

A COMMENTARY ON
PROVERBS

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PREFACE.

PROVERBIAL teaching is one of the most ancient forms of instruction. It was well adapted to the rudeness and simplicity of the first ages, when books were few, and philosophy little understood. The mind, unpractised to the slow process of reasoning, would be much more easily arrested by terse sentences, expressing a striking sentiment in the fewest words. The wise man himself has given the best definition of these sententious maxims. Their elegance he describes under the figure of "apples of gold in pictures (network) of silver."* Their force and permanent impression are "as goads and nails fastened by the Master of assemblies"†--- driven closely home to the heart and conscience, and fastened in the memories by the appointed instructor of the people.

The antiquity of this teaching was recognised in the Church even before the age of Solomon. (1 Sam. xxiv. 13.) Classic Annals have recorded Aphorisms similarly constructed from men of wisdom. All of these however were of a later date. Some possibly might be dim scintillations from this fountain light; so that the King of Israel was ---as an old expositor has remarked ---'the disciple of none, but the instructor of them all.'‡ Indeed his mind largely dealt in this intel-

* Chap. xxxv. 11. This image reminds us of Mr. Addison's apt description conceived in his best style of taste and beauty--'By similitudes, drawn from the visible parts of nature, a truth in the understanding is, as it were, reflected by the imagination. We are enabled to see something like colour and shape in a notion, and to discover a scheme of thoughts traced out upon matter. And here the mind receives a great deal of satisfaction, and has two of its faculties gratified at the same time, while the fancy is busy in copying after the understanding, and transcribing ideas out of the intellectual world into the material.' Concluding paper on 'the Pleasures of the Imagination.' *Spectator*, No. 421.

† Eccles. xli. 11. LXX. write **paroimiai** (**para oimj**—via—sayings spoken in the way. Comp. Dr. Johnson's definition) a word often used in the New Testament for parables. (John, x. 6; xvi. 25, 29.) Marg. Both were of the same popular character. A proverb is often given in the form of a parable.

‡ Lavater. Comment. in Prov. Pref. Tigur. 1596.

lectual exercise. "He spake three thousand proverbs." (1 Kings, iv. 32.) And from this valuable mass of thought he was directed, under Divine inspiration, to "set in order" a collection for the instruction of the Church to the end of time.*

Possibly some would rather have desired the preservation of his discourses on Natural History (Ib. iv. 33), than on Practical Wisdom. But this Sovereign discrimination shews the real intent of the Scriptures--not to teach philosophy, but religion; not to make men of science, but men of sound godliness.

All competent judges will admit this Book to be eminently fitted for this great end. What the Roman Orator pronounced of Thucydides, applies far more truly to this King of Jerusalem ---'so full of matter, that he comprised as many sentences as words.'† This wonderful Book is indeed a mine of Divine wisdom. The views of God are holy and reverential. The observation of human nature is minute and accurate. The rule of life and conduct is closely applied, to make "the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. iii. 16, 17); so that, as Mr. Scott well remarks--'we shall perceive the meaning and utility of the Proverbs, in proportion to our experience in true religion, our acquaintance with our own hearts, and with human nature, and the extent and accuracy of our observation on the character and affairs of men.‡ Eusebius mentions the whole consent of the ancients, considering the Book of Proverbs to be 'Wisdom fraught with every kind of virtue.'§ Bishop Hall drew out mainly from it a complete system of 'Divine Arts.'|| And though the Apostate Julian

* Eccles. xii.9. Grotius supposes the Book to be a compilation from preceding writers. This degradation of Solomon is a gratuitous conjecture, unsupported by a title of evidence. But such are the irreverent liberties that proud learning dares to take with the Word of God!

† *Cicero de Oratore*, lib. ii. 14. Elsewhere he gives nearly the same judgment of Euripides. *Epist. Lib. xvi. 8.*

‡ Pref. to Comment. On Prov.

§ Hist. lib. iv. c. 25. **panareton sofian**. Jerome's direction to one of his friends for the education of his daughter is--'Let her have first of all the Book of Psalms for holiness of heart, and be instructed in the Proverbs of Solomon for her godly life.'--*Epist. vii. ad Laetam*. Matthew Henry, in his beautiful portrait of his mother, describes her as one, that was 'very well versed in Solomon's Proverbs, and the rules of wisdom, which may be fetched from thence for the conduct of human life, and knew how to apply them, and to use knowledge aright.'--*Sermon on the Death of Mrs. Katherine Henry*.

|| 'Solomon's Divine Arts of Ethics, Politics, Economics --that is --the Government of Behaviour, Commonwealth, Family --drawn into method out of his Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes.' *Works*, viii. 427. Edited by Rev. P. Hall. Oxford, 1837.

scornfully preferred to it the sayings of Heathen Philosophy;* yet the apostrophe of the son of Sirach was justly applied to its author-- 'How wise wast thou in thy youth, and as a flood filled with understanding! Thy soul covered the whole earth, and thou fillest it with dark parables.'†

As to its canonical authority' ---Michaelis well observes, 'that no Book of the Old Testament is so well ratified by the evidence of quotations.‡ A few of the Jewish Talmudists appear to have expressed some doubt of its Divine stamp, but upon grounds so futile, that they were abandoned upon a more mature consideration.§ Ecclesiastical History has recorded only one dissentient from the judgment of the universal Church; and that one condemned by her authoritative council.|| Witsius has admirably refuted the neological cavils of his day.¶ Nothing has been said from any quarter to weaken the unhesitating decision of our judgment, that the pen is that of the King of Israel; but the words are the wisdom of God.

Some difference exists among expositors as to the exact divisions of the Book. We have been led to divide it into three parts. In giving a more succinct account of these several parts, we shall avail ourselves largely, though necessarily in an abridged form, of the observations of a Biblical scholar, not more remarkable for his profound learning, than for his elegant taste.**

The first Part--all agree--extends from the opening of the Work to the close of the ninth chapter. It is--as Dr. Good observes-- 'chiefly confined to the conduct of early life. All the most formidable

* Apud Cyrill. Contra Julian. lib. vii.

† Ecclus. xlvii. 14, 15. The whole passage (verses 12-22) is very beautiful. Eusebius remarks of Solomon, that while, inspired by Divine wisdom, "he consecrated all his writings to the profit and salvation of souls; yet he used these dark 'parables' for the exercise of the mind. *Contr. Marcell.* lib. i. c. iii p. 17.

‡ Introd. to New Test. i. 207. Comp. especially in LXX. Chap. iii. 7. with .Rom. xii. 16; 11, 12, with Heb. xii. 5, 6; 34, with James, iv. 6. 1 Pet. v. 5; x. 12, with 1 Pet. iv. 8; xi. 31, with 1 Pet. iv. 18; xxv. 6, 7, with Luke, xiv. 8-10; 21, 22, with Rom. xii 20; xxvi. 11, with 2 Pet. ii. 22; xxvii. 1, with James, iv. 13, 14. It is a marked distinction drawn between this Book and the Apocryphal Book of Wisdom, so similar in character; that from the latter no quotation can be adduced in the New Testament.

§ Hottinger, Thesaur. Philol. lib. ii. c. 1. sect. 14. Comp. Carpzov. Introd. ad Lib. Canon. Part. ii. C. iv. § 7.

|| Theodore Mopsuest. condemned by 5th Council of Constantinople, A.D. 551.

¶ Miscell. Sacra, lib. i c. xviii. 30-34.

** Extracts from an unpublished Translation of the Book of Proverbs, by the late Dr. Good, in his *Life* by Dr. Gregory, pp. 286-306.

dangers to which this season is exposed, and "the sins which most easily beset it," are painted with the hand of a master. And while the progress and issues of vice are exhibited under a variety of the most striking delineations and metaphors, in their utmost deformity and horror; all the beauties of language, and all the force of eloquence are poured forth in the diversified form of earnest expostulation, insinuating tenderness, captivating argument, and sublime allegory, to win the ingenuous youth to virtue and piety, and to fix him in a steady pursuit of his duties towards God and man. Virtue is pronounced in the very outset to be essential wisdom, and vice or wickedness essential folly. The only wise man therefore is declared to be the truly good and virtuous, or he that fears God, and reverences his law; while the man of vice and wickedness is a fool, a stubborn or perverse wretch, and an abomination to Jehovah.

Wisdom is hence allegorized as a tree of life, yielding delicious shade, fruit, and protection to those that approach her branches ; throwing a garland of honour around their shoulders, and decorating their heads with a graceful chaplet, more precious than rubies. She is a sage and eloquent monitor, lifting up her warning voice at the gates and in the squares of the city; denouncing to the young the snares and dangers, to which they are exposed; and exhorting them to abandon "the way of the wicked, which is as darkness," for the path of the just, which is

-----'As the brightening dawn,
Advancing and brightening to perfect day.'*

The Second Part commences at the opening of the tenth chapter, as is obvious from the introductory clause. The style and manner of the second part are as different as possible from those of the first.

* We add two interesting testimonies, of a widely different character. The first part, including the first nine chapters, is a kind of exordium, and is varied, elegant, sublime, and truly poetical. The natural order is generally observed, and the parts are aptly connected together. It is embellished with very beautiful descriptions and prosopopoeias, and adorned with the most finished style, together with every kind of poetical ornament; so that it scarcely yields, in beauty, to any specimen of Sacred Poetry'--Bp. LOWTH'S *Lectures on Heb. Poetry*, xxiv. (Mr. Holden ventures to doubt whether this picture is not somewhat over-wrought.--*Pref. to Translation of Proverbs*, xxxix.) 'The first nine chapters of the Book of Proverbs present us with a most interesting specimen of "acceptable words." There is in them an inimitable union of admonitory fidelity, and enticing and subduing kindness. Like Paul, he "exhorts, comforts, and charges, as a father doth his children." The whole soul of the writer is breathed out in the earnestness of benevolent desire.'--WARDLAW on *Eccles.* xii. 10.

It is evidently designed for the use of persons advanced from the state of youth to that of manhood. While in the preceding, addressed to the young, the richest ornaments of the fancy are made choice of to captivate their attention, and allure them to a right practice; in the present all is business and activity, brevity, continuity, and terseness. Every thought, though as highly polished, is at the same time as compressed as possible; and the Writer, thoroughly aware of the value of every moment of time at this important period, lays down a complete series of short rules of life, and concentrates the most momentous precepts into the narrowest compass. The former appeals to the imagination; the latter to the judgment. The one exhibits all the genius of poetry; the latter all the art of composition; and hence the general matter is rendered as attractive in the one instance as in the other.

"The great object in each of the Proverbs of the present part, is to enforce a moral principle in words so few, that they may be easily learnt, and so curiously selected and arranged, that they may strike and fix the attention instantaneously; while, to prevent the mind from becoming fatigued by a long series of detached sentences, they are perpetually diversified by the changes of style and figure. Sometimes the style is rendered striking by its peculiar simplicity, or the familiarity of its illustration;¹ sometimes by the grandeur or loftiness of the simile employed on the occasion;² sometimes by an enigmatical obscurity,³ which rouses the curiosity; very frequently by a strong and catching antithesis;⁴ occasionally by a playful iteration of the same word;⁵ and in numerous instances by the elegant pleonasms or the expansion of a single or common idea by a luxuriance of agreeable words."⁶

The Third Part we conceive to comprise the last seven chapters. The first five were written by Solomon, and edited some centuries after by the royal scribes in the reign of Hezekiah. The two last were written by separate hands, but preserved by Divine care and altogether worthy of the place they hold in the inspired Canon.

The time when this book was written is a matter of some un-

¹ Chap. I. 19; xvi. 3; xxii. 2.

² Chap. xii. 58; xv. 11; xxi. 16, 22.

³ Chap. xvi. 24; xvii. 8; xviii. 20.

⁴ Chap. xiv. 10; xvi. 16; xvii. 10; xviii. 4; xix. 12; xx. 14.

⁵ Chap. xi. 15; xiii. 20; xvii. 13, 15.

⁶ Chap. xvi. 32; xvii. 17, 27, 28; xix. 6.

certainty. We cannot doubt but its contents were a part of "the three thousand Proverbs," which "he spake" before his most lamentable fall. (1 Kings, iv. 32.) They were therefore the exercise of his vast and comprehensive mind, under the full influence of his Divine wisdom. (Ib. verse 29.) They might, however, as many judicious critics have thought, have been "set in order" (Eccles. xii. 9) in their present form at a period subsequent to that afflictive event. Both parts of this hypothesis read a most solemn practical lesson. Do we see "outlandish women causing him to sin" (Neh. xiii. 26)--this "beloved of his God" falling himself into the snare, which he so minutely described, and against which he so earnestly and repeatedly warned?¹ Christian Ministers! does not Solomon, no less than St. Paul,² awfully teach us, that preaching to others will not save our own souls? The supposition of the posterior arrangement gives additional weight to his faithful admonitions. They come to us, like the exhortations of the restored Apostle,³ with all the force of painful experience, in the true spirit of his Master's command--"When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."⁴

The interpretation of this Book requires much care and sobriety. Believing the principles of the Old and New Testament to be essentially the same, it seems reasonable to expound the more obscure by the more clear. The primary duty is indeed to affix to each Proverb its own literal and precise meaning. This is undoubtedly its spiritual meaning--that is--the mind of the Spirit. In an extended application of this discovered meaning, or in deducing inferences from it, judgment, not imagination, must be the interpreter. When no other than a literal meaning is plainly intended, the object must be, not to search out a new and miscalled spiritual meaning, but to draw practical instruction from its obvious sense.

There is, however--we may remark--a line to be drawn between exposition and illustration. The figures used in this Book, *after their literal meaning has been wrought out*, may fairly be used as illustrative of other collateral truths, not specifically intended. The Sacred Writers appear to warrant this principle of accommodation,* though

¹ Chap. ii. v. vii. ix. xxii. 14; xxiii. 27, 28.

² 1 Cor. ix. 27.

³ 1 Pet. i. 13, 17; iv. 7; v. 8, with Matt. xxvi. 35.

⁴ Luke, xxii. 32.

* See the Apostle's application of Ps. xix. 4, at Rom. x. 18, and DODDRIDGE'S and GUYSE'S *Paraphrase*. Compo SCOTT on Chap. xxv. 6, 7.

its use requires great delicacy and consideration; lest it should divest Scripture of its determinate meaning, and identify us with those artists, whom Dr. South memorializes, 'who can draw anything out of anything.'*

But with all care to preserve a soundly-disciplined interpretation, we must not forget, that the Book of Proverbs is a part of the volume entitled--"The word of Christ." (Col. iii. 16.) And so accurately does the title describe the Book, that the study of it brings the whole substance of the volume before us. It furnishes indeed the stimulating motive to search the Old Testament Scripture (John, v. 39)--the true key that opens the Divine Treasure-house; so that, as Mr. Cecil observes--'If we do not see the golden thread through all the Bible, marking out Christ, we read the Scripture without the Key.'[†] This remark however does not undervalue its large mass of historical and practical instruction. But unquestionably Christ is the Sun of the whole Scripture system; "and in his light we see the light" (Ps. xxxvi. 9), that reflects upon every point of practical obligation, and quickens life and energy throughout the whole Christian path. There is therefore, as Professor Franke reminds us--'much JOY, comfort, and delight to be found in the writings of the Old Testament (especially in reading those places, which before were wearisome and almost irksome) when we perceive Christ is so sweetly pictured there.'[‡]

It has, been recorded, of Mary Jane Graham, 'that she was delighted in the course of her study of the Book of Proverbs to have Christ so much and so frequently before her mind'¹--a recollection--her biographer ventured to observe--of great moment for the spiritual discernment of the divine wisdom treasured up in this storehouse of practical instruction.'§ Indeed, considering that these "Proverbs set in order--these words of the wise"--were originally "given from one Shepherd" (Eccles. xii. 9-11), whom we cannot surely fail to identify, we might naturally expect them to record distinct testimony of himself.

We cannot but fear, however, that this portion of the sacred volume

¹ Chap. 1. viii. ix. &c.

* *Sermon on Matt. v. 44.*

† *Mrs. HAWKES'S Life*, p.171. So Augustine--'The Old Testament has no true relish if Christ be not understood in it.' *Ninth Tractat. on John.*

‡ *Christ the Sum and Substance of Holy Scripture.* Sect. xxi.

§ *Life*, chap. v.

is not generally estimated at its just value. Doubtless its pervading character is not, either explicit statement of doctrinal truth, or lively exercises of Christian experience. Hence the superficial reader passes over to some (in his view) richer portion of the Scriptural field. Now we readily admit, that all parts of the Bible are not of equal importance. But to value one part to the disparagement of another, is a slight to the divine testimony, that will be visited with a severe rebuke. Such a reader will only be possessed of mutilated fragments of truth, severed from their vital influence. He will never rise beyond a sickly sentimentalism. Seeking for novelty and excitement, rather than for the food of solid instruction; like Pharaoh's kine,* he devours much, but digests nothing. Never will he have light enough for the firm settlement of his faith; neither can he receive the true moulding of the mind of the Spirit, or the impress of the divine image.

But the question has been often asked--and that--not in cavilling, but in an anxiously enquiring, spirit--'How can I read this Book profitably ?' Not unfrequently the confession has been added--'My mind and soul do not get food from it. I think I am less interested in this, than in any other, part of Scripture. I acknowledge the wisdom of its sayings. I am fully persuaded, that, being the Word of God, it was not written in vain. The fault therefore must be in myself. Still the question returns-- How am I to read it with profit?'

Now it might almost appear, as if the rules given at the opening of the Book were intended to answer this question. (Chap. ii. 1-4.) Certain it is, that they do furnish the most satisfactory reply. The first and chief direction--that which gives life to every other--that which applies to every page and every verse of the Bible is--Begin with prayer--"Cry--lift up thy voice." Then combine a pondering mind with a praying heart. Actively apply thyself to "seek and search for the hid treasures." The riches lie not on the surface. Only those therefore, that dig into the bowels of the earth--not the readers, but "*the searchers of the Scriptures*"--are enriched. (John, v. 39.) If the surface be barren, the mine beneath is inexhaustible. Indeed it is a wise discipline, that has made an active spirit of meditation necessary to give solid and fruitful interest to this study, and to possess ourselves of

* Gen. xli 20, 21. Comp. the picture drawn, 2 Tim. iii. 7.

a blessing, which carelessness or indolence will never realize. The promise here held out to diligent investigation fixed that intelligent Christian just mentioned 'on one occasion in intense meditation for two hours. She appeared to be lost in astonishment and gratitude at the condescension and kindness of God in giving a promise, so free, so encouraging. She grasped it, as if determined not to let it go.'*

The habit of interested attention being fixed, how shall we best "apply the heart to the understanding" of the Book? Here the valuable exercise of Scripture reference will greatly expand our own thoughtful meditation. Gather contributions from all parts of the field. Many a doubtful or apparently uninteresting Proverb will thus be brightened in instructive application. We are persuaded, that an enlarged Scriptural study, with whatever collateral helps may be within our reach, will bring no regret in having rested awhile in this part of the field, instead of passing onwards to a more inviting surface. To advert once more to our Scriptural student--'She frequently employed herself in the profitable exercise of "comparing spiritual things with spiritual;" Scripture with itself; thus making God His own interpreter. Much light and heavenly unction she conceived herself to have gained by this means.'† The fruitfulness of this exercise will be, when we "find God's words" as our treasure; "eat them" as our invigorating food; and "they" thus become "the joy and rejoicing of our hearts." (Jer. xv: 16.) 'Set your affection'--saith the apocryphal writer--'upon my words. Desire them, and ye shall be instructed. Wisdom is glorious, and never fadeth away; yea, she is easily seen of those that love her, and found of such as seek her. She preventeth those that desire her, in making herself first known unto them. Whoso seeketh her early shall have no great travail; for he shall find her sitting at his doors. Whoso watcheth for her‡ shall quickly be without care. For she goeth about seeking such as are worthy of her, sheweth herself favourably unto them in the ways, and meeteth them, however, in every thought.'§

* *Life of Mary Jane Graham*, ut sup.

† *Ib.* Nicholls's Exposition of this Book, and Scott's Marginal References, will give much valuable assistance to this study. No foreign help, however, should damp the profitable interest of original research.

‡ **Ḫ aḡrupnhsaj** --whom wisdom scarcely affords time to sleep.

§ Wisd. vi. 11-16. The reader will find throughout this Exposition frequent reference

An accurate apprehension of the main end and scope of this Book will greatly facilitate the understanding of it. Different portions of Scripture may be seen to have different ends, all however subordinate to one end--primary and supreme. Without entering into detail foreign to our purpose, suffice it to remark, that the end of this Book appears to be, to set out a system of practical instruction, generally applicable. Nor let this be thought a low gradation in the Christian scheme. Unpalatable as it may be to the mere professor of godliness,* the true man of God will honour practical inculcation in its place, no less than doctrinal statement. "The truth as it is in Jesus"--that which flows from him, leads to him, and centres in him--that in which "we are to be learned, and to be taught by him"--is practical truth. (Eph. iv. 20-24.) While other parts of Scripture shew us the glory of our high calling; this may instruct in all minuteness of detail how to "walk worthy of it." Elsewhere we learn our completeness in Christ (Col. ii. 10): and most justly we glory in our high exaltation as "joint-heirs with Christ, made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." (Rom. viii. 17. Eph. ii. 6.) We look into this Book, and, as by the aid of the microscope, we see the minuteness of our Christian obligations; that there is not a temper, a look, a word, a movement, the most important action of the day, the smallest relative duty, in which we do not either deface or adorn the image of our Lord, and the profession of his name. Surely if the book conduced to no other end, it tends to humble even the most consistent servant of God, in the consciousness of countless failures. Not only therefore is the last chapter--as Matthew Henry would have it--'a looking-glass for ladies,' but the whole Book is a mirror for us all.

Nor is it only a mirror to shew our defects. It is also a guide-

to the Apocryphal Books of Wisdom--*but only as human authorities*. Mr. Horne has most demonstrably overthrown their claim to a place in the sacred canon. (*Introd. to Scrip.* vol. i. Append. No.1. last edit.) Yet while we would most distinctly mark the wide gulf between inspired and uninspired writings, there seems no necessity to lose much valuable and beautiful instruction, only because the writers were not inspired, or their writings were tainted with pernicious errors.

* We fear that Mr. Scott's hearers at the Lock as a sect have not died away. Their real objection--as his son admirably observed--'was not to Arminianism (of which they very probably scarcely knew the meaning) but to *half, or more than half the word of God*. They had been accustomed to overlook it themselves, and could not bear to have it pressed upon their notice by another.'--*Scott's Life*, pp. 232-235. Yet the preceptive part of an Epistle may be set out, so dissociated from the doctrine, that the main-spring of practical godliness is weakened, if not destroyed.

book and directory for godly conduct. The details of the external life, in all the diversified spheres, are given or implied with perfect accuracy, and with a profound knowledge of the workings of the human heart. 'Beside a code of laws directly religious, a variety of admirable rules stream forth from the deep recesses of wisdom, and spread over the whole field.* All ranks and classes have their word in season. The sovereign on the throne is instructed as from God.¹ The principles of national prosperity or decay are laid open.² The rich are warned of their besetting temptations.³ The poor are cheered in their worldly humiliation.⁴ Wise rules are given for self-government.⁵ 'It bridles the injurious tongue,⁶ corrects the wanton eye,⁷ and ties the unjust hand in chains.⁸ It prevents sloth,⁹ chastises all absurd desires;¹⁰ teaches prudence¹¹ raises man's courage;¹² and represents temperance and chastity after such a fashion, that we cannot but have them in veneration.'† To come to important matters so often mismanaged --the blessing or curse of the marriage ordinance is vividly portrayed.¹³ Sound principles of family order and discipline are inculcated.¹⁴ Domestic economy is displayed in its adorning consistency.¹⁵ Nay--even the minute courtesies of daily life are regulated.¹⁶ Self-denying consideration of others,¹⁷ and liberal distribution¹⁸ are enforced. All this diversified instruction is based upon the principles of true godliness.¹⁹ Thus if the Psalms bring the glow upon the heart, the Proverbs "make the face to shine." Indeed the Writer may mention as one motive that led him to this work; that, having in a former Exposition‡ shewn at large Christian experience to be built upon the doctrines of the gospel, he wished to exhibit Christian practice as resting upon the same foundation. That is not sound faith, that does not issue in practical godliness. Nor is there any true morality, apart from

¹ Chap. viii. 15, 16; xvi. 10-13; xx. 8, 26; xxi. 1; xxv. 2-5; xxviii. 16; xxix. 14; xxxi. 1-9.

² Chap. xi. 14; xiv. 34; xxiv. 6; xxviii. 2.

³ Chap. xviii. 11; xxiii. 4, 5; xxviii. 20, 22.

⁴ Chap. xv. 16, 17; xvii. 1; xix. 1, 22; xxviii. 6.

⁵ Chap. iv. 23-27; xvi. 32; xxiii. 1-3.

⁶ Chap. iv. 24; x. 31; xvii. 20; xxv. 23; xxvi. 20-26.

⁷ Chap. v. 20, 21; vi. 25-29; xxiii. 26, 27.

⁸ Chap. xviii. 5; xxviii. 8.

⁹ Chap. vi. 6-11; xii. 27; 4; xix. 24; xx. 4; xxiv. 30-34.

¹⁰ Chap. xxi. 25, 26.

¹¹ Chap. iv. 14, 15; vi. 1-5; xiv. 8, 15, 18; xxii. 3; xxv. 6-10.

¹² Chap. xxviii. 1.

¹³ Chap. xviii. 22; xix. 14; xxxi. 10, with xii. 4; xix. 13; xxi. 9, 19.

¹⁴ Chap. xiii. 24; xiv. 1; xix. 18; xxii. 6; xxiii. 13, 14; xxix. 15, 17, 19, 21.

¹⁵ Chap. xxvii. 28-27; xxxi. 10-27.

¹⁶ Chap. xxiii. 6-8; xxv. 17.

¹⁷ Chap. iii. 27, 28.

¹⁸ Chap. xi. 24; xxii. 9.

¹⁹ Chap. xxxi. 10, 30.

* Lord BACON'S *Advancement of Learning*, Book viii. chap. ii.

† Chap. v. 15-19, with xxiii. 29-35. Basil, quoted by Bp. Patrick.

‡ On Ps. cxix.

"the principles of Christ." This Book, if it be not, as the New Testament,--the Rule of Faith, may surely be considered as a valuable Rule of conduct. And--as Mr. Scott observes--'it would be very useful for those, who can command their time, at some stated season every day, to read and deliberately consider a few of these maxims with reference to their own conduct, in the various affairs in which they are concerned.'* Doubtless if the world were governed by the whole wisdom of this single Book, it would be "a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

One other weighty consideration the Writer would advert to, as having directed his attention to this Book--its distinctive character, as a *Book for the Young*. The wise man's father propounded a most anxious question--"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" His son in this Book has fully opened the answer--"By taking heed thereto according to thy word." (Ps. cxix. 9.) Nay he expressly states the Book to be written for the heeding of youth.¹ It takes them as it were by the hand, sets up way-marks to warn against coming danger and imminent temptations,² and allures them into the bright ways of God by the most engaging motives.³ And never surely was the object so momentous, as at the present day. Our young are growing up at a period, when "the foundations of the earth are out of course;" and when subtle and restless efforts are making to poison their hearts, and pervert their ways. Nothing therefore can be more important, than to fortify them with sound principles; that, when withdrawn from the parental wing into a world or a Church (alas! that we should be constrained to use, the term!) of temptation, they may be manifestly under a Divine cover, as the children of a special Providence. What this invaluable Book impresses upon their minds is, the importance of deep-seated principles in the heart; the responsibility of conduct in every step of life; the danger of trifling deviations for expediency's sake; the value of self-discipline; the habit of bringing everything to the Word of God; the duty of weighing in just balances a worldly and a heavenly portion, and thus deciding the momentous choice of an everlasting good before the toys of earth. These lessons, thoroughly inwrought, will prove the best security against all attempts to loosen

* Pref. to Comment. on Prov.

¹ Chap. i. 4; iv. 1, &c.

² Chap. i. 10-15; ii. 10-19; v. 1-13; vii.

³ Chap. iii. 1-18; viii. 17, &c.

the hold of principle, and to entice upon enchanted ground. This practical godliness--so far from wearing a forbidding, look, or being associated with gloom or sadness--casts a smile over a world of sorrow, is a sunbeam of comfort in suffering, and ever a principle of peace and steadfastness. "Great peace have they which love thy law; and nothing shall offend them." (Ps. cxix. 165.)

As to the matter of the exposition, the Writer cannot indeed say, with a Romish commentator,* 'that he has gone through all the circle of Biblical exposition, versions of the Scripture, Patristic reading, and classic literature bearing upon the Scripture.' He trusts, however, that it will be seen by the mass of references throughout the work, that he has taken due care to mature his own judgment, and to enlarge his scanty resources, by availing himself of the assistance of those expositors, who appear to have been most conversant with the original language, and to have given the most careful and sober interpretation. By a wider range, he would have probably rather perplexed than informed his readers.

He would not only add, in conclusion, in the words of one of the most valuable expositors†--that 'if there should be anything here to please the reader, ascribe not the writing to the pen, but to the writer; not the light to the lamp, but to the fountain; not the picture to the pencil, but to the painter; not the gift to the unfaithful dispenser, but to God the bountiful Giver.'

* Cornelius á Lapide.

† Geier.

Old Newton Vicarage,
Oct. 7, 1846.

ADVERTISEMENT
TO THE FOURTH EDITION.

The Writer desires gratefully to acknowledge the many testimonies of interest and edification connected with his Work. Deeply sensible as he is of its great imperfections, may his God have the glory!

In reference to the mass of Scriptural references, he would state, that his primary object in this, as in a former Exposition, was to draw out into view the unsearchable riches of the Sacred field. And if he may have sometimes inadvertently carried out this desire to an undue extent, he trusts, that upon the whole it may encourage some of his Readers to a meditative study of Holy Writ, so that "the Word of Christ may dwell in them richly in all wisdom," to their own enlarged profit, and to the edification of the Church.

He has been enabled to compress the work (without abridgement), in order to reduce the price for wider circulation. He has now only to commend it afresh to the blessing of his God, and to the kind acceptance of His Church.

*Hinton Martell Rectory,
July 16, 1859.*

In accordance with suggestions repeatedly made to the Author the Exposition of the first nine chapters has been reprinted, apart, for more extensive distribution, under the title of "A MANUAL FOR THE YOUNG;" at the price of 2s. 6d.

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EXPOSITION OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

CHAPTER I.

1. *The proverbs of Solomon, the Son of David, King of Israel;* 2. *To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding;* 3. *To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity;* 4. *To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.*

THE Book naturally opens with a short account of its author. Solomon is recorded as the wisest of men; a man of wisdom, because a man of prayer. (1 Kings iii. 12. Comp. chap. ii. 1-9.) His extraordinary wisdom was the admiration of the world. (1 Kings iii. 28; iv. 34.) Had he been the Son of Jeroboam, he would have commanded respect; much more as *the son of David*, formed by his godly prayers (Ps. lxxii. 1.) and counsels. (Chap. i-v. 1-4. 1 Kings ii. 1-4. 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.) And if a King's sayings, even though without intrinsic merit, are preserved; the wise teaching of this *King of Israel* (Eccles. i. 1; xii. 9, 10) may well demand our especial interest.

Valuable, however, as were Solomon's maxims for their own wisdom (exceeding the sages of his own or any other time) (1 Kings, iv. 29-31); they claim our reverence upon infinitely higher ground. "Behold! a greater than Solomon is here." (Matt. xii. 42.) Often does he speak in the person (Verse 20; viii. ix. xxiii. 26) always under the inspiration (2 Tim. iii. 16) of "the wisdom of God;" so that his sayings are truly "*Divine* sentences in the lips of the King." (Chap. xvi. 10.)

The great end of this inestimable book is to teach, not secular or political wisdom (though many excellent rules of each are interspersed)

(Chap. vi. 1-11; xxvii. 23-27; with xi. 14; xiv. 28, 34; xx. 18); but that knowledge of God (Verse 7), which, while it "maketh wise unto salvation, perfects and furnishes the man of God unto all good works." (2 Tim. iii. 15-17. Tit. ii. 11, 12.) Its glowing privileges are set forth. (Chap. iii. 13-18.) It is pressed upon us with intense earnestness, as "the principal thing," our very "life." (Chap. iv. 5-9, 13.) *Instruction* is the means of gaining it. We are directed *to perceive the words of understanding; to receive the instruction* as a complete rule of *wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity* (Comp. chap. ii. 9); sound principles, and their practical application. Here also *the simple*, so readily deluded (Chap. xiv. 15; xxi. 11. Ezek. xlv. 20), learn that *subtilty*, so needful to discriminate between truth and error (Philip. i. 10. 1 Thess. v. 21); to guard them from false teachers (Ps. xvii. 4. 1 John, iv. 1. Comp. Acts, xvii. 11); and to "convince gainsayers." (Tit. i. 9; ii. 8. Comp. Matt. xxii. 15-46.) Specially is *the young man* directed to this book.* His undisciplined ardour runs to waste. His mind fluctuates at the mercy of the winds of opinion in the world around him; and greatly does he need some settled master-principles to fix his purpose, choice, and conduct. Here then he finds *knowledge and discretion*; a religion, not of imagination, impulse, or sentiment; but the sound practical energy of Scriptural truth.

5. *A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels; 6. To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.*

Not only *the simple and the young*, but even *the wise*, may here gather instruction. For a truly *wise man* is one, not who has attained, but who knows that he "has not attained," and is pressing onward to perfection. (Philip. iii. 12. Comp. 1 Cor. iii. 18; viii. 2.) David, while conscious of comparative attainments, was ever seeking for higher light. (Ps. cxix. 98-100; with 18, 33, 34.) Indeed the richest stores would soon waste, without constant additions. *Hearing* is a great medium of knowledge. Jethro instructed Moses (Exod. xviii. 17-26); our Lord his disciples. (Matt. xiii. 11-16. John, xvi. 12.) Peter enlightened his fellow-apostles. (Acts, xi. 2-18.) Priscilla and Aquila "instructed Apollos in the way of God more perfectly." (Ibid. xviii. 24-26.) Indeed we must be hearers, ere we would be teachers. 'He gathers that hears; he spends that teacheth. If we spend before we gather, we shall soon prove bankrupts.'† The longer we learn, the more we feel ourselves to be learners; and the more ready we shall be to *hear, that we*

* Ps, cxix. 9. Over the gates of Plato's school, it was written: **Mhdeij agewmetrhtoj eisitw.** (Literally--Let no one who is not a geometrician enter.) But very different is the inscription over these doors of Solomon--Let the ignorant, simple, foolish, young enter. CARTWRIGHT in loc.--LAVATER in c. iv. 20-22.

† Bishop Hall.

may increase in learning. (Chap. ix. 9; xviii. 15.) And at such a crisis as this, both of the Church and of the world, how eagerly should we improve every medium of instruction, by which we might become "*men of understanding, and attain wise counsels*, to know what Israel ought to do!" (1 Chron. xii. 32.) The wise man himself expounded his words and dark sayings to the delight and instruction of his royal scholar (1 Kings, x. 1-5); so to a teachable hearer "the deep things of God" will be *interpreted*. (1 Cor. ii. 9, 10.) Hence the value of the Minister of God; "an interpreter, one of a thousand" (Job, xxxiii. 23. Comp. Acts, viii. 27-35); the divinely-appointed mean of bringing to the perfection of knowledge. (Eph. iv. 11-15. 1 Thess. iii. 10.) Many disorders and heresies might have been spared to the Church, if, instead of indulging the perversity of an unsettled judgment, men had honoured "the Priest, as the messenger of the Lord of Hosts," and in humble simplicity had "sought the law at his mouth." (Mal. ii. 7. Comp. Heb. xiii. 17, with 1 Cor. iv. 8; iii. 2-4.) Self-will may resist this suggestion as Romish domination. But a humble subjection *to the faithful "steward of the mysteries of God,"* coming to learn, not to teach; to have, not the curiosity fed, but the conscience satisfied. This reverence of God's ordinance will issue in the "good things of the heart established with grace." (Heb: xiii. 9.)

7. The fear of the Lord is the beginning (principal part, marg.) of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

The preface has stated the object of this Book of Wisdom. The book itself now opens with a noble sentence. "There is not"--as Bishop Patrick observes--"such a wise instruction to be found in all their books (speaking of Heathen ethics), as the very first of all in Solomon's, which he lays as the ground of all wisdom."* *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.* So Job had pronounced before. (Job, xxviii. 28.) So had the wise man's father. (Ps. cxi. 10.) Such is the weight of this saying, that Solomon again repeats it.† Nay--after having gone round the whole circuit; after having weighed exactly all the sources of knowledge; his conclusion of the whole matter is this, that the fear of God in its practical exercise "is the whole of man" (Eccles. xii. 13. Comp. Job, xxviii. 12-14, with 28)--all his duty; all his happiness; his first lesson and his last. Thus, when about to instruct us from the mouth of God, he begins at *the beginning, the principal* part. All heathen wisdom is but folly. Of all knowledge, the knowledge of God is the *principal*. There is no true knowledge without godliness. (Comp. Deut. iv. 6, 7.)

But what is this *fear of the Lord*? It is that affectionate reverence,

* Preface to his Paraphrase.

† Chap. ix. 10 Comp. the fine description by the son of Sirach. Ecclus. i. 14-20, 27.

by which the child of God bends himself humbly and carefully to his Father's law. His wrath is so bitter, and his love so sweet; that hence springs an earnest desire to please him, and--because of the danger of coming short from his own weakness and temptations--a holy watchfulness and fear, "that he might not sin against him." (Heb. xii. 28, 29.) This enters into every exercise of the mind, every object of life. (Chap. xxiii. 17.) The oldest proficient in the Divine school seeks a more complete moulding into its spirit. The godly parent trains up his family under its influence. (Gen. xviii. 19. Eph. vi. 4.) The Christian scholar honours it as the beginning, the head, *of all his knowledge*; at once sanctifying its end, and preserving him from its most subtle temptations.

Why then do multitudes around us *despise wisdom and instruction*? Because *the beginning of wisdom*--"the fear of God"--is not before their eyes." (Ps. xxxvi. 1.) They know not its value. They scorn its obligation. Wise they may be in their own sight. But surely God here gives them their right name. For *fools* they must be, to *despise* such a blessing (Jer. viii. 9); to rush into wilful ruin (Verses 22, 24-32. Comp. 1 Sam. ii. 25. 1 Kings, xii. 13. Jer. xxxvi. 22-32); to treasure up work for despairing repentance. (Chap. v. 12, 13 j xxix. 1.) Good Lord! May thy childlike *fear* be my *wisdom*, my security, my happiness!

8. *My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother*; 9. *For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.*

Let the young mark *the fear of the Lord* connected with reverence to parents. Thus the opening of this book puts honour upon "the first commandment with promise." (Eph. vi. 2. Comp. 1 Tim. v. 4.) God here, speaking by the mouth of a parent or teacher,* blends paternal tenderness with his Divine authority—*My son*. The command supposes the godly character of parents, and recognises the responsibility of both parents.† Children are rational creatures. *Instruction*, not blind submission, must be inculcated. Yet they are wayward. *Instruction* must therefore be enforced with the authority of *law*. God puts his own stamp upon parental discipline. *Hear it--Forsake it not*. Reverence for his *mother's law* was the honourable mark of Timothy's profession. (2 Tim. i. 5; iii. 14, 15.) Nor must this reverence be confined to the years of restraint. The disciple of the Bible will own himself to be a

* Thus the prophets were called Fathers--2 Kings, ii. 12; xiii. 14. Our blessed Lord used the same endearing address--John, xxi. 5. Comp. Matt. ix. 2, 22. Thus the Apostles also acknowledged both their individual converts and collective Churches--1 Tim. i. 2. 2 Tim. i. 2. Tit. i 4. 1 Cor. iv. 15; with 1 John. ii. 1; v. 21.

† See Judg. xiii. 12. No ancient system, so fully as the Bible, recognises the Mother's just and equal claims. Comp. vi. 20; xv. 20; xx. 20; xxiii. 22; xxx. 17. Lev. xix: 3. Deut. xxi, 18-21. Cartwright observes, that the names of *Mothers* of good and bad kings are mentioned in Kings and Chronicles, as partakers in their credit or reproach. See also Eccus. iii. 1-16.

child in relative obligations, long after he has ceased to be a child in years. (Jer. xxxv. 8-10, 18.) Neither age nor rank gives any claim for exemption. Joseph--when ripe in years, the head of a family, and the first Lord in Egypt--bowed before *his father's* feet. (Gen. xlv. 29; xlviii. 12.) Solomon, in the glory of his crown, forgot not the respect justly due to *his mother*.^{*} Nor were the crown *upon his head*, and the *chain of gold about Joseph's neck* (Comp. chap. iv. 9, with Gen. xli. 39, 42), so *graceful* as this ornament of filial humility. (1 Pet. v. 5.) This indeed commands the praise of the world, and may sometimes be a delusive, self-righteous dependence. But wherever it is grounded upon right principle, it is the "putting on of the Lord Jesus Christ" in his lovely example. (Rom. xiii. 14.) Though angels were subject to him, yet was he "subject to his parents." (Luke, ii. 51, with Heb. i. 6.) Yea, how did he honour his mother in his last dying command to his disciple--"Behold thy mother!" (John, xix. 27.)

The same reciprocal obligation binds the spiritual father and his children. Authority softened by tenderness--*instruction* moulded in parental endearment--will always command its measure of reverential and affectionate attention. Such was the Apostolical Ministry to the Churches of Philippi and Thessalonica. Humility, tenderness, mutual communion and cheerful subjection, formed the harmony of Christian love and happiness. (Philip. iv. 9-19. 1 Thess. ii. 7-13.)

10. *My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.* 11. *If they say, 'Come with us, let us lay wait for blood; let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause; 12. Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole as those who go down into the pit; 13. We shall find all precious substance; we shall fill our houses with spoil: 14. Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse: 15. My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path: 16. For their feet run to evil and make haste to shed blood.*

Let the young *hearken to the instruction, and law* of the godly parent and minister. Who that has the charge of youth does not mourn over the baneful influence of evil companions? Would that the Lord's Servants were as energetic in his work, as *sinners* are in furthering the ends of their master! Almost as soon as Satan became an apostate, he became a tempter. And most successfully does he train his servants in this work. (Chap. xvi. 29. Gen. xi. 4. Num. xxxi. 16. Isa. lvi. 12.) *If sinners entice thee*--This is no uncertain contingency. 'My son'--said the wise son of Sirach--'if thou come to serve the Lord prepare thy heart for temptation.' (Ecclus. ii. 1.) Yet we have one rule against all manifold enticements (Chap. vii. 5-23. Comp. Deut.

* 1 Kings, ii. 19, 20. See also Queen Esther's respect for Mordecai, her reputed father--ii. 20.

xiii.. 6-8.1 Chron. xxi. 1. 1 Kings, xiii. 15-19)--*Consent thou not. Consent* constitutes the sin. Eve *consented*, before she plucked the fruit (Gen. iii. 6); David, before he committed the act of sin. (2 Sam. xi. 2-4. Comp. Josh. vii. 21.) Joseph resisted, and was saved. (Gen. xxxix. 8, 9.) Job was sorely tried; "yet in all this Job sinned not." (Job, i. 22; ii. 10.) If the temptation prevail, charge it not on God; no--nor on the devil. As the worst he can do, he can only tempt, he cannot force us, to sin. When he has plied us with his utmost power, and most subtle artifice, it is at the choice of our own will, whether we yield or no. (See Jam. i. 13-15.) The habitual resistance of the will clears us of responsibility. (Comp. Rom. vii. 14-17, 19, 20, 23.) *The consent*, even if it be not carried out into the act, lays the responsibility at our own door.

The *enticement* here was to robbery and blood; covetousness leading to murder. Most fiendish was the plot. The innocent was to be murdered *without cause* (Gen. iv. 8. Ps. x. 8), *swallowed up alive and whole*; like Korah and his company, *going down into the pit* in their full strength. (Num. xvi. 33.) The invitation at first was seemingly harmless--Only *come with us*. Soon the demand rises--*Cast in thy lot with us*. 'But we shall be discovered.' No--they reply--'we will do all so cleverly, that there will be no more blood to be seen, than if the earth swallowed them up; or they died a natural death, and were decently buried.'* *The spoil of precious, substance will be found*, when our victim is destroyed. (Comp. Matt. xxi. 38.) *Precious substance!* Why! This is as large a promise, as that from the mouth of the Son of God. (Chap. viii. 21.) But how can *substance* be found belonging to a world of shadows? (Ps. xxxix. 6.) Much more, how can the fruit of robbery be *precious*, with the curse of God? (Chap. xxi. 6. Ps. lxii. 9,10.)

Not that this horrible plot is usually propounded at first. But step by step, unless the Lord graciously restrains, it may come to this at last. The cover and varnish are; here taken off, to show what sin is in its nature, character, and certain end. What young man, but would shudder, and start away from the wickedness, if presented to his imagination alone? But many a deluded sinner is thus hurried on by the influence of company to lengths of sin, that he had never contemplated.† Other *enticements* are prepared for the amiable and the uninitiated, just entering into life; less fearful and obvious, and therefore more really dangerous. Such "advantage does Satan get of us by our ignorance of his devices!" (2 Cor. ii. 11.)

Is it safe then to trust in our good resolutions or principles? No --*Walk not in the way with them*. The invitation is --come with us. The warning is--*Refrain thy foot from their path*. (Chap. iv. 14, 15.

* Cartwright. But see Gen iv.10. 2 Kings, ix. 26.

† Chartist Associations afford ample evidence of this awful delusion.

Comp. Ps. i. 1.) Avoid parleying with them. No one becomes a profligate at once.* But "evil communications corrupt good manners." (1 Cor. xv. 33.) The tender conscience becomes less sensitive by every compliance. Who can stop himself in the down-hill road? One sin prepares for another, pleads for it, nay, even makes it necessary for concealment. David committed murder to hide his adultery, and for his covering charged it upon the providence of God. (2 Sam. xi. 4, 17, 25.)

Again then—we repeat with all earnestness—*Refrain. The path* may be strewn with flowers; but it is a path of *evil*, perhaps of *blood*.† Every step on Satan's ground deprives us of the security of the promises of God. Often has ruin followed by not *refraining* from the first step. (Comp. Mark, xiv. 54, 71.) The only safety is in flight. (Gen. xxxix. 10, 12.) Run then into "thy hiding-place, and behind thy shield," and boldly bid thy tempter "depart from thee." (Ps. cxix. 114, 115. Comp. Matt. iv. 10.) Awful is the thought! There is not a sin, that the highest saint of God may not commit, if trusting in himself. "Thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear." (Rom. xi. 20.)

17. (*Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird.*) 18. *And they lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives.* 19. *So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof.*

The sight of danger leads, when possible, to the avoiding of it. Instinct directs the bird; reason the man. Yet such is the infatuation of sin, that man in his boasted wisdom will not do, what the bird will do by her native instinct. She shuns *the net spread in her sight*; man rushes into it. These men thirsted for their neighbour's *blood*. But in the end *they laid wait for their own*. They *lurked privily for the innocent without cause*. But it proved to be *lurking privily for their own lives*. (Verse 11 with 18. Comp. Job, xviii. 8. Hab. ii. 10.) Ahab and his guilty partner, in plotting the destruction of their *innocent* victim, worked out their own ruin. (1 Kings, xxi. 4-24.) Little did Haman, when bent upon the murder of Mordecai (Esth. vii. 9); or Judas, when "seeking opportunity to betray his Master" (Matt. xxvi. 14-16; xxvii. 3-5), see, that they were "digging a pit for themselves." (Ps. vii. 15, 16; ix. 15, 16.) Yet the sinner, would he but use his own eyes, might see hell at the end of his path. (Matt. vii. 13.) But sin is self-delusive, self-destructive. So are the ways—such the end—of *greedy*, often murderous, gain.‡ *My son—once more hear thy Father's instruction*, "Flee these things." (Verse 8, with 1 Tim, vi. 9-11.)

* 'Nemo fit repente turpissimus.'—Classical adage.

† Verse 16. Isa. lix. 7. An apt illustration of the total depravity of man in the perverted use of the members of his body.—Rom. iii. 15.

‡ Comp. Job, xxxi. 39, 40. Jer. xxii. 17-19. Mic. iii. 10—12. 'How great a cheat is wickedness! It ensnareth the ensnarers, and murders the murderers; holds a dark lantern in one hand, while with the other it discharges silently a pistol into our bosom.'—JERMIN (Dr. M.), *Comment on Proverbs*, folio, 1638.

20. *Wisdom (Wisdoms, Marg.) crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: 21. She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates; in the city she uttereth her words, saying, 22. How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? 23. Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you; I will make known my words unto you. A Father's instruction has warned us against the enticement of Satan.*

Wisdom--the Son of God himself, now invites us,--in all the plenitude of his Divine authority and grace.* Full of yearning love to sinners, he crieth, not only in the temple, but *without in the streets, in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates* (Comp. chap. viii. 1-5. Matt. xiii. 2. John, vii. 37-39; xviii. 20, 21. Ps. xl. 9, 10)—*How long?* *Simplicity* is another term for folly. It is the temper of mind of those that fear not God. They weigh not what they say or do. They live as if there were neither God nor eternity. Their understandings are blinded by the love of sin. In other cases man delights, not in his ignorance, but in its removal. But these *simple ones*, ignorant of the value and danger of their souls, *love-simplicity*. They consider all endeavours to enlighten them, as breaking in upon an indulgent repose, and exciting a groundless alarm. For while they live riotously, slothfully, or licentiously, "they consider not in their hearts, that God remembereth all their wickedness," and "that for all these things he will bring them into judgment." (Hos. vii. 2. Eccles. xi. 9.) They are encouraged by a few more furious than themselves--*scorners*--who have neither fear nor shame, remorse of heart, nor decency of manner; who take an active *delight in their scorning*: shooting their poisoned arrows against godliness. (See Ps. lxiv. 3, 4.) All earnestness in religion is with them a weakness unworthy of sensible men. The very Scripture terms are revolting. A saint in Scripture means one sanctified by the Spirit of God. With them it means a foolish person or a hypocrite. Their souls are too high to stoop to the vulgar thoughts and habits of the gospel of Christ. Thus do they prove themselves (both the indolent mass of the *simple ones*, and their *scornful* leaders) to be *fools, that hate knowledge*.

* *The cry, the chief place of concourse, the outpouring fountain of the Spirit*, are identified John, vii. 37-39. This very remonstrance, accompanied, as here, with a stirring invitation, is also given in prophecy from the Saviour's own mouth. Isa. lv. 1-3. The terms of the promise forbid any other than a personal application. We can easily conceive a spirit to have wisdom. But that an attribute of wisdom may dispense his Spirit or influence to others, is beyond conception. Moreover, the Messiah assumed this personal title (Matt. xxiii. 34, with Luke, xi. 49); and his Apostle expressly gives it to him (1 Cor. i. 24). The plural noun joined with the singular verb (marg. comp. chap. ix. 1) seems to point him out as the author and whole substance of all wisdom; 'the very wisdom of the most wise God, "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," and by whom rivers of wisdom are poured into man by the word.' (Glass. Lib. iii. Tract. i. Can. 24.) The future tense in the original may possibly give a prophetic character to the proclamation. Altogether, 'this interpretation gives to the exhortation of Wisdom a peculiar majesty and emphasis; setting forth the eternal untreated Wisdom of the Father, using all means to draw men to God; both by his works and by his word, inviting all men to know the truth.'--SCOTT. Bishop Ball. Compare notes on v. 24, viii. 1.

(Verses 7, 29, 30. Job, xxi. 14; xxiv. 13.) Aiming to keep out alarm, with it they shut out all that would make them wise and happy. If they *hate the knowledge* of their lost condition, they exclude all that follows upon it, to make them "wise unto salvation." Of other knowledge they have often too much: mischievous, as keeping out better things; giving them an evil eye, filling the soul with darkness; making them "hate the light, so that they will not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reprov'd." (John, iii. 19, 20.)

Our Lord deals with this case on the perfect freeness of the gospel. He would melt down the hardness by pleading remonstrance—*How long?* (Comp. Matt. xxiii. 37. Luke, xix. 41, 42.) He sweeps away all the suggestions of unbelief, all the heartless excuses of indolence, by inviting promises—*Turn at my reproof.* 'I cannot turn myself.' But *I will pour out my Spirit* as a living fountain unto you. And—as the consequence of this blessing---*I will make known my words unto you.* The Bible, before a dark and sealed book, shall be made clear to you. 'I offer to you both my word outwardly to your ears, and a plentiful, measure of my Spirit inwardly to your heart, to make that word effectual to you.'*

But we are often told, that all the illumination to be expected in our day is the written word, interpreted, like every other book, by our own reason; and that the Spirit's teaching is an enthusiastic delusion. Now this may pass with the *simple and the scorner*— who know nothing of the blindness of their hearts, and of the power of natural prejudice, which Divine grace alone can conquer. But the man that knows his own darkness, and that nothing less than the power of God can teach him—he will—he must—"cry for knowledge, and lift up his voice for understanding" (Chap. ii. 3); not because the word is dark (for it is light itself), but because he is dark, and therefore utterly unable to receive its instructions. (1 Cor. ii. 9-14.) We do not want a new revelation, we only want a Divine Teacher, we want *the pouring out of the Spirit to make known the word.* The word is the same Divine word as before. But it was not understood, discerned, not therefore practically effectual. Now there is joy, a power and sweetness, of which before we had no conception. It humbled us in the sense of our ignorance, and makes us pant for more of its heavenly light and influence.

But the proud caviller complains of God, as if he reckoned with "him for a blindness and inability, which he cannot help,--innate without his consent. "Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" (Rom. ix. 20.) He at once answers this Satanic plea, by offering to you present, suitable, and sufficient relief. He meets you on your way to condemnation with the promise of free and full

* Bishop Hall.

forgiveness. (Isa. i. 18; xliii. 23, 26.) Your plea will be of force, when you have gone to him, and found him wanting. The power indeed is of him. But he hath said — "Ask, and it shall be given you." (Matt. vii. 7.) If your helplessness is a real grievance, bring it to him with an honest desire to be rid of it. If you have never prayed, now is the time for prayer. If you cannot pray, at least make the effort. Stretch out the withered hand in the obedience of faith. (Mark, iii. 5.) If your heart be hard, your convictions faint, your resolutions unsteady; all is provided in the promise — *I will pour out my Spirit upon you*. Move then, and act in dependence upon the Almighty Mover and Agent. (Comp. Philip. ii. 12, 13.) Christian experience explains a mystery unfathomable to human reason. It harmonises man's energy and God's grace. There is no straitening, no exclusion, with God. His promises with one mouth assure a welcome to the willing heart. If it cannot move, his Spirit can compel, point, draw it to the Saviour. Yea, in the desire to turn, has not the Saviour already touched it, and drawn it to himself?

But remember — the call—*How long?* is to an instant conversion; not to the consideration or resolution of the morrow, but to the decision of to-day. Delay is mockery of God. "Quench not the Spirit " now striving, but which "will not always strive with man." (1 Thess. v. 19. Gen. vi. 3.) Add not thus to the mass of guilt ready to sink you into perdition.

24. *Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded: 25. But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: 26. I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock, when your fear cometh; 27. When your fear cometh, as a desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. 28. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me; 29. For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: 30. They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. 31. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.*

The Saviour *calls* by his word, his providence, his ministers, conscience. But *ye refused*. Not till his *calls* have been refused, does he thunder forth his warnings. But such grace, so rich and free, yet rejected—who can take the guage of this guilt? All creatures beside are his servants. (Ps. cxix. 91.) Man alone resists his yoke. *He stretched out his hand* (Isa. lxxv. 2) to afford help; to confer a blessing; to beseech its acceptance; yea, even to command attention to his call. (See Acts, xxi. 40.) But *no man regarded*. The wisest counsel, the most solemn *reproof*, all is *set at nought*. Thus does he "endure with much

long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." (Rom. ix. 22.) But, O sinner! the day cometh, when he, who once yearned, and wept, and prayed, and died, will have no pity (Ezek. v. 11, viii. 18, with xxxiii. 11); when he shall be, as if he *laughed and mocked at your calamity* (Comp. Judg. x. 14. Isa. i. 24); when he shall delight in the exercise of his sovereign justice over you. (Comp. Deut. xxviii. 63. Ezek. v. 13.) All will then be the *desolation* of realized *fear* (Chap. x. 24); sudden *as a whirlwind*;* the *distress and anguish* of utter despair. (Job, xv. 24. Dan. v. 5, 6, 30.)

This is his solemn denunciation. And then, as if he could bear these despisers no longer in his sight, he changes his address, and pictures the scene itself in its strongest colours. *They would not hear when I called. Then shall they call upon me, and I will not answer.* They would not listen to my warnings; I will not listen to their cries. *They shall call upon me — yea, they shall seek me early; but they shall not find me.*† Prayer, once omnipotent, will then be powerless. 'The last judgment before the very last of all is come; the very outward court or portal of hell;‡ the misery of deserted souls. To be forsaken of God at any time is awful woe (Hos. ix. 12); how much more in the time of trouble! (1 Sam. xxviii. 15.) But to have his countenance not only turned: from us, but turned against us, his eternal frown instead of his smile — this will be hell instead of heaven.

Does this unmeasured wrath seem inconsistent with a God of love? "The Lord our God is a consuming fire." (Deut. iv. 24.) And think of his knowledge, instead of being a delight, being *hated*; *his fear not chosen*; none of his gracious *counsel* regarded; all his *reproof despised*. Is it not just, that the sinner, thus obstinately bent upon the choice of *his own way*, should not only gather, but *eat the fruit of it*? (Chap. xiii. 2); that it should enter into him, and become his substance; that he should be *filled with it*, even to satiety;§ *and that*--not only daring his road. (Num. xi. 4, 20. Ps. cvi. 13-15), but at the end, throughout eternity? (Isa. iii. 11. Gal. vi. 7.) The moral elements of sin constitute a hell of themselves, apart from the material fire. 'The fruit of sin in time, when arrived at full and finished maturity, is just the fruit of sin

* Chap. x. 25. Ps. lviii. 9. Isa. xvii. 13; xl. 24. Eastern travellers furnish abundant illustration of this striking figure. Paxton's *Illustrations of Scripture Geography*, pp. 412-416. — (Oliphant.)

† Matt. xxv. 6-12. Luke, xiii. 24-26. Dr. Owen admirably remarks upon this remonstrance as a proof of the Personality of Wisdom — 'If these things express not a person, and that a Divine person, the Scripture gives us no due apprehension of anything whatever. Who is it that pours out the Holy Spirit? Who is it that men sin against, in refusing to be obedient? Who is it, that in their distress they call upon, and seek early in their trouble? The whole Scriptures declare to whom, and to whom alone, these things belong, and may be ascribed.' — *Expos. of Hebrews*. Prelim. Exercit. xxvii. 8-12. We might add — Who besides could threaten rebels with ruin, and promise peace and security to the obedient?

‡ Bishop Reynolds' Works, p. 97]..

§ Chap. xiv. 14. Comp. xxv. 16. — 'Ad nauseam implebuntur, et comedent, ita ut consiliorum vehementer tandem, sed nimis sero, ipsos prnniteant.'--MICHAELIS.

through eternity. It is merely the sinner reaping what he has sown. It makes no violent or desultory step from sin in time to hell in eternity. The one emerges from the other, as does the fruit from the flower. It is simply, that the sinner *be filled with his own ways, and that he eat the fruit of his own devices.*.*

This picture might seem to be the foreboding of despair. Yet, such miracles of Divine grace have we seen; nay—such are we ourselves --that we despair of none. We must not, however, soften down God's own words by a misplaced presumptuous tenderness. Have we never seen them verified in the dying sinner, who has neglected and scoffed at the Gospel, and never sent up one cry for mercy on his soul? Is this no warning of the danger of a *protracted* repentance; of the worthlessness of confessions extorted by terror; "howling on the bed; hot weeping at the cross?" (Hos. vii. 14, with Luke, xviii. 13.) And does it not solemnly tell us, that the day of grace has its limits (Gen. vi. 3. Heb. iv. 7); that there is a knock, which will be the last knock; that a sinner may be lost on this side of hell; intreated, pleaded with, wept over—yet lost! lost even in the day of salvation? To "do despite to the Spirit of grace" (mark the endearing name) —the Spirit of all kindness, of alluring love; who pleads so tenderly with us—to wound him, as it were, to the soul (Heb. x. 29, Gr.) — this is a provocation beyond words, beyond thought. "There remaineth" only that, which might strike into the very centre of the man, "the fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Ib. verses 26, 27, 31.)

32. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them, 33. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.

Again is the sinner's ruin laid at his own door. He turns away from Wisdom's beseeching voice. He despises the only remedy. He dies a suicide. It matters nothing to what we turn. If we turn away from God, we turn from our true, our eternal interests. And, oh ! be it remembered, that every inattention, every wilful neglect, is a step towards this fearful apostasy. The word gradually becomes a burden, then a scorn. *The fool* may seem to be spared from judgment. But *his prosperity is his destruction.*† To desire ease, therefore, is to embrace a deadly enemy. Who that knows his own heart will not feel it a matter, not of congratulation, but of deep and anxious prayer—"In all time of our wealth--Good Lord, deliver us?"‡

* Chalmers on Rom. vi. 21.

† Job, xxi. 11-13. Ps. lv. 19; lxxiii. 3-20. Jer xii. 1-3. Luke, vi. 24, 25; xii. 16-20; xvi. 19-24. Jam. v. 1-5. Examples of Israel. —Deut. xxxii. 15-25. Jer. xxii. 20-22. He's. xi ii. 6-9. Amos, vi. 1.-6. Babylon.—Isa. xivii. 7-9. Moab. —Jer. xlviii. 1-15. Sodom. —Ezek. xvi. 49. Tyre.—Ezek. xxvii. 2, 25-27.

‡ Litany.

But to close with the sunshine of promise--Art thou, Reader, like God's own child, *hearkening unto him*? Then art thou under his cover, where no evil can reach thee; *dwelling* not only *safely*, but assured of safety; quiet even from fear of evil (Chap. iii. 21—26. Job, v. 21. Ps. xci. 5; cxii. 6, 7. Isa. xxxii. 17—19); as Noah in the ark, in conscious security, while the world were perishing around him (Gen. vii. 11-16); as David, fearless in imminent danger, because realizing a refuge in God. (Ps. iii. Comp. 1 Sam. xxx. 6.) Yes — even the *coming day of distress and anguish* brings with it *no fear of evil*. (Contrasting verses 26, 27. Luke, xxi. 26. Rev. vi. 16-18.) "The day will burn like an oven." Thou shalt behold the world on fire, and feel thou hast lost, thou canst lose, nothing. The "day of darkness and gloominess" will be to thee a day of unclouded sunshine, the entrance into everlasting joy. (Mal. iv. 1, 2. Luke, xxi. 28. 2 Pet. iii. 10-13.)

CHAPTER II.

1. *My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; 2. So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine, heart to understanding: 3. Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; 4. If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; 5. Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. 6. For the Lord giveth wisdom a out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.*

Wisdom, having solemnly warned rebellious scorers, now instructs her dutiful children. The dark question long before asked—"Where shall wisdom be found?" (Job, xxviii. 12, 20, 21) —is now answered. It is here set before us, as *the fear and knowledge of God* (Verse 6); a principle of practical godliness (Verses 7-9); a preservation from besetting temptations (Verses 10-19); and a guide into the right and safe path. (Verse 20.) Hence follow the security of its scholars (Verse 21), and the certain ruin of its ungodly despisers. (Verse 22.)

The rules for its attainment are such as the simplest comprehension can apply. Carefully pondered, and diligently improved, they will furnish a key for the understanding of the whole word of God. Let us examine them more distinctly.

Receive my words —Let them be "the seed cast into the ground of an honest and good heart" (Luke, viii. 15)—a heart prepared of God. (Chap. xvi. 1.) Read the book of God as one who "sat at the feet of Jesus, and heard his word." (Luke, x. 39.) Like the Bereans, "receive it with all readiness" (Acts, xvii. 11); like the Thessalonians, with reverential faith, acknowledging its supreme authority (1 Thess. ii. 13).

Hide my commandments with thee. Carry them about with thee as thy choicest treasure for greater security (Col. iii. 16, with Matt. xiii. 44); as thy furniture always at hand for present use. (Chap. iv. 20, 21; vii. 3. Job, xxii. 22.) Let the heart be the hiding-place for the treasure. (Luke, ii. 19, 51. Ps. cxix. 11.) Satan can never snatch it thence.

*But there must be an active, practical habit of attention.** Yet to *incline the ear, and apply the heart*—"who is sufficient for these things?" Oh! my God! let it be thine own work on me—in me. Thou alone canst do it.† Let it be with me, as with thy Beloved Son—"Waken my ear morning by morning to hear as the learned." (Isa. L. 4.) So let me under thy grace "incline mine ear, and hear, that my soul may live." (Ibid. lv. 3.)

Without this spirit of prayer--there may be attention and earnestness ; yet not one spiritual impression upon the conscience; not one ray of Divine light in the soul. Earthly wisdom is gained by study; heavenly wisdom by prayer. Study may form a Biblical scholar; prayer puts the heart under a heavenly tutorage, and therefore forms the wise and spiritual Christian. The word first comes into the ears; then it enters into the heart; there it is safely hid; thence rises the cry—*the lifting up of the voice*. Thus, "the entrance of thy word giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple." (Ps. cxix. 130.) God keeps the key of the treasure-house in his own hand. "For this he will be enquired of" (Ezek. xxxvi. 37) to open it unto thee. We look for no other inspiration than Divine grace to make his word clear and impressive. Every verse read and meditated on furnishes material for prayer. Every text prayed over opens a mine of "unsearchable riches," with a light from above, more clear and full than the most intelligent exposition. David (Ps. cxix. 18, &c.) and his wise son (1 Kings, iii. 9-12) sought this learning upon their knees; and the most matured Christian will continue to the end to *lift up his voice* for a more enlarged *knowledge of God*. (Eph. i. 17, 18.)

But prayer must not stand in the stead of diligence. Let it rather give energy to it.‡ The miner's indefatigable pains ; his invincible

* Chap. xxii. 17; xxiii. 12. The Emperor Constantine stood hours to hear the word; replying, when asked to sit, 'that he thought it wicked to give negligent ears, when the truth handled was spoken of God.'--(*Euseb. de Vita Constant.* lib. iv.) Foxe records of Edward VI. 'That never was he present at any sermon commonly, but would excerpt them, or note them with his own hand.'—Vol. v. 700. Yet Bishop Hooper thought, that his royal master's love for the preached word needed to be quickened. — *Sermon 7th on Jonas*.

† Chap. xx. 12. "Thou giving me the ear, I have heard, as thou wouldest thy word to be heard."—JEROME on Hab. iii. 2.

‡ On one side is Luther's inestimable axiom — 'Bene orasse est bene studuisse.' On the other side is the balance of the old proverb—'Ora et labora.' Comp. Matt. xi. 12. 'We are all,' says the heavenly Leighton, 'too little in the humble seeking and begging this Divine knowledge; and that is the cause why we are so shallow and small proficientes. "If thou cry, and lift up thy voice for understanding, search for it as for hid treasures;" sit down upon thy knees, and dig for it. That is the best posture, to fall right upon the golden vein, and go deepest to know the mind of God, in searching the Scriptures, to be

resolution; his untiring perseverance; *seeking, yea, searching for hid treasures*,—such must be our *searching* into the sacred storehouse.* To read, instead of "*searching* the Scriptures," is only to skim the surface, and gather up a few superficial notions.† The rule of success is--Dig up and down the field; and if the search be discouraging, dig again. The patient industry of perusal and re-perusal will open the embosomed treasure. "Surely there is a vein for the silver." (Job, xxviii. 1.) Yet what miner would be content with the first ore? Would he not *search* deeper and deeper, until he has possessed himself of the whole; not satisfied with taking away much, but determined to leave nothing? Thus let us daily explore "the length, and the breadth, and the depth" of our boundless stores, until we be "filled with all the fulness of God." (Eph. iii. 18, 19.)

This habit of living in the element of Scripture is invaluable. To be filled from this Divine treasury; to have large portions of the word daily passing through the mind; gives us a firmer grasp, and a more suitable and diversified application of it. Yet this profit can only be fully reaped in retirement. We may read the Scriptures in company. But to search them, we must be alone with God. Here we learn to apply ourselves wholly to the word, and the word wholly to us. This enriching study gives a purer vein of sound judgment. The mere reader often scarcely knows where to begin, and he performs the routine without any definite object. His knowledge therefore must be scanty and ineffective. Nor is the neglect of this habit less hurtful to the Church. All fundamental errors and heresies in the Church may be traced to this source—"Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures." (Matt. xxii. 29.) They are mostly based on partial or disjointed statements of truth. Truth separated from truth becomes error. But the mind prayerfully occupied in the search of Divine truth—*crying and lifting up the voice*--will never fail to discern the two great principles of godli-

directed and regulated in his ways; to be made skilful in ways of honouring him, and doing him service. This neither man nor angels can teach him, but God alone.'—Sermon on Ps. cvii. 43.

* 'Viscera terae extrahimus, ut digito gestiat gemma, quam petimus. Quot manus afferuntur, ut unus niteat articulus! Simili studio, industria, constantia, Sapientiae inquisitioni incumbendum erat.'—Pram. lib. ii. c. 65.

† Comp. John, v. 39. Gr.— a similar allusion to the miner's toil. 'I can speak it by experience'—said a wise man—' that there is little good to be gotten by reading the Bible cursorily and carelessly. But do it daily and diligently, with attention and affection; and you shall find such efficacy, as is to be found in no other book that can be named.' ERASMUS'S *Preface to Luke*. Peter Martyr gives the same testimony, *Epist. Dedic. to Comment. on Rom.* The following relic of our renowned Elizabeth will be read both with interest and profit. It was written on a blank leaf of a black-letter edition of St. Paul's Epistles, which she used during her lonely imprisonment at Woodstock. The volume itself, curiously embroidered by her own hand, is preserved in the Bodleian:—'August. I walk many times into the pleasant fields of the Holy Scriptures, where I pluck up the goodly-some herbs of sentences by pruning, eat them by reading, chew them by musing, and lay them up at length in the high seat of memorie, by gathering them together, that so, having tasted their sweetness, I may the less perceive the bitterness of this miserable life.'—MISS STRICKLAND'S *Queens of England*, vi. 113.

ness— *The fear and knowledge of God*. There is no peradventure nor disappointment in this search— *Then shalt thou understand. The Lord giveth wisdom; it cometh out of his mouth*. None shall search in vain. (Job, xxxii. 8. Isa. xlvi. 17; liv. 13. Jam. i. 5, 17. Comp. Gen. xli. 38, 39. Exod. iv. 12. Dan. i. 17.) Never has apostasy from the faith been connected with a prayerful and diligent study of the word of God.

7. *He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. 8. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. 9. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea every good path.*

Vanity (Eccles. i. 18) and foolishness (1 Cor. iii. 19) are the stamp on the wisdom of this world. Here is *sound wisdom*. It looks at things not in their notions, but in their proper substance. It is sound, because it is practical. It is indeed a *hid treasure* (Verse 4); so safe, that no spoiler can reach it; yet so free, that every sinner may have access to it. Yes; in the Son of God himself "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." All these treasures in him are *laid up for the righteous* --made over to them. (Col. ii. 3. 1 Cor. i. 30.) Oh let us draw upon this infinite treasure daily, hourly, for light to direct *an upright walk*. 'To those that are true and upright in heart, he will in his own good time reveal true: and saving knowledge, and that *sound spiritual wisdom*, which shall make them eternally happy.* Our faithful God *is a buckler to them that walk uprightly*. (Chap. xxx. 5. Ps. lxxxiv. 11.) His wisdom covers is from that subtle sophistry, which would spoil us of our treasure. (Chap. xxii. 12.) The way of the saints is indeed fraught with danger; beset with temptation: yet is it safe (Chap. iv. 11; viii. 20. Deut. xxxiii. 26-29. 1 Sam. ii. 9. Ps. xxxvii. 23, 24 lvi. 9)--*kept and preserved* by Almighty power. even on the very edge of the enemy's ground. (1 Sam. xxv. 39; xxvii. 1, with xxix. 2 Cor. xii. 7-9.)

Such also is the completeness of this godly privilege, that not only does it enlarge our *knowledge of God* (Verse 5), but it brings us to a full *understanding* of every practical obligation. Indeed that only is *sound wisdom*, that guides our feet into *every, good path*; that "makes the man of God perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Tim. iii. 15-17.) The gracious *wisdom* that saves the soul, sanctifies the heart and life. (Tit. ii. 11, 12.)

10. *When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; 11. Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee.*

We have seen the good that *wisdom* brings to us. (Verse 5.) Now see the evil, from which it *preserves* us. But observe its place —*in the*

* Bishop Hall.

heart. Here only has it any light, life, or power. (Chap. iv. 23.) Clear knowledge floating in the head is deep ignorance. While it only glitters in the understanding, it is dry, speculative, and barren. *When it entereth into the heart*, light beams out, all the affections are engaged; and how *pleasant is it to the soul*! (Chap. xxiv. 13, 14. Job, xxiii. 12. Ps. cxix. 103. Jer. xv. 16.) Religion *now* is no lifeless notion. It is handled, tasted, enjoyed. It gives a *discreet and understanding* direction to the whole conduct. It becomes not only an external rule, but a *preserving, keeping* principle (Chap. iv. 6; vi. 22-24. Ps. xvii. 4; cxix. 9-11, 104); like the military guard for the safety of the royal person. (1 Sam. xxvi. 16. 2 Kings, xi. 11.) Before, it was the object of our search. Now, having found it, it is our *pleasure*. Until it is so, it can have no practical influence. It is "the man, whose *delight is in the law of the Lord*," who is preserved from "walking in the counsel of the ungodly." (Ps. i. 1, 2; comp. ch. vii. 4, 5.) Education, conviction, high moral principle, are at best only partially operative. The reclaimed drunkard may be true to his Temperance-pledge; but, if the "root of bitterness" be untouched, he may be a Socialist or a Chartist, or revel in some other equally ruinous course. External wickedness may be exchanged for decent formality. Vagrant affections may be turned from some object of vanity; yet not fixed upon the Divine centre of attraction. The mind may be disciplined from utter unprofitableness, only to indulge in the idolatry of talent, or the fascinations of poisoned literature. The folly of the pride of life may be resisted; yet pride in other of its multiform fruits tenderly cherished. In all, these cases, the principle is unsubdued. The forsaken sin only makes way for some more plausible, but not less deadly passion. The heart, cast into the mould of the Gospel, is the only cover from those snares within and without (Rom. vi. 17, 18. 2 Cor. iii. 18), which so imperceptibly, yet so fatally, estrange us from God. Never, till the vital principle is implanted, is their mischief discerned. Never, till then, does the heart find its proper object, its true resting-place.

12. *To deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward things; 13. Who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness; 14. Who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked; 15. Whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths.*

The various snares for the young, about to be detailed, furnish a fearful picture of the temptations to which our children are exposed. Will it not awaken our earnest cries for their deep and solid conversion to God; that *wisdom may indeed enter into their hearts*, and its *pleasures* be really enjoyed; that they may have a religious taste, as well as a religious education; that they may know the Gospel, not only in the

conviction of their conscience, or the excitement of their feelings, but in the entire renewal of their hearts before God? This, and nothing less, will preserve them from the snare of their cruel foe. Every town and village swarms with his emissaries; first, initiated themselves into the mysteries of his art; then, going forth, laborious and practised teachers, well instructed for his murderous work. Against one of these enticements we have been before warned. (Chap. i. 10-13.) Another is here given: The tempter bears his character upon his lips; the evil man that speaketh proud things against God and his law; like a poisonous fountain sending up poisoned waters. Oh! how quickly does the contamination spread! He does not sin in ignorance. He and his companions* have probably been trained *in the paths of uprightness*. Having come in contact with the pestilential breath, of the ungodly, they have caught the contagion, and eagerly spread it. Readily do they *leave the paths*, which they never heartily loved, *to walk in the ways of darkness*, which their hearts do love. (Chap. iv. 16, 17. Job, xiv. 13-16. John, iii. 19, 20.) Having left the hated paths, they become therefore foremost in iniquity. Poisoned themselves, they would poison all around them. They *rejoice*, like Satan himself, *to do evil* † to draw their fellow-sinners into the net; and they *delight in those*, who are most *froward* in their *wickedness*.‡ Thus they plunge deeper and deeper into sin, till they lose all traces of the straight way, and all their *ways become crooked*, leading with sure steps to eternal ruin. Is not this the picture, drawn to the very life, of many a Sunday-scholar, or a child of godly parents, the subject of deep and tender care; "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. iii. 13), the neglect of faithful warning, the stifling of solemn conviction? How do they deserve to be left of God, who have first left him with such fearful aggravation! Young man! especially shun companions, who are sinning against better knowledge and instruction. They are hardened in devotedness to their master's work. Oh! if misguided sinners could but see sin in its horrid deformity and certain end, would not "their hearts meditate terror?" But *the crookedness of their ways hides* the end from view. Satan presents the bait, palliates the sin, covers the enormity, closes the eyes, and conceals the certain end of all—Hell. (Ps. cxxv. 5. Rom. vi. 21; with 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.) *The froward in their paths* cannot—will not—turn back.

16. To deliver thee from the strange woman, from the stranger, which flattereth with her lips: 17. Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God. 18. For her house inclineth unto

* The change to the plural number (the man—who leave) implies confederacy.

† Comp. Isa. iii. 9; Jer xi. 15. God's heavy judgment. 2 Thess. ii. 12.

‡ The sin of the heathen, Rom. i. 32.

death, and her paths unto the dead. 19. None that go unto her return again: neither take they hold of the paths of life.

Another snare of the fowler is here graphically portrayed.* *Wisdom hidden in the heart* is, as before, the most effectual deliverance; restraining even the eye from the hurtful object.† Ought not the *strange woman*, even if she be born and baptized in a Christian land, to be counted as *a stranger* and foreigner among us? One who had *forsaken the guide of her youth*,§ and forgotten the solemn bond of the covenant of her God|| —what else could she be to the unwary but a vile *flatterer with her lips*? (Chap. v. 3; vii. 5, 21.) The slave of unlawful desire; having no *guide* but her own will; no pleasure but sensual gratification; quickly she becomes her own and her victim's murderer. Her house is the land of death. (Chap. v. 5.) Eternal death is her doom. (Gal. v. 19-21. Eph. v. 5. Rev. xxi. 8 ; xxii. 15.) *Her paths incline to the dead*, with the awful monuments of Divine vengeance in olden time.¶ Some instances indeed of *deliverance* are given; not so much examples, as *special miracles*, of grace, to show how far the "arm of the Lord" can reach.** But so rare are they, that it is as if scarcely none†† *that go unto her return again*. And what madness is it to rush into the snare upon so faint and glimmering hope of escape! (Eccles. vii. 26.) The spell of lust palsies the grasp, by which its victim might have *taken hold of the paths of life for deliverance*. He that is "saved, is so as by fire" (1 Cor. iii. 15), the wonder of heaven and earth. "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" (Zech. iii. 2.)

20. *That thou mayest walk in the way of good men, and keep the path of the righteous: 21. For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it; 22. But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it.*

Here is the consummating blessing of *engrafted wisdom*. Not only

* Chap. v. 3-20; vi. 24; vii. 5-23; xxii. 14; xxiii. 27. Some commentators give an allegorical interpretation to these pictures, as descriptive of idolatry or false doctrine. 'But surely,' as Holden well observes, 'if there be any dependence to be placed upon the language of the sacred writer, any propriety in his expressions, it is to be understood in its literal sense, as a warning against the seduction of harlots. The spirit of allegorical interpretation may make the Scriptures speak whatever is prompted by the wildest fancy, or the deepest fanaticism.'—HOLDEN *in loco*. Comp. SCOTT *in loco*.

† Comp. Job, xxxi. 1, and our Lord's rule :—Matt. v. 28.

‡ *The strange woman*—a stranger. Two different words in the Hebrew, the latter appearing to mark a foreigner. Comp. Deut. xxiii. 17; Lev. xix. 29. It is, however, but too evident that this abandoned class was not confined to foreigners. Comp. Gen. xxxviii. 15, 16; Judg. xi. 1; 1 Kings, iii. 18.

§ Though an harlot, she might be (Chap. vii. 5, 10, 19) or might have been (John, iv. 17, 18) a married woman.

|| Mal. ii. 14-16. Comp. Ezra, xvi. 59, 60. Does not this sacred view of the marriage ordinance rebuke the legislative sanction which has now degraded it to a mere civil contract?

¶ 'The dead.'—SCOTT and Bishop PATRICK *in loco*. Comp. chap. ix. 18. Heb. MEDE'S *Learned Discourse*, vii.

** Solomon's own case. Comp. Luke, vii. 37-50; 1 Cor. vi. 9-11.

†† None in comparison, very few. Comp. Isa. lix. 4; lxiv. 7.

does it *deliver from evil men*; but it guides us *into the way of good men*. Clad with this Divine armour, thou shalt have courage, like Joseph, to turn thy face from the enchantment of Sin (Gen.. xxxix. 9, 10), *and keep the paths of the righteous*, rugged indeed, yet the only paths of rest and security. (Cant. i. 7, 8. Jer. vi. 16.) Thus shalt thou *dwell and remain in the land*, as its original inheritor (Ps. xxxvii. 9, 11, 22, 29, 34. Matt. v. 5), having the best portion in earth, and ap infinitely better portion in heaven ; while the *wicked and transgressors*, though they may "enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season," shall be ultimately *cut of rooted out*, and "driven away " into everlasting ruin. (Chap. x. 30; xiv. 32; xv. 25. Ps. lii. 5-7 ; xcii. 7. Matt, iii. 10.)

And now, what serious reader of this chapter can fail to estimate above all price the privilege of being early enlisted under the banner of the cross; early taught in the ways, and disciplined in the school, of the Bible; and early led to hide that blessed book in the heart, as the rule of life, the principle of holiness, the guide to heaven!

Parents, sponsors, teachers of youth; ponder your deep responsibility with unceasing prayer for special grace and wisdom. Beware of glossing over sins with amiable or palliating terms. Let young people be always led to look upon vicious; habits with horror, as the most appalling evil. Discipline their vehemence of feeling, and all ill-regulated excitement. Keep out of sight, *as far as may be*, books calculated to inflame the imagination. To give an impulse to the glowing passion may stimulate the rising corruption to the most malignant fruitfulness. Oh! what wisdom is needed to guide, to repress, to bring forth, develope safely, and to improve fully, the mind, energies, and sensibilities of youth!

Young man! beware! Do not flatter thyself for a moment, that God will ever wink at your sinful passions; that he will allow for them, as slips and foibles of youth. They are the "cords of your own sins," which, if the power of God's grace break them not in time, will "hold" you for eternity. (Chap. v. 22.) Shun then the society of sin, as the infection of the plague. Keep thy distance from it, as from the pit of destruction. Store thy mind with the preservative of heavenly wisdom. Cultivate the taste for purer pleasures. Listen to the fatherly, pleading remonstrance, inviting thee to thy rest---"Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, 'My Father! thou art the guide of my youth?'" (Jer. iii. 4.)

CHAPTER III.

1. *My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments;*
2. *For length of days, long life, and peace shall they add to thee.*

THIS is not the stern language of command. It is our Father's voice in all the endearing persuasiveness of promise—*My son*—He had before instructed us to *seek and search* after wisdom, and set out before us its invaluable blessings. Now he calls us to bring it into practical exercise—*Forget not my law*, The wilful forgetfulness of the heart (Chap. ii. 17. Ps. ix. 17; x. 4; comp. chap. iv. 5; Deut. iv. 23; Ps. cxix. 93, 176), not the infirmity of the memory (for which a special, though we fear too much neglected, help, is provided) (John, xiv. 26) is here implied. *Let thine heart*, like the ark of the testimony, be *the keeping place of my commandments*. (Chap. iv. 4. Deut. xi. 18. Isa. li. 7; with Ezek. xi. 20. Heb. ix. 4.) And is not this the child's desire—"0 that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes.?" (Ps. cxix. 6; comp. verses 69, 129), while his conscious helplessness takes hold of the covenant promise—"I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts." (Jer. xxxi. 33.)

Indeed no laws, but God's, bind the heart. All acceptable obedience begins here. The heart is the first thing that wanders from God: the first also that returns. Here is the vital principle, (Chap. iv. 23. Rom. vi. 17.) All religion without it is a mere name; and, however the professor may practise a thousand arts to put life into it, all must fail, "The root being as rottenness, the blossom goes up as the dust." (Isa. v. 24.) If every moment were filled up with deeds of benevolence, or external piety; yet, except *the heart* was quickened to *keep the commandments*, the voice of rebuke would be heard—"Who hath required this at your hand?" (Isa. i. 11, 12.) "The inner man's delight" (Rom. vii. 22) stamps the excellency upon the service. And this pleasure and perseverance in duty flow from a gracious change upon the heart. (See Ezek. xi. 19; xxxvi. 26, 27.)

Herein also lies our interest, not less than our obligation. The reward of this *hearty* obedience (need we add--a reward of grace?) is a long and happy life--the highest earthly good. (Ps. xxxiv. 12; comp. verse 16; iv. 10; ix. 11; x. 27; Job, x. 12.) The wicked indeed live long, and the godly often "live out only half their days." The wicked die in outward comfort; the righteous in outward trouble. (Eccles. ix. 2.) But *length of days* is the promise to the righteous; whether for earth or for heaven, as their Father deems fittest for them. In itself the promise, as regards this life, has no charm. To the un-

godly it is a curse (Gen. iv. 11–15. Isa. lxxv. 20); to the people of God a trial of faith and patience (Gen. xxvii. 46; xlvii. 9. 1 Kings, xix. 4. Job, vii. 16. Philip. i. 23, 24. Rev. xxii. 20); to all a weariness. (Chap. xv. 15. Ps. xc. 10. Eccles. xii. 1.) But *peace added* forms the sunshine of the toilsome way (Ps. cxix. 165. Isa. xxxii. 17; xlviii. 17, 18): peace with God through the blood of sprinkling" (Rom. v. 1. Eph. ii. 13, 14. Col. i. 20); eternal peace in his home and in his bosom (Ps. xxxvii. 37. Isa. lvii. 2); where all the fightings of a rebellious flesh, all the counter-strivings of a perverse and ungovernable will, shall have ceased for ever. "*Blessed are they that do his commandments*, that they might have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gate into the city." (Rev. xxii. 14.)

3. *Let not mercy and truth forsake thee; bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart; 4. So shalt thou find favour and good understanding (marg., success,) in the sight of God and man.*

Mercy and truth are the glorious perfections of God; always in combined exercise (Gen. xxxii. 10. Ps. xxv. 10; lxxxv. 10; lxxxix. 14; c. 5; cxvii. 2. Mic. vii. 18–20) for his people's good. While we rest upon them for salvation, let us copy them in our profession. Are not his children new-created-in his image? Let then our Father's image be manifested in us, "as his dear children." (Eph. iv. 24; v. 1, 2, 8.) Let these graces be, as with God, in combination. 'The want of one buries the commendation of the other. Such a one is a merciful man to the poor; but there is no *truth* in him. Such a one is very just in his dealings, but as hard as flint.'* "Put on, as the elect of God, bowels of mercy. But lie not one to another. Speak every man *truth* with his neighbour." (Col. iii. 12, with 9. Eph. iv. 25.) Indeed, 'as a rich sparkling diamond added both value and lustre to a golden ring; so do these virtues of justice and mercy, well attuned, bring a rich addition of glory to the crowns of the greatest monarchs.'†

But these virtues must not be in temporary or occasional exercise. *Let them not forsake thee. Bind them as jewels about thy neck.* (Chap. vi. 21; vii. 3. Deut. vi. 8.) Let them be "*written*, not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart." (Chap. vii. 3. 2 Cor. iii. 3.) God indeed is not thy debtor; yet none shall serve him for nought. The man who shows mercy to his neighbour shall find it with him. (Ps. xviii. 25. Matt. v. 7.) "They that deal truly are his delight." (Chap. xii. 22.) So shalt *thou find favour and good understanding* (Ps. cxi. 10)--(success) (Josh. i. 7, 8. M. R.)—both *in his sight, and in the sight of man*. Witness Joseph in Egypt (Gen. xxxix. 2–4, 21–23;

* F. TAYLOR'S *Comment on Chap. i.-ix.*; 4to. 1655-1657.

† Bishop SANDERSON's *Sermon on Chap. xxiv.* 10-12.

xli. 37–43; xlv. 16); David in the family of Saul (1 Sam. xviii. 5, 14–16); the servants of God in the eastern courts;* the early Christians with the people around them. (Acts, ii. 44–47.) What is more lovely than thus to live down reproach by consistent godliness? What more acceptable to God, or more edifying to the Church? (Rom. xiv. 16–19.) The Scripture connects the favour of God with the favour of men, as if the one was often the fruit of the other. (Comp. chap. xvi. 7.) Such was the record of the holy child. (Luke, ii. 52.) The highest crown of a youthful profession is conformity to this Divine pattern. (Comp. 1 Sam. ii. 26.)

5. *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding.* 6. *In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.*

This is the polar-star of a child of God —faith in his Father's providence, promises, and grace. The unmeaning expression of *trust* on the lips of the ignorant and ungodly is a fearful delusion. What ground of confidence can there be when there is, everything to fear? Can the sinner's God—a just, avenging God—be an object of trust, What owe we to that precious atonement, which has opened up our way to a reconciled God (Rom. v. 11), and assured our confidence in him as our Friend and Counsellor! Nor is this the cold assent of the enlightened judgment. It is the *trust of the heart, of all the heart*. It is a child-like, unwavering (Ps. lxxviii. 2 Chron. xiv. 11. Contrast Jer. i. 6–8) confidence in our Father's well-proved wisdom, faithfulness, and love. Any limit to this confidence is a heinous provocation. (Ps. lxxviii. 18–21.) He is truth itself. Therefore he would have us take him at his word, and prove his word to the utmost extent of his power,

But our trust must not only be *entire*: it must be *exclusive*. No other confidence, no confidence in the flesh, can consist with it. (Comp. Philip. iii. 3.) Man with all his pride feels that he wants something to *lean to*. As a fallen being, he naturally *leans to himself*, to his own foolish notions and false fancies. Human power is his idol. His *understanding* is his God. Many would rather be convicted of want of principle than want of talent. Many bring God's truth to their own bar, and cavil at it, as an excuse for rejecting it. In these and other ways, man "trusteth to himself, and his heart departeth from the Lord." (Jer. xvii. 5.) This is the history of the fall; the history of man from the fall; the dominant sin of every unhumiliated heart; the lamented and resisted sin of every child of God. Need we advert to it as the sin of youth? How rare is the sight of the "younger submitting unto the elder!" (1 Pet. v. 5.) If advice is asked, is it not with the hope of

* Dan. i. 8, 9; iv. 8, 9; v. 11; vi. 1–3, 27, 28. —His three Companions, iii. 30; Ezra, vii. 9–12. Neh. ii. 1–6. Mordecai, Esth. x. 3,

confirming a previously-formed purpose? In case of a contrary judgment, the young man's *own understanding* usually decides the course.

Great reason then is there for the warning—*Lean not to thine own understanding*. Once, indeed, it gave clear unclouded light, as man's high prerogative, "created in the image of God." (Gen. i 26. Col. iii. 10.) But now, degraded as it is by the fall (Ps. xlix. 20), and darkened by the corruption of the heart (Eph. iv. 18), it must be a false guide. Even in a prophet of God it proved a mistaken counsellor. (2 Sam. vii. 2–5.) Yet though we refuse *to lean to it*, to follow it may be implicit *trust in the Lord*; because it is a trust in his Divine power, enlightening it, as his lamp for our direction. The Christian on his knees, as if he cast his understanding away, confesses himself utterly unable to guide his path. But see him in his active life. He carefully improves his mind. He conscientiously follows its dictates. Thus practical faith strengthens, not destroys, its power; invigorates, not supersedes, exertion. (Comp. Gen. xxxii. 9–20; Neh. 4–20; iv. 9.).

