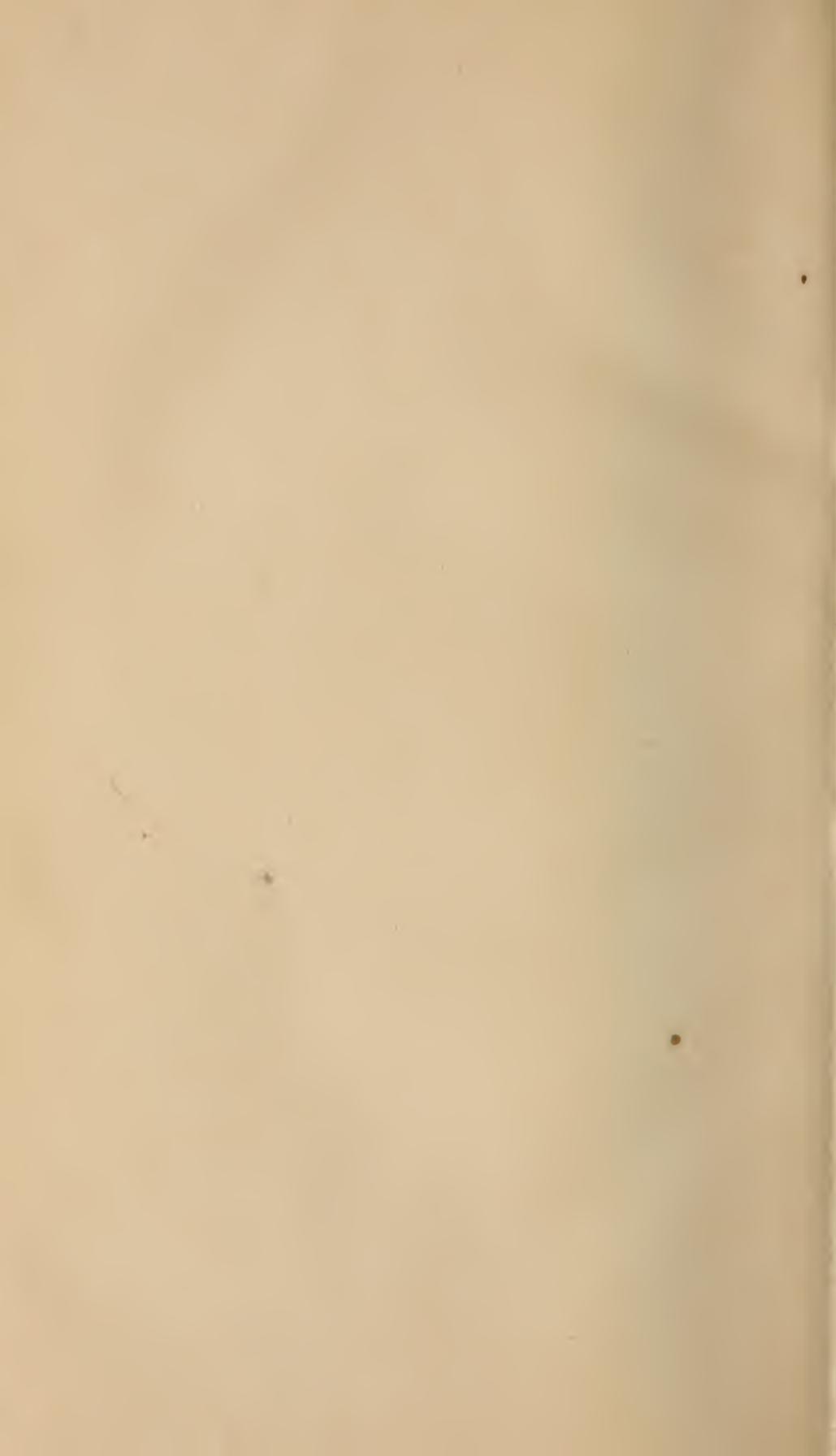
May you then add to virtue prudence, and abound in both yet more and more; that you may escape the snares of the wicked, and the misapprehensions of the weak: may have success in business, acceptance with mankind, happiness in friendship and every private relation; may be useful members of civil society, and of the church of God; may enjoy contentment, and peace of mind in all events: and at length obtain the distinguished recompence which God, who is infinitely wise and holy, will bestow upon those, who have not only been "undefiled in the way," Psalm cxix. 1. but have also advanced the welfare of their fellow-creatures, and the honor of his name in the world.