It is therefore our plain duty not to neglect *our understanding*, but to cultivate it diligently in all its faculties in a world of such extended 'knowledge, ignorance is the fruit of sloth dissipation, or misguided delusion. But *lean not to thine understanding*. *Lean—trust in the Lord*. Self-dependence is folly (Chap. xxviii..26), rebellion (Jer. ii. 13 ; ix. 23), ruin. (Gen. iii. 5, 6. Isa. dlvii. 10, 11.) 'The great folly of man in trials'---as Dr. Owen justly remarks—'is *leaning to or upon his own understanding* and counsels. What is the issue of it? Whenever in our trials we consult our own understandings, hearken to self-reasonings, though they seem to be good, and tending to our preservation; yet the principle of living by faith is stifled, and we shall in the issue be cast down by our own counsels.'*

Next—*let our confidence be uniform— all thy ways acknowledge him*. Take one step at a time, every step under Divine warrant and direction. (Comp. Ezek. viii. 21–23; Neh. i.11.) Ever plane for yourself in simple, dependence on God.† It is nothing less than self-idolatry to conceive that we can carry on even the ordinary matters of the day without his counsel. He loves to be consulted. Therefore take all thy difficulties to be resolved by him. Be in the habit of going to him *in the first place*—before self-will, self-pleasing,‡ self-wisdom, human friends, convenience, expediency. Before any of these have been consulted go to God at once. Consider no circumstances too clear to need his direction.§ In all thy ways, small as well as great; in all thy con-

* *Treatise on Temptation*, chap. viii. Comp. Job, xviii 7; Hos. x. 8.

† Jam. iv. 15. *If the Lord will*— as Fuller remarks with his pithy quaintness —'a parenthesis, and yet the most important part of the sentence.'

‡ See the awful hypocrisy, and judgment of asking counsel of God under this deadly influence. Jer. xlii. 1–3, 19–22. Ezek. xiv. 1–6.

§ See the evil consequence of this inconsiderate neglect. Jos. ix. 14.

cerns, personal or relative, temporal or eternal, let him be supreme. Who of us has not found the unspeakable "peace" of bringing to God matters too minute or individual to be entrusted to the most confidential ear? * Abraham thus *acknowledged God*. Wheresoever he pitched a tent for himself there was always an altar for God. (Gen. xii. 7; xiii. 18.) In choosing a wife for his son there was a singular absence of worldliness. No mention was made of riches, honour, beauty; only of what concerned the name and honour of his God. (Gen. xxiv. 1-8. Comp. also his servant, verse 12-27.) Thus did the wise man's father *in all his ways acknowledge God*, asking counsel of him in all his difficulties, and never disappointed. †

Now if we be weaned from the idolatry of making our bosom our oracle, and our heart our counsellor if in true poverty of spirit we go every morning to our Lord, as knowing not how to guide ourselves for this day; our eye constantly looking upward for *direction* (Ps. v. 3; cxliii. 8-10; xxv. 4, 5), the light will come down. ‡ *He shall direct thy paths*. We want no new revelations or visible tokens. (Such as Exod. xiii. 21, 22.) Study the word with prayer. Mark the Divine Spirit shedding light upon it. Compare it with the observation of the providences of the day (Ps. cvii. 43); not judging by constitutional bias (a most doubtful interpreter), but pondering with sober, practical, reverential faith. Let the will be kept in a quiet, subdued, cheerful readiness, to move, stay, retreat, turn to the right hand onto the left, at the Lord's bidding; always remembering that is best which is least our own doing, and that a pliable spirit ever secures the needful guidance. (Comp. Ps. xxxii. 8, 9; Isa. xlviii. 17, 18, with xxi. 21.) We may "be led," for the exercise of our faith, "in a way that we know not" (Isa. xlii. 16; l. 10) —perhaps a way of disappointment, or even of *mistake*. Yet no step well prayed over will bring ultimate regret. Though the promise will not render us infallible; our very error will be overruled for deeper humiliation and self-knowledge; and thus even this mysterious *direction* will in the end be gratefully acknowledged, "He led me forth in the right way." (Ps. cvii. 7.)

7. *Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and, depart from evil;*

8. *It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.*

This warning against self-confidence is closely connected with the preceding verse. The *wise in his own eyes* is he, that leans to his own

* Phil. iv. 6, 7. "*In every thing.*"

† 1 Sam. xxiii. 9-11; xxx. 6-8. 2 Sam. ii. 1; v. 19. Comp. the smarting rod from the neglect of this godly habit. 1 Sam. xxvii. 1, with xxix.

‡ Matt. vi. 22. Comp. Ps. xxxii. 8; xxxiv. 5. Neh. i. 4-11; ii. 4-8. Sir M. Hale left it on record, when nearly eighty years old, as his experience, that whenever he had committed his way simply and unreservedly to the Lord, he had always *directed his path*.

understanding.^{*} Such wisdom is folly and self-delusion.[†] Put it away, and let it be thy wisdom to *fear the Lord, and depart from evil*. How striking is this connexion between *the fear of God* and the fear of sin. (Chap. xiv. 27; xvi. 6. Gen. xxxix. 9, 10. Neh. v. 15. Job, xxviii. 28.) Where God is honoured, sin is hated, loathed, and resisted. (Rom. vii. 18-24.) It lives indeed; but it is conderined to die. (Ibid. vi.-6.) It cleaves to the child of God; but his heart *departs from it*. Often is it the cause of the sickness of the body:[‡] always of the soul. (Hos. vii. 9.) *The departure from it* in the exercise of self-denial and godly discipline, is *health* to the body. (Verses 1, 2.) The soul, drooping under the baneful influence of spiritual disease, revives in fruitfulness. (Hos. xiv. 5-7.) The man that *feareth the Lord*, under "the healing beams of the Sun of Righteousness, goeth forth" (Mal. iv. 2), as from his sick chamber, full of life and Christian energy. "The joy of the Lord is his strength." (Neh. viii. 10.)

9. *Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase; 10. So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.*

This rule of sacrifice is a costly precept to the worldling and the formalist. But to the servant of God, is it not a privilege to lay aside a portion of substance with this sacred stamp,—"*This is for God?*" (1 Cor. xvi. 2.) The first-fruits of the increase were the acknowledgment of redemption from Egypt. (Exod. xiii. 12, 13. Deut. xxvi. 1-40.) And shall we, redeemed from sin, Satan, death, and hell, deny the claim? (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.) 'Well, may we think *our substance* due, where we owe ourselves.'[§] Nay, could we be happy in spending that *substance* on ourselves, which he has given us wherewith *to honour* him? (Luke, xix. 13. Contrast xii. 16-22.) What a value, what a dignity, does it give to the talent, that he should condescend to employ it for his own grand, eternal purposes! This sacred devotedness is, moreover, the true road to riches. (Chap. xi. 24.) God challenges us to "prove him now herewith," if the abundant harvest, and the overflowing vintage, shall not put unbelief and covetousness to shame. (Mal. iii. 10. 2 Chron. xxxi. 5-10.) A niggardly spirit is, therefore, narrow policy; contracting the harvest, by sparing the seed-corn. (2 Cor. ix. 6. Hag. i. 4-6.)

^{*} Verse 5. Comp. xxiii. 4. Rom. xii. 3-18. See the mind of God expressed in that solemn woe. (Isa. v. 21.)

[†] Even a heathen could remark—'I suppose that many might have attained to wisdom, had they not thought they had already attained it.' SENECA, de Ira, Lib. iii. c. 36. Comp. 1 Cor. viii. 2; Gal. vi. 3. 'Our knowledge should hold the light before us, and help us for the better discovery of our ignorance, and so dispose us to humility, not pride.'—Bp. SANDERSON's *Sermon on Rom.* xiv. 3.

[‡] In sensual indulgence—Chap. v. 8-11. Intemperance—xxiii. 29, 30. As a judicial infliction — Ps. xxxii. 3, 4; xxxviii. 1-8. 1 Cor. xi. 30.

[§] Bishop Hall.

There is no presumption, or enthusiasm in looking for the literal fulfilment of the promise. If we doubt the temporal, should we not suspect our assumed confidence in the spiritual, engagements? For if the Lord's word be insufficient security for *our substance*: much more must it be for the infinitely weightier deposit of our soul!

The rule and obligation are therefore clear. The law dealt with us as children, and prescribed the exact amount. The gospel treats us as men, and leaves it to circumstance, principle, and conscience. This consecration of substance, as the seed-corn for the harvest, is as strange to the world, as would be the casting of the seed in the earth to an untutored savage. Yet is the result secure in both cases; only with this difference, that the temper of the earthly sower has no influence on the harvest; whereas the fruitfulness of the spiritual harvest mainly depends upon the principles of the work. Most important is it to beware of bye-ends and selfish principles; that we *honour the Lord*, not ourselves. Let there be a self-renouncing spirit (1 Chron. xxix. 14-16. Matt. vi. 1-4; xxv. 37-39), implicit faith (1 Kings, xvii. 12-16), constraining love (Rom. xii. 1. 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. Matt x. 42), special regard to his own people. And doubt not, but he will affix his own seal—"Those that honour me, I will honour." (1 Sam. ii. 30. Comp. chap. xi. 25; xxii. 9; Heb. vi. 10.)

11. My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction; 12. For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.

Prosperity and adversity in their wise mixture and proportion, form our present condition. Each is equally fruitful in opportunity of *honouring the Lord*; in prosperity—by the full consecration of *our substance* (Verses 9, 10); in adversity —by a humble and cheerful submission to his dispensation. 'In prosperity it is well to expect the rod; and suppose it be his pleasure, let it not make thee either doubt of his gracious Providence, or out of impatience take any unlawful course to remove it from thee.'* His "exhortation"—the Apostle reminds us—"speaketh to us, as unto children."† And indeed, under no character does he approach so near to us, and endear himself so closely to us, as that of a Father, Most precious at all times, especially under correction, is the privilege of adoption—*My son*.

Nowhere, indeed, are our corruptions so manifest, or our graces so shining, as under the rod. We need it as much as our daily bread. Children of God are still children of Adam; with Adam's will, pride,

* Bishop Patrick.

† Heb. xii. 5. We must not overlook the Apostle's testimony to the Divine inspiration of the Book; showing the instruction throughout to be the teaching of our Heavenly Father to his beloved children.

independence, and waywardness. And nothing more distinctly requires Divine teaching and grace, than how to preserve in our behaviour the just mean between hardness and despondency; *neither despising the chastening of the Lord, nor being weary of his correction.**

Too often, while we guard against an error on the right hand, we forget one not less hurtful on the left; like the man, who, in guarding against the precipice on the one side, rushes into some fearful hazard on the other. The middle path is the right path. *Doubtless the Lord means his chastening to be felt.* (2 Sam. xv. 26. Ps. xxxix. 10, 11.) A leviathan iron-heartedness (Job, xli. 24-29. Jer. v. 3) is the stubbornness of the flesh, not the triumph of the spirit; a frame most offensive to him, and most unseemly for the reception of his gracious discipline. To be as though no pain was felt or cared for; sullenly to "kick against the pricks" (Acts, ix. 5. Comp. chap. xix. 3), and to dare God to do his worst--this is, indeed, *to despise his chastening.*† But pride will lift up the head, stiff and unbending: many a stroke does it require to bring it down.

Yet, alas! this is not the sin only of the ungodly. Often do we see the child of God in an undutiful spirit (Job, v. 17. Heb. xii. 6), caring little whether his Father smiles or frowns. The *chastening* is lightly passed over. He considers only second causes, or immediate instruments. (Amos, iii. 6.) He is irritated by looking at the rod, rather than at the hand that inflicts it. (2 Chron. xvi. 10-12.) He shrinks from searching into the cause. He disregards his Father's loving voice and purpose. Hence there is no softening humiliation (Ps. xxxii. 3, 4); no "acceptance of the punishment of iniquity" (Lev. xxvi. 41, 43); no child-like submission; no exercise of faiths in looking for support. Is not this to *despise the chastening of the Lord?*

But while some *despise* the hand of God as light, others "faint" under it as heavy. (Heb. xii. 5. Ps. xxxviii. 2, 3; xxxix. 10.) They are *weary of his correction.* Beware of yielding to heartless despondency, or fretful impatience. (Ps. lxxiii. 14; lxxvii. 7, 40.) Resist hard and dishonourable thoughts of God. (Gen. xlii. 3; Judg. vi. 13. Jonah, iv. 9.) Their very admission spreads destruction. Very apt are we to judge amiss of our Father's dealings;‡ to neglect present duty; to cherish a morbid brooding over our sorrows (Job, vi. 1-16): to forget our title and privilege of adoption (Heb. xii. 5); or in obstinate grief to "refuse to be comforted" with the "hope of the end" (Ps. lxxvii. 2.

* The philosopher's definition is striking and accurate, but infinitely above his own Tactical standard--'Non sentire mala tua, non est hominis; et non ferre, non est viri.'—(It is inhuman not to feel thine afflictions, and unmanly not to bear them.)—SENECA, Consol. ad Polyb. c. 36.

† Comp. Pharaoh—Exod. vii. 23. Jehoram—2 Kings vi. 31. Ahaz—2 Chron. xxviii. 22. Israel--Isa. i. 6. Zeph. iii. 2. Comp. Job, xv. 25, 26.

‡ Chap xxiv. 10. Isa. xl. 27-31; Comp. 1 Sam. xxvii. 1; 1 Kings, xix. 4; Job iii. 1-3; Jer. xx. 14-18.

Comp. Jer. xxix. 11; xxxi. 15-17.) And is not this to be *weary of his correction*?

But these rules imply much more than their negative meaning. Instead of *despising*, reverence *the chastening of the Lord*. Let it be a solemn remembrance to thee, that thou art under thy Father's correction. (Lam. iii. 28, 29. Mic. vii. 9.) Receive it then in good part. Instead of being *weary* of it, hang upon his chastening hand, and pour thy very soul into his bosom. (1 Sam. i. 10-15.) Kiss the rod. (Job, xxxiv. 31, 32. 1 Pet. v. 6.) Acknowledge its humbling, but enriching, benefit. (Ps. cxix. 67-71.) Expect a richer blessing from sustaining grace, than from the removal of the deprecated affliction. (2 Cor. xii. 7-10.)

After all we must add, that chastening is a trial to the flesh (Heb. xii. 11); yet overruled by wonder-working wisdom and faithfulness to an end above and contrary to its nature. This, very rod was sent in love to the soul. Perhaps we were living at ease, or in heartless back-sliding. The awakening voice called us to our Bible and to prayer. Thus eyeing God in it, we see it to be love, not wrath; receiving, not casting out. We might perhaps have wished it a little altered; that the weight had been shifted, and the cross a little smoothed, where it pressed upon the shoulder. But now that our views are cleared, we discern blessing enough to swallow up the most poignant smart. We see the "needs-be," for our preservation from imminent danger (Comp. Chap. i. 32; Ps. lv. 19), and for "the trial of our faith." We come to an unhesitating verdict in favour of the absolute perfection of the dispensation. (Ps. li. 4 ; cxix. 75.) Faith understands the reasons of the discipline (1 Pet. i. 6, 7); acknowledges it as a part of his gracious providence (Deut. viii. 2, 15, 16), and the provision of his everlasting covenant (Ps. lxxxix. 30-32); waits to see the end of the Lord (Jam. v. 11); and meanwhile draws its main support from the seal of adoption.

For indeed it is the declared test of our legitimacy. (Heb. xii. 7, 8. Rev. iii. 19.) He *corrects whom he loves, the son it whom he delighteth*. His discipline is that of the family; not of the school; much less of the prison. He corrects his children, not as criminal, but as those whom he beholds without spot, "made accepted in the beloved." (Eph. i. 6.) Nor is there caprice, as too often with an earthly father, in his chastisement. (Heb. xii. 10.) It is wisdom in the spirit of love. "He rejoiceth over his child to do him good" (Jer. xxxi. 41); yet as a wise and affectionate father, he would not suffer him to be ruined for want of *correction*. (Chap. xiii. 24. Deut. viii. 5.) It is correction—this is for your humbling. It is only correction—this is your consolation. The intolerable sting of penal infliction is removed. Here then the child has rest indeed?* The rod is now meekly, yea—thankfully borne, because it is in the hand of One supreme in wisdom, as in love,

* 1 Sam. iii. 18 2 Sam. xv. 25; xvi. 10, 11. Ps. xxxix. 9. Job, i. 21. Isa. xxxix. 8.

who knows what is our need, and how to apply the discipline. He chooses the fittest time (Isa. xxx. 18. I Pet. v. 6), the surest yet gentlest means, the most considerate measure (Isa. xxvii. 7, 8. Jer. xxx. 11. Lam. iii. 31-33), the most effective instruments. And, comparing our affliction with our sin, is not the marvel that it is so light? (Ezra, ix. 13. Ps. ciii. 10. Lam. iii. 39.) Have we not more than deserved it all? 'I love the rod of my heavenly Father'-- exclaimed the saintly Fletcher---'How gentle are the stripes I feel! How heavy those I deserve!'* 'O God, I have made an ill use of thy mercies, if I have not learnt to be content with thy *correction*.'†

Should he then at any dark season ask—"If it be so, why am I thus?" (Gen. xxv. 22)—you are thus, because this is your Father's training discipline for heaven.‡ He loves, thee so well, that he will bestow all pains upon thee. He will melt thee in his furnace, that he may stamp thee with his image. (Isa. xxvii. 9; xlviii. 10. Zech. xiii. 9. Mal. iii. 3.) He would make thee "partake of his holiness" (Heb. xii. 10), that thou mightest partake of his happiness. But unless thou enter into his mind, thou wilt, so far as thou canst, defeat his purpose, and lose the benefit—a loss never to be told? (Comp. Jer. vi. 8.) Look then well into the dispensation. (Job, x. 2. Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24. Eccles. vii. 14. Lam. iii. 40.) Every rod is thy Father's messenger; and he will not bear to have his messenger *despised*. Be anxious to "hear the rod; and who hath appointed it" (Mic. vi. 9); well knowing that "the Lord hath not done without cause all that he hath done." (Ezek. xiv. 23.) Be more concerned to have it sanctified than removed; yea, above all things deprecate its removal, until it has fully wrought its appointed work. (Isa. iv. 4.) We can but admire that considerate dispensation, which uses these "*light*" afflictions as the means of deliverance from the most deadly evil. Should flesh and blood rebel; should the earthly tabernacle shake with "the blow of his hand" (Ps. cxxxix. 10, ut supra): yet shalt thou bless him throughout eternity, that even by this crushing discipline he should accomplish his most merciful purpose. Meanwhile, give him unlimited confidence; and if some steps of the way are hid, wait and "see the end." (Job, xxiii. 8-10; Jam. v. 11.) Watch for the first whispers of his will, the first intimation of his Providence, the guidance of his eye. (Ps. xxxii. 8, 9.) Many a stroke will thus be saved to thy peace and quietness. This indeed is a golden opportunity, requiring for its due improvement much study, prayer, and retirement. No communion is so close, so endearing, so fruitful, as with a *chastening* God. Never is Christ more precious to

Comp. John, xviii. 11. The heathen philosopher has accurately drawn the line—'Chastisement is on the sufferer's account. Vengeance is for the satisfaction of him that inflicts it.'

—ARIST. *de Rhetor* b. i. e. 10.

* Life of Rev. H. Venn, pp. 238, 584.

† Bishop Hall.

‡ Job, xxxiii. 14-28; xxxvi. 8-10. Heb. xii. 7, 8, ut supra.---The term refers to the education of children.

us; his love never more sweet, than in the midst,—yea, in the very form, of *chastening*. Never have we so full a manifestation of the Divine character (Ps. cxix. 75), and perfections. What we have before learnt in theory, we here learn experimentally; and what we have before imperfectly understood, is here more fully revealed.* With regard to the full weight and duration of the trial, and all its minute circumstances, successively so bitter and piercing—we may ask—‘Which of them could be spared?’ It is quite clear as to the whole time, the whole weight, the whole number and variety of circumstances that all and each were as necessary as any part. Where could we have stopped, without making that stop fatal to the great end? What does it all mean, but the Lord holding to his determination to save us; all the thoughts of his heart, every exercise of his, power, centering in this purpose of his sovereign mercy?

13. *Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth (marg. draweth out), understanding; 14. For the merchandize of it is better than the merchandize of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold; 15. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared to her.*

Who does not admire this glowing picture of happiness?† The wisdom of this world affords no such happiness, (Eccles. i. 18.) Yet cold and barren is admiration, without an interest in the blessing. The *happy man has found* a treasure, where possibly the least expected it, under *the chastening of the Lord*. David‡ and Manasseh (2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13) found (as who hath not found?) ‘God’s house of correction to be a school of instruction.’§ Under all circumstances, however, prayerful diligence in the search of wisdom ensues success. (Chap. ii. 1-6.) The naturally wise man is a fool in heavenly *wisdom*. The man of prayer *getteth understanding, draweth it out* to light, as out of the hid treasure.|| We wonder not at the merchant-man’s concentrated interest, at his untiring toil.¶ Here the wise man, himself enriched with *the*

* Job, xlii. 5. Comp. the Apostle’s most instructive and encouraging exposition, Heb. xii. There is some slight variation between Heb. xii. 6, and verse. 12. The one describes the mode and subject of the chastening. The other shows the Father’s delight in his chastened child. Some by inverting the first clause, ver. 12, grossly pervert the meaning, and conclude themselves to be the Lord’s children, because they are afflicted. But though every child is corrected, not every one that is corrected is a child. The same hand—but not the same character—gives the stroke, to the godly and the ungodly. The scourge of the Judge is widely different from the rod of the Father. Comp. I Sam. xxviii. 15-20, with 2 Sam. xii. 13, 14; Chap. i. 26. Isa. i. 24, with Jer. xxxi. 18-2. Hos. xi. 7. 8; also Isa. xxvii. 7-9. Nor is it chastening, but the endurance of chastening, according to the rules prescribed, that seals our adoption. Heb. xii. 7.

† Happy man —Heb. plural. Comp. Ps. i. 1; xxxii. 1. Blessedness—to mark supreme and perfect happiness. See the beautiful description of Wisdom, Ecclus xxiv. 1-19.

‡ Ps. cxix. 67, 71. Hence he commends it, Ps. xciv. 12. § TRAPP, *in LOCO*.

|| M. R. Comp. Chap. viii. 35. M. R. Chap. ii. 4. Matt. xiii. 44

¶ Impiger extremos currit mercator ad Indos,

Per mare pauperiem fugiens, per saxa, per ignes.

HOR. *Epis.* i. 1.45.

merchandize of fine gold (1 Kings, ix. 26-28) points out to us a *better merchandize*. It is the search for "the pearl of great price," *more precious than rubies, yea, than all things that could, be desired*.^{*} So the Apostle judged. So upon a trial he found it. All the world's show, all his former valuable "gain, he counted as dung and dross" for "the true wisdom"—"the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord." (Philip. iii. 4-8.) Never will solid happiness be known without this singleness of judgment and purpose. This inestimable blessing must have the throne. The waverer and the half-seeker fall short. Determined perseverance wins the prize. (Philip. iii. 12-14.)

16. *Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour; 17. Her ways are ways of pleasantness; and all her paths are peace; 18. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her.*

Behold this heavenly Queen dispensing her blessings! *Her right hand* presents the promise of both worlds (Verse 2. Ps. xci. 16. 1 Tim. vi. 8)—the rich enjoyment of the world's lawful comforts (1 Tim. vi. 17), and the yet higher joy of serving the Lord and his church—a privilege for which the Apostle was content for a while to be detained from heaven. (Philip. i. 23, 24.) Add *length of days* for eternity to the balance; and the amount sets at nought all computation. *Her left hand* offers riches and honour,[†] so far as may be for her children's good; yet in their highest splendour, only a faint shadow of her more "durable riches," and of the honour of a heavenly crown.

But what say we of *her ways*? Is she a sullen matron, who entertains her followers only on sighs and tears; so that to obtain the joys of the next life, we must bid eternal adieu to the contents of this life; 'we must never more expect a cheerful hour, a clear day, a bright thought to shine upon us?'[‡] This is the world's creed—a slander of the great forger of lies, to deter us from *wisdom's ways*. They must be *ways of pleasantness*, because "Thus saith the Lord." And if we feel them not to be so, we know them not.

The man of pleasure utterly mistakes both his object and his pursuit. The only happiness worth seeking is found here; that which will live in all circumstances, and abide the ceaseless changes of this mortal life. The ways may be dark and lonely; yet howl does the sunshine of reconciliation beam upon their entrance! Every step is lighted from above, and strewn with promises; a step in happiness, a step to heaven.

^{*} Matt. xiii. 45, 46, with Chap. xxiii. 28. Comp. Chap. viii. 11, 19; Job, xxviii. 15-18. Most truly does the great Moralist define Wisdom to be 'The knowledge of the most honourable things'—**episthnh tw niniwtatwn**.—ARIST. *Ethic.* b. vi. chap. vii.

[†] See the treasures of right and hand promised to the wise man himself, 1 Kings, iii. 12-14.

[‡] BISHOP HOPKINS' *Works*, iv 354, 855.

Wisdom's work is its own reward (Ps. xix. 11. isa. xxxii. 17)—strictness without bondage. (Matt. xi. 29, 30.) God rules children, not slaves. They work neither from compulsion, nor for hire; but from an ingenuous principle of gratitude to their Benefactor; filial delight in their Father. *Pleasant* therefore must be the labour—yea—the sacrifices--of love; short the path; cheerful the way, when the heart goes freely in it.

It is saying far too little, that the trials of *these ways* are not inconsistent with their pleasantness. They are the very principles of the most elevated pleasure. 'The verdict of Christ,'—says Dr. South—'makes the discipline of self-denial and the cross—those terrible blows to flesh and blood—the indispensable requisite to the being his disciples.'* And yet, paradoxical as it may appear, in this deep gloom is the sunshine of joy. For if our natural will be "enmity to God" (Rom. viii. 7), it must be the enemy to our own happiness. Our pleasure, therefore, must be to deny, not to indulge it; to mortify sinful appetites, that only "bring forth fruit unto death." (Ib. vii. 5.) Even what may be called the austerities of godliness are mere joyous than "the pleasures of sin." Far better to cross the will; than to wound the conscience. The very chains of Christ are glorious. (Acts, v. 41, 42; xvi. 24, 25.) Moses endured not "his reproach" as a trial. He "esteemed it as a treasure--greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." (Heb. xi. 26.) Our principles are never more consoling than when we are making a sacrifice for them. Hannah yielded up her dearest earthly joy. But did she sink under the trial? Did she grudge the sacrifice? "Hannah prayed and said—*My heart rejoiceth in the Lord*" (1 Sam. i. 26; ii. 1); while—to show that none serve him for nought—for one child that was resigned, five were added. (Ib. ii. 20, 21.)

In fact, the world have no just conception of the real character of *wisdom's ways*. Religion to them is associated with cold, heartless forms and irksome restraints—much to do, but nothing to enjoy. But they only see half the prospect. They see what religion takes away. But they see not what it gives. They cannot discern, that, while it denies sinful, it abounds in spiritual, pleasures. We drudge in the ways of sin. But we "shall sing in the ways of the Lord (Isa. lvii.10; with Ps. cxxxviii. 5.) Here is the only thing below worth the name of joy—solid—abiding—overflowing—satisfying (Hab. iii. 18)--God's own joy. (John, xv. 11; xvii. 13.) It is not a mere impulse of vapid sentimentalism, but a principle of Christian energy, invigorating for duty, supporting for trial. (Neh. viii. 10.) Here, then, "we have less toil, and reap more fruit." For will not any reasonable man, upon the hearing of the names of the things only, presently yield, that "love, joy, peace, and gentleness," which are "fruits of the Spirit," are far more lovely, more easy, fuller of sweetness and calmness, less vexatious, than

* *Sermons*, vol. i. Matt. xvi. 24.

are "hatreds, emulations, murders," and those other "works of the flesh?"*

But ways of pleasantness are not always safe. Yet all wisdom's paths are peace. The deadly breach is healed. The cloud vanishes. Heaven smiles. And peace, the Saviour's last bequest, is realised even in the heat of "this world's tribulation." (John, xvi. 33.) "The feet are shod" for the rugged path "with the preparation of the Gospel of peace." (Eph. vi. 15; with Deut. xxxiii. 25.) The subjugation of the will, the sorrow of contrition, the weariness of the (cross--all end in peace. (Ps. xxxvii. 37. Isa. lvii. 2, with 20, 21.)

Yet nothing can make *wisdom's ways* palatable to a carnal mind. "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh;" so that, as "they cannot please God," God's ways cannot please them. (Rom. viii. 5, 8.) Nor again—though wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, are wisdom's children always happy. Sometimes a naturally morose temper gives a gloomy tinge to religion. Professors forget, that it is no matter of option, whether they should be happy or not; that it is their obligation no less than their privilege to be so; that the commands of God on this duty† carry weight, and demand obedience. The prophets in the burst of their rapture search heaven and earth, bring forth the most beautiful objects of nature; nay—call the inanimate creation into glowing sympathy with the joys of the Gospel. (Ps. xcvi. 11-13; xcviii. Isa. xlv. 23; lv. 12, 13.) A rejoicing spirit is the character of the servants of God (Phil. iii. 3. Acts, ii. 46, 47), specially in affliction. (2 Con vi. 10; viii. 2. 1 Pet. i. 6-8.) Is them thy happiness clouded? Has there not been some deviation from wisdom's paths? Thy God calls thee to search, to humble thyself, to return. (Jer. ii. 17-19. Hos. v. 15; vi. 1.)

Lastly—to the glory, beauty, and fruitfulness of wisdom, the Paradise of God alone can furnish the full counterpart. (Rev. ii. 7.) '*The tree of life* was the means ordained of God for the preservation of lasting life, and continual vigour and health, before man sinned. So true wisdom maintains man in the spiritual life of God's grace, and the communion of his Spirit.‡ Once our way was barred up, and none could touch her. (Gen. iii. 22-24.) Now our way is opened to her in a better paradise. (Heb. x. 19-22.) We "sit down under her shadow with great delight." Her branches bend down upon this world of sin and misery. Her clusters hang within the reach of the youngest child, and "the fruit is sweet to the taste" (Cant. ii. 3); sweeter than ever man tasted, since he became an exile from Eden. For what is so refreshing, as near communion with God; access to him; boldness in

* Bishop SANDERSON'S *Sermon on Gal.* v. 22, 23.

† Such as Ps. xxxii. 11; xxxvii. 4. Phil. iv. 4. 1 These. v. 16. Comp. the warning, Deut. xxviii. 47, 48.

‡ Diodati.

his presence; admission to his most holy delights? And if the earthly shadow and fruit be so rich, what will be "on the other side of the river,"--her monthly fruits, her healing leaves! (Rev. xxii. 2.) And yet only the weeping, wrestling soul can *lay hold upon* the beloved object (Gen. xxxii. 26–28. Hos. xii. 3, 4), and embrace it, in despite of all the enemy's struggle to loosen the grasp. (Matt. xi. 12.) And even, when Almighty power has enabled us to *lay hold*, the same continual miracle of grace, the same continually-renewed effort of faith, is needed to *retain it*. (1 Tim. vi. 12.) There must be "continuance in the ways" (Isa. lxiv. 5. John, viii. 31); "settled, rooted, and grounded" (Col. i. 23 ; ii. 7); "keeping the works;" holding the beginning of our confidence steadfast "unto the end." (Rev. ii. 26. Heb. iii. 6, 14.) *Happy is every one that retaineth her*. The promises are "to him that overcometh." (Rev. ii. iii.) God honours perseverance in the weakest saint.

This lovely description of wisdom's blessing is no fancy picture, but Divine reality. Rest not, till thine heart is filled with its substance. Take it to the Lord in prayer; and ere long, thou shalt rejoice in thy portion.

19. *The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth: by understanding hath he established (marg. prepared) the heavens.* 20. *By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew.*

We have seen wisdom, as it is in man, with all its enriching blessings. Here we behold its majesty, as it is in the bosom of God, and gloriously displayed in his works. 'Hereby he sheweth, that this wisdom, whereof he speaketh, was everlasting, because it was before all creatures; and that all things, even the whole world, were made by it.* Behold it *founding the earth* "upon nothing;" and yet "so sure, that it cannot be moved." (Job, xxvi. 7. Ps. xciii. 1.) See how this great Architect *hath established the heavens*, fixing all their bright luminaries in their respective orbits (Gen. i. 14–16. Ps., cxxxvi. 5. Jer. x. 12; li. 15)—'such a glorious canopy set with such sparkling diamonds!† Each of these departments declares his *knowledge*—In the earth, by *breaking up the depths*, and gathering them up into rivers and streams for the refreshment of man. (Chap. viii. 24–29 Gen. i. 9, 10. Job, xxxviii. 8–12. Ps. civ. 8–13)—*In the heavens*, by collecting the moisture into *dew*, and dropping down fatness upon the parched ground;‡ each of these countless drops falling from this Fountain of life. (Job, xxxviii. 28.) Thus does every particle of the universe glitter with infinite skill. (Ps. civ. 24.) The earth is its pavement, and the

* Reformers' Notes. † Leighton's beautiful fragment On Ps. viii. Works, vol. ii.

‡ Gen. xxvii. 28, 29. There is a philosophical difficulty in supposing "*the clouds* to drop down the dew," which is the moisture rising from the lower region, sometimes a very few feet from the earth. In the East, however, the dew is said to fall from a considerable height. Gesenius states, that the Hebrew word represents a 'gentle rain.'

heavens--its ceiling; both miracles of wisdom, to "declare the glory of God." (Ps. xix. 1.) How beautiful is the uniformity of the two great systems of God! Both are the work of the same Architect. Both display the *wisdom and knowledge* of God. (John, i. 1-14. Eph. i. 8; iii. 10. Col. i. 13-17.) The universe is a parable, a mirror of the gospel. The manifestation of these Divine Perfections in the field of Creation opens a rich provision for our happiness. Much more let their more glorious exhibition in the great work of redemption fill us with adoring praise—"O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"*
 21. *My son, let them not depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion:* 22. *So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace unto thy neck.*

Again we listen to Wisdom's voice. Her repetitions are not "vain repetitions;" but well fitted to impress upon youth (Isa. xxviii. 9, 10) the weight of her instructions. (Philip. iii. 1; 2 Pet. i. 12.) As thy much-loved treasure, as thy daily guide--*let them not depart from, thine eyes.* (Chap. vii. 1-3.) Worse than valueless are they, if received as notions; of inestimable price, if kept as principles. God's teaching is *sound wisdom* (Deut. iv. 9; vi. 8. Josh. i. 7, 8); full of light, and substance; transfiguring Divine truth with heavenly glory. Therefore keep it close to thine heart. Exercise it in that practical *discretion*, which disciplines all our tempers and duties. Man's wisdom is utterly devoid of all energy. The soul, "alienated from the life of God" (Eph. iv. 18), is in a state of death, until "the entrance of God's word giveth light and understanding" (Ps. cxix. 130)--"the light of life." (John, viii. 12.) "The excellency of this knowledge is, that," "with this light and understanding," it giveth *life* to them that have it. (Eccles. vii. 12. Comp. Chap. iv. 22; vi. 23.) Every truth under its influence springs up into the new creature with heavenly glow, and with all the grace of "the beauty of the Lord;"† outshining, even in the most despised garb, the richest glory of an earthly dross.

23. *Then shalt thou walk in thy way safer, and thy foot shall not stumble.*

24. *When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie*

* Rom. xi. 33. Full of profound thought are the words of our admirable Hooker—"That which moveth God to work is Goodness; that which ordereth his work is Wisdom; that which perfecteth his work is Power. All things, which God in these times and seasons hath brought forth, were eternally and before all time in God; as a work unbegun is in the artificer, which afterwards bringeth it into effect. Therefore whatsoever we do behold now in this present world, it was enwrapped within the bowels of Divine Mercy, written in the book of Eternal Wisdom, and held in the hands of Omnipotent Power, the first foundations of the earth being as yet unlaid. So that all things which God hath made are in that respect the Offspring of God. They are in him, as effects in their highest cause. He likewise is actually in them; the assistance and influence of his Deity is their life."—Book v. lvi. 5.

† Ps. xc. 17; cxlix. 4. Comp. Chap. i. 9. 'Grace to thy jaws'— is the Douay Version, with the Marg. Explanation — 'Merit for the words of thy Mouth.'

down, and thy sleep shall be sweet. 25. Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh. 26. For the Lord shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken.

The habitual eyeing of the word keeps the feet in a slippery path.

(Chap. iv. 11, 12. Ps. xvii. 4; xxxvii. 23; cxix. 9, 11, 133.) David, from inattention to wisdom's words, "well-nigh slipped." (Ps. lxxiii. 2-17.) Peter from the same neglect fearfully *stumbled*. (Matt. xxvi. 33-35, 69-75.) But our sleeping hours, no less than our waking steps, are divinely guarded. "So he giveth his beloved sleep." (Ps. cxxvii. 2. Comp. cxxi. 3, 4.) "Underneath them are the everlasting arms." (Deut. xxxiii. 27. Comp. Lev. xxvi. 6.) They enjoy a child-like repose, sleeping in his bosom without fear. Thus did David 'sleep in God, and in a state of salvation,' amid the tumultuous warfare with his undutiful son!* Peter in prison, in chains, between two soldiers, on the eve of his probable execution, when "there seemed but step between him and death"--Yet in such a place, in such company, at such a moment, did *he lie down so fearless, and sleep so sweetly*; that even the shining light failed to disturb him, and an angel's stroke was needed to awaken him.† What would not many in troublous times, waking at every stir, give for one night of this *sweet sleep*! And yet bow many such nights have we enjoyed; waking, as Jacob on his stony—we might add—downy, pillar, in the consciousness of our Father's 'keeping! But where has been our renewed dedication to God? (Gen. xxxvii. 11, 18-22.)

But *sudden fear* may come. Yet be not afraid. (Job, v. 21--24. Comp. 2 Kings, vi. 16, 17; Jer. xxxix. 15-18.) It is *the desolation of the wicked*. They must fear. (Isa. lvii. 20, 21.) Child of God! run you to your *confidence*, and "be safe." (Chap. xiv. 26; xviii. 10. Isa. xxvi. 1, 20.) Surely *he shall keep thy foot from being taken*. (Ps. xci. 1-3.) Noah found this security in the flood of the ungodly; Lot in the destruction of Sodom (2 Pet. ii. 5-9); the Christians in Pella, in *the desolation of the wicked city*. Luther sung his song of *confidence*--"God is our refuge and strength." (Ps. xlvi.) In the consummating *desolation, when it cometh*--what will then be the *sudden fear*--the undismayed *confidence*? "All the-tribes of the earth will mourn" at the sight of their despised Saviour--then their Judge. (Chap. i. 27. Luke, xxi. 26. Rev. i. 7; vi. 15-17.) But, "when ye see these thing's, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh." (Luke, xxi. 28. Comp. 2 Thess. i. 7-10.)

* 'Obdormit in Deo, et in statu salutis.'—*Lyra*.--Ps. iii. iv. 8. Compare the beautiful picture, Ezek. xxxiv. 25-28, in contrast with chap. iv. 16. Deut. xxviii. 66.

† Acts, xii. 6, 7. Our Martyrologist records of John Rogers, the proto-martyr in the Marian persecution, that 'on the morning of his execution, being Found fast asleep, *scarce with much shogging could he be awaked*.'—FOXÉ, vi. 699.

27. *Withhold not good from them to whom it is due* (the owners thereof, marg.), *when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.* 28. *Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and to-morrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee.*

The wise man now comes to practical points. He shows the fruit of selfishness—*withholding dues*. Many are the forms of this dishonesty—borrowing without payment (Ps. xxxvii. 21), evading the taxes;* "keeping back the labourer's hire." (Jam. v. 4. Jer. xxii. 13-17. Comp. Gen. xxxi. 7; Dent. xxiv. 14, 15.) But the rule probes deeper than this surface. If we have no legal debt to any, we have a Gospel debt to all. (Rom. xiii. 8.) Even the poor is bound by this universal law to his poorer neighbour. (Eph. iv. 28. Comp. 2 Cor. viii. 1-3.) Every one has a claim upon our love. (Comp. Luke, x. 29-37.) Every opportunity of doing good is our call to do so. Our neighbours are the real *owners of our good*. (Marg.) The Lord of all has transferred his right to them, with a special reference to "his own brethren." (Gal. vi. 10. Mark, ix. 41. Matt. xxv. 31-40.) Kindness is therefore a matter, not of option, but of obligation; an act of justice no less than of mercy. Not indeed that it may be demanded by our fellow-men. But the obligation lies upon conscience; and to *withhold the due* will be our eternal condemnation. (Matt. xxv. 41-45. Comp. Deut. xxiii. 3, 4.)

Christian benevolence will also do good in the kindest manner. Delay is an offence against the law of love. Too often the cold repulse—*Go, and come again*—is a cover for selfishness. There is a secret hope that the matter will be forgotten, dropped, or taken up by some other party. Often an application is put off from mere thoughtlessness. *We have it by us.*† But it does not just now suit our convenience. This is a serious injury to the applicant. A little given in time of need is more than a larger sum when the time is gone by. We should cultivate a quick sensibility of the wants and sufferings of others; putting ourselves as much as possible in their place; not only "doing good," but "*ready to every good work.*" (Tit. iii. 1. 1 Tim. vi. 18.) If we are to "*do justly*"--which sometimes (as in the punishment of criminals) may be our sorrow; we are like our gracious God (Mic. vii. 18), *to love mercy* (Ib. vi. 8. Comp. Rom. xii. 8; 2 Cor. ix. 7); seizing the present, perhaps the only (Chap. xxvii. 1. Gal. vi. 10), opportunity; rather anticipating the need than wantonly or thoughtlessly delaying to relieve it. (2 Cor. viii. 10.) The Gospel presents every neighbour before us as a brother or sister needing our help, and to be loved and cared for "*as ourselves.*" (Lev. xix. 18.) Why do we not more readily

* The example and admonition of Christ are evidently directed against this iniquity. Matt. xvii. 24-27; xxii. 15-21,

† See how Job rebutted his friend's accusation, xxii. 9, with xxxi. 16. Comp. Jam. ii. 15-16.

acknowledge this standard? The Lord raise us from our selfishness, and mould us to his own image of mercy and love!*

29. *Devise not evil against thy neighbour, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee.*

30. *Strive not with a man without cause, if he have done thee no harm.*

The command—*withhold not good*—is naturally followed by the forbidding to do *evil*. The treachery here rebuked was a scandal even to a heathen.† It is generally abhorred by the world, and should be doubly hated by a godly man. With him all should be clear and open as the day. *An evil device against a neighbour*, from whatever cause, is a cursed sin. (Chap. vi. 14-18. Deut. xxvii. 24. Ps. xxxv. 20; lv. 20. Jer. xviii. 18-20.) But to take occasion from confidence reposed, betrays "the wisdom that descendeth not from above—devilish." (Jam. iii. 15.) Such was the craft of Jacob's sons against the unsuspecting Shechemites (Gen. xxxiv. 13-29; xlix. 5-7); Saul's malice against David, when under his protection (1 Sam. xviii. 22-26); Joab's murder of Abner and Amasa (2 Sam. iii. 27; xx. 9, 10); Israel's of Gedaliah. (Jer. xli. 1, 2.) No trial cuts so keenly. (Ps. lv. 12-14.) This was one of the bitters in the Saviour's cup of suffering. (John, xiii. 21, with Ps. xli. 9; Matt. xxvi. 46-50). And many a wounded spirit has been cheered by his sympathy with this poignant sorrow. (Heb. iv. 15.)

Yet we must guard not only against secret malice, but against *causeless strivings*. A propensity to embroil ourselves in quarrels (Chap. xvii. 14; xviii. 6; xxv. 8, 9) kindles *strife*, instead of following the rule of peace. (Born. xii. 18.) This spirit is a great hindrance to holiness (Heb. xii. 14. Col. iii. 12-15), and inconsistent with a true servant of God. (2 Tim. ii. 24.) Irritable persons, strongly insist upon their rights, or what they conceive to be due to them from others. "Is there not"—say they—"a cause?" But impartial observers frequently judge it to be *striving without cause*; that no harm has been done; none at least to justify the breach of love; that more love on one hand, and more forbearance on the other, would have prevented the breach; that "there is utterly a fault--Why do ye not rather take wrong?" (1 Cor. vi. 1-7.) How valuable is a close application

* Dr. South's caustic application may be wholesome probing--"Was ever the hungry fed, or the naked clothed, with good looks or fair speeches? These are but thin garments to keep out the cold, and but a slender repast to conjure down the rage of a craving appetite. My enemy, perhaps, is ready to starve; and I tell him I am heartily glad to see him, and should be very ready to serve him. But still my hand is closed, and my purse shut. I neither bring him to my table, nor lodge him under my roof. He asks for bread, and I give him a compliment—a thing indeed not so hard as a stone, but altogether as dry. I treat him with art and outside, and lastly, at parting, with all the ceremonial of dearness, I shake him by the hand, but put nothing into it. I play with his distress, and daily with that which was not to be dallied with—want, and misery, and a clamorous necessity.'—*Sermon on Matt. v. 44.*

† 'Fallere eum, qui laesus non esset, nisi credidisset.'—CICERO, *pro Roscio*.

of the self-denying law of Christ! (Such as Matt. v. 39-41.) How earnestly should we seek from himself his own meek and loving spirit! (1 Pet. ii. 21-23.) 'O Lord, 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:*

31. Envy thou not the oppressor (a man of violence, marg.) and choose none of his ways. 32. For the froward is an abomination to the Lord; but his secret is with the righteous.

What is there--we might ask--to envy in the oppressor? The love of power is a ruling passion; and the slave of his own will enjoys a brutish pleasure in tyranny. Yet little reason have we to envy him, much less to choose his ways. (Chap. xxiv. 1. Eccles. iv. 1.) Can he be happy, going froward in his way, in perverse contradiction to the will of the Lord? with the frown of Heaven? 'For he who hateth nothing that he hath made, abhors those who have thus marred themselves. They are not only abominable, but, 'an abomination in his sight.'† Really to be *envied*, or rather ardently, to be desired, is the lot of the righteous, enriched with the *secret of the Lord*--"his covenant and fatherly affection, which is hid and secret from the world."‡ Sinners are an abomination. Saints are his delight. 'They are God's friends, to whom he familiarly imparts, as men used to do to their friends, his mind and counsels, or his *secret* favour and comforts, to which other men are strangers.'§ Communion with himself (John, xiv. 21-23); peace (Phil. iv. 6, 7); joy (Chap. xiv. 10); assurance (Rev. ii. 17); teaching (Matt. xi. 25; xiii. 11-17; xvi. 17. John, vii. 17. 1 Cor. ii. 12, 15); confidence (John, xv. 15); an enlightened apprehension of providence (Gen. xviii. 17, 18. Ps. cvii. 43); yea, all the blessings of his covenant (Ps. xxv. 14)—this is the secret between God and the soul, an enclosed portion, hidden from the world, sealed to his beloved people. Here then--child of God--a dwell in the secret place of the Most High." (Ib. xci. 1.) If he hath given to thee the knowledge of himself, and of thine interest in him; and to the froward oppressor only worldly advantage; is it not the seal of his love to thee, and rejection of him? Is it not infinitely more to dwell on high with thy God, than in the vain pomp of an ungodly world? (Ib. lxXxiv. 10.)

33. The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked; but he blesseth the habitation of the just.

The contrast between the sinner and the saint, affects us not only

* Collect for Quinquagesima Sunday. 1 Cor. xiii. 4-7.

† HENRY *in loco*, chap. vi. 14-18; xi. 20; xv. 9. Mic. i. 1, 2. See the Lord's open judgment, Exod. ix. 16; xiv. 28. Isa. xxxvii. 21-38. Acts, xii. 1, 2, 23.

‡ Reformers' Notes.

§ POOL'S *Annotations*, 'He loves them dearly as his intimste friends, to whom he communicates the very secrets of his heart.'—DIODATI.

personally, but relatively. *The curse or blessing of the Lord* follows us to our homes. Shall we then envy *the wicked*, with his cup of earthly joy filled to the brim? *The curse of the Lord is in his house* (Mal. ii. 2) — a "curse that never cometh causeless." (Chap. xxvi. 2.) Let him think — 'It is my Maker's curse--how awful, that my being and my curse should come from the same sacred source!' It is not the impotent wishing of ill. Could we trace its deadly work, we should see the man wasting, withering, consuming under it. Observe "the roll in the house of the thief, and of the swearer—twenty cubits long"—a long catalogue of woes; "flying"—to mark its swiftness; "remaining in the midst of the house; consuming it even with the timbers and stones thereof." (Zech. v. 1-4.) Is this an idle dream? Surely— but for the blindness of the heart, *the wicked* would see the naked sword hanging by a hair over his head, or the awful "hand-writing upon the wall," solemnly proclaiming — "There is no peace— saith my God— unto *the wicked*." (Dan. v. 5, 6. Isa. lvii. 21.) Vainly will the proud worm resist. Ahab multiplied his *house* beyond all human average, as if to set at defiance *the curse* pronounced against it. Yet at one stroke all were swept away. (1 Kings, xxi. 20-22. 2 Kings, x. 1-11.) Similar instances* abundantly prove whose words shall stand — man's or God's. (Jer. xlv. 28.) "Who hath hardened himself against him, and prospered? Who hath resisted his will?" (Job ix. 4. Rom. ix. 19.)

But bright is the sunshine of *the just*. Not only *is the secret of the Lord with their souls, but his blessing on their habitation*. And when he blesseth, who can reverse it? (Num. xxiii. 20. Job xxxiv. 29.) Many a homely cottage, tenanted by a child of Abraham, shines more splendidly than the princely palace of the ungodly.† An heir of glory dwells here. A family altar of prayer and praise consecrates it as the temple of Jehovah. (Gen. xii. 8.) Promises, like clouds of blessings, rest over it. God has been honoured, and God will honour. (2 Sam. vi. 11. Jer. xxxv. 18, 19. 2 Tim. i. 18.) "They that dwell under his shadow shall return." (Hos. xiv. 7.) Is then my *house* under *the curse or blessing of the Lord*? Let my God be honoured in his own gifts: that I and mine may be manifestly sealed with the full tokens of his love.

34. *Surely he scorneth the scorers: but he giveth grace unto the lowly.*

Two Apostles have combined with the wise man, to set out this rule of the Divine government.‡ On no point is the mind of God more fully declared than against pride — the spirit of *scorning*. It displaces

* JEROBOAM: 1 Kings, xiv. 9—11; Amos, vii. 9. BAASHA: 1 Kings, xvi. 1-4, 12, 113. JEHU: 2 Kings, xv. 8-12. Hos. I. 4. HAZAEL: Amos, i. 4. JEHOIAKIM: Jer. xxii. 13-19. CONIAH: Ib. 24-30. ESAU: Obad. 18. Comp. chap. xiv. 11; xv. 25.

† Job, xxix. 4. Isa. iv. 5. **Enqa kai oi qeoi**. 'The gods are within' — said the Heathen philosopher of his poor cottage.—F. TAYLOR *in loco*.

‡ James, iv. 6. 1 Peter, v. 5.—The exact quotation of the LXX. save the substitution of

man, and would, if possible, displace God himself. Jealous therefore of his own glory, he sets himself in battle array, as against the usurper of his prerogative, the rebel against his dominion.* Witness the Babel-builders (Gen. xi. 1–9); Pharaoh (Exod. xiv. 13); Sennacherib (Isa. xxxvii. 33–38); the proud opposers of his Gospel (Ps. ii. 1–4)--all the objects of *his scorn*. But most hateful to him is the sinner, that will not submit to his righteousness, that *scorns* the corner-stone of salvation. How fearfully does it then become "a rock of offence," of eternal ruin! (Rorn. x. 3, with ix. 32, 33. Matt. xxi. 41–44.) *Surely* without doubt, without way of escape from his frown, *he scorneth the scorers*.

A *lowly spirit*--a deep conviction of utter nothingness and guilt--is a most adorning grace. Nor is it an occasional or temporary feeling, the result of some unexpected hateful disclosure, but an habit, "clothing" the man (1 Pet. v. 5) "from the sole of the foot to the head." It combines the highest elevation of joy with the deepest abasement of spirit. And those who sink the lowest, stand nearest to the most exalted advancement. For "*he that scorneth the scorers, giveth grace to the lowly*"—"more grace" (Jam. iv. 6), till his work is perfected in them. 'He pours it out plentifully upon humble hearts. His sweet dews and showers of grace slide off the mountains of pride, and fall on the low valleys of humble hearts, and make them pleasant and fertile.' † The centurion (Matt. viii. 5–10); the Canaanite (Ib. xv. 21–28); the penitent (Luke, vii. 44–50); the publican (Ib. xviii. 13, 14); such as these are the objects of his favour. (Isa. lxvi. 2.) Their hearts are his dwelling-place. (Ib. lvii. 15.) Their inheritance is his kingdom. (Matt. v. 3.) The soul, swelling with its proud fancies, has no room for his humbling grace. Blessed exchange of the little idol of self-esteem for Him; who alone has the right! when even his own graces are only desired, as instruments to set out his glory.

35. *The wise shall inherit glory: but shame shall be the promotion of fools,*
(exalteth the fools, marg.)

This is the last contrast drawn to restrain our envy at the prosperity of the wicked. (Verse 31.) It carries us forward to the coming day, when all shall "discern" in the full light of eternity. (Mal. iii. 18.) *The wise--the heirs of glory*--are identified with *the lowly* (Verse 34; xi. 2) --the heirs of grace. Self-knowledge--the principle of lowliness--is the very substance of *wisdom*. Their inheritance also is one--*grace and glory*. (Ps. lxxxiv. 11.) For what higher *glory* can there be than

qeoj for **Kurioj**. 'The Apostle's quotation of this passage, though somewhat different in the words, is the same in the sense with the original. For scorers in Scripture are proud, insolent, wicked men. And to resist such persons, by rendering their schemes abortive, and by humbling them, is emphatically called a *scorning of them*.'--MACKNIGHT on James, iv. 6.

* **antitassetai**, LXX.

† Leighton on 1 Pet. v. 5. Compare also on Chap. iii. 8.

the *grace*, which "hath redeemed" a vile worm of, the earth, "and made him a king and priest unto God?" (Rev. v. 9, 10.) Oh! let the redeemed cherish honourable thoughts of their present *glory*. Be careful to clear it from the defilement and degradation of the world's dust, and enjoy it in adoring praise to Him, who hath chosen thee to this so undeserved grace. (Ib. i. 5, 6.)

But who can tell *the glory*, of the after *inheritance*—not like this world's glory—the shadow of a name; but real, solid; 'an infinite gain, in the exchange of dross for down-weight of pure gold.'* All occasion of sin and temptation is shut out for ever; 'The tree of knowledge shall be without enclosure. There shall be neither lust, nor forbidden fruit; no withholding of desirable knowledge, nor affectation of undesirable. The glorified spirits touch nothing that can defile, and defile nothing they touch.'† But after all, the glory of this glory will be communion and likeness with our Lord—"to be with him—to behold his glory." (John, xvii. 24. 1 John, iii. 2.) We need not pry too minutely. Thus much is clear. The value of our inheritance is beyond all price; its happiness unspeakable; its security unchangeable; its duration eternity. *The wise shall inherit glory*. "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament forever and ever." (Dan. xii. 3. Matt. xiii. 43.)

Oh! will not the fools then discover the vanity of this world's glory, too late to, make a wise choice? *Shame* is their present fruit. (Chap. xiii. 18; x. 9.) Honour even now sits unseemly upon them. (Chap. xxvi. 1.) But "what fruit will eternity bring" of those things, whereof they will "then be ashamed?" (Rom. vi, 21.) Truly *shame will be their promotion*. Their fame will be infamous, their disgrace conspicuous; lifting them up, like Haman upon his elevated gallows (Esther, vii. 9)—'a gazing-stock to the, world.' How solemn and complete will be the great separation for eternity! "Many that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; *some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt*." (Dan. xii. 2.)

CHAPTER IV.

1. Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding. 2. For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law.

SURELY these frequent repetitions are as the angel's visit to the prophet—"waking him, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep." (Zech. iv. 1.) A mind like Solomon's, "large even as the sand that is on the sea-shore" (1 Kings, iv. 29), might readily have made every sentence a

* Leighton on 1 Pet. v. 10.

† Howe's *Blessedness of the Righteous*. Chap. v. xi.

fresh discovery of his knowledge. But more suitable to our sluggish and forgetful heart is "the word of the Lord, precept upon precept." (Isa. xxviii. 13.) Children are often bereft of destitute of a parental instructor. Here these orphans are taken up, and called to *hear the instruction of a father*. For truly does the wise man, like the Apostle in after days, "exhort and charge, as a father cloth his children." (1 Thess. ii. 11.)

Solomon evidently speaks from the mouth of God, declaring his *doctrine*--his *law*. Therefore he claims *attention to know understanding, for I give you good doctrine*. (Eccles. xii. 9-11.) To many, exciting (Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32), curious and speculative (2 Tim. iv. 3, 4), compromising (Isa. xxx. 10. Jer. v. 31), self-righteous, self-exalting doctrine (Gal. i. 6, 7), is more attractive. But--young people!--remember--that which humbles the soul before God; that which exhibits the free grace of the Gospel; which melt's down the will, consecrates the heart, imbues' with the spirit of the cross--however unpalatable to the flesh--is alone *good doctrine* for the soul. Therefore *forsake it not*. Do not be carried away with the senseless cry,--'Everybody thinks contrary.' What is the judgment of the mass of mankind worth on the great subject of religion? "This their way is their folly." This is God's stamp upon man's "saying," however applauded and "approved" by successive generations. (Ps. xlix. 13.) Shall this world's judgment be preferred to the word of God?" The morning" of the resurrection will reflect the glory of eternity upon the choice of the narrow path. (Ib. v. 14.)

3. *For I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother.* 4. *He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live.* 5. *Get wisdom, get understanding; forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth.* 6. *Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee.* 7. *Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting, get understanding.* 8. *Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her.* 9. *She shall give to thine head to ornament of grace; a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.*

Solomon here claims our attention as a teacher of youth, on account of his own godly education by such a father. He was a tender child (1 Chron. xxii. 5: xxix. 1), well-beloved, as an only son.* The more dearly he was loved, the more carefully was he taught. Thus we are brought into the family of "the man after God's heart," to hear him

* Not really the only son. 2 Sam. v. 14. 1 Chron. iii. 5. Thus Isaac was called the only son (i.e. most beloved), when Ishmael was another son: Gen. xxii. 2, 12, 19, with xvii. 19. So the Church is called "*the only one—the choice*"—implying others, out of which the choice was made. Cant. vi. 9.

"commanding his child" in the fear and service Of the Lord. (Comp. also 1 Kings, ii. 2-4; 1 Chron. xxii. 6-16; xxviii. 9, 10, 20. Comp. Gen. xviii. 19. Deut. vi. 7.) A special mercy is it to us, if we can tell of an Abraham or a David—of a Lois or an Eunice, having *taught* and bound us to the ways of God! (2 Tim. i. 5; iii. 14, 15.) Parents remember, a child untaught will be a living shame. (Chap. xxix. 15.) Training discipline, not foolish indulgence, is the truest evidence of affection to our *tender and beloved* ones. (Chap. xiii. 24; with 1, Kings, i. 6.)

But let us examine this beautiful specimen of parental instruction.*
Observe the anxiety for his son's heart-religion. Let thine heart retain my words. Often (and this is a comfort to a weak memory) words may be lost to the memory, yet practically retained in the heart. This heart-keeping is the path of life (Verse 13; vi. 23; viii. 34, 35. Isa. lv. 3. Zech. iii. 7), without which all is dead. Observe again, the extreme *earnestness of the exhortation*. Many a parent, like Augustine's father,† insists—'Get wealth, worldly honour, or wisdom.' This godly parent inculcates "line upon line"—*Get heavenly wisdom; get it with all thy getting*--at any cost and pains (Chap. xxiii. 23. Comp. 1, Kings, x. 1; Matt. xii. 42), *as the principal thing*; and when thou hast got it--*forget it not*—decline not from it—forsake it not‡—love§--embrace--exalt—her. Such a *keeping* is she for thy soul! (Chap. 10-18.) Such a treasure for thy happiness! Such a promoting honour even in this life! Such an *ornament of grace* in the Church! Such, *a crown of glory* in heaven! This is not the style of a cold pleader, enforcing with decent seriousness some unimportant truth. It is the father, feeling that his child's soul is perishing, unless it be taught and led in wisdom's ways. Parents! do we know this stirring concern, anxiously looking out for the first dawn of light upon our child's soul? Do we eagerly point out to him *wisdom as the principal thing*, to be *gotten first* (Matt. vi. 33.) Is it our own first choice, infinitely above this world's glitter (1 Kings, iii. 5-12. Phil. iii. 7, 8); not only important, but all-important? It can have no place, if it has not the first place. If it be anything, it will be everything. Earthly wisdom may be "a goodly pearl." But this "wisdom from above is the pearl of great price;" worth *getting*

* Where David's instruction begins, is obvious. Where it ends, is not so clear—Whether it be ver. 6, 10, 12, or 13 ; or as F. Taylor asserts, at the close of the ninth chapter. But as Geier observes—'Let the reader form his own judgment; provided that we pay due obedience to the instruction, it matters little, whether we have it in the words of David or Solomon.'

† Of whom he records —'This father of mine never troubled himself with any thought of— How I might improve myself towards thee, so that I proved eloquent, though I were withal left undrest by thy tillage.'— *Confess.* ii. 3.

‡ See the great importance of this continuance, John, viii. 30, 31. Col. i. 22, 23. Heb. iii. 6, 14, contrasted with Matt. xiii. 20, 21.

§ Thus Jerome wrote to a friend —'Beg now for me, who am grey-headed, of the Lord, that I may have Wisdom for my companion, of which it is written—'Love her, and she shall keep thee.'"

indeed; but only to be got, by "selling all that we have, to buy it."
(Matt. xiii. 45, 46.)

10. Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings; and the years of thy life shall be many. 11. I have taught thee in the ways of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths. 12. When thou goes, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble. 13. Take fast hold of instruction: let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life.

It is instructive to see a king (whether David or Solomon) not forgetting in the midst of his royal cares his domestic responsibilities. We are told—"Youth will have its swing." 'So'--adds an old Commentator solemnly—"it may—to hell."* For where else can a wayward will lead? Let us see the need of guidance of every step, both to take and to avoid. The *ways of wisdom* assure a happy life in the favour of God. (1 Tim. iv. 8, with chap. iii. 1, 2. Ps. xxxiv. 12–14. 1 Pet. iii. 10–12.) And what rest to the parent's conscience on the death-bed will be the recollection of children, not brought up for the world, but *taught in these ways!* Yet this cannot be, if the rod, when needed, has been spared; if the will has been indulged; the love of the world cherished. *This will be*--if godly discipline has been exercised; if the Bible has been laid down as the rule of life if habits of prayer, love to the service of God, fellowship with his people, have been encouraged. The path, though rough and sometimes lonely, is *a right path*, and a path of liberty. (Ps. cxix. 32, 45.) The single eye will preserve a steady walk. (Chap. x. 9. Isa. xlviii. 17, 18. Matt. Vii. 22.) *Thou shalt run, and shalt not stumble.* (Chap. iii. 21–26. Hos. xiv. 9.)

And yet the animated exhortation *to take fast hold*, shows the struggle necessary to retain our principles. Feeble, indeed, is our hold, when connected *merely* with the excitement of novelty (Matt. xiii. 20, 21), temporary convictions (Ps. lxxviii. 34–36; cvi. 12, 13), the restraint of education (2 Chron. xii. 1; xxiv. 2, 15–18), unestablished knowledge (Gal. iii. 1–4), or the indulgence of sin. (Mark, vi. 18–26.) Truths received only in the understanding, not becoming the daily nourishment of the soul, never fix on the heart. *The fast hold of instruction* is by a personal living faith; including an intense interest, and persevering pursuit; "continuing in the things which we have heard and been assured of;" cleaving with purpose of heart unto the Lord. (2 Tim. iii. 14. Acts, xi. 23; ii. 42.) As Jacob detained the angel (Gen. xxxii. 26–29); as the spouse *held fast hold* of her Beloved (Cant. iii. 4); as the disciples "constrained the Saviour to abide with them" (Luke, xxiv. 28, 29)—So—young Christian—*let her not go, Keep her*, as the man "for joy" guarded his precious treasure. (Matt. xiii. 44.) So let thy heavenly treasure stand above every earthly blessing. Thus will

* Taylor.

it be *thy life*. (Chap. iii. 18. Eccles. vii. 12.) And while others "turn back, and walk no more" in the way, thine heart will turn to its only spring of happiness—"Lord, to whom shall I go? "Thou hast the words of eternal life." (John, vi. 67-69.)

14. Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men.

15. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away. 16. For they sleep not, except they have done mischief: and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall. 17. For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence.

How often does fellowship with the wicked loosen the *fast hold of instruction*! *Their path* is so contrary to the way of instruction, that the very *entrance into it* is forsaking the way of God. Their character is here drawn in their Father's image—first sinners, then, tempters. Mischief is their meat and drink. (Job, xv. 16. Ps. xiv. 4.) 'To do evil is more proper and natural than to sleep, eat, or drink.* With sleepless eagerness do they pursue their work (Job, xxiv. 15, 16. Ps. xxxvi. 4. Mic. ii. 1), caring little for any lengths of *violence*, so that *they do mischief, or cause some to fall*. (Chap. i. 10-14, 16; ii. 14; xxiv. 2. Ps. x. 8. 2 Pet. ii. 14.) Judas with his midnight torches (John, xviii. 3); the early morning assemblage of the Jewish rulers (Luke, xxii. 66); the frenzied vow of the enemies of Paul;† and many a plot in after ages against the Church—all vividly pourtray this unwearied wickedness. Yet if we be preserved from this undisguised malignity, what are all the allurements for every rank and circumstance of life, but the more subtle poison of the murderer? A light-minded young person pours into his companion's ear—simple and inexperienced in the ways of sin—perhaps filthy conversation; or presents before him images of lasciviousness. What but a rooted principle of grace can save his unsuspecting victim? Or again—the venomous infidel, intent upon "spoiling" (Col. ii. 8) his fellow-creature of his most precious treasure, drops into his bosom the repetition of the first lie (Gen. iii. 4.) No principle appears to be given up, no fundamental doctrine denied; yet the foundation of an unwavering confidence is shaken to pieces. And is not this *mischief and violence* as the murderer's stab?

Surely then it is mercy, that forbids needless intercourse with *the evil man*. (Eph. v. 11.) With a constitution prone to evil, when the alternative is, whether we shall shun or dare the danger, can we doubt our path? The whole Scripture is on the side of caution, to hazard nothing, except on a plain call of Providence. ' Because we are free,

* Reformers' Notes.

† Acts, xxiii. 12. Such a spirit is graphically described by the Classics:—

Et si non aliqua nocuisses, mortuus esses. —VIRGIL, *Ecllog.* iii. 15.

Ergo non aliter poterit dormire; quibusdam

Somnum rixa facit. —JUVENAL, *Sat.* iii. 278-202.

we may not run wild.* Half our virtue we owe to being out of the way of temptation. Observe how the wise man heaps up his words—*Enter not into the path*—no—not so much as set thy foot into it. If some accident throws thee into it, *go not* on in it; *avoid it* with detestation.† *Pass not by it*, lest thou shouldest unwittingly turn in. (Chap. v. 8.) Not only *avoid it* when near, but avoid nearness to it. It is like living in the atmosphere of contagion, in the midst of virulent and fatal disease. The earnest repetition of the warning shows at once the imminency of the danger, and the certainty of the injury. The world around us is the action of mind upon mind. We are continually, through the medium of intercourse, moulding ourselves by other minds, and other minds by our own. Intercourse with the ungodly must, therefore, be fraught with fatal contamination. (1 Cor. xv. 33. Ps. cvi. 35. Chap. xxii. 24, 25.) The occasions, the company, the borders of temptation -- all must be *avoided*. (Chap. ix. 10, 15. Gen. xxxi. 9, 10.)

Young people are apt to plead with those who have the charge of their best interests--'What harm is there in this or that path?' Apart from other evils--this is plain. It is a contagious atmosphere. You are drinking in poison. It is far more easy to shun the occasion of sin, than the sin when the occasion presents it; to resist the beginnings, than the progress, of sin. There must, therefore, be no tampering with it; no trial of strength, to see how far our resolutions will keep us. Let the examples of Lot (Gen. xiii; 10-13; xiv. 12), Dinah (Gen. xxxiv. 1, 2), Solomon (1 Kings, xi. 1-5), Peter (Matt. xxvi. 58, 69-74), warn us, how far only the *entrance into the path of the wicked* may carry us; lengths that we could never have contemplated in prospect without horror. It may appear an harmless outset. But how far on? The *entrance* is fatally connected with the next step onward. The frightful extent of the probability of falling might make the boldest tremble. Those at least, that know their own corruption and weakness, will shrink back, where you tread lightly. Here and there, indeed, there may be some special miracle of preservation. But no one comes out of *the path* without hurt (2 Chron. xviii. 1-3; xix. 2; xx. 35-37); and the general issue is an open door to ruin. To pretend to dread sin without fearing temptation, is self-delusion. Satan has too nearly allied them for us to separate them. The evil company is loved, then the evil of the company.‡ To pray "not to be led into tempta-

* Bishop HALL'S Contempl. B. xv. 3. † LEIGH'S *Critica Sacra*. See CARTWRIGHT. Eusebius mentions a young man, whom St. John committed to the special charge of the Bishop of Ephesus; but who by evil company was drawn away to be a captain of robbers. until St. John went after him, and brought him back. B. iii. c. 20.--Augustine's recollections of his youthful theft was—'By myself alone I would not have done it. It was the company that I loved, with whom I did it.' He adds —'O nimis iniqua amicitia!' When they said—'Come, let us go and do it, I was ashamed not to be as shameless as they.'— Confess. Lib. ii. 8, 9.

Lion;" yet not to "watch, that we enter not into it"-- is practically to contradict our prayers; to mock our God, by asking for what we do not heartily wish. "Walk then with God and with his people, separate from an ungodly world." (Chap. ix. 6. 2 Cor. vi. 17.) Yet do not presume upon safety, even in separation from the ungodly. The whole tempting world may be presented to your imagination. The unsearchable deceitfulness of the heart may bear fearfully upon you. The tempter may in solitude, as with our Lord, put forth his special power. (Matt. iv. 1.) Walk closely with God in secret, and he will spread his almighty covering over you for your security. *Avoid* fellowship with them, who hinder your fellowship with God. (Ps. cxix. 63, 1.14, 115, also xvii. 4; xxvi. 4, 5.)

18. The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

This is a fine contrast of the Christian's *path* of light with the dark and dangerous *path of the wicked*. It is not the feeble wasting light of a taper, nor the momentary blaze of the meteor; but the grand luminary of heaven, "coming out of his chamber, and rejoicing as a strong man to run his race" (Ps. xix. 5), from earliest dawn to his noon-day glory. And a beautiful sight it is, to see the Christian thus rising out of darkness; not indeed with uniform brightness, but deepening from the first faint beginning of his course; rising higher and higher; widening his circle; advancing onward with increasing brightness *unto the perfect day*. Knowledge, faith, love, holiness; irradiate every step. It is at first but a glimmering ray, the first dawn of day. He does not come at once into the "marvellous light." There is much--often long-continued--struggle with his own wisdom and self-righteousness. And even when brought to a simple dependence on the great work of Christ, it is long ere he sees the fitness and proportion of its several parts, providing for the honour of every perfection of God, as well as the supply of every want of Man. Long also is it, ere he marks the just balance of promise and precept; the sure connection between justification and sanctification; the accurate arrangement, by which, while we are not saved by works, we cannot be saved without them; and while we work of ourselves, our strength and trust is in another. Nor is it at the outset that we discern the identity of happiness with conformity to Christ, and find heaven in communion with God, and consecration to his service. Thus also, in the indistinct beginning of the course, sin lies within a narrow compass. It includes little besides the grosser enormities. Many things are thought harmless, which the spiritual law condemns. But as the line becomes more marked, old habits and associations, hitherto unsuspected, become convicted by a clearer light, and are ultimately relinquished. It is in this path that

as the Christian "follows on," the eye is more unveiled (Hos. vi. 3. Comp. Mark, viii. 22-25), the heart more enlightened, the truth more vividly impressed upon the conscience, the "understanding" more quick in "the fear of the Lord," the taste more discerning between good and evil. Faith now becomes more strong in the Saviour's love, more simple in the promises of God.

Obviously also love will increase as light expands. In proportion to knowledge of our sinfulness and ruin must be the gratitude for the remedy. The view of heaven — in proportion to the clearness of our apprehension of it—must enlarge our love to him, who has obtained our title to it. Thus our knowledge converts itself into a motive, expanding our love more widely to all the legitimate objects of it. We cannot, indeed, always compare its warmth at different periods. But knowledge and love, like the light and heat, must go together under the beams of knowledge; subjection to the Redeemer's sceptre becomes more unreserved; love rises to a higher estimation, to a closer union with him, to a more intimate complacency in him. Experience may be confused. But light will clear away the mists. Practice in some points may be inconsistent. But the advances, however weak, will be sure. "Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into his image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. iii. 18. Job, xvii. 9. Ps. lxxxiv. 7.) Such is the *path of the just*. The devout Nathanael was cheered with the promise of a brighter day. (John, i. 46-51.) The clouds on the minds of the Apostles gradually melted away before a brighter sun. (Mark, vi. 52; x. 35; xvi. 14, with John, xvi. 13; Acts, ii.) The Eunuch and Cornelius, sincerely seeking, rejoiced in the full sunshine of Gospel light. (Acts, viii. 27-39; x.) The Thessalonian Church *shone more and more* with Christian graces. (1 Thess. i. 3. 2 Thess. i. 3.)

But is this *shining light* the picture of *my path*? There is no command given—"Sun, stand thou still." (Josh. x. 12.) Therefore it rebukes a stationary profession. It is a rising and advancing, not a declining, sun. Therefore it rebukes a backsliding state. It, is not necessary that every thing should be perfect at once. There may be an occasional cloud, or even (as in the cases of David and Peter) a temporary eclipse. But when did the sun fail of carrying its early dawn *unto perfect day*? Despise not, then, "the day of small things." (Zech. iv. 10.) But be not satisfied with it. Aim high, and you will reach nearer the mark. A fitful, fluctuating course, instead of illustrating this beautiful figure, throws around the profession a saddening uncertainty. Religion must be a *shining* and progressive *light*. We must not mistake the beginning for the end of the course. We must not sit down on the entry, and say to our soul—"Soul—take thine ease." There is no point, where we may repose with complacency, *as if there were no*

loftier heights, which it was our duty to climb. Christian perfection is the continual aiming at perfection. (Sep Phil. iii. 12-15.) Let us hasten on to *the perfect day*, when *the path of the just* shall be eternally consummated; when 'they shall come to full perfection, which is -- when they shall be joined to their Head in the heavens.'* "Then shall they shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." (Matt. xiii. 43.) And yet even here will not *the path* of eternity, no less than of time, be *shining more and more*? Shall we not be exploring that unsearchable "height, and depth, and length, and breadth, that passeth knowledge," until we be filled with all the fulness of God?" (Eph. iii. 18, 19.) Will not light therefore be more glorious, and love more full of praise and adoration? Yes, surely, the world of eternity will be one *perfect day* of ever-increasing light and joy. "Their sun shall no more go down--for the Lord shall be their everlasting light. The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it, for the glory of the Lord did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." †

19. The way of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble.

The contrast is more clearly repeated.‡ Each has his own way. *The path of the just* is glowing light and joy. *The way of the wicked is darkness*; without direction, comfort, safety, or peace, till "his feet at last stumble on the dark mountains;" till he falls into "the blackness of darkness for ever." (Jer. xiii. 16. Jude, 13. Comp. Job, xviii. 5, 6, 18.) His way is not only dark, but *as darkness*, a compound of ignorance, error, sin, and misery. The love of sin "rebels against the light." (Job, xxiv. 13. John, iii. 19. Comp. Isa. v. 20.) The *darkness* is wilful, and therefore accountable. There is no *stumbling in the path of the just*. So far as he is upright, the Lord keeps him. (Verse 12; iii. 23. Ps. xci. 11, 12.) *The wicked* go on, "groping on as if they had no eyes" (Isa. lix. 10); hurrying on blindly into misery, that they can neither foresee nor avoid. (Job, v. 14; xii. 25. Jer. xxiii. 12. Zeph. i. 17.) *They know not at what they stumble*. Oh! if they did, would they not startle, and shrink back? For *they stumble* on the very foundation of the Gospel! making the rock of salvation a rock of offence. (Rom. ix. 32, 33. 1 Pet. ii. 8.) Would they but listen to the merciful warning

* Reformers' Notes. Comp. Diodati *in loco*.

† Isa. ix. 20. Rev. xxi. 23. The LXX. version is very beautiful—"The ways of the righteous shine like the light; they go on shining, until the day be perfected." Dr. Watts' Hymn on the Summer Evening—written for the infant mind, but glowing to the finest taste—furnishes a most exquisite exposition of this verse,

'How fine has the day been; how bright was the sun,' &c.

‡ See the same contrast drawn by our Lord, Matt. vi. 22, 23. —Schultens considers the original to express *increasing darkness*, answering to the *increasing light* of the opposite path. Comment. in Prow. 4 to. 1748. Comp. Job, xv. 23.

of their Lord--"Yet a little time the light is with you: walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you; for *he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth.*" (John, xii. 35, 36)

20. *My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings.*

21. *Let there not depart from thine eyes: keep them in the midst of thine heart.* 22. *For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh.*

These repeated injunctions (Chap. iii. 1; v. 1; vi. 20, 21; xxii. 17) are an admirable pattern to the Christian Parent or Minister. The desire of wisdom, the first step in the path, is encouraged. The means of obtaining, and the privilege when obtained, are pointed out. Eye, then, the treasure of wisdom habitually. A neglected Bible is the melancholy proof of a heart "alienated from God." For how can we have a spark of love to him, if that Book, which is the full manifestation of his glory, be despised? And yet a superficial acquaintance with it is of no avail. If our ears were bored to the doors of the sanctuary; if the words never departed from our eyes; yet, except they were kept in the heart, our religion would be a notion, not a principle; speculative, not practical; conviction, not love. Nor even here must they possess the mere threshold. Let the word be kept in the midst of the heart. Here only can it be operative (Chap. xxiii. 26. Ps. xl. 8; cxix. 11); "for out of the heart, are the issues of life." (Verse 23.) Here it becomes lively and substantial truth. Here, then, let a home be made for it,* a consecrated sanctuary in the most honoured chambers *of the heart*. This inhabitation of the word is a covenant promise --- the test of our interest in the Lord. (Jer. xxxi. 33.)

This *keeping of the word* will be *life to those that find it*. (Verses 4, 10, 13 ; iii. 18.) 'Some medicines are good for one part of the body; some for another. This is good for all the body, and all the soul.† Vigorous and *healthy* (Chap. iii. 8) shall we be, in feeding upon this heavenly manna. We shall not then bear our religion as our cross--- as a cumbrous appendage. We shall not drag on in Christian duties as a chain. Godliness will be to us an element of joy. Its functions will be free and lively. The spirit will be a vital glow. The mind will be enriched with Divine wisdom. The heart will be established with gospel grace.

23. *Keep thy heart with all diligence* (above all keeping, marg.); *for out of it are the issues of life.* 24. *Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee.* 25. *Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee.* 26. *Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established* (all thy ways: shall be

* **Enoikeitw en uññ.** Col. iii. 16.

† Cartwright.

ordered aright, marg.) 27. *Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil.*

Invaluable are these rules as our safeguard. Assaulted as we are at every point, every inlet of sin must be strongly guarded — the heart — *the mouth — the eye — the feet.*

First—*the heart*— the citadel of man* — the seat of his dearest treasure. It is fearful to think of its many watchful and subtle assailants. Let it be closely garrisoned. Let the sentinel be never sleeping on his post. "Take heed to thy way, and *keep thy soul diligently.*" (Dent. iv. 9.)

But *the heart* must be known in order to be effectually *kept*. Nothing is more difficult, while nothing is more necessary. If we know not our hearts, we know nothing to any purpose. Whatever else we know, to neglect this knowledge is to be a fool at the best. If we know not our weak points, Satan knows them well—"the sins that most easily beset us."

Then when I know my heart, and feel it to be so dangerous, and in such dangers, the question forces itself upon me — 'Can I *keep my heart*?' Certainly not. But, though it be God's work, it is man's agency. Our efforts are his instrumentality. He implants an active principle, and sustains the unceasing exercise. (Phil. ii. 12, 13. Jude, 24 with 21.) Conscious faith "commits the *keeping of the heart* to our faithful Creator." (1 Pet. iv. 19. Ps. xxv. 20.) This done—in his strength and guidance diligently improve all the means of preservation. Watch unto prayer. Cherish an humble dependent spirit. Live in the atmosphere of the word of God. Resist the admittance of an evil world, even in its most plausible forms. (Judges, viii. 22, 23. 2 Kings, v. 5, 16.) Here lies the conflict to the end. 'The greatest difficulty in conversion is to win the heart to God, and after conversion to keep it with him.'† 'What is there'— asks Mede—'that will not entice and allure so fickle a thing as the heart from God?'‡ *Above all keeping* — exhorts the wise man — *keep thine heart*. Here Satan keeps—here therefore must we keep— special watch. If the citadel be taken, the whole town must surrender. If the heart be seized, the whole man— the affections, desires, motives, pursuits—all will be yielded up. The heart is the vital part of the body. A wound here is instant death. Thus — spiritually as well as naturally—*out of the heart are the issues of life*. It is the great vital spring of the soul, the fountain of actions, the centre and the seat of principle,§ both of sin and of holiness. (Matt. xii. 34, 35.) The natural heart is a fountain of poison. (Ib. xv. 19.) The purified heart is "a well of living water." (John, iv. 14. Compare chap. xiv. 14.) As is the fountain, so must be

* Schultens.

† FLAVEL'S Saint Indeed—a searching and valuable Treatise.

‡ See his valuable sermon on this text.

§ Schultens.

the streams. As is the heart, so must be *the mouth, the eyes, the feet*. Therefore, *above all keeping, keep thine heart*. Guard the fountain, lest the waters be poisoned. (Comp. Gen. xxvi. 18-21.) Many have been the bitter moments, from the neglect of this guard. All keeping is vain, if the *heart be not kept*.

But with this *keeping*, let us not forget to guard the outlets of sin! (Chap. xiii. 3.) What a world of evil does 'the heart, pour out from *the froward mouth!*' (Jam. iii. 5, 6.) Commit, therefore, both heart and mouth to Divine discipline. (Ps. xix. 13 ; cxli. 3, 4.) Then let prayer and faith be the practical principles of Christian watchfulness. Not only shun, but *put away*—yea—*far from thee—the perverse lips*. Their evil--be it remembered—extends beyond ourselves. Even should the peace-speaking blood speak peace to ourselves, still will remain the painful sense of injury to our fellow-creatures, perhaps without remedy.

Next to the heart and mouth—keep thine eyes—"the light of the body" (Matt. vi. 22), the directive faculty of the soul. Yet too often are they a most dangerous inlet to sin. (Gen. iii. 6; vi. 2; xxxix. 7. Matt. v. 28. 2 Pet. ii. 14.) Therefore, like Job, "make a covenant with them." (Job, xxxi. 1.) Place them under heavenly restraint. (Ps. cxix. 37.) *Let them look right on*, 'like one ploughing, who must not look back.* Look *straight before us*. Had Eve done so, she would have looked on the command of her God; not on the forbidden tree. (Gen. iii. 3-6.) Had Lot's wife looked *straight before*, instead of behind her," she would, like her husband, have been a monument of mercy. (Gen. xix. 17, 26.) Achan was ruined by neglecting this rule of wisdom. (Josh. vii. 21.) David's example calls the holiest of us to godly jealousy.† In asking the way to Zion, be sure that your "*faces are thitherward*." (Jer. i. 5.) The pleasure of sin, and the seductions of a tempting world, do not lie in the road. They would not therefore meet the *eye looking right on—straight before us*. They belong to the bye-paths on the right hand and on the left, or to some backward track. It is only, therefore, when the Christian lingers, turns aside, or turns back, that they come in sight. Take the racer's motto--"This one thing I do." Eye the mark, and press to it. (Philip. iii. 12-14.) Onwards-- upwards—heavenwards.

Lastly, *keep your feet*. Oh! has not experience, no less than Scripture, shown your need of a circumspect walk? (Eph. v. 15.) Snares are laid out for every path, yea for every step in your path; for your meat, your think, your calling--perhaps more than all—for the service of God. What deep *pondering* should there be in a path so beset with danger! Every step should be carefully weighed. (Gen. xxiv. 5. Ps. xxxix. 1. Dan. i. 8; vi. 3, 4.) Joseph *pondered*, and thereby

* Cartwright. Comp. Luke, ix. 62.

† 2 Sam. xi. 2. Mede, ut supra.

established his way. (Gen. xxxix. 9, 10. Comp. verses 14, 15.) Peter, neglecting to *ponder*, was fearfully sifted. (Matt. xxvi. 58, 69-75.) David also, looking at the trial of the path, instead of *pondering* its direction, brought shame upon himself (1 Sam. xxvii.-xxix.); like the trouble, which Christian made for himself in the smooth exchange of Bye-path meadow for the rough and strait road. "The habit of calm and serious thinking makes the real difference between one man and another."

Here, then, is the voice of wisdom. Beware of mistaking presumption for faith, temptations for Providential appointments. Never forsake a plain for a doubtful command. (1 Kings, xiii. 18-22.) Estimate every step by its conformity to the known will of God. Dare not to advance one step without God. (Josh. ix. 14.) *In his path* you may "tread upon the lion and adder" without hurt. (Ps. xci. 11-13.) But who shall venture into a path of his own choosing, without a wound? See that "your feet are straight," like those of the Cherubim.† "The pleasures of sin" lie *on the right hand and on the left. The eyes* therefore, *looking right on*, escape the sight. *The pondering foot is established* in steady perseverance; and, by marking small deviations (See Ecclus. xix. 1), and never turning out of the straight path to avoid a cross, *is removed from evil.*

May we all have grace and wisdom to ponder these sound practical rules! The man of God must only have one standard. (Isa. viii. 20.) He must "know no man after the flesh." (2 Cor. v. 16.) He must often put aside the Church, no less than the world, that he may listen more closely to the command— *Walk before me.* (Gen. xvii. 1.) He must discern and crush the first motions of corruption; guarding every avenue of sin—the senses—the memory—the imagination—the touch—the taste. He must walk by the straight rule of the Gospel; else will he not only bring discomfort upon himself, but stumbling to the Church. (Gal. ii. 11-14.) A single eye, steadily fixed upon the One Object, will make the path luminous. (Matt. vi. 22.) *Straightforward* progress will insure prosperity. (Deut. xvii. 20. Josh. i. 7, 8.) Keeping the middle path, and daily lifting up the voice for restraint and guidance. (Ps. cxix. 37; cxliii. 8-10.)

"Thine ears shall hear the word behind thee,, saying, This is the way: walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left."‡

* Dr. Abercrombie.

† Ezek. i. 7-9. Comp. Heb. xii. 13. Nearly the LXX. translation of the last clause of verse 26.

‡ Isa. xxx. 21. Comp. Deut. ii. 27; v. 32. The LXX. and Vulgate add here— 'For God knows the ways on the right hand. But those on the left axe crooked. But he shall make straight thy paths, and advance thy goings in peace.' Geier remarks — 'we have no ear for these words, as not belonging to the holy fountain. We leave them to the Papists.' Cartwright's exposition of this middle path is valuable. 'It is as if the royal way was

CHAPTER V.

1. *My son, attend unto my wisdom, and bow thine ear to my understanding :*
 2. *That thou mayest regard discretion, and that thy lips may keep knowledge.* 3. *For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil:* 4. *But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword.* 5. *Her feet go down to death: her steps take hold on hell.* 6. *Lest thou shouldest ponder the path of life, her ways are moveable, that, thou canst not know them.* 7. *Hear me now, therefore, O ye children, and depart not from the words of my mouth.* 8. *Remove thy way from her, and come not near the door of her house:* 9. *Lest thou give thine honour unto others, and thy years unto the cruel:* 10. *Lest strangers be filled with thy wealth, and thy labours be in the house of a stranger;* 11. *And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed,* 12. *And say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof;* 13. *And have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me!* 14. *I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly.*

PONDER this chapter—ye that know not the poison and corruption of fleshly lusts. Perhaps painful experience (1 Kings, xi. 1-8. Eccles. vii. 26) had given the wise man *wisdom and understanding*. Therefore attend to it with fear and trembling. Man's own strength, the restraint of education or self-discipline, is powerless, as the green withs to bind the giant. (Judg. xvi. 9.) Engrafted wisdom is *the only effectual safeguard*. This heavenly influence teaches us, both to *regard discretion* for the covering of our souls, and to *keep knowledge* for the warning of our fellow-sinners. (Chap. ii. 10, 11, 16; vi. 20, 24; vii. 1-5. Ps. xvii. 4; cxix. 9, 11.)

The extreme plausibility of the temptation calls our *attention*. The deluded victim only tastes, or expects to taste, *the honeycomb*: only hears the *wily smoothness* of the charmer's voice. (Chap. ii. 16; vi. 24; vii. 21.) But never is the beginning so sweet as the end is *bitter*. God shows *the wormwood—the two-edged sword* (Comp. Ps. lv. 21)—her path of death—every step *taking hold of hell*, as if invading it with a high hand; grasping it as her home. One feature of the tempter's wiliness is most remarkable.* She winds herself in a thousand moveable ways, to meet the varying humours and circumstances (Chap. vii. 21); she works upon every weakness; seizes every unguarded moment--

hemmed, in by the sea, and a fall over either side were danger of drowning. Some are too greedy; others too ascetic. Some are too bold; others too diffident. Some neglect the Mediator; others seek new Mediators. Some flee the cross; others make one. Some tamper with Popery; others, from the dread of it, hazard the loss of valuable truth.'

* Schultens *in loco*. Chap. ii. 18; vii. 17; ix. 18. 1 Cor. vi. 10. Rev. xx i. 8.

all with one deeply-hidden object — *lest thou shouldest ponder the path of life*. The checks of conscience must be diverted. No time must be given for reflection. The intrusion of one serious thought might break the spell, and open the way of escape. (See Ps. cxix. 59. Ezek. xviii. 28. Luke, xv. 17.)

Can we wonder then at parental earnestness, forcing back *the children* playing on the brink of a precipice? *Hear now, O ye children!* We mean no austere restraint upon youthful pleasures. Only avoid the tempter's touch, her word, even her look. *Remove thy way far from her*. Not only go not in to her; but—such is the contagion—*come not near the door*. (Comp. ch. iv. 14, 15; vi. 27, 28.) To thrust ourselves into temptation, is to throw ourselves out of God's protection. The snare as it approaches becomes more enticing. The voice of wisdom therefore is — "*Flee youthful lusts*."

The loss of honour (Chap. vi. 32. 33. Gen. xxxviii. 23–26), taking the crown from the victim's head (2 Sam. xii. 11; xv. 30. Neh. xiii. 26); years given to the cruel mockers of his misery (Chap. vi. 26; xxxi. 3. Judg. xvi. 18–21); the waste of the family wealth (Chap. vi. 26, 35; xxix. 3. Job, xxxi. 12. Hos. vii. 9. Luke, xv. 13, 30. Comp. Eccius. v. 6) ; servitude *in a stranger's house* (Luke, xv. 15, 16): *consumption*, slowly bringing *the body* to the grave (1 Cor. vi. 18) — such is the bitter fruit of the neglected warning. Add to this the voice of conscience *at the last*; telling of slighted privileges, stifled convictions, abused knowledge. And will not this be the sting of thousands instructed in our schools, or the children of godly parents, now *despising the reproofs* of God, *and the voice of their teachers*; proclaiming their shame openly; perhaps making Christian *assemblies* the scenes of *almost all evil*? (Num. xxv. 6, 7. Ezek. viii. 5–16.)

Such is the picture of sin. Its "pleasure is but for a season;" "its wages death eternal." (Heb. xi. 25. Rom. vi. 23.) Every sin unrepented here will bring its perpetual torment in eternity. Impenitence does not put away its sorrow. It only delays it to *mourn at the last*, when mercy shall have fled away for ever (Chap. i. 24–31), and nothing will remain, but the piercing cry of the accusing conscience — "Son! remember." (Luke, xvi. 25.) There are no infidels in eternity, and but few on a death-bed. Sinner! *the path of life* is now open to thee. Ponder it anxiously, prayerfully. The light of the word, and the teaching of the Spirit, guide thee to it.

15. *Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well.* 16. *Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of waters in the streets.* 17. *Let them be only thine own, and not strangers' with thee.* 18. *Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth.* 19. *Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let*

her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love.

Desire after forbidden enjoyments naturally springs from dissatisfaction with the blessings in possession. Where contentment is not found at home — *drinking out of our own cistern**-- it will be sought for, however vainly, abroad. Conjugal love is chief among the earthly goods in mercy granted by God to his fallen and rebellious creature. Enjoy then with thankfulness thine own, and desire not thy neighbour's *well*. (Exod. xx. 17. 2 Sam. xi. 2, 3.) If a happy issue is given (Ps. cxxvii. 3-5; cxxviii.), let it be as *fountains* (Comp. Num. xxiv. 7; Deut. xxxiii. 28; Ps. lxxviii. 26; Isa. xlviii. 1) *dispersed abroad*, to fertilize with godly influence the way through which their course may be directed. (Comp. Zech. viii. 5.) *Rejoice with the wife of thy youth*. (Deut. xxiv. 5. Eccles. ix. 9.) Regard her as the special gift of thy Father's hand. (Chap. xix. 14.) Cherish her with gentleness and purity (Gen. xxiv. 67), *as the loving hind and pleasant roe*.† Whatsoever interrupts the strictest harmony in this delicate relationship, opens the door to imminent temptation. Tender, well-regulated, domestic affection is the best defence against the vagrant desires of unlawful passion. Yea—it is consecrated by the Word of God itself to the high purpose of shadowing out "the great mystery—loving and cherishing our own flesh, even as the Lord the Church." (Eph. v. 25, 29.)

20. *And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger?* 21. *For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings.* 22. *His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins.* 23. *He shall die without instruction; and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray.*

With such a view as we have had of the deadly enticement of sin on the one hand (Verses 9–11), and the calm happiness provided on the other by the ordinance of God (Verses 15–19), surely none but the infatuated would leave the wholesome fountain for the poisoned and forbidden spring. If he were not stupified, would he slight the "honourable" state of marriage (Heb. xiii. 4), *to embrace the bosom of a stranger*, 'loveless, joyless, unendeared?' Would not the thought, that

* The beauty of the figure is illustrated from the circumstance, that the houses of the East appear each to have had their own cistern. 2 Kings, xviii. 31.

† Comp. 2 Sam. xii. 3. The *hind* and the *roe* were objects of special delight (Cant. ii. 17; iii. 5) and endearment—a picture of the lively delight, which the wife naturally engages; relaxing in her society from severer duties; and taking the liveliest pleasure in her company. As Bishop Davenant beautifully observes—'Abroad the man may consider himself as tossing in the waves; but at home with his wife, in repose, as in a desired haven.'—On Col. iii. 19.

the ways of man are before the Lord, arrest him in his course? But no. Practical atheism is the root of human depravity. (Ps. xiv. 1-3.) The eye of man, even of a child, is a check upon him (Job, xxiv 1,15. Isa. xxix. 15); but the thought of an all-seeing God, even if it enters his mind (Ps. x. 4), inspires no alarm, conviction, or restraint. Oh! if men would but read—would but believe--their Bibles, how would this solemn truth — *he pondereth all his goings*--flash upon their consciences! Not only does he see and mark them as the Omniscient God (Job, xxxi. 4. Ps. cxxxix. 1--4); but *he ponders them* as the just Judge. (Chap. xvi. 2. 1 Sam. ii. 3. Dan. v. 27.) Not one is hidden from his piercing eye. (Heb. iv. 13.) "He will bring every secret thing to judgment." (Eccles. xii. 14.) He "will be a swift witness against the adulterers. No unclean person shall enter into his kingdom." (Mal. iii. 2. Eph. v. 5.)

But if no regard to reason, or to the all-seeing Eye, will restrain the sinner, let him think of the trouble that he is bringing upon himself. God needs no chains or prison to bring him under his hand. Wherever he goes, his sins go with him, as *cords to hold him* for judgment. (Chap. xi. 3, 5, 6; xxix. 6. 1 Sam. xxviii. 5-10.) Does he think that he can give them up when he pleases? Repetition farms the habit. The habit becomes a ruling principle. 'Every lust deals with him, as Delilah with Samson—not only robs him of his strength, but leaves him fast bound.'† Shutting his eyes against the light, he dies without instruction (Verse 12. Chap. i. 29; x. 21. Job, iv. 21; xxxvi. 12. Hos. iv. 14, 17) -- *The greatness of his folly leads him astray*--to perdition. (2 Pet. ii. 14, 15.)

But is there no remedy for this deadly curse? Thanks be to God! cleansing is provided for the impure (Lech. xiii. 1. 1 Cor. vi. 11); "deliverance is proclaimed to the captive." (Isak lxi. 1.) Blessed Saviour! cleanse the leper in thy precious fountain. Perform thy mighty commission. Set the captive free.

CHAPTER VI.

1. My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, if thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger, 2. Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth, thou art taken with the words of thy mouth. 3. Do this now, my son, and deliver thyself, when thou art come into the hand of thy friend: go,

* Job, xxxiv. 21, 22. Ps. xciv. Jer. xiii. 25-27; xvi. 17; xxix. 23. Hos. vii. 2 See some striking thoughts in MEDE'S *Sermon* on iv. 23.

† Archbishop Tillotson quoted in NICHOLL'S *Commentary*. Jude. xvi. 19-21. 'Thus I,'—said Augustine adverting to this hateful sin—'delighted with the disease of the flesh, and with the deadly sweetness of it, drew my shackles along with one, much afraid to have them knocked off; and, as if my wound had been too hard rubbed by it, I put back my friends' good persuasions, as it were the hand of one that would unchain me.'— *Confess.* b. vi. c. 12. Comp. chap. xxiii. 29-35.

humble thyself, and make sure (so shalt thou prevail with, marg.) *thy friend*. 4. *Give not sleep to thine eyes, or slumber to thine eyelids*. 5. *Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler*.

THE *son* has just been warned against the deadly wound of a stranger. He is now cautioned against a hurt from an imprudent friend. So graciously has our God made his book, not only our guide to heaven, but the directory of our common life. We must, however, often take its wise rules with some restriction. We are here earnestly warned against *suretyship*. Yet in some cases it is plainly allowed and approved.* "A man that hath friends must show himself friendly." (Chap. xviii. 24.) And the passing of our word, or giving a bond, may be an act of prudent friendship, and of solid and permanent advantage. The caution is evidently directed against rash engagements (Comp. also chap. xi. 15; xvii. 18; xx. 16; xxii. 26, 27), to which the young and inexperienced are especially exposed; *striking with hands* (the usual mode of plighting faith) (Chap. xvii. 18; xxii. 26. Job, xvii. 3), in an unguarded moment. Often may they be *snared* and *taken by the words of their mouth*, by entering into virtual promises, without knowing how far they were pledged, or what might be the issue. Christian prudence will keep us clear from such engagements, which bring distress upon our families, dishonour upon our name, and reproach upon our religion. (Comp. Eccles viii. 13.) While the "good man showeth favour, and lendeth, he must guide his affairs with discretion;"† however grating it may be to incur the suspicion of unkindness. If, however; by any inconsiderate bond, thou *hast come into the hand of thy friend*; the instant duty is, to *humble thyself for thy imprudence, and make sure thy friend*, if *thou cant prevail with him* to answer for himself; and, give thyself no rest, till, *like as the roe and the bird*, thou be disentangled from the snare.

Our God, while he warns us against *suretyship*, has taken it upon himself. Praised be his name! He has give his word, his bond, yea—his blood—for sinners—a security, that no powers of hell can shake.

6. *Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise:* 7. *Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler,* 8. *Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.* 9. *Flow long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?* 10. *Yet a little*

* Reuben and Judah for Benjamin. Gen. xlii. 37; xliii. 9 ; xliv. 32, 33. Paul for Onesimus. Philem. 18, 19.

† Ps. cxii. 5. P. Henry always cautioned sureties not to be bound for any more than they knew themselves able to pay, nor for more than they would be willing to pay, if the principal failed.— *Life*, chap. v.

more sleep, a little more slumber, a little folding! of the hands to sleep: 11. So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.

'It is a shame'-- said the heathen philosopher--'not to learn morals from the small animals.' Yet what a proof is it of the degradation of the fall, that "man, created in the image of God," and made wiser than the creation (Gen. i. 26. Job, xxxv. 11), should be sent, as here, to this insignificant school for instruction! *The ant, having no guide* to direct her work, no *overseer* to inspect her, or *ruler* to call her to account (Comp. chap. xxx. 27, and contrast Exod. v. 13, 4; 1 Kings, v. 16); yet *gathereth* with diligent foresight the *summer and harvest* store for her winter need.† Let *the sluggard consider her ways, and be wise*. He sleeps over his work, and, if for a moment half-startled by some rousing call, still pleads for a *little more sleep, and folds his hands to sleep*. Present ease is all he calculates on, all he provides for. The future he carefully keeps out of sight, to be provided for, like the present, when it comes. Thus life runs to waste. *Poverty comes* step by step *as one that travelleth, and, like an armed man*, with irresistible violence. (Chap. x. 4; xiii. 4; xix. 15, 24; xx. 4; xxi. 25; xxiv. 33, 34.)

Perhaps he perverts his Master's word to excuse his sloth. But, if we are to "take no *anxious* thought for the morrow " (his true meaning),‡ are we to take none at all? Care is a duty, parental obligation (2 Cor. xii. 14. Comp. Gen. xxx. 30; xli. 33), and, therefore, a component part of godliness.§ Carefulness is a sin (Luke, x. 41. 1 Cor. vii. 32), a needless burden to ourselves, an unworthy distrust of God. (Matt. vi. 25-33.) The diligent use of providential means honours God. (Chap. x. 5; xxiv. 27.)

But much more loudly would we call to the spiritual sluggard. Thou that art sleeping away the opportunities of grace; not "striving to enter in at the strait gate" (Luke, xiii. 24); taking thy salvation for granted; hoping that thou shalt "reap that which thou hast not sown, and gather where thou hast not strawed" (Matt. xv. 26) -- *Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise*. Improve, after this pattern, the summer and harvest season—the time of youth, the present,

* Pudeat ab exiguis animalibus non trahere mores.—SENECA, De Clementia. Lib. i.

† Chap. x. 5; xxx. 25. Horace's miser quotes this example as an excuse for hoarding. But—as the poet replies—it was to use the hoard in the winter prudent care, not covetousness. *Sat* i. 32. See also Virgil's exquisite picture, *AEn.* iv. 402, &c. The hoarding spirit of the ants, though attested by numerous writers and naturalists, does not characterise those known to us ; though the habits of the species in a warmer climate would probably widely differ from our own. Some, however, have thought, that Solomon only refers to their wisdom and prudence in preparing suitable food in summer and harvest, when it is most plentiful.—See KIRBY and SPENCE's *Entomology*, ii. 46.

‡ **Merimaw.** Matt. vi. 34.—*Solicite et anxie cogito*; at plus est sollicitum esse, quam cogitare, as Erasmus notices, and that of Tully confirms,—*Sollicitudo est aegritudo cum cogitatione*. 'The root of the word expresses the dividing of the mind into divers thoughts.' —LEIGH'S *Critica Sacra*. Comp. Philip. iv. 6.

§ 1 Tim. v. 8. Our Lord had a bag for the provision of his family. John, xiii. 29.

perhaps the only, moment. *The ant hath no guide*. How many guides have you—conscience—the Bible—ministers! (Job, 8. Ps. cxix. 105. Mal. ii. 7.) *She has no overseer*. You are living before Him, whose "eyes are as a flame of fire." (Chap. xv. 3. Rev. i. 14 ; ii. 18.) She has no ruler calling her to account. "Every one of us must give account of himself unto God." (Rom. xiv. 1 .) *How long then wilt thou sleep, O sluggard?*—is the solemn remonstrance of thy God. (Comp. chap. i. 22; 1 Kings, xviii. 21.) Thy sleep is not like that of the body, refreshing at the dawn of day; but it is that of the poisoned draught, heavier and heavier; the slumber of death. "Awake, thou that sleepest, and Christ shall give thee light." (Eph. v. 4.) Slight not the call of the present moment. The spell grows stronger, as resistance is delayed. Every day's slumber makes it more improbable, whether thou wilt ever awaken at all. The intended struggle of to-morrow is a delusion. A thousand such to-morrows there may be; and yet thou mayest be found at last perishing in thy *poverty*, and he King of terror will *come as an armed man* to summon thee to judgment.

But how one is made to feel that from his deep slumber no voice but Omnipotence can rouse! Enter *the sluggard's* chamber; put aside his curtain; hang over his bed; sound a solemn cry in his ears—*How long?* endeavour even to open his eyelids to the light of day ; and yet the spell is too strong for man. He shifts his posture, murmurs his cry—*a little more sleep*—and slumbers again. Christians! you feel the helplessness of your work. Then call in the power of God in your brother's behalf—"Lighten his eyes, lest he sleep the sleep of death." (Ps. xiii. 3.)

And then, as for thyself—grow intense energy in thy high calling. Remember, faith without diligence is slumbering delusion. Faith is the practical energy of a living faith. Always, therefore, look at sloth, not as an infirmity, but as a sin, affecting the whole man: growing upon us with unperceived power. Allow it therefore no rest, no time to root itself. Resist it in all its forms—bodily, mental, spiritual: indulgence of sleep and appetite: self-pleasing in all its subtle and plausible workings. Live by rule. Have your time strictly arranged. Be employed in early work for God. Store the mind with useful knowledge; ever reserving the first place for an industrious and prayerful study of the book of God. "Mortify" this baneful lust "through the Divine Spirit" (Rom. viii. 13); drawing all your motives from the death (Ibid. vi. 6), the life (Mark, i. 2-35), the rules of Christ. (Luke, ix. 23. Rom. xiii. 11-14.) Victory will soon declare for you; and how enriching will be the spoil!

12. *A naughty person, a wicked man, walketh with a froward mouth.* 13.

He winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers. 13. *Frowardness is in his heart; he deviseth mischief con-*

tinually; he soweth discord. 15. Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy.

What a contrast between the inactivity of the sluggard and the unwearied diligence of *the naughty person!* This man of Belial (Heb.)—as if his *froward mouth*—itself "a world of iniquity" (Jam. iii. 6)—could not give sufficient scope for his malice, makes every member—*eyes, feet, and fingers*—vocal and significant (Isa. iii. 16), an active "instrument of unrighteousness." (Chap. x. 10. Rom. vi. 13-19.) These, however, are only the external manifestations. Seep within lies the laboratory of evil—"the chambers of imagery," terming with "greater and yet greater abominations." (Ezek. viii. 8-15. Matt. xv. 19.) *Frowardness* is in the heart.* Here is the restless devising of mischief,† *sowing discord*, instead of piety and love. (Chap. x. 12.) Such a pest to society brings on himself his own ruin, *suddenly and without remedy.*

The sight of this all-pervading power of sin is truly affecting. How utterly powerless is any remedy save that involved in the solemn declaration—"Ye must be born again!" (John, iii. 7. Tit. iii. 3-5.)

16. These six things doth the Lord hate; yea, seven are an abomination unto him: (of his soul, marg.) 17. A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, 18. An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, 19. A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.

Man conceives of God in his heart as "such a one as himself" (Ps. 1. 21), looking with indifference at sin. Here therefore Solomon names *six--yea--seven* (Comp. chap. xxx. 15-18) *abominations* (most of them mentioned in the preceding list) *which the Lord--hateth—a proud look,‡ a lying tongue,§ a blood-stained hand.||* And, lest we should think, that he "looketh only on the outward appearance;" *the heart, active in devising wickedness,¶* is brought out; and is ready organ, the feet swift in running to mischief. (Chap. i. 16. Isa. ix. 7. Rom. iii. 15:) How *hateful* also *is the false witness* (Zech. viii. 17), surely reserved by him for judgment! (Chap. xix. 5. Zech. v. 4. Mal. ii. 5.) Let the self-willed separatist remember the double stamp (Vers:s 14, 19) upon him *that soweth discord among brethren.* if the heavenly "dew descends

* 'Frowardness,' Heb. See POOLE's Synopsis—not one but many; the heart so filled with them, that the vessel cannot hold more. Gen. vi. 5. Acts, x. ii. 10.

† Ps. x. 7-9; xxxvi. 2-4. Compare the striking figure, Hos. vii. 6. Chap. xvi. 28. Ps. lii. 2.

‡ Chap. viii. 13; xxx. 13. Ps. xviii. 27. Isa. ii. 12. Jer. i. 31—the examples of Pharaoh—Ex. ix. 16. Haman—Esth. vii. 10. Nebuchadnezzar—Dan. iv. 28-33. Herod—Acts, xii. 21-23.

§ Chap. xii. 22. Ps. v. 6. Rev. xxi. 8. Gehazi—2 Kings, v. 25-27. Ananias and Sapphira—Acts, v. 1-10.

|| Gen. ix. 6. Cain—iv. 8-12. Manasseh—2 Kings, xxi. 15, 16. Specially the murderers of his dear Son—Matt. xxiii. 31-38.

¶ Ahithophel—2 Sam. xvi. 20-23; xvii. 23. Mic. ii. 1. 2 Pet. ii. 14.

upon the brethren that dwell together in unity" (Ps. cxxxiii.), a withering blast will fall on those, who, mistaking prejudice for principle, "cause divisions" for their own selfish ends. (Rom. xvi. 17, 18.) Fearful is the Lord's mark upon them—"sensual, having not the Spirit."* If we cannot attain unity of opinion—"perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment;"† at least let us cultivate unity of spirit—"Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule; let us mind the same thing." (Philip. iii. 16.)

20. *My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother:* 21. *Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck.* 22. *When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee: and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.* 23. *For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life;* 24. *To keep thee from the evil woman,‡ from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman.*

The authority of parental instruction is again enforced. (Chap. i. 8, 9; iv. 1.) God never intended young people to be independent of their parents. Instruction from every quarter is valuable. But from parents—always supposing them to be godly parents—it is the ordinance of God. They will bring you God's word, not their on. Therefore *bind it continually about thine heart* (Chap. iii. 3; iv. 21; vii. 3), as thy rule; *about thy neck* (Chap. iii. 3. Comp. Job, xxxi. 36), as thine adorning. Let the law be thy friend for all times and circumstances—a guide by day (Chap. iii. 22, 23; iv. 12); a solace by night (Chap. iii. 24. Ps. lxiii. 5), yea—a friend for thy *waking* moments. (Ps. exxxix. 17, 18.) Take care that nothing hinders thy early converse with this faithful counsellor before the world comes in; as the best means of keeping the world out. 'Happy is the mind to which the word is an undivided companion.'§ *A lamp*, so full of *light*, in this dark world|| is an inestimable gift. Its *reproofs of instruction*, the discipline of our wayward will, are to us as *the way of life*. (Ps. xix. 11. 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17. Comp. Matt. vii. 13, 14.)

* Jude, 19. 1 Cor. iii. 3, 4. Let the wisdom of experience given by an accurate observer of himself and the Church, be seriously pondered—I am much more sensible of the evil of schism, and of the separating humour, and of gathering parties, and making several sects in the Church, than I was heretofore. For the effects have shown us more of the mischiefs. I am much more sensible, how prone many young professors are to spiritual pride and self-conceitedness, and unruliness, and division, and so prove the grief of their teachers, and firebrands in the Church. I am much more sensible than heretofore of the breadth, and length, and depth of the radical, universal, odious sin of selfishness, and the excellency and necessity of self-denial, and of a public mind, and of loving our neighbour as ourselves.'—BAXTER'S *Narrative of his Life and Times*.

† 1 Cor. i. 10—'A text'—says the godly Flavel—to be commented upon rather by tears than by words.'—*Sermon on Text*.

‡ Heb. Woman of wickedness—the woman full of wickedness—wholly given to it. Comp. Zech. v. 7, 8.

§ Felix mens, cui verhum individuus comes.'—BERNARD, *Serm. xxxii. in Cant.*

|| Ps cxix 105. See Bishop Patrick's note quoted in Scott.

Specially valuable are this *lamp and light* in sensual temptation. (Chap. ii. 10, 11, 16-19; v. 1-8; vii. 1-5.) Those who choose their own light fall into a *flattering* snare. (Chap. ii. 16; vii. 21. The neglect of parental warning will furnish in the end bitter matter for unavailing repentance. (Chap. v. 11-13.) Oh! let the Father's instruction be heard betimes — "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word." (Ps. xix. 9. Comp. v. 11; xvii. 4.)

25. *Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids.* 26. *For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life.* 27. *Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?* 28. *Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned?* 29. *So he that goeth in to his neighbour's wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent.*

Solomon here gives our Lord's own rule. (Matt. v. 28. Comp. Jam. i. 14, 15; Job, xxxi. 1; Ps. cxix. 37; also, Eccus. ix. 3-5.) Resist lust in its first rising in the heart. By vain *beauty*,* and wanton eyes,† many a deluded victim has been *brought to a piece of bread*.‡ Like the insatiable huntsman, who never loses sight of his prey, till he has pursued it to death; never does the seducer cease to solicit, till she has *hunted for the precious life*. (Gen. xxxix. 14. Judg. xvi. 18-21. Comp. Ezek. xiii. 18, 20, 21.) Yet neither the present miseries, nor the certain end, of this wretched course, can draw away the foot, that has dared to tread the forbidden path. 'Self-confidence sees and fears no danger. 'I can look to myself; I need not go too far, and I shall get no harm.' But the temptation acts upon a congenial nature like fuel, not water, on the fire. As well might we expect to *take fire into our bosom, and our clothes not be burned, or to go upon hot coals, and not be burned*; as to go wilfully into sin, and to escape the punishment.§ Sin and punishment are linked together by a chain of adamant. 'The fire of lust kindles the fire of hell.'|| He cannot afterwards plead the strength of the temptation. Why did he not avoid it? Who that knows how much tinder he carries about him, would wilfully light up the sparks? Heedlessly to rush into temptation, is to provoke the corruption, which is too ready to stir of itself. The influence of temptations though not

* Chap. xxxi. 30. Gen. vi. 2; xxxix. 6. 2 Sam. xi. 2. Comp. Eccus. xxv. 21.

† Gen. xxxix. 7. 2 Kings, ix. 30. Marg. Isa. iii. 16. 2 Pet. ii. 14. Comp. *Paradise Lost*, book xi. 1, 620.

‡ Chap. v. 10; xxix. 3. 1 Sam. ii. 26, 36. Job, xxxi. 9, 12. Luke, xv. 13, 30. Comp. the difference between Solomon's chaste and unholy age. I Kings, x. 21, 27, with xii. 4.

§ Exod. xx. 14, 17. Lev. xx. 10. 2 Sam. xii. 9. Mal. iii. 5. Even as a sin of ignorance it was liable to be visited. Gen. xii. 15-15; xx. 1-6; xxvi. 10. So strictly has the holy Lord fenced his own ordinance! See MEDE'S *Sermon on Chap. iv. 23*.

|| Henry *in loco*. Comp. Job, xxxi. 12; Jam. i. 14, 15.

always sensible, is immediate. The man must be in haste, who would effectually resist it. Beware of suspicious familiarities on the borders of sin. (Gen. xxxix. 10. Rom. xiii. 13. 1 Thess. v. 22.) The temptation to criminality in this atmosphere is fearful. (2 Sam. xi. 2-4. Comp. Eccius. ix. 8, 9.) *Whosoever toucheth shall not be innocent.* (Gen. xx. 6; xxxix. 9. 1 Cor. vii. 1.)

30. Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul, when he is hungry; 31. But if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his house. 32. But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul. 33. A wound and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away. 34. For jealousy is the rage of a man; therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance. 35. He will not regard (accept the face of, marg.) any ransom; neither will he rest content, though thou givest many gifts.

Here is no excuse or impunity for *the thief*. The full restitution that he is compelled to make*—perhaps sweeping away *all his* little *substance*—proves that no extremity can excuse "the transgression of the law." (Comp. 1 Cor. vi. 10, with 1 John, iii. 4.) Let him earn his bread by honest industry. If the fruits of industry fail, let him, trusting in God, seek the help of his fellow-creatures. If he have faith to trust, he will never be forced to steal. (See Matt. vi. 25-33.) Yet his extreme temptation renders him an object rather of pity than of scorn—*Men do not despise him.*

But the sin of the adulterer claims no sympathy. His plea is not the cry of hunger, but of lust; not want, but wantonness; not *the lack* of bread, but *of understanding*. (Comp. Eccles. vii. 25, 26; Jer. v. 8, 21.) He is wilfully given up to his sin. He *destroyeth his own soul*. (Lev. xx. 10. Chap. ii. 18, 19; v. 22, 23; vii. 22, 23. Eph. v. 5.) *He gets a wound*—not like the soldier or the martyr for Christ—full of *honour*; but rankling on his conscience (Ps. xxxii. 3, 4), and bringing *dishonour* and indelible *reproach* upon his name.† The tremendous passions of *jealousy and rage* shut out all forgiveness.‡ *The face* of no one who offered a *ransom* would be *accepted*. No compensation (Gen. xxxix. 19, 20. Judg. xix. 29, 30), however costly, will *content*.

Such are the many sins (2 Sam. xi. 6-24), the awfully destructive

* Exod. xxii. 11-4. Seven-fold—not literally. Four or five-fold was the extent of the Divine requirement. Comp. Luke, xix. 8. It means full (ver. 3) and satisfactory—an indefinite number. Comp. Gen. iv. 15, 24; Ps. lxxix. 12, and cilia passim. Comp. Job, xx. 18.

† Chap. v. 9. Gen. xxxviii. 23; xlix. 4. 2 Sam. iii. 13; xiii. 13. 1 Kings, xv. 5, with Matt. i. 6. Neh. xiii. 26. Comp. Deut. xxiii. 2.

‡ Gen. xxxiv. 7; xlix. 5-7. Num. v. 14. Esth. vii. 7-10. Ezek. xvi. 38. Schultens remarks that no version fully expresses the strength of the original. Rage; 'Ignitio.' *In loco*

miseries,* flowing from the breach of God's holy commandment. 'Oh! how great iniquity'—exclaimed the godly Augustine—'is this adultery! How great a perverseness! The soul, redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, is thus for the pleasures of an hour given to the devil; a thing much to be lamented and bewailed; when that which delighteth is soon gone, that which tormenteth remaineth without end.'†

And shall not this fearful picture of sin and its consequences (which Solomon, alas! was too well fitted to draw) teach us to avoid everything that may be temptation; to be sensitive to the first intimations of its becoming so; to close every avenue of sense to the entrance of this seductive poison; to shun all communications that taint the purity of taste, that familiarise the mind with impurity, that give a vivid interest to associations from which a chaste imagination recoils with disgust? Let us learn to seek Divine strength to "watch and pray" continually; and, while we "think we stand, to take heed lest we fall." (1 Cor. x. 12)

CHAPTER VII.

1. My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee. 2. Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye. 3. Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart. 4. Say unto wisdom—'Thou art my sister,' and call understanding thy kinswoman: 5. That they may keep thee from the strange woman, from the stranger that flattereth with her words.

THE study of wisdom in the word of God is here commended to us with affectionate earnestness, and with a beautiful variety of imagery. Let us ponder these valuable rules for practical application.

Let the whole mind and heart be occupied with it. Keep it as the daily means of life. (Chap. iii. 21, 22; iv. 4, 13. Isa.lv. 2, 3. Jer. xxii. 15.) Sir Matthew Hale told his children—'If I omit reading a portion of Scripture in the morning, it never goes well with me through the day.' *Lay it up* (Chap. x. 14. Deut. xi. 18. Luke, ii. 19, 51) carefully, not on our shelves, but on our hearts. Let *the whole* Word of God be our precious treasure. Receive the promises from his grace with simple affiance, and *the commandments* from his holiness with ready obedience. Stand with your eye in the land of promise; but with your feet "in the land of uprightness." (Ps. cxliii. 10.)

Maintain a jealous regard for the law. What care is necessary to *keep the apple of the eye*—that most tender part of the most tender

* The quaint lines of an old Chronicler give an awful picture--

'Corpus, opes, animum, famam, vim, lumina. scortum
Debilitat, perdit, necat, aufert, eripit, orbat.'

Quoted by Trapp on verse 26.

† Lib. de Honest. Mulier. quoted by Lavater on verse 26.

member! (Deut. xxxii. 10. Ps. xvii. 8. Zech. ii. 8.) With the same care preserve the integrity of *the law*. Let every part of it have its full weight. To explain it away, or to lower its requirements, breaks down the barrier, and gives an easy entrance to temptation. The sensual sinner is often a covert infidel.

Let it be at hand for constant use. Bind them upon thy fingers (Chap. iii. 3. Deut. vi. 8; xi. 18); that, being always in sight, they may be always ready for the present moment. And for their practical influence, *write them upon the table of thine heart*. Oh! my God! this is thy Almighty work. (Isa. xxvi. 12. 2 Cor. iii. 3.) But thou hast engaged to do it for thy people. (Jer. xxxi. 33.) I "take hold of thy covenant." Lord! seal thy promised grace.

Let it be the object of tender affection—as our sister--our kinswoman. It is her embrace that throws the harlot's beauty into the shade. Man must have his object of delight. If wisdom is not loved, lust will be indulged. The Bible therefore—not merely read, but the cherished object of familiar intercourse—proves a sacred exorcist to expel the power of evil. (Chap. ii. 10, 16; vi. 23, 24; xxiii. 26, 27.)

6. *For at the window of my house I looked through my casement, 7. And beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths a young man void of understanding, 8. Passing through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her house, 9. In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night: 10. And, beholds there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart. 11. (She is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house: 12. Now is she without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner.) 13. So she caught him, and kissed him, and with an impudent face said unto him, 14. 'I have peaces-offerings with me; this day have I paid my vows. 15. Therefore came I forth to meet thee, diligently to seek thy face, and I have found thee. 16. I have decked my bed with coverings of tapestry, with carved works, with fine linen of Egypt. 17. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. 18. Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning: let us solace ourselves with loves. 19. For the goodman is not at home, he is gone a long journey: 20. He hath taken a bag of money with him, and will come home at the day appointed.'* 21. *With her much fair speech she caused him to yield; with the flattering of her lips she forced him. 22. He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks: 23. Till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life.*

Solomon paints the deadly snare of *the strange woman* with a master's hand, and with exquisite fidelity of colouring. A *young man without understanding* (Chap. i. 4, 22 ; xiii. 16) in company with *youths as simple*

as himself, *takes in the dark of evening the way to the harlot's house*. She meets him. Her *attire* (Gen. xxxviii. 14, 15): her *subtilty* (Chap. xxiii. 27. Eccles. vii. 26., Judg. xvi. 4–20); her *loud and stubborn voice* (Chap. ix. 13); *her feet at this late hour not abiding in her house* (Comp. 1 Tim. v. 13 ; Tit. ii. 5); *lying in wait at every corner of the street*;* *her impudent face and conduct*—all show the harlot's forehead. (See Gen. xxxix. 7, 12. Jer. iii. 3.) She allures her victim with the garb of sanctity. She had just been engaged in special religious duties. Now she was come forth to seek diligently her lover, that they might feast together upon her *peace-offerings*,† and *solace themselves with love*, with every indulgence. 'The goodman (perhaps the name of husband might have awakened conscience) is gone a long journey till the time appointed. Meanwhile, therefore, we may take our fill of love without fear of interruption.' Unarmed with principle, the weakness of resolution yields to the seduction of lust; and her unsuspecting prey rushes on to ruin.

Trace this sad end to its beginning. Was not idleness the parent of this mischief? (2 Sam. xi. 2.) The loitering evening walk; the unseasonable hour (Job, xxiv. 15. Rom. xiii. 12, 13); the vacant mind—all bringing the youth into contact with evil company (Chap. xiii. 20. 1 Con xv. 33)—was not this courting tempting the tempter?

"The house was empty," and therefore ready for his reception, and soon altogether in his possession. (Matt. xii. 44, 45.) How valuable are self-discipline, self-control, constant employment, active energy of pursuit, as preservatives under the Divine blessing from fearful danger !

See also the base varnish of religion. It is often a cover for sin! (1 Sam. ii. 22. 2 Sam. xv. 8–11. John, xviii. 28.) 'She durst not play the harlot with man till she had played the hypocrite with God, and, stopped the mouth of her conscience with her *peace-offerings*.'‡ Nay—she seems to have emboldened herself in her wickedness, as if her meeting was a happy providence, the reward of her religious services. (Verses 14, 15. 1 Sam. xxiii. 7. Zech. xi. 5.) Beware of any voice, though from the most revered quarter, that manifestly encourages forbidden indulgence.

Observe also the infatuation of the snare. 'Man cannot be ruined till he has been made confident to the contrary. A man must get into his victim's heart with fair speeches and promises, before he can come

* Chap. ix. 14, 15; xs:iii. 28. Dr. Richardson mentions seeing "these wretched women in a large commercial town in Egypt, in the harlot's attire, sitting at the doors of their houses, and calling on the passengers as they went by, in the same manner as we read in the Book of Proverbs."—Travels, vol. i. p. 270.

† See Holden. Comp. Lev. vii. 16; xix. 6; Dent. xii. 6. Scott takes the same view—adding— 'that it is no wonder, that these sacred ordinances should have given occasion to carnal indulgence, when our Christian festivals (Christmas especially) are abused for similar profanations.'

‡ Gurnal. It is a well-known fact, that the favourite mistress of Louis XIV. was so rigid in her religious duties, that her bread was weighed during Lent, lest she should transgress the austerity of fasting.

at it with a dagger.* Thus the harlot's *flattering speech* chained the youth blindfolded for destruction. As *the ox goeth to the slaughter*, unconscious of his fate, perhaps dreaming of rich pasture: *or as a fool goeth to the stocks* (Eccles. vii. 26. Judg. xvi. 16-19), careless and unfeeling; so does this poor deluded victim rush on with pitiable mirth or indifference, *till the dart strikes through his liver*. (Hos. iv. 11, 14.) He hasteth as a bird to the snare (Eccles. ix. 12), thinking only of the bait; *and he knoweth not that it is for his life*. (Chap. ix. 18.) What will recollection bring, but the fragrance of exciting perfume (Verses 16, 17), changed into the bitterness of wormwood and gall; the short night of pleasure succeeded by the eternal night of infernal torment!† for a cup of pleasure drinking an ocean of wrath! (Verse 27; ix. 18.)

Lastly—*mark the danger of venturing into temptation*. Could we expect any other results, when we *saw the youth going the way to the harlot's house*? (Chap. iv. 15; v. 8. Judg. xvi. 1.) He intended merely his own idle gratification; and when he *yielded*, it was probably not without some struggle. But it is a just judgment, that those who fear not temptation should fall. 'Who would avoid danger must avoid temptation to sin. Who would avoid sin must avoid temptation to sin.'‡ The force, to which the youth's own folly subjected him, he could not plead as an excuse. When the first bounds of modesty are broken through, the door of the fancy is opened to the tempter for the kindling of lust. Thus to rush into the very jaws of ruin is to "enter into temptation" by our own will; instead of being led or falling into it, under the providential discipline and dispensation of God. (Matt. xxvi. 41, with iv. 1. Jam. i. 2.) Self-confidence has ruined many a promising profession. Tenderness of conscience, sensibility of weakness, dependence on Divine strength and promise --in this frame "he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not." (1 John, v. 18.)

24. *Hearken unto me now therefore, O ye children, and attend to the words of my mouth.* 25. *Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths.* 26. *For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her.* 27. *Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death.*

In the hand of a licentious poet or painter, this picture might serve to contaminate the unsanctified imagination. But as it stands on the page of inspiration, it is God's solemn warning to *children*, whether in years, understanding, or experience. *Now, therefore*, that you have seen the end of sin (Verses 22, 23), *hearken unto me*. That you may *not go astray in her paths, let not thine heart decline*. (Chap. iv. 23; v. 8.) An impure thought, a polluted fancy, an idle book, filthy conversation,

* SOUTH's *Sermons*, iii. 130.

† 'Delectat in momentum; cruciat in aeternum'—JEROME. ‡ Geier on verse 9.

foolish company, theatres or places of vain resort—these are *her ways*. Dread the first step, and dream not that you can stop yourself at pleasure in her course. Familiarity with sin weakens abhorrence. Soon will you begin to love the object of detestation. And what! should you find too late, that you have chosen as your home her house, which is *the way to hell, and to the chambers of death?** *Many*, not of the meaner sort, but *strong men* has she cast down wounded and slain. And a miracle it is of Almighty power and grace, that plucks the child of God from the brink of destruction.

Let not then the most established Christian dismiss this subject as of no personal concern. Be it so—that "you are risen with Christ;" that you have "set your affections on things above;" that "your life is hid with Christ in God;" that you are looking for the glorious hope of his "appearing." It is to you, in whom "fleshly lusts are yet warring against the soul" (1 Pet. ii. 11), that the exhortation is given—*Mortify, therefore, your members that are upon the earth*—even the worst members of the old man—*fornication, uncleanness, evil concupiscence*.† And who, with the picture of the wounded and slain before him will revolt?—"Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?" (2 Kings, viii. 13)—that he should need this warning? Look at the footsteps of the strong men who have gone in.‡ Whom do we see come out whole? "Behold! kings stood not before her; how then shall we stand?" (2 Kings, x. 4.)

Nor let present steadfastness, or seclusion from temptation, blind our eyes to the liability of yielding to the vilest indulgence. The eye of God discerns a far deeper corruption than appears in the outer man—such a total depravation, that even the affections, designed to be the sources of our holiest delight, become the principle and occasion of the most awful departures from the ways of purity and peace.

The gospel presents the only remedy. The love of Christ is the counteracting principle to the love of lust. 'If impure love solicits, remember the holy love of thy Saviour to thee, proved by his most shameful death. Think of him, as looking into thy heart boiling over with corruption, showing thee his wounds, and exciting thee to a reciprocal love of himself.'§ The crucifixion of the flesh by a living union with Him will "keep us from our iniquity." (Gal. v. 24, with

* Chap. ii. 18; ix. 18. The plural number (*the ways*, Heb.) seems to imply 'many other ways of guilt branching out, alaiy other paths of ruin coinciding.'—HERVEY's *Theron and Aspasio*. Letter v. Schultens insists, that the present most wretched state, full of all horror and execration, is included; so that the man who hath entered the seducer's house, may be said to have entered alive into hell, and gone down to the chamber of death.—Chap. v. 5.

† Col. iii. 1-5. Compare the exhortation to the flourishing Thessalonian Church, 1 Thess. iv. 3-5; and to a Christian Bishop, 2 Tim. ii. 22.

‡ Samson—David—Solomon. Neh. xiii. 26.

Vestigia terrent.

Felix, quern faciunt aliena pericula cautum!

§ Geier on verse 18. Comp. 1 Cur. vi. 18, 20; 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

Ps. xviii. 23.) "How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Rom. vi. 2, 3.) "The flesh will still lust against the Spirit." (Gal. v. 17.) But the man, who walks with God in Gospel liberty, and Christian discipline and watchfulness, is safe. (Rom. vi. 14, with 1 Cor. ix. 27.)

But if sin be not mortified by these principles, sooner or later it will break out; if not, as here, to open disgrace; yet so as to defile the conscience, to "quench the Spirit," and by a sure, though perhaps imperceptible, course, to bring soul and body *to hell—to the chambers of eternal death*. (Rom. vi. 21. Jam. i. 14, 15.)

CHAPTER VIII.

1. *Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice?* 2. *She standeth in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths.* 3. *She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors.* 4. *Unto you, O men, I call: and my voice is to the sons of man.*

LISTEN we now to the calls of heavenly *Wisdom*—to the voice of the Son of God.* Careless soul! shall thy Divine call be slighted, when the allurements of sin and vanity have had power to arrest thine ear?† Can ignorance be pleaded? *Doth not wisdom cry?* and that—not in the hour of darkness, and in the secret corners, but in the *high places—the paths of the city—the doors* of thy house? Has she not followed thee to thy places of business—of diversion—of sin? Has she *not put forth her voice* in the Bible—in the family—in the preached ward? The loudness--the perseverance of the *cry* betokens earnestness in thy

* We assume the speaker to be personal—essential Wisdom. Apart from the general reasons before given (Notes on chap. i. 20, 21, 24), this description could not without unnatural force apply to an attribute It set out, I. Personal existence—brought forth—brought up—in conjunction with Deity—by Him (verses 24, 30.) II. Personal properties (1.) set up (anointed, Heb.) from, everlasting, for distinct office. (verse 23), (2.) The efficient cause in the work of creation (verses 27-30), (3.) Having wisdom (verse 14) which, as an attribute itself, could not be the property of an attribute; and strength (verse 14) an independent quality, not a property of wisdom, (4.) Personal authority (verses 15, 16), (5.) Leading into the ways of truth (verses 19, 20), (6.) Causing to inherit. (Verse 21.) III. Personal affections—hatred (verse 13), love (verse 17), joy. (Verses 30, 31.) IV. Giving personal promises. (Verse 21.) V. Commanding obedience as a matter of life and death. (Verses 32-36.) Whether Solomon fully understood his own words, may be a question. 1 Pet. i. 10, 11. But receiving the words as from God; weighing their natural force; comparing them with Scripture parallels, we doubt not that they describe—not an attribute, but a Person—Eternal—Omniscient—in the most endearing relation to man--his Creator—Mediator—Saviour.

† Chap. vii. 'Imagination cannot form to itself a more exquisite and affecting piece of scenery, than that exhibited by Solomon in the Book of Proverbs. In his seventh chapter he introduces the world, by its meretricious blandishments alluring the unwary to the chambers of destruction. In the succeeding chapter, by way of perfect contrast, appears in the beauty and majesty of holiness, the Son of the Father, the true and eternal Wisdom of God, with all the tender love and affectionate concern of a parent, inviting men to the substantial joys and enduring pleasures of immortality, in the house of salvation.'—Bishop HORNE's *Sermon on the Tree of Knowledge*.

friend, and danger in thy condition. For would she have cried so loud, or continued so long, if she had not loved thy soul; if she had not known the wrath that was hanging over thee—the hell that was before thee?

The call is unfettered; not to devils, but to men: not to the righteous, but *to the sons of men*. Every child, therefore, of guilty Adam has his name in the warrant. It is the proclamation of the Gospel "to every creature." (Mark, xvi. 15.) Wherever the word reaches, the offer is made. Wherever a lost sinner be found on this side of the grave, the free welcome of the Gospel meets him. If he be not saved, he is more lost than ever. His ruin lies at his own door. (Matt. xxiii. 37.)

5. O ye simple, understand wisdom: and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart. 6. Hear; for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be right things. 7. For my mouth shall speak truth; and wickedness is an abomination to my lips. 8. All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing froward or perverse in them. 9. They are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge. 10. Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold. 11. For wisdom is better than rubies: and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it.*

The great Teacher *calls the simple and fools to hear*. (Chap. i. 23; ix. 4, 5.) And where else can they hear such *excellent things*. Worthy are they of the attention of princes† —his glorious person; his everlasting covenant; his rich and sovereign love to sinners. (Verses 12–31.) Often does the truth of God, by the tradition of men,‡ or the subtilty of the father of lies (Comp. Matt. iv. 6, 7, with Ps. xci. 11), become virtually a principle of error. (Gal. i. 7–9.) But here all is unchangeable *righteousness*. There is no *froward perversion*. *Every such wickedness is an abomination*. (Chap. xxx. 5. Ps. xix. 9; xxxiii. 4; cxix. 152, 160.)

But are they within the reach of the multitude? They who "lean to their own understanding" (Chap. iii. 5. 1 Cor. i. 20; iii. 18); who care more to be learned than to be holy; who value the tree of knowledge more than the tree of life; who desire "meat for their lust," rather than manna for their souls. Such, indeed, make difficulties for themselves. The "voice out of the whirlwind" rebukes them, as "darkening counsel by words without knowledge." (Job, xxxviii. 1, 2.) Scripture difficulties belong not to the Book itself, but to man's blind and

* Rather than silver. See next clause, and Comp. Hos. vi, 6.

† Heb. princely.

‡ It was a keen reply of one of the Martyrs, when asking of Bonner's chaplain—"Is not God's book sufficient for my salvation?"—the answer was—"Yes, it is sufficient for our salvation; but not for our instruction." "God send me the salvation, and you the instruction."—Exam. of Thomas Hawkes. FOXE, vii. 100.

corrupt heart. The carnal man cannot understand it, any more than the blind can see the noon-day light of the sun. But 'it is easy to all that have a desire to it, and which are not blinded by the prince of this world.'* The "babes" are taught of God. (Matt. xi. 25; xviii. 4.) He not only unfolds the truth, but opens their hearts to receive it. There will be, indeed, great depths. But they will grasp important, saving truths. Here 'the wisest Solomon may fetch jewels for ornament, and the poorest Lazarus bread for life.'† Come then—sinner—"sit," with one of old, "at the feet" of thy Divine Teacher. (Luke, x. 39.) *Receive his instruction more precious than silver or fine gold.* (Verse 19 ; xvi. 16. Job, xxviii. 15–19. Ps. xix. 10; cxix. 127.) Enrich thyself with his satisfying and enduring treasures, *compared with which all the things that may be desired* are lighter than vanity. (Chap. iii. 15.) And will not the children of God daily draw more abundantly from these treasures? Oh! let them not be, like the pomp of this world, the object of gaze, but of active desire and increasing enjoyment.

12. I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions.

How adorable is the Being here before us! His glorious perfections, each *dwelling with* the other in such harmonious combination! All the *witty inventions* of science are ultimately traceable to this heavenly source. (Exod. xxxi. 3–6; xxxv. 30–35. 1 Chron. xxviii. 19. Isa. xxviii. 24–29.) But his great mind was soaring far beyond. The vast discovery of man's salvation was now before his eyes (Verses 22–31) found out, not by laborious investigation, but by the intuition of the Infinite Godhead. Here is his most splendid display of *wisdom* (Eph. iii. 10) *dwelling with prudence*—*wisdom* contriving for the highest end *prudence* directing the most effective means. The same perfect combination controls all his arrangements, both as "the Head of the Church" (Col. i. 18), and "the Head over all things to his Church" (Eph. i. 22), for her present good, and his eternal glory. 'And what' owe we individually, to "the riches of his grace, wherein," by the removal of insuperable difficulties, and the communication of suitable grace," he hath abounded towards us in all *wisdom and prudence!*" (Ib. i. 7, 8.)

Prudence is commonly thought to be only a moral quality. Here we see it to be an attribute of Deity. The humanity of our beloved Lord was filled with this perfection. (Isa. xi. 2.) With what Divine acuteness of *wisdom* did he *find out the knowledge of the inventions* of his

* Reformers' Notes. Comp. chap. xiv. 6; xvii. 24. 'What wonder, if the unlettered and despised Christian know more of the mysteries of Heaven than the naturalists, though both wise and learned? Christ admits the believer into his bosom, and He is in the bosom of the Father.'—LEIGHTON'S *Sermon on Heavenly Wisdom*.

† Bishop REYNOLDS on *Hos.* xiv. 9.

enemies, and put them to shame! (Matt. ix. 4-8; xxii. 15-46.) And how did this combination of *prudence* restrain him from hasty confidence (John, ii. 23, 24), remove him from premature danger (Matt. xii. 14-16. John, vi. 15), and preserve him from giving needless offence! (Matt. xvii. 27.) Praised be our God for such "treasures of *wisdom*," hid in our glorious Head," ready for distribution for every emergency of his people's need! (Col. i. 19; ii. 3.)

13. The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.

Such is the holiness of Divine wisdom! *She dwells with prudence.* But she cannot dwell with evil. Therefore, *the fear of the Lord*, which is her very nature, is *to hate evil*. (Chap. iii. 7; xvi. 6.) Thus of *pride* in all its branches —*arrogancy of spirit, the evil way and the froward mouth*—the Wisdom of God declares without reserve—*I hate them*. (Chap. vi. 16-19; xvi. 5. Ps. xlv. 7. Zech. viii. 17.) How clearly did he mark his *hatred* in the days of his flesh by the full exhibition of the opposite grace! "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but *to minister*." (Matt. xx. 28. Luke, xxii. 27.) A proud disciple of a lowly Saviour! how offensive is this contradiction to our Master! What a cause of stumbling to the world!

14. Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom; I am understanding; I have strength.

This *counsel*, as we have just hinted (See on verse 12), is not, as with man, the fruit of deliberation, but Divine intuition. It is not that it flows from him; but that he is himself the essence—the fountain-head. (Isa. xl. 13, 14. Rom. xi. 34.) It is not that he *hath understanding* to order and govern the world. But *he is understanding*. All is in him. All is derivable from him. (John i. 9.) "His understanding is infinite; his *strength* Almighty, everlasting." (Ps. cxlvii. 5. Isa. xl. 28 xxvi. 4.) Thus we adore him—we rest in him — as the great "Counsellor" (Isa. ix. 6); One with his Father in the everlasting plan of salvation (Zech. vi. 12, 13); One with his Church, undertaking her cause (Ib. iii. 1), guiding her in all her difficulties and perplexities. (Isa. lxiii. 9-14.) His self-existent power is ever ready to execute the purpose of his *counsel*. (Ib. verses 1-6. Ps. lxxxix. 19. Job, ix. 4; xii. 13, 16. Dan. ii. 20.) Behold him then, surrounded with the majesty of his mighty perfections—"Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God." (1 Cor. i. 24.) In all thy doubts and anxieties—*counsel is mine, and sound wisdom*. (Isa. xlviii. 17.) In all thy conflicts and weariness—*I have strength*. (Ib. xl. 28, 29.) See him as man filled with these Divine perfections. (Ib. xi. 2.) Remember—his fulness is thy portion. (1 Cor. i. 30. Col. ii. 10.)

15. *By me kings reign, and princes decree justice.* 16. *By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth.*

Another glorious contemplation of this Divine Person! He proclaims himself to be the source of power and authority, no less than of *counsel and wisdom*. "KING OF KINGS" was the mysterious name written upon his vesture. (Rev. xix. 16; i. 5; xvii. 14.) Yet his crown does not displace the regal diadem from the brow of earthly princes; nor is the sceptre to fall from their hands. These ensigns of power are to be held, but in subordination to his own. *By me kings reign*; not only by my permission, but by my appointment. They bear my name. They are stamped with my authority. (Exod. xxii. 28. Ps. lxxxii. 6. John, x. 35.) Proud anarchy disputes the prerogative, and traces the authority to the people; only that they may cast off the yoke of God, and "do that which is right in their own eyes." (Judg. xvii. 6; xix. 1. Hos. viii. 4. 2 Pet. ii. 10. Jude, 8.) Scripture polities lay down the offensive truth—"There is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God. They are ministers of God," not servants of the people. (Rom. xiii. 1-6.) Government in all its administrations—kings, princes, nobles, judges—is a Divinely-consecrated ordinance.* Every kingdom is a province of the universal empire of the "King of kings." Men may mix their own pride, folly, and self-will with this appointment. But God's providential counter-working preserves the substantial blessing. Yet, if "the power be *exclusively* of God," then is *Wisdom, by whom kings reign*, the very essence and person of God. And here is our rest, our anchor in this world's agitating storm. "The government of the world is on the shoulders" of "the Head of the Church." (Isa. ix. 6.) All things—all power in heaven and in earth—is delivered unto him of his Father.† The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice." (Ps. xcvi. 1.)

17. *I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me.*

Now behold the grace of this Divine Person to his *loving* children. None by nature are interested in it. (Rom. viii. 7.) But his free grace first implants *love* in their hearts, and then cheers them with the assurance of his own *love*. (1 John, iv. 19. John, xiv. 21.) The first kindling of the flame is of him. We *love*, because we are drawn. (Jer. xxxi. 3.)

* Ps. lxxv. 7. Jer. xxvii. 5-7. Dan. ii. 37, 38; iv. 25; v. 18. Comp. John, xix. 11. It is interesting to trace this acknowledgment even in the darkness of Heathenism. Kings inherited their sceptre from Jove; Magistracy was consecrated by Augurs, the Assessors and Counsellors of Jove.

† Matt. xi. 27; xxviii. 18. Scott remarks the future tense in the original, as seeming to agree with the prediction of righteous kings and rulers in the latter times of the Church. Comp. Ps. lxxii. 1-3; Isa. xlix. 23; lx 16, 17. See the national blessing of godly rulers—2 Chron. ix. 8. Isa. i. 26.

We seek, not by the impulse from within, but by the grace from above (Chap. xvi. 1. Ps. cxix. 32); and *seeking, we find*. (Isa. xlv. 19. Jer. xxix. 13. Matt. vii. 7, 8.) But it must be *early seeking--the first desire and choice of the heart*. (Chap. xxiii. 26. Ps. lxiii. 1. Hos. v. 15. Matt. vi. 33.) It must be *early in the day* (Ps. v. 3; cxix. 147. Isa. xxvi. 9. Mark, i. 35), the first-fruits of our time. Consecrate the whole to him. Take care that God is the first person we speak to; that we see his face first before any other; else will our lamp be untrimmed, our soul estranged from his presence, our heart unready for his service. *Let it be the early breaking in of the day of grace* (Job, viii. 5-7. Isa. Iv. 6. 2 Cor, vi. 2)—the improvement of the first—who knows that they be not the only—opportunities of salvation? (Chap. xxvii. 1. Heb. iv. 7.) Every present opportunity for the soul is worth worlds. Mercy is in it—grace and glory are in it—heaven and eternity are in it. But remember—the door of grace, that is opened to-day, may he shut to-morrow—for ever.

Again—this *early seeking*. Oh! let it be the early spring and morning of life (1 Kings, xviii. 12. 2 Chron. xxxiv. 3.)—when the eye is full of life, and the heart of gladness. Let it be "the kindness of youth" (Jer. ii. 2) "the first love:" before it has been devoted to the world; before the hardening habits of sin have been formed and fixed. Is he not the greatest—the most desirable—the most satisfying good? Therefore, let him be to us—as he deserves to be—the first of the first—the best of the best.

Children! Here is a special encouragement for you, added to the general one. It can never be too early for you. Even now it is too late. God has claimed you from the moment that you passed from unconscious infancy to the dignity of a responsible being. The time spent, so long estranged from God, has been all too long. Early devotedness saves from many follies and mistakes, retracing of steps, and the after misery of being "made to possess the iniquities of our youth." (Job, xiii. 26.) Early satisfaction—the pure fruit of *early seeking*—(for they that thus *seek shall find*) will be the joy of your whole life (Ps. xc. 14, with verses 34, 35)—the dawn of your blessed eternity. Remember—the bud and bloom of life is specially acceptable to God (Hos. xi. 1-4); specially honoured by him. (1 Sam. ii. 18; iii. 19. Ps. xcii. 12-15.) But is it reasonable—nay—is it not a most abasing thought—to offer the flower of youth to Satan; and, when you have well worn yourself out in his service, to reserve only the dregs and sweepings of life for your Saviour? (Mal. i. 8.) Every day you lose a world of happiness; you bind a chain of sin; you take a step to hell. Come, then, and answer the call that is drawing you to Him, who is worthy of all. (1 Sam. iii. 9. Ps. xxxii. 8. Jer. iii. 4.) Never will you regret that you have come too soon. But many have been the sorrowing cries—Lord, 'I have loved thee too late!' (Matt. xxv. 6-12.

Luke, xiii. 24, 25.) Come, then, by his help, and in dependence on his grace make him your first, your present choice. Lay claim by faith to this promise to *early seekers, and you shall find*.

18. *Riches and honour are with me: yea, durable riches and righteousness.*

19. *My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver.* 20. *I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment:* 21. *That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures.*

What a treasure do *early seekers find*! This fading world is too poor a portion. (Ps. xvii. 14, 15.) Theirs are *durable riches* of eternity (Matt. vi. 19, 20. Luke, x. 42. Rev. iii. 18); the *honour* of "reigning" as kings "in life" (Rom. v. 17; viii. 17. Rev. i. 6); *a righteousness*, in which they are accepted with God, and conformed to his image. (Rom. iii. 22; xiii. 14. Eph. iv. 24.) Is not this *fruit and revenue better than choice silver*? (Verses 10, 11; iii. 14, 15. Eccles. vii. 12.) And then, when our way is shut up, how valuable is Wisdom's counsel! (Chap. iii. 6; iv. 11, 12; vi. 22. Isa. xlviii. 17; xlix. 10) so carefully *leading in the midst of the paths*; 'at a distance from the extreme'* on either side of the narrow way. The sober-minded Christian is equally remote from formal service and enthusiastic delusion. His apprehensions of truth are alike distinguished from the dryness of system, and from loose unconnected principles. The intelligent and spiritually-minded Churchman is alike separate from exclusiveness or idolatry on the one side, and from indiscriminate Christianity on the other. He values highly his Scriptural ordinances; yet he neither mistakes them for the substance of the gospel, nor does he substitute self-willed effervescence in their room. This is the *Via Media*—Christian unity, consistency, and fruitfulness. Here also is *substance*—things that have a being, in contrast with "things that have not" (Chap. xxiii. 5. Ps. xxxix. 6. 1 Cor. vii. 31); solid realities (Isa. xxix. 8, contrasted with Isa. lv. 2); "faith substantiating things hoped for." (Heb. xi. 1.) Sin pardoned: the Father smiling acceptance; the Comforter witnessing our peace; a new moulding of our mind and spirit. Here is no yawning vacuum, but a grand object to give interest to life, to fill up every vacancy in the heart—'perfect happiness.'† All that we could add from the world would only make us poorer, by diminishing that enjoyment of God, for the loss of which there is no compensation. There is one point—only one—in the universe, where we can look up, and cry with the saintly Martyn—"With thee there is no disappointment."‡

Now contrast the portion in this life—of the men of this world. Mark how the word of God pictures it—a fashion (1 Cor. vii. 31) — a

* Scott. Chap. iv. 23-27. See Bunyan's fine description of the middle path.

† Cartwright.

‡ *Journals*, vol. ii. 130.

dream (Ps. lxxiii. 20)—a nonentity (Chap. xxiii. 5. Amos, vi. 13)—a lie. (Jonah, ii. 8.) Thus men are spread over the world, "feeding upon ashes, a deceived heart turning them aside." (Isa. xlv. 20.) The inlet of their misery is, that they walk in a vain shadow, and "therefore they are disquieted in vain." The child of God finds *substance* in "returning to his "true" rest. Now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee." (Ps. xxxix. 6, 7.)

But how does he come to his portion? Has he any part in deserving it? Far from it. Free grace, not free will, is the procuring cause. It is an *inheritance*, now indeed "obtained," while "the earnest" is in hand (Eph. i. 11); but to be fully enjoyed at the great consummation-day. Then, indeed, what here he promises will be fully made good. His joyous welcome "to them on his right hand" will indeed be *causing them that love him to inherit substance* (Heb. x. 34)—eternal, unfading. (Matt. xxv. 34.) Even now from his royal bounty does he *fill their treasures*. But what will be the burst of joy at that day—what the unbounded delight throughout eternity, when, endowing them with such a royal--yea—Divine bounty, the glorious Giver shall proclaim—*I will fill their treasures!* (1 Pet. i. 4, 5.) And the countless throng of the redeemed shall unite in the testimony--*One Christ hath abundantly filled us all!*

22. *The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old.* 23. *I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.* 24. *When there were no depths, I was brought forth: when there were no fountains abounding with water.* 25. *Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth:* 26. *While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world.* 27. *When he prepared the heavens, I was there; when he set a compass upon the face of the depth:* 28. *When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep:* 29. *When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth* 30. *Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him;* 31. *Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth: and my delights were with the sons of men.*

It must be a perverted imagination that can suppose an attribute here. So glorious are the rays of eternal supreme Deity, distinct personality, and essential unity, that the mysterious, ever-blessed Being—"the Word, who was in the beginning with God, and was God" (John, i. 1, 2) —now undoubtedly stands before us. Curiously to pry into the mode of his subsistence, would be "intruding into those things which we have not seen." (Col. ii. 18. 1 Tim. vi. 16.) To receive his own revelation of himself is our reverential privilege.

How clear is his essential unity with the Father! The Lord possessed me—present with him in the bosom of Deity. Every movement of the Divine mind was infinitely known—every purpose of Divine counsel eternally present—fully developed, I was by Him†—in the same essence and blessedness. (John, x. 30.) Such was "the glory which he had with the Father before the world was!" (lb. xvii. 5.) Neither man nor angel could declare it. No created intelligence could tread one footstep in the course, that realises any conception of the mystery. The mode of his existence in the Godhead (and this is all that is revealed of this inscrutable subject) is generation—I was brought forth—"the only-begotten Son"‡—a term which it is much safer to adore than to expound; expressing, as it does, what is unsearchable. 'Take care'—saith an old expositor—"that in this generation we invent nothing temporal, carnal, or human. But rather let us worship this generation, beholding it by faith; and let us take heed from searching further than Scripture doth teach us thereof. Otherwise we should deserve to be blinded and punished for our great curiosity."§*

*Not less clear is his eternal existence—in the beginning|| of the way of God—coeval with his eternal counsels—before his works of old ¶ set up or anointed** from everlasting for his covenant offices (1 Pet. i. 20); 'destined and advanced to be the Wisdom and Power of the Father, Light and Life, and All in All, both in the creation and the redemption of the world.'††*

Connected with his eternity was his agency in the work of Creation. Before the works was he brought forth. But when they were in operation he was there—and that, not, like "the sons of God," an interested

* LXX. and Syriac Translation—'created'—most unwarrantable—one of the main pillars of the Arian heresy.

† John, i. 2. Geier remarks, that out of above sixty instances, where this preposition occurs, not one can be produced, where vicinity is not supposed between two distinct persons or substances.

‡ John, i. 18 ; iii. 16. Col. i. 15— 'begotten before every creature.'—Bishop MIDDLETON.

§ CopE (MICHAEL), *Exposition of Proverbs*. 4to. 1580.

|| Holden strongly advocates the Translation—supported by many Ancient Versions, and some of the best critics (see POOLE's *Synopsis*)—"the beginning of the way"—and expounds it—"That Jehovah possessed by an eternal generation Wisdom or the Son, who is the origin, or efficient cause, of all the works of God."—Comp. Col. i. 18. Rev. iii. 14, also i. 8; xxii. 13. Geier and other accredited authorities prefer the received version upon critical grounds. Holden's remark, however, holds good on either hypothesis:—"It is scarcely possible in the whole compass of the Hebrew language to select terms more expressive of the eternity of Wisdom than those which Solomon employs from this verse to the thirtieth."

¶ Contrast Job, xxxviii. 4, 5. Comp. verses 23-25, with Ps. xc. 2—the sublime adoration of the eternity of God. Comp. also Exod. iii. 14, with John, viii. 58. Mic. v. 2. Rev. i. 11.

** Heb. Anointing was the inaugurating ceremony in the consecration of prophets, priests, and kings—a figure of the eternal consecration of Messiah to those high offices. Comp. 1 Kings, xix. 16, with Isa. xli. 1; lxii. 1. Exod. xxix. 7, with Ps. cx. 4. 1 Sam. x. 1; xvi. 13. 2 Kings, ix. 6, with Ps. ii. 6, marg. xlv. 6, 7.

†† HENRY *in loco*. Comp. Eph. iii. 9.

spectator (Job, xxxviii. 6, 7), but an efficient cause.* The whole detail of the creative work is brought out—the *highest part* or summits of the *dust of the world*, with its deep and unsearchable *foundations*. Thus is uncreated Wisdom displayed in clear and undoubted glory—the Divinity and eternity of Wisdom, meaning thereby the eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ our Saviour.†

Next he describes his *unspeakable blessedness in communion with his Father*. *I was by him, as one brought up with him*—embosomed in him as the object of *daily delight*;‡ rejoicing before him as the Fountain and Centre of infinite joy. All this mutual intimate satisfaction and delight had respect to the *beginning of the way of God*.—his eternal purpose, and "the counsel of peace, which was between them both." (Zech. vi. 13.) Here it was that the Father once and again proclaimed him to be *his delight*; "His elect, in whom his soul delighted; his beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased" (Isa. xlii. 1. Matt. iii. 17 xvii. 5. Comp. Col. i. 13, Gr.); 'willing that by the Son we should approach to him; in the Son we should honour and adore him; and honour the Son as himself.'§

Yet how deeply interesting is it to see him rejoicing, not only before his Father, but in the habitable part of the earth! And what was it that here attracted his interest? Man had been created in the image of God—free to stand or fall. This freedom was the perfection of his nature. His fall was permitted as the mysterious means of his higher elevation. His ruin was overruled for his greater security. This habitable earth was to be the grand theatre of the work, that should fill the whole creation with wonder and joy. (Ps. xcvi. Isa. xliq. 23.) Here "the Serpent's head was to be visibly bruised" (Gen. iii. 15. Heb. ii. 14, 15. 1 John, iii. 8), the kingdom of Satan to be destroyed, precious "spoil to be divided with the strong." (Isa. liii. 12. Luke, xi. 21, 22.) Here was the Church to be framed, as the manifestation of his glory, the mirror of all his Divine Perfections. (Eph. iii. 10, 21.)

Considering the infinite cost at which he was to accomplish this work—the wonder is — that he should have *endured* it — a greater wonder that, ere one atom of the creation was formed— ere the first blossom had been put forth in Paradise, he should have rejoiced in it.

But the wonder of wonders yet remains—that he, who was his

* John, i. 3. Col. i. 16. Even in the creation of man he was a co-worker, Geri. ii. 7, with i. 26.

† Reformers' Notes.

‡ Comp. John, i. 18—the *only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father*—'exhibiting at once,' as Dr. Jamieson admirably observes—the idea conveyed by both the terms—brought forth, and brought up.—*Vindication of Doctrine of Deity of Christ*, i. 224. Holden with some others prefers the rendering 'Fabricator' for *brought up*, But the scope appears to be—not the power of Messiah, but the mutual delight and communion between himself and his Father, as it were, never absent from each other.

§ Quoted by Scott.

Father's infinite delight, and infinitely delighting in him, should find *his delights* from all eternity *in the sons of men*; that he should, as it were, long to be with us; that he should solace his heart with the prospect; that he should anticipate the moment with joyous readiness (Ps. xl. 6—8. Heb. x. 7); that he should pass by the far nobler nature of angels "to take hold of man" (Heb. ii. 16, marg.), to embrace man as one with his All-perfect self! But though he foresaw how they would despise, reject, and put him to shame; yet they were the objects of his everlasting love (Jer. xxxi. 3.), the purchase and satisfaction of the "travail of his soul" (Isa. liii. 10, 11), the eternal monuments to his praise (Ib. lv. 13). Yet for their sakes did he make humanity a temple of the Deity, for them did he exchange the throne of glory for the accursed cross (Philip. ii. 6-8) — the worship of the Seraphim for the scorn and buffeting of men (Isa. vi. 1, 2, with Matt. xxvii. 22-31).—inexpressible joy for unknown sorrow. (John, xvii. 5, with Matt. xxvi. 38; xxvii. 46.) Yes — thou adorable Redeemer, nothing but the strength of thine own love could have brought thee out from the bosom of ineffable delight to suffer such things for such sinners! But this was "the joy set before thee, for" which — unfathomable love! — thou wast content "to endure the cross, despising the shame." (Heb. xii. 2.) For this love dost thou inherit thy Father's justly proportioned reward. (Philip. ii. 8-11.) On this foundation is thy people's confidence — rest — security.

32. *Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways.* 33. *Hear instruction and be wise, and refuse it not.*

Now therefore hearken. It is no mean and undeserving person that calls. It is none other than the Wisdom of God; the source of all light and knowledge (Verses 12-14); the King of kings (Verses 15, 16); the loving rewarder of his children, especially of his young children (Verse 17. Comp. Heb. xi. 6); the rich portion and unfailing guide of his people. (Verses 18, 19.) Look at him once again in his Divine glory, as "the only-begotten Son of God " (Verses 22, 24); the Mediator in the everlasting Councils of Redemption (Verse 23); the Almighty Creator of the world (Verses 27-30); the adorable Friend of sinners (Verse 31). How should his Divine Majesty and condescending love endear his *instruction* to us!* Yet his promised blessing belongs only to practical hearing—to *those that keep his ways* (Isa. lv. 2, 3. Luke, xi. 28. John, xiv. 21-23. Jam. i. 25) with godly fear, constancy, and perseverance; keeping their eye on them, their hearts towards them, their feet in them. Such *are* truly *blessed*. They choose rightly; they walk surely; they live happily; they progress honour-

* See how the Father manifested the glory of his Divine Son to give constraining force to his instruction. Matt. xvii. 1-5.

ably; they end gloriously. Is it not therefore our *wisdom to hear instruction* with "the obedience of faith"—not doing what he commands — (in which we may sometimes do — not his will, but our own) but doing because he commands — doing his will in it--obeying as well when it crosses our nature, as when it is more congenial with it? But for this cheerful, child-like obedience, sovereign grace must open the heart, and give the ear. (Chap. xx. 12, with Acts, xvi. 14.) The guilt *of refusing* is inexcusable — a resolved will against the most gracious call. (Acts, iii. 22, 23. Heb. ii. 1-3.)

Now therefore hearken, O ye children. Oh! happy moment, when the soul is made "willing in the day of his power" (Ps. xc. 3); when "the bands of love are drawing" (Hos. xi. 4) unto him! The cold, dead indifference is gone. The enmity is slain. And who will not now joyfully swear fealty; yea, count it his unspeakable delight to take such a yoke; to be bound to such a service, where there is nothing but for our good? (Dent. x. 12, 13.) Oh, my Prince—my Saviour! thou hast based thy dominion on thy blood. Thou hast purchased thy right by thy cross. (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. Rom. xiv. 9.) Thou rulest, only that thou mightest save. Take to thyself the glory of thy victory. I am thine — not my own — for ever.

34. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. 35. For whoso findeth me, findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord. 36. But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death.

This is the *hearing* of faith—the voice of Christ to the inmost ear—the impression of his word upon the heart. (John, v. 25. Rev. iii. 20.) The effect is unwearied diligence and patient expectation; like the *priest* waiting *at the doors* of the tabernacle for the assured blessing (Exod. xxix. 42); or the people *watching at, the temple gates* for his return from his holy ministrations. (Luke, i. 10, 21.) This free and habitual attendance upon Sacred Ordinances indicates an healthy appetite for Divine nutriment. The superficial professor excuses himself from this "weariness" (Mal. i. 13) by the fear of legality, or the danger of *overvaluing* the means. But is there not at least equal danger of *undervaluing* the means, to which our gracious Lord has engaged his blessing? (Exod. xx. 24. Isa. lvi. 7. Matt. xviii. 20.) In gazing on the heavenly Jerusalem, the Apostle "saw no temple therein." (Rev. xxi. 22.) But what right-hearted Christian will doubt that the life-blood of his soul while on earth consists in *watching*, like the servants of the temple, *daily at her gates* (Ps. lxxxiv. 1, 4, 10), *when not involving the neglect of imperative obligations*. Wisdom's child will ever be familiar with *Wisdom's gates*. The *Weekly* as well as the Sabbath assemblies will be his delight. Most thankful will he be for the service, which invigorates him in the

midst of the toils of his worldly calling. "The way by the footsteps of the flock, *beside the Shepherds' tents*," will be his constant resort. (Cant. i. 7, 8.) And never would he wound the feelings of his Shepherd by wilfully absenting himself from the well, when he comes to water his flock. All the ordinances of prayer, meditation, Scripture reading, or godly conference, will be his salutary provision. When it is not so; when the common routine satisfies; when the intervals between the Sabbath pass without any appetite for food, or any effort to seek the bread of the sanctuary — Christian, is not thy pulse beating feebly? Hast thou not lost many a precious message from thy Lord (see John, xx. 19, 24) — the fruit of thy Minister's special study, a word of distinct application to thy state, and which might have guided and comforted thee to the end of thy days? Oh, listen to thy Lord's rebuke — "Be watchful and strengthen the things that remain that are ready to die?"*

Observe the *blessing* breathed down upon the Lord's waiting ones. They *find life*. (Isa. lv. 3. John, v. 24.) For he on whom they wait is the Author (John, i. 4 ; xi. 25 ; xiv. 6), the Dispenser (lb. x. 10), the Keeper of life. (Col. iii. 3. 1 John, v. 11. Jude, 1.) "He therefore that hath him, hath life" (1 John, v. 12), with all its present privileges of *favour of the Lord*. (Isa. lxiv. 5.) 'The smiles of God make heaven; and they that *obtain favour of the Lord*, have a heaven upon earth.'† Set then this expectation before thine eyes in waiting on thy God. 'I am seeking *life* for my soul; I will *wait at the post of his doors*, missing no opportunity of a means of grace; I shall not wait in vain.'

Would that *the sinner*—the thoughtless sinner—not the daring and ungodly only—pondered how his heartless neglect of wisdom *wronged his own soul*! (Chap i. 17-19, 31; ix..12. Jer. viii. 19. Acts, xiii. 46. Num. xvi. 38.) How cruel he is to himself, while he is despising his Saviour. Every bait of sin is the temptation to suicide—soul-murder. The snatching at it is as if men were in love with damnation. '*They that hate me love death*. They love that which will be their death, and put that from them which would be their life. Sinners die, because they will die; which leaves them inexcusable, makes their condemnation more intolerable, and will for ever justify God when he judges. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself."‡

* Rev. iii. 2. 'The places where the Gospel is faithfully preached, are "the gates, and the posts of the doors of wisdom," at which Christ would have his disciples to "wait daily." And may not Christians, consistently with other duties, redeem time for this waiting, as well as the children of this world find time for their vain amusements, who yet do not neglect their one thing needful? Is not the time spared from attending on a week-day, often spent in unprofitable visits or vain discourse? Ought Ministers to be "instant in season, and out of season," in preaching the word; and ought not the people to be glad of an opportunity of hearing it?' — SCOTT.

† Lawson (George) Exposition of Proverbs. 2 vols. 12mo. 1821.

‡ Hos. xiii. 9 Henry *in loco*.

CHAPTER IX.

1. *Wisdom* hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars:*
2. *She hath killed her beasts;† she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table.*
3. *She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city.*
4. *Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him,*
5. *Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled.*
6. *Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding.*

WE have delighted to contemplate the Divine Saviour in his glorious majesty, and specially in his wondrous love to *the sons of men*. (Chap. viii. 22-31.) Here his love is poured out before us. The parable of the marriage-feast clearly identifies the speaker. Then the King made the feast, and sent his servants to invite the guests. (Matt. xxii. 1-4, also Luke, xiv. 16, 17.) Here Wisdom is a Queen, according to Eastern custom, attended by *her maidens* (Exod. ii. 5. Esth. iv. 4), and *she sends them forth* to bid to the feast. *She hath builded her house*—"the church of the living God"—firm upon the *pillars* of eternal truth. (1 Tim. iii. 15. Eph. ii. 20-22. Heb. iii. 3, 4. Matt. xvi. 18.) The great sacrifice supplies her feast. (1 Cor. v. 7. Ps. xxxvi. 8. Isa. xxv. 6.) *She hath killed her beasts, mingled her wine* with the choicest spices,‡ and plentifully *furnished her table*. And now *she cries to the simple*—ignorant of his danger (Chap. xxii. 3), and easily deceived (Chap. xiv. 15)—*to him that wanteth understanding* (Hos. vii. 11)—who has no apprehension of his need, or desire for the blessing—*Let him turn in hither*. Here is a feast, not to see, but to enjoy. *Come, eat of the bread of life drink of the wine* of gospel grace and joy.§ Is there not besides a special invitation for her children—a *table richly furnished* for their refreshment; where they *eat of the bread, and drink of the wine*, such as "the world know not of" (Matt. xxvi. 26-28.)

But are not all corners welcome to the Gospel feast? The Master's heart flows along with every offer of his grace. His servants are ministers of reconciliation. (2 Cor. v. 18-20.) Their message is to tell of the bounty of Messiah's house, and to bid sinners welcome to Him. Here, sinner, is thy warrant—not thy worthiness, but thy need, and the invitation of thy Lord. All the blessings of his Gospel are set before thee—love without beginning, end, or change. Honour the freeness of his mercy. Let him have the full glory of his own grace,

* Wisdoms. Heb. Comp. note Chap i. 20. † Comp. Gen. xliii. 16. Marg.

‡ Bishop Lowth remarks the difference between the Classics and the Hebrews The one by mingled wine understand wine diluted with water; the other intend wine made stronger by spices, or other exhilarating ingredients. Note on Isa. i. 22. Comp. chap. xxiii. 29-31. Cant. viii. 2.

§ Matt. xxii. 44. Isa. lv. 1. Comp. Bishop Hall's note.

who invites thee to a feast, when he might have frowned thee to hell.* Let his heavenly hope be enthroned in the soul, displacing every subordinate object from its hold on thine affections, eclipsing the glories of this present world, absorbing thy whole mind, consecrating thy whole heart.

Here only are the ways of peace. The very severities of the Gospel prepare the way for its consolations. But never can these blessings be valued, till the path of *the foolish be forsaken*. Thou must *forsake* either them or Christ. (Jam. iv. 4.) To abide with them, is to "remain in the congregation of the dead." (Chap. xxi. 16.) To *forsake them*, is the way of *life and understanding*. (Chap. xiii. 20. Ps. xxvi. 3-6; xxxiv. 12-14; cxix. 115. Amos, v. 15.) Are they more to you than salvation? To "be the friend of the world is to be the enemy of God." "Come out, and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive thee, saith the Lord Almighty." (2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.)

7. He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame: and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot. 8. Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a arise man, and he will love thee. 9. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will yet be wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning.

Wisdom's messengers must discriminate in the proclamation of their message. If *the simple* welcome it, the *scorner and wicked* will rebel. Yet we must distinguish between the ignorant and the wilful scorner. Paul "did it ignorantly, in unbelief." (1 Tim. i. 13.) His countrymen deliberately refused the blessing, and shut themselves out from the free offers of salvation. (Acts, xiii. 45, 46, 50; xviii. 6. Matt. x. 14, 15.)

One cannot think of the scorner without compassion. He cannot bear to commune with himself. Under an assumed gaiety, he would envy—as did Colonel Gardiner—the dog his existence. 'I hate life'—said Voltaire—'yet I am afraid to die.' Such is the bitterness of soul linked with rebellion against God! Wretched indeed must he be, when the thought of God is an abomination, and when it is necessary to his peace to expunge all idea of him from his creed. (Ps. xiv. 1.)

Yet, in dealing with him, Solomon here gives us the rule of Christian prudence. The gospel is a thing too holy to be exposed to scoffing fools. (Matt. vii. 6.) Why should we *reprove*, where more harm than good may be occasioned? Avoid irritations. Await the favourable opportunity. Sometimes a sad, serious, intelligible silence is the most effective reproof. (Amos, v. 13; vi. 10.) Whereas open rebuke might stir up a torrent of *hatred* (Chap. xv. 12; xxiii. 9. 1 Kings, xxii. 8.

* Calvin speaks of the pleading invitations of Christ, as 'his sweet and more than motherly allurements,' and beautifully adds—that 'the word of God is never opened to us, but that he with a motherly sweetness opens his own bosom to us.' On Matt. xxiii. 37.

2 Chron. xxv. 16) and abuse (Gen. xix. 9. Amos, vii. 10. Matt. vii. 6); and under provocation of spirit, the *reprover* might *get to himself a blot*. (Isa. xxix. 21.)

Yet this prudence must not degenerate into cowardice, and compromise the primary obligation boldly to rebuke sin (Eph. v. 11. 1 Thess. v. 14. 1 Tim. v. 20. Matt. xiv. 3, 4), and confess our Master. (Matt. x. 32, 33. Acts, iv. 19, 20.) Every sinner is not *a scorner*. And a "word spoken in due season, how good is it!" (Chap. xv. 23.) That false delicacy, therefore, which recoils from an unflinching profession, is treachery to our Lord, and deep—perhaps eternal—injury to our fellow-sinners. Have not each of us a tongue to speak? To suffer any therefore to rush into perdition without opening our mouths to save them, is a sin of omission, which will cause a bitter pang to the awakened conscience.

The *wise and just* man gladly encourages well-timed reproof. (Chap. xxviii. 23.) Conscious of his own failings, he *loves his reprover* as a friend to his best interest (Lev. xix. 17. Ps. cxli. 5. 1 Sam. xxv. 33. 2 Sam. xii. 7-14); and he would receive *instruction* from the lowest, as a means of becoming *yet wiser, and increasing in learning*. (Chap. i. 5. Exod. xviii. 17-24. Acts, xviii. 26.)

After all—wisely to give, and humbly to receive, reproof, requires much prayer, self-denial, love, and sincerity. But where the mind of Christ is mutually exhibited, it cements a bond of the warmest affection. (1 Sam. xxv. 32-42.) "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." (Chap. xxvii. 6.) Happy is that church which receives the loving admonitions of the Christian pastor with humility and thankfulness.*

10. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. 11. For by me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased.

The repetition of this weighty sentence (Chap. i. 7. Job, xxviii. 28. Ps. cxi. 10) deepens our estimate of its importance. *The fear of the Lord* was a lovely grace in the perfect humanity of Jesus. (Isa. xi. 2, 3.) Let it be the test of our "predestination to be conformed to his image." (Rom. viii. 29.) It is the genuine spirit of adoption. The child of God has only one dread—to offend his Father; only one desire—to please and delight in him. Thus is the *fear of the Lord* connected with his love. 'The heart that is touched with the loadstone of Divine love, trembles still with godly fear.'† If this temper is *the beginning*, it is

* 2 Cor. ii. 1-9. Mr. Martyr — his Biographer observes — 'felt reproof to be 'a duty of unlimited extent and almost insuperable difficulty.' But, said he, 'the way to know when to address men, and when to abstain, is to love.' And, as love is most genuine, where the heart is most abased, he resolved not to reprove others, when he could conscientiously be silent, except he experienced at the same time a peculiar contrition of spirit.'—Life, chap. ii.

† Leighton on 1 Pet. ii. 17.

also (as the word imports) *the head—of wisdom*—not only its first rudiment, but its matured exercise. It is obviously combined with *the knowledge of the Holy One*.^{*} For if men did but know *his holiness*--who would not fear thee, O Lord?" (Rev. xv. 4.) Days multiplied were the Old Testament reward. (Chap. iii. 2, 16; iv. 10; x. 27.) And truly the value of life is only realized in the *knowledge* and service of God. Inconceivably joyous to us is the prospect of *years of life increased* into a boundless eternity—infinite desires; fully satisfied, yet excited unceasingly to more full and heavenly enjoyment.

12. If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.

The consequences of our conduct, good or bad, chiefly reflect on ourselves. (Chap. xvi. 26.) God cannot be profited by us (Job, xxii. 2, 3. Ps. xvi. 2. Luke, xvii. 10); and he is infinitely above our injury. (Job, xxxv. 6, 7.) *The wise man's light* is a blessing to the Church and to the world. (Matt. v. 14, 16.) But he *is wise for himself*—for his own advantage. (Chap. iii. 13-18; xxiv. 3. Eccles.. viii. 1.) *The scorner* is a grief to his minister, and a stumbling to his church. But he hurts no one so much as himself. *He alone shall bear it.* (Chap. viii. 36. Ezek. xviii. 20. Luke, vii. 30.) A surety indeed there is. But his *scorning* rejects him. He sinks therefore into perdition under a mill-stone of guilt without remedy. (Chap. xxix. 1. Heb. x. 28, 29. Lev. xxiv. 15.) This then is the ordinance of God. "Every man shall bear his own burden. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap:" life or death—a double harvest—for time and for eternity. (Gal. vi. 5, 7, 8.)

13. A foolish woman is clamorous; she is simple, and knoweth nothing.

14. For she sitteth at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city. 15. To call passengers who go right on their ways:

16. Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: and as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, 17. Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret (of secrecies, marg.) is pleasant. 18. But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell.

Wisdom's free and gracious invitation has been before us. And we

^{*} The parallelism with the former clause seems to demand this meaning. The application of the plural number to the sacred name is elsewhere used by Solomon (verse i. 1-20. Eccles. xii. 1) as well as by others of the inspired Writers. Gen. i. 26. Job, xxxv. 10. Isa. liv. 5. Compare the Heb. of Hos. xii. 1. Josh. xxiv. 19. Bishop Horsley remarks—God is the only Being, to whom the same name in the singular and in the plural may be indiscriminately applied. And this change from the one number to the other, without any thing in the principles of language to account for it, is frequent in speaking of God in the Hebrew tongue, but unexampled in the case of any other Being.' Sermon xxix. on the Watchers. The reason of this peculiar usage—we may add—is obvious to any one, who receives with implicit and reverential faith the Scriptural revelation of the Divine Essence.

might almost ask—who could resist it? Now we have an allurements from the opposite quarter. For sin is no less earnest to destroy, than wisdom is to save. The distinct character of folly here alluded to, may be gathered from the pictures formerly given. (Chap. ii. v. vii.) Fleshly lusts are in open opposition to Divine wisdom. ‘The delight of the soul fixed on anything but God and his grace, is but spiritual adultery.’* *The woman of foolishness is clamorous* (Chap. vii. 11), and, though “subtil in heart” (Ib. verse 10) in the devices of Satan, she is *simplicity* itself in her utter ignorance of right. So fearfully do sensual pleasures darken the understanding, that the tempter, from the very habit of deceiving, becomes the victim of her own delusion! (Hos. iv. 11. 2 Tim. iii. 13.) With a shameless front she dares to present herself *in the highest places of the city* (Gen. xxxviii. 14, 21. Jer. iii. 2, 3. Ezek. xvi. 24, 25, 31), alluring, not only those who are “going the way to her house” (Chap. vii. 8), but the inexperienced who are *going right on their ways*. Thus, even the highway of God, though a path of safety (Chap. x. 9), is beset with temptation. Satan is so angry with none as with those, *who are going right on*. When Israel was in the straight path, quickly did he turn them aside by the golden calf. (Exod. xxiv. 7, with xxxii.) And now enticements or assaults wait on every step. The temptation to open sin would be revolting. But must you give up all your pleasures? May not some *stolen waters* (Chap. v. 15-17. 2 Sam., xi. 2), some *secret* indulgences (Chap. xx. 17. Job, xx. 12-14), be allowed? Ah! sinner—there is no such thing as *secret* sin. All is naked and open as day before the eye of God. (Job, xxiv. 15; xxxiv. 21, 22.) All will soon be proclaimed before the assembled world. (Luke, xii. 1, 2.) But the strength of this temptation is, that they are forbidden pleasures. (Gen. iii. 1-6.) Restraint provokes the dormant power of sin;† as children will do that which is forbidden, because it is forbidden. But what will be the end? Satan shows only the sparkling cup, and the glaring light. Ask to look into the inner chamber. The blinded fool hath wilfully closed his eyes (Chap. vii. 22. Isa. i. 3. 2 Pet. iii. 5); else might he *know that the dead are there; and that her guests*—the wilful despisers of wisdom, are *in the very depths of hell*. (Chap. ii. 18; vii. 27.)

Reader—*the wisdom of God*, and the great deceiver of man—stand

* Diodati.

† Rom. vii. 8. 1 Cor. xv. 56. See Augustine's description of his robbing the pear-tree—not for the gain of the fruit (the greater part of which he threw away), but for the mere pleasure of sin *as sin—as breaking God's law*. Truly affecting also is it to see him, like the Psalmist (Ps. li. 5) tracing the sin to its root—‘Behold my heart, O Lord, behold my heart, which thou hadst pity upon in the very bottom of the bottomless pit!’—*Confess.* iii. 4, 6.

‘Nitimur in vetitum semper, cupimusque negata :

Sic interdictis imminet aeger aquis.

Quidquid servatur, cupinius magis, ipsaque furem

Cura vocat pauci, quod sinet alter, amaut.’—OVID.

before you. Both are wooing thine heart; the one for life--the other for death. Both are intensely anxious for success. *Wisdom crieth. The foolish woman is clamorous.* (Verse 3 with 13.) Both take their station *in the high places of the city.* (Verse 3 with 15.) Both spread out their feast *for the simple* and ignorant (Verse 4 with 16), smiling and happy on the brink of ruin. But how opposite their end? The one makes *the simple* wise unto eternal life. The other bears away her willing captive into unutterable misery. Which voice arrests thine ear, and allures thine heart? Which feast excites thine appetite? Whose guest art thou? Wilt thou not open thine eyes to the infatuation and pollution of this house of horror and death? Oh! remember that every listening to the enticement rivets thy chain, rejoices thy grand enemy, cheats thee out of thy present, no less than of thine eternal, happiness, and will banish thee for ever from the paradise reopened as thy home. Thou mayest sink into the grave and perish. But it will be with the Saviour's voice crying in thine ears, "How long, ye *simple* ones, will ye love *simplicity*?" (Chap. i. 22.) The voice of mercy now warns thee against estranging thyself from thy God. But mercy is limited to time. Then justice, without mercy, will hold the scales with relentless severity, and the sentence of condemnation will bind thee in the lost and blasted kingdom of eternal death. What then is our heart's desire and prayer, but the free grace and love of the Gospel may draw and fix thine heart; and that the Lord may preserve thee from the tempter's snare, by keeping thee closely walking with himself.

CHAPTER X.

1. The proverbs of Solomon. A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.

THE former chapters have beautifully set forth in continuous discourse the nature and value of heavenly wisdom, contrasted with the fascinations of sinful folly. We now come to what are more properly (not excluding the foregoing) (Chap. i. 2) *the Proverbs of Solomon*. They are for the most part unconnected sentences, remarkable for profound thought, and acute observation, expressed in an antithetical or illustrative form; the whole comprising a Divine system of morals of universal application; a treasury of wisdom in all its diversified details, personal, domestic, social, civil. The previous chapters form a striking introduction to the book. The glorious description of the Great Counsellor (Chap. i. viii.) commends to us his gracious instruction as the principles of true happiness and practical godliness.

Perhaps this first sentence may have been placed in the front, to

point to the value of a godly education in its personal, social, national influence, connected both with time and eternity. We naturally look for rest in our children, as the choicest gift of God. (Gen. v. 28, 29; xxxiii. 5. Ps. cxxvii. 3.) Faith, indeed, may he tried, perhaps severely tried. (Eccles. xi. 1.) But the child, watched, prayed over, instructed, and disciplined, shall, in the Lord's best time, choose *wisdom's* paths (Chap. xxii. 6), and be *the gladness of his father's heart*. (Chap. xv. 20; xxiii. 15, 16, 24, 25; xxvii. 11; xxix. 3. Gen. xlv. 28; xlvi. 30.)

Many a *mother*, alas! is chastened with *the heaviness of a foolish son*. (Gen. xxvi. 34, 35; xxvii. 46.) In such cases, has not indulgence, instead of wholesome restraint; pleasure, instead of godliness; the world, instead of the Bible—educated the child? Want of early discipline; passing over trifles; yielding when we ought to command—how little do we think to what they may grow! (1 Sam. ii. 24; iii. 13. 1 Kings, i. 5, 6; ii. 25.) God has laid down plain rules, plain duties, and plain consequences flowing from their observance (Chap. xxii. 6; xxiii. 13, 14) or neglect. (Chap. xxix. 15.) To forget a daily reference to them; to choose our own wisdom before God's (1 Sam. ii. 29);— can we wonder that the result should be *heaviness*?*

2. *Treasures of wickedness profit nothing: but righteousness delivereth from death.*

The most substantial earthly *treasures profit nothing*. (Chap. xxiii. 5. Matt. vi. 19.) Much inore do *treasures of wickedness*. (Jer. xxii. 13. Ezra, vii. 19. Amos, iii. 10, 11. Hab. ii. 6-9.) 'A man may seem to *profit* by them, and to come up wonderfully for a time.'† But what was the *profit* of Naboth's vineyard to Ahab, when in his "ivory palace" he was withering under the curse of God? (1 Kings, xxi. 4-24, with xxii. 39.) What was the *profit* of the thirty pieces of silver to Judas? Instead of *delivering from death*, their intolerable sting plunged him into death eternal. (Matt. xxvii. 5.) What else will be the fruit of covetousness, but shame (2 Kings, v. 23-27. Rom. vi. 21), disappointment (Jer. xvii. 11), and ruin? (Chap. xxi. 6, 7. Josh. vii. 20-26. Dan. v. 1-6.) "Thou, O man of God, flee these things, and follow after *righteousness*." (1 Tim. vi. 11.) This is "the breast-plate" (Eph. vi. 14. 1 Thess. v. 8), that covers the vitals in the fearful conflict. This is the path-way to eternal life. (Chap. xii. 28. Ps. xv.; xxiv. 3-5. Isa. xxxv. 8.