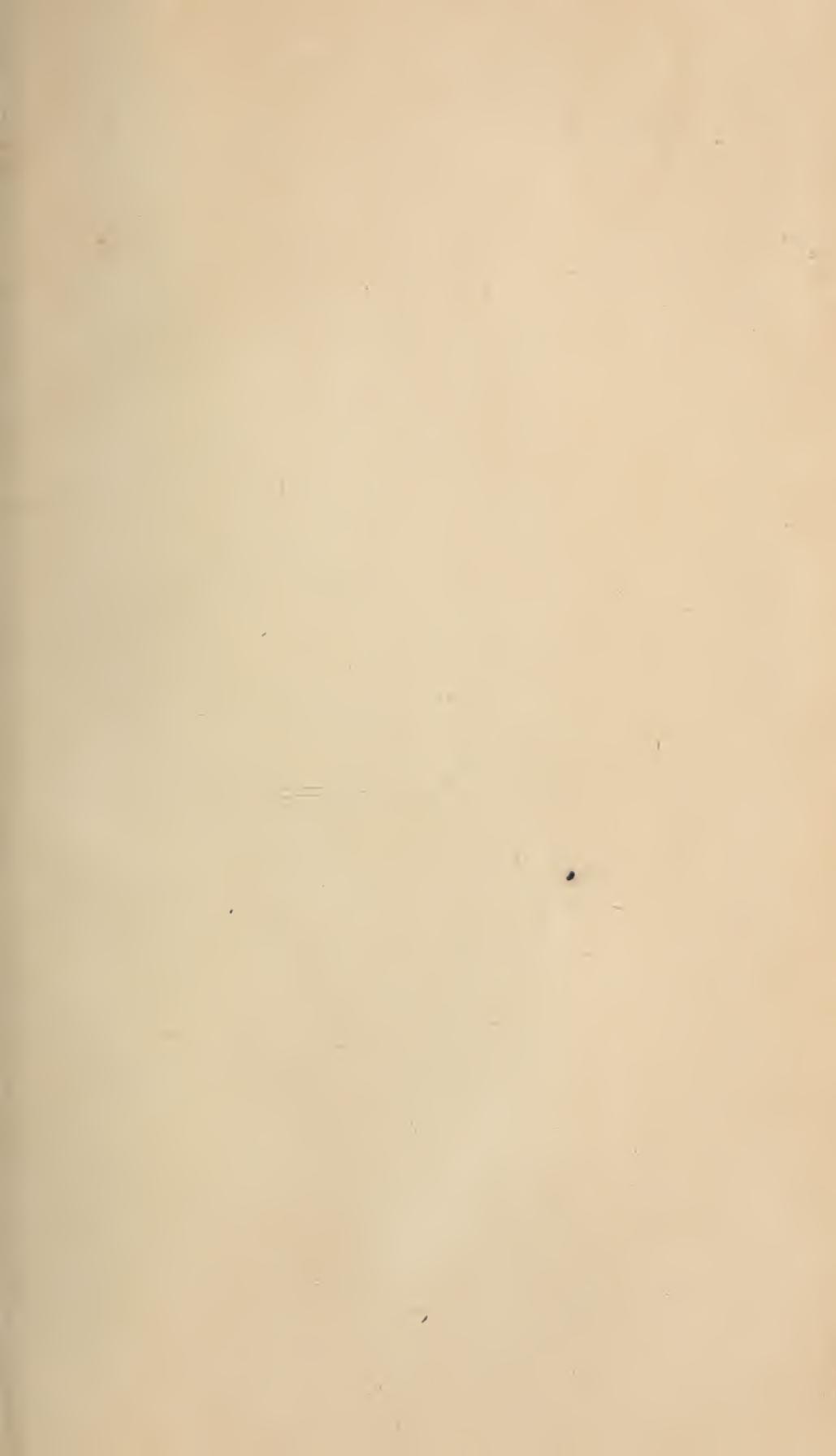


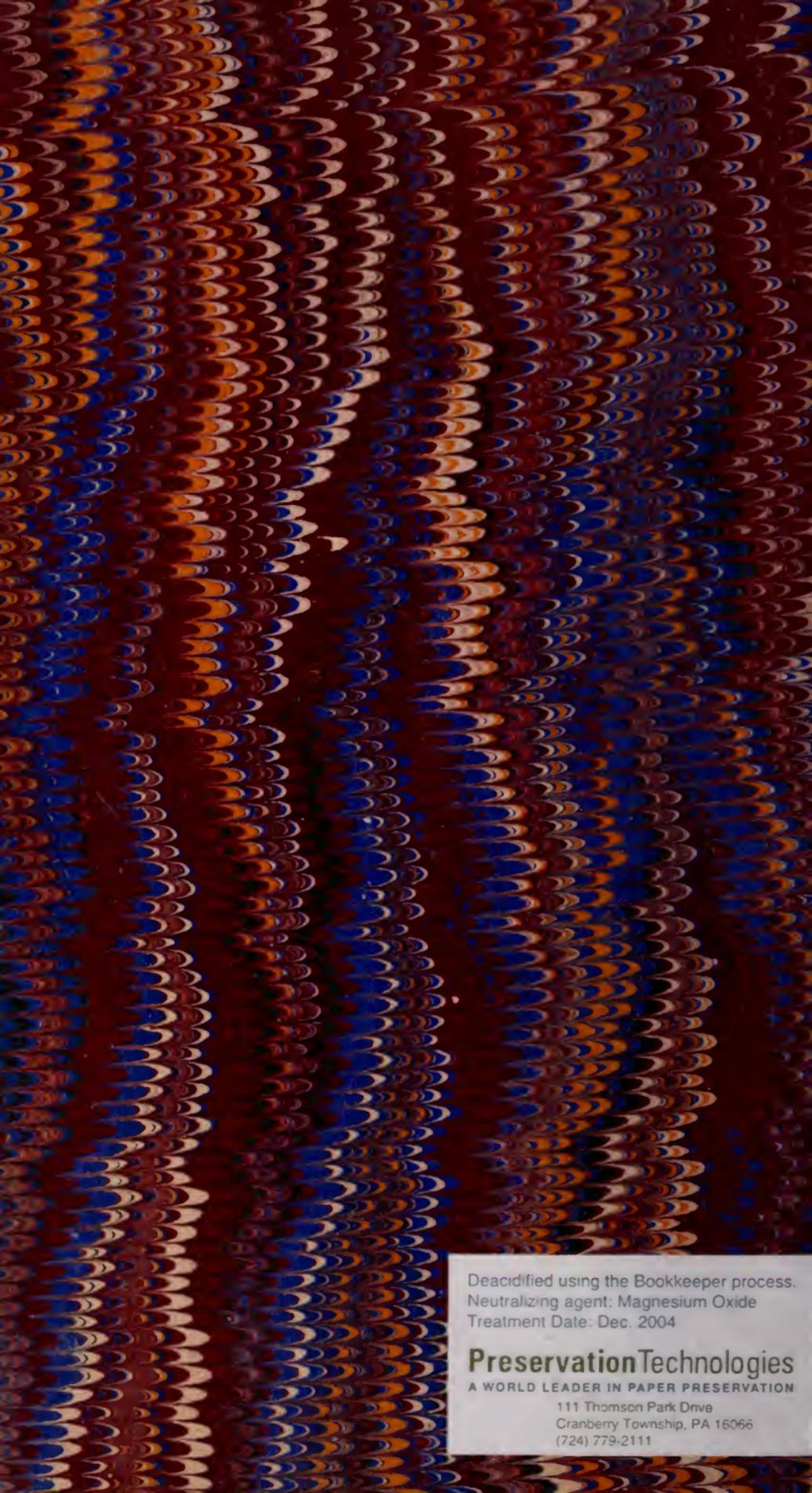












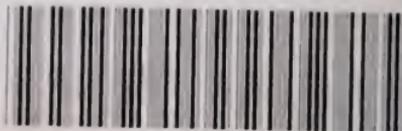
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