* Bishop Lowth supposes an antithesis between the relative terms (*Prelim. Dissert. Isaiah*), which Bishop Jebb illustrates by the distinctive character of *the father's gladness*, whose affections are more disciplined, and *the mother's grief*, whose tenderness might bind her to the faults of her children, or lead her weakly to excuse them. — *Sacred Literature*, Sect. ii. But, probably, this refinement of criticism is beside the meaning of the inspired Writer, who interchangeably ascribes these exercises of feeling to both parents. Chap. xvii. 24, 25; xix. 13; xxiii. 24, 25. Comp. Gen. xxvi. 35. 2 Sam. xiii. 37-39. Comp. *Glass. Phil. Sacr. Lib.* iv. Tract ii. Obs. 13. Schultens *in loco*.

† Bishop SANDERSON's *Sermon on* 1 Sam. xii. 3.

Matt. v. 8.) This is the *deliverance* from the sting, the terror, the taste of death. (Chap. xi. 4. John, viii. 51.) We must not flinch from this scriptural statement from fear of legality. Lay the foundation of acceptance deep and clear upon the righteousness of Christ. But upon this foundation fear not to raise the superstructure of inherent *righteousness*. Take up the prayer and confidence of the man of God—"Let integrity and uprightness preserve me; for I wait on thee." (Ps. xxv. 21.)

3. *The Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish; but he casteth away the substance of the wicked.*

To spiritualize the temporal promises would be to lose great enlargement of faith. They are not restricted to the Old Dispensation. If David was preserved from *famishing*, and that too by those most unlikely to help him,* Paul could also in similar trial "set to his seal"—"I have all, and abound, I am full." (Philip. iv. 18.) How does our gracious God double and redouble his engagements!† He sends us to the fowls of the air for the confirmation of our little faith. "Are not ye much better than they?" (Matt. vi. 25, 26.) 'Yet the promises require faith, whereby we believe that God helpeth us.'‡ He may for the exercise of faith *suffer* us to hunger (1 Cor. iv. 11. 2 Cor. xi. 27, with Deut. viii. 3. Matt. iv. 2-4); yet not to *famish*. (Ps. xxxvii. 3. Isa. xxxiii. 16. Matt. vi. 32.) And does not his unfailing care for temporal provision convey the assurance, that *he will not suffer the soul to famish*? "The good Shepherd knows his sheep." He "seeks them out in the cloudy and dark day," and brings them into his fold, where "they go in and out, and find pasture." (John, x. 9. Ezek. xxxiv. 12.) Awful indeed is the contrast of *the wicked—their substance cast out* (Job, xx. 15); themselves buried in the ruins of their own family. (Ps. xlix. 6, &c. Luke, xii. 19, 20; xvi. 23.)

4. *He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack (deceitful, marg.) hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.*

Every day's observation confirms the fact, that *a slack hand* impoverishes (Chap. xix. 15; xx. 4; xxiii. 21; xxiv. 30-34. Eccles. x. 18), and *the hand of the diligent enriches* (Chap. xiii. 4; xxi. 5), the harvest's lord. Justly is the slothful condemned as, *deceitful*; because he pretends, to serve his Master, when in truth he has been doing nothing. (Matt. xxv. 26. Jer. xlviii. 10. M.R.). *He becometh poor* by wasting his trust. (Chap. xviii. 9. Comp. Matt. xxv. 28, 29.) His life, which might have been a continued feast, is a continual vexation. Industry was the law of Paradise (Gen. ii. 15); and though now it bears the stamp of

* By Shobi the brother of his bitter enemy. 2 Sam. xvii. 27, with x. 4. Machir also of the house of Saul. Ib. ix. 4. Comp. Ps. xxxvii. 25.

† Heb. xiii. 5; five negatives in the original.

‡ Cope *in loco*.

the fall (Ib. iii. 19), it is overruled as a blessing; and in the ordinary course of Providence *maketh rich*. (Chap. xii. 24, 27 ; xxii. 29.) The Lord's visits of favour were never given to loiterers. Moses and the Shepherds of Bethlehem were 'keeping their flocks. (Exod. iii. 1, 2. Luke, ii. 8, 9.) Gideon was at the threshing-floor. (Judg. vi. 11.) 'Our idle days'—as Bishop Hall observes—'are Satan's busy days.' Active employment gives us a ready answer to his present temptation—"I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down." (Neh. vi. 3.)

Is then the man of God waxing low in his store? Has there not been a *slack hand* in drawing upon the sacred treasury? Has not he gazed upon the heavenly treasures, with "his hand in his bosom?" (Chap. xix. 24.) Has he not *become poor* by slighting his rich consolations? The Lord gives his blessing, as he gives the fruits of the earth, not to those that wish (Chap. xiii. 4; xx. 4), but to those that "labour" (Verse 3 with 4. John, vi. 27); not to sentimental indolence, but to Christian energy and perseverance. The trade of the world is uncertain. The trade of godliness is sure. There are no bankrupts here. The diligent servant is honoured with an increase of his grace (Matt. xxv. 29), and the enlargement of his confidence.*

5. *He that gathereth in summer is a wise son: but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame.*

Indolence has just been contrasted with diligence. Forethought is here opposed to improvidence. (Chap. vi. 6-8.) The importance of opportunity is practically admitted in temporal matters. (Eccles. iii. 1; viii. 5.) Joseph wisely *gathered in summer and harvest* for the coming need. (Gen. xli. 46-56.) The woman of Canaan (Matt. xv. 22-28) — the blind men (Ib. xx. 30) — improved their present opportunities. *The wise son* will thus *gather* his blessing at the fittest time. *The freshness of youth is a summer harvest*. It is as much the will of God, that the young should gather knowledge, as that the farmer should gather his harvest. The *wise gathering in this summer* gives substance, vigour, high tone and power of usefulness in after-life! How often may we trace poverty of mind, enervation of character, unprofitable habits, to *sleeping in this fruitful harvest*! 'He who idles away the time of his youth will bear the shame of it when he is old.'† Specially looking at this, as the season of Christian instruction, anxious promise, our Father's

* 2 Pet. i. 5-11. Bp. SANDERSON'S *Sermon on* 1 Cor. vii. 24.

† Henry *in loco*. See Bp. HORNE'S *Sermon on the Redemption of Time*. Sir Walter Scott's testimony in his *Auto-Biography* is most instructive—"If it should ever fall to the lot of youth to peruse these pages. let such a reader remember, that it is with the deepest regret that I recollect in my manhood the opportunities of learning which I neglected in my youth; that through every part of my literary career I have felt pinched and hampered by my own ignorance: and that I would at this moment give half the reputation I have had the good fortune to acquire, if, by doing so, I could rest the remaining part upon a sound foundation of learning and science."

pleading time with the wayward heart (Jer. iii. 4), ere yet it be hardened in habits of sin—is not the *sleeper in such an harvest a son that causeth shame*? Look again at the large harvest of opportunity in labouring for God—the great and diversified machinery of religious societies, needing direction and energy; the mass of fellow-sinners around us, claiming our sympathy and helpfulness—"While we have time, let us do good." (Gal. vi. 10.) How high is the privilege of *gathering with Christ in such an harvest*! (Matt. xii. 30.) How great the *shame* of doing nothing, where there is so much to be done! What a *harvest* also is the present "accepted time!" (2 Cor. vi. 2.) Mark the abundance of the means of grace, the living verdure of the gospel. The Bible opens the way. The Saviour invites. The Holy Spirit strives with the conscience. *The Sabbath* also is a golden gathering time for the week. It draws us aside from the world, and beams with the peace, joy, and hope of heaven. Now, am I diligently improving this harvest? or am I *sleeping*—perhaps in the very house of God--instead of listening to the voice from heaven—a *shame* to my minister, to my church, to my Lord?

The Lord preserve me from the ruin of *sleeping* (Matt. xxv. 5. Comp. Isa. lv. 6. Luke, xiii. 28, 29. Chap. i. 24-28) away the invaluable hours of "the day of salvation!" Can I bear the thought of that desponding cry of eternal remorse—"The harvest is passed; the summer is ended—and I am not saved?" (Jer. viii. 20. Comp. chap. v. 11-13.)

6. *Blessings are upon the head of the just: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.* 7. *The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot.*

Is not affliction the lot of *the just*? (John, xvi. 33. Acts, xiv. 22: 2 Tim. iii. 12.) Yet how abundantly is it compensated by the *blessings that are upon his head* (Chap. xxviii. 20. Gen. xlix. 26) —blessings temporal (Deut. xxviii. 1-6. 1 Tim. iv. 8) and spiritual (Isa. xxxii. 17); from man (Chap. xvi. 7. Job, xxix. 11-13) and from God. (Ps. iii. 8; v. 12. Isa. lxiv. 4, 5. Matt. v. 3-12.) His very *memory is a blessing* to his family and to the Church. (Ps. cxii. 6.) Fragrant is the "good report of the elders" immortalized in the Apostolic Book of Martyrs. (Heb. xi. 2.) Truly *blessed is the memory* of a godly parent (Chap. xxxi. 28); of a faithful minister (Heb. xiii. 7); of a righteous king (2 Chron. xxxv. 24, 25); of a public benefactor (2 Chron. xxiv. 6); of a self-denying Christian.*

No such honour belongs to *the wicked*. Often some outward stroke

* Mark, xiv. 9 'No spices can so embalm a man; no monument can so preserve his name and memory, as a pious conversation, whereby God hath been honoured, and man benefited. The fame of such a person is, in the best judgments, far more precious and truly glorious, than is the fame of those, who have excelled in any other deeds or qualities.' —BARROW'S *Sermons*.

of *violence covers their mouth* (Ps. cvii. 42), and marks them for condemnation (Esth. vii. 8. Job, ix. 24), as they will all be so marked at the day of retribution. (Rom. iii. 19.) And even now their memory rots in corruption. (Job, xviii. 17. Ps. xlix. 11, 12; cix. 13. Eccles. viii. 10. Isa. lxxv. 15. Jer. xxii. 18, 19; xxix. 22, 23.) Contrast the memory of the "man after God's heart," with that of "Jeroboam the son of Nebat" (1 Kings, xi. 26; xiv. 14-16. 2 Kings, xiv. 3); or in later times, Ridley and Latimer with *the name of their wicked* persecutors. Such is *the blessing* and curse of God, long after the men had passed into eternity. 'Thou mayest choose'—said godly Bishop Pilkington—'whether thou wilt be remembered to thy praise or to thy shame.'*

8. *The wise in heart will receive commandments; but a prating fool will fall,* (be beaten, marg.)

The heart is the seat of true *wisdom*, and a teachable spirit is the best proof of its influence. For who that knows himself would not be thankful for further light? No sooner, therefore, *do the commandments* come down from heaven, than the well-instructed Christian *receives* them, like his father Abraham (Heb. xi. 8. Gen. xxii. 1-3), with undisputing simplicity; welcomes the voice of his heavenly teacher (1 Sam. iii. 10. Acts, x. 33. Ps. xxvii. 8; lxxxvi. 11; cxliii. 10); and, when he knows that "it is the Lord, girds himself " with all the ardour of the disciple to be found at his feet. (John, xxi. 7.)

But look at the professor of religion destitute of this *heart-seated wisdom*. We find him a man of creeds and doctrines, not of prayer; asking curious questions, rather than listening to plain truths (Ib. verses 21, 22); wanting to know events rather than duties; occupied with other men's business, to the neglect of his own. (Luke, xiii. 23, 24. 1 Tim. v. 13.) In this vagrant spirit, with all his thoughts outward bound, he wanders from church to church, and from house to house, *a prating fool* upon religion; bold in his own conceit (3 John, 10), while his life and temper fearfully contradict his fluent tongue. Too blind to respect himself (Chap. xviii. 2), too proud to listen to counsel (Verse 17; xv. 32), he will surely *fall* into disgrace, *beaten* with the rod of his own foolishness. (Chap. xviii. 6, 7. Eccles. x. 12. 2 Kings, xiv. 8-14.) Let me look at this picture as a beacon against the folly of my own heart. Young Christian! beware of a specious religion, without humility, consistency, love; because separated from close walking with God.

9. *He that walketh uprightly walketh surely; but he that perverteth his ways shall be known.*

An upright walk is Christian, not sinless, perfection (Job, i. 8);

* Works, Parker Society, p. 36G.

"walking before God," not before men. (Gen. xvii. 1.) Impurity indeed defiles the holiest exercise. But if the will be rightly bent, the integrity will be maintained. 'Show me an easier path'—is nature's cry. 'Show me'—cries the child of God—'a *sure* path.' Such is *the upright walk* under the shield of the Lord's protection (Chap. ii. 7. Ps. lxxxiv. 11) and Providence (Chap. i. 33. Eccles. viii. 5. Isa. xxxvii. 15, 16); under the shadow of his promises (Ps. xxiv. 3-6); in the assurance of his present favour (1 John, iii. 18-22), and in its peaceful end. (Ps. xxxvii. 37. Isa. lvii. 1, 2.) There will be difficulties. But a deliverance will be wrought through them; as the Babylonish captives were delivered through the fire from the infinite greater danger of apostacy. (Dan. iii. 21-29.)

From the want of *this uprightness of walk*, Peter denied the foundation of the Gospel. (Gal. ii. 14.) Learn then the value of this principle for an enlightened and full reception of the truth; that we may welcome "a Prince as well as a Saviour" (Acts, v. 31); combine his sceptre with his sacrifice, his holy precepts with his precious promises and prove the influence of a vital faith in godly practice. We shall thus carry out the rule of the Gospel into everything, making God the master of every thought, word, temper, motive, not less in our secular calling than in our spiritual devotedness. (1 Cor. x. 31. Col. iii. 17.) Such an *upright walk* will bring a happy confidence. 'The man, conscious to himself of an honest meaning, and a due course of prosecuting it, feeleth no check or struggling of mind, no regret or sting of heart. He therefore briskly moveth forward with courage, there being within him nothing to make him halt, to distract or disturb him.'*

But to bend our rule to our own humour; to *pervert our ways* to escape trouble, or for some interested end, will shake our confidence far more than the heaviest cross. The eye of God *knows* the deviation already (John, vi. 70, 71), and will bring it to shame. (Luke, xii. 1, 2. 1 Tim. v. 24.) Thus was Jacob chastened to the end of his days. (Gen. xxvii. with xlii. 36-38.) Peter was openly rebuked. (Gal. ii. 11-14.) Judas (Matt. xxvii. 3-5) and Ananias (Acts, v. 1-40) are *known* in the records of the church as a beacon to the end of time. "Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed. I will walk in my integrity; redeem me, and be merciful unto me." (Ps. cxix. 80; xxvi. 11.)

10. He that winketh with his eye causeth sorrow; but a prating fool shall fall.

The contrast here intended seems to be between the man who brings trouble on his fellow-creatures, and one who brings it upon

* Barrow.

himself.* Mischievous sport indeed is it to *cause sorrow* for selfish gratification (Verse 23; xxvi. 18, 19); to make the eye an instrument of wanton sin. (Chap. vi. 13. Ps. xxxv. 19.) Scarcely less affecting is it to see the tongue a world of *foolishness*. But not a trace is visible of the likeness, in which man was first created. Every member is perverted from its proper use and glorious end. Man is a plague to his neighbour, because he is an enemy to his God. And because "*the fool despises wisdom*" (Chap. i. 7), *he falls* the victim of his own folly.

11. The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life; but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.

The Indwelling Spirit—"a well of living water"—is the glorious privilege of *the righteous*. (John, iv. 14; vii. 38.) Hence his mouth, replenished from the heavenly source, is *a well of life*, sending forth refreshing waters. (Chap. xvi. 23.) The precious talent of speech is thus consecrated to His service, "who made man's mouth." "Grace in its measure is poured upon our lips" (Ps. xlv. 2); and our "tongue" becomes "our glory." (Ps. lvii. 8 ; cviii. 1.) Wit, originality, imagination may furnish 'the feast of reason, and the flow of soul.' But how poor is this pleasure compared with the godly instruction—perhaps with little intellectual attraction—that pours forth from *a well of life*! Servant of God! honour your high privilege of thus ministering a blessing to the Church. (Verse 21; xv. 7. Eph. iv. 29.) Enlarge its exercise by increasing your spiritual store, and walking in closer fellowship with your God. What owe you to His grace, who hath made *your mouth a well of life*; while *the violence of the wicked* falls back upon themselves, and *covers their mouth* with confusion?

12. Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.

A simple but forcible contrast! *Hatred*, however varnished by smooth pretence, is the selfish principle of man. (Tit. iii. 3.) Like a subterraneous fire, it continually *stirs up* mischief, creates or keeps alive rankling coldness, disgusts, dislikes, "envyings and evil surmisings;" carps at the infirmities of others; aggravates the least slip (Isa. xxix. 21); or resents the most trifling, or even imaginary, provocation. These strifes are kindled (Chap. xv. 18; xvi. 27, 28; xxviii. 25; xxix. 22) to the great dishonour of God, and the marring of the beauty and consistency of the gospel. Is not here abundant matter for prayer, watchfulness, and resistance? Let us study 1 Cor. xiii. in all its detail. Let it be the looking-glass for our hearts, and the standard of our profession. *Love covers*, overlooks, speedily forgives and forgets. (Chap. xvii. 9. Gen. xlv. 5-8.) Full of candour and inventiveness, it puts the best construction on doubtful matters, searches out

* See Bishop Hall.

any palliation, does not rigidly eye, or wantonly expose (Gen. ix. 23) a brother's faults; nor will it uncover them at all, except so far as may be needful for his ultimate good. To refrain from gross slander, while abundant scope is left for needless and unkind detraction, is not *covering* sin. Nor is the "seven-times forgiveness" the true standard of love (Matt. xviii. 21), which, like its Divine Author, *covers all sins*. And who does not need the full extent of this *covering*? What is our brother's all against us, compared with our *all* against God? And how can we hesitate to blot out a few pence, who look for the covering of the debt of ten thousand talents? (Ib. verses 22-35.) Oh! let us "put on the Lord Jesus" in, his spirit of forbearing, disinterested, sacrificing love—"Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."*

13. In the lips of him that hath understanding wisdom is found; but a rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding.

Solomon and his son admirably illustrate this contrast. Such *wisdom was found in his lips*--the fruit of an *understanding* (1 Kings, iii. 12) heart—that "all the world came to hear of it." (Ib. iv. 31; x. 1.) And "happy were they" justly pronounced, which stood continually before him, and "heard his *wisdom*." (Ib. x. 8.) Rehoboam was as void, as his father was full, of *understanding*. His folly prepared a *rod for his back*.† Learn then to seek for *wisdom* at the lips of the wise. (Verses 11, 21; xiii. 20; xv. 7.) The want of this wisdom, or rather the want of a heart to seek it, will surely bring us under *the rod*. In many a chastisement we shall feel its smart, for the loose education of our children (Chap. xxix. 15); for the neglect of family discipline (Ib. verse 21); for carnal indulgence. (2 Sam. xii. 9-11.) And how different is this *rod* from our Father's loving chastisement! That—the seal of our adoption (Chap. iii. 11, 12. Heb. xii. 6, 7)—This the mark of disgrace. (1 Pet. ii. 20.) Will not the children of God cry—"Turn away the reproach that I fear, for thy judgments are good." (Ps. cxix. 39.)

14. Wise men lay up knowledge: but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction.

Did not Solomon prove his title as a *wise man* by his diligence in

* Col. iii. 13. Comp. I Pet. iv. 8. The first clause of the verse, compared with the Apostle's application of the second, clearly proves that the subject is the covering our brother's *sin* before men. Este—one of the most evangelical of the Romish interpreters—thus limits the application. The gloss, therefore, of man's covering sins before God is utterly groundless. Comp. chap. xvii. 9. Calvin and Geier conceive Jam. v. 20 to be only an allusion to the Proverb. The latter adds—"It is one thing to cover sin before men; another thing to cover it before God. The first is the act of love. (1 Cor. xiii. 4. Gal. vi. 2.) The last requires an infinite price, equal to the turning away of the eternal wrath of God." Rom. iii. 25. 1 John, i. 7. Ps. xxxii. 1, &c.

† 1 Kings, xii. 13-24. Comp. chap. xix. 29; xxvi. 3. The rod was the usual corporal punishment under the Mosaic law. Deut. xxii. 18; xxv. 2, 3.

laying up knowledge? (Eccles. xii. 9, 10.) No wonder that *wisdom is found in the lips*, where "out of the abundance of the good treasure of the heart the mouth speaketh."* It is "the householder" storing his mind not for selfish gratification, but for liberal and useful distribution. (Matt. xiii. 52.) If the hoarding wisdom be cultivated in youth (Chap. vi. 6; xviii. 1, 15), what a store of valuable treasure would be *laid up!* yet all little enough to meet the coming trial. Let every day add something to the stock. So inexhaustible is the treasure, that no doubt, difficulty, temptation, or duty, will be found unprovided for!

Wise men lay up knowledge, for their own use—*Fools lay it out*. For want of sound wisdom, they only open *their mouths* for their own mischief, in profane rebellion (Exod. v. 2. Ps. xii. 3-5; lii. 1-5); grovelling selfishness (1 Sam. xxv. 10, 11, 38); ungodly worldliness (Luke, xii. 18-20); or hateful pride (Acts, xii. 21-23)—*near to destruction*. (Chap. xii. 13; xiii. 3; xviii. 7. Eccles. x. 12, 13.) How *near*--who can say?—But if they be not "taken away with a stroke" without remedy (Job, xxxvi. 18); they only stand out as monuments of the "much long-suffering of God, enduring the vessels of wrath fitted to *destruction*." (Rom. ix. 22.)

15. The rich man's wealth is his strong city; the destruction of the poor is their poverty.

This is as it appears on the surface. *The rich man's wealth* fences him from many invading evils (Eccles. vii. 12), obtains for him influence and respect (Chap. xix. 4, 6. Gen. xxiii. 6), and serves to him as a talisman against all sorrows. (Eccles. x. 19.) Thus "in his own conceit" it is *his strong city*. (Chap. xviii. 11.) So prone are we to rest on the creature as the stay and comfort of life. (Ps. xlix. 6; lxii. 10. Jer. ix. 23. 1 Tim. vi. 17.) All notions of God are blotted out, and man becomes a god to himself. *The poor*, having no such defence, dwell as "in a city without walls," exposed to every assault. (Chap. xiv. 20; xix. 7; xxii. 7. John, vii. 48, 49.) "*Poverty* comes upon them as an armed man" (Chap. vi. 11), and sinks the spirit in *consternation*.†

How secure--how happy then—we are ready to say—are the rich! How wretched the condition of the poor! But the glass of God's word discovers a more even balance. "Hath not God chosen *the poor* of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of his kingdom?" (Jam. ii. 5. Zeph. iii. 12.) Think of Jesus sanctifying the state of poverty by his own blessed example. (Luke, ii. 7-12; iv. 22; viii. 3. Matt. viii. 20.) Think of the riches of his grace, raising the poor out of the dunghill,

* Matt. xii. 34. Jerome mentions of his friend Nepotian, that, 'by daily reading and meditating in the sacred volume, he had made his soul a library of Christ.'—*Letter to Nepotian*.

† This is the accurate rendering.—See Schuiteus, Holden, Scott.

that he may set him with the princes of his people. (Ps. cxiii. 7, 8. 1 Sam. ii. 8.)

Both states however have their besetting temptations, needing special grace. (Chap. xxx. 8, 9.) The safety of both is, when *the rich are poor in spirit* (1 Chron. xxix. 14) and large in heart; and *the poor* "rich in faith," and "contented with the gain of godliness." (Job, i. 21. 1 Tim. vi. 6-8.) "Let the brother of low degree rejoice, in that he is exalted; but the rich, in that he is made low." (Jam. i. 9, 10.)

16. *The labour of the righteous tendeth to life: the fruit of the wicked to sin.*

Labour, not idleness, is the stamp of a servant of God: thus cheered by the glowing confidence, that it *tendeth to life*. (John, vi. 27.) "Occupy till I come--Do all to the glory of God" (Luke, xix. 13. 1 Cor. x. 31) --this is the standard. Thus the duties even of our daily calling *tend to life*. (Chap. xi. 19. Jer. xxii. 15, 16.) God works in us, by us, with us, through us. (Isa. xxvi. 12.) We work in and through him. Our *labour* therefore is work--wrought in dependence on him; not for life, but *to life*. (Rom. viii. 13. 1 Cor. xv. 10. Philip. ii. 12, 13.) And this is *life* indeed; the only exercise deserving the name; the only object worth living for. (Philip. i. 21.) Lord! quicken us to "*life* more abundantly." Thus sowing "to the Spirit, of the Spirit we shall reap life everlasting." (Gal. vi. 8.) With *the wicked*, self is both the object and the end. *His fruit* therefore *is sin*. (Chap. xxi. 4. Tit. i. 15. Matt. xii. 33 j xv. 19.) His Master, so long as he serves him faithfully, cares little how or in what sphere. "He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption." Each *tendeth* to its own end. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." (Gal. vi. 7.)

17. *He is in the way of life that keepeth instruction: but he that refuseth reproof erreth.*

Mercy unspeakable is it, that *the way of life* is opened! *Instruction* sets the way before us. He that *keepeth instruction* cannot fail of finding and enjoying it. (Chap. viii. 34, 35.) The more we value that most needful part of *instruction*-discipline (Chap. vi. 23; xxii. 17), the more shall we regard every practical lesson in the heavenly school. To *refuse the reproof*; to be deaf to the voice that would save us from ruin--is a most fearful *error*--the proof of a foolish and unhumbled heart (Chap. xii. 1. 2 Chron. xvi. 7-10; xxv. 15, 16); the certain forerunner, if not corrected, of irremediable destruction. (Chap. i. 25, 26, 30; v. 12; xv. 10; xxix. 1. Jer. vi. 10. Zeph. iii. 2.) Child of God! is it not matter of shame and sorrow, that you should be so slow to *keep* such irestimable instruction; so prone to *err from the way of life*; and,

though having the full promise of Divine guidance, still so often acting as the slave of your own will?

18. *He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander is a fool.*

Scripture history from the first chapter of fallen man abundantly illustrates this proverb. Cain talking with his brother (Gen. iv. 8); Saul plotting against David (1 Sam. xviii. 21, 22, 29); Joab's treachery to Abner and Amasa (2 Sam. iii. 27; xx. 9, 10. Comp. xiii. 23, 29; Ps. v. 9; lv. 21); the enemies of the Church on the return from Babylon (Ezra, iv. 1-16. Neh. vi. 2)--*all hid hatred with lying lips*. Such was also the smooth tongue of the Herodians (Luke, xx. 20, 21), and more than all--the deadly kiss of Judas. (lb. xxii. 47, 48, with Ps. lv. 12-14; xli. 9.) So perfectly, yet with the most exquisite sensibility of pain, did our Blessed Lord identify himself with the trials of his people! Closely allied with the hypocrite is *the slanderer* (Ps. 1. 16-20)--both stamped by God with the mark of *fools*. For of what avail is this mask? Is there not an Eye that looks through, and a Hand that will tear off, the flimsy cover? (Chap. XXVI. 23-28. Comp. Ps. 1. 21; Luke, xii. 1, 2.) And if their *hatred* be vented against the godly, is not the day at hand, when their "rebuke and *slander* shall be taken away from the earth?" (Isa. xxv. 8.)

But is this "root of bitterness" thoroughly mortified in the Christian's heart? Is there no insincerity in our intercourse with those, to whom we feel, if not *hatred*, at least strong repugnance? In the language of polite courtesy, there is much that is hollow, if not false. Do we really mean what we say? Or rather is not the profession of regard often ill absolutely contrary to our real feelings? Do we never bring them under ridicule, set them out in an unfavourable light, assert things upon mere suspicion,* or attempt to raise our own name upon the ruin of their reputation? In common society, how is it often considered the acme of disappointment, when this conversation flags, or comes to a pause; whereas the reverse ought to be the true subject of regret. This spirit surely in the eyes of God is *slander*; an offence against the "new commandment of love"--which is the badge of all the disciples of Jesus. (John, xiii. 34, 35.) These noxious humours are the bane of

* Occasions of evil report can never be wanting to them who seek, or are ready to embrace them. No innocence, no wisdom, can anywise prevent them; and if they be admitted as grounds of defamation, no man's good name can be secure. It is not every possibility, every seeming, every faint show, or glimmering appearance, which sufficeth to ground bad opinion, or reproachful discourse concerning our fellow-creature. The matter should be clear, notorious, and palpable, before we admit a disadvantageous conceit into our head, a distasteful resentment into our heart, a harsh word into our mouth about him.... Justice requireth full proof, "Charity thinketh no evil, and believeth all things" for the best. Wisdom is not forward to pronounce before full evidence.'

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true godliness. They must not only be restrained, but "laid aside," if ever we would, "as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby." (1 Pet. ii. 1,2. Jam. i. 21.) Lord, purge our hearts from these hateful hidden corruptions; even though it be by "the Spirit of judgment and the Spirit of burning." (Isa. iv. 4.)

19. *In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.*

Hypocrisy and *slander* are not the only sins of the tongue. Indeed, considering the corrupt fountain from whence they flow (Gen. vi. 5. Matt. xii. 34), we cannot conceive of words, much less *a multitude of words*, without *sin*. *There is the sin of egotism*. "Our own mouth praises us, not another." (Chap. xxvii. 2.) We love to hear ourselves talk; and present our own judgment intrusively". *There is also the sin of vain babbling*, a canker to the vital principle. (2 Tim. ii. 16, 17. Eccles. x. 13, 14. 1 Tim. v. 13.) The fool talks for ever upon nothing; not because he is full, but because he is empty; not for instruction, but for the pure love of talking. This wantonness is a sin of the flesh, trifling with the most responsible talent, when conversation is, as Bishop Butler truly remarks, 'merely the exercise of the tongue; no other human faculty has any place in it.'* The government of the tongue is therefore a searching test of the soundness of our religion. (Jam. i. 26; iii. 2.) Considering, therefore, the *sin* connected with the *multitude of words*, it is surely our *wisdom to refrain our lips* (Chap. xvii. 27, 28. Job, xiii. 5. Eccles. v. 3. Jam. i. 19), not indeed in silence, but in caution; to weigh our words before uttering them; never speaking, except when we have something to say; speaking only just enough; considering the time, circumstances, and person (Job, xxxii. 4-7); what is solid, suitable, and profitable. (Chap. xv. 23. Eph. iv. 29. Col. iv. 6.) Indeed a talent for conversation is valueless both to the possessor and to the auditors, except it be connected with a talent for silence. The sphere of social intercourse, that stimulates the conversational powers, at the same time teaches the wholesome discipline of the tongue--that beautiful accomplishment of silence; which however, alike with its opposite grace, derives its chief loveliness, as the fruit of Christian humility and kindness. The *wisdom* is especially valuable under provocation. (1 Sam. x. 27. 2 Kings, xviii. 36.) And even in the unbending of innocent recreation, the discipline of godly sobriety is of great moment. The sins of this "little member" are not trifles. They need the full application of the gospel? What but "the blood of sprinkling,"

* *Sermon on the Government of the Tongue*. 'One meets with people in the world, who never seem to have made the wise man's observation, that "there is a time to keep silence." These times, one would think, should be easily distinguished by everybody; namely, when a man has nothing to say, or nothing but what is better unsaid.' Ib. Comp. Eccles. xix. 6; xx. 5-7.

could enable us to meet "the account for every idle word at the day of judgment?" 'Light words weigh heavy in God's balance.* Woe to us, if the great Surety did not bear the sins of our vain words, no less than of our grosser wickedness! Never let us think of these sins as anything less than the nails that pierced his hands and his feet. And will not this sensibility of sin quicken our prayer for an increase of this *refraining wisdom*? "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, and keep the door of my lips." (Ps. cxli. 3.)

20. *The tongue of the just is as choice silver: the heart of the wicked is little worth.* 21. *The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of wisdom (of heart, marg).*

The wisdom of refraining our lips must always be connected with diligence in improving our talent. If our tongue be our shame in the overflowing of sin (Verses 18, 19): is it not also our glory? (Ps. lvii.8; cviii. 1.) When "speaking of the things touching the king" (Ib. xlv. 1), or sketching the features of his transcend ant loveliness (Ib. 2. Cant. v. 10-16); is it not then *as choice silver*, refined from this world's dross, and shining with heavenly brightness? Who would not eagerly gather up the *silver* scattered in the streets? And shall not we enrich our store from *the choice silver of the just man's tongue*, pouring out its precious instruction before us? If, as regards this world's wealth, the Lord's poor must say--"Silver and gold have I none;" at least they may scatter *choice silver* with a widely-extended blessing--"As poor, yet making many rich." (Acts, iii. 6. 2 Cor. vi. 10.)

Observe also the usefulness of this member. If we be living with God, it will diffuse a salt, a heavenly leaven, a rich propagation of holiness in our various circles. *The lips of the righteous feed many* from the rich stores of "the indwelling word" (Col. iii. 16); "ministering to them grace," the soul's true and proper nourishment! (Eph. iv. 29. Job, iv. 3, 4; xxix. 22, 23.) 'Their breath is food to others, as well as life to them.'† When "the priest's *lips* keep knowledge, and they seek the law at his mouth," he *feeds* the church of God.‡ And as our great Master broke the bread, and gave it to his disciples for their distribution (John, vi. 11); so does he now dispense to his servants heavenly provision, suitable, and abundantly sufficient for the need of their charge. And every Sabbath is the wondrous miracle displayed before our eyes. The imperishable bread multiplies in the breaking. The hungry, the

* Nicholls. Matt. xii. 36.

† FLAVEL *On Soul of Man.*- Works, 8vo. ii. 551.

‡ Mal. ii. 7, with Jer. iii. 15. John, xxi. 15. Acts, xx. 28. 1 Pet. v. 2. Of Bishop Ridley our Martyrologist records in his own beautiful style, that 'to his Sermon the people resorted, swarming about him like bees, and coveting the sweet flowers and wholesome juice of his fruitful doctrine.'-Foxe, vii. 407.

mourners, the weary and fainting; yea, all that feel their need, are refreshed and invigorated.

The wicked – his coffers may be full. But *his heart*, being empty of the *choice silver*, is *little worth*. (Jer. xxii. 28.) So far from *feeding* others, *the fool dies himself for want of wisdom*; or rather for *want of heart* to seek it. He despises *the lips that would feed him*, and 'dies of famine in the midst of the rich pastures of the Gospel.* Oh! how often are we reminded that sin is self-destruction! (Hos. xiii. 9.)

22. *The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.*

We have been told (Verse 4), that *the hand of the diligent*--here we see that *the blessing of the Lord--maketh rich*. Both are consistent. The one marks the primary, the other the instrumental and subordinate, cause. Neither will be effective without the other. The sluggard looks for prosperity without diligence; the practical atheist from diligence alone; the sound-hearted Christian from *the blessing of God* in the exercise of diligence. This wise combination keeps him in an active habit; humble, and dependent on God. (John, vi. 27.) For "except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it. The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." (Ps. cxxvii. 1. Eccles. ix. 11.) The rich then may receive their portion (Eccles. ii. 24-26; iii. 13; v. 18-20) *as the blessing of the Lord* (Gen. xxiv. 35; xxvi. 12. 1 Chron. xxix. 14. Deut. viii. 17, 18); carefully using it as a talent for his service (Luke, xix. 13), and for the good of their fellow-creatures. (1 Tim. vi. 17, 18) The poor may enjoy the same *enriching blessing* in the "gain of godly contentment." (Ib. verse 6.) Their cottage is a palace, as the habitation of the King of kings; and neither life nor death, neither time nor eternity, can separate them from their God. (Rom. viii. 38, 39.)

The blessing of the Lord moreover hath this prerogative. *He addeth no sorrow with it*; at least no sorrow, but what turns to a blessing. Accumulation of riches may be the accumulation of sorrows. (Chap. xx. 21; xxviii. 22. 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.) Lot's covetous choice was fraught with bitterness. (Gen. xiii. 10, 11; xiv. 12; xix. 15. 2 Pet. ii. 8.) Ahab wore a crown and "lay sick on his bed" in discontent. (1 Kings, xxi. 4.) Gehazi was laden with his bags; but the plague of leprosy was on him. (2 Kings, v. 27.) Haman's mortification was the canker in his boasted glory. (Esth. v. 13.) The rich youth's rejection of Christ was the source of present- must we not fear?--everlasting *sorrow*. (Luke, xviii. 23.) The worldling's recompense for his daily toil is "eating the bread of sorrows. So"--mark the striking contrast--"he giveth his beloved

* Schultens. Comp. Acts, xiii. 41, 45, 46.

sleep." (Ps. cxxvii. 2. Eccles. ii. 26; v. 12.) Happy portion of the children of God! They "know both how to be abased, and they know how to abound." (Philip. iv. 12.) "All things are theirs." (1 Cor. iii. 21.) "*Thy blessing* is upon thy people." (Ps. iii. 8.)

23. *It is as sport to a fool to do mischief: but a man of understanding hath wisdom.*

The wanton *sport* of putting others to pain argues the perverseness of a *fool* both in judgment and heart. (Chap. xxvi. 18, 19. 2 Sam. ii. 14-16.) Sometimes this cruel amusement may engage a man in the tempter's work. (Chap. i. 11-14.) *For fools, who make sport of mischief*, may heedlessly go on to "make a mock of sin." (Chap. xiv. 9.) But even without going so far, should not we guard against *mischievous* jokes, tending to wound a neighbour's character, or to give him uneasiness? Are we sufficiently careful against indulging our wit or humour at his expense? All this is not less unmanly, than it is inconsistent with the sobriety and gravity of a Christian profession. It is the pure native selfishness of the human heart. Should not also children's play be sometimes under restraint? Young people cannot be too strongly disciplined to thoughtfulness and consideration of others. Never let their hilarity of spirits lead to make *sport* of that, which ought to call forth sympathy and tenderness. A *man of understanding* is too wise to find a reckless delight in his neighbour's injury. The spirit of our Divine Master was according to his own law (Gal. vi. 2)--eminently considerate and sympathizing. (Luke, vii. 13.) Let us who bear his name, cultivate his self-denying, loving mind. (Philip. ii. 4, 5.)

24. *The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him: but the desire of the righteous shall be granted.*

The sport of the wicked: how soon is it gone! (Eccles. vii. 6.) But *his fear*--the evil which he *feared*--comes upon him. The Babel builders were punished with the evil, which they had laboured to prevent. (Gen. xi. 4,8.) Ahab's device could not shelter him from his foreboded judgment. (1 Kings, xxii; 28-37.) The rebellious Jews rushed into the ruin from which they fled. (Jer. xlii. xliii.) Belshazzar's trembling was realized in his speedy destruction. (Dan. v. 6,30.) Thus are "*the wicked*" tossed, "like a troubled sea." (Isa. lvii. 20, 21.) Do not "*their hearts*" in solitude "*meditate terror*?" (Ib. xxxiii. 18. Comp. Deut. xxviii. 67. Job, iii. 25; xv. 21.) Do not their consciences turn pale at the question--"Where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Pet. iv. 18.) And will it not be the constrained confession at the great day--"According to thy *fear*, so is thy *wrath*?" (Ps. xc. 11. Mal. iv. 1.) Unwilling are they now to be reckoned among *the*

righteous. Much more will they then be to be found in their sins--
fear their portion--ruin their doom--without hope--without end.

But if *the fear of the wicked*--so also will the *desire of the righteous*--be fully realized. As the one cannot fear anything so bad, so the other cannot desire anything so good, as what is really in store for them. *Desires* bounded by the will (1 John, v. 14), and centered in the enjoyment, of God (Ps. iv. 6; xxxvii. 4), *will be granted* to their utmost extent. (Ib. lxxxi. 10. Jer. xxxiii. 3. John, xvi. 23, 24.) God did not raise them to be our torment, but our rest.

Granted they are upon the principle, that they "are only good." (Chap. xi. 23.) Yet too often *the desires of the righteous* are not *righteous*. The defilement of a worldly spirit (Mark, x. 37), or the hastiness of an impatient spirit*--far better that they should be denied than granted. (Ps. cvi. 15. Jam. iv. 3.) So generally indeed are they mixed with infirmity, that their *unreserved gratification* might be our destruction. (Exod. xxxiii. 18, 20.) But he is no less wise than kind: he separates the evil, and fulfils the good (Ib. verse 19); answering, not according to our wishes, but our wants; not as in our ignorance we may have asked, but as an enlightened regard to our best interests would have led us to ask.

But 'I have *desired* a thousand times on my knees, and yet it has not been *granted*.' Yet is it not worth being upon our knees for it a thousand times more? May not the blessing be withheld a while, till our sensibility of need be quickened (Isa. xli. 17); or to prepare us ultimately for a richer enjoyment? (Chap. xiii. 12.)

But if our *desires be granted*, and even exceeded (Gen. xlviii. 11. 1 Kings, iii. 13. Eph. iii. 20); faith and patience will be tried in the very *grant*. Growth in grace is given by deep and humbling views of our corruption. Longings for holiness are fulfilled by painful affliction. Prayers are answered by crosses. Our Father's dispensations are not what they seem to be, but what he is pleased to make them.† Yet in the darkest cloud the ground of our confidence is firm. All things needful will be given, and at the grand consummation every *desire* will be eternally fulfilled--'As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." (Ps. xvii. 15, xvi. 11.)

25. *As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more: but the righteous is an everlasting foundation.*

Thus suddenly, *as the whirlwind*,‡ does *the fear of the wicked* often

* Elijah, 1 Kings, xix. 4. Jonah, iv. 1-4. The disciples, Luke, ix. 54-56.

† See a beautiful hymn in Olney Collection.--Book iii. 36.

‡ See note* p. 11. Comp. Jer. xxiii. 19. Hos. xiii. 3; also Job, xx. 8, 9; xxi. 13, 19-21. Ps. lxxiii. 19, 20.

come *upon him*. All his hopes, pleasures, and dependencies; all his opportunities of grace, and offers of mercy, are swept away in a moment for ever. Such a *whirlwind* was the destruction of the old world, of the cities of the plain (Luke, xvii. 26-29); of Sennacherib's army. (2 Kings, xix. 35.) And such a *whirlwind*, infinitely more terrible, will be the coming of the Lord. (Luke, xvii. 30. 1 Thess. v. 2, 3.) "But he that doeth the will of God abideth ever" (1 John, ii. 17), as *an everlasting foundation*. Faith hath fastened him to the Rock of Ages; hath built his house upon this Rock; and no storm can root him up. (Matt. vii. 25. Ps. cxii. 7.) But remember, this is the confidence of *the righteous*. Sin allowed and indulged will shake this foundation far more than all the outward assaults of earth and hell. "Hold fast then thy rejoicing" in a jealous godly fear. Thy portion is secure. Thy hopes, joys, and prospects are unchangeable. Thou canst look at trouble-yea, at death itself--without dismay, and feel--'I am safe.' But while "thou standest by faith, be not high-minded, but fear." (Rom. xi. 20.)

26. *As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to them that send him.*

A lively figure of the vexation of *the sluggard* to his employers! (Contrast Chap. xxvi. 6, with xiii. 17; xxv. 13.) Suppose a fire to be extinguished, medical assistance needed, a message of urgent haste to be conveyed--he is worse than unserviceable. Common prudence dictates the selection of active and industrious servants. And such when influenced by godly principles, are "worthy of double honour." (Chap. xxii. 29. Gen. xxiv. 1-14. 1 Tim. v. 17.)

Does then *the sluggard* disappoint and provoke his earthly master? See that we be not such *sluggards* to our heavenly Master. Laodicean professors are specially hateful in his sight. (Rev. iii. 16.) The slothful Minister carries in a tremendous account *to him that sent him*. No more pitiable object is found, than the man who has time to spare; who has no object of commanding interest; and is going on to the end, as if he had spent his whole life in children's play, and had lived for no useful purpose. He may probably have parcelled out a portion of his time for some miscalled religious duty. But he might as well be asleep as on his knees; in idleness as in meditation--so little pains--so little heart, is connected with his duties! Why "standeth he idle in the market-place?" It cannot be--"No man hath hired him." His Master's call sounds in his ears--"Go ye into the vineyard." (Matt. xx. 7.) And at his peril he disobeys it. (Ib. xxv. 30.)

27. *The fear of the Lord prolongeth days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened.*

The fear of the Lord is not a single grace. It includes the substance

of all godly tempers. For all are radically one principle, from one source. It essentially differs from *the fear of the wicked*. They fear those whom they hate. The child of God-whom he loves. Whether his temporal life be shortened or *prolonged*, he lives long in a little time. He is an infinite gainer by the contraction of life; *when his days are prolonged* and swallowed up in the one unclouded day, of which "the sun shall no more go down." (Chap. ix. 11. Ps. xci. 16. Isa. ix. 19.) Justly is *the fear of the Lord* contrasted with the *wicked*; because the absence of this grace is their distinguishing mark (Ps. xxxvi. 1), the principle of all their ungodliness. (Rom. iii. 10-18.) And often do we see the letter of this curse realized in *the shortening of their years*. Excessive worldliness wears out the spring of life (Eccles. v. 10-12), and often brings it to an untimely end.* Sometimes the God of vengeance breaks out, and "takes away" the daring offender "with his stroke." (Job, xxxvi. 18. 1 Sam. ii. 32; iv. 11. Acts, v. 1-10.) Yet, if he be "visited after the visitation of all men," awful indeed is the course of a long life wasted in folly and sin; living little in a long time--"The sinner, being an hundred years old, shall be accursed." (Isa. lxv. 20.)

28. *The hope of the righteous shall be gladness: but the expectation of the wicked shall perish.*

The fear of the Lord, so far from being opposed to, is often connected with, *the hope of the righteous*. Ps. xxxiii. 18; cxlvii. 11.) And well may this *hope be gladness*; for it is 'accompanied with sweet patience, joyful hope, and crowned with a happy issue.'† It has its origin in eternity. (Tit. i. 2.) Its substance is Christ and heaven. (Rom. v. 2. 1 Pet. i. 3,4. Col. i. 27.) The foundation is the work of Christ. (1 Pet. i. 3, 21.) The security, the unchangeable engagements of God. (Heb. vi. 17, 18.) "Who then but must see it to be "a hope that maketh not ashamed; sure and stedfast?" (Rom. v. 5. Heb. vi. 19. 2 Thess. ii. 16.) Instead of, as is commonly supposed, bidding farewell to *gladness*, it brings the only sunshine of the soul. Beaming from the precious cross, how does it dry up the penitent's tears. (Isa. xii. 2.) Or, if the *gladness* be withheld for a time, yet it is sown: and the "sheaves of joy shall doubtless " follow the "weeping." (Ps. xcvii. 11; cxxvi.6. Isa. xxxv. 10.) And then-carrying as it were heaven in and about us (Heb. x. 34)-how refreshing is *this hope* in its clear insight into eternity! as Bunyan describes, in one of his beautiful touches, his feelings on witnessing Christian and Hopeful's welcome

* Impurity, Chap. v. 9-11. Drunkenness, xxiii. 29-32. Malice, Ps. Iv. 23. 1 Kings, ii. 31-44. Wickedness, Ps. xxxvii. 9, 20. Eccles. vii. 17. Jer. xvii. 11. Comp. Job, xv. 32, 33; xxii. 15, 16.

† Diodati.

into the heavenly city--'which when I had seen, I wished myself among them.' Oh! there must be a reality in that *hope*, which bears us away from earth, and makes its meanest heir richer and happier, than if he were the sole possessor of this world's glory. Let me hasten towards it, longing, yet not impatient. For how can I but desire to change my traveller's lot for my home; my toil for rest; my sorrow for joy; my body of sin for the likeness to my Lord; "the tents of Kedar" for "the innumerable company of angels, and the church of the first-born?" (Ps. cxx. 5, with Heb. xii. 22, 23.) Do I grasp this *hope*? Then--as a godly man exclaimed--'Let who will be miserable; I will not--I cannot!'

But the *wicked*--they too have *their expectation*. For none have a stronger hope than those, who have no ground for hope. (Deut. xxix. 19.) And this delusion often reaches to the moment of eternity (Matt. xxv. 10)--nay, even to the "day" of the Lord (Ib. vii. 22, 23); expecting the door to be "opened to them," after it has been "shut " for ever (Ib. xxv. 11); dreaming of heaven, and waking in hell! *The expectation of the wicked shall perish.**

Christian! make sure the ground of *your hope*. (2 Pet. i. 10.) Then set out its *gladness*, as becomes an heir of glory. Let not a drooping spirit tell the world the scantiness of *your hope*. But show that you can live upon its *gladness*, until you enter into its perfect and everlasting fruition. (Ps. xvi. 11.) Doubtfulness leaves believers and infidels nearly on the same level. A clear apprehension of its infinite joy stimulates our "diligence to make our calling and election sure."

29. *The way of the Lord is strength to the upright: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity.*

Observe how *the gladness of the righteous* is "their *strength*." (Neh. viii. 10.) In the roughness of the way "Go in this thy might"--is the cheering voice--"Have not I sent thee?" (Judg. vi. 14.) "He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth *strength*." (Isa. xl. 29.) This promise, however, implies help for our work, not rest from our labour. We shall have *strength* for the conflict. But "there is no discharge from the war." There is supply for real, not for imaginary, wants; for present, not for future, need. The healthful energy of the man of God is also supposed. He is alive in the way. His heart is set in it. This makes it practicable. What before was drudgery is now meat and drink. Indeed, the more godly we are, the more godly we shall be. The habit of grace increases by exercise. One step helps on the next.

Thus was *the way of the Lord strength to the upright* Nicodemus.

* See the hope of the worldling, Ps. xlix. 6-14. Luke, xii. 19, 20. Of the wicked, Job, xi. 20; xviii. 14. Of the hypocrite, Ib. viii. 13, 14; xxvii. 8.

His first step was feebleness and fear. Walking onwards, he waxed stronger (Job, xvii. 9); standing up in the ungodly council, and ultimately the bold confessor of his Saviour, when his self-confident disciples slunk back. (John, iii. 2; vii. 50, 51; XIX. 39.) Innate sufficiency we have none. The strongest in their own strength shall "faint and be weary." The weakest in the Lord's strength shall "march on, and not faint."* Thus, in the hour of temptation, *the upright* will find their *way to be strength*. (2 Chron. xv. 2.) Joseph in Potiphar's house (Gen. xxxix. 10); Obadiah in Ahab's house (1 Kings, xviii. 3); Daniel in the Persian court (Dan. vi. 10), held on a fiery trial, sustained from on high. Thus--*thus alone*--"the righteous shall hold on their way; going from strength to strength; strengthened in the Lord, and walking up and down in his name." (Job, xvii. 9. Ps. lxxxiv. 5-7. Zech. x. 12.) When we look at our own resources, we might 'as well despair of moving sin from our hearts, as of casting down the mountains with our fingers.'† Yet none of us need to shrink from the confession--"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." (Philip. iv. 13.)

No such resources support *the workers of iniquity*. Captives instead of soldiers, they know no conflicts; they realize no need of strength. Even now "*destruction* is in their ways" (Isa. lix. 7. Rom. iii. 16. Isa. l. 11), and the "voice of the Judge will fearfully seal their doom. Depart from me, ye *workers of iniquity*." (Luke, xiii. 27. Chap. xxi. 15. Job, xxxi. 3. Ps. xxxvi. 12.)

30. *The righteous shall never be removed: but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth.*

The frailty of our present condition, common to all (Eccles. ix. 2, 11), was not in the wise man's eye; but the state of the two classes as in the purpose and mind of God. *His way is strength to the upright. The righteous*, walking steadily in the way, *shall never be removed*. (Ps. xv.; xxxvii. 22; cxii. 6; cxxv. 1. 2 Pet. i. 5-11.) "They enjoy in this life by faith and hope their everlasting Life."‡ "No weapon that is formed against them shall prosper. The mountains shall depart, and the little hills shall be *removed*: but my loving-kindness shall not depart from I thee; neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed; saith the Lord I that hath mercy on thee." (Isa. liv. 10.) Is not this a confidence, that earth nor hell can never shake? (Rom. viii. 38, 39.)

The wicked--have they any such confidence? So far from being *never removed*, they *shall never inhabit*. They have no title, like the *righteous* (Matt. v. 5. 1 Cor. iii. 22), as sons and heirs, to the blessings *of earth*; no hope or interest in the land, of which *the earth* is the type.

* Isa. xl. 31. Bishop Lowth's version

† Bishop Reynolds.

‡ Reformers' notes.

(Ps. xxxvii. 29.) Often are they cut off from *inhabiting* the one. (Verse 27; ii. 22. Ps. xxxvii. 22. Ezek. xxxiii. 24-26.) Never will they be suffered to *inhabit* the other. (1 Cor. vi. 9. Rev. xxi. 27.) As our character is, so is our hope and prospect. We gain or lose both worlds.

31. *The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom: but the forward tongue shall be cut out.* 32. *The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable: but the mouth of the wicked speaketh frowardness.*

Another image (Comp. Verses 11, 20, 21) of the fruitfulness of a gracious tongue! It *bringeth forth wisdom* (Ps. xxxvii. 30), and that too in the practical exercise of *knowing what is acceptable*. This gift needs to be deeply pondered, and carefully cultivated (Chap. xv. 23; xxv. 11. Job, vi. 25), to give it a free scope, while we jealously confine it to its own sphere of influence. There is evidently much diversity of application. The same statement of truth does not suit all. And how--what--when--to whom--to speak--is a matter of great wisdom. (Eccles. viii. 5.) Yet this consideration of *acceptableness* must involve no compromise of principle. Let it be a considerate accommodation *of mode* to the diversity of tastes; a forbearance with lesser prejudices and constitutional infirmities; avoiding--not *all* offences (which faithfulness to our Divine Master forbids), but all *needless* offences; all uncalled-for occasions of design and irritation. "The meekness of wisdom" (Jam. iii. 13) should be clearly manifested in Christian faithfulness. Thus Gideon melted the frowardness of the men of Ephraim. (Judg. viii. 2, 3.) Abigail restrained David's hands from blood. (1 Sam. xxv. 23-33.) Daniel stood fearless before the mighty monarch of Babylon. (Dan. iv. 27.) *Their lips knew what was acceptable*, and their God honoured them.

But most of all--let the Minister of God study to clothe his most unpalatable message in an *acceptable* garb. Let him mould it in all the sweetness of persuasion (2 Cor. v. 11, 20), compassion (Rom. ix. 1-3. 2 Cor. ii. 4), and sympathy. (Tit. iii. 2, 3. 2 Cor. xi. 29.) With what parental earnestness does the 'Preacher of Jerusalem,' in his introductory chapters, allure us to Wisdom's voice and instruction! Yet were his "*acceptable* words upright, even words of truth." (Eccles. xii. 10.) And thus must "the priest's lips keep knowledge," if he would have his people "seek the law at his mouth, as the messenger of the Lord of Hosts." (Mal. ii. 7.) He must discriminate his statements, without diluting them. The "truth is to be proclaimed upon the housetop" to the multitude. But it is to be refrained from ungodly scorners. (Matt. x. 27, with vii. 6.) Always must he gain his people's ears, that he may win their hearts.

The froward tongue, pouring forth its own frowardness, provokes its

own ruin. *It shall be cut out.* (Chap. viii. 13; xviii. 7. Ps. xii, 3; lii. 1-5; cxx. 3, 4. Num. xvi. 1-33.) O my God, what do I owe thee for the bridle of discipline, that restrains me from self-destruction!

CHAPTER XI.

1. *A false balance is abomination to the Lord: but a just weight (a perfect stone,* marg.) is his delight.*

How valuable is the Book of God in its minute detail of principles for every day's conduct! Commerce is a Providential appointment for our social intercourse and mutual helpfulness. It is grounded with men upon human faith, as with God upon Divine faith. *Balances, weights*, money, are its necessary materials. Impositions; double-dealings; the hard bargain struck with self-complacent shrewdness (Chap. xx. 14)--this is the *false balance* forbidden alike by the law (Lev. xix. 36) and the gospel. (Matt. vii. 12. Philip. iv. 8.) Men may "commend its wisdom" (Luke, xvi. 8); God not only forbids, but he *abominates* it. (Chap. xx. 10. Deut. xxv. 13-16. Amos, viii. 5.) *The just weight* often passes unnoticed. But such a *perfect stone* is a perfect jewel, and a precious stone in the sight of God.† It is his delight (Chap. xvi. 11; xii. 22)--a testimony infinitely above all human praise!

We must not put away this proverb as a mere moral maxim. It was given as a warning to a flourishing Christian Church (1 Thess. iv. 6); and the sin here reprobated has been a leprous spot upon many a highly-gifted professor. (1 Cor. vi. 8.) Is it not a solemn thought, that the eye of God marks all our common dealings of life, either as an *abomination or a delight*? Have we never found, when upon our knees, the frown of God upon some breach in our daily walk? (Ps. lxvi. 18.) Look and see, whether the "conscience has been void of offence towards man." (Acts, xxiv. 16.) "The righteous Lord loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright." (Ps. xi. 7.) They--they only--"shall dwell in his presence." (Ib. xv. 1,2; xxiv. 3-5; cxi. 13.)

2. *When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom.*

Pride was the principle of the fall (Gen. iii. 5), and therefore the native principle of fallen man. (Mark, vii. 22.) When pride had stripped us of our honour, *then*--not till then--*cometh shame*. (Gen. iii.

* In many shops in Palestine now, the only weights in the balance are smooth stones. *Narrative of the Scottish Mission to the Jews*. Saphet, p. 274. Comp. chap. xvi. 11, marg.

† *Jermin in Loco*

7, with ii. 25.) This is the wise discipline of our God to scourge the one by the other. The Babel-builders (Gen. xi. 4); Miriam (Num. xii. 2, 10); Uzziah (2 Chron. xxvi. 16-21); Haman (Esth. v. 11; vii. 10); Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. iv. 29-32); Herod (Acts, xii. 22,23); all are instances of *shame*, treading upon the heels of *pride*. Even in common life, a man will never attempt to raise himself above his own level--but *then cometh shame* (Luke, xiv. 11)--the most revolting recompense. And thus our God puts to shame the man, who knows not his bounds, and who refuses to stand on the low ground, on which he has placed him. "Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased." (Luke, xviii. 14. Isa. ii. 17.)

Such is the folly of *pride*. *With the lowly is wisdom*. What a splendour of *wisdom* shone in the *lowly* child, "sitting at the doctors' feet, astonishing them at his understanding and his answers!" (Luke, ii. 47.) And will not this spirit be to us the path of *wisdom*? For the Divine Teacher "reveals to the babes, what he hides from the wise and prudent." (Ib. x. 21.) There is no greater proof of proud folly, than believing only what we understand. Faith is thus grounded on knowledge, not on testimony: as if the word of God could not be implicitly received, except as corroborated by other witnesses. Happy is that lowliness of spirit, that comes to God's revelation, as it were without any will or mind of our own; humbly receiving what he is pleased to give; but willing--yea--thankful--to be ignorant, when he forbids us to intrude! (Col. ii. 18.)

3. *The integrity of the upright shall guide them; but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them.* 4. *Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death.* 5. *Their righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way: but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness.* 6. *The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them: but transgressors shall be taken in their own naughtiness.* 7. *When a wicked man dieth, his expectation shall perish: and the hope of unjust men shall perish.*

Integrity or righteousness is a most valuable *guide* in all perplexities. (Matt. vi. 22.) The single desire to know the will of God, only that I we may do it (Ps. cxliii. 10), will always bring light upon our path. It is also a covert from many dreaded evils. "God is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. Who therefore is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" (1 Pet. iii. 13.) Let the Christian "stand, having on the breast-plate of *righteousness*; and that wicked one toucheth him not." (Eph. vi. 14. 1 John, v. 18.) Often indeed does it deliver from temporal, always from eternal, death. "Whoso walketh uprightly shall be saved. In the pathway thereof

there is no death. If a man keep my sayings, he shall never see-- never taste of--death." (Gen vii. 1; 2 Kings, xx. 3-6.)

The *perverseness*, that neglects this godly principle, is the sinner's own snare and *destruction*. (Chap. xxviii. 18. John, viii. 51. Ezra, xviii. 27.) And when *the day of wrath* cometh--as come it will--"a great ransom will not deliver." (Deut. i. 43, 44. Num. xxii. 32. Isa. i. 28. Ezra, ix. 9, 10. Hos. xiv. 9.) *Riches will profit, nothing* (Job, xxxvi. 18, 19); not even will they obtain "a drop of water to cool the tormented tongue." (Luke, xvi. 19-24.) In vain will "the rich men of the earth" seek a shelter from "the wrath of the Lamb." (Rev. vi. 15-17.) They and their *hopes will perish* together.* "They were not living, but lying hopes, and dying hopes."† What a contrast to that "hope, which is as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil!"‡

8. *The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead.*

Thus do these two classes change places in the dispensations of God. The same providence often marks Divine faithfulness and retributive justice. The Israelites *were delivered out of the trouble* of the Red Sea; the Egyptians *came in their stead*. (Exod. xiv. 21-28.) Mordecai was *delivered* from the gallows; Haman was hanged upon it. (Esth. v. 14; vii. 10.) The noble confessors in Babylon were saved from the fire; their executioners were "slain" by it. (Dan. iii. 22-26.) Daniel was preserved from the lions; his accusers were devoured by them. (Ib. vi. 22-24.) Peter was snatched from death; his jailors and persecutors were condemned. (Acts, xii. 6, 19, 23.) Thus "precious in the sight of the Lord is" the life, no less than "the death, of his saints." (Ps. cxvi. 15.) For the *deliverance* of one precious soul *out of trouble* he will bring a nation into distress. (1 Sam. xxiii. 25-28.) Yea--for the ransom of his own chosen people, he gave not only "Egypt" of old, but in later times "Ethiopia and Seba--men for them, and people for their life."§ To what source but his own free and sovereign love can we trace this special estimation? "*Since thou wast precious in my sight,*

* Chap. x. 28. Job, viii. 13, 14; xl. 20; xviii. 14-18. Ps. xlix. 17, 18; cxlvi. 4. One of Bunyan's graphical and accurate sketches represents Ignorance ferried over the river by one Vain Hope, ascending the hill alone, without encouragement, and ultimately bound and carried away. "Then I saw"--adds he with fearful solemnity--"that there was a way to Hell, even from the gates of Heaven!"

† LEIGHTON on 1 Pet. I. 3.

‡ Heb. vi. 19. Does not this verse prove the knowledge of a future state; since, as respects this life, the expectation of the righteous -alike with that of the wicked--perisheth? Comp. 1 Cor. xv. 19.

§ Isa. xliii. 8; 4, with 2 Chron. xiv. 9-11. 2 Kings, xix. 9. Comp. chap. xxi. 18 How different their estimation in the eyes of man, when an Eastern autocrat was willing to cut them off at a single blow as a worthless thing! Esth. iii. 8-15. Comp. I Cor. iv. 13.

thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee." (Isa. xliii. 4, *ut supra.*) We do not always mark the same outward manifestation. But the love is unchangeably the same. And how should it at once lay us in the dust, and build our confidence upon an unshaking foundation!

9. *An hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his neighbour: but through knowledge shall the just be delivered.*

Haman under the pretence of loyalty would have *destroyed* a whole nation. (Esth. iii. 8-13.) Ziba under the same false cover would have *destroyed his neighbor*. (2 Sam. xvi. 1-4.) The lying prophet from mere wilfulness ruined his brother. Such is *the hypocrite's mouth!* "a little member;" but "a world of iniquity: set on fire of hell." (Jam. iii. 5, 6.)

Then look at him in the church--"a ravening wolf in sheep's clothing," devouring the flock (Matt. vii. 15); "making merchandize with feigned words" (2 Pet. ii. 1-3); an apostle of Satan, so diligent is he in his Master's work of *destruction!* (2 Cor. xi. 3, 13.) "These false Christs"--we are warned—"deceive many; *if it were possible* the very elect." (Matt. xxiv. 24.) But they--*the just--are delivered through knowledge*--by the light and direction of the Holy Ghost, and by the lively knowledge of God's word, which giveth unto the faithful man wisdom sufficient for his preservation.* Learn the value of solid *knowledge*. Feeling, excitement, imagination, expose us to an unsteady profession.† *Knowledge* supplies principle and steadfastness. "Add to your faith knowledge." (2 Pet. i. 5.) Guard against plausible error, Usually built upon some single truth, separated from its connection, and pressed beyond its due proportion. Do not the many delusions of our day give force to the earnest exhortation--"Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go; keep her, for she is thy life?" (Chap. iv. 13.)

10. *When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth: and when the wicked perish, there is shouting. 11. By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted: but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.*

The world, in despite of the native enmity of the heart, bears its testimony to consistent godliness (Chap. xvi. 7; Mark, vi. 20), and rejoices in the prosperity of *the righteous*. Their elevation to authority is a matter of general joy. (Chap. xxix. 2. Esth. viii. 15.) A godly king;‡ a premier, using his authority for the glory of God (2 Chron. xxiv. 16); a man of God of high influence in the church (2 Kings, ii.

* Diodati. Comp. Heb. v. 14. 1 John, ii 20, 27. 2 Pet. iii. 17, 18.

† Such as Eph. iv. 14.

‡ Chron. xxx. 25, 26. 'All things prosper in every respect, so long as thou rulest well'--was the speech of the Senate to the emperor Severus. Comp. Isa. xxxii. 1, 2. 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.

12)--these are justly regarded as a national *exaltation*. Their prayers (Exod. xxxiii. 12. Isa. xxxvii. 14-36. Jam. v. 16-18), wisdom (Gen. xli. 38-42), disinterestedness, and example (Job, xxii. 30), are a public blessing.

The wicked--they are only a curse to the community. Often has *it been overthrown*; or endangered *by their mouth*. (Num. xvi. 3, 41. 2 Sam. xv. 1-14; xx. 1.) So that *their perishing* is a matter of present exultation. (Job, xxvii. 23.) Such was the joy of Rome on the death of Nero, and the public rejoicings in the French Revolution at the death of Robespierre. The people of God unite in *the shouting*; not from any selfish feeling of revenge; much less from unfeeling hardness towards their fellow-sinners. But when a hindrance to the good cause is removed (Chap. xxviii. 28. Eccles. ix. 18); when the justice of God against sin (2 Sam. xviii. 14-28) and his faithful preservation of his church (Exod. xv. 21. Judg. v. 31), are displayed, ought not every feeling to be absorbed in a supreme interest in his glory? Ought they not to shout? (Ps. lii. 6, 7; lviii. 10. Rev. xviii. 20.) The "Alleluia" of heaven is an exulting testimony to the righteous judgments of the Lord our God, hastening forward his glorious kingdom. (Rev. xix. 1, 2.)

12. *He that is void of wisdom* (destitute of heart, marg.) *despiseth his neighbour: but a man of understanding holdeth his peace.*

Pride and uncharitableness show a man to be *void of wisdom*; ignorant alike of himself, his neighbour; and his God. For could he delight in magnifying "the mote in his neighbour's eye," had he *wisdom* to "consider the beam that is in his own eye?" (Matt. vii. 3-5.) Could he despise his neighbour, did he really know him to be his own flesh (Isa. lviii. 7. Mal. ii. 10. Acts, xvii. 26); perhaps even "a member of the body, and of the flesh, and of the bones of his Lord?" (Eph. v. 30.) Could he look down upon him in the plenitude of pride, did he realize the consciousness; that, if he differs, it is God--not himself, "that hath made him to differ?" (1 Cor. iv. 7.) Surely this blindness is to be *void of wisdom, and destitute of heart*. 'It denotes the want of a right state of mind, judgment, and affections. Such a man is *without heart* to what is wise and good.'

A man of understanding may see much in *his neighbour* to excite his pity, and stir up his prayers, but nothing to *despise*. He may be called openly to condemn him. But his general course will be loving forbearance; *holding his peace*; 'keeping himself from speaking or doing anything in scorn of another;† "*considering thyself*, lest thou also be tempted." (Gal. vi. 1.) Self-knowledge shows *the man of understanding*, and forms the man of love.

* Scott *in loco*-Comp. chap. xiv. 21. John. vii. 47-49.

† Diodati

13. *A tale-bearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit
concealeth the matter.*

Another breach of love is here reproved. (Lev. xix. 16,17.) The gospel does not shut us up in our own private interests, as if we had no sympathy with our neighbour. It is an universal brotherhood of love. Yet it rebukes the *tale-bearer*, who, having no business of his own, traffics with his neighbour's name and honour, and vends his wares of scandal, as it may be, whether for gain or wantonness. (Neh. vi. 17-19.) It is most unsafe to be within the breath of this cruel trifler with the happiness of his fellow-creatures. (Chap. xvi. 28; xxvi. 22.) For as readily as he *reveals our neighbour's secrets* to us, will: he reveal ours to him.* All the bonds of confidence and friendship are broken in pieces. Let ears and lips be closed against him. If there be no vessel to receive his base matter, his words will fall to the ground, and die away. Children, servants, and visitors in the family, should guard most carefully against *revealing secrets*, that have been spoken before them in the unreserved confidence of domestic life. *The tale-bearer* having much time on his hands, worms out family secrets. He is always delighted to make a discovery. The most idle rumour is a treasure. A quarrel made up before he had time to *reveal* it, is a disappointment. This busy idleness has always been a sore in the church. (2 Thess. iii. 10-12. 1 Tim. v. 13. 1 Pet. iv. 15.) It is a religion always abroad, occupied impertinently with foreign interference; while at home it is "the field of the slothful, grown over with thorns." (Chap. xxiv. 30, 31.) Would we have our friend rest his anxieties on our bosom (Chap. xvii. 17), let him not see the results of misplaced confidence dropping out of our mouth. It is of great moment to our peace, that those about us should be of *a faithful spirit*, to whom it is not necessary on every occasion to *enjoin secrecy*; true to our interest as to their own; who would rather refuse than betray a trust; whose bosom is a cover of *concealment*, except when the honour of God and the interests of society plainly forbid. (1 Sam. iii. 17, 18. Jer. xxxviii. 24-27. Contrast Judg. xvi. 16-20.) Invaluable is such a friend, but rare indeed in this deceitful world. (Chap. xx. 6.) Yet Christian consistency includes the *faithful spirit*; and its habitual absence makes it most doubtful, whether the spirit and mind of Christ is not altogether wanting.

14. *Where no counsel is, the people must fall: but in the multitude of
counselors there is safety.*

Even in private matters the value of wise counselors is generally

* Chap. xx. 19. Horace has given us this same warning:

Percontatorem fugito; nam garrulus idem est;

Nec retinent patulae commissa fideliter aures.--*Epistle* I. 18. 1 69, 70.

admitted. The agreement of *the multitude* gives *safety* to our decision. And even their difference, by giving both sides of the question, enables us to ponder our path more safely. The nation, therefore, without *counselors* is like a ship in the midst of the rocks without a pilot, in imminent peril. God has given to some the gift of government--"wisdom that is profitable to direct." (Eccles. x. 10.) *Where there is no counsel, the people mush fall.* In the dark time of the Judges, the want of a king led to anarchy, and the *people fell* into the enemies' hands. (Judg. ii. 8-23; xxi. 25.) Ten parts of the *people fell* when Rehoboam listened to evil counsel.* A *fall* again was there of *the people*, when the counsel of godly Jehoiada was removed! (2 Chron. xxiv. 17-21.) The good Lord, deliver us from the deserved national judgment of weak and blinded counsellors! (Eccles. x. 16. Isa. iii. 1-4; xix. 11-14.)

David and Solomon, though themselves specially endowed with wisdom, governed their kingdoms prosperously by wise counselors. (Ps. cxix. 98-100, with 2 Sam. xv. 12; xvii. 14, also 1 Kings, xii. 6.) The larger the multitude of *such counselors* (contrast Isa. xlvii. 13), the greater the *safety*. To one such, a heathen monarch owed the *safety* of his kingdom from desolating falling. (Gen. xli. 38-57.)

Often has the Church been preserved by this blessing. (Acts, xv. 6-31: Comp. chap. xv. 22; xxiv. 6.) Shall we not now plead for her *safety* in this day of her distress, that *her people* may not *fall* by the want of *counsel* (Ezra, xxxiv. 4-6. Matt. xv. 14); that her ordained *counselors* may be largely filled with the "spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. i. 7), to establish her people more firmly in the pure faith of the gospel? (Acts, xvi. 4, 5.)

15. *He that is surety for a stranger shall smart* (be sore broken, marg.) *for it: and he that hateth suretyship is sure.*

This repeated warning against *suretyship* (Chap. vi. 1-5) is intended to inculcate considerateness; not to excuse selfishness, or to dry up the sources of helpful sympathy. It must not be *for a stranger* (Chap. xxvii. 13), whose character and responsibilities are unknown to us. For such incautious kindness, too often done to the injury of our family, we shall *smart*, if not be *sore broken*. To *hate* such engagements is therefore our prudent security.

But one exception we can never forget. The blessed Jesus, from his free grace--unsought, unasked (John, x. 15, 17, 18. Philip. ii. 6-8)--became *surety*--not for a friend (in which case we should have had no interest), but *for a stranger*. He became One with us in nature, that he might be One with us in law. He took our place under the curse of the broken law. (Gal. iii. 13.) He put his soul to the fullest extent in our soul's place; and then made our nature pay the debt, which all the

* 1 Kings, xii. 16:-19. 'Fall like leaves,'--LXX.

angels of heaven could never have discharged. Oh! this was a *smart* indeed. Yea--*sore broken* was he under the stroke of his Father's hand.* The Upholder of the universe was prostrate in the dust (Mark, xiv. 35, with Heb. i. 3); his own creature strengthening his sinking frame., (Luke, xxii. 43.) Had he *hated suretyship*, he would have been *sure*; (for what could have disturbed his self-existent happiness?) but we should have perished. Glory to his name! Though from all eternity he knew the bitterness of *the smart*, instead of hating, he "re-joiced and delighted" in his work. (Chap.viii. 31. Heb. x.7. Ps. xl. 6-8.) His was no rash engagement. For it was the arrangement of the everlasting covenant. (Isa. liii. 10-12. 1 Pet. i. 20.) Every way it was lawful. There was an infinite treasure to discharge the liabilities. The claims of justice were fully satisfied. (Isa. i. 27; xlii. 21. Rom. iii. 26.) Sin was as thoroughly punished, as it was thoroughly pardoned. There was no injury, but rather direct benefit to the family of God. (Eph. i. 10. Col. i. 20.) What then remains for us, but to fall down before this grace, and to spend our days, as we shall spend our eternity, in adoring this wondrous manifestation of Divine glory! (Rev. i. 5, 6; v. 12.)

16. *A gracious woman retaineth honour: and strong men retain riches.*

Everywhere the excellency of godliness meets our eyes. What loveliness, dignity, and influence does it impart to the female character! (Chap. xxxi. 10.) A *gracious woman* is known, not by her outward beauty (Ib. 30), but by her "inner becoming ornaments" (1 Tim. ii. 9, 10. 1 Pet. iii. 3, 4); which remain in full lustre, when external accomplishments have faded away. (Chap. xxxi. 25.) And though "the weaker vessel," she *retaineth honour*, as firmly as *strong men retain riches*. She preserves her character unblemished. (Ruth, iii. 11.) She wins her children (Chap. xxxi. 28)--perhaps her ungodly husband (Ib. verses 12, 28. 1 Pet. iii. 1, 2)--into the ways of holiness. Thus Deborah *retained honour* as "a mother in Israel," the Counselor and the stay of a sinking people. (Judg. iv. 4; v. 7.) Esther *retained* her influence over her heathen husband for the good of her nation. (Esth. ix. 12, 13, 25.) And still the *gracious woman retaineth honour* long after she has mingled with the dust. Sarah the obedient wife (1 Pet. iii. 5, 6); Hannah the consecrating mother (1 Sam. i. 28); Lois, Eunice, and "the elect lady" (2 Tim. i. 5; iii. 15. 2 John, 1-4), in the family sphere; Phoebe and her companions in the annals of the Church (Rom. xvi. 2-6. Philip. iv. 3); the rich contributor to the temple (Mark, xii. 42-44); the self-denying lover of her Lord (Ib. xiv. 3-9); Mary in contemplative retirement (Luke, x. 39); Dorcas in active usefulness (Acts, ix.

* Isa. liii. 5, 10—*bruised--sore broken*.

36):--Are not these "good names" still had in *honourable* remembrance? (Ps. cxii. 6.)

17. *The merciful man doeth good to his own soul: but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh.*

Mercifulness is not natural benevolence, without God or godliness. It is the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. v. 22); the image of our Father (Luke, vi. 36); the constraint of the love of Christ (2 Cor. viii. 9); the adorning of "the elect of God." (Col. iii. 13.) It is not pity in words and looks. It is when our neighbour's trouble descends into the depths of our hearts, and draws out thence bowels of kindness and practical sympathy. (Luke, x. 33.) *The merciful man* will ever find a merciful God. (Ps. xli. 1. Matt. v. 7.) The widow of Sarepta and the woman of Shunam, each for their kindness to the Lord's prophets, "received a prophet's reward." (2 Kings, iv. 16; viii. 1-6.) The alms of Cornelius brought good to his own soul. (Acts, x. 2-4.) In watering others with our mercy, our own souls will become a watered garden." (Isa. xxxii. 8. Ps. cxii. 4.) Even now" God is not unrighteous to forget our work and labour of love." (Heb. vi. 10. Matt. x. 42.) At the great day he will honour it before the assembled universe. (Matt. xxv. 34.)

But not less certainly will *cruelty* bring its own mischief. (Jam. ii. 13. Matt. xviii. 34, 35.) Unsubdued passion is carrying about us the very element of hell, wanting nothing but immortality to perfect the misery. Cain found his brother's murder an intolerable *trouble to his flesh*. (Gen. iv. 13, 14.) Joseph's brethren severally smarted for their unfeeling wantonness. (Ib. xlii. 21.) Adoni-bezek was constrained to acknowledge the justice of his chastisement. (Judg. i. 6, 7.) The doom of Ahab and Jezebel was the curse of their own *cruelty*. (1 Kings, xxii. 38. 2 Kings, ix. 36, 37.) The treasures of selfishness will eat as doth a canker in *our own flesh*. (Jam. v. 1-3.) O my God, save me from the tyranny of my own lust, and may thy perfect image of mercy be my standard and my pattern!

18. *The wicked worketh a deceitful work: but to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward. 19. As righteousness tendeth to life, so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death.*

Both the Masters that claim the heart put forth their promise of reward. Did Satan fulfill all his promises, truly his servants would be abundantly enriched. (Gen. iii. 4, 5. Matt. iv. 8, 9.) But *the wicked worketh a deceitful work*, ending in disappointment. (Heb. ii. 13. Rom. vi. 21.) Pharaoh's exterminating project against Israel *deceived* him in its result, issuing in their increase, and the ruin of himself and his people. (Acts, vii. 19. Exod. i. 20.) Abimelech doubtless expected peace

as the result of his murderous work. (Judg. ix. 22-51.) But *he pursued evil to his own death*. Ahab anticipated rest from the riddance of Naboth. But the words of his troublesome reprover were to him as the "piercings of a sword." (1 Kings, xxi. 19.) How little did Gehazi contemplate the plague of the leprosy, as the issue of his well-contrived plan! (2 Kings, v. 27.) Were the temptation presented in a naked form--'For this pleasure sell thy soul--thy God--thy heaven'--who would not fly with horror from the most enticing bait? But the tempter *worketh a deceitful work*, painting the present pleasure, and hiding the certain reality of ruin. (Chap. i. 15-18.) Oh! it is affecting to see his poor victim eagerly *pursuing evil* (Chap. iv. 16, 17)--yet *to his own death*. Not only his open acts, but his thoughts, motions, pursuits, ends--all *tend to death*. (Chap. v. 1-5; ix. 18.) God has no place in his heart. And what else can be the end of a life without God? Thus the religious professor *deceives* others, perhaps himself. But his *deceitful work* will be the delusion of a moment, an eternity of confusion.

The sure reward of righteousness stands out in bright contrast. The "seed is precious;" and "the sheaves shall doubtless" follow. (Ps. cxxvi. 6.) No sinner since the fall of man has ever known the *full reward* of righteousness even in this life. It may be given as an afflictive dispensation--grace to support under trouble, and to triumph in the issue of it. It will probably be given as the harvest to the sower--after trying and anxious waiting. (Jam. v. 7, 8.) But whenever vouchsafed, or however delayed, it is a *sure reward*. *Righteousness* is the seed. Happiness is the harvest. *The reward* indeed is not from cause, but by consequence; not of debt, but of grace; depending upon a free promise; mercifully, yet surely, linked with Christian perseverance. (Eccles. xi. 6. Hos. x. 12. 1 Cor. xv. 58. Gal. vi. 7, 8.) It must however be true *righteousness*--not according to man's profession, but according to the Divine standard. A routine of duties may skirt the borders of religion, at the utmost distance from the Spirit of God, and equally remote from the vital principle of the heart. But *righteousness* not only "delivereth from death" (Verse 4) (a special mercy even with the loss of all) (Gen. xix. 16. Jer. xlv. 5); but it *tendeth to life* (Chap. x. 16. Isa. iii. 10. Rom. ii. 7. Gal. vi. 8); full of living enjoyment, of infinite, eternal pleasure. What importance then attaches to every godly principle! All have reference to eternity. If *righteousness* be our main end, God will make it our best friend; nor will he, as the world has done, reward us with ciphers instead of gold. Who will not love and serve thee when "in keeping thy commandments there is *a sure reward*?" (Ps. xix. 11; xxxvii. 3-6. Isa. xxxii. 17.) Irresistible will be the conviction of *the wicked* at the last.--'Had I but sown *righteousness* in the service of God, it would have been infinitely happy for

me to eternity!" But inconceivably joyous will be the great consummation to the righteous--"Behold, I come quickly, and *my reward* is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." (Rev. xxii. 12.)

20. *They that are of a froward heart are abomination to the Lord: but such as are upright in their way are his delight.* 21. *Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished: but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered.*

The *froward* and the *upright* are often contrasted, as God looks at them. (Verse 3. Chap. iii. 32. Ps. xi. 5-7.) *Frowardness is abomination* to the Lord. (Chap. viii. 13.) All the contests between God and man are--whose will shall stand? (Exod. v. 2; ix. 17. Jer. xliv. 16, 28.) Most thankful should we be for the school of discipline, that makes us feel the privilege of "subjection to the obedience of Christ." (Ps. cxix. 67, 71.) *Frowardness in the heart* is specially hateful (Chap. xvi. 5); most of all under the garb of external religion. (Isa. lxxv. 2-5. Luke, xvi. 15.) Sinners encourage one another in sin (Chap. i. 11-14. Isa. xli. 7)--*hand joining in hand*. But all such "confederacies shall be broken in pieces." (Isa. viii. 9. Gen. xi. 8. Num. xvi. 1-33. Josh. ix. 1, 2.) For as "it is the same with him to save by many or by few" (1 Sam. xiv. 6); so when he lifts his arm of vengeance, it is the same, "whether it be against a nation or a man only." (Job, xxxiv. 29.) The flood; the judgment on Egypt; the chastenings of rebellious Israel in the wilderness; the destruction of Sennacherib's army--plainly prove, that *hand joining in hand* is a vain resistance to the hand of God. (Chap. xvi. 5.)

The upright are those, whom God makes upright. They are his own workmanship. *The upright in the way* are contrasted with the *froward in heart*: because as the heart is, so is the way. Yet he is not said to delight in their way (though this is an undoubted truth). They themselves are *his delight*. (Chap. xii. 22. Ps. lxxxiv. 11.) He singles them out from the ungodly world. (Gen. vii. 1. Num. xiv. 24.) Nay, he even points to one of them as a challenge to Satan to do his worst. (Job, i. 8.) Such is the condescension of his sovereign love--accepting his own word; stamping with open honour the graces of his people, sullied though they be with such "base defilement! "He knoweth their days"--the first day of going to their Bibles, the first day of prayer; all their after "cloudy and dark days." Nor does he put them off with a "portion in this life." Their inheritance shall be for ever. (Ps. xxxvii. 18.) It is but a moment, and they that love him shall be with him for ever.

Nor is their blessing confined to themselves. *The seed of the righteous* shall be delivered. (Chap. xx. 7. Ps. xxxvii. 26. 1 Kings, xv. 4.)

'The best way for any man to do his children good, is to be godly himself.* They have then a place in their father's covenant. (Gen. xvii. 7. Acts, ii. 39.) And is not this an encouragement--not indeed to indolence and presumption--but to parental faith, in leaving our children in this naughty world unprotected and alone? (Ps. ciii. 17.) "The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee." (Ib. cii. 28.)

22. *As a jewel of gold in a swines snout, so is a fair woman which is without* (departeth from, marg.) (Chap. vii. 10; ix. 13) *discretion.*

A most distasteful, and yet an apt comparison! Let us see things as the Bible shows them to us. If a *fair*, light-minded young woman should see her own face in this mirror, she might well start aside with horror. Beauty indeed is to be honoured, as the gift of God.† Yet in itself it is a fading vanity (Chap. xxxi.30); and, *without discretion*, it is as misplaced, as mis-becommg, *as a jewel of gold in a swine's snout.*‡ Would the ornament beautify the filthy animal? Rather would not the unnatural combination make it more than ever an object of disgust? All the charms of beauty are lost upon a foolish woman. Instead of "retaining honour" (Verse 16), she only brings upon herself disgrace. For just as *the jewel* is soon employed and besmeared in racking the mire; so too often does the beauty of the *indiscreet woman* become subservient to the vilest passions. (2 Sam. xi. 2.) No ornament can give comeliness to a fool (Chap. xxvi. 8); but "wisdom maketh the face to shine." (Eccles. viii. 1.)

'Lightness and fantastic garb in apparel is the very bush or sign hanging out, that tells a vain mind lodges within. The soul fallen from God hath lost its true worth and beauty; and therefore it basely descends to these mean things, to serve and dress the body, and take share with it of its unworthy borrowed ornaments, while it hath lost and forgotten God, and seeks not after him, knows not that he alone is the beauty and ornament of the soul, and his Spirit, and the grace of it, his rich attire.'§

Learn then to value far beyond beauty of face, the inner "ornaments" of grace, "which are in the sight of God of great price." (1 Pet. iii. 4, 5.) Many a lovely form enshrines a revolting mind. All external even all intellectual, accomplishments *without discretion* issue in barrenness. So entirely do we depend upon God's grace, for a fruitful improvement of his own gifts!

* Exposition of Proverbs, by JOHN DODD and ROBERT CLEAVER, 4to. 1614.

†⁺ See Moses, Acts, vii. 20. Joseph, Gen. xxxix. 6. David, 1 Sam. xvi. 12. Esth. ii. 7. Job's daughters, xlii. 15.

‡ Isa. iii. 21. See Bishop Lowth's interesting note

§ LEIGHTON on 1 Pet. iii 3, 4.

23. *The desire of the righteous is only good: but the expectation of the wicked is wrath.*

'*Desire* is the wing of the soul, whereby it moveth, and is carried to the thing which it loveth, as the eagle to the carcase, in the Scripture Proverbs (Job, xxxix. 30. Matt. xxiv. 28), to feed itself upon it, and to be satisfied with it.* *The desire of the righteous* must be *good*, because it is God's own work. (Ps. x. 17. Rom. viii. 26, 27.) It must be *only good*, because it centres in himself. (Ps. lxxiii. 25. Isa. xxvi. 8, 9.) God in Christ is *his portion*: and what earthly portion can compare with it? (Ps. iv. 6, 7)--*his object*; and what object is worth living for--worth half a serious thought--besides? (Rom. xiv. 8, 9. 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. Philip. i. 21.) Only let me subordinate my *desires* to his will (1 John, v. 14); and I shall be equally happy, whether they be granted or withheld. (1 Kings, viii. 17, 18.) As a physician, "he knoweth my frame" (Ps. ciii. 14); what is, what is not, expedient for me. "As a Father, he pitieth" my weakness. (Ib. verse 13.) As a God, he fully supplies my *real* need. (Philip. iv. 19.) *The desire*, therefore, inwrought by him, fixed on him, submitted to his will, must be *good*. But might not an angel weep to see the corrupt mixture† of worldliness (Mark, x. 35-37), selfishness (2 Sam. xxiii. 15. Jonah, iv. 8, 9), pride? (1 Chron. xxi. 1, 2.) Yet is this against our better will. (Rom. vii. 15.) The main strength of *the desire* is to God; even though the tossing tempest of sin and Satan may combine to drive it out of its course. (Rom. vii. 22.) In despite of this mighty assault--"Lord, all my desire is before thee; thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." (Ps. xxxviii. 9. John, xxi. 17.) "Thou didst put into my mind good desires; and thou wilt bring the same to good effect!"‡

But the *expectation of the wicked* is discontent and opposition to God. Often is it indulged, but with the fearful accompaniment of wrath. (Num. xi. 18. Ps. lxxviii. 29-31; cvi. 15.) And how shortly will the deluding dream end in inexpressible, eternal *wrath*! (Verse 7. Luke, xvi. 23. Rom. ii. 8, 9. Heb. x. 27.) Oh! let me daily test my *desires* by the true standard, and discipline them, that they may be fixed upon the true object; so that, "delighting myself in the Lord," I may find them "*granted*" "exceedingly abundantly above" my largest expectations. (Chap. x. 24. Ps. xxxvii. 4. Eph. iii. 20.)

24. *There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty.*§ 25. *The liberal*

* Bishop REYNOLDS' Treatise on the Passions.—Works, p. 666. † Comp. Article ix.

‡ Collect for Easter Day.

§ There are those, who, sowing their own, make it more: and those who gather, and are impoverished'--LXX.

soul (soul of blessing, marg.) *shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.*

God has put a mark of distinguishing favour upon the exercises of that mercy, which is his own attribute. He scatters his blessings richly around (Ps. xxxiii. 5; xxxvi. 5-7); and those that partake of his spirit do the same. Men may *scatter* in improvidence and sin, *and it tendeth to poverty*. (Chap. xxi. 17.) But *there is that scattereth, and yet increaseth*. The husbandman, *scattering* his seed "plentifully" over his field, expects a proportionate increase. And shall not the man of God, "dispersing abroad" the seed of godliness (Ps. cxii. 9); consecrating his substance and influence to the Lord; "as he has opportunity, doing good unto all men" (Gal. vi. 10)--shall not he receive a plentiful increase? (2 Cor. ix. 6, 11.) The men of the world hazard all in uncertain, and often, ruinous, speculations. But in this *scattering* there is no uncertainty, no speculation. Bounty is the way to plenty. Have faith in God; and laying out for him will be laying up for ourselves. (Chap. iii. 9, 10; xix. 17.) This will be abundantly manifest, either in a visible enlargement of earthly blessings,* or in a satisfying enjoyment of a more limited portion. (Deut. xv. 10.) The reward of grace will be given in the gracious acceptance of our God (Heb. xiii. 16), and in a blissful reception into "everlasting habitations." (Luke, xvi. 9. 1 Tim. vi. 18, 19.)

But is the covetous worldling happier nay--is he richer--in *withholding more than is meet*? (Hag. i. 4-10.) 'Seldom does he prosper much even in the world. For God metes to men in their own measure; and bad crops, bad debts, expensive sickness, and a variety of similar deductions, soon amount to far more than *liberal* alms would have done.'†

Still more clearly does the Lord mark his blessing and his blast in the Spiritual dispensation. *The liberal soul is made fat* in the healthful vigour of practical godliness (Verse 17. Isa. xxxii. 8. M.R.): and while he is *the soul* of blessing to others, *he is watered himself* with the descending showers.‡ The Minister is refreshed by his own message of salvation to his people. The Sunday School Teacher learns many valuable lessons In the work of instruction. The soul of the District Visitor or the Christian friend glows in carrying the precious name of Jesus to a fellow-sinner. Every holy temper, every spiritual gift, every active grace is increased by exercise; while its efficiency withers by neglect. (Matt. xxv. 29.)

* Luke, vi. 38, *into thy bosom*--the sensible experience of the blessing'

† Scott *in loco*.

‡ Isa. lviii. 10, 11. 'How often, when my heart has been cold and dead, have I been quickened by the loving-kindness of the Lord, upon doing something kind and loving for a fellow-creature, and more especially for a fellow-Chnstian!--VENN *Life*, pp. 501, 502.

26. *He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him; but blessings shall be upon the head of him that selleth it.*

This is a piece of sacred 'political economy.' It reminds us, that we are the stewards of the gifts of God. (2 Cor. ix. 11.) To use them therefore for our own interest, without a due regard to our neighbour, is unfaithfulness to our trust. (Matt. xxv. 26, 27.) A flagrant sin, therefore, is it to withhold the very "staff of life" (Isa. iii. 1); holding back the hand of God stretched out in bounty over our land. This may indeed be a prudential restraint in the time of scarcity. (Gen. xli. 46-49.) Private interest may also claim a measure of consideration. But a grinding spirit; a spirit of selfish monopoly; raising the price for gain, with manifest suffering to the poor--will bring a piercing curse.* And here the *curse of the people* may be the curse of God. For if the cry of oppressed individuals (Exod. xxii. 22-24. Jam. v. 4)--much more that of an oppressed people--will "enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth." (Amos, viii. 4-8.) His withering blast upon *withholden* corn has often scourged this merciless covetousness.

The point of the antithesis apparently fails, only to give stronger security to the blessing. *The curse* comes directly from *the people*; *the blessing* from above. To him that subordinates his own interest to the public good--*blessings shall be upon his head* (Chap. x. 6), descending immediately from the fountain of all grace.

Would that the cry for the "bread of life" were as earnest and universal as for the bread that perisheth! But if he be justly *cursed that withholds* the one; much more he, that unfaithfully and cruelly *withholds* the other. And if *blessings be upon the head of him, that selleth the corn* of this life; what is his privilege, who sells not indeed the bread

* The original implies the piercing of a sword, or dagger; as if the selfish spoiler was, as it were, pierced through and stabbed to death by the *curse of the people*. --Cartwright *in loco*. The system of speculating in corn, ill cruel disregard of the poor, was rebuked by a popular preacher in the latter days of Elizabeth, in the true spirit of Latimer--'The poor man must needs sell presently to maintain his family, to pay his rents. And that which he sells the rich cormorant buys that hath money enough lying by him, to hoard it up, that he may sell it dearer after. These buyers commonly dwell ill market-towns, and wait to get into their hands all the com (if it were possible) in the country. Nay--they will not only wait at home, but they will travel abroad into the country to those men, whom they know have great plenty of corn to sell, and will bargain beforehand with them for as much as they can spare, and so will prevent the market And when they have it in their garners, they make the price at their pleasure. Surely this is a wolf of the soul. Some others will sell at home to their poor neighbours; but they will make them pay for their ease. They shall pay, above the market something; or else they will let them have none. They know the poor man must need have it. He cannot buy it in the market, because he cannot then convey it home; and knowing this his necessity, they will make him pay above all reason. And that also which makes their sin more heinous; if they send any corn to market, they will dress it very clean, and it shall be of their best corn. But if they sell at home, they which buy shall be constrained to take their worst or meanest and not so well dressed.' A godly and fruitful sermon, preached at Grantham A.D. 1592, by FRANCIS TRIGGE.

of life, but freely dispenses it to his fellow-sinners! "The blessing of him that was ready to perish shall come upon him." (Job, xxix. 13.) The supply is abundant. Let the invitation be welcomed. (Isa. Iv. 1.)

27. *He that diligently seeketh good, procureth favour; but he that seeketh mischief, it shall come unto him:*

There is no negative existence. Man is born for action, "as the sparks fly upward," or the stone tends downward. All of us are living with a stupendous measure of vital activity for *good* or for *mischief*. Man was never intended--least of all the Christian--to be idle. Our Divine Master "went about doing good;" always in motion; active in beneficence. And he is a counterfeit, who does not live after this pattern. Usefulness is everything. We must not rest in life received. We should feel ashamed of our depravity, that we could ever spend a day without the great object--*seeking good*. Nor must we wait to have it brought to us. We must *seek it diligently*, rise up early, and spring with joy to the work. Let us awake to the conscious responsibility of having the means of blessing our fellow-sinners in our own hands. Every talent finds its suitable sphere, and may be "put out to usury" with large returns. There is the practical exercise of "pure and undefiled religion" (Jam. i. 27. Matt. xxv. 35, 36); the teaching of the ignorant; the instruction of the young--the rising hope of our Church--a work of deepening interest and anxiety. Let each of us try what we can do; and, whether it be little or much, do it prayerfully, faithfully, heartily; not damped by trifling hindrances (Eccles. xi. 4); nor making the incapacity of doing much an excuse for doing nothing. In living for others, we live for our true happiness. In *seeking diligently their good, we procure favour*; often from man (Chap. xvi. 7) always from God. (Chap. xii. 2. Neh. v. 19.) He honours a little strength (Rev. iii. 8), the single talent (2 Cor. viii. 12), laid out for him. And 'filling up every hour with some profitable labour, either of heart, head, or hands' (as Brainerd justly observed) 'is an excellent means of spiritual peace and boldness before God.'*

The ceaseless energy of Satan's servants in *seeking mischief* (Ps. xxxvi. 4) puts to shame our indifference! Yet *their own mischief often comes to them*. (Esth. vii. 10. Ps. lvii. 6.) Satan himself found the *mischief* that he brought upon man *come unto him*. (Gen. iii. 1-6, 14, 15.) His servants often become the victims of their own delusions (2 Thess. ii. 10, 11), with the fearful aggravation of having dragged multitudes with them into the pit of ruin. What then will be the fruit of my

* *Life of Brainerd*--Edwards' Works, 8vo. vol. iii. 148. Religious people are heavy, and moping, and cast down, principally because they are idle and selfish--Living and working for God and to save souls, is the only way to knowing more and more of his truth and his salvation.--VENN'S Lift, pp. 321, 354.

diligence? Will it be a blessing or a curse to my fellow-sinners? O my God! may it be from thee, and for thee!

28. *He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch.*

Here is the cause and misery of the fall. Man seeks his rest in God's blessings, in opposition to himself. (Jer. ix. 23, 24.) *Riches* are one of his grounds of trust. (Chap. x. 15. Luke, xii. 19.) He depends on them, as the saint upon his God. (Chap. xviii. 10, 11.) And is not this the "denial of the God that is above?" (Job, xxxi. 24, 25, 28.) A revolting truth indeed! such as only the heart crucified to the world, by the cross of Christ can receive. Not that the possession of riches is sin,* but the *trusting in them*. (Mark, x. 24.) Nor may it be always wrong to improve an opportunity of increasing them. But no one that cares for his own soul, and believes the testimony of God (Mark, x. 25-27. 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10), will *seek* the opportunity; or even avail himself of it without a plain call, and clear advantage for the glory of God. (1 Tim. vi. 18, 19.) Let God be our satisfying portion. Let him be supremely loved and honoured, and he will determine for us, whether the worldly advantage be a Providence or a temptation.

Disappointment will be the certain end of this trust. (Ps. xlix. 6-12. Eccles. v. 10, 11.) "Then we need a staff we shall find a piercing spear. (1 Tim. vi. 10.) Or we *shall fall*, like the withered leaf or blossom before the blast. (Deut. viii. 17-19.) And how many lovely blossom has this *fallen*! (Mark, x. 21, 22.) Thus does "the rich man fade away in his ways!" (Jam. 1. 10, 11.)

But *the righteous is the branch*; not like the leaf or blossom, easily shaken and withered;† but abiding In the true vine: full of life and fruit. (John, xv. 5.) There may be, as in nature's winter, times of apparent barrenness. But the spring returns, and with it *the branch flourishes* never ceasing from yielding fruit; yea--"filled with the fruit of righteousness" (Jer. xvii. 8): the branch of "the Lord's planting; the work of his hands, that he may be glorified; "to be transplanted in his own best time to the other side of the river, where "the leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed." (Isa. lx. 21. Ezra, xlvii. 12.) Shall not this prospect fill us with lively joy and praise?

29. *He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind: and the fool shall be servant to the wise of heart.*

A house at unity with itself, flourishes under the special favour of

* See the gift of God to Abraham, Gen. xxiv. 35; to David, 1 Chron. xxix. 12; to Solomon, 2 Chron. i. 11, 12; to Job, xlii. 11, 12.

† See the same contrast, Ps. iii 7, 8.

God. (Ps. cxxxiii.) But *a house troubled* with division, "cometh to desolation." (Matt. xii. 25.) Often also the irreligion or ungoverned passion of the head blights the comfort of the family. (1 Sam. xxv. 17.) Indeed he cannot neglect his own soul without injury to *his house*. He deprives them of the blessing of holy prayers and godly example; while he *troubles* them with the positive mischief of his ungodliness, and himself *inherits the wind* in utter disappointment. (Hos. viii. 7.) Thus did the rebellion of Korah (Num. xvi. 32,33); the sin of Achan (Josh. vii. 24, 25); the neglect of Eli (1 Sam. ii. 32, 33); the wickedness of Jeroboam and Ahab (1 Kings, xiv. 9-11; xxi. 20--22); the perverseness of the re-builder of Jericho (Ib. xvi. 34) *trouble their house* to its ruin. Prayerless, careless Parents! ponder the responsibility, of bringing a curse, instead of a blessing, upon your families. What! if your "root should be as rottenness, and your blossom go up as dust?" (Isa. v. 24.) What! if a man, instead of building up his house, should be '*so foolish* as to mispend himself, and come to be a *servant* at the last to him that is *wise* to get and keep his own?''* Such retributions have been known (Luke, xv. 13-15) for the abuse of the gifts of God and the neglect of Christian responsibility.

30. *The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life: and he that winneth*
(taketh, marg.) *souls is wise.*

Here is *the fruit* of the *flourishing branch*. (Verse 28.) The whole course of *the righteous*--his influence, his prayers, his instruction, his, example--is a tree of life. What the tree of life was in paradise; what it will be in heaven, that he is in this wilderness, fruitful (Rev. xxii. 2, with chap. x. 11, 31, 32), nourishing (Rev. ii. 7, with chap. x. 21), healing. (Chap. xii. 18; xv. 4.) 'And surely he, who by these means *winneth souls* to righteousness and salvation, *is wise* indeed.'† He only, who purchased them by his blood, can *win* them to himself (and who that knows the work, but will give him all the praise!); yet has he set apart men for the work of 'drawing souls to God, and to the love of him; sweetly gaining, and making a holy conquest of them to God.'‡ This was the *wisdom* of our Divine Master. He "taught the people as they were able to hear it" (Mark, iv. 33); accommodating himself to their convenience (Ib. vi. 31-34), and their prejudices (Matt. xi. 16-19) if that he might *win their souls*. And truly were these opportunities "his meat and drink." For when "wearied with this journey, he sat down on the well," thirsting for water; far more intensely did he thirst *for* the soul of the poor sinner before him; and, having *won* her to himself, he forgot his own want In the joy of her salvation. (John, iv. 6, 32-34.) In close walking after this pattern of

* Bishop Hall. Comp. chap, xvii, 2.

† Bishop HORNE'S *Sermon on the Tree of Life*

‡ Diodati

wisdom, did the great Apostle "become all things to all men, that he might by all means gain some." (1 Cor. ix. 20-22; x.33.) God grant that no Minister of Christ may spend a day, without labouring to win at least one soul for heaven!

But--blessed be God!--this *fruit--this wisdom*--is not confined to the Sacred calling. Do we love our Lord? Arise; let us follow in this happy work, and he will honour us. *The righteous--wife wins her husband's soul* by the *wisdom*, of meekness and sobriety. (1 Pet. iii. 1,2.) The godly neighbour *wins* his fellow-sinner by the patient energy of faith and love. (Jam. v. 19, 20.) "No man" in the true Church of God "liveth unto himself." (Rom. xiv. 7.) The Christian who neglects his brother's salvation, fearfully hazards his own. He is gone back to his native selfishness, if he does not exhibit that "love and kindness of God, which hath appeared unto men." We should be diamonds in the lustre of grace, loadstones for our attractive power in *winning souls*. How poor is the mitre or the crown; how debasing the wisdom of the philosopher, the scholar, or the statesman, compared with this *wisdom*! For *wise* indeed we must be to *win souls*; so hard are they to be won! If only *one soul be taken*, the honour passes thought. 'A soul is a kingdom. As many as we can bring back to God are so many kingdoms' reconquered.* No ambition so great, no results so glorious. "They that be *wise* shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and "they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." (Dan. xii. 3.) Every soul *won by this wisdom*, will be a fresh jewel in the Saviour's crown; a polished stone in that temple, in which he will be honoured throughout eternity.

31. *Behold! the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth; much more the wicked and the sinner.*

The inspired application of this proverb infallibly expounds the mind of God.† It is introduced to us with a special call to attention. --*Behold!* Let *the righteous* expect from their relation to God--not immunity, but strict *recompense*. (Amos, iii. 2. 1 Pet. iv. 17.) They are under the discipline, though not under the curse, of the rod. Such is our too high estimation of the world, conformity to its ways and spirit, and forgetfulness our inheritance and home; that but for the rod we should soon backslide to our stubborn wantonness. *The righteous therefore are recompensed in the earth.*‡ Every perfection of God is

* Quesnel. Luke, xv.

† Pet. iv. 18, is verbatim, LXX translation of this version--So also the Syriac--'Si justus vix vivit, impius et peccator--ubi reperietur?'

‡ Jacob, Gen. xxvii. with xxxiii. Moses and Aaron, Num. xx. 12, with Deut. iii. 23-26; xxxiii. 48-52. Ps. xcix. 6-8. Eli, 1 Sam. ii. 27-36. David, 2 Sam. xii. 9-12. Ps. xxxii. 3, 4; xxxviii. 1-5. Solomon, 1 Kings, xi. 9-18. The disobedient prophet, Ib. xiii. 21-24. Hezekiah, Isa. xxxix. 1-7.

glorified in this dispensation. As a wise Father, he will not indulge them in sin. As a holy God, he must show in them his abhorrence of it. As a faithful God, he will make the chastisements of his rod the means of their restoration. (Ps. lxxxix. 30-32.) But--blessed be God--all the penal curse is subtracted. *We are recompensed in the earth*; not, as we deserve to be, in hell. Nay--"we are chastened of the Lord, that we might not be condemned with the world" (1 Cor. xi. 32); punished here, that we might be spared for ever; *recompensed in the earth*, to be made meet for heaven. (Heb. xii. 10.)

Much more then will the wicked and the sinner be recompensed. If the children be scourged, much more the rebels. If the fatherly corrections be so terrible, even when the child be accepted; what must be the unmingled wrath for the willful sinner? "If the righteous scarcely be saved; where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Pet. iv. 18.) "If they do these things in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" (Luke, xxiii. 31.) "Behold the day of the Lord cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all that do wickedly shall be as stubble." (Mal. iv. 1.) Let the *wicked* tremble. Let the child of God be humbled in the dust--"My flesh. trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy Judgments." (Ps. cxix. 120.)

CHAPTER XII.

1. *Whoso loveth instruction loveth knowledge: but he that hateth reproof is brutish.*

Instruction, as the contrast teaches, chiefly implies discipline (Judg. viii. 16: Jer. vi. 8).--that most needful course for acquiring spiritual *knowledge*. (Ps. CXIX. 67, 71.) For so contrary is it to our proud hearts, that the submission of the will is our only road to Christian attainment. (Matt. xviii. 3, 4.) Yet the value of this attainment abundantly covers the cost. (Philip. iii. 8.) A faithful Ministry, therefore, is a most valuable blessing; and all *instructive* discipline may well be *loved* as the way of life." (Chap. ix. 8. Ps. cxli. 5, with chap. vi. 23. Comp. Ps. xvi. 7; xciv. 12; Jer. xxxi. 18.)

But that irritable pride, that *hates reproof*, as if it were an affront to be told of our faults, argues not only want of grace (Chap. x. 17; xv. 10), but want of understanding--*brutish* folly (Isa. i. 3. Jer. viii.): like the horse, which bites and kicks at the man, who performs a painful operation upon him; tough absolutely necessary for removing a dangerous distemper. He is surely *a brute*, and not a rational creature, who has swallowed poison, and will rather suffer it to take its course, than admit the necessary relief of medicine, lest he should be obliged

to confess his folly, in exposing himself to the need of it.* 0 for a teachable spirit to "sit at the feet of our Divine Master" and learn of Him!

2. *A good man obtaineth favour of the Lord: but a man of wicked devices will he condemn.*

Goodness is "the fruit of the Spirit." (Gal. v. 22.) *The good man* therefore is a man filled with the Spirit. He reflects the munificent goodness of God. (Matt. v. 44, 45.) He is not only the subject, but the almoner, of grace; not only "enriched" with all blessings for himself, but "unto all bountifulness" (2 Cor. ix. 11) for the service of his fellow-creatures. As a benefactor to mankind, he commands our devoted gratitude. But as a far richer reward (of grace indeed, not of debt) (Luke, xvii. 10) he *obtaineth favour of the Lord*. (Isa. lviii. 8-11. Neh. xiii. 14. 1 Pet. iii. 12.) What are all this world's treasures compared with it? (Ps. iv. 6, 7.) Is it not the joy of our salvation; our soothing mercy (Ib. cxix. 76); our covering shield (Ib. v. 12); in the near prospect of eternity, our absorbing interest? (2 Cor. v. 9, 10.) And if here, in a world of sin, it be "life, yea, better than life" (Ps. lxxiii. 3); what will be that unclouded sunshine; "the path of life;" "the fulness of joy in his heavenly presence; the pleasures at his right hand for evermore!" (Ib. xvi. 11.)

The contrast to *the good man* is--not the man--(which alas! may be a child of God) (2 Sam. xi. 12-15) in whom, *wicked devices* are found, but *the man of these devices*. He lives in them as his element; his mind is set upon them. He contrives them. He follows them as his course and delight. (Chap. i. 10-12; vi. 18. Isa. xxxii. 6, 7.) Instead of favour, he "is condemned already." (John, iii. 19, 20.) His sting of conscience and the curse of God is present *condemnation*. (Zech. v. 3, 4. 1 Kings, xii. 25-30; xiv. 10.) And in the great day, the All-seeing Judge "shall be a swift witness against him!" (Mal. iii. 5. Ps. l. 16-21.)

3. *A man shall not be established by wickedness: but the root of the righteous shall not be moved.*

The man of evil devices may prosper for a time, but he shall not be established by wickedness; except as God may permit it, in the sovereignty of his purposes, and the judicial chastening of his wrath. But how soon was the successful treason of Abimelech (Judg. ix. 54-57); and the Israelitish kings (1 Kings, xvi. 9, 10. 2 Kings, xv. 10-14. 2 Chron. xxi. 4, 13-15), brought to an end! Ahab strove to *establish* himself in despite of the threatened curse of God. He increased his family, trained them with care under the tutelage of his choicest nobility. And surely one at least out of seventy might remain to inherit his throne. But

* Lawson *in loco*. Comp. Ps. xxxiii. 9.

this was the vain "striving" of the worm "with his Maker." One hour swept them all away; and not a word of the threatening fell to the ground.* The *evil device* of Caiaphas also, *to establish his nation by wickedness*, was the means of its overthrow. (John, xi. 49, 50; with Matt. xxi. 43, 44.) Such is the infatuation of sin!

Firm and unshaken is the condition of *the righteous*. Their leaves may wither in the blast. Their branches may tremble in the fury of the tempest. But *their root*--the true principle of life--*shall not be moved*. They "are scarcely saved," not without many tossings. But they are surely saved, beyond the powers of hell to destroy. Does not thy faith--Christian--sometimes *faint* in the wearisome assaults of thy implacable enemy? Rejoice in the assurance, that it cannot *fail*. (Luke, xxii. 31, 32.) Thou art "rooted and grounded" in a sure foundation. (Eph. iii. 17. Col. ii. 7.) Let "the Lord, who is thy strength,"--be "thy song."--'He only is my Rock and my salvation; I shall not be greatly moved: I shall *not be moved* at all.' (Isa. ii. 2. Ps. lxii. 2, 6. Mic. vii. 8. Rom. viii. 31-39.)

And how bright is this prospect for the Church! *It shall not be moved*. (Ps. cxxv. 1, 2. Isa. xxvi. 1.) Triumphant is her confidence in the day of conflict. "The gates of hell shall not prevail. No weapon that is formed against her shall prosper." (Matt. xvi. 18. Isa. liv. 17.)

4. *A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness to his bones.*

Faithful (Chap. xxxi. 11, 12), chaste (Tit. ii. 5. 1 Pet. iii. 2), reverentially obedient (Eph. v. 22, 23. 1 Pet. iii. 1, 4-6), "immovable in affection (Tit. ii. 4), delighting to see her husband honoured, respected, and loved; covering, as far as may be, his failings; prudent in the management of her family (Chap. xiv. 1), conscientious in the discharge of her domestic duties (Chap. xxxi. 27, 28); kind and considerate to all around her (Ib. verses 20, 26); and as the root of all--"fearing the Lord" (Ib. verse 30)--such is *the virtuous woman*; "the weaker vessel" indeed, but *a woman of strength*,† with all her graces in godly energy. She is not the ring on her husband's finger, or the chain of gold around his neck. That were far too low. She is his *crown*; his brightest ornament;‡ drawing the eyes of all upon him, as eminently honoured and blessed. (Chap. xxxi. 23.)

Truly affecting is the contrast of a contentious (Chap. xix. 13; xxi. 9,

* 1 Kings, xxi. 21. with 2 Kings, x. 1-7. Compare the striking figures in the book of Job. xv. 29; xx. 5-9; xxvii. 13-17.

† Heb. 1 Pet. iii. 7. with Chap. xxxi. 10. Ruth, iii. 11. **gunh andreia**--LXX. Strenua, Schultens, Fortis, Geier. The etymology of **areth** in Greek, and *virtus* in Latin, gives the meaning of manly courage. In the first ages of barbarism this was the 'primary virtue' and therefore it naturally became the generic term of virtue.

‡ Perhaps there may be some allusion to *the crown* on the nuptial day. Comp. 1 Cor. xi. 7.

19), imperious, extravagant, perhaps unfaithful, wife; in the levity of her conduct forgetting her proper place and subjection: seeking the admiration of others, instead of being satisfied with her husband's regard. This is indeed a living disease--*rottenness in his bones*;* marring his usefulness; undermining his happiness; perhaps driving him into temptation, and "a snare of the devil." Let a young woman, in contemplating this holy union, ponder well and in deep prayer its weighty responsibility. Will she be *a crown to her husband*, or *one that maketh ashamed*? Will she be what God made the woman--"an help meet" (Gen. ii. 18); or--what Satan made her--a tempter--*to her husband*? (Ib. iii. 6. 1 Kings, xxi. 25. Job, ii. 9.) If she be not *a crown* to him, she will be a shame to herself. If she be *rottenness to his bones*, she will be a plague to her own. For what is the woman's happiness, but to be the helper of her husband's joy? Oh! let their mutual comfort be sought, where alone it can be solidly found, in "dwelling together as heirs of the grace of life." (1 Pet. iii. 7.) Better never to have seen each other, than to live together forgetful of this great end of improving their union as an indulgent gift of God, and an important talent for his service, and their own eternal happiness.

5. *The thoughts of the righteous are right: but the counsels of the wicked are deceit.* 6. *The words of the wicked are to lie in wait for blood: but the mouth of the upright shall deliver them.* 7. *The wicked are overthrown, and are not: but the house of the righteous shall stand.*

The workings of good and evil are here traced to the fountain-head. (Gen. vi. 5.) The *thoughts of the righteous*, "renewed in the spirit of his mind" (Eph. iv. 23), *are right*. (Chap. xi. 23.) He learns to measure everything by the unerring rule, and to lean upon his God in the careful distrust of himself. Many indeed are his deviations. But there is an overcoming law within, that, in despite of all oppositions, fixes *his thoughts*, with delight on God and his law (Ps. cxxxix. 17, 18. Rom. vii. 15-23), and gives to them a single bias for his service. Widely different are the thoughts of *the wicked*, ripening into *counsels* fraught with *deceit*. Such were *the counsels* of Joseph's brethren to deceive their father; of Jeroboam, under a feigned consideration of the people; of Daniel's enemies, under pretence of honouring the king; of Sanballat, under the guise of friendship; of Haman, under the cover of patriotism; of Herod, under the profession of worshipping the infant Saviour.† Indeed from such "a corrupt fountain" as man's heart, what else can be expected but "bitter waters?" (Jer. xvii. 9. Matt. xv. 19.)

* Jerome aptly compares it to the worm eating into the heart of the tree, and destroying it, Trapp *in loco*.

† See Gen. xxxvii. 18-20. 1 Kings, xii. 26-28. Dan. vi. 4-7. Neh. vi. 2. Esth. iii. 8-10. Matt. ii. 7, 8.

Then look at *words*--the natural organ of the *thoughts*. How murderous were *the words* of Ahithophel; the trap laid for our beloved Lord; the conspiracy against the great Apostle*--all *lying in wait for blood!* (Chap. xxix. 10. Ps. xxxvii. 12, 14.) The fiercer ebullitions of humanity may indeed be softened down and restrained.† But the principles remain the same. The fiery elements only lie in slumbering cover, and often break out, wasting the very face of society. Yet even in this bursting storm the *mouth of the upright preserves them*. (Chap. xi. 9.) The wisdom of our Divine Master was an unfailing *preservative*. (Matt. xxii. 34, 35, 46.) The same *mouth* was a cover to his *upright* disciples, with little of man's help, and much of man's opposition; "None could gainsay or resist." (Luke, xxi. 14, 15. Acts, iv. 13, 14.)

We cannot but wonder at the long-suffering, that suffers *the wicked* thus to load the earth with such a mass of guilt and misery. Yet their triumphing is but for a moment. (Job, xx. 5. Ps. xxxvii. 35, 36.) Look at Haman--*his deceitful counsels, his bloody words. He is overthrown, and is not*. (Esth. vii. 10.) "And shall not God avenge his own elect?" (Luke, xviii. 7.) *Their house*, feeble as it often is, and brought low (Verse 3. 1 Kings, xv. 4), *shall stand*. They shall "have a place in the Lord's house" immovable here (Isa. lvi. 4, 5), and in eternity. (Rev. iii. 12.) Yes--those, *whose thoughts and words are upright, shall stand*, when all is sinking around--"They shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I shall make up my jewels." (Mal. iii. 17.)

8. *A man shall be commended according to his wisdom: but he that is of a perverse heart shall be despised.*

The ordinary judgment of this world is to "put darkness for light" (Isa. v. 20), and therefore to *commend* according to folly, rather than *according to wisdom*. And yet even hated *wisdom* often carries its voice of conviction both to conscience and judgment; and *a man is commended according to it*. Hence the elevation of Joseph and Daniel; the honour paid to David in private life; and the universal respect shewn to his wise son.‡ Our Lord's *wisdom* was also *commended*, not only by the popular voice (Matt. vii. 28, 29), but even by the testimony of his enemies. (John, vii. 46.) the *wisdom* of Stephen, "making his face to shine," overpowered his beholders with solemn awe. (Acts, vi. 10, 15.) How thrilling will be the *commendation of wisdom* before the assembled universe! (Luke, xii. 42-44.) Who will not then acknowledge the *wise* choice of an earthly cross with an heavenly crown? (Matt. v. 11, 12.) *Wisdom* (2 Sam. xx. 18-22) then--not dignity, riches, or talent

* 2 Sam. xvii. 1-4. Luke, xx. 19-21. Acts, xxiii. 14, 15.

† See Rom. iii. 15, as the proof of universal and total depravity, verses 9, 10.

‡ Gen. xli. 39. Dan. i. 19, 20; ii. 46. 1 Sam. xvi. 18; xviii. 30. 1 Kings, iii. 28; iv. 29-34.

--brings honour. This is the Lord's *commendation*. It must be right. (2 Cor. x. 18.) It will stand for eternity.

What then makes a man *despised*? Not his poverty, obscure circumstances, or misfortune; but *perverseness of spirit* (1 Kings, xii. 16. Mal. ii. 8, 9), too proud to be taught: following a mad course to ruin. Perverse Nabal was *despised* by his own family (1 Sam. xxv. 17, 25); the prodigal by his former companions. (Luke, xv. 15, 16.) And of all such, shame will be their present promotion (Chap. iii. 35; xi. 2; xviii. 3), their eternal doom. (Dan. xii. 2.)

9. *He that is despised, and hath a servant, is better than he that honoureth himself, and lacketh bread.*

A man, who has only a competency, sufficient to *have a servant* (Chap. xxx. 8, 9), and making no appearance, may be *despised* by his richer neighbours. (1 Sam. xviii. 23.) But his state is *better* than the proud show of rank, or family, without the means of sustaining it; or than one humbled by Providence, yet unhumbled in heart. (Chap. xiii. 7. Luke, xiv. 11.) Nothing is so despicable as to be proud, where there is nothing to be proud of. Sometimes from 'a shabby gentility'* --the foolish vanity of keeping up appearances--a man debars himself from the common comforts of life--*honouring himself, and lacking bread*. Such slaves are men to the opinion of the world! Principle is sacrificed to pride; and men rebel against Him, who makes no mistake in his allotments, and often appoints a descent from worldly elevation as a profitable discipline. (Jam. i. 10, 11. Dan. iv. 32-37.) Yet it is hard, even for the Christian, as Bunyan reminds us, 'to go down the Valley of Humiliation, and catch no slip by the way.' We need our Master's unworldly, elevated spirit (John, vi. 15) to make a safe descent. Remember--"the pride of life is not of the Father, but is of the world." (1 John, ii. 16.) "Let our moderation be known unto all men," under the constraining recollection--"The Lord is at hand." (Philip. iv. 5. Mark, xiii. 1, 2.) How will the dazzling glare of man's esteem fade away before the glory of his appearing!

10. *A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies (bowels, marg.) of the wicked are cruel.*

The minuteness of Scripture is one of its most valuable properties. It shows the mind of God on many points apparently trivial. Here it tests our profession by our treatment of the brutes. They were given to man, as the lord of the creation, for his use, comfort, and food (Gen. i. 28; ix. 3); not for his wantonness. *A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast*, duly attends to its comfort (Gen. xxiv. 32), and never presses it beyond its strength. (Ib. xxxiii. 13, 14.) The brutal habits,

* Bp. Sanderson.

therefore, the coarse words, inhuman blows (Num. xxii. 27), and hard tyranny on the public roads, are disgraceful to our nature. The delight of children in putting animals to pain for amusement, if not early restrained, will mature them in cruelty, demoralize their whole character, and harden them against all the sympathies of social life. For, as Mr. Locke wisely observed, 'they who delight in the sufferings and destruction of inferior creatures, will not be apt to be very compassionate and benign to those of their own kind.'* Thus *the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel*, having no right feeling (Gen. xxxvii. 26-28); only a milder exercise of barbarity (1 Sam. xi. 1, 2. Luke, xxiii. 13-16); and usually meted out for some selfish end.†

But why is this humanity marked as the feature of *a righteous man*? Because it is the image of our heavenly Father, who spreads his cherishing wings over his whole creation. (Ps. xxxiii. 5; cxlv. 9, 16; cxlvii. 9.) As though the field of man was too small for his goodness, *he regardeth the life of the beast*. (Ib. xxxvi. 6, 7.) Witness the sanctions of his law (Exod. xxii. 30. Deut. v. 14; xxv. 4), and the dispensations of his judgments. (Jonah, iv. 11.) Nay, even did he by miraculous interference put into the mouth of the stupid ass to plead as it were the cause of the dumb creation. (Num. xxii. 28-30.) Must not then his children reflect his whole image of love? (Matt. v. 44, 45.). And is not the want of any feature of this image a mark of doubtful relationship to him?

11. *He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread: but he that followeth vain persons is void of understanding.*

Special honour is given to the work of *tilling the land*. God assigned it to Adam in Paradise. (Gen. ii. 15.) It was the employment of his eldest son. (Ib. iv. 2.) Its origin appears to have been under immediate Divine Teaching. (Isa. xxviii. 23-26.) In ancient times it was the business or relaxation of kings.‡ A blessing is ensured to

* *Thoughts concerning Education*

† Acts, xxiv. 26, 27.-- 'We have been used to hear much of the benevolence of infidels, and the philanthropy of deists. It is all a pretence. Self is the idol, and self-indulgence the object, in the accomplishment of which they are little scrupulous about the means. Where self is the idol, the heart is cruel. While they talk of universal charity, they regard not the cruelty of robbing millions of the consolation of religion. While they clamour about reform, they would with unfeeling barbarity exult in the demolition of venerable establishments. While they speak of harmless gaiety and pleasure, they would treacherously corrupt piety, and pollute unsuspecting innocence' --Holden *in loco*.

‡ 2 Chron. xxvi. 10. 'Omnium rerum, ex quibus aliquid acquiritur, nihil est agricultura melius, nihil uberius, nihil dulcius, nihil homine libero dignius.' Such was the judgment of the Roman Moralist.--Cicero De Offic. B. I. xlii 'Of all the arts of civilized man, agriculture is transcendently the most essential and valuable. Other arts may contribute to the comfort, the convenience, and the embellishment of life. But the cultivation of the soil stands in immediate connexion with our very existence. The life itself, to whose comfort, and convenience, and the embellishment, other arts contribute, is by this sustained: so that others without it can avail nothing.'--WARDLAW on Eccles. v. 9.

diligence; sometimes abundant (Gen. xxvi. 12); always such as we should be *satisfied with*. (Chap. xxvii. 23-27.).

The principle applies alike to every lawful calling. Industry is an ornamental grace (Chap. xxxi. 13-22), and a Christian obligation. (Rom. xii. 11. 1 Thess. iv. 11.) Most ample is its reward in the work of God. How rich is the harvest for the diligent student of the Scriptures! Truly he shall be *satisfied with bread*. But idleness is a spot upon our royal name, (2 Thess. iii. 10-12.) As an old writer observes The proud person is Satan's *throne*, and the *idle* man his *pillow*, He sitteth in the former, and sleepeth quietly on the latter.* The man therefore that *followeth vain persons*, instead of honest labour, proves himself to be *void of understanding*, and will reap the fruits of his folly (Chap. xiii. 20. Acts, v. 36, 37)--perhaps throughout eternity.†

12. *The wicked desireth the net of evil men: but the root of the righteous yieldeth fruit.*

Man is always restless to press onwards to something not yet enjoyed. The Christian reaches forth to higher privileges and increasing holiness. (Philip. iii, 12-14.) *The wicked* emulate each other in wickedness; and if they see *evil men* more successful than themselves, they *desire their net* (Ps. x. 8-10. Jer. v. 26-28); to discover their plans, in order to imitate them. Not satisfied with the honest "gain of godliness," they *desire a net*, in which they may grasp richer treasures of this world's vanity. (1 Tim. vi. 10.) The history of the Church strongly illustrates this energy of sin; Infidelity and Popery; one net following another with more crafty device. Such is the root of evil, fraught with destruction. *But the root of the righteous yieldeth fruit*--true, solid, abundant fruit; not always visible, but always acceptable. (Heb. xiii. 15, 16.) Dependence on Christ is the source of this blessing; necessary *in order to fruit*,‡ and never failing to produce it. (John, xv. 5.) The spiritual branches 'are nourished and increased by the living root of God's grace and blessing.'§

13. *The wicked is snared by the transgression of his lips: but the just shall come out of trouble.*

We have seen the intense *desire of the wicked* to snare others in the *net*. Here he is *snared* himself: *The transgressions of his lips* become

* SWINNOCK'S *Christian Man's Calling*, Part I. 346.

† The LXX gives a curious addition to this verse, not without some wholesome application to young votaries of pleasure--'He that is *sweet in wine-parties* shall leave behind disgrace in his strong places.'

‡ John, xv. 4. Rom. vii: 4. It was the remark of a venerable relative of the Writer's, who was never suspected of enthusiasm--'As surely as the vine-branch can have no powers, independent of the root; so surely cannot the Christian think, act, or live, as such, but only so far as he derives his abilities from the stock, on which he is engrafted.'--The Rev. WILLIAM JONES' (Nayland) *Enquiry upon the Spring*, p.36. § Diodati

the *snare* of his life. (Chap. xviii. 7. Ps. lxiv. 8.) 'Many have felt the lash upon their backs for the want of a bridle on their tongues.'* Such a snare were *the lips* of the Amalekite bringing the tidings of Saul's death. Expecting a reward, he found his death. (2 Sam. iv. 9-12.) Such also was Adonijah's deceitful petition (1 Kings, ii. 22, 23); the hypocritical loyalty of Daniel's enemies (Dan. vi. 7, 8, 24); the fearful imprecation of the devoted nation. (Matt. xxvii. 25.) *The lips of the wicked* miss their mark, and become the instruments of his ruin. (Ps. xxxv. 8.)

On the other hand, the godly exercise of the lips often delivers *out of the trouble*, into which the wicked rush headlong. (Jer. xxvi. 12-16.) The noble confession of Caleb and Joshua brought them safe out of the trouble which was frowning upon their rebellious brethren. (Num. xiv. 6-10, 24.) And even when *the just* "are overtaken with" *a transgression of the lips*, still their faithful God makes a difference. He will not indeed wink at sin in his own children. (Amos, iii. 2.) But while his covenant provides stripes for *their transgressions*, it ensures deliverance in the end. (Ps. lxxxix. 32, 33.) Thus a presumptuous confidence is restrained; and a humbling, self-abasing, tender confidence is established.

14. *A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth; and the if recompense of a man's hands shall be rendered unto him.*

We have seen the snare of the tongue. Here is its blessing, not to others (Chap. x. 20, 21) only, but to ourselves. Have we the mark of "the saints of God, to speak of the glory of his kingdom?" (Ps. cxlv. 10, 11.) What a dignity will this grand subject give to our conversation! What a preservative from that frivolous "talk of the lips, which tendeth only to penury!" (Chap. xiv. 23.) What a tone of elevation to our whole character! (Mal. iii. 16, 17.) How shall we be *satisfied with good by the fruit of our consecrated lips*! (Chap. xiii. 2; xv. 23.) When our God becomes, not our visitor, but our inmate, the *fruit of our mouth* is no constrained effort, but "out of the abundance of heart"

From the devotedness of the lips flows the ready exercise of *the hands*. Every member of the body is his purchased possession. (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.) And here also is a sure *recompense*. For who ever served God "for nought?" (Job, i. 9, 10.) "He is not unrighteous to forget our work and labour of love. A cup of cold water given to a disciple in his name shall in no wise lose its reward." (Heb. vi. 10. Matt. x. 42.) The meanest exercise of love will be abundantly and eternally *recompensed*.

* Henry *in loco*.

15. *The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.*

The fool's conceit hinders his wisdom. (Job, xi. 12.) 1 discouraging case! (Chap. xxvi. 12.) *His way is right in his own eyes.* (Chap. xvi. 2.) He needs no direction, asks no *counsel*, is stubborn in his own way, because it is his own (Judg. ii. 19), and follows it to his own ruin. His chief danger is his security. (Deut. xxix. 19.) There may be no flagrant sin, nothing that degrades him below the level of his respectable neighbour. He has no doubt of heaven. Instead of the way being so narrow, that few find it (Matt. vii. 14); in his view it is so easy of access, that few miss it. Thus all his religion is self-delusion. (Chap. xiv. 12.) O my God! save me from myself--from my own self-deceitfulness.

What a proof of wisdom is a teachable spirit! What an excellent means of increasing it! (Chap. i. 5.) Was not Moses wiser for *hearkening to Jethro's counsel* (Exod. xviii. 14-24); and David for listening to the restraining advice of Abigail? (1 Sam. xxv. 23-32.) How precious then to the child of God is the office of the Divine Counsellor! (Isa. ix. 6.) How wise the reverential faith, that *hearkens to his counsel*! Whom does he ever disappoint? Whom does he "upbraid?" (Jam. i. 5.)

16. *A fool's wrath is presently (in that day, marg.) known: but a prudent man covereth shame.*

Let the tongue be ever under discipline. An unbridled tongue is the proof of an unrenewed heart. (Ib. ver. 26; iii.2.) But specially never let it be loose in a moment of *wrath*. How readily is *the fool known by his wrath*! He has no command of himself. On the first rising, he bursts out with an ungovernable impulse. (Chap. xiv. 17, 29; xxv. 28.) Truly is *wrath* called *shame*. For is it not a *shame*, that unruly passions should, as it were, trample reason under foot, disfigure even the countenance, and subjugate the whole man to a temporary madness? (Dan. iii. 19.) What else were Saul's unseemly sallies against David and Jonathan;¹ Jezebel's boiling rage against Elijah;² Nebuchadnezzar's unreasonable decree to kill his wise men, because they could not interpret his vision?³

Yet far more painful is the sight of *the fool's wrath* in the children of God; in Moses, the meekest of men;⁴ in David, "the man after God's own heart;"⁵ in "Asa, whose heart was perfect with God all his days."⁶ Nothing more excites the scoff of the ungodly, than the sight of these gross ebullitions, which Divine grace ought to restrain. But

¹ 1 Sam. xviii. 10, 11; xix. 9-11; xx 30-34.

³ Dan. ii. 12,13.

⁵ 1 Sam. xxv. 21, 22.

² 1 Kings, xix. 1,2

⁴ Num. xx. 10, 11.

⁶ 2 Chron. xvi. 10.

what is "man in his best estate," left to himself! animated with the spirit of a wild beast! *in that day* he becomes an object of *shame*. (Chap. xvii. 12.)

Self-controul, that *covers the shame*, and represses the rising fermentation, is true Christian *prudence*. (Chap. xxix. 11. Judg. viii. 2, 3.) Even as a matter of policy, it is most commendable. (1 Sam. x. 27.) But as a gracious principle, it is indeed a victory more honourable than the martial triumph (Chap. xvi. 32; xix. 11; xx. 3); not only subduing our own spirit, but melting the hardness of our adversary. (Rom. xii. 18-21.)

Do we feel our temper at any time ready to rise? Cry instantly to Him, who quiets the storm. (Matt. viii. 26. Ps. lxxv. 7.) Keep before our eyes his blessed example, "who, being reviled, reviled not again" (1 Pet. ii. 23); and be what we behold. (2 Cor. iii. 18.)

17. *He that speaketh truth sheweth forth righteousness: but a false witness deceit.*

This proverb may appear almost too obvious to need remark. But the Scripture not only sets out what is deep and searching, but stamps the every-day truths with the seal of God for our more reverential obedience. Yet there is here more than lies on the surface. It might seem enough for a faithful witness to *speak truth*. But no--he must *shew forth righteousness*; what is just, as well as what is true. The best-intentioned purpose must not lead us to conceal what is necessary to bring the cause to a righteous issue; "rejoicing not in iniquity, but rejoicing in the truth." (1 Cor. xiii. 6.)

A *false witness* does not always deal with open lying, but with *deceit*--truth misrepresented, concealed, and thus turned into falsehood. Thus was Doeg a *false witness* against the priests. He states the fact, but by suppression of circumstances gives a false impression. (1 Sam. xxi. 1-7; xxii. 9, 10.) The *false witness* condemned our Lord by a similar perverse misconstruction of his words. (Matt. xxvi. 60, 61. John, ii. 19-21.) Oh, cherish a deep abhorrence of deceit in all its forms and beginnings. (Chap. xiii. 5. Ps. cxix. 163.) Christian obligation and privilege alike forbid it. (Eph. iv. 22, 25.) *Truth and deceit* are not mere moral qualities, but the distinctive mark of the two classes of the world. Look to it, that the broad stamp of *truth and righteousness* brings out the testimony--"Behold! an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." (John, i. 47.)

18. *There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health.*

Who has not felt the piercings of false, unkind, inconsiderate *speeches*? How keenly have the servants of God suffered from this

*sword!** Many will speak daggers without compunction, who would be afraid to use them. Surely it was not without reason, that our Lord charges an angry word or tongue with the guilt of murder. (Matt. v. 21, 22.) The source of this mischief demonstrably shews its malignity. "The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity, *and it is set on fire of hell.*" (Jam. iii. 6.) Indeed, 'a great and almost incredible calamity is it, that man, who was created for humanity, should be so corrupted, that no animal in the world is more ferocious and malignant.'†

Yet is the little member no less powerful to heal than to wound. It gives instant healing to *the piercings of the sword* (Judg. vii. 1-3. 1 Sam. xix. 1-7; xxv. 32, 33), even to the very wound, which it may have constrained to inflict.‡ But it is *the tongue of the wise, that is health.* Its unrestrained and unregulated vent might be hurtful. *Wisdom* is the guiding principle; not a loose loquacity, but a delicate discriminating tact, directing us, how, when, what, to whom to speak; sometimes repressing; sometimes quickening: "the tongue of the learned, to speak a word in season to him that is weary." (Isa. 1.4.) This is no negative responsibility. It is not enough, that there is no poison in the tongue. It must be *healing*, not only purified from "corrupt communication," but "ministering grace unto the hearers." (Eph. iv. 29.) What need have we of the "indwelling of the word in all wisdom," that in "teaching and admonishing one another, our speech may be always with grace," wholesome and edifying, to the glory of our common Lord! (Col. iii. 16; iv. 6.)

19. *The lip of truth shall be established for ever; but a lying tongue is but for a moment.*

How important is it to eye eternity in all our words! *Truth* would then be seen in its permanent value and results. The profession may bring us into present trouble. (Matt. x. 32-39.) But *its lip shall be established for ever.* Who will gainsay the martyr's testimony--'Be of good comfort, Master Ridley; play the man? We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England, as, I trust, *shall never be put out.*'§ The lip also of the faithful minister of God is *established for ever.* For "whatsoever he binds and looses on earth, shall be bound and loosed in heaven." (Matt. xviii. 18. John, xx. 23.)

Truth then is eternal. *Lying*, even if it suits our purpose as an easy escape from difficulty (a miserable--short-lived policy!) *is but for a moment.* (Ps. lli. 4, 5.) Nay--should it escape detection for a whole life; yet with eternity before us, what a moment is that! And

* Job, xlii. 4; xvi. xix. David, Ps. xlii. 10; lli. 2. Jeremiah, xviii. 18-23. Lam. iii. 14. Paul, 2 Cor. x. 1, 2, 10; xlii. 2, 3.

† DAILLE on Col. iii. 8.

‡ Ps. cxli. 5. Comp. the *healing* counsel, 2 Cor. ii. 6-11, with 1 Cor. V.

§ Foxe, vii. 550.

what will be the relief of this short moment under the tremendous wrath of God? (Rev. xxi. 8; xxii. 15.) God's own people have always found this *momentary* escape from trouble to be followed by shame and confusion.* The lie of the Gibeonites ended in their confusion (Josh. ix.) The fruit of Gehazi's lie was the pleasure *for a moment*. The shame endured under the end. (2 Kings, v. 25-27.) Under the same withering curse, *the lying tongue* of false teachers passes away (2 Tim. iii. 6-9); while truth remains constant. 'None are so visibly blasted as those who make no conscience of a lie.'† Children! ponder it well --Eternity is at once the gain of truth, and the cost of a lie. (Ps. xv. 1, 2. Rev. xxi. 8.) But oh! the infinite difference between heaven and hell!

20. *Deceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil: but to the counsellors of peace is joy.* 21. *There shall no evil happen to the just; but the wicked shall be filled with mischief.* 22. *Lying lips are abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly are his delight.*

The principle of *deceit* is here traced to its fountain--*the heart*. How early it is found there, the first lisplings of infancy too plainly prove. A lie is ready upon the child's lips, when the temptation is presented to it; though nothing is to be gained by it, but the hateful pleasure of sin. Yet though *deceit* is the native fruit of the heart, all are not equally ready in *imagining evil*--"inventors of evil things." (Chap. xiv. 22. Mic. ii. 1.) The principle is not equally active, or equally developed in all. But when it does operate, *the wicked are filled with mischief*, and reap the full harvest in disappointment and ruin. (Esth. vii. 10. Job, v. 12, 13.)

How frightful also is it to remark the outward expression of *deceit* in *lying lips*! Diversified indeed are its forms--falsehood, exaggeration, colouring, wilful perversion, wrong impressions produced or encouraged.‡ No part of Christian Education is more important, than the training of children in the deepest reverence for the simplicity of truth.--Dr. Johnson has well observed, that the prevalence of falsehood arises more from carelessness about truth, than from intentional lying. If a child was relating what he had seen in the street, 'do not'--he

* Abraham, Gen. xx. 1-16. Isaac, xxvi. 7-10. Peter, Matt. xxvi. 69-75.

† *Matthew Henry's Life*, chap. xiii.

‡ 'As one common but most responsible instance of this,' (observes Mr. Goode in his valuable Sermon on this text), 'is instructing servants to say- *'Not at home.'* Great is their guilt, who thus tempt a fellow-creature to litter a palpable untruth for the paltry convenience of a master. No Christian servant will consent to defile his conscience by acquiescing in any such iniquity. 'It is a matter of common consent, and everyone understands it.' Be it so--it is untruth still, and *lying lips are abomination to the Lord*. Moreover, *if it be* so generally understood, and admitted without offence; then how much more honourable and Christian to say at once--'We are engaged. We wish to be alone!' Who that accepts one excuse will not readily accept the other?' Comp. Eccus. vii. 13.

advises--'suffer him to say, that he had seek it out of one window, if he has seen it out of another.' Let them know that every wilful deviation from strict accuracy bears the stamp of *lying lips*, which are (and let the sentence be pondered, not only by children, but by all*) *an abomination to the Lord*. (Chap. vi. 16, 17. Pi. v. 6.) With this sin were Ananias and Sapphira hurried into eternity. (Acts, v. 1-10.) The wilful liar proves his parentage (John, viii. 44), and will be classed in eternity with all that is hateful. And fearfully will a righteous God, even in forgiving his own child, "take vengeance of his inventions." †

Here however is *peace*--the contrast to evil inventions: and, instead of that sorrow which is connected with *deceit* (Judg. ix. 2 Sam. xv. 6; xviii. 15), to them that "seek and pursue it," there is *joy*. Thus doubtless did Jonathan and Abigail *rejoice* in the success of their good *counsels*. (1 Sam. xix. 4-7; xxv. 23-32.) And most responsible is the obligation of Christians to be *counsellors of peace*, breathing their Master's spirit of peace and love. (Col. iii. 14, 15.) A blessed office indeed is it! pouring in the balm of peaceful counsel upon irritated feeling. They will mediate, explain, and cover with considerate prudence all the little causes of excitement. They will bring out the strong and unchangeable obligations of Christian love. They will seize the happy moment of softening to rekindle confidence. Happy indeed are they, in *the joy* of their own conscience, in their dignity as "the children of God" (Matt. v. 9), in the rich harvest of their Christian exertions. (Jam. iii. 17, 18.) Instead of being *filled with mischief*, *no evil shall happen to them*. *Evil*, whenever permitted, will become their good. (Rom. viii. 28.) They shall be supported in it,¹ delivered out of it,² sanctified by it.³ Its sharpness will pierce their corruptions. Its bitterness will wean them from the creature. Its furnace will mould them into the image of their Lord. Thus, what to the ungodly would be a mass of sorrow, *to the just* becomes a world of blessing.

Freedom from *deceit* is their broad mark in the promiscuous crowd. They not only speak, but *they deal truly*: uniform in light and life. (John, iii. 21.) They bear the image of a God of truth, and he delights in them. (Chap. xi. 1.) "They are children that cannot lie. So he is their Saviour." (Isa. lxiii. 8; xxxiii. 15, 16.)

23. *A prudent man concealeth knowledge: but the heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness.*

Knowledge is a talent to be wisely, not promiscuously, communicated.

* Lavater *in loco*.

† Ps. xcix. 8. Comp. the example of Jacob, Gen. xxvii. with xxxvii. 31-35. David's He Punished with such dreadful results, 1 Sam. xxi. 2; xxii. 18, 19.

¹ 1 Cor. x. 18. 2 Cor. xii. 7-10. ² Verse 13. Ps. xxxiv. 19. ³ Ps. cxix. 67, 71.

(Chap. ix. 9. Matt. vii. 6.) In Scriptural *knowledge* indeed there must be no *concealment* of fundamental truths (Ps. xl. 9, 10. 1 Cor. xv. 3); or in declaring on suitable occasions, or to suitable persons, the gracious dealings of God to our own souls. Much harm would be done by obtruding upon the ungodly those interior matters of Christian experience, which we are invited to tell to those "that fear God." (Ps. lxvi. 16.) Every truth is not therefore fitting for every person, or for every time. (Eccles. iii. 7. Amos, v. 1.3.) Our blessed Lord charged upon his disciples the prudent *concealment of knowledge*, after his example, till a more favourable season. (Matt. xvi. 20; xvii. 9. John, xvi. 12.) The Apostle *concealed his knowledge* for fourteen years, and even then mentioned it reluctantly, to vindicate his own rightful claims of Apostleship. (2 Cor. xii. 1-6.) Elihu, though "full of matter," and longing to give vent, yet *prudently concealed his knowledge*, till his elders had opened his way. (Job, xxxii. 6, 18, 19.)

Circumstances also may sometimes *prudently dictate concealment*. Abraham spared the feelings of his family, and cleared his own path, by hiding the dreadful message of his God.* Joseph *concealed* his kindred for the discipline of his brethren (Gen. xlii. 7); Esther from a *prudent* regard to consequences to herself. (Esth. ii. 10.) Nothing can justify speaking contrary to the truth. But we are not always obliged to tell the whole truth. Jeremiah answered all that he was bound to speak; not all that he might have spoken. (Jer. xxxviii. 24-27.) In all these cases "the wise man's heart will discern both time and judgment" (Eccles. viii. 5. Chap. xv. 2); cherishing at once a sound judgment and an ardent love for truth.

The fool however everywhere *proclaims his foolishness*. (Eccles. x. 3, 12-14.) He imprudently opens his heart. (Judg. xvi. 17.) He is dogmatical in dispute, when wiser men are cautious. He is teaching, when he ought to take the learner's place; his self-confidence *proclaiming* his emptiness. (1 Tim. vi. 3,4.) Self-distrust and humility are most important, to enable us to improve the gifts of God for his glory.

24. *The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute.*

Diligence is the ordinary path to advancement. Pharaoh required men of activity for the charge of his cattle (Gen. xlvii 6); Solomon for the administration of his kingdom. (1 Kings, xi. 28.) This was Joseph's road to *bearing rule*. (Chap. xxii. 29.) But if it does not raise in the world it will command influence in its own sphere. The faithful steward is made *ruler* over his Lord's household. (Matt. xxiv. 45-47.) The active trader bears *rule* over many cities. (Ib. xxv. 21.) Diligence

* Gen. xxii. 1-7. Comp. Moses' conduct, Exod. iv. 18.

therefore is not a moral virtue separate from religion, but rather a component part of it. (Rom. xii. 11.)

The *slothful* spirit brings a man under bondage. 'He is perpetually needing counsel of others, and hanging upon it.'* In the grand concern, he is the slave of his own lust; in the worst service, under the most degrading tyranny; "wicked" because *slothful*," and "cast out and condemned as an unprofitable servant." (Matt. xxv. 26-30.) Christian Professor! tremble at this responsibility of doing nothing, of living for thine own indulgence; neglecting the great object of life--the only object that tells upon eternity.

25. *Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad.*

Heaviness in heart is a palsy, that *maketh it stoop*, as under an intolerable burden. (Gen. xxxvii. 33, 35; xlii. 38.) And *gladdening indeed is a good word* of sympathy and comfort! (Neh. i. 4, with ii. I-8.) 'This maxim therefore points out an easy and cheerful way of being useful.'† Here we realize the precious efficacy of the Gospel. How full is it of these *good words*! Is it distress for sin? "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden; and I will give you rest." (Matt. xi. 28.) Is it the pressure of affliction? How *good is the word*, "that speaketh unto us as unto children;" warning us neither to "despise, nor to faint, under the chastening of the Lord!" (Heb. xii. 5.) Is it despondency? Oft is the *good word*, repeated--"Fear not." (Isa. xli. 10, 14; xliii. 1.) Know we not the voice--"It is I; be not afraid?" (Matt. xiv. 27.) Human sympathy may give temporary relief. But 'that was the grace, softer than oil, sweeter than roses, which flows from the Saviour's lips into the sinner's wounds; and being poured into the contrite heart, not only heals, but blesses it, yea, and marks it out for eternal blessedness. Oh! how sweet is the voice of pardon to a soul groaning under the burden of sin!‡ David, but for these *good words*, "would have perished in his affliction." (Ps. cxix. 92.) What beside *made glad the jailor's stooping heart*.' (Acts, xvi. 28-34.) Precious indeed is the privilege, to strengthen the weak hands "with *a good word* of God" (Isa. xxxv. 3, 4); to take the chair by the mourner's side, and "comfort him with the same comfort, wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." (2 Cor. i. 4.) Precious is the ministry of the gospel, commissioned with *the gladdening word to the heavy* of heart. (Job, xxxiii. 23-26. Isa. xl. 1, 2.) Yet more precious the office of the Beloved Saviour, "gifted with the tongue of the learned," and called with the unction of the Spirit, for the express purpose of "comforting them that

* *Dathe in loco*. 'The slothful shall become subservient to others.'--FRENCH and SKINNER'S *Translation of Proverbs*, with notes, 1831. Comp. Chap. x. 4; xi. 29.

† Scott.

‡ LEIGHTON'S *Meditations on Ps.* cxxx. 4.

mourn." (Isa. 1.4; lxi. 1, 2.) How tenderly did he perform this office let his last sermon testify. (John, xiv.-xvi.) See then the provision for joy, so rich, so free, so ready. Beware "lest Satan should get advantage" by a brooding spirit. (2 Cor. ii. 7.) Think on thy obligation and thy privilege to "rejoice in the Lord." (Philip. iii. 1; iv. 4.)

26. *The righteous is more excellent, (abundant, marg.) than his neighbour: but the way of the wicked seduceth him.*

God and the world are at issue in their estimate of his own people. *The righteous* is low indeed in man's scale. But place him beside the wicked (Mark, vi. 20)--even upon the same level (2 Kings, iii. 14), and his superiority is acknowledged. *More excellent* is he in character, *more abundant* in privilege, *than his neighbour*, be his external advantage and endowments ever so great. Look at his birth, a child of God;¹ his dignity, a king;² his connections, a member of the family of heaven;³ his inheritance, a title to both worlds;⁴ his food, the bread of everlasting life;⁵ his clothing, the righteousness of the Saviour;⁶ his prospects, infinite and everlasting joy.⁷ *Mark the honor which his God puts upon him.* He is the fulness of Christ;⁸ "the temple of the Holy Ghost,"⁹ throwing the splendour of Solomon's temple into the shade.¹⁰ Angels, while "beholding the face of their Father which is in heaven," count it an honour to "minister to him as an heir of salvation."¹¹ How can *his neighbour's* most exalted privileges compare with his? *Contrast his high walk with God* in "the holiest,"¹² his heavenly profession before men (Philip. ii. 15); his Christian victory over himself (Chap. xvi. 32. Matt. xvi. 24), with his grovelling *neighbour*. For 'what an unprofitable drudgery is the service of the greatest prince in the world, in comparison with the work of a poor Christian, that liveth in communion with God!* *And then--passing to the last contemplation,* --see him in the full enjoyment of his present prospects, "carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom;"¹³ "entering into the joy of his Lord;"¹⁴ welcome before the assembled world;¹⁵ then fixed on the throne of his Lord¹⁶ to be with him,¹⁷ near him,¹⁸ like him,¹⁹ for ever --what are *his neighbour's* prospects, but as hell compared, with heaven?²⁰ Can we doubt this testimony--*The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour?*

¹ John, i. 12,13.

⁴ Matt. v. 5. I Cor. iii. 22, 23.

⁷ Isa. xxxv. 10.

¹⁰ Isa. lxvi. 1,2.

¹³ Luke, xvi. 22.

¹⁶ Rev. iii. 21.

¹⁹ I John, iii. 2.

² Rev. i. 6.

⁵ John, vi. 35-58.

⁸ Eph. i. 23.

¹¹ Matt. xviii.10. Heb. i. 14.

¹⁴ Matt. xxv. 21.

¹⁷ John, xiv. 3.

²⁰ Prov. xiv 32. Matt. xxv. 41.

³ Heb. xii. 22, 23.

⁶ Isa. lxi. 10.

⁹ I Cor. vi. 19.

¹² Heb. x. 19, 20.

¹⁵ Ib. v.34.

¹⁸ Rev. vii. 15.

* MANTON on Ps, cxix. 45. 'God knows how much rather I would be the obscure tenant of a lath-and-plaster cottage, with a lively sense of my interest in a Redeemer, than the most admired object of public notice without it.'--COWPER'S *Private Correspondence*.

But we must not decide this character according to the standard of this world. It includes all that is meant in that important but despised word--*conversion*. What is commonly meant by amendment comes very far short of it. That is only an external work. Conversion is an inward change. That is only partial. This is total. That concerns only the outward conduct, and leaves the heart untouched. But whatever good may be in it of moral restraint, the principles are to be found with a far higher standard and tone in the inward change, which reaches the heart, infuses there a new and heavenly principle, and turns it to God by Christ, as its centre of rest, peace, and holiness. Here alone is the real *excellence*, bearing the stamp of God, and commanding often the reluctant admiration of the world.

But though wicked Balaam acknowledged the higher *excellence of the righteous, his own way seduced him?* to his own ruin. (Num. xxxi. 8.) Saul's testimony to David, and Joash's reverence for Elisha, still left them *seduced* by the power of their own corruptions. (Isa. xlv. 20.) Always is *this way* more pleasant to flesh, and therefore more generally approved. Hence is *the wicked* easily *seduced* with the appearance of the right way, and blinded to his own ruin. (1 Sam. xxiv. 17. 2 Kings, xiii. 14, with 11.) Let me weigh my path most carefully--With whom am I walking? In what way?

27. *The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting: but the substance of a diligent man is precious.*

How miserable and ruinous is the habit of sloth! It is a dead palsy, under God only to be checked by early discipline and constant resistance. Sometimes however the man makes a vigorous and successful effort. He rouses himself even to the toil of *hunting*. But his fit of exertion is soon over. He cannot be at the pains of preparing his prey for his repast. (Contrast Gen. xxvii. 30, 31.) He leaves it to others, perhaps even to his dogs; and quickly relapses into his beloved habit.

Is not this a graphical picture of *the slothful* professor? He will take up religion under a strong excitement. He begins a new course, and perhaps makes some advances in it. But "having no root in himself," his good frames and resolutions wither away. (Matt. xiii. 20, 21.) The continued exertion required (Ib. xi. 12); the violence that must be done to his deep-rooted habits; the difficulties in his new path; the invitations to present ease; the delusive hope of better success at a future day--all these hang as a weight upon his efforts. So that, not knowing the only secret of resistance to his powerful enemy--earnest and persevering prayer; he grows slack, and with just life enough to feel himself dying, he sits down upon his little attainments; thus virtually throwing them away; content to lose heaven itself, if it is to

be gained at such a cost. (Chap. xiii. 4; xxi. 25; xxvi. 15.) What use --professor! Is it to make an effort, if you do not seek the grace of perseverance? No present blessing can be enjoyed without grasping something beyond. (Philip. iii. 12-14.) Godliness without energy loses *its full reward*. (2 John, 8.) The enfeebling influence of doubts and fears often arises, not from a deep feeling of corruption, but from an indolent habit, and a want of a realized conviction of the infinite stake of the soul, calling for instant and persevering labour.

Real *substance* (Chap. viii. 21; xv. 6) is the reward of *the diligent*; *precious*, as the fruit of his toll; and increasing by his unwearied exercise. (Matt. xxv. 16, 28, 29.) Live then—Christian--more in thy work--"spend and be spent" in it. Thy privileges will be enlarged. Thy *substance* will be enriched. Thy God will be honoured. (John xv. 8. Philip. i. 11.) Thy crown will be secured. (2 Pet. i. 11.)

28. *In the way of righteousness of life; and in the pathway hereof there is no death.*

Righteousness is here crowned with "*life* and immortality."* So clearly did the wise man see beyond this dying world; and catch the sun-beams of glory "brought to light by the Gospel!" (2 Tim. i. 10.) *The way of righteousness* is the way of God's salvation (John, xiv. 6), in which his children come to him; the way of his commandments, in which they love to walk with him. (Isa. xxxv. 8.) *In this way is* present life (Chap. viii. 35; x. 16), "a passage from death unto *life*" eternal. (John, v. 24.) Enjoying the sense of God's love; confiding in his unspeakable, satisfying friendship; consecrating ourselves in spiritual devotedness to his service; anticipating the fulness of his eternal joy--this is *life* indeed for eternity.† For where the life of grace is possessed, "the life of glory is secured. It is "hid with Christ in God" (Col. iii. 3); so that--"Because I live, ye shall live also." (John, xiv. 19.)

In this pathway, there is no death. (Ib. viii. 51; xi. 25.) The curse of the first death hath passed away. (Rom. v. 21.) The power of "the second death cannot hurt." (Rev. ii. 11; xx. 6.) "The body is dead because of sin." (Rom. viii. 10; v. 12.) Yet it "sleeps," rather than dies, under the care of Jesus. (Acts, vii. 60. 1 Thess. iv. 14.) "Surely the bitterness of death is passed." Now, "O death! where is thy sting?" (1 Cor. xv. 55.) Sheathed in the body of Jesus.

And is not this cheering privilege, this glorious hope, an infinite recompense for all the crosses of *the way*? Contrast the was of sin, full of death (Rom. viii. 6. Eph. ii. 1. 1 Tim. v. 6), ending in death eternal. (Matt. vii. 13. Rom. vi. 21.) Then wonder at the multitudes

* 'In the path (If righteousness is life; yea--the highway is immortality.'--MSS. Translation of Proverbs, by the late Dr. GOOD. See also Schultens.

† 'Those who seek after *righteousness* preserve, and increase in themselves the spiritual life of God's grace, and the presence of his Spirit, and so attain to life everlasting,'--Diodati.

"loving death." (Chap. viii. 36.) Pity, pray for them, "pull them out of the fire." (Jude, 23.) Adore the riches of that Sovereign grace, which has brought you to *righteousness, to life, to salvation.*

CHAPTER XIII.

1. A wise son heareth his father's instruction: but a scorner heareth not rebuke.

SUCH *a wise son* in filial reverence was Solomon himself. (Chap. iv. 3, 4.) The connection however of *instruction with rebuke* mainly points us to that *instruction*, which is obtained by discipline.* Here then we turn to our great Exemplar. Was not he *a wise son*, when his ears were opened to his Father's discipline? (Isa. 1. 5.) How did he condescend to this painful school to "learn obedience!" (Heb. v. 8.) How good is it in our daily practical walk to keep our eyes steadily fixed on him, following him closely in this child-like habit!

But the proud spirit does not easily bend. He has never *heard his father's instruction* with deference. Soon therefore he takes "the scorner's seat." (Ps. i. 1.) When *rebuke* becomes necessary, *he hears it not* (Chap. xv. 12); turns from it to his own course at the extreme point from wisdom (Chap. xii. 1; xv. 5), on the brink of ruin (Chap. xv. 10; xxix. 1); carrying about him a fearful mark of reprobation! (1 Sam. ii. 25.) Let me remember--If I am reluctant to *hear the faithful rebuke* of men, I am prepared to resist the rebuke of God. And how soon may this stubborn revolt bring his long-suffering to an end (2 Chron. xxxvi. 16), and my soul to destruction! (Jer. v. 3. Zeph. iii. 2.) 'From hardness of heart, and contempt of thy word and commandment, Good Lord, deliver me.'†

2. A man shall eat good by the fruit of his mouth: but the soul of the transgressors shall eat violence.

The first clause has been lately before us. (Chap. xii. 14.) But let it ever be fixed in our minds, that, if the Christian is walking with God, his tongue will pour out godly communication. Whatever be the effect on others, at least his own soul will be warmed, refreshed and edified. *He shall eat good by the fruit of his mouth.* Never shall we carry upon our lips that Beloved Name to our fellow-sinners in simplicity, but its "savour" to our own souls will be "as ointment poured forth." (Cant. i. 3.) We shall feed ourselves in the Christian distribution of the heavenly manna.

The transgressor also eats the fruit of his mouth--yet not good.

* Chap. xii. 1. Schultens.

† Litany.

His soul sets his tongue on a flame. He loves *violence*, and therefore *eats it* to his own ruin. (Ps. lxiv. 8.) "Death as well as life are in the power of the tongue." (Chap. xviii. 21.) Let us look, that it be under the influence of Divine grace, restrained from evil, disciplined for usefulness, the fruitful instrument of our own happiness.

3. *He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.*

The last Proverb contrasted a fruitful and mischievous—this a cautious and ungoverned—tongue. "Keep thine heart." (Chap. iv. 23.) This guards the citadel. *Keep thy mouth*. This sets a watch at the gates. If they be well guarded, the city is safe. Leave them unprotected—Thus was Babylon taken. 'He that looketh carefully to his tongue takes a safe course for preserving his life, which is oft in danger by much and wild talking.'* Think before we speak; ponder our words, their substance, manner, time, place, audience. The unruly member needs a strong bridle, and a strong hand to hold it. (Jam. iii. 2, 3.) Though it be necessary to open our lips; yet to *open them, wide*; to let all come out; is a fearful hazard. (Chap. x. 14; xii. 13.) For if "in the multitude of words there wanteth not sin" (Chap. x. 19), this evil must bring us within the jaws of *destruction*.

"Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; and keep the door of my lips" (Ps. cxli. 3) —was the prayer of one, who knew the danger of an ungoverned tongue, and the only way to tame it. Shall we not call in God's help, in the recollection, how often has our unguarded tongue "given place to the devil" (Eph. iv. 27), and "grieved the Holy Comforter?" (Ib. verse 30.) How much more matter do we make for repentance by our speaking than by our silence! Let the practical power of faith quicken watchfulness and prayer, self-abasement and self-discipline, godly fear and energy of conflict. Two things are clear. But for the blood of Christ, the mass of guilt from the sins of the tongue would have condemned us for ever; and in proportion as the "little member" is bridled, "the peace of God rules in the heart."

4. *The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.*

Another vivid contrast of *the sluggard with the diligent*! (Chap. x. 4; xii. 24.) *The sluggard desires* the gain of diligence, without the diligence that gains. He would be wise without study, and rich without labour. His religion is of the same heartless character. *He desires* to overcome his bad habits, to enjoy the happiness of God's people. So

* Bishop Hall, Chap. xxi. 23. Ps. xxxiv. 12, 13.

far well. *Desires* are a part of religion. There can be no attainment without them. Many have not even *the desire*. They ridicule it as enthusiasm. Yet *the sluggard hath nothing*, because it is *desire* without effort. 'He ever desireth; but he taketh no pains to get any thing.'* He would fain go to heaven, if a morning dream would carry him there. And *many a wish* (alas!--*of prayer* he knows nothing) he sighs for "the death of the righteous." (Num. xxiii. 10.) He would gladly be a Christian, if it cost him no trouble. His duties are a force upon him; and when they are over, he feels as if relieved from a heavy weight. This is no rare case. Often do we hear the cry—and that year after year—'I desire to be a child of God.' And yet the soul continues at the same point; or rather settles down more resolutely in a lifeless profession. 'Hell'—says an old writer--'s paved with such desires.'

Oh! be industrious—if anywhere—in religion. Eternity is at stake. Hours, days are lost. Soon they come to years; and for want of energy, all is lost. Heartless wishes will not give life. The halting step will not bring us to God. A few minutes' cold prayers will not seize the prize. To expect the blessing without diligence is delusion.

Diligence brings its own reward in the world (Chap. xxii. 29); much more in religion. It will not be content with *desiring*, without the reality of possession. The "exercise of godliness" tends to health and profit. (1 Tim. iv. 8.) Useful habits are formed; dormant energy is excited. The conflict of faith, and the violence of prayer, ensure success. (Matt. xi. 12.) God honours the trading of talents, where he has the full revenue of his own gifts. (Ib. xxv. 14-29.) He gives, not the wisdom only, but "the manifestation;" not for selfish indulgence, but "to profit withal." (1 Cor. xii. 7.) The "talent must not be hid in a napkin" (Luke, xix. 20), or "the light under the bushel." (Matt. v. 15.) False humility--a cover for indolence—must not hinder the faithful discharge of our trust.

Child of God! shake off the dust of sloth. Take care that the bed of ease cloth not pall thine appetite, and hinder thee from seeking food for thy soul; or from active exercise for God. Let thy graces be vigorous and radiant. Let thy profession be always progressing, deepening, expanding. If thou be in Christ, seek to be "rooted and grounded in him." (Col. ii. 7.) Let there be "life more abundantly." (John, x. 10.) "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." (2 Tim. ii. 1.) Let "the joy of the Lord be thy strength." (Neh. viii. 10.) Then *thy soul shall be made fat*, healthful, vigorous in all fruit and grace. (Ps. xcii. 12-14.)

* Reformers' Notes.

5. *A righteous man hateth lying: but a wicked man is loathsome, and cometh to shame.*

Observe the accuracy of Scripture. It is not that a *righteous man never lies*. David lied.¹ Peter lied.² Yet David could say—"I hate and abhor lying."³ He prayed to have it "removed from him."⁴ He would not suffer the "liar in his sight."⁵ Peter in the painful remembrance of his sin earnestly shewed the happiness of departure from it.⁶ The child of God, though always a sinner, maintains an holy antipathy against sin—"What I hate, that do I."⁷

Nor is it a proof of a *righteous man that he avoids lying*. Selfish motives, regard for character, may dictate restraint, without any *hatred of the sin as sin*. But true religion brings in the new taste, conformity to the mind of God. Therefore, as "lying lips"—however common, profitable, convenient, or pardonable, they may be counted—"are abomination to the Lord," the *righteous man hateth them*. (Chap. xii. 22. Rom. xii. 9.) He would rather suffer by truth, than sin by lying. (Dan. iii. 16-18.)

And yet how often, even in the Church, is this feature of godliness obscured! Is not strict truth often sacrificed to courtesy? Is not *lying* sometimes acted, insinuated, or implied, where we should be ashamed of plainly speaking it? Is not the simple truth often coloured with exaggeration? "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thess. v. 22)—is the rule for the man of God. Commit the tongue to the only safe ordering, the restraint and guidance of the God of Truth. (Ps. xix. 14; cxli. 3.)

A *wicked man* indeed takes pleasure in deceit. Scripture gives him his right name. His base means often bring him *to shame* on this side of the grave. (2 Kings, v. 27. Acts, xii. 21-23.) But however this be, *shame* will be his "everlasting recompence." (Dan. xii. 2. Rev. xxi. 8.)

6. *Righteousness keepeth him that is upright in the way: but wickedness overthroweth the sinner.*

Would that this repetition of the aphorism (Chap. xi. 3, 5, 6) might deepen its impression! It is indeed a straight way to heaven. "Lead me in it, O my God" (Ps. v. 8), and keep me there. The many deviations even of the children of God prove our need of Divine keeping. The fear of man,⁸ the flinching of the flesh from positive duty;⁹ the grasp of some desired object;¹⁰ the subtle allurements of sin¹¹—all these have turned him out of the path; embracing his Father's will in

¹ 1 Sam. xxi. 2; xxvii. 9, 10.

⁴ Ib. verse 29.

⁷ Rom. vii. 15, 19.

¹⁰ Gen. xxvii. 19-24.

² Matt. xxvi. 70-74.

⁵ Ps. ci. 7; xxvi. 4.

⁸ Gen. xii. 11-13; xx. 2.

¹¹ 2 Sam. xi. 2. 1 Kings, xi. 1-4.

³ Ps. cxix. 163.

⁶ 1 Pet. iii. 10; ii. 1.

⁹ Jonah, i. 1-3.

many things; in others preferring his own. *Righteousness*—steady conformity to the mind of God—keeps the soul upright, and so *keeps it in the way*. (Ps. xxv. 21.) Not that we exalt it to any meritorious efficacy, or put it in the place of simply "looking unto Jesus" (Heb. xii. 2) for life and salvation. The Christian, while "walking in his integrity" (Ps. xxvi. 11), never loses his sense of sin, or forgets his need of mercy. Yet his "*righteousness* is a breastplate" (Eph. vi. 14) *keeping* him from many assaults of sin (Gen. xxxix. 9), and covering him from threatening wrath. (Gen. vii. 1. 2 Pet. ii. 7-9.) But this is *righteousness*, not perfection, mixed with much cleaving infirmity. Yet—blessed be God—the uprightness is accepted, and the fault is covered. (2 Chron. xv. 17.)

But while 'saints are secured *from* ruin, sinners are secured *for* ruin.* *The sinner's own wickedness overthroweth him*. (2 Chron. xxviii. 23.) He is bent upon his own way, the sure road to destruction. 'Let him not blame the Lord, or any mortal man beside himself, inasmuch as he is the author of ruin to himself.'†

7. *There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing; there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches.*

What a bubble are the world's riches! Yet some will affect their shew, in order to gain the respect usually connected with them (Chap. xii. 9); *making themselves rich, yet having nothing*. Others *make themselves poor*, 'and live as if they were so,'‡ *having great riches*. In all cases riches are more justly estimated by their use than by their possession. But both persons here practise a deceit upon God; the one by pretending to have received, the other by virtually denying, his gracious gifts. Both dishonour his wisdom and goodness; the one by discontent with his dispensations; the other by neglecting the communication of his blessings. (1 Tim. vi. 18.)

The Church presents the counterpart of both these classes. The boasting Pharisee,¹ the gifted Corinthian;² the proud beggarly Laodicean³--all admire their nothing, as if it were *great riches*. Others again *make themselves poor* in "voluntary humility." Describing their whole course as unmingled sin, they deny the Almighty work of grace. They give excuse for lying under the power of their corruptions; instead of quickening the energy of a successful conflict. Thus they promote the very evil which they deprecate, and sink the soul into a hopeless despondency, alike prejudicial to their happiness and usefulness. Sometimes, indeed, the Christian, from the deep sense of remaining corruption, may be blind to what is evident to every one else, and known to his God. (Rev. ii. 9.) But if it is the ruin of the

¹ Luke, xviii. 11, 12. ² 1 Cor. iv. 8, 10. ³ Rev. iii. 17, 18.

* Henry in loco. † MUFFET's (Peter) *Commentary on Proverbs*, 12mo. 1596. ‡ Scott.

self-deceiver to think himself better, it is at least the hindrance of the upright to think himself worse, than he is.

The true path of simplicity is to renounce all dependence on the flesh, and gladly to welcome the gospel of grace. (Philip. iii. 3-9.) Such disciples, rich in their holy poverty, are honoured of the Lord. (Isa. lxvi. 2. Luke, xviii. 13.) 'O blessed Lord, who resistest the proud, and givest grace to the humble, give me more humility, that I may receive more grace from thee. And thou, whose gracious rain shelves down from the steep mountains, and sweetly drenches the humble valleys, depress thou my heart more and more with true lowliness of spirit; that the showers of thy heavenly grace may sink into it, and make it more fruitful in all good affection and all holy obedience.'*

8. *The ransom of a man's life are his riches: but the poor heareth not rebuke.*

The last Proverb rebuketh discontent with our lot, whether of riches or poverty. The wise man here strikes the balance between these two conditions. *A man's riches may be the ransom of his life.* Extortion of money may prompt false accusation, and *riches* may be a ransom cheerfully paid.† Or they may be the price of deliverance from his enemies. They may save him from the punishment of the law (Exod. xxi. 29, 30.) or from imminent danger of his life. (Jer. xli. 8.) Yet if "money is a defence" (Eccles. vii. 12), so also is often want of money. If "the rich man's wealth is a strong city" (Chap. x. 15), *the poor* man's poverty is often his safeguard. He is beneath notice. *He hears not many a rebuke*; he escapes many a danger, which is destruction to his richer neighbour. (2 Kings, xxiv. 14; xxv. 12.) Had Isaac's flocks been less numerous (Gen. xxvi. 13, 14), or Jacob less prosperous (Ib. xxxi. 1), they would not *have heard so much rebuke* from their selfish enemies. The poor with his empty pocket travels with security. His cottage offers little temptation to the nightly robber. "A man's life" therefore—his true happiness—"consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth." (Luke, xii. 15.)

His riches may be the ransom of his life. But "what shall he give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. xvi. 26.) Too "precious" is it to be "redeemed with corruptible silver and gold." (1 Pet. f. 18.) So far as he is concerned, "it ceaseth for ever." (Ps. xlix. 8.) Praised be the Lord! when all the treasures of earth would have been beggared in *the ransom*, the riches of heaven were freely poured out. (1 Pet. i. 19.)

* Bishop HALL's *Devotional Works*, vol. viii. 276.

† See Job, ii. 4. The Apostle refused to avail himself of this ransom. Acts, xxiv. 26. 'The primitive Christians quoted this proverb in defence of their occasional habit of giving money to restrain the fury of their persecutors.'—Geier *in loco*.

Heb. x. 5-8.) The blood of the Son of God was the acceptable price. The voice was heard from heaven—"Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom." (Job, xxxiii. 24.)

9. The light of the righteous rejoiceth: but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out.

Who can estimate the worth of a Christian's bright shining light? (Matt. v. 14-16. Philip. ii. 15. Chap. iv. 18.) Happy in his own soul, like his counterpart in the heavens, he sheds a *joyous* light around him. But how glowing, then, is the light of the Church in the combined shining of all her members! Many of them have no remarkable individual splendour; yet, like the lesser stars forming the milky way, they present a bright path of holiness in the spiritual firmament. This happy heavenly *light* "shineth into perfect day," and that day will never set. (Isa. lx. 19, 20.) Sometimes it may be obscured, but only that it may break out more gloriously. (Mica vii. 8); and soon will it be a day without a cloud. (Rev. xxi. 23, 24.)

But it is *the light of the righteous that rejoiceth*. Sin therefore will bring the cloud. Do we hope to shine in the heavenly firmament? Then must we shine with present glory in the firmament of the Church. So delicate is the Divine principle, that every breath of this world dims its lustre.

The wicked have their *lamp*, a cold profession of the name of religion. But being without oil, it will soon *be put out* (Job, xviii. 5, 6, Matt. xxv. 8.) Even while it lasts, it *rejoiceth not*. It sheds no light upon the soul. It guides no fellow-pilgrim with its light. Fearful will be the end. He takes his leave of the light of this world, only to enter into eternal darkness, without even a flickering ray to cheer "the blackness of darkness for ever." (Ps. xlix. 19. Matt. xxii. 13.)

10. Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom.

Most accurately is *contention* here traced to its proper source. (Chap. xxviii. 25.) All the crudities of the day, all the novelties of doctrine producing *contention* (1 Tim. i. 4. 2 Tim. ii. 23), originate in the *proud* swelling of "the fleshly mind." (Col. ii. 18. 1 Tim. vi. 3, 4.) Men scorn the beaten track. They must strike out a new path. Singularity and extravagance are primary charms. They are ready to quarrel with every one, who does not value their notions as highly as they do. The desire of pre-eminence (Matt. xx. 21. 3 John, 9); revolt from authority (Num. xii. 2) or sound doctrine (2 Tim. iv. 3, 4); party spirit, with the *pride* of knowledge and gifts (1 Cor. iii. 3, 4, with iv. 8) --all produce the same results. Is it too much to say, that vain-glory hath lighted up all the sinful *contentions*, that have ever kindled in the Church? We must indeed "*contend* for the faith" (Gal. ii. 5. 1 Thess.

ii. 2. Jude, 3), though it be with our own compromising brethren. (Gal. ii. 11.) But even here how yet imperceptibly may *pride* insinuate itself under the cover of glorifying God! Truly 'is it the inmost coat, which we put on first, and put off last.'*

This mischievous principle spreads in families, or among friends. 'Some point of honour must be maintained; some affront must be resented; some rival must be crushed or eclipsed; some renowned character emulated; or some superior equalled and surpassed.'† Even in trifling disputes between relatives or neighbours—perhaps between Christians—each party *contends* vehemently for his rights, instead of satisfying himself with the testimony of his conscience, and submitting rather to be misunderstood and misjudged, than to break the bond of the Divine brotherhood. (1 Cor. vi. 7.) In the wide field of the world we may well ask—"From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not from this lust?" (Jam. iv. 1.) Often has wounded pride (Judg. xii. 1), even without any proved injury (2 Kings, xiv. 10), brought destructive *contention* upon a land.

The proud man conceives himself wise enough. He asks no counsel, and thus proves his want of wisdom. But *with the modest, well-advised, there is the wisdom* that is from above, "which is first pure, then peaceable." (Jam. iii. 17, with 14-16.) Many a rising *contention* has it quelled, (Gen. xiii. 8. Judg. viii. 1-3. Acts, vi. 1-6.) "Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." (Philip. ii. 3.) Christian *wisdom* will keep us within our own line; knowing our own measure and bounds (2 Cor. x. 13-16); and—whatever be our place, parts, or gifts—humble, active, loving, constant, thankful, in the improvement of them.

11. Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase.

This Proverb does not imply the means, by which wealth has been gotten;‡ but the impoverishing use, to which it is applied. However large, *by vanity* it will soon *be diminished*. Frivolous and expensive pursuits, empty amusements, and the vain pomp and shew of dress, will soon prove, that "riches certainly make themselves wings" (Chap. xxiii. 5); that the treasure is "put into a bag with holes" (Hag. i. 6); and that nothing remains but the awful account of unfaithfulness to a solemn trust.

On the other hand—God's blessing is upon Christian industry; and, so far as is good, *he that gathereth with his labour shall increase*.

* Bishop Hall.

† Scott *in loco*.

‡ The interpolation of our translators is uncalled for, and misleads the reader. The word '*vain*' is of very frequent occurrence, and always implies, not what is sinful, but what is empty and unsubstantial.— See Parkhurst.

Only let him remember, that the security for his *increasing wealth* is the dedication of himself and his substance to the Lord; the ready acknowledgment, that he "is not his own," but God's property for God's glory. (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.) 'All that man can have, we have it on this condition; to use it, to have it, to lay it out, to lay it down unto the honour of our Master, from whose bounty we received it.* The Lord deliver us from the guilt of wasting on vanity what is due to Himself!

12. Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life.

The first springing of hope is a pleasurable sensation, yet not unmixed with pain. It is the hunger, that makes our food acceptable. But *hope deferred*, like hunger prolonged, brings a kind of torture. It *maketh the heart sick*. (Ps. cxix. 82, 123 ; cxliii. 7.) Yet *when the desire*—the fulfilment of the *hope--cometh*, what *a tree of life it is*—so invigorating! (Verse 19.)

We must however limit this application to the spiritual world. Elsewhere the fulfilment of the desire, instead of *a tree of life*, is vanity. (Eccles. ii. 11.) Here however the child of (trud is often tried in his faith, but never disappointed of his hope. Long we may have to wait. But never let us despair. "The patience of hope" issues in "the full assurance of hope." What was it to Abraham, when, after long *deferred hope, the desire came*, and he called the child of promise--Laughter! (Gen. xv. 3; xxi. 3-6.) What was it "when the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, and they were like unto them that dream!" (Ps. cxxxvii. with cxxvi.) What was it to old Simeon and the waiting remnant, when "*the desire* of all nations" *came*! (Luke, ii. 25-30, with Hag. ii. 7. Comp. Matt. xiii. 16, 17.) What to the disciples, when at the manifestation of their risen Lord, their *sickening hearts* "believed not for joy, and wondered!" (Luke, xxiv. 41.) What to the little flock met together in the faintness of *deferred hope* to plead for Peter's deliverance, When *the desire came*—the answer to prayer, so marvelously vouchsafed! (Acts, xii. 12-16.)

To come to more personal experience. Such was the trial of faith appointed for our Beloved Lord. Such was the joyful issue. (Ps. xxii. 1-3, with 22-25; lxix. 1-3, with 30-35.) Many a waiting, sickening heart has been thus refreshed from *a tree of life*. But what will be the joy of the grand consummation of *hope*! (Rom. viii. 23-25. 2 Cor. v. 1-4.) "The earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God." (Rom. viii. 19.) Time seems long, trials heavy, hearts failing. But "yet a little while, and he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry." (Heb. x. 37, 38. Hab. ii. 3. Rev. xxii. 7, 12, 20.) The first moment of the glorious manifestation will blot

* SWINNOCK's *True Christian*, 4to. 1663, p. 169.

out the remembrance of all toils, weariness, and trial. Yes—*the desire cometh*--come it will in God's best time--"quickly." One moment sick; the next—"the inhabitant of that land," where sickness is no more. (Isa. xxxiii, 24. Rev. xxi. 4.) One moment clad in the rags of the flesh; "in the twinkling of an eye" arrayed in the glory of the Saviour's image. (1 Cor. xv. 51-54.) "Come, Lord Jesus! Come quickly." (Rev. xxii. 20.)

13. *Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed: but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.*

God as a God of holiness will not be trifled with. As a God of grace, none "serve him for nought." The presumptuous *despiser of his word* cannot escape. The world before the flood was the object of his long-suffering. "A preacher of righteousness" warned them of their danger. But the *despisers* provoked their own ruin. (1 Pet. iii. 20. 2 Pet. ii. 5.) Pharaoh, often reproved, sometimes half-resolved, yet at length *despising the word, was destroyed*. (Exod. v. 2; x. 16,17; xiv. 28.) Jehoiakim's daring rebellion met with its righteous recompense Jer. xxxvi. 23-32.) The warnings of Sinai are as a voice of thunder--"If every transgression of the word spoken by angels received its just recompence of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, spoken by the Lord? If they escaped not, that refused him that spake on earth; much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh." (Heb. xii. 25.)

Let God and his word be our *fear*, not our terror. Faith is the principle of *fear*, of reverential child-like obedience. (Ib. xi. 7.) Indeed the heart can never be right, till *it fears the commandment* above every earthly consideration. The slave *fears* the penalty; the child the *commandment*. And this he fears more, than if an angel from heaven were standing in his way with a flaming sword. He fears the father, not the Judge. Here is no bondage, no legality. It brings its own reward. The "heart that stands in awe of God's word," rejoices in it, "and is largely enriched with its spoil." (Ps. cxix. 161, 162.) Here too is sunshine in the special favour of God--"To this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite heart, and that *trembleth at my word*." (Isa. lxvi. 2. Comp. Ezra, x. 3.)

14. *The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.*

Reverence to *God's commandment* has just been enforced. The blessing of the law or instruction (Chap. iii. 1; iv. 2) *of the wise* is here shown. It is *a fountain of life* (Chap. x. 11) to a teachable and thirsting heart. It is a grand conservative principle in a world full of

snares, not of danger only, but of *death*. There is no safe treading, but in the ways of God. The word of God gives the necessary warning. (Ps. xvii. 4; cxix. 9, 11.) *The law of the wise*--his instruction with all the authority of *a law*--applies it. This was David's seasonable instruction to Solomon (Chap. iv. 4); Solomon's to us. (Chap. v. 1-13; vii. 24-27.) Hear this warning *law of the wise* from an Apostle's mouth. The love of money was fearfully destroying souls.--"Thou, O man of God, flee these things." (1 Tim. vi. 9-11.) This is the grand end of the Ministry of the Gospel; to "deliver them from the snares of the devil, who taketh men captive at his will." (2 Tim. ii. 24-26.) Let the young take heed to their feet, where every step is *a snare of death*. Let the instruction of thy God and his Ministers be *the law of the wise* to keep thy path in safety. Even in defect of literal prescript, the spirit of *the law* will supply practical rules for keeping the heart and life — *e.g.* to do nothing, of which the lawfulness is questionable--to consider everything as unlawful, which indisposes for prayer, and interrupts communion with God—never to go into any company, business, or situation, in which the presence and blessing of God cannot be conscientiously asked and expected.* Such rules are in the spirit of the law, and well worthy of adoption. "Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established." (Chap. iv. 26.)

15. *Good understanding giveth favour; but the way of transgressors is hard.*

Hence the value of that "good thing, bearing the yoke in the youth." (Lam. iii. 27.) The exercise in this yoke, under Divine grace, hardens the character to all manly virtues and practical godliness. This is *a good understanding* (Ps. cxi. 10) — not a cold and dry apprehension, but the glow of heavenly light and love in all the discipline of Christian habits. Natural conviction is often constrained to do homage to it, as the image of God stamped upon his servants. Joseph in this exercise acquired many of those valuable rules, which *gave him favour*, and were of essential service to him in his various and important responsibilities. (Gen xxxix.—xli.) And well was it for himself, for his people, and for the whole Church of God, that he had been trained in this school of *understanding*. The histories of Samuel (1 Sam ii. 6), David (Ib., xviii. 14—16), attest the same point. *Good understanding* the effect of early discipline *gave Daniel favour*, even when past his ninetieth year, the premier of the largest empire of the world.† Our blessed Lord, as "he increased in wisdom, increased also in *favour*

* 'By the help of these three rules, I soon settle all my doubts, and find that many things I have hitherto indulged in, are, if not utterly unlawful, at least inexpedient, and I can renounce them without many sighs.'—*Life of Rev. Dr. PAYSON*, chap. iii.

† Dan. i. 9, 19, 20; vi. 1-3, 28. See also Abraham, Gen. xxiii. 10, 11. Paul, Acts, xxvii. 43; xxviii. 2. Comp. Rom. xiv. 18.

both with God and man." (Luke, ii. 52.) Thus the way of wisdom, with all its crosses, is cheered with sunshine. 'Wisdom exalteth her children.' (Ecclus. iv. 11.)

Can we say this *of the way of transgressors*? They dream of a flowery path; but they make to themselves *a hard way*; perhaps pleasing at first, as the spell to fasten them to the end. 'Wicked men live under a hard task-master.'* 'I was held before conversion'—said Augustine—'not with an iron chain, but with the obstinacy of my own will.' The philosophical infidel bears the same testimony I begin to fancy myself in a most deplorable condition, environed with the deepest darkness on every side.' (*Essays*, i. 458.) Voltaire, judging of course from his own heart, pronounces—'In man is more wretchedness than in all other animals put together. Man loves life, yet knows he must die.' 'I wish'—concludes this wretched witness for his Master—'I had never been born.' The worldly infidel adds his seal to the record. Col. Gardiner declared, that in his course of wickedness, he had often envied the existence of a dog. Wretch indeed must he be, who cannot endure to commune with himself, and to whose peace it is necessary that he should rid himself of every thought of God and his soul!

In every shape and form, the service of this merciless tyrant is *a hard way*.† Men fight their way to hell, as they do to heaven (Acts, xiv. 22)—"through much tribulation." The native perverseness of the will (Num. xxii. 32); the continual warfare with conscience;‡ the absence of peace (Isa. lvii. 20, 21; lix. 8); the sting of sin (Chap. xxiii. 29-32. Jer. ii. 17-19); the certainty of destruction (Isa. lix. 7) —all prove a way of thorns.§

Which then is the way of my choice? Lord, do thou choose for me. Help me under thy guidance, to choose the safe and pleasant path of wisdom (Chap. iii. 7), the rich portion of godliness for both worlds. (1 Tim. iv. 8.) *The way of transgressors is hard*. The end of that way is death. (Rom. vi. 21.) The task-master will have his full "tale" of work. The paymaster will pay down his well-earned wages to the utmost farthing—Death eternal. (Rom. vi. 23.)

* CARYL on Job, xv. 20. † Isa. v. 18; xlvii. 13; lvii. 10. Jer. ix. 5.

‡ Acts, ix. 5. See a fine passage in ARISTOTLE'S *Ethics*, B. ix. c. iii.; also SHAKESPEARE'S King John:

'Hostility and civil discord reign
Betwixt my conscience,' &c.

§ 'The pain of wickedness is grievous, and, apart from all other consequences, the most painful.'—CICERO. *De Leg.* ii. § 17. 'Nothing makes a man so wretched as impiety and crime.'—Ib. *De Finib.* lib. iv. § 24. 'His own iniquity and inward dread, remorse, and agitation of conscience—these are the untiring and domestic furies of the guilty mind.'—Ib. *Pro. Rom. Amer.* The philosopher, utterly ignorant of the spiritual character of sin, probably only intended an application to heinous crimes. But the admission of the principle is important, that the path of sin is present misery.

16. *Every prudent man dealeth with knowledge: but a fool layeth open*
(spreadeth, marg.) *his folly.*

How often is even valuable knowledge frittered away from the want of *prudent* application! We must ponder the time, measure, helps, and means of dealing with it, so as to put it out to its full advantage. (Chap. xv. 2.) And how wide is the sphere for trading with this responsible talent! *In daily life* it provides against foreseen dangers (Chap. xxii. 3), and makes a way to escape in trying difficulties).¹ Not less useful is it in the family economy; in the training of children (Judg. xiii. 8-1:2); in the "guidance of affairs" (Chap. xiv. 1); in looking well to household occupations. (Chap. xxxi. 27.) Must we not also *deal with it in the Church*; in a wise accommodation to circumstances (Gal. ii. 2); in the conviction of gainsayers (Tit. i. 9); in forbearing with the prejudices of the weak (Acts, xv. 22-29); in the exercise of Christian admonition? (Rom. xv. 14.) The want of it is the source of an unstable profession. In understanding we are children, not men. (1 Cor. xiv. 20.) Most precious therefore is "the word of knowledge," as "the manifestation of the Spirit given to us to profit withal." (1 Cor. xii. 7.) Greatly also do we need this gift *in our intercourse with the world*; to avoid occasions of stumbling;² to mark seasonable times of reproof;³ to refrain from needless offence.* Nay—even *in the political world* what need have we of "understanding of the tithes, to know what Israel ought to do!" (1 Chron. xii. 32.) Thus to deal with knowledge in this diversified application, is the responsibility of *a prudent man* of God. (Chap. xiv. 8, 15.)

From the want of this *prudence*, *the fool layeth open his folly*, he pours out his wrath. (Chap. xii. 16. Num. xxii. 29, 30.) He vaunts out his vanity. (1 Sam. xvii. 44.) He exposes his thoughtlessness. (Matt. xiv. 7.) He exercises no judgment (Chap. xviii. 13), and fills his sphere of influence with mischief.

Let us study the minute details of our Master's well-filled life. *He shall deal prudently.* (Isa. lii. 13.) This was his distinctive character. The Spirit of prudence was the furniture for his work. (Ib. xi. 2, 3.) How gloriously did it shine forth in the confounding of his enemies (Matt. xxi. 24; xxii. 42-46), and in tender sympathy with his afflicted people! (Isa. 1. 4.) How good is it to have our knowledge disciplined by his teaching, and consecrated to his service!

17. *A wicked messenger falleth into mischief: but a faithful ambassador is health.*

A messenger proves his character by his neglect or discharge of his

¹ Acts, xvi. 37, 38; xxii. 25; xxiii. 7. ² Ezra, viii. 22. Neh. vi. 11.

³ Chap. ix. 7, 8; xv. 23. 1 Sam. xxv. 86. Amos, v. 13. Matt. vii. 6.

* Neh. ii. 5. Speaking of his land before a heathen King, in reference not to the God of Israel, but to the sepulchres of his fathers.

trust. *A wicked messenger* betrays his trust (Luke, xvi. 1), damages his master (Chap. x. 26. Matt. xxv. 26), and, as a just recompense, *falls into mischief*. *Faithfulness* is the servant's glory, and his master's gain. He brings and receives a blessing. Gehazi's unfaithfulness brought him *into mischief*. (2 Kings, v. 26–27.) Eliezer, "spewing all good fidelity," was blessed himself, and health to his master. (Gen. xxiv. 33–56.)

But to speak of the *messenger and ambassador of the Lord*. (Mal. ii. 7. 2 Cor. v. 20.) What words can tell the awful *mischief of the wicked messenger*, ignorant of the worth of his commission, and utterly careless in the discharge of it! Yet *the mischief* returns upon his own head; laden as he is with the guilt of the blood of souls; himself overwhelmed in the eternal damnation of those, who have perished through his neglect. (Ezek. iii. 17, 18. 1 Cor. ix. 16.)

Faithfulness marks the true *ambassador*. (1 Cor. iv. 1, 2. 1 Thess. ii. 3–6.) He "shuns not to declare the whole counsel of God" (Acts, xx. 27); not obtruding offensive truths in unnatural prominence; but not withholding them in their just scriptural proportion. He condescends to the capacities of his people: but he will not humour their prejudices or antipathies. He "handles not the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth he commends himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God," (2 Cor. iv. 2; ii. 17.) "The tongue of such an *ambassador*" is *health* (Chap. xii. 18), both to himself and to his people. (Job, xxxiii. 23–26.) "The wilderness rejoices" under his fertilizing blessing (Isa. xxxv. 1); and the burst of joy and peace is heard on every side—"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him, that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace!"

18. Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction: but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured.

The *instruction* of discipline is God's ordinance. Little do those who *refuse* it know, what a blessing they cast away! (Heb. xii. 10, 11.) *Poverty and shame* are often the Lord's rod for his wayward children (Luke, xv. 12–16); two dreaded evils—the one bringing them to want; the other hiding their heads; both disappointing "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." (1 John, ii. 16.) Young persons! learn to dread the liberty of being left to your own choice. Dread the first step in the downward course, *refusing instruction*—Remember your birth, "as the wild ass's colt." (Job, xi. 12.) Know your besetting temptation, "as the horse and the mule" (Ps. xxxii. 9), impatient of restraint. If godly remonstrance be slighted, all may end in *poverty and shame*, embittered with the poignant sting of death-bed remorse. (Chap. v. 11.)

But here is *honour* contrasted with *shame*. For reverently to regard *reproof* will ensure *honour* from man. (Chap. xxv. 12.) *Honour* from

God will be abundant. "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons." (Heb. xii. 7.) If we be humbled under his reproof, we shall be raised to his throne. (1 Pet. v. 6.) Pleasant indeed are his words to his well-disciplined child. To have our ears open to receive discipline, is to walk in the path of life and happiness (Chap. vi. 23. Job, xxxvi. 10-12); the *honour* of conformity to our Divine Saviour. (Heb. v. 8.) Man's pride deems it a degradation to receive reproof. God counts it "brutish to hate it." (Chap. xii. 1.) Which judgment is according to truth and right?

19. The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul: but it is abomination to fools to depart from evil.

This must be limited to "*the desire* of the righteous."* As that is "only good," it "will be granted" (Chap. xi. 23; x. 24); and the *accomplishment is sweet to the soul*. Infinitely sweeter will be the full, the eternal, *accomplishment*--"I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." (Ps. xvii. 15.)

May not all enjoy this *sweetness*? All might, but all will not, be happy. The object is so revolting to the "enmity of the carnal mind." Perhaps those, who have been early trained in the ways of God, cannot experimentally estimate the bitterness of this enmity. But what can give a more awful view of this principle than the truth, that what is abomination to God to see, *is abomination to the fool to depart from!* (Chap. xv. 21.) A striking figure of heaven and hell, in full contrast; with the great gulf that is fixed between them! Holiness makes heaven; sin makes hell. See then for which place the ungodly are fitting. Hatred of holiness is meetness for hell. Oh! what a mighty change must that be, that can slay the enmity, and make it to the soul an abomination to commit *evil*, as it now *is to depart from it!*

20. He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.

Every one desires to engrave his own image upon his *companions*. We naturally therefore take our mould from their society. It is not left to us to determine, whether there shall be any influence; only, what that influence shall be. Walking *with the wise*—under their instruction, encouragement and example—*we shall be wise*. Our principles and habits will be fixed, our interest excited, and the resolution formed—"We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you." (Zech. viii. 23.) See here the blessing of living in a godly family, hearkening daily to "the wise man's learning" (Chap. xvi. 23. 1 Kings, x. 8), or in membership with a Church, where each imparts from his store for the increase and edifying of the body. (Eph. iv. 15, 16.) Mark

* See on verse 12.

—young people—the responsibility of the choice of friends. How much hangs upon the determination to be "a companion of all them that fear God, and keep his precepts?" (Ps. cxix. 63.) The world may allure, the ungodly may mock, the evil heart may consent to their voice. But seek you strength from God, and resolve to *walk with the wise*--as the Lord liveth, and as my soul liveth, I will not leave thee." (2 Kings, ii. 4.) Walk with those, whose acquaintance (as Bp. Burnet testified of his intercourse with Abp. Leighton), will be a special talent, to give account of to God.

Joash, while he *walked with his wise guardian, was wise*. But when, after his guardian's death, he became *a companion of fools, he was destroyed*. (2 Chron. xxiv.) And how often does the scaffold warn us of the "corruption from evil communications!" (1 Cor. xv. 33. Ps. i. 18-21; cvi, 28, 35.) Many a promising professor has been brought step by step to *destruction*. The horror of sin, the instinctive recoil from it, gradually abates. The fear of God—that cover from sin (Gen. xxix. 9. Neh. v. 15)—is weakened. The hold on the great hopes of the gospel is relaxed. Other objects gain the ascendancy from this disastrous commerce, and the ruin is complete. And when—we might ask—have the godly *companied with fools*, without injury to their profession, and hazard to their souls? (2 Chron. xviii. 3; xix. 2.) If we can live in a worldly element, without feeling out of our own element; if we can breathe a tainted atmosphere, without sensibility of infection; if we can familiarize ourselves with the absence of religion in the ordinary intercourse of life, is there no ground of alarm, lest unsubdued worldliness should be regaining dominion?

The first warning to sinners just plucked out of the fire, was--- "Save yourselves from this untoward generation." (Acts, ii. 40.) And the rule will be to the end—"Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." (Eph. v. 11. 2 Cor. vi. 14-16.) *Connection* we must often have with them. (1 Cor. v. 10.) But let our *delight* be with the saints of God. (Ps. xvi. 3.) God may soon decide for an halting professor. His patience may be exhausted. His justice may take its course; and those, who are now his *companions in folly*, will be his tormentors in hopeless misery.

21. *Evil pursueth sinners; but to the righteous good shall be repaid.*

'Sinners are sure to find *evil* at last; the *righteous, good*:'* The histories of sin from the beginning--Cain,¹ Achan,² Abimelech,³ Ahab,⁴ and his wicked wife,⁵ with many others—are solemn demonstrations, that *evil pursueth sinners*, even when they seem to have found a refuge.

¹ Gen. iv. 10-13.

² Josh. vii. 20-26.

³ Judg. ix. 24, 56, 57.

⁴ 1 Kings, xxi. 19; xxii. 38. 2 Kings, ix. 26.

⁵ 1 Kings, xxi. 23. 2 Kings, ix. 30-36.

* Jermin *in loco*.

(1 Kings, ii. 28-31.) The delay even of centuries does not weaken the certainty. (Exod. xvii. 14. 1 Sam. xv. 3-7.) As sure as the shadow follows the substance, as the avenger of blood *pursued* "the manslayer" (Num. xxxv. 19), "evil shall hunt the violent man to overthrow him." (Ps. cxl. 11.) Yet often the sinner goes on in his blinded infatuation. 'No one has been witness to his sin. Or no one will make account of it. Or his accusers, being as guilty as himself, will hold their peace; or, should he be discovered, prudence or pleading will secure him from punishment.* And then, though a the iniquity of his heels compasseth him about" (Ps. xlii. 5), he thinks only of present gratification, never looks back, and therefore sees not the *evil pursuing him*. His blindness thus makes his ruin more certain. (Dent. xxix. 19, 20. Job, xi. 20. 1 Thess. v. 3.) And how clearly are his momentary pleasures purchased at the cost of eternity! (Eccles. xi. 9.)

Not less sure is *the good, which shall he repaid to the righteous*. (Isa. 10, 11. Rom. ii. 6-10.) The *evil* follows in just retribution. The other is the reward of grace. Not the smallest good—even "a cup of cold water to a disciple" (Matt. x. 42), or honour shewn to his servants. (Ib. verse 41. 1 Kings, xvii. 16-23)--shall "lose its reward." (Heb. vi. 10.) And if a single act is thus remembered, much more "a course, a fight," held out to the end. (2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.) How manifestly is this the constitution of grace; that when perfect obedience can claim no recompence (Luke, xvii. 10), such unworthy, such defiled, work should be so honoured with an infinite, overwhelming acceptance!

22. *A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid, up for the just.*

Here we have particular instance of the *good to be repaid to the righteous*. It cannot however be meant as an universal statement. Many *good men* have no inheritance to leave; or they have no *children*; or none that survive them; or no *children's children*; or this generation may be in poverty. *The wealth of the sinner* also, instead of being laid up for the just, descends to his posterity for successive generations. (Ps. xvii. 14.) Yet Scripture gives many examples of this dispensation of Providence; shewing the blessing of personal godliness to unborn posterity. Abraham left his covenanted *inheritance to his children's children*.¹ Caleb's children inherited their father's possession.² "Although David's house was not so with God" as he could have desired yet his lamp continued to burn for upwards of seventeen generations.³ Often also has the Divine blessing upon the discreet guidance of his affairs (Ps. cxii. 5), and the special promise to Christian liberality (Chap. iii. 9, 10), preserved *the good man's inheritance*. And if there is no earthly

¹ Gen. xvii. 7, 8. Ps. cxii. 2. ² Josh. xiv. 14. ³ 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. 2 Chron. xxi. 7.

* Lavater *in loco*.

substance to leave; yet a church in the house; a family altar; the record of holy example and instruction; and above all, a store of believing prayer laid up for accomplishment, when we shall be silent in the grave—will be *an inheritance* to our children of inestimable value. For though no trust can be placed in hereditary religion (John, i. 13); yet the recollection of the path in which their fathers walked, and in which they themselves were trained, may, under God's grace, continue a godly entail in our families, so that "instead of the fathers may be the children." (Ps. lxxviii. 5, 6; xlv. 16.)

But *the good man's inheritance* is also increased from the *wealth of the sinner*. Laban's *wealth was laid up for Jacob*;¹ the spoils of Egypt and Canaan² for Israel; Haman's *wealth for Esther and Mordecai*.³ Indeed this appears to have been a prominent feature of the Old Dispensation (Chap. xxviii. 8. Job, xxvii. 16, 17); and it will be openly renewed in the latter-day glory of the Church. (Isa. lxi. 6.) Probably therefore the fulfilment is far more frequent than meets the eye. Often also *the wealth of the sinner, laid up for the aggrandizement of his own name in his posterity, becomes the portion of the just in their own holy seed; consecrated to the service of their Lord and his Church.* (Eccles. ii. 26.)

23. Much food is in the tillage of the poor: but there is that is destroyed for want of judgment.

The produce of the soil is the fruit of industry. Chap. xii. 11. Gen. iii. 19.) *Much food is in the tillage of the poor*; because, being wholly dependent on their own exertions, they spare no pains or labour. So that by careful husbandry they may gain support from a small plot; while a large and fertile estate may be *destroyed for want of judgment*. (Chap. xxiv. 30-34.) Indeed, for want of prudent management the richest tillage may come to waste. Egypt with her abundant crops would have been *destroyed*, but for Joseph's *judgment* in preserving the *much, food in the tillage*. (Gen. xli. 33-36.) Solomon's prudent administration of his household restrained waste and extravagance. (1 Kings, iv. 27, 28.) Even our Divine Master, in the distribution of the food, directed, that "the fragments should be gathered up, that nothing be lost" (John, vi. 12), or *destroyed for want of care and judgment*.

But what is the practical and extended application? If talents lie inactive, or if their activity is not wisely directed, a rich harvest is *destroyed for want of judgment*. The same ruin flows from the neglect of religious advantages. The harvest of grace withers into a famine. Slothful professor! rouse thyself to *till the ground*; else wilt thou starve for want of *food*. Then let thy roused energy be directed by a *sound*

¹ Gen. xxxi. 1, 9, 18. ² Exod. iii 35, 36. Josh. xi. 14. Ps. cv. 44.

³ Esth. viii. 1, 2.

judgment; for want of which, the fruits of industry, temporal, intellectual, and spiritual, will run to waste.

24. *He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him, chasteneth him betimes.*

Among the many modern theories of education, how often is God's system overlooked! Yet should not this be our pattern and standard? *The rod* of discipline is its main character; not harsh severity, but a wise, considerate, faithful exercise; always aiming at the subjugation of the will, and the humbling and purifying of the heart. Here however God and man are at issue. Man often *spares the rod*, because he loves the child. This at least he calls love. But is not our Father's love to his children inconceivably more yearning than that of an earthly parent? Yet does he not *spare the rod*—"What son is he, whom the Father chasteneth not?" (Heb. xii. 7.) Is *the rod* the proof of his hatred? "Whom the Lord *loveth*, he chasteneth." (Ib. verse 6. Deut. viii. 5. Rev. iii. 19.) Nay—he gives us his Divine judgment—*He that spareth the rod, hateth the child*. Does he not act at least as if *he hated him*; omitting a duty so necessary for his welfare; winking at the indulgence of vicious habits and a wayward will, so surely issuing in bitter sorrow?¹ Is not this delivering him up to his worst enemy? Better that the child had been trained in the house of strangers, than that he should thus be the unhappy victim of the cruelty of parental love.

The discipline of our children must therefore commence with self-discipline. Nature teaches to love them *much*. But we want a controlling principle, to teach us to love them *wisely*. The indulgence of our children has its root *in self-indulgence*. We do not like putting ourselves to pain. The difficulties indeed can only be known by experience. And even in this school one parent cannot measure the trials of another. But all our children are children of Adam. "Foolishness is bound up in their hearts." (Chap. xxii. 15. Gen. viii. 21.) All choose from the first dawn of reason, the broad road of destruction. (Isa. liii. 6.) And can we bear the thought, that they should walk in that road? We pray for their conversion. But prayer without teaching is mockery, and Scripture teaching implies *chastening*.* Discipline therefore must be. All need the rod, some again and again. Yet it must be the father's rod, yearning over his *chastened* child. (Ps. ciii. 13), even while he dares "not spare him for his crying." (Chap. xix. 18.) The rod without affection is revolting tyranny.

But often do we hear mourning over failure. And is not this the

¹ Chap. xxix. 15. 1 Sam. iii. 13. 1 Kings, i. 6; ii. 25. Comp. 2 Sam. xiii. 39; xviii. 33.

* The Scripture term combines chastening with instruction—LXX. Verse 18. Eph. vi. 4. Heb. xii. 6. Comp. Ps. xciv. 12; cxix. 67, 71.

grand reason? We do not *chastise betimes*. (Ib.), Satan begins with the infant in arms! (Ps. lviii. 3. Isa. xiviii. 8.) The cry of passion is his first stir of the native corruption. Do we begin as early? Every vice commences in the nursery. The great secret is, to establish authority in the dawn of life; to bend the tender twig, before the knotty oak is beyond our power.* A child, early trained by parental discipline, will probably preserve the wholesome influence to the end of life.

But fearful indeed is the difficulty, when the child has been the *early* master; to begin *chastening*, when the habit of disobedience has been formed and hardened; to have the first work to do, when the child is growing out of childhood, and when the unreserved confidence needs to be established. Rarely indeed does this late experiment succeed: while the severity necessary to enforce it is not less dangerous than painful. "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth." (Lam. iii. 27.)

25. *The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul: but the belly of the wicked shall want.*

This is one of the many proofs, that "*the righteous* is more excellent than his neighbour." (Chap. xii. 26.) Temporal blessings are assured, so far as they are really good for him; whether little or much; enough to satisfy his wants, not to "fulfil his lusts." (Chap. x.. 3. Ps. xxxiv. 10; xxxvii. 3, 18.) Indeed 'he can never want a sufficiency, because his desires are moderate, and he makes a temperate use of God's blessings.'† He therefore shall *eat to his satisfying*, while *the wicked* shall want. Jacob was fed with the best of the land, while the Egyptians were destitute. (Gen. xviii. 11-13.) Elijah was fed, first by ravens, afterwards by a widow, when *the wicked* nation were in extremity. (1 Kings, xvii. 1-11; xviii. 5.) The fare of *the righteous* maybe coarse, and that of the wicked "sumptuous." But did not Daniel and his friends eat their pulse with more *satisfaction*, than their fellow-captives did their richer dainties? (Dan. i. 12-16.) And—as to higher food and heavenly *satisfaction*, Christ is a substitute for everything; nothing for Him.—'If then'—as the noble Luther declares—'we live here by begging our bread, is not this well recompensed, that we are nourished with the food of angels, with eternal life, and Christ himself?‡'

Such a chaos of desires is the soul of *the wicked*, that no abundance can satisfy *his want*. Ahab's crown could give him no rest, without Naboth's vineyard. (1 Kings, xxi. 1-4. Job, xx. 20, 22.) So full is the ungodly heart of insatiable cravings! (Ps. xvii. 14. Isa. lxv. 13, 14. Hos. iv. 10. Mic. vi. 14.) But how intolerable will be this conscious

* Principiis obsta; sero medicina paratur,

Cum mala per longas convaluere moras.--OVID.

† Bishop Patrick.

‡ LUTHER on Ps. cxxxii. 16. Comp. Ps. xxxvi. 8. John, vi. 35, 55.

want throughout eternity, when a drop of water to cool the tormented tongue shall be denied! (Luke, xvi, 24.)

CHAPTER XIV.

1. Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands.

WE have seen the wife to be a blessing or a curse to her husband. (Chap. xii. 4.) Such is She to his *house*. Her *wisdom* may supply many of his defects ; while all the results of his care and prudence may be wasted by her folly. The godly matron is the very soul of the house. She instructs her children by her example, no less than by her teaching. She educates them for God and for eternity; not to shine in the vain show of the world, but in the Church of God. Her household order combines economy with liberality (Chap. xxxi. 13, 18-27); strict integrity in the fear of God. (Ib. ver. 30.) Thus, as godly servants bring a blessing to the house (Gen. xxx. 27; xxxix. 5), *so does the wise woman build her house* (Chap. xxiv. 3) under the blessing of God, 'establishing it in a firm and durable state.* Who can estimate the worth of a Christian mother -- a Hannah¹--an Eunice?²

But mark *the foolish woman*—her idleness waste, love of pleasure, want of all forethought and care, her children's wills allowed, their souls neglected, their happiness ruined! We see her *house plucked down* in confusion. A sad issue, if an enemy had done this! But it is the doing, or rather the undoing, of *her own hands*. In proportion to her power and influence is her capability of family mischief. Such was Jezebel, the destroyer of her house.³

What responsibility then belongs to the marriage choice, linked with the highest interests of unborn generations! If ever there was at matter for special prayer and consideration, this is it. Here to err once, may be an undoing of ourselves and of our house. Of how little account are birth, fortune, external accomplishments, compared with godly *wisdom*!†

¹ 1 Sam. 1. 27, 28. ² 2 Tim. i. 5; iii. 15.

³ 1 Kings, xvi. 81-33; xxi. 24, 25. Comp. 2 Kings, xi. 1.

* Diodati. Chap. xxxi. 28-31.

† Mr. Scott here, aptly quotes the proverb — that 'a fortune in a wife is better than a fortune with a wife.' 'For the *building of a house* three things are principally necessary; first, a holy coming together; secondly, a special fitness in the head of the family; and lastly, a holy living together. As many order the matter, they so provoke God by the first entering upon a family, that the family travels ever after under the burden of God's anger. — BYFIELD *on Col.* iii. 18.

2. *He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the Lord: but he that is perverse in his ways, despiseth him.*

There can be no stream without the fountain. Grace in the heart is the spring of *the upright walk*. (Chap. iv. 23. Matt. xii. 33-35.) The proof that we believe the reality of religion, is that we walk in the power of it. The proof of the influence of *the fear of God* is, that we "are in it all the day long" (Chap. xxiii. 17); not saints in our prayers, and worldlings in our conduct; not substituting active zeal for personal devotedness; not teaching our families half of religion, to read and pray; but "whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, to think on these things." (Philip. iv. 8.) Man may boast of his moral *uprightness*, that he would scorn a mean action. But the heart-searching Saviour lays open the root of worldly selfishness, and spews *his way to be perverse* before him. (Luke, xvi. 14, 15.) Does he remember, or does he know, while he slumbers in the delusion of external decency, that the allowed supremacy of any earthly object (1 Sam. ii. 29, 30), or the indulgence of a secret lust (2 Sam. xii. 9, 10), brings him under the fearful guilt of *despising God*?

3. *In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride: but the lips of the wise shall preserve him.*

How many figures does the wise man employ to sew the destructive evils of the tongue! Here it is a rod (Ezek. vii. 10, 11), *a rod of pride*. *The rod in the mouth* is often sharper than the rod in the hand. (Jer. xviii. 18.) Sometimes it strikes against God (Exod. v. 2. Ps. xii. 3, 4. 2 Kings, xix. 10); sometimes it is "the rod of his anger" (Isa. x. 5) against his people; permitted (Rev. xiii. 5), yet restrained. (Ps. cxxv. 3.) Always in the end is it *the rod* for the *fool* himself. (Ib. lxiv. 8.) Yet when the heart is humbled, and filled with wisdom, the tongue becomes the preservative from imminent dangers (Chap. xii. 6), even from the threatened scourge of *the rod of pride*. (Job, v. 21. Ps. xxxi. 20.)

Were this iron rod to rule the earth, who could tolerate the abodes of men? (Ps. lvii. 4; cxx. 5.) But adored be the grace, which converts this unruly boasting member of unrighteousness, to be "an instrument of righteousness unto God!" (Rom. vi. 13.)

4. *Where no oxen are, the crib is clean: but much increase is by the strength of the ox.*

Oxen are used in husbandry. (Deut. xxv. 4. 1 Kings, xix. 19.) Where, therefore, *no oxen are*, to till the ground, *the crib is clean*. (Amos, iv. 6.) Because, where is no labour, there can be no food wherewith to supply it. God works by means, not by miracles. There must be good husbandry, in order to an abundant harvest. Let the *ox* be put to his

work, and *much increase will be by his strength*. (Ps. cxliv. 14.) In the spiritual husbandry, where there are no labourers, all is barrenness and desolation. But see the *much increase*—the harvest of precious souls—the fruit of *their strength* and effectiveness.* "In all labour," both in the natural and spiritual husbandry, "there is profit." (Verse 23.) But God will never acknowledge a slothful servant.

5. *A faithful witness will not lie: but a false witness will utter lies.*

This might seem to be a truism, unworthy of inspiration. But a closer inspection brings out a valuable maxim of practical wisdom. A *faithful witness* is moved neither by entreaties nor bribes, neither by promises nor threats, to swerve from truth. He is the man to trust. *He will not lie. But a false witness* has lost all principle of truth. *He will utter lies*, without any inducement but his own interest or pleasure. *Flee from his very breath*. (Chap. xxv. 19.)

The faithful witness answers God's requirements. (Ps. li. 6.) He is therefore his delight. (John, i. 47.) He is the citizen of the heavenly Zion (Ps. xv. 2; Isa. xxxiii. 15), and the ornament of godliness. (Philip. iv. 8.) In the Sacred Office *he will not lie*. His spirit is firm and independent. His message is full and transparent truth. (1 Thess. ii. 3, 4.) But *the false witness* is a true child of "the father of lies." (John, viii. 44. 1 Kings, xxi. 13.) Awful indeed is his *utterance* in common life (Chap. xxv. 18); more awful in the profession of the gospel (Acts, v. 1-4); awful beyond conception in the Sanctuary. (Jer. v. 31.) A minister of God in his commission! a minister of Satan in his work! (2 Cor. xi. 13-15) delivering a *lying* message "subverting the gospel of Christ" (Gal. i. 7), to the destruction of his people, to the double destruction of his own soul.

Thus "the good and the corrupt tree," each brings forth its own fruit. (Matt. vii. 17, 18.) Let us remember, that our principles, good and evil, are exemplified in the most trivial transactions, and gather strength from the slightest, as well as from the most important, exercise. (Luke, xvi. 10.)

6. *A scorner seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not: but knowledge is easy to him that understandeth.*

What then?—Is the promise belied—"He that seeketh findeth?"¹ The failure lies at *the scorner's* own door. He seeks indeed, but without seriousness;² without honesty of purpose;³ without delight;⁴ solely for his own interest.⁵ He finds therefore matter enough for his

¹ Matt. vii. 7, 8. Isa. xlv. 19.

² John, xviii. 38.

³ Jer. xlii. 1-3; xliii. 1-4. Ezra, xiv. 1-4; xx. 1-3. Matt. xxii. 15, 16.

⁴ Chap. xvii. 16; xviii. 2.

⁵ Acts, viii. 18-23.

* 1 Cor. iii. 9; ix. 9, 10. 1 Tim. v. 18, and the image of the Minister, Rev. iv. 7, seem to warrant this application of the proverb.

humour, but none for his instruction!* He charges the darkness upon the Scripture, not—where it really belongs—to his own heart. He feels himself able to comprehend the subject, and therefore free to reject what is beyond his conception, or contrary to his prejudices. He scorns the humbling submission of faith, so that the glory even of the wisdom of God is foolishness with him. (Rom. ix. 31, 32; x. 3.) No wonder that, while he makes an effort to *seek*, he *findeth not*. (Chap. xxiv. 7. 2 Tim. iii. 7.) He seeks his object, but neglects the means, and perishes in the *scornfulness* of his own unbelief (1 Cor. iii. 19.)

To another class of seekers, *knowledge is easy*. (Chap. viii. 9.) The Ethiopian Eunuch gathered his knowledge from simplicity. (Acts, viii. 31.) God gave him a ready will, a right taste; and in "doing his will he knew his doctrine." (John, vii. 17.) Obedience is the path of *understanding*. "Whosoever shall humble himself as a little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. xviii. 4.)

Shall not we thus unite with our Divine Master in adoring the gracious Sovereignty of this dispensation?—"Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." (Matt. xi. 25.) Shall not we seek for deeper humility, as the pathway to higher instruction? While we "are in our Father's hands" as the object of his love, think of the privilege of "sitting down at his feet, every one to receive of his words." (Deut. xxxiii. 3.)

7. Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge.

Fellowship with the ungodly is absolutely forbidden, and it is never safe to contradict a plain command. (Chap. ix. 6. 2 Cor. vi. 17.) Let us labour to win their souls to Christ. But the rule of prudence directs--"Cast not your pearls before swine." 'Avoid'--says the holy Leighton--'the mixture of an irreverent commonness of speaking of holy things indifferently in all companies.'† Therefore *when we perceive not in the foolish man the lips of knowledge, go from his presence*. Some may be called to dispute with him. But take care that the call is clear. It is at least the safest path to dispatch your business with him as in a shower of rain, and not to loiter in his society.

Sweet indeed is the glow of the Saviour's name upon the young Christian's lips. Its warmth may put elder Christians to shame. But we must warn him--Harm may be got in an imprudent endeavour to do good. Confess your Master, wherever he may open your door and your mouth. But better retreat from cavillers. (Chap. xxvi. 4. 1 Tim. vi. 4, 5.) You may be foiled by specious reasonings. Beware of tampering with your simplicity by the hazardous experiment, how much poison your constitution may bear. (1 Cor. xv. 33.) If our Lord. exposed

* Lord Bacon, quoted by Bishop Patrick. † Matt. vii. 6. Leighton *in loco*, vol. iii.

himself to moral danger; yet think of the impenetrable cover of his sanctity, his perfect self-government, his rules of godly prudence. Do we feel secure in the strength of our Christian habits? None are so confirmed, as to be safe in relaxation of watchfulness, and wanton rushing into danger. There is a perpetual warfare with the old principles of corruption. No dependence can be placed upon any habits, that do not produce right conduct, and right apprehension of present duty. The path of sin is much more easily avoided than relinquished. We can far more readily keep out of the course of the stream, than stem the torrent. Walk closely with God; and under his cover and shield bear a protest against the ungodly. (Ps. cxix. 114, 115.) Commune much with his people. The very sight of a man of God is refreshing. (Chap. xxvii. 9.)

8. *The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way: but the folly of fools is deceit.*

This is not *the wisdom* of the learned, but *of the prudent*; not abstract and speculative, but sound and practical. It is self-knowledge and self-controul looking upward for Divine guidance. And how much is this wisdom needed to *understand our way*! The restless professor eagerly follows his own impulse. His constitutional bias interprets Providences, and makes openings for himself. Everything is out of place. He is so "fervent in spirit," that he becomes a slothful in business." He conceives himself to be doing good; the more so, because it is different from his brethren. He pleads the constraint of zeal as an excuse for indiscretion; as if religion was meant to destroy, and not rather to rectify, his judgment.

But "God hath made everything beautiful in his time." (Eccles. iii. 11.) Religion is an orderly thing, as wise as it is warm. Whatever be the excitement to an irregular course, more good is done in steady consistency. To break the ranks in disorder; to "busy ourselves in other men's matters" (1 Pet. iv. 15. 2 Thess. iii. 11, 12); to be eager to *understand* our neighbour's way (John, xxi. 21, 22), obscures the light upon our own. The true *wisdom is to understand* what belongs to us personally and relatively. (1 Kings, iii. 6-9. Eccles. viii. 5.) "As God hath distributed to every man, so let him walk, and abide with God." (1 Cor. vii. 17.) Let the eye do the work of the eye, and the hand of the hand. If Moses prayed on the Mount, and Joshua fought in the valley (Exod. xvii. 10, 11), it was not because the one was deficient in courage, or the other in prayer; but because each had his appointed work, and *understood his own way*. Many steps of our way are different from our neighbour's, and may-often be difficult to discern; being rather involved in the principles, than expressed in the detail, of Scripture. But *the wisdom of the prudent* will "*understand* what the

will of the Lord is." (Eph. v. 17. Col. i. 9, 10.) "A single eye" and a sound heart will make our way plain. (Matt. vi. 22.)

But while the attention of a truly wise man is occupied in *understanding his way*; 'the arts of *deceit* engross the polluted minds of the wicked.* Their wisdom of *deceit* is really *folly*. Gehazi's overreaching wisdom proved *folly* in the end. Daniel's accusers "were taken in their *craftiness*." (Dan. vi. 24. 1 Cor. iii. 19.) Ananias and Sapphira vainly endeavoured to hide their covetousness under the cover of liberality. (Acts, v. 1–10.) Who can deceive a heart-searching God? The attempt to do so is fearful provocation, certain confusion.

9. *Fools make a mock at sin : but with the righteous there is favour.*

What! Are there such, as will count sin a sport? They have never seen the sight, never felt the weight. Look into eternity. It is thought a grave matter in heaven. It is felt so in hell. Why should it be made a *mockery* on earth? 'It brought death into the world, and all our woe.' † And is this a worthy matter of jest? How does God feel it?¹ Go to Gethsemane. Go to Calvary. Learn there what sin is. Shall we *make a mock at that*, which was a crushing burden to the Son of God?² Ask converted souls, awakened consciences, dying sinners—do they speak lightly of sin? How will the wretched *mock* call himself in eternity what God calls him now—a *fool*! The *mocking* cannot be beyond the grave; except it be the sport of the cruel enemy at the unchangeably hopeless torments of his deluded victim. The damnation of souls is sport in hell. Is not then the poor *mock*, rushing into this woe, the object of our pity and prayer? We warn, we weep, we would yearn over him.

The righteous cannot mock, like this hardened *fool*. While 'he makes himself merry with his sin, and scoffs at the reproof and judgment which pertains thereunto;‡ "they have the mark of those that sigh and cry for the abominations of the land"—the sure seal of the Lord's *favour*.§ Soon does the sport of the fool come to an end. Here is *favour* abundant and unchangeable. Our God looks over, pities, bears with, guides, loves, saves, eternally. What are crowns and kingdoms compared with such a portion!

10. *The heart knoweth its own bitterness: and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.*

A graphical illustration of man's proper individuality! "What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man that is in him?"

¹ Isa. xliii. 24. Jer. xlv. 4. Ezek. vi. 9. Amos, ii. 13. ² Matt. xxvi. 37, 38; xxvii. 46.

* FRENCH and SKINNER'S *Translation of Proverbs*. † Milton. ‡ Bishop Hall.

§ Ezek. ix. 4-6. 2 Kings, xxii. 19, 20. Dan. ix. 4-21. See the contrast set out by God himself. Isa. lxvi. 2-6.

(1 Cor. ii. 11.) The history of the soul is only fully known and felt by the conscious subject. Each *knoweth his own bitterness*, deep, interior.* The most poignant sufferings often arise from causes, which cannot be told to our dearest friend.† No two of us are framed alike; and this diversity of mind and character precludes a *perfect* reciprocity even in the warmest glow of human sympathy. Each only knows where the heart is wrung. Each therefore must in a measure tread a solitary path, and in that path often submit to be misunderstood. Hannah, *knowing her own bitterness*, was rashly rebuked by him, who ought to have been her comfort. (1 Sam. i. 10-43.) Gehazi harshly repelled the Shunamite, through ignorance of her bitter sorrow. (2 Kings, iv. 27.) Job's friends, from misconception, proved to be "miserable comforters, physicians of no value." (Job, xiii. 4 ; xvi. 2.)

But think of Him, who made himself "a man of sorrows," that he might be "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." (Isa. liii. 3. Heb. iv. 15.) This is not the common love to the whole family, but an individual interest of fellowship, as if each, had his whole heart, and each was loved alone. *The heart's bitterness* is experimentally known, and effectually relieved. (Isa. 1. 4, 5.) Man—very man as he is even on the throne of God—he is alive to all our sorrows. (Ib. lxiii. 9.) None of his members are too low for his highest and most endearing thoughts. Into this bosom we may pour the tale of woe, which no ear besides can receive. We may not be able to comprehend it. But he will make us feel, that his sympathy with sorrow is no fiction, but a precious reality. My Saviour! Has *my heart a bitterness*, that thou dost not know, that thou dost not feel with me, and for which thou dost not provide a present cordial and support?

No less individual is the *heart's joy*. It lies deep within itself. *A stranger doth not intermeddle with it*. Michal could understand David's bravery, not his joy. She knew him as a man of war, not as a man of God. (1 Sam. xviii. 20. 2 Sam. vi. 16.) Indeed, joy is a plant in "a garden enclosed," a stream from "a fountain, sealed." (Cant. iv. 12.) It is "the secret of the Lord, which is with the righteous." (Chap. iii. 32. Ps. xxv. 14.) It is the indwelling "Comforter, whom the world cannot receive." (John, xiv. 16, 17.) Yes truly----that is the highest joy, that the man hides in his own bosom, covered from observation. There is no noise, or froth on the surface. But they are deep waters of a Divine spring. Christ takes the believer apart from the crowd, feeds him on hidden manna (Rev. ii. 17), and makes him partaker of his own joy. Whatever cause there may be for mourning, there is "joy from our

* 1 Kings, viii. 38, 39. 'Every one is inwardly the only true and faithful judge of his own joys and sorrows, and none also can truly perceive them.'—DIODATI *in loco*. 'Each mind has an interior apartment of his own, into which none but itself and the Divinity can enter.'—FOSTER *On a Man writing Memoirs of himself*, Letter vii.

† Thus the Saviour separated himself even from his chosen disciples. Mark, xiv.32-35.

sorrow" (Jer. xxxi. 13), in the midst of it (Rom. v. 3), and as the everlasting fruit of it. (Isa. lx. 20.)

11. The house of the wicked shall be overthrown: but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish.

The feeblest state of *the upright* is more stable than the prosperity of *the wicked*. They build a house. The earth is their home, where they would settle, and take their rest. *The upright*—knowing the uncertainty of earth, and seeking a better house—only set up a *tabernacle* (Heb. xi. 9) -- weak and trembling. Yet *the house is overthrown*, and the *tabernacle flourishes*. (Chap. iii. 33; xii. 7.) The strongest support of man totters. (Job, viii. 15. Ps. xlix. 12.) The support of God to the weakest is Omnipotence. (Isa. xl. 29; xli. 10.) The eye of sense seems however to see the contrary—the flourishing of the wicked, and the overthrow of *the upright*. And a sore trial is it to the servant of God. (Jer. xii. 1.) But "we must walk by faith, not by sight." (2 Cor. v. 7.) "The sanctuary"—the word of God—will explain. (Ps. lxxiii. 16, 17. Job, xviii. 14-21.) Wait awhile. The great day will set all in order before us, and show that "the Judge of all the earth doeth right." (Gen. xviii. 25. Ps. lviii. 11.) Meanwhile let us leave him to do his own work, and to fulfil his own word in his own time.

12. There is a way that seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death.

No one can doubt the end of open ungodliness. (1 Cor. vi. 9. 1 Tim. v. 24.) But other paths in the broad road, *seemingly right*, are not less. certainly in their *end the ways of death*. Vice passes under the cover of virtue. Covetousness is disguised under the name of prudence. Indeed it is the fearful property of sin to hide its own character and tendency. The blindness increases in proportion to our familiarity with it. The self-deceiver has often been "a backslider in heart." (Ps. xxxvi. 2, 3.) He lost his humility, relaxed his watchfulness, neglected "the diligent keeping of the heart." Sin soon found admission. When it could not be wholly covered, it was excused. Appearances were kept up; misgivings gradually vanished, and the fool mistook death for life. (Dent. xxix. 19. Isa. xlv. 20. Rev. iii. 17, 18.) But oh! how soon will the cover drop off, and the discovery be made, that all along sin was cherished in self-delusion.

'Take care then'—as the saintly Leighton warns us—of sleeping unto death in carnal ease.' (On 1 Pet. iii. 21.) Look well to the foundation and soundness of thy faith. (2 Cor. xiii. 5.) Search carefully both thy Bible and thine heart. Go to the Lord in prayer, and to his Ministers, to shew you the true way. (1 Sam. xii. 23. Mal. ii. 7.) "Prove thine own work." (Gal. vi. 4. Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.) If not a bold

rebel against thy God, hast thou yielded freely thine heart to him? If thou be free from open wickedness, art thou not equally free from vital godliness? The most moralized unrenewed professor is the slave of sin. Terrible indeed will it be to meet the bridegroom with a bright, but unfurnished lamp; to fall from high expectations of heaven into the depths of hell! (Matt. xxv. 1–12.) The Lord keep our eye steadily on the *end of our way*, and make that end sure for heaven!

13. Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful: and the end of that mirth is heaviness.

Many a sigh is heaved amid the loud *laughter* of folly. (Esth. v. 9–13.) As soon might true joy be found in hell, as in the carnal heart. As soon might we "gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles," as this "fruit of the Spirit" (Matt. vii. 16.) from 'nature's barren soil.' As soon might the tempest-tossed ocean be at rest, as the sinner's conscience. (Isa. lvii. 20, 21.) He may feast in his prison, or dance in his chains. He may drink away his trouble. But it is a vain show of happiness. Ask him what is in his bosom. Is not his smile a counterfeit to hide a reality of woe? The voice of conscience and experience will make itself heard—"It is mad—what doeth it?" (Eccles. ii. 2.) If he has found a diversion from present trouble, has he found a cover from everlasting misery? It is far easier to drown conviction, than to escape damnation. And to be merry for a day, and to be in torment for eternity—who would envy—who would not flee from—such a portion?

Nor do we speak only of the coarse *mirth* of the vulgar. Take the fullest cup of earth's best joys. What is this to satisfy desire, to allay trouble, to meet eternity? Even the present *end of this* short-lived *mirth is heaviness* (Amos, vi. 3–7); sometimes so intolerable, that death is fled to, as the cure of the anguish; and to avoid the fear of hell, the wretched sinner leaps into it. (Matt. xxvii. 3–5.) And at best eternity will change the face of *this mirth*, when that will remain, which would be the most desirable riddance—the sting of conscience, as enduring as the pleasures of sin were momentary. (Luke, vi. 24; xvi. 21–24. Rom. vi. 21.)

But the end of *that mirth* implies another *mirth* with a different end. Contrast the prodigal's *mirth* in the far country, with his return to his father's house, when "*they began to be merry*." (Luke, xv. 13–24.) The fruit of carnal *mirth ends in heaviness*. Penitential sorrow begets a mirth, that ends in everlasting joy. (Ps. cxxvi. 5, 6. Isa. xxxv. 10.) Lord! choose mine inheritance for me among thy weeping people.

14. The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man shall be satisfied from himself.

Every spot is not the leprosy. Every mark of sin does not prove a

backslider. "A man may be overtaken in a fault" (Gal. vi. 1); or it may be the sin of ignorance (Lev. iv. 2. Heb. v. 2); or sin abhorred, resisted, yet still cleaving. (Ram. vii. 15-24.) *Backsliding* implies a wilful step; not always open, but the more dangerous, because hidden. Here was no open apostasy, perhaps no tangible inconsistency. Nay — the man may be looked up to as an eminent saint. But he is *a backslider* in heart. A secret canker of unwatchfulness worldly conformity (Hos. vii. 8), neglect, or indulgence, has insensibly "devoured his strength." (Hos. vii. 9. Judg. xvi. 20.) He was once pressing onward. A languor has now stolen upon him. His heart beats unsteadily. He has become formal and hurried in his prayers; lukewarm in the means of grace: reading his Bible to soothe his conscience, rather than to feed his soul. The first steps, instead of alarming, and bringing him to secret weeping (Matt. xxvi. 75), hurried him onwards from one liberty to another, till he lost all power of resistance. His unsoundness was known to God, long before it was manifested to the Church. Before the matter of Uriah, indolence and security had probably unhinged the man of God, and laid him open to the tempter. (2 Sam. xi. 1, 2.) Perhaps this dispensation may be permitted to teach the child of God his need of watchfulness and dependence. (2 Chron. xxxii. 31. Philip. ii. 12.) *The backslider's* folly and wretchedness is graphically portrayed, as a merciful warning to the church. He needs no other rod than *his own ways*. *To be filled with them*; thus to become the fountain of his own misery; is the most fearful of all Divine judgments.¹

The good man is also filled *from himself*;* yet not as *the backslider*, with misery, but with solid *satisfaction*. God has gives him a fountain fed from a higher fountain; a living spring within himself (John, iv. 14); the witness of the Spirit (Rom. viii. 16); the life and joy of the Heavenly Comforter (John, xiv. 16, 17); the rejoicing testimony of his conscience (2 Cor., i. 12); the assured hope of glory. (Col. i. 27.) This is not independent of God, the one source of self-sufficiency. But it is Himself dwelling in the heart and filling it with his fulness. Let the sinner compare the satisfaction of sin and godliness--the curse and the blessing; and lift up his heart for the direction of a right choice. Let *the backslider* return to the gospel to awaken his contrition, and to reanimate his faith. (Hos. xiv.) Let *the good man* invigorate his soul daily from his well of consolation.

15. The simple believeth every word; but the prudent man looketh well to his going.

To *believe every word* of God is faith. To *believe every word* of man is credulity. Faith is a principle of infinite moment. Eternal life and

¹ Ps. xxxii. 3, 4. Jer. ii. 19; iv. 8. Comp. 1 Sam. xxviii. 15; Matt. xxvii. 3-5.

* **auſarkhj**, Philip. iv. 11, self-sufficiency. Comp. 2 Cor. ix. 8.—Gr.

death hang upon it. (Mark, xvi. 16. John, iii. 36.) But it must be grounded upon evidence, and it can only be exercised according to the character and measure of the evidence. An indiscriminate faith is therefore fraught with mischief. The world was ruined by this *weakness*. (Gen. iii. 1-6.) And often since has it been the occasion of sin (2 Sam. xvi. 1-4. Esth. iii. 8-11), and even of downfall. (1 Kings, xiii. 11-19.)

Look at the fruit of this folly in the Church, when "our faith stands in the wisdom of men, not in the power of God." (1 Cor. ii. 5.) Men become loose in fundamental principles. They are "carried about with divers and strange doctrines," and never know "the good thing of a heart established with grace." (Heb. xiii. 9. Eph. iv. 14.) The novelties of fancy, accredited by some favourite name, readily pass for the revelation of God. We do not thus sit down to our food blindfolded; not knowing whether we take food or poison. But here men are ready to drink of any cup that is presented to them, like children, who think everything good that is sweet. Thus are "unstable souls beguiled," and "corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." (2 Cor. xi. 3.) Errors, never solitary, are built upon some partial, insulated, or perverted truth. Feeling and excitement come in the place of solid practical principle.

But the prudent looketh well to his going. Cautious consideration should mark our general conduct; trying before we trust; never trusting an uncertain profession. (Neh. vi. 2-4. John, ii. 24.) Specially in the Church, carefully ponder whom we follow. Sift the most plausible pretensions. (1 Thess. v. 21. 1 John, iv. 1.) Never set a great name against the Divine testimony. (Isa. viii. 20. Admit only the one standard; like the noble Bereans, who would not believe even an apostle's word, except it was confirmed by the written testimony. (Acts, xvii. 11.) Ask wisdom of God. Carefully regulate the energy of religion by the Divine rule. Enlist feeling on the side, and under the direction, of sound judgment. This *prudent carefulness* will exhibit a well-ordered Christian profession.

16. A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident.

Fear is sometimes thought to be an unmanly principle. But look at the terrible extent of *the evil* dreaded. Without—it is vanity and disappointment.¹ Within—it is the sting of guilt.² Upward—we see the frown of God.³ Downward—everlasting burnings.⁴ Surely then to *depart from this evil*,⁵ yea—to *fear it* worse than death,⁶ is true wisdom.

¹ Rom. vi. 21.

² Chap. xiii. 15. 1 Cor. xv. 56.

³ John, iii. 36.

⁴ Ps. ix. 17. Mark, ix. 44.

⁵ Gen. xxxix. 9, 10.

⁶ Dan. iii. 16-15; vi. 10. Luke, xii. 5.

The fool however, stout and stubborn in his mind, never *fears* till he falls. The voice of God is unheard amid the uproar of passion, like a raving tempest. Bravely independent, he sits amid the threatenings of God as unalarmed, as Solomon amid his brazen lions; 'carried by his rash will, and blind passion, without apprehending the end and issue of things.'* His character is here drawn to life. *He rageth, and is confident*. Such a *fool* was Rehoboam, when his self-willed confidence rejected the counsel of wisdom and experience. (1 Kings, xii. 13–15.) Such a *fool* was the *raging* Assyrian, blindly *confident* in his own might, till the God whom he despised turned him back to his destruction. (2 Kings, xix. 28–37.) And will not the child of God bless his Father's painful discipline, so needful to curb his *raging* will, and bring down his high *confidence*—"Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God?" (Jer. xxxi. 18.)

17. He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly: and a man of wicked devices is hated.

Different gradations of sin are here opposed to each other—the sudden passion, and the deliberate purpose; the gust and the continuance of the storm. A hasty temper convicts us of *foolishness* before our fellow-men. (2 Kings, v. 11–13.) What frightful mischief may be the consequence of an *angry* word! (Jam. iii. 5.) How fearfully did the "man after God's own heart" suffer the fire to burst out! (1 Sam. xxv. 21.) Who then, with this example before us, will dare to relax the watch? But are these sins of temper matters of sorrow and humiliation? Does the remembrance of their cost to our crucified Friend exercise our constant watchfulness, and prayerful resistance? Is not our loving Father's rod sometimes needful to bring conviction of their guilty *foolishness*? (Num. xx, 10–12) Oh, for a rich vouchsafement of that "charity, that is not easily provoked!" (1 Cor. xiii. 5.) 'Let us give our hearts no rest, until we have purged their gall, and tempered them with the sweetness and gentleness of our Lord and Saviour.'†

But sin grows from weakness to wilfulness. "The first makes a man contemptible; the second, abominable."‡ *Wicked devices*;¹ cherished malice;² one act preparing for another; almost aiming at the uttermost³ — all this shews the true picture of man, "*hateful*", and hating one another."⁴ Such a man is *hated* of God, as "an abomination."⁵ Man holds him up to his righteous scorn.⁶ Absalom's pillar,

¹ Ps. xxxvi. 2-4; lxiv. 2-9. Jer. v. 26. ² Gen. iv. 8; xxvii. 41. ³ 2 Sam. xv. 2-12.

⁴ Tit. iii. 3.

⁵ Chap. vi. 16-18.

⁶ Ps. lii. 2-7.

* Diodati, 2 Chron. xxv 15-20. † DAILLE on Col. iii. 8. Comp. Col. iii. 13.

‡ Diodati.

the monument of his name, is to this day the object of universal contempt.* The *hatred* of Haman's *wicked devices* is perpetuated from generation to generation. (Esth. ix. 23-28.) Why are these warnings, if we regard them not? Our dignity is our likeness to God! What shame and degradation must there be in this contrariety to him!

18. The simple inherit folly: but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.

The simple and prudent are again contrasted. The child of Adam is born to folly. (Job, xi. 12.) That is his inheritance. He "received it by tradition from his fathers" (1 Pet. i. 18): yea, from his first father. (Gen. v. 3. Ps. li. 5.) So long as he remains *simple*, he confirms his title. Unlike an earthly *inheritance*, he cannot relinquish it. He holds it in life; and, when he "returns naked to the earth, from whence he came" (Job, i. 21. 1 Tim. vi. 7), he still holds it firm in death, and reaps its bitter fruits throughout eternity. Here is no injustice, no just cause of complaint. Sinner! is not wisdom freely offered to thee in asking for it? (Jam. i. 5.) Dost not thou therefore continue *simple* only by thy wilful neglect? If knowledge is at hand, to be satisfied with ignorance, is to throw away a talent of inestimable price. 'I confess'--says Doctor South--'God has no need of any man's learning; but certainly then he has much less need of his ignorance.'† *The prudent*, instructed in heavenly *knowledge*, are enabled to behold Divine objects in a Divine light. Is not this *knowledge* therefore their crown, not of laurel, not of perishing gold; but beautifying the man with all the light, holiness, joy, and glory of life eternal? This is not that religion of eccentric singularities, which obscures the glory of the Divine image. Steady consistency is stamped upon it, such as enthrones its possessor in the conviction and regard even of those, who are unfriendly to his principles. (1 Pet. ii. 12.) Thus "the wise" in this life "inherit glory." (Chap. iii. 35.) What shall be their glory in eternity, sitting on the throne of God, crowned with the hand of God himself!

19. The evil bow before the good: and the wicked at the gates of the righteous.

This is not the general rule of the present dispensation. *Righteous Lazarus bowed at the wicked man's gate*. (Luke, xvi. 20.) Thus faith is tried (Ps. lxxiii. 12), and the foundations of our heavenly hopes more deeply grounded. (2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.) And yet often has the very letter of the proverb been verified. The Egyptians and Joseph's

* Calmet mentions the habit of passing travellers throwing stones at Absalom's pillar, to shew their hatred of a son's rebellion against his father and that now the accumulation of stones hides the lower part of the monument. This tradition is confirmed by recent travellers.

† *Sermon on 1 Kings*, xiii. 33, 34. Vol. i.

brethren *bowed before Joseph*;¹ the proud Pharaoh and his people before Moses;² Saul to David;³ Jehoram and Naaman before Elisha;⁴ Haman before Esther;⁵ the magistrates before the apostles.⁶ More often still is the spirit of this proverb illustrated in the constrained testimony of *the wicked* to the pre-eminence of *the righteous*. (Rev. iii. 9.) The millennial era will exhibit a more glorious fulfilment. (Isa. xlix. 23; lx. 14. Rev. xx. 4.) The grand consummation will set all things right, and shed a Divine splendour over this profound aphorism. "The upright shall have dominion over the wicked in the morning." (Ps. xlix. 14. Mal. iv. 1-3.) "The saints shall judge the world." (1 Cor. vi. 2) They shall there appear in their suitable rank, exalted with their glorious Head over the whole creation. (Rev. ii. 26.) Oh! let the sunshine of this glory irradiate every clouded morn. If this be not enough to counter-balance the scorn of the ungodly, where is our faith? Had we a clear apprehension of this glory, should we have an eye for anything else? Would not all besides, except as it had a reference to this day, be an utter impertinence?

20. *The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich hath many friends.*

An humbling, but how common an illustration of native selfishness. Sometimes however we hear of cheering exceptions. "Ruth clave to Naomi" in her poverty;⁷ Jonathan to David, when stripped of royal favour.⁸ But too generally *the poor*, instead of being pitied and comforted (Job, vi. 14. Isa. lviii. 7), is *hated* or neglected of *his own neighbour*.* Yet the rich is not in a more enviable condition. He has *many friends* indeed to his money and favour, but few to his interest. Many would be the deserters, should a change of circumstance cut off supplies for their appetites, pleasures, or covetousness. (Chap. xix. 4, 6.) But how endearing is the love of Jesus! He was emphatically the Poor man's Friend. (Ps. lxxii. 12, 14.) He sought *his many friends* among the wretched and forlorn (Matt. iv. 18-22); and still does his powerful compassion plead for those *hated* ones among their fellow-sinners. (Ps. cix. 31.) Shall not we then, like the tried saint of old, learn to look off from earthly destitution in a cleaving confidence on Him, as the Rock of our salvation? (Job, xix. 13-27.) The practical exercise of this confidence will be an overcoming of our selfish propensity; cultivating that tenderness, which, instead of shrinking from the

¹ Gen. xli. 43; xlii. 6.

² Exod. viii. 8; ix. 27, 28; xi. 8.

³ 1 Sam. xxiv. 16-21; xxvi. 21.

⁴ 2 Kings, iii. 12; v. 9.

⁵ Esth. vii. 7.

⁶ Acts, xvi. 39.

⁷ Ruth, i. 14, 21, 22.

⁸ 1 Sam. xix. 1-7; xxiii. 16.

* Chap. x. 15; xix. 4, 7. Luke, xvi. 21.

Nil habet infelix paupertas durius in se,

Quam quad ridiculos homines facit.—JUVENAL, iii. 152, 153.

sight of misery, hastens, though at the expense of personal sacrifice, to its sympathizing relief. (Luke, x. 33-35.)

21. He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he.

The last proverb sheaved the general standard of selfishness. Here we see its positive sinfulness. Some men are so high, that they cannot see their lower brother. Yet infinitely precious and honoured may be this *despised* one in the Saviour's eyes, as the purchase of his blood. And what a span is the distance between him and his most elevated fellow-creature, compared with the infinite space between him and his God! Yet doth he "that dwelleth on high," instead of despising, write his name upon him, "raise him from the dust, and lift him out of the dunghill, that he may set him with the princes of his people." (Ps. exiii. 7, 8.) The plain command is--"Honour all men" (1 Pet. ii. 17), not all with equal measure; but in all honour our own nature, the remains, however defaced, of the image of God. To look therefore upon the meanest, as if he were made to be *despised*, shews a want of wisdom, and a want of heart. (Chap. xi. 12.) 'Because we think we over-top him, therefore to think we may overlook him,* and neglect to have mercy on him (Chap. xxi. 13. Jam. ii. 16)--this is reflecting on God's own Providence (Verse 31); forgetting his example (2 Cor. viii. 9); setting up our own judgment against his; sinning against his law of love. (Jam. ii. 1-9.) And most fearfully will he visit this sin at the day of recompense. (Job, xxxi. 13-15. Matt. xxv. 42-45.)

But oh! the felicities of him *that hath mercy on the poor*;¹ "hoping for nothing again" (Luke, vi. 35); constrained by love to Christ and his fellow-sinners! 'He shall be happy beyond expression.'† Does not every exercise of love enlarge our own happiness? (Chap. xi. 17.) Do we not ourselves richly feed on the bread, with which we "feed the hungry?" (Isa. lviii. 8.) And will not the great day declare and honour every act of love for our Divine Master? (Matt. xxv. 35-40.)

22. Do they not err that devise evil? but mercy and truth shall be to them that devise good.

Scripture traces actions to principles. Wicked as it is to *do evil*, it is far more hateful to *devise it*. (See verse 17.) *Devising* is the incipient working of the principle. Devising evil therefore, if it comes not to the act, shews the purpose. (Chap. xxiv. 8.) They, may be men of consummate wisdom in other matters; but here at least *do they not err*? They miss either their object, or their anticipated happiness from it.

¹ 1 Comp. Ps. xli. 3; cxii. 9. Jer. xxii. 16. Dan. iv. 27. Matt. v. 7.

* Bishop SANDERSON *on Rom.* xiv. 3.

† Scott. 'At qui miseretur inopum, 0 beatitudines illius!'--SCHULTEMS. Holden also marks the peculiar emphasis of this pronoun.

Witness the shame of the Babel-builders (Gen. xi. 9); the confusion of Haman's device (Esth. vii. 10); the over-ruling of the wicked plot against our beloved Lord. (Ps. ii. 1-4. Matt. xxi. 41-44.) How did the *devisers* thwart their own purpose to their fearful cost! How little did Judas estimate the result of his *devising of evil*--"A little matter kindling an unquenchable fire!" (Matt. xxvi. 14-16; xxvii. 3-5.)

Children of God! Do you exhibit the same diligence and determination in *devising good*? Even if your fruit be frustrated, your work will be accepted. (1 Kings, viii. 18.). *Mercy and truth* are often set out as reward of grace, the cheering encouragement to practical godliness. What can be more joyous than the glorious perfections of Jehovah, pouring into the soul the quickening energy of Divine blessing; *mercy* the fountain-head, *truth* the pledge and fulfilment of unchangeable mercy!*

23. *In all labour there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury.*

This is not universally true. What *profit is in the labour* of sin (Rom. vi. 21), or of ill-timed work? Fruitful also *is the talk of teaching lips* (Chap. x. 21; xv. 7.) But the contrast is intended between what is solid on the one hand and what is shadowy on the other, between lawful, well-directed *labour*, and empty *talk*. "Bread eaten in the sweat of the face" is the *profit of bodily labour*. (Gen. iii. 19.) But the idler is condemned to penury upon *the talk of his lips*. (Chap. xx. 4; xxi. 25.) Enlargement of mind is also the *profit of mental labour*. (Eccles. xii. 9, 10.) But the "prating fool" (Chap. x. 8) 'cuts himself off from all advantage, except that of being entertained by his own talk; his business in coming into company not being, at all to be informed, to hear, to listen, but to display himself, and to talk without any design at all.'† Clearly therefore *the talk of his lips tendeth only to penury*. Rich beyond conception is *the profit of spiritual labour*. (Chap. x. 16.) "The Son of man gives to the labourer enduring meat. The violent take the kingdom of heaven by force. The *labour* of love God is not unrighteous to forget." (John, vi. 27. Heb. 6, 10.) *But the talk of the lips* gives husks, not bread. Where there are only shallow conceptions of the gospel, and no experimental enjoyment of Christian establishment, it is 'all running out in noise.'‡ There is no instruction, because there is no "good treasure" within. (Matt. xii. 35.) "What manner of communications are these that ye have one to

* Gen. xxiv. 27. 2 Sam. xv. 20. Ps. xxv. 10; lxi. 7; cxvii. 2. Mic. vii. 20. 'Note'—says an old expositor—that Solomon here is no lawgiver, but an evangelist, leading us unto Jesus Christ. For we can obtain no mercy but in him only. For "the promises of God are yea and amen in him."—Cope *in loco*.

† Bishop BUTLER'S *Sermon on the Government of the Tongue*.

‡ Henry. 1 Tim. v. 13. See Bunyan's graphical portrait of Talkative.

another?" (Luke, xxiv. 17) —is a searching question. Ministers, doctrines, the externals, circumstantial, disputations on religion--all may be the mere skirts and borders of the great subject, utterly remote from the heart and vitals. And indeed, the discussion of the substance of religion without reverence, without a sense of the Divine presence, and a single eye to edification, is only a profanation of holy things, and at best must alienate the precious truths from their true purpose. Nothing comes from a broken heart. It is only the deluding indulgence of a refined lust, a religious tongue without a godly heart--all *tending only to penury*. Take care that religious conversation deserves the name. Let the stamp of the profession of the saints of God be visible. (Ps. cxlv. 10-12.) Let the burning theme of the Saviour's love flow from the heart. (Luke, xxiv. 14-32.) Let that "name, which is above every name," be upon our lips, "as ointment poured forth;" so that "the whole house"—all that are living with us—"may be filled with the odour of the ointment." (Cant. i. 3. John, xii. 3.)

24. *The crown of the wise is their riches: but the foolishness of fools is folly.*

The godly first are made *wise* by being "crowned with knowledge." (Verse 18.) Then *the crown of the wise are their riches*. For though, as a fearful temptation (Matt. xiii. 22; xix. 23), no *wise* man would desire them; yet as the gift of God (1 Kings, iii. 13. Ps. cxii. 3) (the gift indeed of his left hand) (Chap. 16) they may become his crown. They enhance his reputation, and enlarge his usefulness as a consecrated talent for God. What *a crown* were they to David and his wise Son, as the materials for building the temple;¹ and to Job, as employed for the good of his fellow-creatures!² So that, though wisdom "under all circumstances is a blessing, it is specially pronounced to be "good *with an inheritance*." (Eccles. vii. 11, 12.) 'It is necessary to distinguish between the thing itself, and the abuse of it. Wealth is in fact a blessing, when honestly acquired, and conscientiously employed. And when otherwise, the man is to be blamed, and not his treasure.*

But if riches *are the crown of the wise*, they cannot disguise fools. They only seem to make their folly more open. Wasted on their selfish gratifications they become, not their crown, but their *foolishness*.³ The *foolish* son of this wise father, with all his riches, only exposed his *folly* more egregiously, and lost ten precious jewels from his royal crown, (1 Kings, xii. 16.) Whatever be our talents, let us trade with them for eternity, and they will be our everlasting *crown*. (Luke, xix. 13; xvi. 9. 1 Tim. vi. 19.)

¹ Chron. xxix. 1-5. 2 Chron. v. 1. ² Job, xxix. 6-17. Comp. Ps. cxii. 9.

³ 1 Sam. xxv. 36-33. Ps. xlix. 1.0-13. Luke, xii. 19, 20.

* COWPER's *Cursory Remarks on Carraccioli*. Southey's Ed. viii. 273.

25. *A true witness delivereth souls : but a deceitful witness speaketh lies.*

How weighty is the responsibility of testimony! (Chap. xxiv. 12.) Every Christian has in him a principle of conscientious faithfulness. *As a true witness he would deliver* the innocent from oppression or ruin. But an ungodly man would prove *a deceitful witness*, the agent of Satan (1 Kings, xxi. 13), *speaking lies* for his neighbour's destruction. (Matt. xxvi. 60. Acts, vi. 13. Comp. chap. xii. 6, 17.) What need have we to "walk before God" in our words, ready to hazard all for the interests of truth (Ps. xv. 2; xxiv. 3-5); considering our obligations to one another (Eph. iv. 25); 'mindful of that true and faithful witness, which every man carries in his own bosom, which no gift can blind, no power can silence;'* realizing our solemn appearing before the God of truth, when "by our words we shall be justified or condemned!" (Matt. xii. 37.) If the responsibility be so great to the *witness* in court, how much more to the *witness* in the pulpit!† Oh! is the minister of God *a true witness*, by the declaration of his message, assured, that no other truth, no adulteration of this truth, will *deliver souls*? (1 Tim. iv. 16.) Or is *he speaking lies*, holding back or denying truth, to the ruin of the soul, whom he was charged to deliver? (Jer. v. 31. Exod. xiii. 17. Comp. verse 5.) 'As they are the most profitable *witnesses*, which preach to us Jesus Christ; even so, the most exquisite deceivers are they, who under the shadow of religion do set forth men's traditions.'‡

26. *In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge.*

"Fear hath torment." (1 John, iv. 18. Acts, xxiv. 25.) It is the trembling of the slave (Rom. viii. 15); the dread of wrath, not of sin. There is no *confidence* here. It is pure selfishness. It ends in self. There is no homage to God. But the true *fear of God* a holy, happy (See Ps. cxii. 1; xxxiii. 18; cxlvii. 11), reverential principle; not that which "love casts out" (1 John, iv. 18), but which love brings in. It is reverence tempered with love. We fear, because we love. We "fear his goodness" (Hos. iii. 5. Ps. cxxx. 4) no less than his justice; not because we doubt his love, but because we are assured of it. (Heb. xii. 28. 1 Pet. i. 17, 18.) We fear, yet we are not afraid. (Ps. cxii. 1, 7.) The holiest and humblest is the most fixed and trusting heart. The fear of man produces faintness. (Chap. xxix. 25. Jonah, i. 3. Gal. ii. 12.) *The fear of the Lord*—such is the Christian paradox—emboldens. Its child-like spirit shuts out all terrors of conscience, all forebodings of eternity. *Confidence*—*strong confidence*—issues out of it. Abraham sacrificed his son in *the fear of God*; yet fully *confident*, "that God was able to raise him up from the dead." (Gen. xxii. 12, with Heb. xi. 17-19.)

* Bishop HORNE's *Sermon on the Great Assize*.

† Lavater and Scott *in loco*.

‡ Cope *in loco*.

The fear of God led the Babylonish captives with unshaken confidence into the fiery furnace. (Dan. iii. 16-18.) And thus does the child of God, while walking in godly *fear*, rejoice in *confidence*, even in the most frowning dispensation.¹ His covenant privilege covers him;² "and that wicked one toucheth him not."³

And how happy is the change wrought on our profession! Before, as criminals, we fled *from God*—now, as *his children*, we "*flee* to him—to hide us." (Gen. iii. 8, with Ps. cxliii. 9) The atonement, which has "made an end of sin;" the righteousness, which hath brought in the sunshine of favour; the intercession which maintains our standing of acceptance—this is our ground of *confidence*, strong as death, stronger than hell. (Rom., viii. 31-39.) Yes—if heaven and earth shake, God hath ordained and secured, that *his children shall have a place of refuge*, such as they need, and when they need (Ps. xlvi. 1; xxviii. 3. Isa. xxxii. 2) when the enemy is most strongly assaulting (Ps. lvi. 1-4. Isa. xxv. 4); at the last extremity, when every other *refuge* shall have been swept away. (Isa. xxviii. 16, 17.) Oh! does not every act of faith strengthen our *confidence*, and realize more sensibly the peaceful security of our *refuge*? (Chap. i. 33; xviii. 10. Isa. xxxii. 18, 19.) But remember—nothing short of a *full* application of the atonement can establish our confidence, and deliver us from slavish fear and uncertainty.

27. *The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.*

How glowing is this Divine principle! refreshing like the springs of Canaan;⁴ full of life,⁵ temporal,⁶ spiritual,⁷ eternal.⁸ It is the influence of the heavenly Comforter, as a *fountain* "springing up into everlasting life." (John, iv. 14.) Its preserving tendency is invaluable. It is always connected with the fear of sin (Chap. iii. 7; xvi. 6), as grieving our most beloved friend, and separating from our only happiness; while it keeps us *from the snares of death* (Eccles. vii. 26), "the end and wages of sin." (Rom. vi. 23.) How complete then is its application! Not only is it a *refuge* from danger, but a *fountain of life*. Not only does Christian *confidence* open a cover from the guilt, but its holy influence roots out the power, of sin. For among the countless throng of the redeemed not one finds a cover, from condemnation, who is not renovated unto spiritual life. Thus does this invaluable grace flow with the full streams of gospel blessing. How much of that worldliness that soils our profession, and of the restraint that contracts our spiritual joy, may be traced to the sparing or defective application of this Christian principle!

¹ Job, i. 1, with xiii. 15. Mic. vii. 7-9. Heb. iii. 16-19.

² Jer. xxxii. 40.

³ 1 John, v. 18. Comp. chap. iii. 21-26; xix. 23.

⁴ Deut. viii. 7. Josh. xv. 19.

⁵ Chap. xxii. 4.

⁶ Chap. x. 27.

⁷ Chap. xix. 23. Mal. iv. 2.

⁸ Ps. viii. 17.

28. *In the multitude of people is the king's honour; but in the want of people is the destruction of the prince.*

The Bible is a book for all. Even *the King* is interested in it, and was commanded to treasure it. (Dent. xvii. 18.) It describes him as a curse or a blessing to his people, as he is led by his own caprice (1 Kings, xii. 13), or directed by Divine wisdom. (2 Chron. ix. 8.) 'He is not appointed for luxury or for pleasure; but that as a Head he may preside over his members; as a Shepherd, he may care for his flock; as a tree, he may nourish those who dwell under his shadow.* *In the multitude of people is his honour.* They are the stay and strength of his kingdom.† *In the want of people is his destruction.* His revenue fails. His, strength is enfeebled. His enemies take advantage of his weakness. (2 Kings, xiii. 4-7.) His interests and his people's are one. In promoting their happiness, *the prince* secures his own *honour*. (Ps. lxxii.) If he be the father of his numerous family, he will always have "a quiver full of arrows to meet his enemies in the gate." (Ib. cxxvii.) How great then is *the honour* of our heavenly *King in the countless multitude of his people!* How overwhelmingly glorious will it appear, when the completed number shall stand before his throne (Rev. vii. 9, 10) each the medium of reflecting his glory (2 Thess. i. 10); each with a crown to cast at his feet (Rev. iv. 10, 11), and a song of everlasting joy to tune to his praise! (Ib. v. 9.)

29. *He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty (short, marg.) of spirit exalteth, folly.*

The world judge very lightly of a hasty spirit, except when it touches themselves. 'It is a fit of passion, soon over and forgotten.' But does God judge so? See how his word stamps the native rooted principle. It is "giving place to the devil;¹ grieving the Holy Spirit;"² contrary to the mind and example of Christ;³ inconsistent with the profession of the Gospel;⁴ degrading human nature;⁵ a work of the flesh, that shuts out from heaven,⁶ and condemns to hell? Surely then to be *slow to wrath*--such a fruitful source of sin and misery — is a proof of *great understanding*. (Chap. xx. 11; xx. 3. Jam. iii. 17.) It is as if we felt our just dignity, and high obligations. But too often, instead of being *slow to wrath*, the *spirit is hasty*, and finds a *short* way to wrath. It is as tinder to every spark of provocation, and at one step hurries into the midst of *wrath*. There is often a sourness of spirit, that sits upon men, by which they are

¹ Eph. iv. 26, 27.

² Ib. verse 30.

³ Matt. xi. 29. Phil. 11.3-6. 1 Pet. ii. 23.

⁴ Col. iii. 8, 12, 13.

⁵ Chap. xvii. 12; xxv. 8 ; xxix. 20.

⁶ Gal. v. 19-21.

⁷ Matt. v. 22.

* Geier.

† 1 Kings, iv. 20. 2 Chron. xvii. 14-19. Yet this honour had well nigh proved the destruction of the prince in the chastisement of his pride. 2 Sam. xxiv.

angry at they know not what; lighting into a flame at the most trifling matters, such as in cooler moments we shall be ashamed at having contended for. Terrible flames have arisen from these trifling sparks.* This is indeed *exalting folly* on an eminence to be seen by all. (Chap. iii. 35.) Yet too often passion serves instead of law and reason, and this folly is deemed high-mindedness and proper spirit. Oh! it is a mercy to be delivered from the standard of this world, and to live, act, and judge by the standard of God and his word.

But let the children of God remember, that a *hasty spirit* condemned the meekest of men. (Ps. cvi. 32, 33.) Never was *folly more exalted*, than by the fretful selfishness of a prophet of the Lord. (Jonah, iv.) The gentlest spirit needs to be cast into a deep mould of lowliness and love for communion with God. (Isa. lvii. 15. 1 John, iv. 16.) Who can plead inability to resist? Has not God given understanding to shew the temper; reason to govern it; his Word and Spirit to crucify it? Realize our obligations to sovereign grace, as the effective discipline for this baneful propensity. (Jam. i. 18, 19.)

30. *A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones.*

Many will admit religion to be good for the soul. But they conceive its fancied gloom to be injurious to the body. The wise man, however, teaches, that it is *the life of the flesh*. (Chap. iii. 7, 8.) And surely *a sound heart*, freed from corroding passions, and imbued with Christian habits, though it will not bring immortality, must be eminently conducive to health.† The contrast, however, here distinguishes *a sound heart* by the absence of selfishness,‡ and rejoicing in another's happiness or honour. (Num. xi. 29.) *Envy*, on the other hand, is wounded by our neighbour's prosperity. (Gen. xxvi. 14. 1 Sam. xviii. 9.) His ruin, or at least his injury, would give pleasure. It sickens at hearing of his praises, and repines at his very virtues. Something is always wrong in his conduct, something at least, which, if it does not deserve blame, greatly detracts from his intolerable praise. This evil is indeed the deadliest fruit of selfishness. Nothing flourishes under its shade. (Jam. iii. 16.) Often is it a fretting sickness (Esth. vi. 6, 12), or a pining despondency (Ps. cxii. 10), like the destruction of the bodily system by *the rottenness of the bones*. 'Truly'—as Bishop Hall observes —'this vice is executioner enough to itself!'§ Such a hell does the man carry in his own bosom! Alas! that this plant should be the growth of our own soil.|| So contrary is it to the mind of Christ

* See on verse 17.

† The soul disburdened of passions and perturbations, helpeth strength and liveliness of body very much.--DIODATI.

‡ 'Cor senator' SCHULTENS—a benevolent heart.

§ *Sermon on Rom. xii. 2.*—Works, v. 251.

|| Mark, vii. 22, 'evil eye,' James, iv. 5.

(Rom. xiii. 13), and to the spirit of his gospel. (II Cor, xiii. 4.) So surely will it exclude from heaven! (Gal. v. 21.)

31. He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor.

Are not the poor no less than the rich "made in the image of God?" (Gen. ix. 6.) Both "meet together" before their Maker without respect of persons. (Chap. xxii. 2. Job, xxxi. 15.) Both carry the same undying principle in their bosom. Both sink to the same humiliating level of death. Both rise to the same eminence of immortality. Besides-- have not the poor a special interest in, the Gospel?¹ Was not the Gospel first spread by the poor?² Has not the voluntary poverty of the Son of God for us put high honour upon the lowly condition?³ Then what ground is there *to oppress the poor*, as if they were of a lower grade than ourselves? This involves the guilt of *reproaching our Maker*. (Chap. xvii. 5.) It is slighting his own work; despising his own ordinance (Deut. xv. 11), and charging him with injustice, as if he had formed *the poor* to be the footstool of *their oppressors*. (1 Sam. ii. 7.) Would we *honour God*? We must not only refrain from *oppressing*; but we, must *have mercy on the poor*. Sure and large is the interest of this mercy (Chap. xix. 17. Ps. xli. 1) in the case of the Lord's poor. High indeed is the privilege, and everlasting the recompense, of honouring the Saviour in *his own person*. (Matt. xxv. 40.)

32. The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death.

We cannot judge men by their outward condition, for "there is one event to *the righteous and to the wicked*." (Eccles. ix. 2.) Such a judgment would often throw the balance on the wrong side. (Ps. lxxiii. 12.) The standard of the world is not less erroneous. While men rarely give an unqualified commendation of their neighbours in mutual intercourse; yet—as *respects God*--all are good enough for heaven. A hope is entertained of the most criminal, that they, will be taken to mercy at last. And thus the distinctive terms — *righteous and wicked* --so confounded, and brought so near each other, that there is little meaning in either.

But now let us turn to this striking picture before us, which sweeps away all human standards. Eternity is here realized before us—the *wicked and the righteous*— each "going to his own place." (Acts, i. 25.) Let us ponder the sight with deep-toned solemnity. O my soul, "make thy calling sure! "*The wicked* includes a diversified mass of character. Many are amiable, useful, and in a variety of ways exemplary. Others

¹ Matt. xi. 5. Jam. ii. 5. Ps. lxxviii. 10.

² Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. Acts, iv. 13.

³ Luke, ii. 7. Phil. ii. 7. 2 Cor. viii. 9. Matt. viii. 20.

are Absorbed in vanity; or they wear themselves away by the lamp of study; or they are given up to selfish indulgence. But whatever be the external shape or feature, the stamp is every way broad—"forgetfulness of God"—and the condemnation sealed—"turned into hell." (Ps. ix. 17.)

Truly is *the wicked* pictured as *driven away in* his wickedness. He is dragged out of life, like a criminal to execution; torn away from his only heaven here, with no joyous heaven beyond. (Job, xviii. 18; xxvii. 21.) Dreadful beyond imagination to the thus forced out of the body, to die a violent death. Fain would he stay. But he cannot. He cannot live. He dares not die. Sometimes he departs with a horror that no words can paint. Hell is manifestly begun on this side eternity. (1 Sam. xxviii. 15.) He is *driven* out of a world, which has cheated and damned his soul for ever. And even where he has "no bands in his death, but his strength is firm" (Ps. lxxiii. 4), where do we hear of "a desire to depart?" (Philip. i. 23.) Though he may fall asleep as softly as lambs, he will wake to live for ever "with the devil and his angels." His few moments of peace are only the respite from hopeless, never-ending torments. *His wickedness* was his element in life. It will cleave to him still, the sting of the undying worm, the fuel of unquenchable fire.

But is *the righteous driven away*? He dies by his own consent. It is a glad surrender, not a forcible separation. (Ps. xxxi. 5.) The tabernacle is not rent or torn away, but "put off." (2 Pet. i. 14.) He can take death by his cold hand, and bid him welcome. 'I can smile on death'—said a dying saint—"because my Saviour smiles on me." There, is courage to face "the King of terrors," and delight in looking homeward to his God.* There is loveliness and sunshine in his death, such as flashes conviction upon the most hardened conscience. (Nuns. xxiii. 10.) *The righteous hath hope in his death*. His death is full of *hope*. Job pierced his dark cloud of sorrow with this joyous *hope*.¹ David rested his way-worn spirit upon the Rock of salvation.² Stephen anchored within the vail, undisturbed by the volley of stones without.³ Paul triumphed in the crown, as if it was already on his head.⁴ And hear we not daily "the voice from heaven," assuring to us the "blessedness of them that die in the Lord?" (Rev. xiv. 13.) Praise to our Immanuel! 'When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death, thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.'† By thee as the way to the Kingdom we go freely, gladly, out of life. We go to what we love, to our native home, to our Saviour's bosom, to our rest, our

¹ Job, xix. 25-27. ² 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. ³ Acts, vii. 55-60. ⁴ 2 Tim. iv. 6-8. 2 Cor. v. 1.

* 2 Cor. v. 8. **qarþuhen**—undaunted boldness. **Eulokouhen**—we are well pleased.
—Comp. Matt. iii. 17.

† *Te Deum*.

crown, our everlasting joy. "Now, Lord, what wait I for? I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord."*

33. *Wisdom resteth in the heart of him that hath understanding: but that which is in the midst of fools is made known.*

Often does the wise man spew the blessing of wisdom on the lips. (Chap. x. 11, 20, 21; xv. 2, 7.) Here we trace it to its home. It flows from the head, and *rests in the heart*. Thus did it rest without measure in the humanity of Jesus (John, iii. 34); and most glorious was its manifestation.¹ When it rests in our hearts, incalculable is its value, as a fixed principle. It preserves us from the tossing of "divers and strange doctrines," and gives us "the good thing of a heart established with grace." (Heb. xiii. 9.) We see now the vital difference between speculation and experience; between the convictions of the judgment and the movement of the will.

It differs widely from mere worldly disputation. This--as Bishop Taylor observes — 'covers no vices, but kindles a great many. Though men esteem it learning, it is the most useless learning in the world.'† True *wisdom*, while it fixes its rest, sets up its throne, *in the heart*. All is therefore Christian order and holiness.

But there is another fountain always bubbling up.² *The fool's* multitude of words,³ selfish indulgence,⁴ uncontrolled passions,⁵ *make manifest what is in the midst of him.*⁶ Let him stand out as a warning beacon against display, self-conceit, self-ignorance. Never let our prayers cease, until He who is the Wisdom of God (1 Con i. 24) "takes his *rest in our hearts*." Have we received the precious gift? Then let us seek the increase by a close union with him, and an entire dependence upon him. (Ib. ver. 30.)

¹ Luke, ii. 47, 52; iv. 22. Matt. xxii. 46. John, vii. 46.

² Chap. xv. 2, 28; xxix. 11.

³ Eccles. v. 3; x. 14.

⁴ 1 Sam. xxv. 10.

⁵ 1 Sam. xx. 30-34. 1 Kings, xix. 1, 2. Comp. ver. 16; xii. 16.

⁶ Chap. x. 9; xii. 23; xiii. 16; xviii. 2. Eccles. x. 3.

* Ps. xxxix. 7. Gen. xlix. 18. Does not this text clearly prove that, while "life and immortality were *brought to light* by the gospel" (2 Tim. i. 10), the dawn of the day beamed upon the Old Testament saints? What could *this hope of the righteous* be, but the consummating prospect of the Gospel? Bishop Warburton (Div. Leg. B. vi § 3) expounds. 'that they shall be delivered from the most imminent danger.' That sagacious mind could never have confounded two things so essentially distinct, as hope in death, and hope of escape from death had it not been necessary to subserve a favourite hypothesis. Equally satisfactory and beautiful is the note of a learned German critic — 'A splendid testimony of the knowledge of the Old Testament believer in a future life. The wicked in this calamity is agitated with the greatest terror. He knows not where to turn. But the godly in this last evil has no fear. He knows to whom to flee, and where he is going.'—*DATHE in loco* Again—'He (the righteous) dieth in God's grace, and in an fissured confidence of the salvation of his soul, and of the glorious resurrection of his body.'—*DIODATI*.

† Via Intelligentiae--Preached before the University of Dublin.

34. *Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.*

If it be not beneath statesmen to take lessons from the Bible, let them deeply ponder this sound political maxim, which commends itself to every instinct of the unsophisticated mind; Indeed it would be a strange anomaly in the Divine administration, if the connection between godliness and prosperity, ungodliness and misery, established in individual cases, should not obtain in the multiplication of individuals into nations. The Scripture records however—confirmed by the result of impartial and extended observation—clearly prove this to be the rule of national, no less than of personal, dispensation. The annals of the chosen people, as they were a *righteous or sinful nation*, are marked by corresponding *exaltation or reproach*.* Not the wisdom of policy, extent of empire, splendid conquests, flourishing trade, abundant resources—but *righteousness—exalteth a nation*. It is both ‘he prop to make it subsist firm in itself, and a crown to render it glorious in the eyes of others.’† Greece in her proud science; Rome in the zenith of her glory—both were sunk in the lowest depths of moral degradation. Their true greatness existed only in the visions of poesy, or the dream of philosophy. Contrast the influence of *righteousness*, bringing out of the most debased barbarism a community, impregnated with all the high principles, that form a nation's well-being.‡ Thus to Christianize, is to regenerate, the community; to elevate it to a more dignified position; to *exalt the nation* (Deut. xxvi. 16-19), and that, not with a sudden flash of shadowy splendour, but with solid glory, fraught with every practical blessing. *But sin is a reproach to any people*. No nation is so low, as not to sink low under it; while to the mightiest people, it is a blot in their escutcheon, that no worldly glory can efface. What an enemy is an ungodly man to his country! Loudly as he may talk of his patriotism, and even though God should make him an instrument of advancing her temporal interest; yet he contributes, so far as in him lies, to her deepest *reproach*.

* Exaltation, Deut. xxviii. 13. Josh. x. 42. 1 Kings, iv. 20-24. 2 Chron. xvii. 2-5, 11, 12; xxxii. 22, 23. Reproach, Dent. xxviii. 43, 44. Judg. ii. 715. 2 Kings, x. 31, 32; xviii. 11, 12. 2 Chron. xv. 2-6; xxxvi. 11-17. Jer. vii. 29. See the name of reproach given by God himself. Isa. i. 10; lvii. 3. Hos. i. 6-9. Zeph. ii. 1. Comp. Wisd. v. 23.

† Bishop SANDERSON'S Sermon on Erod. xxiii. 1-3. Even an heathen sage spoke of moral righteousness—**εὐνομία** **πολιτεία**—the pillar and support of the city. —PLATO de Legibus, book vi. ‘Those princes and commonwealths, who would keep their governments entire and uncorrupt, are, above all things, to have a care of religion and its ceremonies, and preserve them in due veneration. For in the whole world there is npt a greater sign of imminent ruin, than when God and his worship are despised.’ Such was the testimony of the infidel and profligate politician — Machiavel. — Discourses on Livy.

‡ Rom. i. 22-32, was a picture of the heathen world in the best ages of refinement.

§ The Missionary Records of New Zealand and the South Sea furnish ample proof of this statement.

Beloved Britain! nation highest in the profession of *righteousness*! For thee we "rejoice with trembling." The combined effort of a little band, to promote the honour of the Sabbath;* to resist the encroachments of Popery; to enlarge the usefulness and efficiency of the Church; to train the young in the sound principles of the Gospel;† to circulate the word and preaching of the gospel to the ends of the earth—this is thy *national exaltation*. But the evil example among the Heathen,‡ the accredited influence of Romish heresy;§ the flood of infidelity, lawlessness, and ungodliness; the want of a full recognition of God in thy public acts—this is thy *reproach*. Let the little remnant in the midst of thee remember their high responsibility. (Matt. v. 13.) Let them take care, that their personal and relative profession add to the *righteousness*, not to the *sin*, of the nation. Let them plead for their country's true prosperity with humiliation, faith, and constancy.|| Let them labour for her *exaltation* with more entire union of heart.

35. The king's favour is towards a wise servant: but his wrath is against him that causeth shame.

The administration of *the wise servant* is often the working cause of national exaltation. (2 Chron. xxiv. 1-16.) *The king's favour towards him*¹ is therefore the rule of sound policy. Not less so *is his wrath against him that causeth shame* (Esth. vii. 6-10) 'to the office which he beareth, and to the Prince's choice.' ¶

Thus is it with the great King. All of us are his *servants*, bound to him by the highest obligations;² animated by the most glowing encouragements.³ All of us have our responsibilities, our talents, our work, our account. Towards "the faithful and *wise servant*," who has traded with his talents, who has been diligent in his work, and who is ready for his account—*his favour* will be infinitely condescending and honourable. (John, xii. 26.) *But against him that causeth shame--*

¹ Gen. xli. 38-40. Dan. vi. 3. Comp. chap. xvi. 13; xxii. 29.

² Ps. cxvi. 16. 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20; vii. 23.

³ Matt. xxv. 21, 23; xxiv. 44-46.

* See how heavily the honour of the Sabbath weighs in the scale of national dispensation. Neh. xiii. 15-18. Isa. Iviii. 13, 14. Jer. xvii. 24-27. Ezra, xx. 15-24.

† Mr. Addison, in one of his papers, after drawing a lively picture of the procession of children on a day of thanksgiving for the triumphs of the Queen's arms, gives his decided testimony, that these unprecedented victories were God's national blessing for the religious instruction of the poor. This was the testimony of a Secretary of State.—Guardian, No. 105.

‡ Ezra, xxxvi. 20-23 Rom. ii. 23. 'What a God must he be'—said a poor Indian of the Spaniards—'who had such bloody men for his servants and children!'

§ What must be the national guilt connected with the annual dedication of 100,000 l. of our revenue (including the ungodly grant to Maynooth) to the support of Popery! Who that receives implicitly the Scripture testimony, Rev. xviii. 4, must not tremble at the consequence of our nation madly going into Babylon, instead of coming out of her? Expediency may plead plausibly. But Burke's golden maxim is the soundest policy—'What is morally wrong can never be politically right.'

|| What a pattern does Dan. ix. furnish for this exercise of Christian patriotism!

¶ Diodati.

reflecting upon his Master, neglectful of his work, and unprepared for his account—*his wrath* will be tremendous and eternal. (Matt. xxv. 24-30.) What will the solemn day of reckoning bring to me? May I--may we all--be found *wise servants* to the best of *Kings*! looking with confidence for his welcome!

CHAPTER XV.

1. *A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger.*

WHAT a mine of practical wisdom is this Book of God! Let us ponder this valuable rule for self-discipline, family peace, and Church unity. Scripture often illustrates the different effects of the tongue. *The soft answer* is the water to quench*--*Grievous words* are the oil to *stir up*, the fire.† And this is, alas! man's natural propensity, to feed rather than to quench, the *angry* flame, We yield to irritation; retort upon our neighbour; have recourse to self-justification; insist upon the last word; say all that we could say; and think we "do well to be angry." (Jonah, iv. 9.) Neither party gives up an atom of the will. Pride and passion on both sides strike together like two flints; and "behold! how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" (Jam. iii. 5.) Thus there is the self-pleasing sarcasm; as if we had rather lose a friend, than miss a clever stroke. All this the world excuses as a sensitive and lively temper. But the gospel sets before us our Saviour's example;¹ imbues with his spirit;² and imparts that blessed "charity, that is not easily provoked;"³ and therefore is careful not to provoke a chafed or wounded spirit. If others begin, let us forbear from continuing the strife.‡ 'Patience is the true peace-maker.'§ *Soft* and healing words⁴ gain a double victory—over ourselves⁵ and our brother.⁶

2. *The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth forth foolishness.*

Before we had the tongue of love. Here is the *tongue of wisdom*.

¹ Pet. ii. 23.

² 2 Cor. iii. 18. Philip. ii. 3-5.

³ 1 Cor. xiii. 5.

⁴ Chap. xxv. 15. Comp. Eccles. vii. 8. Jam. iii. 17, 18.

⁵ Chap. xvi. 32.

⁶ Rom. xii. 19-21.

* See Jacob with Esau, Gen. xxxii. xxxiii.: Aaron with Moses, Lev. x. 16-20: the Reubenites with their brethren, Josh. xxii. 15-34: Gideon with the men of Ephraim, Judg. viii. 1-3: David with Saul, 1 Sam. xxiv. 9-21; xxvi. 21: Abigail with David, xxv. 23-32.

† See the instances of Jephthah, Judg. xii. 1-6: Saul, 1 Sam. xx. 30-34: Nabal, xxv. 10-12: Rehoboam, 1 Kings, xii. 12-15: the Apostles, Acts, xv. 39. Comp. chap. xxx. 33.

‡ Chap. xvii. 14. Even a Heathen could give this excellent advice—"Let dissension begin from others, but reconciliation from thee."—SENECA.

§ Bishop SANDERSON'S Sermon on Rom. xv. 5.

The tongue chews the man. *The wise* commands his tongue. *The fool*—his tongue commands him. He may have a mass of *knowledge* in possession. But from the want of the *right use*, it runs to waste. Wisdom is proved, not by the quantum of knowledge, but by its right application. Observe "the Spirit of *knowledge* resting upon our Divine Master."¹ In condescending to the ignorance of the people;² in commanding their respect;³ in silencing the gainsayers;⁴ in alluring sinners to himself⁵--how did his *wise tongue use knowledge aright!* Thus did his great Apostle give to all the same *knowledge*, but wisely—not the same form or gradation. (1 Cor. iii. 2.) Instead of exasperating his Heathen congregation by an open protest, he supplied their acknowledged defect, by bringing before them the true God, "whom they were ignorantly worshipping." (Acts, xvii. 23.) He pointed an arrow to Agrippa's conscience, by the kindly admission of his candour and intelligence. (Ib. xxvi. 27-29.) This *right use of knowledge* distinguishes the "workman approved of God, and that needeth not to be ashamed." (2 Tim. ii. 15.) The want of it often gives out. truth so loosely and unsuitably, as to open, rather than to shut, the mouth, of the gainsayer; rather to bring discredit upon the truth, than conviction to the adversary. Specially will the *tongue of the wise* direct a *right* application of knowledge to those, who have newly entered the path of God. May we not sometimes in our present stature, forget our former feeble infancy? If now we "strike our roots as Lebanon," was it not once with us only "the least of all seeds?" (Hos. xiv. 5. Matt. xiii. 32.) Let our considerate instruction pluck the thorn out of their tender feet, "lest that which is lamed be turned out of the way; but rather let it be healed." (Heb. xii. 13.)

But to judge of the waters flowing from a *fool's* fountain; listen to Baal's worshippers;⁶ Rabshakeh's proud boasting;⁷ the fretting murmurings of the people of God⁸ all *pouring out foolishness*. Oh! for a large infusion of sound *knowledge* in the treasure-house within, that the tongue may be at once disciplined and consecrated!

3. *The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.*

Adored be this All-seeing God!⁹ His inspection of the universe so minute, exact, unwearied!¹⁰ The first mark of the apostacy was a dread of his presence.¹¹ The ungodly try to forget it,¹² and often succeed in banishing him out of their thoughts. (Ps. x. 4.) Yet in despite of all their efforts to hide, he does see them. *His eyes are in every place*. Heaven, hell, the secret places of the earth, are all open before him.¹³ He *beholds*

¹ Isa. xi. 2.

² Mark, iv. 33.

³ Matt. vii. 29. John, vii. 46.

⁴ Matt. xxii. 15-46.

⁵ Ib. xi. 28-30. John, iv. 1-26. ⁶ 1 Kings, xviii. 26.

⁷ 2 Kings, xviii. 26-29.

⁸ Num. xiv. 2-10; xvi.-13.

⁹ Ps. cxxxix. 1-6.

¹⁰ Jer. xxiii. 24. Ps. xi. 4.

¹¹ Gen. iii. 8.

¹² Ps. x. 11. Ezra, viii. 12.

¹³ Verse 11. Ps. exxxix. 8.

the evil; whether the king on his throne;¹ or in his palace;² or the servant indulging his secret sin.³ Yes—he may shut out the sun from his retreat, but he cannot shut out the eye of God, "from whom the darkness hideth not."⁴ Reckless indeed is he to do or think what he would hide from God; and then—such is the secret root of atheism!⁵—thinking he can do so. (Isa. xxix. 15.)

But *his eyes also behold the good*. He sees them in outward destitution,⁶ in secret retirement,⁷ in deep affliction.⁸ He pierces the prison walls.⁹ He "covers their heads in the day of battle."¹⁰ He is with them in the furnace,¹¹ and in the tempest.¹² *His eye* guides them as their journeying God, and will guide them safe home;¹³ full of blessing,¹⁴ protection,¹⁵ and support.¹⁶ 'He fills hell with his severity, heaven with his glory, his people with his grace.'

But how shall I meet these *eyes*? As a rebel or as a child? Do they inspire me with terror, or with love? Do I walk carefully under their lively impressions? (Gen. xvii. 1.) Conscious corruption leads me to shrink from the eyes of man. But oh! my God! I would lay myself naked and open to thee. Search me; try me; shew me to myself. Bring out my hidden iniquities, and slay them before thee. (Ps. cxxxix. 24.) How is the overwhelming thought of this piercing eye more than counterbalanced by the view of the great High Priest, who covers and cleanses all infirmities and defilements, and pleads and maintains my acceptance notwithstanding all discouragement! (Heb. iv. 13, 14.)

4. *A wholesome tongue* (The healing of the tongue, marg.) *is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit.*

Wisdom is finely pourtrayed as a *tree of life*. (Chap. iii. 18.) So is also the genial influence of the righteous (Chap. xi. 30)--here the fruitfulness of this "little member." A high image of what it ought to be; not negative, not harmless, but *wholesome*. As the salt, cast into the spring, cleansed the bitter waters (2 Kings, ii. 21); so when there is grace in the heart, there will be *healing in the tongue*. (Chap. xii. 18.) "The speech will be with grace, seasoned with salt." (Col. iv. 6.) Large indeed is the sphere, and abundant the blessing. When employed in soothing the afflicted, calming the troubled waters with words of peace, it creates a paradise around. It is not like 'the thorny bush, pricking and hurting those that are about us, but a fruitful tree--*a tree of life*.'†

¹ Acts, xii. 23.

² Dan. v. 5.

³ 2 Kings, v. 20.

⁴ Job, xxxiv. 21, 22. Jer. xvi. 17.

⁵ Ps. xiv. 1.

⁶ Gen. xvi. 7, 13.

⁷ John, i. 48.

⁸ Exod. iii. 7. Ps. xci. 15.

⁹ Gen. xxxix. 21. 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13.

¹⁰ Ps. cxl. 7.

¹¹ Dan. iii. 25.

¹² Acts, xxvii. 23.

¹³ Ps. xxiii. 4; xlviii. 14. Isa. xlii. 16.

¹⁴ Gen. xxvi. 3.

¹⁵ 2 Chron. xvi. 9. 1 Pet. iii. 12. ¹⁶ Isa. xli. 10.

* Charnock. † LEIGHTON'S *Exposition of the Ninth Commandment*, vol. iv.

But if the gracious *tongue be healing*, the evil tongue is wounding. The meekest of men felt *perverseness a breach in the spirit*. (Num. xvi. 8-15.) The tongue of Job's friends broke "the bruised reed," which needed to be bound up. (Job, xiii. 1-5.) Even our Beloved Lord, who never shrunk from external evil, keenly felt the piercing edge of this sword to his inmost soul. (Ps. lxi. 19, 20.) May "grace be poured upon my lips," as upon my Divine Master's (Ib. xlv. 2), so that it may be a *wholesome tongue*, full of blessing and of good fruits! 'Everlasting benediction be upon that tongue, which spake, as no other ever did, or could speak, pardon, peace, and comfort to lost mankind! This was *the tree of life*, whose leaves were for the healing of the nations:*

5. *A fool despiseth his father's instruction, but he that regardeth reproof is prudent.*

Alas! we cannot wonder at this *folly*. Remember the birth of the fool, "as a wild ass's colt" (Job, xi. 12), *despising* discipline and restraint. Yet subjection to parents is the law of nature, recognized by the most uncivilized nations. Much more is it the law of God.† The authority of parents is the authority of God. 'The wayward resistance of the ungodly will be fearfully scourged.' (1 Sam. ii. 22-25.) And even the Christian penitent has felt the smart of the rod to the end of life.‡ If example would put this *folly* to shame, do we not read of One child, able to teach, yea to command, his parents, who yet exhibited the lovely pattern of filial subjection?§ But pride must be broken down, and the "clothing of humility" worn (1 Pet. v. 5), before the child will see that his parents know better than himself, and that to count their word law,—to "bear the yoke in his youth" (Lam. iii. 27),—and to *regard reproof*, is the path of *prudence* (Verses 31, 32; xix. 20), no less than of honour. (Chap. xiii. 18.) Solomon's wisdom, though the special gift of God, was doubtless connected with his filial *regard* to his *father's instruction*. (1 Chron. xxii. 11-13; xxviii. 9, 20.) Will those, who *despise their earthly father's instruction*, listen to their Heavenly Father? How surely therefore will this untractable spirit exclude from the Kingdom of God! (Matt. xviii. 3, 4.)

6. *In the house of the righteous is much treasure: but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble.*

The comparison between *the righteous and the wicked*, always turns in favour of *the righteous*. Even in treasure (Verses 16, 17; iii. 33),

* Bishop HORNE's *Sermon on the Tree of Life*.

† Exod. xx. 12. Eph. vi. 1, 2. Comp. Deut. xxi. 18—21. **Tinhn, kaqaper qeoi**. ARIST. *Eth.* ix. 2. E. Comp. viii. 14. PLATO *De Leg.* Lib. iv.

See Memoirs of Mrs. Hawkes, p. 524. —A most instructive biography.

§ Luke, ii. 49-51. 'Who was subject? And to whom? God to men.'—BERNARD, Homily i.

the world's idol, he exceeds. For though *his house* may be destitute of money, yet is there *much treasure*; often unseen (2 Cor. vi. 10), yet such, that *the revenues of the wicked*, compared with it, sink into nothing. Divine Teaching alone can convey any just apprehension of it. (1 Cor. ii. 9.) Even eternity cannot fully grasp it; as throughout eternity it will be progressively increasing. 'Drop millions of gold, boundless revenues, ample territories, crowns and sceptres; and a poor contemptible worm lays his One God against all of them.'* The treasures of the wicked are too much for their good, and too little for their lust. They cannot satisfy their senses, much less their souls. (Eccles. v. 10.) They may "take wings" (Chap. xxiii. 5) at any moment; and, while they continue, unlike *the treasures of the righteous* (Chap. x. 22), they are burdened with *trouble*. (Eccles. iv. 6.) But is it not the crown of the Christian's crown, and the glory of his glory, that his portion is so full, that he cannot desire more? All the excellences of the creation are only dark shadows of its more substantial excellency. What a mercy to be delivered from the idolatrous bait, so ruinous alike to our present peace and eternal welfare! (1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.) But a greater mercy still, to be enriched with that *treasure*, beyond the reach of harm, that raises to heaven; a portion in God, his favour, his image, his everlasting joy.

7. The lips of the wise disperse knowledge: but the heart of the foolish doeth not so.

The "right use of knowledge" is, first to "lay it up" in a store-house (Chap. x. 14); then out of the store-house to *disperse it*. The sower scatters the seed in the furrow, and calculates upon a proportionate harvest. (2 Cor. ix. 6.) Thus the *lips of the wise disperse* the precious seed, "giving a portion to seven, and also to eight;" not discouraged by trifling difficulties, but "sowing morning and evening," and committing the result to God. (Eccles. xi. 2, 4, 6.) Our Lord thus *dispersed* the heavenly *knowledge* of his gospel. (Matt. iv. 23; ix. 35.) He commanded his Apostles to scatter the seed through the vast field of the world. (Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.) The persecution of the Church was overruled for this great end. (Acts, viii. 4.) The Reformers widely *dispersed* their treasures both by preaching and writing, and rich indeed was the fruit. Do we remember, that our gifts and talents are the riches of the Church (1 Cor. xii. 7. 1 Pet. iv. 10); that, like our father Abraham, we are blessed, not for our own sakes, but to "be a blessing?" (Gen. xii. 2.) And does not conscience speak of the waste of many, even important, opportunities of intercourse with our fellow-sinners or fellow-Christians, when not an atom of *knowledge has been dispersed*? We contend for no eccentric irregularity, no passing of our proper

* Bishop HOPKINS' Works, i. 43. *Treatise on Vanity of the World*.

boundary, no entrenchment upon paramount obligations. But be careful, lest in quenching unnatural fire, we inadvertently quench some genuine spark of holy flame. Be mindful of small opportunities. The careful cultivation of the smallest field ensures an abundant harvest. The acceptance is not to the number, but to the improvement of the talents; not noly "where much has been given;" but where we "have been faithful in a few things." (Matt. xxv. 21.)

The sin of *the wicked* is not always, that they "pour out foolishness " (Verse 2); but that they *do not so*. They neglect to *disperse*. If they do not abuse their talent, they omit to improve it. If not blots, they are blanks in the Church. If they do no harm, they do nothing. (Matt. xxv. 25-28.) Indeed, they can disperse nothing from their empty storehouse. They can only trade with the trash of the world, not with the commerce of substantial *knowledge*--The end of both is according to their works--"Unto everyone that hath (actively improves) shall been given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not (uses not) shall be taken away, even that which he hath." (Matt. xxv. 29.)

8. *The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer of the upright is his delight.* 9. *The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord: but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness.*

Let the reader ponder this awful question 'What am I--what is my service--when upon my knees before God? *an abomination or a delight!* Man judges by acts; God by principles. *The sacrifice of the wicked*, though it be part of God's own service, yet 'will be found in his register in the catalogue of sins to be accounted for.'* 'At best little is said or done, where nothing would be lost. But it is "the sacrifice of fools" (Eccles. v. 1)--heedless and unreflecting, performed without interest, with the heart asleep. Nay more--where the heart is deliberately and habitually absent (Isa. xxix. 13)--it is the acting of a lie. And whether it be smoothly fashioned to impose on man, or whether it be forced by the sting of an awakened conscience--instead of possessing the virtue of *a sacrifice*, it is an insulting provocation; not only vain (Matt. xv. 7-9), but abominable--yea *abomination* itself. (Chap. xxi. 27.) That is wanting, "without which it is impossible to please God; "the lack of which stamped *the sacrifice* of Cain as an abomination. (Gen. iv. 3-5, with Heb. xi. 4.) It is a 'work, that doth not flow from a lively faith, and therefore hath in it the nature of sin.' (Art. xiii.)

Not that prayer itself is a sin. 'It is,' as Archbishop Usher expounds --'a good duty, but spoiled in the carriage.'† And far indeed would we be from discouraging *the wicked* from prayer. (Acts, viii. 22.) We

* Bishop HOPKINS' *Works*, ii. 481 Comp. Isa. lxvi. 3; Hag. ii. 12-41.

† *Eighteen Sermons on Eph.* ii 1.

would only press the awakening conviction, that it must be done in God's order and way; else never can it find his acceptance.

But not only *the sacrifice* but the *way, of the wicked*; not only his religion, but his common course, natural as well as moral, *is abomination*. (Chap. xxi. 4. Tit. i. 15.). All is the course of a rebel against God. All his doings are the corrupt stream from a corrupt fountain. Awful, indeed, is the thought of every step of life as being hateful to God!

Is he then finally rejected? Far from it. His desire to seek the Lord would be the beginning of *the prayer*, that ensures acceptance. *The prayer of the upright*, from its first, feeblest utterance, is not only acceptable to the Lord, but *his delight*. (Cant. ii. 14; iv. 11. Dan. ix.23; x. 12.) Here is that which brings acceptance--not the perfection, but the simplicity of uprightness. The man feelingly knows his own defilement. If he has not fathomed the depths of his corruptions, he has made the discovery, that to him at least they are unfathomable. (Jer. xvii. 9.) This consciousness of hidden sins only makes him more concerned to tear them from their hiding-place. His sacrifice therefore is that of truth, as contrasted with that of falsehood. That was the service of the outer--this of the inner--man. That seems what it is not, and covers what it is. This, "cometh to the light," and "the deed is made manifest," with all its infirmities, "that it is wrought in God." (John, iii. 21.) This *prayer of the upright is the Lord's delight*. It is suited to his own spiritual nature. "The Father seeketh such to worship him." (Ib. iv. 23, 24.) The golden censer above (Heb. x. 19-22), and the gracious intercession within (Rom., viii. 26, 27), combine with fragrant odour before our God. Never could we faint in prayer, did we realize more habitually this pure ground of acceptance. Not less pleasing to him is the course of the upright. He has given him a measure of *righteousness*, and an effort for more. And though he fulfils it not, he *follows after it*, cheered with the smile of his Father's gracious *love*. (Chap. xxi. 21. Philip. iii. 12.)

10. *Correction is grievous unto him that forsaketh the way: and he that hateth reproof shall die.*

But is it not also "*grievous* for the present" to the child of God? He knows his need of it, kisses the rod, bows his will, and reaps a fruitful blessing. (Heb. xii. 11.) But *grievous* indeed *is it to him that forsaketh the way*. He is humbled by force, not in spirit. He kicks at it and like an untractable child under the rod, only increases his own chastisement. There is no surer step to ruin than this *hatred of reproof*.*

* Chap. i. 30; v. II, 12, 23; xxix. 1; Pharaoh, Ex. x. 24-29; Ahab, 1 Kings, xviii. 11; xxi. 20; xxii. 8, 31; Amaziab, 2 Chron. xxv. 15, 16, 27; Ahaz, xxviii. 22, 23; the Jews. xxxvi. 15-17. Jer. vi. 16-19.

How do "the spots of God's children" (2 Chron. xvi. 10) here warn us --"Cease ye from man!" (Isa. ii. 22.)

But *correction* turns back him, who had *forsaken the way*. Then it is *grievous* no more. Had not Manasseh more cause to bless God for his fetters than for his crown, for his dungeon than for his palace?*"This man was born there." We would always look hopefully at a sinner under *correction*. For surely so long as the physician administers the medicine, there is no ground for despondency.

Child of God! Dost not thou still need the *correction*, to perfect thee for more difficult and refined obedience? This costly teaching brings us on wonderfully. The Lord teach thee, when the thorn is in the flesh, to pray for grace in the heart! (2 Cor. xii. 7.) Seek thy Father's favour, more than thine own ease. Desire the sanctifying, rather than the removal, of his rod. Mock him not by the empty ceremonial of repentance. But in true penitence look up to thy smiter to be thy healer (Hos. vi. 1); yet not till his *correction* has fully accomplished his gracious work. Lord! let me know the smart of thy rod, rather than the eclipse of thy love. Show me thy love; then do with me what thou wilt.

11. *Hell and destruction are before the Lord: how much more, then, the hearts of the children of men.*

Once more (Verse 3) behold we an Omniscient--Omnipresent God. *Hell and destruction*; every recess of the vast Hades; the state of the dead, and the place of the damned--are *before the Lord*,† before his eye; open to his cognizance. *How much more, then, the hearts of the children of men* (1 John, iii.20), unsearchable though they be! (Jer. xvii. 9, 10.) No depth is there within, that he cannot fathom; no manner of deceit so complicated, that he cannot track them. Words are not necessary with him to lay open the heart. Aaron's rebellious feelings were as cognizant to his eye as Moses's angry words. (Num. xx. 12, 24.) The inward hypocrisy of his people was as open before him, as if it had been stamped upon their foreheads. (Deut. v. 28, 29. Zeph. i. 12.)

Yet what a mass of practical unbelief is there in this plain demonstrative truth! For would men dare to indulge their vain thoughts, their light notions, their trifles, their impurities, did they really believe that the Lord searched their hearts? Would they attempt a forced concealment from his eye (Isa. xxix. 15); as if outward service, lip-worship, would avail, while the heart was cherishing its unrepented sin? Would they not be afraid *to think* before him what they would

* Chron. xxxiii. 11-13. Comp. David, Ps. cxix.. 67, 71: Ephraim, Jer. xxxi. 18-20: the Prodigal, Luke, xv. 12-20.

† Job, xxvi. 6. Pa. cxxxix.. 7, 8. Destruction, Heb. Abaddon. Comp. Rev. ix. 11

shrink *from doing* before men? Oh! is it not an awful moment in privacy to stand the test of this searching eye? Awful indeed is the thought to the idolatrous sinner, the lover of pleasure, distinction, or low ambition. Thine heart is open before thy God. Never will he stoop to occupy the second place there. Thy covering of deceit is swept away. The refuges of lie are pierced and laid bare.

The conscious sinner shrinks from this appalling view. The believer walks undismayed in the sight of this "consuming fire." His godly fear is the exercise of filial confidence. (Heb. xii. 28, 29.) The sins, that are opened to his Father's knowledge, are covered from his justice. (Ib. iv. 13. Ps. xxxii. 1.) When he "finds the law, that when he would do good, evil is present within him;" he can look up--"All my desire is before thee." (Rom. vii. 21. Ps xxxviii. 9.) Thus does the Gospel clothe the Divine attributes with light and love.

And see we not here a testimony to the Divine Glory of Immanuel? For *are not hell and destruction before him* (Rev. i. 18) as his vast empire? And did not he often prove his prerogative of searching *the hearts of the children of men*; charging sin in the inner world, beyond the ken of any, but the One all-seeing eye? And this indeed is the confidence of his people. Each of them appeal to this Omniscient eye, in despite of all accusing from the enemy--"Lord! thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee!" (John, xxi. 17. Rev. ii. 23.)

12. *A scorner loveth not one that reproveth him: neither will he go unto the wise.*

How different from David's spirit, thankful for the "kind smiting of the righteous" (Ps. cxli. 5); and from the lovely humility of an Apostle, who shewed before the Church his honour and *love to his reprovor*! (Gal. ii. 11-14, with 2 Pet. iii. 15.) Yet he had need to be wise with "the wisdom that is from above" to give reproof aright. So closely does the mixture of our own spirit cleave to every Christian exercise! Not less grace and wisdom does it require, instead of revolting from our Reprover, to *go unto him*, and ask the continuance of his faithful offices. That most sensitive, delicate, and unvarying of all feelings, *self-love*--has been wounded, and the wound is not easily healed. *The scorner* has been his own flatterer so long, that he cannot bear to be brought down to his proper level. The truth-telling friend therefore he counts as his enemy. (Gal. iv. 15, 16.) He *loveth not*--yea--he *hateth--one that reproveth him,** though before he might have revered him. (Mark, vi. 17-20.) "The Pharisee derided" our Lord with external *scorn*, when he struck at their right eye, and reproveth their *hypocrisy*.†

* Chap. ix. 8. 1 Kings, xxi. 20; xxii. 8. Amos, v. 10; vii. 10-13.

† Luke, xvi. 13, 14. **ecenukthrizon**, from **mukthr**, nostril--contempt shewn by the nostrils--**musw**, to blow the nose--'They blowed their nose at him.' See LEIGH'S *Critica Sacra*, and PARKHURST on **mukthrizw**.

"Everyone that doeth evil hateth the light; neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." (John, iii. 20.)

13. *A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.*

How close is the sympathy between the body and soul, though framed of such opposite elements! A man's countenance is the index of his spirit. In the sensation of joy, *the heart* sits smiling in the face, and looks *merrily* out of the windows of the eyes.* Yet too often this high exhilaration, this countenance lighted up, is a matter of sadness rather than of pleasurable contemplation; as connected with a happiness, that estranges the heart from God. Who has a true right to a *merry heart*, but he that is walking in the joy of Divine acceptance? (Ps. xxxii. 1, 2, 11.) This spring of joy lighted up Hannah's sorrowful countenance into godly cheerfulness. (1 Sam. i. 18.) Stephen stood before his judge, with his heavenly prospects beaming in his "angel face." (Acts, vi. 15; vii. 55.) Everywhere does the hearty reception of the gospel "give beauty for ashes," sunshine for gloom. (Isa. lxi. 3.)

Sad, indeed, is the contrast of *a heart broken* by worldly sorrow. (1 Sam. xxviii. 16. 2 Cor. vii. 10.) Too often does a mischievous gloom worm itself into the vitals of the child of God. (Chap. xviii. 14.) The melancholy victim drags on a weary, heavy-laden existence, clouding a distinct feature of his character (Philip. iii. 3), and one of the most attractive ornaments of his profession. (Ps. xxxiii. 1. Philip. iv. 4.) His hands slacken; his whole energies are paralyzed for, the work of God; and he sinks into desponding apathy and indolence, as if he had taken leave of life and the sun. (Chap. xvii. 22.)

Every effort should be made to sweep away this black hovering cloud. Let sense and feeling be kept within their bounds; and the Saviour's voice, encouraging confidence, will be practically regarded. (Isa. l. 10.) Even our very "sighing and crying for the abominations of the land" (Ezek. ix. 4) must not issue in heartless complaints, but, rather stimulate to the diligent improvement of present opportunities. Did we realize, as we ought, our present privilege, and grasp our eternal prospects; *no sorrow of the heart would break our spirit*. 'I wonder many times'--says Rutherford--'that ever a child of God should have a sad heart, considering what his Lord is preparing for him.' The gleam of the present sunshine is the earnest of what it will be, when--as he again beautifully observes--'we shall be on the sunny side of the Brae.'† Meanwhile the first step in religion is, not only beginning "to be serious, but to be happy. To maintain our Christian balance,

* Trapp *in loco*. This merriment, however, widely differs from the noisy mirth of the ungodly. (Chap xiv. 13.) The word is of frequent use among our old writers, It is Foxe's favourite description of the holy joys of the martyrs. Comp. Eccles. ix, 7.

† RUTHERFORD's, *Letters*.

even "godly sorrow" must be disciplined; lest it *break the heart* which it was intended only to humble; lest it give advantage to the enemy, and bring hindrance to the Church. (2 Cor. ii. 7.)

14. *The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge, but the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness.*

Observe the man of natural *understanding*. Every apprehension quickens the thirst to *seek knowledge*. He is ready to learn from any quarter, even from a child. He is all eye, all ear, all heart, for his object. Much more will spiritual *understanding* stimulate the desire. (Chap. i. 5; ix. 9.) Repress the appetite to be "wise above what is written." But make vigorous effort to be wise to the full extent of the Revelation. David, with his attainments, was ever crying for Divine Teaching.¹ His wise son *sought knowledge* upon his knees,² and not less in the diligent habit of application.³ The Queen of Sheba, "coming from the utmost parts of the earth;"⁴ Nicodemus and Mary, "sitting at the feet of Jesus;"⁵ the Eunuch, journeying to Jerusalem;⁶ Cornelius and his company, drinking in the precious message of salvation;⁷ the Bereans, carefully "searching the Scriptures"⁸--all these shew *the understanding heart, seeking* a larger interest in the blessing.

Invaluable, indeed, is the gift. Warm affections need the discipline of *knowledge* to form Christian consistency and completeness (Philip. i. 9. Ps. cxix. 66): seeking for wholesome food, not intoxicating draughts; not deeming novelty the most desirable thing; but rather, with the wise Sir M. Hale, desiring 'to be impressed and affected, and to have old and known truths reduced to experience and practice.'

But while the *man of understanding* is never satisfied with *knowledge*, *the fool* is fully satisfied with folly. His brutish taste *feeds upon foolishness*, as his meat and his drink. His spirit "is of the earth, earthly." Young people! guard against this folly at every turn. Avoid trifling amusements, frivolous reading, profane merriment. In religion, beware of preferring empty speculations and disputings on matters indifferent, to the rich pasture of the children of God. (Verse 21; Acts, xvii. 21.) Let us all ponder the responsibility or "going on to perfection; that, being of full age, we may have our senses exercised to discern both good and evil." (Heb. vi. 1; v. 14)

15. *All the days of the afflicted are evil: but he that is of a merry heart hath a continued feast.*

Affliction, as the fruit and chastening of sin, is an *evil*. Hence *all the days of the afflicted are evil*. (Gen. xlvii. 9. Ps. xc. 7-9.) Yet a solid

¹ Ps. cxix. 98-100, with 33, 34, &c.

² 1 Kings, iii. 5-10.

³ Eccles. xii. 9, 10.

⁴ 1 Kings. x. 1. Matt. xii. 42.

⁵ 5 John, iii. 1, 2. Luke, x. 39.

⁶ Acts, viii. 28.

⁷ Ib. x. 33.

⁸ Ib. xvii. 11.

principle of inward satisfaction will bring real comfort in most trying circumstances. Though therefore the abounding consolation of Christian affliction does not blot out his penal character; yet the child of God is not so miserable as he seems to be. (2 Cor. vi. 10.) The darkest of these *evil days* can never make "the consolations of God small with him."¹ He can sing in the prison, as in a palace.² He can "take joyfully the spoiling of his goods."³ He can praise his God, when he hath stripped him naked."⁴ He can rejoice in him as his portion in earthly destitution.⁵ 'Who is it'--said the heavenly Martyn in a moment of faintness--'that maketh my comforts to be a source of enjoyment? Cannot the same hand make cold, and hunger, and nakedness, and peril, to be a train of ministering angels conducting me to glory?'"*

What real *evil* then can affliction bring? Or rather, what does it bring, but many *feast days*? (Eccles. ix. 7.) A few days' feasting would soon weary the epicure. But here *the merry heart hath a continual feast*. His temporal mercies are fraught with cheerfulness. And 'all his trouble is but the rattling hail upon the tiles of his house,'† not disturbing his enjoyment. Fed with this heavenly portion, shall I not thank my God, that he hath rooted me up from present satisfactions? "Let me not eat of this world's dainties. Thou hast put gladness into my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased." (Ps. cxli. 4; iv. 6, 7.)

16. *Better is little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure, and trouble therewith.* 17. *Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.*

Here are the sources of *the merry heart*--*the fear of the Lord*, and *love* to man. And here also is the *continual feast*, so satisfying, that the saint's *little* is better than the worldling's all.⁶ It is his Father's gift;⁷ the fruit of his Saviour's love;⁸ enjoyed by special promise,⁹ and sweetened with the "great gain of godly contentment."¹⁰ If it be only *little*, it is not from lack of his Father's care and love; but because his wisdom knows what he really needs,¹¹ and that all beyond would be a temptation and snare. Truly "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."¹² 'Riches and poverty are more in the heart than in the hand. He is wealthy, that is contented. He is poor, that wanteth more.'‡ The universe will not fill a worldly,¹³ while a *little* will suffice for an heavenly,¹⁴ heart. "The

¹ Job, xv. 11.

² Acts, xvi. 25.

³ Heb. x. 34.

⁴ Job, i. 21.

⁵ Hab. iii. 17, 18.

⁶ Chap. xvi. 8. Ps. xxxvii. 16.

⁷ Matt. vi. 11.

⁸ 2 Pet. i. 3.

⁹ Ps. xxxiv. 10; xxxvii. 3, 19. Isa. xxxiii. 15, 16.

¹⁰ 1 Tim. vi. 6. Philip. iv. 11, 12.

¹¹ Matt. vi. 32.

¹² Luke, xii. 15.

¹³ Eccles. i. 8.

¹⁴ Gen. xxviii. 29

* *Life*, Chap. ii.

† LEIGHTON on 1 Pet. i. 2; iii. 17.

‡ Bishop Hall.

children of light" content themselves willingly with the small pittances, which their Father allows them during the time of their minority; knowing that their main portion is reserved for them in safe keeping unto the "full age." (1 Pet. i. 4.) They are well satisfied on their way home to live rather more scantily by the way; like Joseph's brethren, who were provided with food for their journey; but their full sacks were unopened, till they reached their home. (Gen. xlii. 25.) Here their God compensates for everything. But what would compensate for him?

On the other hand, there must be *trouble with great treasure*, without *the fear of the Lord*. (Eccles. iv. 6; v. 12.) And far more destitute is its possessor in his unsubstantial happiness, than the man of God, who is "eating his bread in the sweat of his brow." 'Jacob's ladder, which conveys to heaven, may have its foot in the smoking cottage.* And as to this world's comforts--the *dinner of herbs*, the homely meal of love, is better than *the stalled ox*, preparing for a sumptuous, but unbrotherly, feast.¹ *Love* sweetens the meanest food. *Hatred* embitters the richest feast.² How did the presence and converse of the Lord of angels dignify the humble fare!³ How much more refreshing were the social meals of the Pentecostal Christians, than the well-furnished tables of their enemies!⁴ When the Lord's ordinance of marriage is marred by man's selfishness; when wealth, rank, or adventitious accomplishments govern the choice of life's companion, rather than the *fear of the Lord*; what wonder if *the stalled ox*, and *hatred therewith*, be the order of the house? Mutual disappointment is too often the source of criminal indulgence abroad; always the bane of peace and unity at home.

Few, alas! practically believe this divine testimony. Parents! do you seek the solid happiness of your children? Then lead them to expect little from the world; everything from God.

18. *A wrathful man† stirreth up strife, but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife.*

This Proverb requires no explanation. But observe the principles of *hatred and love*, contrasted in active exercise. Some persons make it their occupation to sit by the fire, to feed and fan the flame, lest it be extinguished. An useful and friendly employment, were it a fire to warm. But when it is an injurious, consuming, and destructive element, it would seem difficult to discover the motive of these incendiaries (Chap. x. 12; xvi. 27, 28; xxvi. 21), did we not read, that

¹ Chap. xvii. 1; xxi. 19; xxiii. 6.

² 1 Sam. xx. 24-34. 2 Sam. xiii. 23-29.

³ John, xxi. 9-12.

⁴ Acts, ii. 4-6. Comp. Ps. cxxxiii.

* Bishop REYNOLDS' *Sermon on 1 Tim.* vi. 17-19.

† A man of wrath, Heb. constantly indulging it; unwilling to put it away; a firebrand, *Vir flagrantiae*.--SCHULTENS. Comp. xxix. 22.

"out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, wickedness, an evil eye, pride, foolishness." (Mark, vii. 21, 22.)

What then is the Christians exercise? Instead of *stirring up*, to *appease, strife*; to bring water, not fuel, to the fire; by "a soft answer to turn away wrath;"* by a yielding spirit to melt, subdue, and bring peace. (Gen. xiii. 7-9. Eccles. x. 4.) Let me remember, that I owe my very salvation to this attribute, *slow to anger*. (Ps. ciii. 8. 2 Pet. iii. 15.) And shall I not endeavor to imbue my profession with this lovely adorning, and to "be a follower of God, as his dear child, walking in love?" (Eph. v. 1,2.) Will not this temper of the gospel secure my earthly enjoyment of godliness? (Matt. v. 5.) Will it not also seal my title as a child of God? (Ib. ver. 9.)

19. *The way of the slothful man is as an hedge of thorns; but the way of the righteous is made plain* (raised up as a causey, marg.†)

Another picture of the *slothful man* drawn to life! He plants his own *hedge*, and then complains of its hindrance. He is always at a stand. Every effort is like forcing his way through a *hedge of thorns*, where every *thorn*-bush tears his flesh. Indecision, delay, and sluggishness, add to his difficulties, and paralyze his exertion; so that after a feeble struggle of conscience, with much to do, but no heart to do anything, he gives up the effort.

This sloth is ruinous in temporals. One or two hills vigorously climbed *make the way* plain for future triumph. But to put half the soul to the work; to drag to it as an unavoidable task; to avoid present difficulties in order to find a smoother path, makes a *hedge of thorns*, harassing to the end of the journey.

Much more ruinous is this evil in the Christian life. The sluggard in religion is never at ease. He knows that he needs a change. He makes an effort to pray; or he takes up a good book. But all withers for want of purpose of heart. Exertion is to him impossible. He sees no hope of overcoming, and sinks again.

Nor is this merely the beginning of his path. It is *his way*--his whole course. *The righteous* may loiter or decline, but it is not *his way*. *The slothful man* may have a fit--sometimes an astonishing fit--of exertion; but he relapses to his former state (Chap. xii. 27), still surrounded by a *hedge of thorns*, unable to force his way, pierced, disheartened to the end.

Observe God's estimate of him. He contrasts with him, not the diligent, but *the righteous*, marking him as a "wicked, because a *slothful servant*." (Matt. xxv. 26.) The difficulties are far more in the

* Verse 1. References.

† 'A highway--a path so formed, as to be easy to the foot of the traveler'--FRENCH and SKINNER. Comp. Isa. xxxv. 8. Also 2 Chron. ix. 11, marg.

mind than in the path. For while *the slothful* sits down by his *hedge-side* in despair, *the way of the righteous*, in itself not more easy *is made plain*. He does not expect God to work for him in an indolent habit. But he finds that God helps those that help themselves. Working with diligence, he finds that he can work in comfort. Following his commands, feeding upon his promises, continuing in prayer, in waiting and watching for an answer to prayer--*his way is raised up*, before him. He believes what is written, and acts upon it without disputing, without delay. As soon as ever the light comes into his mind--at the very first dawn--this determines the direction of his steps, and the order of his proceedings. Thus his stumbling-blocks are removed. (Num. xiii. 30; xiv. 6-9. Isa. lvii. 14.) Industrious wisdom performs what lazy foolishness deemed impossible. *Thorns* there are doubtless in the way, but not an impassable *hedge of thorns*; only such, as while they pierce his flesh, are overruled as a blessing to his soul. (2 Cor. xii. 7, 8.)

Now to apply this to myself--to my great work. Of infinite moment it is for me to have *my way made plain*. For this--confidence of success is indispensable. Let me then examine my ground. Suppose up to this moment I have been living in enmity with God; yet now he "willeth not my; death;"¹ he invites me to come to him;² he assures my acceptance."³ I have his word to depend upon. Why should "I stagger in unbelief?" His truth claims my confidence, and warrants my expectation of the certain blessing. I do not begin, hoping to amend for past neglect, but, believing in him for free pardon and strength. The physician heals my helplessness. Faith expels slavish fear, and "the way of the Lord," instead of a *hedge of thorns*, is "strength to the upright." (Chap. x. 29.) The prospect brightens, and instead of "the hard man," which the *slothful* pictures to himself, a reconciled God appears before me. (Matt. xxv. 24. 2 Cor. v. 19.)

This is no easy way. What fluctuation of faith!--What weariness and discouragement! But at length *the way is made plain*. Difficulties are faced, surmounted, carried by assault, and what cannot be removed is endured. The mountains are leveled before Zerubbabel. (Zech. iv. 7.) The feeble worm threshes them by the energy of faith. (Isa. xli. 15.) Hope, love, and joy, are conquering principles. Religion, with all its crosses, is found to be a practicable thing. (Philip. iv. 13.) The victory over sloth opens a happy and triumphant way to heaven. (Matt. xi. 12.)

The slothful man has enjoyed the same advantages. But he has not gone through the *thorn-hedge* of his own corruptions. He has never learnt, that the cross is the discipline to the end of the way. He does not think what is spoken to faith, but what is agreeable to feeling. He has never broken through the *thorn* of unbelief. He has compromised

¹ Ezek. xxxiii 11.² Matt. xi 28.³ John, vi, 37.

and failed in the unreserved trust and surrender of himself to his Saviour. He never therefore comes to God in confidence. All his service is with a festering conscience, and with that timidity and delay which ensures defeat. His way at every turn is restless trouble; struggling with *a hedge of thorns* to the very last.

Child of God! beware of a sluggish spirit. Even the morbid, scrupulous strife about your state may sometimes be a slothful indulgence in direct opposition to the plainest declarations of God. Let not unbelief wrest the promise from your hand, or paralyze the hand that holds it. If *the way has been made plain*, sit not down in the indulgent comfort of it. But "go in this thy strength" to more important advantage. Prize every particle of success obtained by exertion. Oh! it is worth everything, if we have suffered ourselves to be entangled by spiritual sloth, to rise, though it be at the setting of the sun, and clear away the clouds, that "in the evening time there may be light." (Zech. xiv. 7.) Happy indeed will it be to be quickened, though at the last, to a firmer confidence; to be brought, though only a step nearer to Christ,--to have one thorn less to conflict with in the struggle of death.

20. *A wise son maketh a glad father; but a foolish man despiseth his mother.*

Do not the brightest joys,¹ and the bitterest sorrows² in this world of tears, flow from parents' hearts? Whatever be the delight to see a son prospering in life; the Christian father finds no rest, until *a wise son maketh him glad*. And here we need not any development of talent, or superior attainment, but the true *wisdom*; humble and docile, marked. (as the contrast suggests) by filial reverence, specially by the cordial choice of that, which "is the beginning of wisdom--the fear of the Lord." Such a son does indeed rejoice his father, as he watches, with equal pleasure and thankfulness, the daily growth and healthiness of his choice vine.

But what if *folly*, instead of *gladdening*, *despise a mother*³--her, whose tender love,⁴ and yearning faithfulness,⁵ are a faint picture of the heart of God? The law of God commands honour⁶ and reverence,⁷ and the transgression of the law will not be forgotten.⁸ But is not this neglect a chastening rebuke for capricious indulgence? What grace and wisdom is needed, that the parents may be a valuable blessing to their children for their highest interests! A single eye is the primary concern.

¹ Chap. x. 1; xxiii. 24. 1 Kings, i. 48.

³ Chap. xix. 26; xxiii. 22.

⁶ Exod. xx. 12.

⁴ Isa. lxvi. 13.

⁷ Lev. xix.3.

² Chap. xvii. 25. 2 Sam. xviii. 33.

⁵ Ib. xlix. 15.

⁸ Chap. xx. 20; xxx. 17. Ezek. xxii. 7.

21. *Folly is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom: but a man of understanding walketh uprightly.*

This Book of instruction probes our profession. What think we of *folly*! Not only does the ungodly practise it. But *it is joy* to him. He sins without temptation or motive. He cannot sleep without it.¹ It is "the sweet morsel under his tongue."² He "obeys it in the lusts thereof."³ He "works it with greediness."⁴ He hates the gospel, because it "saves from it."⁵ But hear the humbling confessions of a child of God--"I am carnal, sold under sin. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" Verily would he sink under his hated burden, but for the confidence--"I thank God--There is no condemnation." (Rom. vii. 24, 25; viii. 1.)

This appetite for sin proves the man to be *destitute of wisdom*. That which hath turned this fair world into a sepulchre; nay--that which hath kindled "everlasting burnings," is *his joy*. And thus he goes on, intent upon the trifles of the day; and trifling with eternal concerns; preferring shadowy vanities to everlasting glory. Will he not open his eyes to the discovery, that "they that observe lying vanities, forsake their own mercy?" (Jonah, ii. 8.) The Lord save him, ere it be too late, from reaping the bitter fruit of his foolish choice!

But the man of understanding gives himself to the word of God. He has joy in wisdom (Chap. xxi. 15), as the sinner in *folly*. Even his painful discoveries of indwelling corruption ground him deeper in solid religion, than those who know only the surface. He is taught of God, and *his upright walk* is a bright "shining path." (Chap. iv. 18.) Give me, O my God, *understanding*, that my *joy* may be in thy wisdom, not in my own folly.

22. *Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.*

The value of this proverb as a political truth is sufficiently obvious. A nation *without counsel* can never be *established*. (Chap. xi. 14.) A *multitude of counsellors* is an indispensable advantage to the Sovereign for his own *purposes*. (Chap. xx. 18; xxiv. 6.) And by the neglect of them many good *purposes have been disappointed*.* In the Church, also, combined counsel has greatly tended to Christian *establishment*. (Acts, xv. 6, 31.) Its influence also in our religious institutions is of the highest moment. Clear and commanding is the duty of godly and able men as a *multitude of counsellors*, to take an active part in their *purposes*.

¹ Chap. iv. 16, 17.

² Verse 14; ix. 17. Job, xx. 12.

³ Rom. vi. 12.

⁴ Eph. iv. 19.

⁵ Matt. i. 21. Acts, iii. 26.

* Rehoboam, 1 Kings, xii. 13-19. Ahab, xxii. 18-39. Even David, 2 Sam. xxiv. 1-4, 15.

In many individual perplexities we are led highly to estimate this advantage. For how weak and ignorant we are! Were our judgment perfect, the first impressions would be infallibly right. But feeble and of shaken as it is by the fall, every dictate needs pondering. How much evil has been done by acting upon impulse in a hasty moment, or by a few warm words or lines without consideration! (Chap. xix. 2.) Our wisdom lies in self-distrust; at least leaning to the suspicion that we may be wrong. Yet, while guarding on the other side, against that indecision of judgment, which is carried about by every person's opinion; the expediency, especially in important matters, of experienced *counsel* will be generally felt. But even here the wisest is fallible, and often erroneous. In the use of human means, let us mainly look up to the great "Counsellor" (Isa. ix. 6) of his Church for guidance, and in reverential thankfulness take "his testimonies as the men of our *counsel*." (Ps. cxix. 24, M.R.) Blessed be God for this special privilege of counsel always at hand! In humility and confidence we shall not materially err. (Chap. iii. 5, 6.)

23. *A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth; and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!*

This is a true Proverb, when the mouth is under Divine discipline. A word for our Great Master to our fellow-sinners he will condescend to bless. The remembrance--"Who made man's mouth?" (Exod. iv. 11)--puts away pride. But have we not *joy by the answer of our mouth?* (Chap. xii. 14; xiii. 2.) The pain that every right-minded Christian feels in giving "open rebuke," is abundantly compensated by, *the joy* of the happy issue. (Chap. xxvii. 5. 2 Sam. xii. 1-13.) Even an unsuccessful effort brings *the joy* in "the testimony of our conscience." It must however be *a word spoken in due season* (Chap. xxv. 11), though it be from feeble lips.* For--though 'there are some happy seasons, when the most rugged natures are accessible;' † yet many a good word is lost, by being *spoken* out of season. Obviously a moment of irritation is out of season. We must wait for the return of calmness and reason. (1 Sam. xxv. 37,) Sometimes indeed the matter forces itself out after, lengthened and apparently ineffectual waiting. It has been long brooded over within, and must have its vent. But this explosion sweeps away every prospect of good, and leaves a revolting impression.

* Chap. xxiv. 26. Thus Luther, after the pattern of the great Apostle, gladly acknowledged his obligation.--"The word of a brother, pronounced from Holy Scripture in a time of need, carries an inconceivable weight with it. The Holy Spirit accompanies it, and by it moves and animates the hearts of the people, as their circumstances require. Thus Timothy, and Titus, and Epaphroditus, and the brethren who met St. Paul from Rome, cheered his spirit; however much they might be inferior to him in learning and skill in the word of God. The greatest saints have their times of faintness, when others are stronger than they."--SCOTT'S Contin. of Milner, i. 332: See the ministry of Christ, Isa. vii. 4.

† Bishop HOPKINS' *Works*, iv. 485. 'Mollissima fandi tempora.'--VIRG. *AEn.* iv. 293, 294.

Instead of a fertilizing shower, it has gathered into a violent and destructive tempest.

It is most important, that our whole deportment should bring conviction, that we yearn over the souls of those whom we are constrained to reprove. The general rule is, to give reproof privately (Matt. xviii. 15); not exasperating, except when the occasion calls for it (1 Tim. v. 20. Acts, xiii. 6-11), by public exposure. Never commence with an attack; which, as an enemy's position, naturally provokes resistance. Study a pointed application. A word spoken for everyone, like a coat made for everyone, has no individual fitness. When "the wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment" (Eccles. viii. 5), the word is doubly effective. Manoah's wife upheld her husband's faith.¹ Abigail restrained David's murderous intent.² Naaman's servants brought their master to sober reason.³ Paul withheld the jailor's hand from self-destruction, and opened salvation to his soul.⁴ Sweet indeed also is the Minister's *joy from the answer of his mouth*, when the "gifted tongue of the learned speaks a *word in season* to him that is weary." (Isa. l. 4.) And will it not be an element of his consummating joy "at that day," when he shall welcome those instrumentally saved *by the answer of his mouth*, as his "glory and joy?" (1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.)

24. *The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath.*

Another beam of light and immortality here shines upon the Old Testament Dispensation. For if the *life above* is beyond animal sensation, it must be the life eternal. *The hell beneath*, opposed to it, must stretch beyond the grave into eternity. But the *way of life*--the way in which alone life is formed, the way to God, the way to glory--is but one. That way is Christ. (John, xiv. 6.) If therefore I come to him, renouncing all other hope, casting all my hope on him, and every step of my way "looking unto him" (Heb. xii. 2)--am not I in this way? And if I follow him in "the obedience of faith," is not my course, my daily walk, advancing in that way? (John, viii. 12.)

This way is above--of heavenly origin--the fruit of the eternal councils--the display of the manifold wisdom of God. Fools rise not high enough to discern it, much less to devise and walk ill it. Their highest elevation is groveling. God does not allow them even the name of life. (1 Tim. v. 6.) Cleaving to the dust of earth, they sink into *the hell beneath*. But *this way of the wise is above*. They are born from *above*; taught from above; therefore walking above, while they are living upon earth. A soaring life indeed! The soul mounts up, looks aloft, enters into the holiest, rises above herself, and finds her resting-place in the bosom of her God. A most transcendent life! to

¹ Judg. xiii. 23.
31.

2. 1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33.

3. 2 Kings, v, 13, 14.

4. Acts, xvi. 28-

be "partaker of the Divine nature!" (2 Pet. i. 4) the life of God himself (Eph. iv. 18); in humble sublimity, ascending above things under the sun, above the sun itself. Not only is it out of the reach of carnal men, but beyond the comprehension of all. (Job, xi. 7-9.) It is such a way as neither men nor angels could ever have cast up, such as can never be contemplated but with reverential faith. The wise in their most favoured moments cannot fully conceive their present privileges; how much less the glorious unfolding, when the clouds shall never more be known.

The further we walk in *this way above*, the further we *depart from hell beneath*. Heaven and Hell are here before us. Soon will our state be fixed for eternity.--What then am I? Where am I? Those "who mind earthly things, their end is "the *hell beneath* Those who walk in *the way above*--"their conversation is in heaven;" their hope is fixed on the Lord's coming from thence; their everlasting joy will be the complete transformation into his own image.¹ There is no downward tendency. It is still upwards. It is all rising ground. Mount ever so high, the ascent is ever before us; an immense distance still appears, ere we gain the summit. Yet the moment we desire this heavenly state, we have begun to know it, and we shall rise higher and higher heavenward, till we take our place before the throne of God. Thus 'he that is truly wise, In this holy way of obedience, walketh to eternal life.*

Children of God! walk like yourselves; with "your hearts lifted up in the ways of the Lord;"² with a holy loftiness above the debasing pleasure of earth; "looking at the things that are unseen;"³ "having respect unto the recompence of the reward;"⁴ walking in *the way above*, where your hope is,⁵ where your treasure,⁶ where your home,⁷ above all--where your ascended Saviour is;⁸ and where one golden ray of his favour, one reflected beam of his glory, will outshine all the glare of a shadowy world. Had we more of heaven in our hearts, we should have more of its spirit in our profession. We should think less of the roughness of the way, if we more fully realized the rest beyond. But except we know--in its measure--heaven as our state now, how can we hope to enjoy it as our everlasting home? 'Grant, we beseech thee, that, like as we do believe thy only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to have ascended into the heavens; so we may also in heart and mind thither ascend, and with him continually dwell.'†

¹ Philip. iii. 19-21. Comp. Ps. xvii. 14, 15.

* Bp. Hall.

² 2 Chron. 11. xvii. 6. Comp. Isa. xxxiii. 16; xl. 31; lviii. 14.

³ 2 Cor. iv. 18.

⁴ Heb. xi. 24-26.

⁵ 2 Cor. v. 1-5. Col. i. 27.

⁶ Matt. vi. 20.

⁷ 2 Cor. v. 6-8. Heb. xi. 19; xiii. 14.

⁸ Col. iii. 1.

* Bp. Hall.

† Collect for Ascension day.

25. *The Lord will destroy the house of the proud: but he will establish the border of the widow.*

The administration of the Divine Government is to humble the *proud*, and to exalt the humble. (Luke, i. 51, 52.) The contrast marks *the proud* oppressor, an usurper of God's rights. Therefore as a traitor, he *destroys* not only his person, but *his house*.¹ And who can but acknowledge the retributive vengeance of the Judge of the earth?²

But *the widow*, whom many care not for, many are ready to trample on--what a Friend and Protector has she!³ "Let thy widows trust in me."⁴ God condescends to link himself with them in a special relation; concentrating all his care and tenderness on their bereaved condition.⁵ Did not he provide for sorrowing Naomi a staff in her faithful daughter, and ultimately *establish her borders* in Israel?⁶ (Did he not supply the pressing need of the Minister's widow⁷ (a cheering warrant of faith in similar affliction), and take up the Shunamite's oppression, and again *establish her border*,⁸ And shall we forget how he teaches the returning penitent to plead the gracious manifestation--"In thee the fatherless findeth mercy?" (Ps. xiv. 2, 3.)

26. *The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord; but the words of the pure are pleasant words* (words of pleasantness, marg.)

How lightly do most men think of the responsibility of their thoughts! as if they were their own, and they might indulge them without restraint or evil. One substantial sin appals men, who quietly sleep under the mighty mass of *thinking* without God for months and years, without any apprehension of guilt. But *thoughts* are the seminal principles of sin.* And as the cause virtually includes its effects; so do they contain, like the seed in its little body, all the after fruit. They are also the index of character. Watch their infinite variety; not so much those that are under the control of circumstances, or thrown up by the occasion, as the voluntary flow, following the habitual train of our associations. "For as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." (Chap. xxiii. 7.) Let the Christian yield himself up to the clear radiance of "the word, as a discernor of *the thoughts* and intents of the heart:"† and what a mass of vanity does only one day, one hour, bring to

¹ Esth. vii. 10; ix.10. Jer. xxii. 13-30.

³ Chap. xxiii 10, 11.

⁵ Ps.lxviii. 5; cxlvi. 9. Deut. x.17, 18.

⁷ 2 Kings, iv. 1-7.

² Ps. x. 14, 18; xii. 5; l.iii. 11.

⁴ Jer. xlix. 11. Comp. 1 Tim. V. 5.

⁶ Ruth. i. 7-18; iv.14-17.

⁸ Ib. viii. 1-6.

* Chap. xxiv. 9. Gen. vi. 5. Even an Heathen accurately described them. **Autoxqonaj phgaj thj kakiaj.** 'The indigenous fountains of evil.' PLUTARCH. Moral--Again--' If thou wouldest unlock the door of thine heart, thou wilt find a storehouse and treasury of evils diversified, and full of numberless passions.'

† Heb. iv. 13. **xritikoj**--a critic, censuring the errata with the most minute accuracy.

account! As to *the wicked*? "Evil thoughts" are the first bubbling of the corrupt fountain. (Matt. xv. 19.) The tide; of evil rolls on unceasingly in "thoughts of iniquity" (Isa. lix. 7), in order to give effect to the malevolent temper; dwelling on wickedness with complacency; pursuing it with determined purpose. What can such thoughts be, but *an abomination to the Lord*?

Very different is his mind towards his own people. The words of the pure, as the expression of *their thoughts* (Matt. xii. 34. Ps. xxxvii. 30, 31), *are pleasant words*. How *pleasant*, is manifest from his inviting, call to their intercourse with him (Verse 8. Cant. ii. 14); yet more from the open reward prepared for them before the assembled world. "They that *spake* often one to another--and *thought* upon his name--they shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels." (Mal. iii. 16, 17.)

27. *He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live.*

What an awful stamp has God fixed upon covetousness! Idolatry;¹ abomination;² an evil eye: the cause of poverty;³ "the root of all evil!"⁴ Not only is it a curse to the sinner, but often a *trouble to his house*. So did Lot,⁵ Achan,⁶ Saul,⁷ Ahab,⁸ Gehazi,⁹ Jehoiakim,¹⁰ and the Jews,¹¹ find it. And often in our own day, *has greediness of gain* plunged whole families into misery by ruinous speculations!¹² For where the enriching blessing of God is not desired or sought, we cannot wonder that it is withheld!

Can the man of God do so? Not only would he refuse, but *he hateth gifts*, not only in the corruption of bribes,¹³ but in any case, that would bring dishonor upon his God. Abraham refused the gifts of the king of Sodom,¹⁴ and Peter the enticement of Simon¹⁵ The man who thus walks in integrity, *lives* on high in the special favour of his God.¹⁶ He, who *hateth* this world's *gifts* for the affliction of the cross, shall receive an hundred-fold recompence in this life, and in the world to come, everlasting life." (Heb. xi. 24-26. Matt. xix. 29, 30.) 'Let their money perish with them' (was the noble confession of the Marquis of Vico, nephew to Paul V. 'that prefer all the world's wealth before one day's communion with Jesus Christ, and his despised people.'*)

¹ Eph. v. 5. Col. ill. 5. Job, xxxi. 24.

² Ps. x. 3.

³ Chap. xxviii. 22.

⁴ 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.

⁵ Gen. xiii. 10, 11; xiv. 12; xix. 14, 30.

⁶ Josh. vii. 1, 15, 24. Deut. vii. 26.

⁷ 1 Sam. xv. 19-26.

⁸ 1 Kings, xxi. 1-14, 19-22. 2 Kings, ix. 24-26.

⁹ 2 Kings, v. 20-27.

¹⁰ Jer. xxii. 13, 18-30.

¹¹ Ib. vi. 12, 13; viii. 10. ¹² Hab. ii. 9, 10.

¹³ Exod. xviii. 21; xxiii. 8. Deut. xvi. 19.

¹⁴ Gen. xiv. 22, 23.

¹⁵ Acts, viii. 18-20.

¹⁶ Ps. xv. 5. Isa. xxxiii. 15. 16. Jer. xxii. 15, 16. Ezek. xviii. 5-9.

* See his interesting history in Dr. M'CRIE'S *Reformation in Spain*.

28. *The heart of the righteous studieth to answer; but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things.*

Consideration is an important part of the Christian character; nowhere more important than in the discipline of the tongue. Think twice, before we speak once. The wise man's *heart* is at his right hand" (Eccles. x. 2), that he may weigh his words, and *study how to answer* (Chap. x. 31, 32; xvi. 23), and "be ready always to give an answer to him that asketh a reason of the hope that is in him." (1 Pet. iii. 15.) Though there may be "good treasure" within, yet we must carefully ponder to draw from it "a word in due season." (Verse 23.) Often may we reflect upon ourselves for speaking hastily. And indeed, when that comes out which is uppermost, nothing but the dross of evil can be looked for. Many stumblings have been made by speaking from the impulse of the moment, from warm feelings, rather than from a well-balanced and considerate judgment. (Ps. xxxi. 22; cxvi. 11.) In this haste, Joshua was beguiled by the Gibeonites;¹ David indulged a burst of murderous revenge;² Peter would fain have dissuaded his I Master from the work,³ which he came down from heaven to do, and without which we should have been a world eternally lost. Cultivate a pondering mind. If ever asked to open an important subject, throw it not off hastily, nor give an answer, till we have obtained it from God. For *the heart's study to answer* necessarily implies prayer, the only medium of receiving the "wisdom that is profitable to direct." (Chap. ii. 1-6. Eccles. x. 10. Jam. i. 5.) Nehemiah darted up his prayer; and how graciously was *the answer* for the moment vouchsafed! (Neh. ii. 1-6.) This is especially a ministerial responsibility for the many cases of conscience, that require "the tongue of the learned"--a word of wisdom, conviction, or consolation. How can "the priest's lips keep knowledge" (Mal. ii. 7), unless *the heart* under his Master's teaching *studieth to answer*

The wicked has no such restraint. He cares not what he says. It is of little consequence to him, whether it be true, or well-timed, or whom it wounds. His poisoned fountain *poureth out* poisonous waters. (Eccles. x. 3, 12-14.) Yet fearful is it to think, how every light word brings its account (Matt. xii. 36), and will be found a 'hot coal to make the fire of hell burn more fiercely.'* Such a plague often infests the Church. (Tit. i. 10, 11.) "From such withdraw thyself." (1 Tim. vi. 5.) Separation is the keeping of the soul.

29. *The Lord is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.*

Such is the Lord's difference between these two classes! He is

¹ Josh. ix. 14, 15.

² 1 Sam. xxv. 13-21

³ Matt. xvi. 22.

* Cartwright, *in loco*.

equally near to them both in his essence.¹ But in his favour *he is far from the wicked*,² and reflects their prayer.³ He is near to *the righteous, and heareth them*.⁴ His distance from *the wicked* is to their hearts' desire.⁵ Yet does he sometimes make them groan,⁶ as they will sink hereafter under its everlasting curse.⁷ But who can estimate the grace, that calls these "stout-hearted, that are afar off, to hearken, and brings near righteousness and salvation to them?"⁸ Inexpressible must be the guilt of despising such abounding mercy.⁹

But to *the righteous*, he is most graciously near.¹⁰ *He heareth* their breath, when there is no voice;¹¹ their desire and weeping, when there are no words;¹² their stammering, when there is no gift.¹³ Wonderful indeed is it, that he should *hear such prayers*, polluted as they are in their very breath. Yet does our compassionate High Priest wait for these vile offerings at the door of the oracle; and in his golden censer they appear spotless before the throne.¹⁴ For his sake we are not only borne with, but accepted. Our sighs are the breathings of faith. Our broken words his own Spirit has indited. (Rom. viii. 26, 27.) How then can he turn away from them?

Yet the enemy will suggest the doubt. *Does he hear?* Well he knows, what a shelter prayer is from his assault; and gladly would he drive us from it. 'Am I *righteous*?' Be it so, that thou art not. But is not thine advocate so? (1 John, ii. 1.) Then put thy prayer in his hands. Thou canst not doubt his access to God; that the ear, if it be shut to thee, is open to him. "Wouldst thou he spoken for to the king?" (2 Kings, iv. 13.) Stammer out the prayer to thy Friend--"O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me." It would tire the hands of an angel to write down the pardons, that God bestows upon one penitent sinner.*

'But I see no answer.' Correct the errors of sense by faith in his word, which declares, whatever appearances may be--*He heareth*. Judge not by thy feelings or conceptions, but by his own unchangeable word, by the manifestation of his name (Ps. lxxv. 2); that he will refuse thee nothing that is really good; that thou dost obtain, If not what thou desirest yet what upon the whole is best and fittest for thee. Have patience with God. Dictate nothing. Commit thy will to him. Say not--"I will that thou give me by and by." (Mark, vi. 25:) Leave time and all to him. If he does not answer in thy time, he will in his own far better season. (Isa. xxx. 18.) He has clearly shewn his

¹ Jer. xxiii. 24. Acts, xvii. 27, 28.

³ Isa. i. 11. Jer. xiv. 12. Ezek. viii. 18.

⁵ Job xxi. 14.

⁷ Ps lxxiii. 27. Matt. xxv. 41. 2 Thess. i. 9.

¹⁰ Ps. xxxiv. 18; cxlv. 18, 19.

¹² 1 Sam. i. 13. Ps. xxxviii. 9; vi. 8.

² Ps. xxxiv. 16. Jer. xviii. 17. Amos, ix. 4.

⁴ Isa. i. 11. Jer. xiv. 12. Ezek. viii. 18.

⁶ Exod. xxxiii. 1-7. 1 Sam. xxviii. 6. Hos. v. 15. Mic. iii. 4.

⁸ Isa. xlvi. 12, 13.

⁹ Acts, xiii. 38-46.

¹¹ Lam. iii. 56.

¹³ Isa. xxxviii. 14.

¹⁴ Rev. viii. 3, 4.

* Dr. Bates.

Sovereign appointment, that those who pray must wait his time, and his will. (Luke, xviii. 1-7.)

Yet let us look out, and see how our prayers speed. The husbandman looks for his harvest. And when we have sown in a fruitful soil --in the very bosom of God--shall not we look for the return, wait in hope, strengthen our heart in the--Divine promises, and never cease to look up, till the answer come down? No prayer will be without God's fruit.

Study the character of God. It is not the judge on his seat; or the king on his throne of state; but the Father in the full flowing of his love. Is not this attraction? In the sharpest trial, not all the world, not all the power of hell, can bar thine access to him. No child runs to his father with such a confidence as thine. Never will he chill the heart, that throws itself upon his love.

Then honour him in this confidence. Shew that you really mean what you say. Bring to him no general petitions (the signs of an heartless frame), but definite objects. Tell him what you want, and all that you want. Shew that prayer is no penance, or irksome endurance, but a pleading exercise; a conscious reality, a living soul speaking to a living God. Prize his presence supremely--the pleasures of the closet above all privileges. No creature, not even the company of Apostles, can compensate for the loss of him. Wrestle in prayer, but sit still in faith. He has bound himself by his own promises. And the fulfillment of them in answer to prayer will quicken confidence and praise.

30. *The light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart; and a good report maketh the bones fat.*

The eye is the medium of the most rational enjoyment. Most elevating is the sight of the wonders of the creation! (Ps. xix. 1; cxi. 2.) The Psalmist's hymns of praise finely pourtray his delight. (Ib. cviii. civ.) Glowing was the joy, which, burst from the wise man's heart in the sight of the morning glory--"Truly light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun." (Eccles. xi. 7,) Look also at his gracious and unexpected providence--How did *the light* of the aged Patriarch's eyes *rejoice his heart*, when he embraced his long-lost son! A sunbeam truly was it in the cloud of despondency! And when the eye fastens upon the one object of attraction; even one look casts a glory on the soul, and fills it with life and joy. (Gen. xlv. 29, 30. Chap. xiii. 12.) "They looked unto him, and were lightened." (Ps. xxxiv. 5.) And what will it be, when the whole soul, animated with Divine Power, shall centre in the eye; when *the light of the eyes* shall present him to unclouded view, whom all heaven adores with everlasting praise!

But let us look at the joy of hearing. How did the Patriarch's heart bound at the *good report* of his beloved Joseph! (Gen. xlv. 27, 28. Chap. xxv. 25.) The absent Minister seems to live again in the *good tidings* of his thriving people. (1 Thess. iii. 8.) 'How delightful must it be to the humbled sinner to hear the good report of salvation, and to have *his eyes* enlightened to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ!'^{*} The animating delight, with which the Shepherds saw the *good report* realized before their eyes, can scarcely be conceived. (Luke, ii. 15-17.) So joyful is it still to the humbled sinner, that the very "feet of its messengers are beautiful" in his eyes. (Isa. lii. 7.) "Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound." (Ps. lxxxix. 15.)

31. *The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise.*

32. *He that refuseth instruction (correction, marg.) despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding--(possesseth an heart, marg.)*

What a contrast to the "scorner" lately described, who "goeth not unto the wise!" (Verse 12.) Naturally we are unteachable, neither knowing, nor caring to know. But the Lord gives humility and self-knowledge. Our unteachableness yields. Light pours in. We learn the meaning of words before familiar to us only in sound. The circumcised *ear* now *heareth the reproof* that tends to *life* (Chap. vi. 23), and welcomes the medicine. (Verse 5; xii. 18. Ps. cxli. 5.) This exercise of *reproof* is the law of social life; a component part of the love of our neighbour (Lev. xix. 17, 18); the bounden obligation to be "our brother's keeper" to the utmost of our power.[†] The mode of receiving reproof is a test of principle. Humility, sincerity, self-knowledge--the exercise or the defect of these graces--is brought out to our honour or dishonour. Beautiful indeed is the sight of "a wise reprover upon an obedient ear."¹ The man of God *abode with the wise*. He took his meek reprover to be his wife.² He honoured the faithful messenger of his Father's rod with his highest confidence. The Apostle's affectionate testimony to his reproving brother shewed, that he had *heard the reproof of life*.³ This considerate and humble temper always *gets understanding*.⁴ Nothing teaches like experience; and no experience is more useful, because none so abasing, as rebuke.⁵

Reproof indeed may be considered one of the wholesome bitters of life.⁶ Thoughtless gaiety may prefer "the song of fools" to "the rebuke of the wise."⁷ But after-reflection will shew the wisdom of honouring those, who deal faithfully with our faults, though it may be with somewhat of severity; rather than those, who would soothe us

¹ Chap. xxv. 12.

² 1 Sam. xxv. 39-42.

³ 2 Sam. xii. 7-12. 1 Kings, i. 32. Comp. chap. xxviii. 23.

⁴ Gal. ii. 11, with 2 Pet. iii. 15.

⁵ Chap. i. 5; ix. 9; xii. 1.

⁶ Chap. xxix. 15. Rev. iii. 19

⁷ Comp. Eccles. vii. 5.

^{*} Scott.

[†] This obligation was repudiated by the first murderer. Gen. iv. 9.

with the poisoned sweets of flattery, and wink at or encourage our wayward follies. (Chap. xxvii. 5, 6.) Unhappily however for a man, a want of real sincerity is his nature. He has no hearty desire to be set right. He concludes a hollow truce with his conscience, dreading its painful disturbance. He throws a protective cover over all his faults, thus shielding his most dangerous enemies. In this unfavorable state of mind *he refuseth instruction*, because contrary to flattery, and *despiseth his own soul*. (Verse 10.) Many are the examples of this ruinous folly.* The fool will not indeed own the charge. But does he not underrate its high value and imminent danger, when he despises God's warning and provision for its salvation? (Matt. xvi. 26.) "Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee." (Jer. vi. 8. Zeph. iii. 2.)

33. *The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom: and before honour is humility.*

The fear of the Lord is elsewhere described as the substance (Job, xxviii. 28), and the beginning or principal part (Chap. i. 7; ix. 10; Ps. cxi. 10), of wisdom. Here it is set forth as *the instruction of wisdom*. The Teachers, inspired by Divine *wisdom*, inculcated it as a grand subject of their instruction.† Nor is it less important under the new dispensation, linked as it is with the full privileges of the Gospel. (Acts, ix. 31. Heb. xii. 28.) The fear of terror melts away. The fear of reverence fills the soul. God rejoices in his mercy; the child of God in his confidence. But as it realizes the presence of a holy God, it must always be connected with *humility*. Indeed no Christian grace can exist without this conserving principle. Every dispensation of God strikes at the root of self-exaltation, and tends to that real absence of self-esteem and self-sufficiency, which most of us rather long after than attain.

Most wise therefore is our Father's discipline--*Humility before honour*. Indeed, without *humility*, *honour* would be our temptation, rather than our glory. Had not the Apostle been kept down by a most humbling trial, his *honour* would have been his ruin. (2 Cor. xii 7-9.) The exaltation of the Lord's people in Providence, is therefore often conducted through the valley of *Humiliation*. Joseph was raised from the prison to the throne.¹ Moses and David were taken from the Shepherd's fold to feed the Lord's inheritance.² Gideon acknowledged himself to be of "the least of the families of Israel."³ Ruth was humbled by adversity, ere she was raised to the high *honour* of a Mother

¹ Gen. xli. 14-44.

² Exod. iii. 1-12. Ps. lxxviii. 70-72. ³ Judg. vi. 15, 16.

* The young man, Chap. v. 11-13; Korah and his party, Num. xvi. 12-14, 31-33; Zedekiah. Jer. xxvii. 17; xxxviii. 14-23, with xxxix. 1-7.

† Moses, Deut. x. 12; Joshua, xxiv. 14; Samuel, I Sam. xii. 14, 20, 24; David, Ps. xxxiv. 9-11; Solomon, Eccles. xii. 13.

in Israel, and progenitor of the Saviour.¹ Abigail confessed herself unworthy to wash the feet of her lord's servants, before she was honoured if to be his wife.² And in the daily walk of life, the lowest place is the path-way to *honour*.³

The same principle obtains in the dispensations of grace. "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted---In due time."⁴ Not that in the forgetfulness of our high privileges and confidence, we are to be weighed down in a sense of degradation. The true humility, which realizes our vileness, casts us most simply upon the full resources of the gospel, so that the most humble is the most triumphant believer. 'The lower then any descend in humiliation, the higher they shall ascend in exaltation. The lower this foundation of *humility* is laid, the higher shall the roof of *honour* be over-laid.'*

And was not this the track of our beloved Lord--*Before honour, humility*--the cross before the crown? How deep was that descent, by which he, who was infinitely more than man, became "a worm and no man" (Ps. xxii. 6.) And yet *the honour*, which rewarded this humility, what tongue can tell! (Phil. ii. 9.) 'We must not disdain to follow Jesus Christ.† Is it a light privilege to follow in the path-way consecrated by his steps, irradiated by his smile? (Matt. xi. 29; ii, xx. 28. John, xiii. 14.)

CHAPTER XVI.

1. *The preparations (disposings, marg.) of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord.*

The grand question is here decided--'Who is the first mover in the work of conversion? Can man prepare his own heart for the grace of God?' *The preparations of the heart in man are from the Lord.‡* He takes the stone out of the heart, that it may feel (Ezek. xxxvi. 26); draws it, that it may follow; quickens it, that it may live. He opens the heart, that he may imprint his own law, and mould it into his image. (Acts, xvi. 14. Jer. xxxi. 33.) He works, not merely by moral suasion, or by the bare proposal of means of uncertain power; but by invisible Almighty agency. The work then begins with God. It is not, that we first come, and then are taught. But first we learn; then

¹ Ruth, ii. iv. 13-22. Matt. I. 5.

² 1 Sam. xxv. 41, 42.

³ Luke, xiv. 7-11.

⁴ Ibid. xviii. 14. 1 Pet. v. 6.

* Trapp *in loco*. 'The more humble, the fitter to come to God, and he the more willing to come into the soul, and dwell in it. The highest heavens are the habitation of God's glory; and the humble heart hath the next honor, to be the habitation of his grace.'--LEIGHTON.

† Cope *in loco*.

‡ Ps. x. 17. 'From whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed.'--*Liturgy*

we come. (John, vi. 45.) His grace both prevents and co-operates (Art. x.): not working upon a stone, and leaving it in its dead condition; but as when in Paradise he breathed into the lifeless earth principle of life and energy. (Gen. ii. 7.)

Shall we then indolently wait until he works? Far from it. We must work, but in dependence upon him. He works not without us, but with us, through us, in us, by us; and we work in him. (Phil. ii. 13. Job, xi. 13.) ours is the duty; his is the strength. Ours the agency; his the quickening life. His commands do not imply our power to obey, but our dependence upon him for the grace of obedience. The work, as it is a duty, is ours; but as a performance, it is God's. He gives what he requires, and his promises are the foundation of our performances.* Our works are not the cause, but the effect, of his grace; and never could they come out of us, until God had first put them in us.

The fruit also, as well as the root--*the answer of the tongue*, no less than *the preparation of the heart--is from the Lord*. The tongue of the ungodly is under Divine restraint. (Num. xxii. 18.) And when the Christian's thoughts are marshalled in due order, does not he depend upon the Lord for utterance? (Eph. vi. 19.) Often in prayer, the more we speak, the more we leave unspoken, till *the answer of the tongue* is fully given, "crying, Abba, Father." (Gal. iv.6.) But the fluency of the tongue without the preparation of the heart; when prayer is without special business; when we read the precious promises, and carry not a word to plead before the throne--this is man's dead formality; not *from the Lord*; an abomination in his sight.

This habit of dependence must continue to the end. We can no more prepare ourselves after grace received, than before it.† He who "is the Author," must be "the Finisher, of faith." (Heb. xii. 2.) He is "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end" (Rev. i. 8), in this Almighty work. Our happiness and prosperity is in the humbling acknowledgment of praise--"By the grace of God I am what I am." (1 Cor. xv. 10.) Dependence is not the excuse for indolence, but the spring of active energy.‡

And if man's reason disputes--'If God does not give me grace, how can I come?'--we ask--Did you ever desire, did you ever ask for, grace? If not, how can you complain, that you have never received it?

* Bp. REYNOLDS' *Works*, p. 129.

† Isa. xxvi. 12. 2 Cor iii. 5. 'I beg '--said Jerome--'that I may receive; and when I have received. I beg again.'

‡ Quamvis enim, nisi adjuvante illo, sine quo nihil possumus facere, os non possumus aperire; tamen nos aperimus illius adjumento, et opere nostro.-- *Aug. contra duas Epist. Pelag ad Bonif.* Commentators appear to be much perplexed on the translation of this verse. Many give it, as if the preparations or disposings (marg.) of the heart were in man, but the answer of the tongue from the Lord. But Holden, as the result of a minute and critical examination, has substantially vindicated the received translation.

If helplessness is really felt, if it brings conviction, grace is ready to be vouchsafed." Ask, and it shall be given you." (Matt. vii. 7.)

2. *All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes, but the Lord weigheth the spirits.*

If man were his own judge, who would be condemned? But man judges by acts; God by principles. His eye therefore beholds a mass of corruption; while *all the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes*. (Gen. vi. 5. Ps. xiv. 3.) In fact--man will never believe his real character, until the looking-glass is held to his face will convincing light (Rom. vii. 9), or some subtle temptation unfolds the hateful discovery. He confesses himself indeed to be a sinner. But what his sins are, he knows not; probably only venial, and abundantly compensated by his fancied virtue. "Ye are they"--said our Lord to men of his stamp--"which justify yourselves before men: but God knoweth your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." (Luke, xvi. 15.)

Sometimes we see this delusion under the most shadowy cover: Pilate washed his hands, and was *clean in his own eyes*, from the blood of his condemned victim. (Matt. xxvii. 24.) The murderers of Christ were clean, by refraining from the defilement of the judgment-hall, and by eating the passover. (John, xviii. 28.)

The persecutors of the Church blinded their consciences in the sincerity of unbelief. (Acts, xxvi. 9.) Often has the self-deceiver passed into eternity under a creditable profession. But how does he stand before God? He never acted from principle. He had the form and shape of a Christian, so drawn to life as to pass for a living man. But the eyes that are as a flame of fire, bare witness--"Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." (Rev. iii. 1.)

External form without a sanctified heart is a baseless religion. Our real worth is, what we are in the sight of God. *He weighs*, not "the actions"¹ only, but *the spirits*. His eye discerns, if but one grain too light, and pronounces the sentence. Saul was thus "weighed in the balances, and found wanting."² And "if thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities"--the short-comings of thy full and righteous demands--"O Lord, who shall stand?"³ Must we not fly from Omniscience to satisfied justice, and there find, that "there is forgiveness with God?"⁴ Joyous, indeed, is it to mark the even balances of our Judge; in one scale, his own perfect law; in the other, his Son's perfect obedience. Here, O my God, is my peace, my security. "Thou, most upright, dost *weigh* the path of the just." (Isa. xxvi. 7.) But oh! place the blood of

¹ 1 Sam, ii. 3; xvi. 7.

³ Ps. cxxx. 3; cxliii. 2.

² Ib. xv. 11. Dan. v, 27.

⁴ Gal. iii. 10, 13, with Ps. cxxx. 4.

thy beloved Son even in the scale of thy justice; and we will render to thee the glory of thy wondrous work of grace.

3. *Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.*

An unsettled mind is a serious evil--a canker to Christian peace. Every faculty is thrown into disorder. The memory is confused, the judgment undecided, the will unsteady. No moral rules can discipline the tossing exercise. Faith is the only principle of solid establishment. (Ps. cxii. 7. Isa. xxvi. 3.) Here was our original happiness and security. Independence was the destruction of our well-being. (Gen. iii. 5.) The return to this humble simplicity is the privilege of the gospel. "In all thy ways acknowledge him" (Chap. iii. 6)--is the rule of peace. Eliezer's *thoughts* were *established in committing his work to the Lord*. (Gen. xxiv.) This confidence was the stay of our beloved Lord in his great work. (Isa. xlix. 4; 1. 7-9.) Prayer was the exercise of his faith. *Establishment* was the issue. (John, xvii. 4.) Has the fretting spirit ever tried this true remedy? Actively engage the two hands of faith and prayer in making over our burdens to our Father. To have a sanctuary to flee to--a God, on whom to roll our cares;* to lean to his wisdom, and rest on his faithfulness--Here is a chamber of quietness in the most distracting anxieties--"So he giveth his beloved sleep." (Ps. cxxvii. 2.)

Commit then all thy works to him. Seek to him for strength and guidance in all. Look to him for success in all. Roll on him the great *work* of thy soul's salvation. Be satisfied with his management of thy concerns. Put thy works, as thou wouldest put thy children, with confidence into the hands of God. Christian self-possession will be the result. Let thy heart habitually turn to the throne of grace; so that in a crisis of trouble instant faith, instant--perhaps speechless (Neh. ii. 4)--prayer, may bring instant composure and resolution. This active energy of faith will enable us to collect *our thoughts, establish them* in the peace of God, and keep our souls in fortified security.† Indeed a great part of our worship is to *commit our works to him* "without carefulness;" not in a general dependence on his goodness or wisdom, but in a particular dependence for our special need. The burden being now cast upon one who is better able to bear it (1 Pet. v. 7), the mind is easy, the thoughts composed, quietly waiting the issue of things; knowing that all, that is for our good, and the glory of our God, shall be brought to pass. (Ps. cxii. 7.) Thus "we which have believed do enter into rest." (Heb. iv. 3.) But if we will not believe

* M. R. 'Volve in Dominum quae tibi facienda sunt.'-MICHAELIS, Ps. xxxvii. 5. M. R.

† Phil. iv. 6, 7, **f rourhsw**.

- so speaks the solemn warning--"surely we shall not be established."*

4. *The Lord hath made all things for himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.*

Every workman has some end for his work. God has the highest end. As the Apostle reasons concerning the oath of God--"because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself" (Ib. vi. 13); so here--because he could propose no higher end, he proposed himself. Indeed it is his exclusive prerogative, that, as he has been "the Beginning" (Col. i. 18. Rev. iii. 14), so he should be the end of all his works. † *The Lord hath created all things*--all the works of the creation--all the events of nations--all the dispensations of Providence--*for himself*, not to fill up a vacuum (for what vacuum could there be to the fountain of sufficiency?); but for the manifestation of his glory to his intelligent creatures. (Isa. xliii. 21; Ix. 21.) Nor Indeed can it be doubted, but that from his immense power and wisdom, from his benevolent and diffusive goodness he displayed, an infinite weight of glory is reflected upon the great source of all these perfections. "The Lord rejoices in his works" (Ps. civ. 31) with inexpressible delight and satisfaction. And thus *all things* return to that boundless ocean, from whence they sprung. Even *the wicked*, whose existence might seem scarcely reconcilable to the Divine perfections, he includes in the grand purpose of setting out his Name. 'It is the greatest praise of his wisdom, that he can turn the evil of men to his own glory! ‡ *He hath made even the wicked for the day of evil.*--Wicked they are of themselves. He made them not so.¹ He compels them not to be so.² He abhors their wickedness. But he foresaw their evil. He permitted it; and though "he hath no pleasure in their death,"³ he will be glorified

¹ Gen, i. 27, Eccles. vii. 29.

² John, iii. 19.

³ Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

* 2 Chron. xx. 26. Isa, vii. 1-9. Nothing can be more erroneous than for those who fear God, to suppose themselves as liable as ever to "the changes and chalices of this mortal life." Change, if God see good, they may experience; but the sincerely religious have done with chance. Having once cordially committed themselves to God's paternal care, they can meet nothing in their course, which is not the result of Divine adjustment, of wisdom which cannot err, of love, to which the tenderness of the tenderest parent bears no comparison. Under such a management what can we rationally fear? Let us, through Divine grace, only keep within the circle where these movements are carried on, and we need not doubt, that, though we see nothing remarkable in our course, an unseen hand is directing every circumstance, so as in the most effectual manner, to avert what might hurt us, to ensure what will benefit us, and to direct all our concerns to the best possible issue--ALEXANDER KNOX'S *Remains*, Vol. ii. 'Divine Providence,'--a work full of instructive thought, but deeply tinctured with unsound principles",

† Isa. xliii. 7; xlviii. II, 12. Rom. xi. 36. Rev, iv. 10, 11. See President Edwards's profound and interesting reasoning, '-God's chief end in Creation.' Chap. i. Works? i. Could there be a clearer demonstration of the Divinity of Christ, than the representation of him as the great end of creation--"All things were made by Him, and for Him?". Col. 1. 16.

‡ Bishop Hall. Comp. Exod. xiv. 17.

in them *in the day of evil*;¹ and when they sin by their own free-will, he ordains them to punishment, as the monuments of his power, his justice, and his long-suffering.²

Clearly God is not the Author of sin; He cannot impart what he has not--what is contrary to his nature. Infinite perfection cannot impart imperfection. Absolute holiness cannot be the cause of sin; though, like the law,³ it may be the innocent occasion or excitement of it. If he foreknows--'infinite foreknowledge'--as Edwards profoundly observes--'proves the necessity of the event foreknown; yet it may not be the thing, which causes the necessity.'* He can decree nothing but good. If he permits evil, so far as not to hinder it, he hates it as evil, and permits it only for, the greater good--the greatest of all good--the more full manifestation of his own glory in it, and out of it. He will be glorified in, or on, all his creatures. "All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord!" (Ps. cxlv. 10.) His retributive justice, no less than the riches of his grace, sets out his glory. (Rom. ix. 22, 23.) It would seem as if the redeemed are permitted to see this, and to participate with Divine satisfaction. The flames of hell excite the reverential praises of heaven.--"And again they said--Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever."†

5. *Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord; though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished*,--(held innocent, marg.)

The hatefulness of a proud look has been mentioned. (Chap. vi. 17.) But the Searcher of hearts marks *pride in heart* under a humble look. (Matt. vi. 16.) Men see no *abomination* in this spirit. It brings no disgrace. Nay, it is often thought to be high-minded. But it keeps back the heart from God. It lifts up the heart against him. It contends for the supremacy with him. (Ezek. xxviii. 2.) When it thus strikes at God, what wonder that God strikes at it (1 Pet. v. 5), as *an abomination to him*?

How unseemly moreover is this sin! A creature so utterly dependent, so fearfully guilty, yet *proud in heart*! A true child of a fallen

¹ Job, xxi. 30, 2 Pet, ii. 9. ² Rom. ix. 17, 22. ³ Ib. vii 5, 8, 11-18. 1 Cor. xv. 56.

* Treatise on Will, Part ii. Sect. 12. See also Doddridge's valuable note on Luke, xxii. 22.

† Rev. xix. 3. 'God made man neither to save nor damn him, but for his own glory. And it is secured, whether in his salvation or damnation. (See 2 Cor. ii. 15.) Nor did, nor does, God make man wicked. He made man upright. Man makes himself wicked; and being so, God may justly appoint him to damnation for his wickedness; in doing which he glorifies his justice.' GILL *in loco*. 'Those two great acts of his most secret and unsearchable' counsel, than the one whereof there is not anyone act more gracious--the destination of those that persevere in faith and godliness to eternal happiness; nor anyone act more full of terror and astonishment than the other--the designation of such as live and die in sin to eternal destruction; the Scriptures in the last resolution refer them wholly to his glory, as the last end. The glory of his rich mercy being most resplendent in the one, and the glory of his just severity in the other.'--Bishop SANDERSON's *Sermon on Rom xv. 6*.

parent, who, in dreaming to be as God, made himself like the devil. (Gen. iii. 5.) Many are the forms of this hateful spirit. Some are *proud* of their beauty; some of their talents; some of their rank; some of their goodness--all forgetting, that they "have nothing which they have not received (1 Cor. iv. 7); all unconscious, that they are *an abomination to the Lord*.

Perhaps, however, this declaration applies more distinctly to *proud* combinations against God--*hand joining in hand*.¹ "That is all this force, but the worm "striving with his Malter?"² "who is the Lord?" --was the boast of haughty Pharaoh. Let him and his people go to the Red Sea, and learn.³ *Hand joining in hand* shall not be *held innocent* --shall not be *unpunished*. The Babel combination was blasted with confusion.⁴ The "associations" against the holy child Jesus were "broken In pieces."⁵ The infidel conspiracies of Voltaire and his school have been overthrown. And thus in our own day, "will all Social and Chartist banding together for wickedness, Only manifest more gloriously--"There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord." (Chap. xxi. 30.)

6. *By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the Lord, men depart from evil.*

The true exposition of this verse requires much care and consideration. We protest against that false principle of theology, which substitutes the grand doctrines of the gospel in the place of its practical statements. The *purging of iniquity* seems here however to direct us to expiation.* Therefore to connect it with man's *mercy and truth* is to overturn the foundation of the gospel. These are duties to be performed (Chap. iii. 3); not atonement for sin: and often are they performed by men destitute of the grace of God, whose *iniquity therefore is not purged*. They may indeed in the dispensation of God be available for averting national judgments. (Dan. iv. 27.) But there is a wide difference between this "lengthening tranquility," and in *purging iniquity*. On the other hand--considering that divine *mercy and truth* are frequently exhibited in connection with this invaluable blessing;⁶ the analogy of faith appears to link it here with these combined perfections, 'which kiss in Christ the Mediator (Ps. lxxxv. 10), and with that covenant of grace, in which they shine so brightly.'† Should this view be thought not to cohere with the general tenor of this book, which 'deals more with practical points and matters of common life, than

¹ Chap. xi. 21. Ps.lix. 3,12,13.

² Isa. xlv. 9.

³ Exod. v. 2; xiv. 26-30.

⁴ Gen. xi. 1-9.

⁵ Isa. viii. 9. Ps. ii. 1-5.

⁶ Exod. xxxiv. 6. Ps.lvii. 3; lxxxvi.15. Mic. vii. 18-20. John, i. 17. Comp. ch. xiv. 22.

* It is the ordinary sacrificial term. Exod. xxx. 10. Lev. iv. 20; v.6. xvi. 6. Dan.ix. 24. Also Ps. lxxv.3.

† Henry. Comp.lxxxix. 2, 3, 14. Ps. cxvii. 1.

with the deeper articles of faith; * it may be observed, that, when some of its pages are so fully illuminated by evangelical sunshine (Chap. viii. 9), we might naturally expect--besides this connected splendour--occasional rays of doctrinal light to rest upon this system of Christian morals.

Taking, therefore, in accordance with most of our best critics and soundest expositors,† this ground of interpretation--we observe the great controversy between God and man. Men would *purge iniquity* by repentance or external ceremonials. God determines it by sacrifice; not nullifying the sanctions of the law by a simple deed of *mercy*; but combining the manifestation of his *truth*, by fulfilling these sanctions upon the Surety, which *mercy* provided. (Isa. liii. 6. 2 Cor. v. 21.) No display of *mercy* can be conceived in force and emphasis to compare with that awful moment when "God spared not his own Son" (Rom. viii. 32), but permitted blameless love and purity to agonise upon the cross. Yet was this wondrous display of *mercy* a display of *truth* not less wondrous; inasmuch as it was the means, by which inflexible justice could justify the guilty. (Rom. iii. 26.) So gloriously do these two attributes harmonise! We enquire not, to which we owe the deepest obligation. *Mercy* engages, *truth* fulfils--the engagements. *Mercy* provides, *truth* accepts--the ransom. Both sat together in the Eternal council. Both made their public entrance together into the world. Both, like the two pillars of the temple (1 Kings, vii. 21), combine to support the Christian's confidence; that, though there is abundant material for condemnation even in the holiest saint; actual condemnation there is not--there cannot be. (Rom. vii. 14 -25; viii. 1.)

But if in the first clause of the verse we see how the guilt of *iniquity* is *purged*, the second clause shews, how its power is broken. The very exercise of forgiveness is to implant a conservative principle.¹ *By the fear of the Lord, men depart from evil.*² The supposition of pardon for a sinner continuing impenitent, would be to unite the two contraries of reconciliation and enmity. *Iniquity is not purged*, that we should wallow again in the mire.³ The beam of light, which scatters every record of condemnation, is convincing, sanctifying, healing to the soul. Indeed God shews the deepest abhorrence of sin in the very act of its expiation. Yet the implanted principle of obedience is no legal bondage. *The fear of the Lord* is at once a bridle to sin, and a spur to holiness.

* Geier.

† Junius and Tremellius, Cartwright, Schultens, Holden, Henry, Scott, Comp. Glass' beautiful exposition. Lib. iii. Tract. iii. Can. xxvi. The LXX omit the verse in its place, and add it to Ch. xv. 27, connecting the blessing with man's moral virtues, not with God's perfections.

¹ Ps. cxxx. 4. Comp. Jer. xxxii. 40.

² Chap. iii. 7; viii. 13; xiv. 16, 27.

³ Luke, i. 74, 75. Comp. Rom. vi. 1. 2 Cor. vii. 1.

It changes the slave into a child. Filial confidence--its twin-grace --like a seven-fold shield-covers from sin. Sin's very touch is hateful; and all its ways are abhorred and forsaken.

7. *When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.*

Often is the favour of God and man combined to the man of God. (Chap. iii. 3, 4. Rom. xiv. 18.) Yet he will always have *his enemies*, if from no other source, from "his own household." (Matt. x. 36.) To *seek peace with them* by compromise of principle, would be to forfeit his character at a dreadful cost. Let him hold fast his principles in the face of *his enemies*. "Though they mean him no good, they shall do him no harm."^{*}

How then do we explain the persecution of the saints (2 Tim. iii. 12), of Him especially, whose *ways always pleased the Lord*? (John, viii. 29, 37.) Each statement limits the other. The one shews the native enmity of the heart: the other its Divine restraint. It shall be let loose, so far as is for the glory of God. Beyond this, it shall be restrained. (Ps. lxxvi. 10.) His Church had her season of rest. (Acts, ix. 31.) He hath all tongues, all hands, all hearts, under his power. Who then needs to fear man, that walks in the fear of God? (Rom. viii. 31.)

'The best way for *our enemies* to be reconciled to us, is for us to be reconciled to God.'[†] All our danger lies in his wrath, not in their anger. No creature can touch us without his permission.¹ Laban followed Jacob as *an enemy*, but was constrained to be *at peace with him*.² Esau when about to execute his long-brooded threat, was melted down into brotherly endearment.³ Israel's lands were preserved from invasion, while they were engaged in the service of God."⁴ *The enemies* of the godly kings were manacled, and bowed before them.⁵ Often has the majesty of the godly brow commanded the reverence, and even bound up the hands of the wicked.[‡] And such will be the ultimate victory of the Church over all opposition.⁶

But even if *the enemies* be let loose; yet if their harm be overruled to larger good, is not the promise substantially fulfilled? 'No wise man will tax him with breach of promise, who, having promised a *pound of silver*, giveth a *talent of gold*. Or who can truly say, that that man is not so good as his word, that is apparently much better than his

* Bishop SANDERSON'S *Sermon on Text*

† Bishop Patrick.

‡ David, 1 Sam. xxiv. 17. Daniel and his fellow-captives, i. 6-21; iii. 26-30; vi. 24-28.

¹ See Job, i. 9-12. Ps. cv. 13-15.

² Gen. xxxi. 24.

³ Ib. xxvii. 41; xxxii. 1-4.

⁴ Exod. xxxiv. 23, 24.

⁵ 1 Kings, iv. 21-25; x. 23-29. 2 Chron. xvii. 10.

John the Baptist, Mark, vi. 20. Paul, Acts, xxvii. 43.

⁶ Rev. iii. 9.

word?*" God will take care of his people. Peace or war shall turn to their everlasting good. (Rom. viii. 28. Philip. i. 12-19.)

8. *Better is a little with righteousness, than great revenues without right.*

We have before had this Proverb in substance (Chap. xv. 16); save that the treasures are more distinctly shewn to be revenues without right. It seems almost too plain to need illustration. Yet so blind is the love of gain, that it looks only at its own selfish end, and the present moment; and fancies, what never can be, enjoyment¹ and security.² Retributive justice is at hand.³ *Far better is the little with righteousness.* Was not the widow of Zarephath richer with her scanty fare, than Jezebel in her royal attire;⁴ the poor prophet, sharing her pittance, than the King with his *revenues without right*;⁵ Zaccheus, when reduced to his comparative *little with righteousness*, than with his former abundance of "the unrighteous Mammon?"⁶ If the sight of a man's possession stirs envy, his scantiness of enjoyment might shortly melt it away in compassion. We learn the valuable lesson--The fewer desires, the more quiet. This is the present manifestation. Much more clearly will the day declare it. The *little righteously* employed will then find a gracious acceptance.⁷ The treasures of wickedness will be found treasures of wrath eternal.⁸

Few however possess *great revenues*. But the most trifling acquisitions *without right* will canker. Beware of the hair-breadth deviation from straight principle. "Mortify that member of the earth," which "is idolatry" (Col. iii. 5) against God, and "the root of all evil" to ourselves. (1 Tim. vi. 10.) Godliness is great riches in this life; what will it be in eternity! (1 Tim. v. 6; iv. 8.)

9. *A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps.*

A fine description of the Sovereign government of God! Inscrutable indeed is the mystery, how he accomplishes his fixed purpose by free-willed agents. Man without his free will is a machine. God without his unchangeable purpose ceases to be God. (Mal. iii. 6.) As rational agents we think, consult, act freely. As dependent agents, the Lord exercises his own power in permitting, overruling, or furthering our acts.⁹ Thus man proposes; God disposes. *Man devises; the Lord directeth.* He orders our will, without infringing our liberty, or disturbing our responsibility. For while we act as we please, we must be answerable.

* Bishop Sanderson *ut supra*.

¹ Ps. cxxvii. 2. Eccles. v. 12.

³ Jam. v. 4.

⁵ 1 Kings, xxi. 19, with xvii. 15.

⁷ Matt. xxv. 34-40. Luke, xvi. 9.

⁹ Chap. xix. 21; xxi. 30. Ps. xxxiii. 11. Isa. xlvi. 10, Lam. iii. 37.

² Chap. x. 8; xxi. 6, 7. Jer. xvii. 11.

⁴ 1 Kings, xvii. 10. 2 Kings, ix. 32-37.

⁶ Luke, xix. 2, 8.

⁸ Hab. ii. 6, 9, 12. Jam. v. 1-8.

We observe this supremacy, in *directing*, not only an important end, but every step towards it; not only the great events, but every turn;* not only in his own people,¹ but in every child of man.² How little did Joseph's brethren contemplate the overruling *direction* to their evil *devisings*!³ When Saul's *heart was devising* "slaughter against the disciples of the Lord;"⁴ when the renegade slave was running in his own path,† little did they think of that gracious *direction of their steps*, to the salvation of their souls. When David simply went at his father's bidding, little did he know the grand crisis, to which *the Lord was directing his steps*.⁵ As little did the captive girl calculate upon the weighty results from her banishment from her country.⁶ Often also hath the path of the Lord's people been encouraged by the counter-acting of their enemies' *devising*, and the backward *direction of their steps*, at the moment when they were ready to grasp their prey! (1 Sam. xxiii. 27; Isa. xxxvii. 7, 8.) In fact--as Bp. Hall remarks--'Every creature walks blindfold. Only he that dwells in light, sees whither they go.' (2 Kings, v. 2, 3.)

This doctrine of Providence is not like the doctrine of the Trinity--to be received by faith. Experience gives a demonstrable stamp of evidence--even in all the minutiae of circumstances which form the parts and pieces of the Divine plan. A matter of common business;⁷ the indulgence of curiosity;⁸ the supply of necessary want;⁹ a journey from home¹⁰--all are connected with infinitely important results. And often, when our purpose seemed as clearly fixed, and as sure of accomplishment, as a journey to London, this *way of our own devising* has been blocked up by unexpected difficulties, and unexpected facilities have opened an opposite way, with the ultimate acknowledgment--"He led me forth in the right way." (Ps. cvii. 7. Isa. xlii. 16.) The Divine controul of the Apostle's movements, apparently thwarting their present usefulness, "turned out rather to the furtherance of the gospel. Philip was transferred from an important sphere in Samaria, from preaching to thousands, into a desert. But the Ethiopian Eunuch was his noble convert, and through him the gospel was doubtless widely circulated. (Acts, viii. 37-39.) Paul was turned aside from a wide field of labour to a more contracted ministry. A few women, and a family, were his only Church. Yet how did these small beginnings issue in the planting of flourishing Churches!¹¹ After all, however, we need much discipline to wean us from our own devices, that we may seek the Lord's direction *in the first place*. The fruit of this discipline

¹ Ps. xxxvii. 23.

² Chap. xx. 24. Jer. x. 23.

³ Gen. xxxvii. 26-28; xlv. 5.

⁴ Acts, ix. 1-6.

⁵ 1 Sam. xvii. 17, 18, 23, 58.

⁶ 2 Kings, v. 2, 8.

⁷ 1 Sam. ix. 3, 15, 16.

⁸ Luke, xix. 4, 6, 9.

⁹ John, iv. 7.

¹⁰ Acts xvi. 14.

¹¹ Ib. xvi. 6-15, 34, with Philip. i. 1. 1 Thess. i. 1.

* What vast results hung upon the sleepless night of the Eastern autocrat! Esth. vi. 1.

† Epistle to Philemon.

will be a dread of being left to our own devices; as before we were eager to follow them. (Ps. cxliii. 10.) So truly do we find our happiness and security in yielding up our will to our Heavenly Guide! He knows the whole way--every step of the way--"the end from the beginning." And never shall we miss either the way or the end, if only we resign ourselves with unreserved confidence to his keeping and *direction of our steps*.

10. *A Divine sentence (Divination,* marg.) is in the lips of the king; his mouth transgresseth not in judgment.* 11. *A just weight and balance are the Lord's; all the weights of the bag are his work.* 12. *It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness; for the throne is established by righteousness.* 13. *Righteous lips are the delight of kings; and they love him that speaketh right.*

Here is a manual for kings; shewing, not what they are, but what God requires them to be, that they may be a blessing to their people, and benefactors to the world. (2 Sam. xxiii. 3, 4.) If this standard be neglected, the wisely-arranged ordinance fails of its end. "One man ruleth over another to his own hurt" (Eccles. viii. 9); and ruler and people may each become a curse to the other. (Judg. ix. 20.)

The king is not indeed wiser by birth than his subjects; but he is under stronger obligations to seek wisdom.¹ And when God's law is his law, *a divine sentence is in his lips*. Such was the wisdom of Solomon, when in a delicate and difficult cause *his mouth transgressed not in judgment*.†

Such a King (and this is the glory of royalty) will have no interest of his own, apart from the public good. The remembrance that the *balances and weights are the Lord's, his work*--made by his appointment--dictates an even-handed justice.‡ Not only will he refrain from *wickedness*; but it will be *abomination to him to commit it*. Not only will he be careful to remove all evil from his person;² but he will surround himself with faithful counsellors.§ *Righteous lips will be his delight*.

* Not Divination--strictly so called, which was absolutely forbidden (Deut. xviii. 10); but penetration in discovering truth. See PARKHURST.

† 1 Kings, iii. 26-28. 'Who would have expected to have found in this Proverb a proof of the Pope's infallibility! 'If Kings are infallible, much more Popes.' 'Arguments must be extremely scarce, when such are alleged.'--SCOTT.

‡ Deut. xxiv. 15, 16. Ezek. xlv. 10, The Jews used to keep their weights in bags. Mic. vi. 11.

§ Chap. xxii. 11. Ps. ci. 6, 7. Dan. iii. 28-30; vi. 24-28. Constantius, the father of Constantine, tested the character of his Christian servants, by the imperative command to offer sacrifices to his gods. Some sunk under the trial. Those, who had really "bought the truth," would sell it for no price. (Chap. xxiii. 2:1.) They were inflexible. He banished the base compliants from his service. The confessors he entrusted with the care of his own person. 'These men'--said he--'I can trust. I value them more than all my treasures.' This was sound judgment. For who are so likely to be faithful to their king, as those that have proved themselves faithful to their God!

¹ Chap. xxv. 2. 1 Kings, ili. 9. 2 Sam. xiv. 17.

² Chap. xx. 8, 26, contrast xxix. 12.

Admirable was Eli's, regard to Samuel's *lips*, even when they spoke daggers to his heart.*

Nothing is wanting to such a reign but stability. And thus speaks the word, unnoticed indeed by worldly statesmen, but well-warranted by experience--*The throne is established by righteousness*.¹ Thus 'the Polity acknowledges itself indebted to religion. Godliness, being the chiefest top and well-spring of all true virtues,' is the foundation of national prosperity.† The *righteous* are the pillars of the earth,² the lions around the King's throne, his glory and defence.³

And shall we not plead for our Beloved Queen, that she may embody this royal standard in her personal character and high responsibilities? (1 Tim. ii. 1, 2. Ps. lxxii. 1.) And may we not see here some faint delineation of the glorious King of Zion? What *Divine sentences* of discriminating *judgment* dropped from his lips! (Matt. xxii. 15-46.) How even are *the balances* of his perfect standard!⁴ How fully is his *throne established by righteousness*!⁵--himself "loving righteousness, and hating iniquity!" And what and who are *his delight*?--*righteous lips*--*He that speaketh right*.⁶

14. *The wrath of a king is as messengers of death; but a wise man will pacify it.* 15. *In the light of the king's countenance is life; and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain.*

The vast power of a King is here developed in a graphic picture of Eastern despotism. Life and death is in his hands. His will is law. (Eccles. viii. 4.) Every sign of *his wrath*--even the frown of his face, or the word out of his *mouth*--*is a messenger of death*. (Esth. vii. 7-10.) The despot issues his order, and the executioner performs his warrant without delay or resistance.‡ No common wisdom was needed to *pacify his wrath*. Jonathan appeased his father's *wrath*.⁷ Daniel *pacified* the outrageous autocrat of Babylon.⁸ What a blessing, in contrast with this tyranny, is our own constitution! Such an admirable counterpoise between the power of the people and the caprice of the Sovereign! The just authority of the crown is preserved, without invading the due liberty of the subject.

¹ Kings, ii. 3. 2 Chron. xxxii. 22, 23. Jer. xxii. 13-20.

² Ps. 1 xxv. 3.

³ 1 Kings. x. 19, 20.

⁴ Ps. xlv. 6, 7. Isa. xi. 3, 4; xxxii. 1.

⁵ Isa. ix. 7. Jer. xxiii. 5.

⁶ Chap. xi. 1; xii. 22; Ps. xv. 1, 2; xxiv. 3-5.

⁷ 1 Sam. xix. 4-6.

⁸ Dan. ii. 15, 16. Comp. Acts, xii. 20-22.

* 1 Sam. iii. 15-18. Contrast 1 Kings, xxii. 8; 2 Chron. xv. 7-10; xxv. 15, 16; Mark, vi. 17, 18. Clarendon perhaps was the finest example in modern times of unbending rectitude, boldly reproving his flagitious master, and beseeching him 'not to believe, that he had a prerogative to declare vice to be virtue.' Well had it been for Charles, had these *righteous lips* been his delight.

† HOOKER, *Eccl. Pol.* B. v. c. i. 2. Chap. xiv. 34.

‡ 1 Sam. xxii. 16-21. 1 Kings, ii. 24, 25, 46. 2 Kings, vi. 31-33. Matt. xiv. 10. Comp. PAXTON'S *Sacr. Geogr.* 405.

The king's favour marks the same absolute power. The restoration of Pharaoh's butler to his place was as 'life from the dead.'¹ The captive monarch found renewed *life in the light of his Master's countenance*;² Nehemiah's depression was cheered by his Sovereign's kind manners and still kinder indulgence.³ And was not the golden sceptre, held out to Esther,⁴ as the *reviving cloud of the latter rain*--the security of "the joy of harvest?"*

But think of the King of kings, before whom the mightiest Monarch is as dust. (Isa. xl. 22.) How much more is his *Wrath to be dreaded as a messenger of death*!⁵ The Kings themselves will fly to the rocks in vain for a shelter from its fury.⁶ *Wise indeed is the man who pacifies it.* What owe we to that blood, which speaks our peace?⁷ Sinner--ere it be too late--listen to the pleading call--"Be ye reconciled unto God."⁸ And then whose wrath need he fear, who knows that God is propitious to him?

For truly, if *in the light of the earthly King's countenance*, much more "in his favour is life." (Ps. xxx. 5.) One smile scatters the thickest cloud, and brings "gladness" infinitely more than all the treasures of earth;⁹ *refreshing as the latter rain*.¹⁰ 'Christ liveth'--said the noble Luther--'else I would not desire to live one moment.' Yea--Christian!--bitter and deep as thy sorrow may be, dread above all thy troubles the clouding of thy Lord's *countenance*. Watch every interval to obtain a glimpse of it. Seize every leisure to exchange a word or a look. Count every moment of separation irksome to thee. Above all--look and hasten to that time, when thou shalt walk up and down in the unclouded *light*. Oh, my Lord! 'let the splendour of that day irradiate my soul, even at this distance from it, and leave no space void of its light and comfort. Yea--let it eclipse all other joys, and by its glistening beauty cause the small contentment of this world to be so many glow-worms, which shine only in the night. Impress on my heart such a lively sense of thee, and of thy glory, that I may sooner forget myself, than thee and thine appearing.'†

16. *How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather than chosen silver!*

This apart from inspiration, must be considered to be a competent judgment. It was formed by one, who had the largest portion of both

¹ Gen. xl. 20, 21.

² 2 Kings, xxv. 27-30.

³ Neh. ii. 1-8.

⁴ Esth. v. 2, 3, with iv. 16.

⁵ Matt. xxii. 13. Luke, xii.

⁶ Rev. vi. 15.

⁷ Col. i. 20; Heb. xii. 24.

⁸ 2 Cor. v. 200; vi. 2. 9

⁹ Ib. iv. 6, 1; xxi. 6.

¹⁰ Ib. lxxii. 6. Hos. vi. 3.

* Deut. xi. 14. Job, xxix. 23. Joel, ii. 23. Zech. x. 1. Jam. V. 7. As the Jews began their civil year after the Autumnal Equinox, the latter rain fell in the spring; 'and the more wet the spring'--says Dr. Russel--'the later the harvest, and the more abundant the crop.' HARMER'S *Observ.* i. 71.

† Bishop PATRICK'S *Glorious Epiphany*, pp. 110, 114

blessings, that ever fell to the lot of man. (1 Kings, iii. 12, 13.) Calculate in the balances of the sanctuary the overwhelming interests of heaven above earth, of the soul above the body, of eternity above time; and who will dispute this verdict? One who had made the *choice* counted all things but loss and dung in comparison. (Phil. iii. 8.) It is more valuable,¹ more abiding,² more fruitful,³ more satisfying. It is inexpressibly *better*. The question implies admiration and delight--*How much better to get wisdom than gold? understanding than silver!*⁴ It is the only thing under the sun exempted from the universal verdict --"All is vanity."⁵ The spiritual apprehension of it is like the sudden discovery of a rich treasure ready for immediate use.

The security of the possession also heightens its value. Multitudes labour night and day for *gold*; yet miss the treasure. But who was ever disappointed in the effort to get *wisdom*?⁶ When has earnestness and prayer failed of success?⁷ "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting, *get understanding*."⁸ Nothing less than salvation is the great end.⁹ How rich must be that blessing, of which the Son of God is the storehouse! For "in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Col. ii. 3.) And none shall spoil us of our portion.

17. *The highway of the upright is to depart from evil: he that keepeth his way preserveth his soul.*

The highway is the plain beaten path. *The highway of the upright*--his ordinary course of profession--is "the way of holiness" (Isa. xxxv. 8. Ps. cxix. 1-3)--*departing from evil*. Here let him be seen, peculiar in his practice as in his principles. Each of us have our own world of *evil*--an inner circle, where the conflict is far more sharp; where the need of divine discipline is far more sensibly felt, than in the grosser form of sin. Shew great forbearance to others, but none to ourselves. Admit no foibles or infirmities. Count nothing small, that hinders the completeness or consistency of profession. The real injury is not from our living in the world, but from the world living in us. So delicate is the vital principle, that it never can emit its glowing influence, except in the atmosphere of heaven.

To keep therefore this way is to preserve our soul. (Chap. iv. 23-27; xix. 16.) Indeed 'if religion did possess sincerely and sufficiently the minds of all men, there would need no other restraint from evil.'^{*} Joseph was thus saved (Gen. xxxix. 9, 10): while David, forsaking the path, fell into a grievous sin. (2 Sam. xi. 2.) The quick perception of evil--the sensibility of danger from lawful things--at once proves

¹ Chap. iii. 13-15; viii. 10, II, 18.

² Chap. xxiii. 5.

³ Ecc. vii. 12.

⁴ Ib. v. 10.

⁵ Eccl. i. 2.

⁶ Matt. xi. 12.

⁷ Chap. ii. 3-5. Jam. i. 5.

⁸ Chap. iv. 7.

⁹ 2 Tim. iii. 15.

* HOOKER, *Eccl. Pol.* B. v. c. i. 2.

our heavenly birth, and covers, us from many subtle devices. (1 John, v. 18.) "The unclean shall not pass over this *highway*; but the redeemed shall walk there." (Isa. xxxv. 8, 9.)

18. *Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.* 19. *Better is it to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.*

What more vivid exposition of these Proverbs is needed than our own ruined condition? Our father's *pride*, desiring to "be as God" hurried his whole race to *destruction*. 'O Adam'--was the exclamation of a man of God, 'what hast thou done!'^{*} 'I think,'--said another holy man--'so far as any man is proud, he is kin to the devil, and a stranger to God and to himself.'[†] The most awful strength of Divine eloquence seems to be concentrated to delineate the character and ruin of pride.¹ Example abounds throughout the Scripture;‡ each sounding this solemn admonition--"Be not high-minded, but fear."² Fearful indeed is our danger, if the caution be not welcomed; if the need for it be not deeply felt!

The haughty spirit§ carries the head high. The man looks upward, instead of to his steps. What wonder therefore, if, not seeing what is before him, he *falls*? He loves to climb. The enemy is always at hand to assist him (Matt. iv. 5, 6); and the greater the height, the more dreadful the fall. There, is often something in the *fall*, that marks the Lord's special judgment. God smites the object, of which the man is proud. David gloried in the number of his people, and the Lord diminished them by pestilence. Hezekiah boasted of his treasure; and the Lord marked it to be taken away. At the moment that Nebuchadnezzar was proud of his Babel, he was banished from the enjoyment of it. "The vain daughters of Zion," priding themselves on their ornaments, were covered with disgrace. (Isa. iii. 24.) Yet after all, the state of heart that prepares man for *the fall*, is the worst part of his condition. For what is our pride is our danger, 'Why'--a wise man asks--'is earth and ashes proud? Pride was not made for man.' But have we been preserved from open disgrace? Examine secret faults. Trace them to their source--a subtle confidence in gifts, attainments, and privileges. And then praise thy God for his painful discipline--the preserving mercy from ruinous self-exaltation. Truly the way down to the valley of Humiliation is deep and rugged. Hu-

¹ Isa. xiv.4-19. Ezek. xxviii. xxix. Job, xl. 11,12.

² Rom. xi. 20. Comp. I Cor. x. 12; 1 Tim. iii. 6.

* ADAM'S *Private Thoughts*

† BAXTER'S Narrative.

‡ Pharaoh, Ex. ix. 16,17; Amaziah, 2 Chron. xxv. 15-20; Haman, Esth. v. 11; vii. 10; Pharaoh, Ezek. xxix. 3-5. Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. iv. 29-33; Herod, Acts, xii. 21-23; *In the Church*, David, 2 Sam. xxiv. 1; Uzziah, 2 Chron. xxvi. 4-16; Hezekiah, xxxii. 25; Isa. xxxix.; Peter, Matt. xxvi 33, 69-74.

§ Altifrons elatio spiritus.--SCHULTENS.

mility, therefore, is the grand preserving grace. The contrite publican was safe, when the boasting Pharisee was confounded. (Luke, xviii. 14.) *Better* then--more happy, more honourable, more acceptable to God and man--is a *humble spirit*, accompanying *with the lowly, than the spoil* of the haughty conqueror, ministering only to his *destruction*. (James, i. 9.) Better is an humble spirit, than a high condition; to have our temper brought down, than our outward condition raised. But who believes this? Most men strive to rise; few desire to lie low! May thy example--blessed Saviour--keep me low! 'When Majesty'--said pious Bernard--'humbled himself shall the worm swell with pride?'

20. *He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good; and whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he.*

Two things are needed for the success of *a matter*--wisdom and faith. One teaches us what to do for ourselves; the other what to expect from God. "Wisdom is profitable to direct" (Eccles. x. 10), specially in important *matters*. Joseph's *wise* management in a great emergency *found good*.* The Apostles *wisely handled the matter* of the ministration of the widows, relieving themselves from the secular work, and for the greater satisfaction choosing the officers (as seems probable from the original of the names)† from the complaining party. And great *good did they find* from the arrangement.‡ Let the young Christian earnestly study this *wisdom*. His first glowing impulse would cast away every relic of his former course, and stamp his religion with needless singularity. But he may learn, that true self-denial is more an internal exercise than an external badge of difference; that there may be a martyred singularity without the genuine love; that the distinction between enthusiasm and zeal is not the energy, but the direction, of the principle. This *wisdom* will be profitable for Christian humility and consistency.

After all, however, the most profound human wisdom may be outwitted. (2 Sam. xvii. 14.) Prudence without faith, will come to nought.§ True *wisdom handles the matter* in self-distrusting dependence. (Chap. iii. 5, 6.) Eliezer's discreet *handling* was in the spirit of faith. In the same spirit did Jacob conduct his prudential defence against his brother. (Gen. xxxii. xxxiii.) Esther *wisely handled her delicate matter*; using a fast to call upon God, and a feast to obtain favour

* Gen. xli. 25-44. Hence the removal of wise men is a national judgment. Isa. iii. 1, 2. Comp. also Chap. xiii. 16, xvii. 2, xix. 8.

† SCOTT *in loco*.

‡ Acts, vi. 1-7. Similar good result was obtained in the wise handling of the difficult matter of circumcision. Ib, xv.

§ Isa. xxii. 5-11, Comp. 2 Kings, xviii. 13-17, Man *at his best estate* vanity, Verses 5, 6.

with the King.* This is in all cares true wisdom--to make man the excitement to diligence; God the object of trust.

And where, as in this practical *trust*, shall we find so Divine, so simple, a recipe of *happiness*? Never did God intend to create our happiness out of our own resources. To feel that we know nothing, that we can do nothing, contrive nothing; then to look up to him, our supreme Good, and to trust him as our only Friend--when was such reliance and expectation ever disappointed? We feel that we, and all that we have, are in his hands. This is our peaceful security. 'I have had many things'--said Luther--'in my hands, and I have lost them all. But whatever I have been able to place in God's, I still possess.'† In this quiet confidence we have nothing more to do with ourselves. A thousand perplexing thoughts are scattered to the winds. God now takes the place once filled by most unquiet agitations. The soul is fixed in God. He reigns over all with an all-seeing eye, and an all-moving hand. The eye of faith pierces through the darkest cloud and reads God's thoughts of peace and love. All the world cannot rob us of one word of God, Providence may seem to oppose his promises. But there is more reality in the least promise of God, than in the greatest performance of man. 'I will therefore ever trust him on his bare word; with hope, beside hope, above hope, against hope, for small matters of this life. For how shall I hope to trust him in impossibilities, if I may not in likelihoods?'‡ This simple habit of faith enables us fearlessly to look an extremity in the face. Thus holding on, it is his honour to put his own seal to his word--*whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he.* (Ps. ii. 12. Jer. xvii. 7,8.)

21. *The wise in heart shall be called prudent; and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning.*

The heart is the proper seat of wisdom.¹ There "it dwells with *prudence*."² Their combined exercise is essential to the completeness of a Christian profession. Intellectual *wisdom* without a *prudential* application tends to no practical end. The pervading want of prudence gives needless offence to the gospel, and destroys influential weight of character. Often also do spiritual affections run to waste for want of *prudent* direction or discipline. Moral habits from this defect become either morbid or hardened. There is either a superstitious scrupulousness, or a reckless indifference; sometimes conscience about everything, sometimes about nothing. *Prudent wisdom* gives consistency to

* Esth. iv. 16; v. 5; vii, 1-7. Bishop REYNOLDS on *Hos*, xiv 3,

† D'AUBIGNE'S *History of the Reformation* Book xiv. chap. vi.

‡ Bishop HALL'S *Works* viii, S

¹ Chap. ii. 10; x, 8.

² Chap, viii. 12. *Hos*. xiv. 9.

the whole system. The eye directs the foot, and we walk safely upon firm ground. 'Bright and sparkling parts are like diamonds, which may adorn the proprietor, but are not necessary for the flood of the world. Whereas common sense' (substantially identified with *prudent wisdom*) 'is like current coin. We have every day in the ordinary occurrences of life occasion for it. And if we would but call it into action it would carry us much greater lengths than we seem to be aware of.'*

These internal qualities gain increasing acceptance from external gifts. "When we are enriched with all utterance, as well as with all knowledge" (1 Cor. i. 5); when we are enabled to clothe our thoughts in a flowing style and clear expression; this doubtless gives a great advantage in communicating knowledge. (Eccles. xii. 10, 11.) *The sweetness of the lips increaseth learning!* Ambrose's mellifluous eloquence arrested and gradually brought conviction to Augustine's mind. † Yet much more does this advantage belong to 'the *sweet* words of consolation, which come forth of a godly trust. ‡ *Wisdom is in the heart*, as in a treasury; and "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."¹ When therefore "the heart is inditing a good matter, speaking of the things touching the King; the tongue, "like the Apostle's²--without any adventitious attractiveness, is "the pen of a ready writer."³ And when without measure "grace was poured upon the lips"⁴ of the King himself what wonder that he should have constrained the admiration,⁵ and fixed the attention,⁶ of his hearers! How inestimable the privilege of his true disciples to sit at his feet, *increasing learning from the sweetness of his lips!*

22. *Understanding is a well-spring of life unto him that hath it: but the instruction of fools is folly.*

A religion of notions--what is it? A dreaming theory! All is death. There is no pulse in the affections, no motion in the heart. But when the *understanding* is enlightened, to apprehend spiritual things in their spiritual glory, notions become principles. Feelings flow from light, and are filled with *life*. The Book of God shines forth with new glory. Every verse is a sunbeam. Every promise is irradiated with Divine love. What before was unmeaning sound becomes now "spirit and *life*." (John, vi. 63.) This spiritual *understanding* is indeed a *well-spring of life* (Ib. iv. 14; vii. 38), not a work on the surface; not a mere forced impulse; not the summer stream, but a deep-flowing fountain. (Chap. xviii. 4.) If it be not always bubbling, there is always a supply at the bottom-spring.

¹ Matt. xii. 34. Comp. verse 23; also Eccles. xl. 21.

² 1 Cor. ii. 1-4.

³ Ps. xlv. 1.

⁴ Ib. verse 2.

⁵ Matt. vii. 28. Luke, iv. 22. John, vii. 46.

⁶ Luke, xix. 48.

* SEED'S *Sermons*

† Confess. Lib. v. c. 13, 14.

‡ *Reformers' Notes.*

But the contrast leads us to speak of this *well-spring*, as not only refreshing *to him that hath it*, but a blessing to all around him. And indeed every Christian will feel the responsibility of fertilizing his sphere, be it narrow or wide. The fountain in the Apostle's heart, filled with knowledge and spiritual *understanding*, "communicated a widely-extended blessing. (Acts, xiv. 21, 22;) Let the meanest member of the Church attend to the valuable advice of one of the Ancients; and 'by the daily reading of the Scriptures pour oil into his faculties, and prepare the lamp of his mind; so that, according to the precept of the gospel, it may give light to all that are in the house.'*

Yet the stream cannot rise above its level. It must be only as the fountain. What then but *folly* can be the *instruction of fools*?¹ Such in the fullest sense was the whole system of Heathenism;² the instruction of its dark philosophy;³ and the creed of the sensual Epicureans.⁴ Justly did our Lord stamp with his rebuke the senseless instruction of the Scribes and Pharisees.⁵ What else could it be, but "the blind leading the blind, and both falling into the ditch?"⁶

Christian professor! ponder--Unless thy *understanding* be filled with heavenly light, it will be a poisoned fountain, not a *well-spring of life*. What if thy *understanding* be clear, and thy heart be dark; if thou be learned in the truth of Christ, yet not "*taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus*" (Eph. iv. 20, 21); if like Balaam, thou be sound in theology, yet damned in sin! (Num. xxxiii. 19-23. 2 Pet. ii. 15.) 'Let us not think much of ourselves'--says the excellent Bishop Reynolds though God should have adorned us with the most splendid natural gifts; with quickness of *understanding*, almost like that of angels; unless at the same time he adds to all the gift of his spiritual grace, by which we may attain to a knowledge and delight in the heavenly mystery.'†

23. *The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips.*

The well-spring of life, however silently it may flow, cannot be concealed. The weighty instruction, pouring out from a Divinely-instructed heart, shews the heavenly source, from whence *the well-spring* is supplied. While the "talk of the lips impoverishes" (Chap. xiv. 23), *the teaching of the heart addeth learning*. Who does not know the difference between one, who speaks of what he has read or heard, and one who speaks of what he has felt and tasted? The one has the

¹ Chap. xv. 2.

² Isa. xlv. 9-20. Jer. x. 1-8.

³ Rom. i. 21-25. 1 Cor. i. 19, 20.

⁴ 1 Cor. xv. 82.

⁵ Matt. xxiii. 16-26.

⁶ Ib. xv. 14.

* Theophilus of Alexandria, quoted by Nicholls.

† *Animalis Homo*--an admirable Sermon preached before the University of Oxford. Works, p. 822.

knowledge of the gospel--dry and spiritless. The other has "*the savour of this knowledge*" (2 Cor. ii. 14)--fragrant and invigorating. The theorist may exceed in the quantum (for Satan-as an angel of light--is a fearful proof, how much knowledge may be consistent with ungodliness;) but the real difference applies, not to the extent, but to the character, of knowledge; not to the matter known, but to the mode of knowing it. 'Unbelievers'--as Dr. Owen admirably observes--may know more of God, than many believers; but they know nothing as they ought; nothing in a right manner; nothing with an holy and heavenly light. The excellency of a believer is, not that he hath a large apprehension of things; but that what he doth apprehend (which perhaps may be very little) he sees it in the light of the Spirit of God, in a saving, soul-transforming light. *And this is that, which gives us communion with God.** It is not therefore the intellectual knowledge of Divine truth that makes the Divine. The only true Divine is he, who knows holy things in a holy manner; because he only is gifted with a spiritual taste and relish for them. His apprehensions therefore are manifestly of God. His object has a real existence. Without any theological aid, he comes to the enjoyment of "all the riches of the full assurance of understanding" (Col. ii. 2); to a clearer certainty of the truth, than by the most demonstrable theorism. (1 John, ii. 27; v. 20.) And this experimental theology gives a rich unction to his communications. Divinity is not said by rote. *The heart teacheth the mouth.*

Take as an illustration the doctrine of the Trinity--that mystery, of which every letter is mysterious. The disputant of the schools, in attempting to expound it, only "darkens counsel by words without knowledge." (Job, xxxviii. 2.) *The heart of the wise*--heaven--taught--realizes the indwelling of the three sacred persons in undivided essence; and every act of prayer is through God--by God--to God. (Eph. ii. 18.) Conscious weakness needs Divine breath. Conscious guilt trusts in Divine advocacy. *The heart*, thus taught in the school of experience, expounds the doctrine in simplicity, and *addeth learning to the lips*. How much better is faith understood in the practical exercise than in the accurate definition! He who lives most simply "a life of faith on the Son of God" (Gal. ii. 20. 1 John, v. 10) will explain most clearly its office and influence. Contrast also proud reasoning man replying to the Sovereignty of God, with the heart humbled, and *teaching the mouth* the adoration of wonder and praise. (Rom. ix. 19, 20; xi. 33.)

This *heart-teaching* gives the Minister "the tongue of the learned" for the refreshment of the weary soul, when he "declares," not only "what he has seen and heard" (Isa. 1. 4, with 2 Cor. i. 4), but "what

* *On the Mortification of Sin in Believers*, Chap. xii.

his hands have handled of the Word of life." (1 John, i. 1-3.) He then speaks, not only the message of God, but from the mouth of God; and his "gospel comes not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." (1 Thess. i. 5.)

In fine--man's religion begins, with the head; God's with the heart. "Out of the heart are the issues of life." (Chap. iv. 23.) Let me be careful, in what atmosphere, under what teaching I live. The vivid theory brings me into the icy zone: cold, and clear and cold.* The experimental application realizes the glow of evangelical light and warmth. Let me look mainly, not to intellectual or theological attainments, but to heavenly teaching. Let me seek that my *heart be first taught*. Then let it *teach my mouth, and add learning to my lips* for the praise of my God, and the edifying of his Church.

24. *Pleasant words are as honeycomb: sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.*

The sweets of pleasure are not always health. (Chap. v. 3-5.) *The honeycomb* combines both. Description may give a fancied notion of it. But the taste affords the only true apprehension. Such is the mysterious delight and refreshment conveyed to us in *pleasant words*. When they are words of counsel, sympathy, or encouragement, they are medicinal also; not only *sweet to the soul*, but *health to the bones*. Much more are the *pleasant words* of God both sweet and wholesome. The professor may enjoy a passing *sweetness* in them.¹ But it is only "the drinking in of them," that realizes their solid *pleasure*,² "*sweeter than honey or the honeycomb*"³ We go on our way, like Samson, eating our *honeycomb*;⁴ like Jonathan, revived.⁵ We take the Lord's words to the throne of grace; and, pleading them humbly and thankfully, most *pleasant* are they to our taste. Yea, so overwhelming often is their richness, that we can only ask, as concerning the manna--"What is it?"⁶ Not less *healthful* are they than *pleasant*; invigorating to our inner principles, the strength--*the bones*--so to speak--of our spiritual system. (Chap. iii. 8; iv. 22.)

The like *pleasure and health* flow from the words of man in the things of God.⁷ How did "David and Jonathan in the wood strengthen each other's hands in God!"⁸ How was the Eunuch cheered by Philip's exposition of the precious Scripture!⁹ What *health* did Paul's most

¹ Ezek. xxxiii. 32. Matt. xiii. 20. Heb. vi. 4, 5.

² Heb. vi. 7.

³ Ps xix. 10. Comp. cxix. 103.

⁴ Judg. xiv. 8, 9.

⁵ 1 Sam. xiv. 27.

⁶ Exod. xvi. 15, marg.

⁷ Verses 21, 23; xv. 23; xxvii. 9. ⁸ 1 Sam. xxiii. 16.

⁹ Acts, viii. 35-39.

* 'Going over the theory of virtue in one's thoughts, talking well, and drawing fine pictures about it, this is so far from necessarily or certainly conducing to form the habit of it in him, who thus employs himself, that it, may harden the mind in a contrary course, and form an habit of insensibility to all moral considerations.' Such is the weighty and solemn warning of Bishop Butler, *Analogy*, part i. chap. v.

pleasant words pour into the heart of the desponding jailor!¹ And how was his own spirit received by the meeting at Appii Forum;² as the disciples had been refreshed by the converse of their Divine Master on the walk to Emmaus!³ When he is the subject, and his Spirit the teacher, *pleasant indeed will be the words* of Christian communion beyond any earthly enjoyment.

25. *There is a way that seemeth right unto a man: but the end thereof are the ways of death.*

Again we have this solemn, searching caution. For so fearful is the danger of self-delusion, that we are only safe by warning upon warning. (Philip. iii. 1.) Not defect of understanding, but love of sin is the cause. (John, iii. 19.) The judgment is perverted, because the heart is blinded.⁴ It is no proof that *a way is right*, because it *seemeth right*.⁵ "All the ways of a man are right in his own eyes;"⁶ yet *the end thereof are the ways of death*. The way of disobedience seems to be necessary; or it is only a small deviation; yet was it punished as "witchcraft and idolatry."⁷ *The way of deceit seems to be right*; an easy way of escaping difficulty;⁸ or obtaining some present advantage.⁹ "But a lying tongue is but for a moment;"¹⁰ and the unrepenting liar finds his "part in the lake, that burneth with fire and brimstone." (Rev. xxi. 8.) *The Pharisee* is dazzled with his own goodness. All his religion is in externals; sufficient ground for his own acceptance with God.¹¹ He has compounded for the internal work, to add to the pomp of the heartless ceremonial. He brings to God the formal duty, which he abhors,¹² and he refuses the spiritual service, which he demands.¹³ Yet his *way seems to be right*. But his countenance is hated,¹⁴ his prayer is cast out;¹⁵ his goodness is an abomination.¹⁶ *The orthodox professor* takes up his opinion, and puts on appearances, only to keep the Spirit out of the heart, and to quiet his conscience, without coming to the true point. Yet *his way*--with so much doing in religion--*seemeth right unto him*. Often there is considerable working of natural feeling. Joy is mistaken for faith, till the scorching sun has withered it away. (Matt. xiii. 20, 21.) Alarm is mistaken for penitence; better indeed than total indifference; yet proving itself to be only a fit. selfish terror, passing away with the apparent danger. (Ps. lxxviii. 33-37.) Yet thus "he feedeth upon the ashes" of his own delusion,

¹ Acts, xvi, 27, 34.

² Ib. xxviii. 15.

³ Luke, xxiv. 32.

⁴ Isa v. 20. Eph. iv. 18.

⁵ Chap. xii. 26. John, xvi. 2. Acts, xxvi. 9.

⁶ Verse 2; xii. 15.

⁷ 1 Sam. xv. 20-23.

⁸ Ib. XXI. 2.

⁹ 2 Kings. v. 22.

¹⁰ Chap. xii. 19.

¹¹ Chap. xxx. 12, with Rom. ix. 33. Luke, xviii. 11, 12.

¹² Isa. i 10-14.

¹³ Matt. xv. 7-9.

¹⁴ Verse 5; chap. vi 16, 17.

¹⁵ Luke, xviii. 14.

¹⁶ Isa. lxxv. 5. Luke, xvi 15.

grave; yea--even to the presence of his God, when heaven shut, and hell opened, shew him the truth too late.¹ Madness indeed is it to dream of heaven, when every step is the way of hell. *The end* tests the safety of the path. Hence it is the enemy's grand design to shut it out of view, that he may make his *way seem to be right*. *The ways of death* are many. The way of life is but One--"I am the way; no man cometh to the Father, but by me." (John, xiv. 6.) Oh! the transcendent mercy of the eyes opened to see the awful danger of our own way, and our ears opened to hear the voice behind us, saying--"This is the way; walk ye in it!" (Isa. xxx. 21. Jer. vi. 16.)

26. *He that laboureth, laboureth for himself; for his mouth craveth it of him.*

A state of labour is the penal appointment of God. (Gen. iii. 19.) It is the law of God in his Church, so that those who are no workers; are counted "disorderly workers." (1 Thess. iv. 11.) Yet is mercy mingled with this curse. What if there were no obligation to labour? "Every imagination of the heart" (Gen. vi. 5)--unmingled, unceasing "evil"--would, for want of other occupation, be left to its own undisturbed energy. Wise then and gracious is the decree--Rest in heaven; *labour* on earth. This is the necessary condition of the great mass of mankind. *Their mouth craveth it of them* (Eccles. vi. 7), eager as a suppliant to receive the needful food. This is *labouring for ourselves*. The harvest is our rich recompence. Only take care, that we labour not for vanity,² or for "evil covetousness."³ This is working our own ruin.⁴

But even where we are exempt from bodily toils, the wide-spreading progress of knowledge fills up daily life with wearisome mental occupation; which, under Christian discipline, brings its own reward, so that *he that laboureth, laboureth for himself*. Barrow severely handles the popular notion--"What is a gentleman, but his pleasure? If this be true,"--he remarks--"if a gentleman be nothing else but this; then surely, he is a sad piece, the most despicable, the most pitiable and wretched creature in the world. But"--he adds--"in truth it is far otherwise. To suppose that a gentleman is loose from business, is a great mistake. For indeed no man hath more to do; no man lieth under greater obligations to industry than he."*

And yet all toil, whether bodily or mental, is an evil, if it prevents concentration of interest on the only satisfying object of *labour*. This--need we state it?--is "not for the meat which perisheth, but for

¹ Matt. vii. 22, 23; xxii. 11-13; xxv. 10-12.

² Chap. xxiii. 4, 5. Isa. xlvii. 12, 13. Hab. ii. 13.

³ Hab. ii. 9. Isa. V. 8.

⁴ Chap. xxviii. 22. 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.

* Sermon on *Industry in our particular Calling as Gentlemen*

that which endureth unto everlasting life." (John, vi. 27.) Ponder the certain harvest--"The Son of man will give it." Look over the field of *labour*--the gospel of his grace. Every promise is there to meet thee, to wait on thee, to "perform all things for thee" (Ps. lvii. 2); and yet of what avail, if thou dost not apply, and take it to thyself? Happy indeed for us, when the spiritual appetite is created; *and our mouth craveth this labour of us* for satisfaction. All other objects find their place, when the primary object is rightly determined. We do not annihilate our interests in this world, which has its due claims, and will make them good. Our hands and our time are given to the world; our hearts to God. Our activity is in our calling; our affections above it. This is in the highest sense *labouring for ourselves*--for our best, our most enduring good. All is centered in God. Indeed without him our life is, cast away. Whatever be its momentary enjoyments, it is all a gloomy world of emptiness and vanity. Most truly does the Christian's heart respond to Augustine's confessions 'All other plenty besides my God is mere beggary to me.'*

27. *An ungodly man* (a man of Belial, marg.) *diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire.* 28. *A froward man soweth strife; and a whisperer separateth chief friends.* 29. *A violent man enticeth his neighbour, and leadeth him into the way that is not good.* 30. *He shutteth his eyes, to devise froward things: moving his lips, he bringeth evil to pass.*

The man of Belial laboureth hard; but not for himself "certainly not for his own good. Yet his labour presents a vivid picture indeed of the energy of sin. He has broken away every yoke of restraint. Every member of his body, every power of his mind, is "a servant of iniquity unto iniquity." (Rom. vi. 19.) May we not learn from him in humiliation the true standard of concentration of mind, singleness of object, diligence, delight, and perseverance? His pleasure is to *dig up evil*; pursuing his *evil* projects with intense activity, † as if he was "searching for hid treasure." The tongue is usually the chief instrument of mischief. In what black colour has the Divine pen set out this vile criminal--*a burning fire*--"a world of iniquity, set on fire of hell!"‡ And as he *diggeth*, so he *soweth*, *evil*-seed that comes up only with a blast. Strife he soweth in every furrow (Chap. xv. 18);

* *Confess.* Lib. Xiii. C. 8.

† Ps. vii. 14, 15; Saul, I Sam. xviii. 21, 22; Ahab, 1 Kings, xviii. 10; Jeremiah's enemies, xviii. 18; the chief priests seeking false witnesses against our Lord. Matt. xxvi. 59.

‡ Jam. ill. 6-8. Ps. Iii. 1-4; lvii. 4. 'His tongue is a burning firebrand, to set all the world ill combustion.'--Bishop HALL. The LXX Version is very strong--'The perverse carrieth perdition on his own mouth. The foolish man diggeth up evil to himself; he treasureth up fire on his own lips.'

jealousies among nations,¹ war between the Sovereign and his people,² divisions among Churches,³ coldness between Ministers and their flocks,⁴ ill-will among friends⁵--a spirit eminently hateful to God. (Chap. vi. 16, 19.) Where open contentions might not work, *whisperings*,* "evil-surmisings," idle and slanderous reports are employed to *separate even chief friends*. (Chap. vi. 14; xviii. 8.)

Truly he is a man of mischief. If he deals not in direct falsehoods, his dark *whispers* are plain enough to be understood, and sure to be exaggerated. The well-meant word or act may be misinterpreted. He has seen or heard probably only a little. He guesses at the rest to make his story complete. And thus by this report, half true and half false, he plays with his neighbour's name to his incalculable injury. No wonder, that this mischievous gossip should be classed with "the thief and murderer." (1 Pet. iv. 15.) For the man, who thus loosens the closest ties, and breaks up the peace of whole families, sins against those commandments, which charge crime upon the thoughts, the word, the principle, as well as the outward act. (Matt. v. 21, 22.) Again, we find him in his father's native work--a tempter--a *violent* man indeed; but combining with loud and overbearing speech *enticements for his neighbour, to lead the unwary into the way that is not good*.⁶ His whole soul is filled with this Satanic object. Sometimes we may see him *shutting his eyes* from outward distractions; *moving his lips*, as if engaged in deep thought to *bring evil to pass*;⁷ all 'expressing the profound study, with which he contrives his neighbour's ruin!'†

Such is the heavy service of the most cruel Master! He wears out both the minds and bodies of his slaves, and gives them at the end only the fearful wages of eternal death.⁸ If the way to heaven be narrow, is not "the way of transgressors hard?"⁹ Is there not more toil in the way to hell; and that--without one beaming hope of the cheering home, one staff of the heavenly promise, that upholds the servants of God in all their weariness and trial? "Gather not my soul with sinners, in whose hands are mischief," and where "destruction and misery are in their paths." (Ps. xxvi. 9, 10. Rom. iii. 16.)

31. *The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.*

The hoary head is the old man's glory (Chap. xx. 29), and claim for

¹ 2 Sam. x. 3.

² Ib. xx. 1.

³ 1 Cor. i. 11, 12; iii. 3.

⁴ Ib. iv. 8. 2 Cor. xii. 15. Gal. iv. 16.

⁵ 2 Sam. xvi. 3.

⁶ Chap. i. 11-14; iv. 16, 17. Acts, xx. 30. 2 Pet. ii. 1, 2.

⁷ Chap. vi. 12-14; x. 10.

⁸ Rom. vi. 23.

⁹ Matt. vii 14, with Chap. xiii. 15.

* 1 Sam. xxiv. 9. Ps. xxxv. 15. 2 Cor. xii. 20. This sin is numbered in the black catalogue of Heathen abominations. Rom. i. 29. Comp. Eccclus. xxviii. 13.

† Bishop Patrick--'A furnace of mischief'-is the addition of LXX. Comp. Isa. xxxii. 6, 7.

reverence.¹ God solemnly links the honour of it with his own fear.* "The ancient" are numbered with "the honourable." (Isa. ix. 15.) The sin of despising them is marked (Ib. iii. 5), and, when shewn towards his own prophet, was awfully punished.² Wisdom and experience may justly be supposed to belong to them.³ and the contempt of this wisdom was the destruction of a kingdom.⁴

But the diamond in *the crown* is, when *it is found in the way of righteousness*. Even an Heathen Monarch did homage to it (Gen. xlvii. 7-10); an ungodly nation and King paid to it the deepest respect.† The Fathers of the Old and New Testament reflected *its glory*. The one died in waiting faith in the Lord's salvation. The other was as ready to "depart in peace" in the joyous sight of it.⁵ "Zacharias and Elizabeth walked in all the ordinances of the Lord blameless;"⁶ Anna--"a widow indeed" in the faith and hope of the Gospel;⁷ Polycarp, with his fourscore and six years in his Master's service.‡ --*Crowns of glory were their hoary heads* shining with all the splendour of royalty. Earnestly does the holy Psalmist *plead* this *crown* for usefulness to the Church (Ps. lxxi. 18); the Apostle, for the cause of his converted slave. (Philem. 9:) And who more honourable than those, who, having been "planted" in youth within the courts of the Lord, grow up to "bring forth fruit In old age," manifesting the glory of the Lord's faithfulness and love? (Ps. xcii. 13-15.) Truly is an old man's 'diadem that, which not the art of man, but the kingdom of God, hath fashioned and set on his head.'§ And is not the earthly *glory* brightened by its nearness to the unfading, everlasting crown?

But separate the heavenly virtue from *the hoary head*. "*The crown, is fallen.*" It lies dishonoured in the dust. For, what is a more lamentable spectacle, than a graceless old man, only gaining by his score of years a proportionate share of guilt? Time is no empty duration. It is filled up with talents for eternity, a field for their exercise, helps for their improvement, and account for their neglect or abuse. The white hairs of ungodliness bespeak ripeness for wrath "wrath treasured up" with every day's uninterrupted increase "against the day of wrath." (Rom. ii. 5.) "The Sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed."||

¹ Chap. xxiii. 22. 2 Sam. xix. 32, 39.

² 2 Kings, ii. 23, 24.

³ Job, xii. 12; xxxii. 4-7.

⁴ 1 Kings, xii. 18-20.

⁵ Ib. xlix. 18. Luke, ii. 28, 29.

⁶ Luke, i. 6.

⁷ Ib. ii. 36, 37.

* Lev. xix. 32. The Roman satirist intimates, that the neglect of "rising up before the hoary head" was punishable with death,--JUVEN. *Satire*, 13, 54-56. The reverence paid by Lacedaemonians to the hoary head is well known. They probably borrowed this law from the Egyptians, who inculcated this respect to its full extent. HEROD. Lib. ii. c. 26. Comp. also OVID, *Fasti*, v. 57, 58. See a serious all destructive paper in the *Rambler*, No. 50.

† Samuel, 1 Samuel xxv. 1. Elisha, 2 Kings, xiii. 14. Jehoiada, 2 Chron. XXIV. 15, 16.

‡ EUSEB. Lib. IV. c. 15. MILNER'S *Church History*, i. p. 16.

§ Muffet *in loco*.

|| Isa. lxv. 20. "There is not on earth a more venerable and delightful spectacle than

32. *He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.*

A great conflict and a glorious victory are here set out; a conflict not in notion, but in action; hidden from *the mighty* ones of the earth: known only to those, who having enlisted under the baptismal banner, are 'manfully fighting'* against their spiritual enemies. The heart is the field of battle. All its evil and powerful passions are deadly foes. They must be met and triumphed over in the strength of God. Those who are ignorant of God and of themselves make light of them. They scarcely acknowledge them as such. Instead of being *slow to anger*, under provocation, they think that they "do well to be angry." (Jonah, iv.9.) It is a disgrace to put up with wrong. An hasty temper is an infirmity. They are hardly responsible for it. Nay--the indulgence is a relief, and they hope to cool down in time, utterly unconscious of any sin against God. Thus, instead of *having rule over their spirit*, they are captives, not conquerors.

But can a Christian do so?--he who hath "yielded himself unto God, as one that is alive from the dead?" (Rom. vi. 13.) "How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (1b. verse 2.) Must we not vigorously "keep under the body, and bring it into subjection" (1 Cor. ix. 27); especially that "little member," which is such a mighty instrument of evil? To bridle the tongue, so as to check the expression of passion, or "speaking unadvisedly with our lips"--is a victory (Jam. iii. 2), that can only be achieved by Almighty strength. The pains and cost of the conflict are beyond human calculation. But the victory compensates for all.

The glory of this victory is indeed far above *the mighty*. *The taking of a city* is child's play, compared with this "wrestling with flesh and blood." That is only the battle of a day. This, the weary, unceasing conflict of a life. There, the enemy might be mastered with a single blow. Here, he is to be chained up, and kept down with unremitting perseverance. The magnifying of the conflict exalts the glory of the

that of an aged pilgrim walking with God; and a more affecting and deeply melancholy sight can hardly, on the contrary, be imagined, than that of a hoary-headed sinner, who has lived his fourscore years "without God in the world,"—all that time God calling and he refusing, and the Almighty "angry with him every day:" his body now bowed down beneath the wight of years; all his powers of action and of enjoyment decaying; every hour likely to be his last; time all behind him, and eternity all before him; and his soul still "dead in trespasses and sins;" the hour of his departure come, and no readiness for the world to which he is bound. O! with what opposite emotions do we contemplate old age in this character, and in the saint of God; who in approaching the close of his earthly pilgrimage is drawing near to what has been the goal of his hopes and desires; who, while outwardly decaying, is inwardly maturing for heaven; in whom every symptom of coming death is but a symptom of approaching life; and who, in the final exhaustion of nature, bids adieu to the world in the words of aged Simeon—"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."—WARDLAW, *on Eccles. xii.7.*

* Baptismal Service

triumph. Gideon's *rule over his spirit* was *better* than his victory over the Midianites. (Judg. viii. 1-3.) David's similar conquest was *better*, than could have been the spoils of Nabal's house. (1 Sam. xxv. 33.) Not less glorious was that decisive and conscious mastery over his spirit, when he refused to drink the water of Bethlehem, obtained at the hazard of his bravest men; thus condemning the inordinate appetite, that had desired the refreshment at so unreasonable a cost? (2 Sam. xxiii. 17.) On the contrary, the renowned conqueror of the East lived and died a miserable slave. He lost more honour at home, than he gained by his conquests abroad; famous in war, but shamefully degraded by a brutish foe.* Though valour is commendable, as a natural gift of God (Judg. vi. 12); yet 'to be our own master, is far more glorious for us, than if we were the masters of the world.'† Among all my conquests—said the dying emperor Valentinian—'there is but one that now comforts me. I have overcome my worst enemy—my own haughty heart.' This then is to subdue an enemy, that has vanquished conquerors-- This surely is to be "more than conquerors." Christian! never forget the source of victory—"Through him that loved us." (Rom. viii. 37.)

This recollection brings us to the true point. Keep close to the glorious standard of an Almighty, most loving Saviour. Never is victory severed from it. Trials may be appointed, yet only to discipline for triumph; to draw us from our fancied, to our real strength.

Often does the Christian soldier win the day, even when he has been wounded in the fight. Yet think not the war is ended, because a battle is won. No quarter can be given, no truce allowed on either side. The enemy may have been stabbed at the heart; yet will he get up, and renew the fight. Thou must walk--yea--sleep—in thine armour. It must be worn, not laid up. There is "no discharge from this war," till thy body of sin and death is laid in the grave. Meanwhile victory is declared, before the conflict begins. Let every day then be a day of triumph. The promises are to *present* victory.‡ With such stirring, stimulating hopes, thou shalt surely *have rule*, if thou wilt but dare to have it. And if thou hast not courage enough to be a Christian, thou must be a slave for life to the hardest of task-masters.

This bloodless victory, so contrary to the turmoil of war (Isa. ix. 5), is the crown of Christian grace. (Rom. xii. 19.) No other grace of the gospel can be exercised without its influence, Yet the daily conquest

* 'So old and no older'--wrote Philip Henry in his Diary, when he had completed his thirtieth year—'Alexander was, when he conquered the great world: but I have not yet subdued the little world—myself.' 'Thou art a slave of slaves'--said the proud Philosopher (Diogenes) to this mighty conqueror—'for thou art a slave to those appetites, over which I rule.' The complaint of the Czar Peter—"I can govern my people, but how can I govern myself?"—was a practical acknowledgment of the difficulty: 'Quem magis admiraberis, quam qui imperat sibi; quam qui se habet in potestate!' SENECA *De Benef.* 7.

† Lawson *in loco*.

‡ Rev. ii. 7; &c. iii. Him that *overcometh*.

anticipates the final victory, the spoils of which will be reaped throughout eternity.*

33. *The lot is east, into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.*

The lot cast into the lap, or into the bottom of an urn, † often determined important matters. Officers were thus chosen;¹ work determined;² dwellings fixed;³ discoveries made;⁴ contentions caused to cease;⁵ Yet *the Lord's disposal* was manifestly shewn. Canaan was thus divided, so as to accord fully with Jacob's prophecies.⁶ The offender was brought to justice.⁷ What could be more beyond human direction? Yet what more entirely under the Divine *disposal*? No one doubted the decision. Saul was acknowledged to be King,⁸ Matthias was numbered among the Apostles⁹—without disputing. Even when cast profanely or superstitiously, the same Sovereignty overruled. Haman's lot was so *disposed*, as wholly to overthrow his exterminative project; giving full time for the deliverance of his victims,¹⁰ The soldier's lot was the direct fulfilment of a prophecy, that could not otherwise have been accomplished.¹¹ The Heathen sailors *cast* it in ignorance; yet was it the Divine discovery of the guilty criminal. (Jonah, i. 7.) Heathen divinations were controuled by the same absolute power. (Ezek. xxi. 21, 22.)

The lot is however a solemn matter, not to be lightly *cast*. (Acts, i. 24-26.) It is an acknowledgment of absolute Sovereignty; giving up our personal responsibility, and virtually appealing to an Omniscient,

¹ 1 Chron. xxiv. 5.

² Luke, i. 9.

³ Neh..xi. 1.

⁴ 1 Sam. xiv. 41.

⁵ Chap. xviii. 18.

⁶ Num.xxvi. 55. Josh. xviii. 8.

⁷ Josh. vii. 16.

⁸ 1 Sam. x. 20-24.

⁹ Acts, i. 26.

¹⁰ Esth. iii. 7; ix. 1, 2.

¹¹ John, xix. 24, with Ps. xxii. 18.

* Many striking sentiments from Heathen Ethics might illustrate this aphorism. Cato the elder (in Plutarch) declared him to be the best and most praiseworthy general, who had rule over his own passious. Livy brings in Scipio speaking to his friend—'The danger of our age—believe me—is not so much from armed men, as from the pleasures scattered all around us. He that has disciplined them by his own temperance, has obtained to himself much honour and a greater victory, than we had in the conquest of Syphax.'—Lib. xxx. c. xv. 'In all ages fewer men are found, who conquer their own lusts, than that conquer an army of enemies.'—CICERO. *Ep. Lib.* xv. Ep. 4. Thus Seneca writes to a friend --- 'If you wish to subject all things to yourself, subject yourself to reason. You will rule many, if reason ruleth you.'

Latus regnes avidum domando

Spiritum, quam si Libyam remotis

Gadibus jungas, et uterque Poenus

Serviat uni.. Holt. *Od. Lib. ii. Od. 2.*

Alas ! that this should be all fine barren sentiment, not Christian principle !

Video meliora, *proboque*:

Deteriora sequor.

Medea in OVID. Metam. vii.

† Parkhurst translates the word to mean the bottom or midst of an urn or vessel, into which the lots were cast.

Omnipresent, Omnipotent God. It teaches us, that things that we conceive to be accident are really under Providence. 'What is chance to man is the appointment of God.'* *The lot, cast* 'at peradventure, carrying a show of casualty,†--is under a certain *disposal*. Yet admitting it to be a Scriptural ordinance, its expediency under our more full light is more than doubtful. "We have" at least "a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto we do well that we take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place." (2 Pet. i. 19.) The book of God is given us expressly as "a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path." (Ps. cxix. 105.) The rule is more clear in itself, and linked with a most encouraging promise—"In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." (Chap. iii. 6.) It is far better to exercise faith, than indolently to tamper with personal responsibility.

The instructive lesson to learn, is that there is no blank in the most minute circumstances. Things, not only apparently contingent, but depending upon a whole train of contingencies, are exactly fulfilled. The name of a King (1 Kings, xiii. 2), or of a deliverer (Isa. xlv. 28), is declared many hundred years before their existence--before therefore it could be known to any—save the Omniscient Governor of the universe—whether such persons would exist. The falling of a hair or a sparrow is directed, no less than the birth and death of Princes, or the revolutions of empires. (Matt. x. 29, 30.) Everything is a wheel of Providence. Who directed the Ishmaelites on their journey to Egypt at the very moment, that Joseph was cast into the pit?‡ Who guided Pharaoh's daughter to the stream, just when the ark, with its precious deposit, was committed to the waters? (Exod. ii. 3-5.) What gave Ahasuerus a sleepless night, that he might be amused with the records of his kingdom? (Esth. vi. 1.) Who prepared the whale at the very time and place, that Jonah's lot was cast? (Jonah, i. 17.) Who can fail to see the hand of God, most wonderful in the most apparently casual contingencies, overruling all second causes to fulfil his will, while they work their own? 'When kingdoms are tossed up and down like a tennis-ball (Isa. xxii. 18); not one event can fly out of the bounds of his Providence. The smallest are not below it. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without it. Not a hair, but it is numbered by it.'§

* Scott *in loco*.

† Bishop Hall.

‡ Gen. xxxvii. 25. 'The unparalleled story of Joseph'—as Dr. South remarks in his striking Sermon on this text—'seems to be made up of nothing else but chances and little contingencies, all tending to mighty ends.'

§ POLHILL *on the Divine Will*, p.159.

CHAPTER XVII.

1. Better is a dry morsel and quietness therewith, than a house full of sacrifices with strife.

THE allusion is to the Jewish ordinance of feasting at home upon the remains of the sacrifices.¹ *A house full of sacrifices* was therefore a house of plentiful provision. Yet when the spirit of love does not rule, self predominates, the fruitful source of strife and confusion. Well may the Christian be content with his *dry and quiet morsel*, to be delivered from such jarrings. 'Holy love, found in a cottage,'* is *better* than the most luxurious feast in the palaces of *strife*. (Chap, xv. 17.) The happiness is not adding to our condition, but straitening our desires, and proportioning them to our condition. The secret dew of the Lord's blessing brings the rich gain of godly *quietness* (1 Tim. vi. 6). and contentment, and provides a satisfied meal, and a well-furnished house in the poorest dwelling.

The marriage-feast perhaps was comparatively *a dry morsel*. Yet was this a feast of love *better than* the Pharisee's house, *full of sacrifices with strife*.² Would we then enjoy our temporal mercies? Welcome the Saviour to them. Cherish his Spirit. Eye his glory in their enjoyment. The scanty fare or the more abundant store will be alike blessed with the token of his presence, and the seal of his everlasting love. Ponder every thought that may quiet to contentment. If you have not so many comforts as you had, or as you might have, or as others less deserving enjoy; yet have you not far more than you deserve? Might not a larger abundance have tempted you to forget God, and to live for the world? Will not the remembrance of the earthly lot which thy Saviour chose, turn every thought of discontent into the adoring rapture of thankfulness and love? Such is the "great gain of godliness with contentment."

2. A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame; and shall have part of the inheritance among the brethren.

Folly naturally tends to *shame*; wisdom to honour. (Chap. iii. 35; 8.) *The son*, the heir of the family, may degrade himself by misconduct, and, instead of being the glory of the house, *cause shame*. A *wise servant*, though having only a temporary interest in the house (John, viii. 35), may be promoted to *rule over him*. The Scripture path recorded no *literal* instances of this interchange of place. But retributive Providence has ordained, that "the foolish shall be servant to *the wise* in heart." (Chap. xi. 29.) The prodigal son, in. conscious *shame*,

¹ Lev. vii. 16; min. 6. 1 Sam. ix. 24. ² John, ii. 1-3, with Luke, vii 36-39; xi. 87, 38, 45, 53.

* Henry.

was ready to take his place among the "hired servants." (Luke, xv. 19.) *The wise servant* has however sometimes shared the *inheritance among the brethren*. Jacob, by marrying Laban's daughter, was portioned with the *inheritance*.¹ Solomon's own *servant* probably thus verified this proverb.² Abraham also would have made his *wise servant* his heir, but for the interposing mercy of God.³

Yet this promotion is a dangerous eminence. No one can bear elevation safely without special grace and painful discipline.⁴ Great wisdom, much prayer, and constant watchfulness, are needed to promote humility and Christian consistency; as well as to silence the envy and jealousy, which unexpected prosperity naturally excites. (Dan. vi. 3-5.) Honour from man calls for abasement before God, and careful holiness in adorning our profession.

3. *The fining-pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold; but the Lord trieth the hearts.*

The refiner's *fining pot and furnace* try his metals. But Jehovah claims to himself the prerogative of *trying the hearts*. (1 Kings, viii. 39. Jer. xvii. 10.) His eyes are as a flame of fire. (Rev. i. 14.) Nothing deceives him; nothing escapes his probing search. The gold must be put into *the furnace*. So mixed is it with dross, that the workman's eye can scarcely discover it. But for the furnace, the dross would cleave inseparably. The refiner's process burns it out, and the pure metal is left behind. No burnishing is of any avail. Till it has undergone the fire, it is unfit for use. And must there not be a furnace for the child of God? (Isa. xxxi. 9. Jer. ix. 7.) None of us know ourselves, until "the fire has tried every man's work, of what sort it is." (1 Cor. iii. 13.) We can but exclaim in witnessing the result--Lord! what is man! the heart of man of the holiest saint thus proved--thus laid open to view?

But the Lord will have the metal cleansed. We cannot do the work. It is no common power, that can separate the base alloy. No milder remedy will accomplish the purpose. But by this process the hidden evil is brought out for humiliation;⁵ the hidden good for honour.⁶ Deep personal or relative affliction; "the knowledge of the plague of our own hearts;"⁷ the discovery of secret sins; circumstances of daily trial in trifles, known perhaps only to the heart that feels them⁸—all or any of these are a searching, piercing *furnace*.

Painful indeed is the purifying process. The flesh trembles at the fire. Yet shall we not let the refiner do his work, though it be by Nebuchadnezzar's furnace?⁹ Shall we not commit ourselves with well-

¹ Gen. xxx. 27-34; xxxi. 1.

⁴ 2 Cor. xii. 1-7.

⁶ Gen. xxii. 12. Matt. xv. 23-28.

⁹ Dan. iii. 19.

² 1 Kings, iv. 7, 11.

⁵ Deut. viii. 2 2 Chron. xxxii. 31.

⁷ 1 Kings, viii. 3

³ Gen. xv. 3, 4.

⁸ 3 Chap. xiv. 10.

grounded confidence to his wisdom, tenderness and love?—"O Lord, correct me; but with judgment." (Jer. x. 24.) Is not any furnace, that "purges away our dross" (Isa. i. 25) of earthliness, that brings us to know ourselves, our God, and his dealings with us--a mighty blessing? The best materials for praise are brought out of this consecrated furnace. Yet we must carefully examine, ere we shall perceive the value of these trying dispensations. When the action of fire, upon the metal has brought it into its best state for use, we now look for the results, in the displacing of all worldly idols, in the melting away of the stubbornness of the will, and the entireness of the heart for God. For as gold cast into the furnace receiveth their new lustre, and shineth brighter when it cometh forth than it did before; so are the saints of God more glorious after their great afflictions, and their graces even more resplendent.* The refiner's process may be slow, but its results are sure. Nothing but dross will perish, The vilest earth will be turned into the finest gold. No refiner ever watched the furnace with such exactness and care. Many glittering particles may be swept away. But the pure residue--the solid particles--comparatively scanty in the amount, but sterling in quality, shall be delivered into the mould. Strange as it may seem to see the gold-left in the fire, 'he that put it there will be loth to lose it. Not one grain, not one drachm, shall be lost.'† He "sits" in patient watchfulness (Mal. iii. 2, 3), moderating the heat, and carefully marking the moment, when it "shall be brought *through the fire*" (Zech. xiii. 9), and set out in all the purity of the purifying trial. Every hour of the trial is above gold, and issues in a richer vein of Christian attainment. A suffering Saviour is realized and endeared.

Here then in the furnace—child of God—see the seal of thine election (Isa. xlvi. 10); the ground and establishment of thy confidence (Zech. xiii. 9); thy joyous anticipation, that thy faith that is here in the furnace shall, when thy Lord shall appear, be then made up into a crown 'of pure gold, and be found unto praise and honour, and glory.'‡

4. *A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips: and a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue.*

Here is a black, but true picture of human nature. *The wicked doer* is not content with the stirring impulse of his native lust. But such is his craving appetite for sin, that he seeks foreign stimulants to give it increasing activity.¹ Amnon thus stimulated his own lust, by *giving heed to the false lips* of his friend.² Ahab, to secure his desired object,

* Bp. SANDERSON'S *Sermon on Ps. cxix. 75.*

† LEIGHTON on 1 Pet. i. 7.

‡ 1 Pet. i. 7. Leighton *ut supra.*

¹ Chap. iv. 16, 17. Ps. lxiv. 5, 6.

² 2 Sam. xiii. 5, 6.

eagerly listened to the counsels of his murderous wife.¹ The Jews gave delighted ears to the false prophets, who flattered them in their wickedness.² Active and intense was the malice of the ungodly, in suborning false witness for our Lord's condemnation.³ Yet 'there would not be so many open mouths, if there were not as many willing ears to entertain them.'* But be it remembered, that the listening ears share the responsibility of the *naughty tongue*; as all are involved in the treason, that are directly or indirectly acquainted with the plot.

Gladly does *the liar give ear* to that, which countenances his own wickedness.⁴ If he did not "love a lie," he would not listen to it. But thus he shrinks from the condemning light of truth into his own atmosphere of darkness. (John, iii. 20.) How unlike is this spirit to the true "charity" of the Gospel, which "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth!" (1 Cor. xiii. 6.) 'If then'--- saith good Bishop Hall,† 'I cannot stop other men's mouths from speaking ill, I will either open my mouth to reprove it; or else I will stop mine ears from hearing it, and let him see in my face, that he hath no room in my heart.' (Ps. xv. 3.) Let the guilty talker think,—how certainly will this "reproach taken up against his neighbour" exclude from the heaven of light and love! Oh! my God, fill my heart and tongue with thine own gracious Spirit!

5. *Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker: and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished* (held innocent, marg.)

The sin against our Maker of "oppressing the poor," has before been noticed. (Chap. xiv. 31.) In this *mocking* probably there might be no power to oppress. The *poor* is so, not by fortune, but by Providence. The *reproach* therefore falls, not on the *poor*, but on His *Maker*— on Him who made him, and made him *poor*, "Woe unto him that" thus "striveth with his Maker!"‡ To pour contempt upon the current coin with the king's image on it, is treason against the sovereign. No less contempt is it of the Sacred Majesty, to despise *the poor*, who have, no less than the rich, the king's image upon them. (Gen. ix. 6.) This view marks the contempt of the poor as a sin of the deepest dye.

Specially when poverty is brought on by *calamity*; when the hand of God is therefore more manifest, then to be *glad at calamities* is a fearful provocation. This was the sin of Shimei, scorning his fallen Sovereign. (2 Sam. xvi. 5-8.) This sin brought the enemies of God's

¹ 1 Kings, xxi. 4-7.

² Isa. xxx. 9-11. Jer. v. 30, 31. Mic. ii. 11. 1 John, iv. 5.

³ Matt. xxvi. 59, 60.

⁴ Chap. xxviii. 4.

* Bp. HALL'S *Works*, viii. 7.

† *Works*, ut supra.

‡ Isa. xlv. 9. Comp. Job, xl. 2. See Bp. SANDERSON'S *Sermon on* 1 Pet. ii. 17, § 13.

people under his severest *punishment*.^{*} Very different is the spirit of the Bible: teaching us, even where *calamity* is the fruit of misconduct, instead of being *glad*—to sympathize; instead of crushing, to raise, a fallen brother, or even a fallen enemy.¹

All slight of *the poor* is evidently here rebuked. And who, that knows himself and his obligations, could ever disdain? 'Why should I'—asks Bishop Reynolds—'for a little difference in this one particular of worldly wealth, despise my poor brother? When so many and great things unite us, shall wealth only disunite us? One sun shines on both; one blood bought us both; one heaven will receive us both; only he hath not so much of earth as I, and possibly much more of Christ. And why should I disdain him on earth, whom haply the Lord will advance above me in heaven?'†

6. *Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers.*

This Proverb has its limit. What a *crown* of thorns to each other are an ungodly progeny and graceless parents! Little *glory* indeed did Rehoboam and his son add to *their fathers*.² As little was the godly Hezekiah dignified by his reprobate parent.³ Gehazi brought shame, not glory, to his children.⁴ But in the ordinary course gracious children and parents reflect honour upon each other. Such parents rejoice in the number and growth of their *children*. Such children regard *their father's* name as *their glory*. Joseph was indeed *a crown* to his aged father (Gen. xlvii. 11, 12); as was Jacob himself *the glory of his child*, even in a Heathen nation. (Ib. xlvii. 7-10.) 'A good root maketh the branches to flourish, by virtue of the lively sap that it sendeth up. And flourishing branches win praise to the root, for the pleasant fruit which they bring forth.'<‡

The Old Testament promise---"length of days" (Chap. iii. 2, 16)--was enhanced, when accompanied with the blessing of children; yet more—when crowned with the increase of *children's children*.⁵ The true blessing, however, could only be known, when children, early brought up into God's covenant, were trained in his ways, and "declared them to their children, that they might set their hope in God."

¹ Chap. xxiv. 17, 18. Job, xxxi. 29. Ps. xxxv. 13, 14. Rom.. xii. 20, 21.

² 1 Kings, xii.

³ 2 Chron. xxviii. xxix.

⁴ 2 Kings, v. 27.

⁵ Ib. xlviii. 11; 1. 23. Job, xlii. 16. Ps. exxviii. 6.

* Babylon, Lam. i. 21, 22. Ammon, Ezek. xxv. 6, 7. Tyre, xxvi. 2, 3. Edom, Obad. 10-15. Contrast this barbarous delight with the godly tenderness of the Lord's prophets in foretelling calamities. Isa. xvi. 9-11. Jer. ix. 1; xvii. 16. Mic. i. 8. The gladaess, elsewhere expressed in the calamities of the enemies of the Church, was obviously the admiring discovery of the Lord's faithful keeping of his Church, and of his glory in the deserved punishment of his irreconcilable rebels. Exod. xv. Ps. xxxv. 8-10, 19-26. Rev. xviii. 20.

† *Works*, p. 9115.

‡ CLEVER on Chap. i. 1.

(Ps. lxxviii, 5-7.) "Happy was the man, who had his quiver full of such children." (Ib. cxxvii. 5.) Happy the children, thus crowned with the example of such fathers! Abraham was the honourable, though delusive, boast of his seed.¹ David was *the glory of his children*, preserving to them the throne of Judah for seventeen generations.² And may not godly parents, under a larger dispensation of grace educating their children by example, no less than by precept--may they not look for a "godly seed"—the children of the covenant,³ who shall acknowledge infinite, eternal obligations to parental faith and godliness?⁴

7. *Excellent speech* (a lip of excellency, marg.) *becometh not a fool; much less do lying lips a prince.*

Men naturally speak as they are. The *lip* is the organ of the heart. *The lip of excellency*, to speak suitably of high and lofty things, evidently *becometh not a fool*.⁵ A grave discourse on godliness *becometh* not an ungodly man.⁶ It carries no weight, and, so far from doing good, it often brings contempt.⁷ Christ would not accept even a sound confession from the lips of Satan, lest it should bring an occasion of stumbling.⁸ So unseemly was *excellent speech* from so corrupt a source!

Much less do lying lips become a prince—the Minister and Guardian of truth. (Chap. xvi. 10.) Yet in a world, where self reigns supreme, such inconsistencies are but too prevalent.* The pure doctrine of our Divine Master alone secures Christian consistency in heart, lip, and life. Never let us forget, that, if *excellent speech becometh not a fool*, it does *become* the gospel of Christ—the "saints of God." (Philip. i. 27.) And oh! let it be fully manifested in all its gracious unction and power, for "the edifying" of the Church (Eph. iv. 29), and for the conviction of gain-sayers." (Col. iv. 6.)

8. *A gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it; whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth.*

‘A gift is so tempting, that it can no more be refused than a lovely

¹ Matt. iii. 9. John, viii. 33.

² 1 Kings, xi. 12, 13; xv. 4. 2 Chron. xxi. 7.

³ Gen. xvii. 7. Ps. exxvii. 3.

⁴ 2 Tim. i. 5 ; iii. 15.

⁵ Chap. xxvi. 7, 9. Comp. Eccclus. xx. 20.⁶ Ps. 1. 16, 17.

⁷ Matt. vii. 3-5. Rom. ii. 21-24.

⁸ Mark, i. 34. Comp. Acts, xvi. 16-18.

* Heathen morality from the lips of one of her wisest teachers allowed *the lying lips of princes*, because they governed for the public good, ‘All others’—he adds—‘must abstain.’ PLATO, *De Repub.* ‘Qui nescit dissimulare, nescit regnare’—has been too often a royal maxim. Far more *becoming a prince* was the saying of Louis IX. of France—‘If truth be banished from all the rest of the world, it ought to be found in the breast of princes.’ Alphonsus of Arragon declared (*Lavater in loco*) that ‘one word of a prince should be a greater security than a private man's oath.’ Undoubtedly the royal character ought to display a grandeur and dignity of principle, that should shine through every dark cloud of trial and perplexity.

jewel, by him to whom it is presented; and such is its power, it commonly prevails over all men, dispatches all business, carries all causes, and—in a word—effects whatever a man desires.* Such is the sympathy between a lusting eye and a glittering gift. The covetous prophet¹--'nay even an apostle²—was wilfully beguiled by its fascination. The Heathen soldiers sold themselves to its slavery.³ A King's Minister was won over by its allurements. (Acts, xii. 20.) Even a King—and such as the man after God's own heart—was sinfully perverted in the snare. (2 Sam. xvi. 1-4.) Seldom does it fail to *prosper whithersoever it turneth*. But who would envy a *prosperity* for evil? All ministers of law were wisely directed (like fabled justice) to give their decisions blindfolded! not looking at this *precious stone*, lest they should be dazzled by its sparkling attraction.⁴ Unfaithfulness was always visited with the heavy displeasure of the Great Judge.⁵

And is not the child of God often pressed with this temptation? Does the influence of a gift, the sense of obligation, never repress the bold consistency of godliness? Does no bias of friendship, no plausible advantage, entice into a crooked path? Oh! be resolute in a better strength than thine own in the resistance of the sin. The conflict is not with violent temptation, or with open sin, but with subtle and apparently harmless deviations from the strait path. Exercise thy "integrity and uprightness" in the spirit of faith; and doubt not that they will "preserve thee." (Ps. xxv. 21.) The man of God, who "dwells on high" with his God, "shaketh his hands from holding of bribes;" as the Apostle shook off "the viper that had fastened on his hand."⁶ From this height he looks down upon this corruption with indignant abhorrence—"Let thy gifts be to thyself--Thy money perish with thee."⁷

¹ Num. xxii. 7, 8, 21. 2 Pet. ii. 15.

² Matt. xxvi. 14-16.

³ Ib. xxviii. 12-15.

⁴ Exod. xxiii. 8. Deut. xvi. 10.

⁵ Deut. xxviii. 25. Isa. v. 22, 23. Mic. vii. 8, 4.

⁶ Isa. xxxiii. 15, with Acts, xxviii. 5.

⁷ Dan. v. 17. Acts, viii. 18-20. Comp. 1 Sam. xii. 3.

* Bishop Patrick—"What a description!"—adds Mr. Scott--'of the mercenary selfishness of mankind!' Comp. also verse 23; xviii. 16. Even the Heathen conscience seems to have had a just perception of this evil. The saying of Philip of Macedon is well known, that 'there was no fortress so strong, but it might be taken, if an ass laden with gold was brought to the gate.' The poet finely illustrates this remark, referring also to the current report, that—'not Philip, but Philip's gold,—conquered Greece.' HOR. *Od.* lib. iii. M. 'Auro loquenite, inest omnis Oratio.' GREG. NAZIAN. 'Gold and silver pervert many things, especially motives of right. Money bath a great power with those that are in power. A golden key will open any prison door, and east the watchman into a deep sleep. Gold will break open gates of iron, as well as silence the orator's voice, and blind the judge's eyes. It will bind the strong man's hands, and blunt the edge of the sword. It makes war, and it makes peace. What almost can it not do with corrupt minds?' CARYL on *Job*, xxxi. 21.

9. *He that covereth a transgression seeketh love: but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends.*

Seeketh love! A beautiful expression, much to be kept in mind! It shows a delight in the atmosphere of *love*-- man's highest elevation in communion with his God. (1 John, iv. 16.) It implies not the mere exercise of love, where it is presented, but the searching and making opportunity for it. But how seldom do we rise to the high standard of this primary grace, exalted as it is pre-eminently above "the best gifts" (1 Cor. xii. 31; xiii.); and illustrated and enforced by no less than the Divine example! (Eph. v. 1, 2.) Yet too often it sits at the door of our lips, instead of finding a home in our hearts; forgetting that the exhortation is not, that we should talk of *love*, but that we should "walk in it;" not stepping over it, crossing it, walking by the side, but "*in it*," as our highway and course. One step of our feet is better than an hundred words of the tongue.

A forbearing spirit is a fine manifestation of this heavenly grace. Our motives are often misconstrued. We meet in a world of selfishness, cold reserve, instead of glowing confidence. Prejudice builds a wall against Christian intercourse. Wounded pride would return unkindness with contempt. Resentment stirs up recrimination. Disappointment kindles morbid suspicion. Here is a noble field for Christian victory; instead of resenting, to *cover the transgression* with a mantle of love (Chap. x. 12. 1 Cor. xiii. 7. Gr.); with that act of amnesty, by which we are saved—the most aggravated *transgression*, the most unprovoked injuries, being covered in eternal forgetfulness. (Heb. viii. 12.)

The repeating a matter has often *separated friends* by uncovering a forgotten quarrel. (Chap. xvi. 28.) Mischievous might not be intended. But to amuse ourselves with the follies or weakness of our brethren, is a sinful trifling, fraught with injury. Justly are "tellers and busybodies" described as "speaking things which they ought not." (1 Tim. v. 13) A disciplined tongue is a gracious mercy to the Church.

10. *A reproof entereth more into a wise man, than an hundred stripes into a fool.*

If we should *cover transgression*, we should not forbear *reproof*. *Reproof* distinguishes the wise man from the *fool*. (Chap. xiii. 1.) A word is enough for the wise. The discipline of *stripes* is needful for *the fool*. Parents and tutors should specially study the character of children, that they may temper *reproof* wisely. Many a fine spirit has been spoiled by unsuitable treatment.

If this be true of man's *reproof*, much more of God's. A word was enough for David.¹ A look *entered more into* Peter's heart,² *than an*

¹ 2 Sam. xii. 1-7; iv. 13, 14.

² Luke, xxii. 61, 62.

*hundred stripes into Pharaoh,*¹ *Ahaz,*² *Israel.*³ *Stripes* only scourge the fool's back. They never reach his heart. He is therefore a fool still.

"Though thou shouldest bray him in a mortar among wheat in a pestle; yet shall not his foolishness depart from him." (Chap. xxvii. 22.)

What then makes the difference as to the effect of *reproof*? "The stony heart is taken away, and an heart of flesh is given." (Ezek. xxxvi. 26.) A needle pierces deeper into flesh, than a sword into Stone. A wakeful ear, a tender conscience, a softened heart, a teachable spirit--these are the practical exercises, by which a wise and loving father disciplines his children for his service, for his cross, and for his crown.

11. *An evil man seeketh only rebellion: therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent against him.* 12. *Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly.* 13. *Whoso rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house.*

Some awful pictures of man are here set out. *Look at his waywardness—seeking only rebellion*—resisting all authority of God and man. This is no light sin. (1 Sam. xv. 23.) *Therefore a cruel messenger*, one that will not be turned from his work, *shall be sent against him*. The disobedient son in the family;⁴ Korah in the Church,⁵ Absalom,⁶ Sheba,⁷ and Pekah,⁸ in the kingdom—all stand out as monuments of retributive justice. Not that *rebellion* is the only sin, but that it is the grand outbreking of the stubborn will. It may be hidden under a peaceful and amiable cover. But it "is not dead, but sleepeth."* Let God remove the restraint; let Satan bring the occasion of temptation; and, when all before appeared love and unity, "hateful, and hating one another" (Tit. iii. 3) — will be the dark features of the prospect.

Look again at man in his folly. The strength and accuracy of the figure can scarcely be surpassed. The savage beast under the strongest excitement — *a bear robbed of her whelps*—is less dangerous to meet. Witness Jacob's sons putting a whole city to fire and sword for the folly of one man;⁹ Saul slaying a large company of innocent priests;¹⁰ Nebuchadnezzar heating the furnace sevenfold;¹¹ Herod murdering the children in Ramah;¹² "Saul breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord"¹³—was not all this the rage of a beast, not the reason of a man? Humbling, indeed, is this picture of man, once "created in the image of God." (Gen. i. 27.) More humbling is it to see this folly in a child of God; to see David binding himself

¹ Exod. ix. 34, 35.

² 2 Chron. xxviii. 22.

³ Isa. i. 5; ix. 13. Jer. v. 3.

⁴ Deut. xxi. 18.

⁵ Num. xvi.

⁶ 2 Sam. xviii. 7, 5, 16.

⁷ Ib. xx. 1, 22.

⁸ 2 Kings, xv. 27-30.

⁹ Gen. xxxiv. 25.

¹⁰ 1 Sam. xxii. 18.

¹¹ Dan. iii. 13-19.

¹² Matt. ii. 16.

¹³ Acts, ix. 1.

* The philosophical remark of Burke — 'Those who do not love religion, hate it'—is the spirit of our Divine Master's saying, Matt. xii. 30.

with an oath to massacre a whole family, some of whom had taken up his cause against the sottish offender. Yet the melting away of his fury under wise remonstrance shewed the man of God covered with the shame of his *folly*; not *the fool* living *in it* as his nature, habit, and delight. (1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33.)

But to turn nearer home—are there no households where uncontrolled anger governs all at pleasure? Does the self-willed victim remember, that 'nothing is said or done in a passion, but may be better said or done afterwards?''* Do we never see the Christian, whom his Master's discipline and example ought to have transformed to a lamb, still like *the bear robbed of her whelps*? Man—the holiest, "left of God to try him, that he might know *all* that was in his heart" (2 Chron. xxxii. 31)—"man," so left to himself, "verily at his best estate is altogether vanity." (Ps. xxxix. 5.) Abhorred be that vain, but too common excuse—'It is my way.' Is not this the very cause of grief to a contrite soul, calling for deep humiliation and increasing watchfulness?

Look again at man in his ingratitude. God forbids to reward evil for evil; much more *evil for good*. This sin even the Heathen deemed to include every other. †--And so hateful is it to God, that he visits the evil, not only on the sinner himself, but on *his house*. Israel was punished for the ill return to Gideon.¹ The traitor's *house* was doomed to a curse.² And how fearful *the evil* to the ungrateful nation, who does not know?³

This ingratitude is by no means uncommon, though the conscience is little awake to the guilt. What else is it, when the ungodly resent an attempt to promote their best interests? David complained of this unkind and undeserved return, simply because he was pursuing active benevolence. (Ps. xxxviii. 20.) Such a recompence is marked out for special reprobation.

And surely *evil rewarded for good* was the stamp of our father's sin. (Gen. iii. 5, 6, with ii. 8-18.) And ever since has the curse been fearfully verified--*Evil shall not depart from his house*. Nor is this unjust severity. What say we to a child, nourished with the tenderest care, yet casting off all filial regard, and *rewarding evil for good*? Could any other appearances of virtue atone for this unnatural abomination, this awful deformity? And yet is not this sin—the astonishment of heaven and earth--the mark of every child of fallen Adam? "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me."

¹ Judg. viii. 35; ix. 56, 57. Comp. Jer. xviii. 20-23.

² Ps. lv. 12-15; cix. 9-13.

³ Matt. xxvii. 25, with xxiii. 32-39.

* MATTHEW HENRY'S Sermon on *Meekness*.

† 'Ingraturn si dixeris, omnia dixeris.' Yet was it the aggravation of their own sin. Rom. i. 21.

(Isa. i. 2.) But for the transfer of this mighty mass of guilt, how could we stand before God? And who of us still in the consciousness of this guilt, will not seek for a more full influence of that no less perfect work, by which the rebel spirit is tamed and humbled into the meekness and love of the Gospel?

14. The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave of contention before it be meddled with.

Both the destructive elements---fire and water---illustrate the danger of *the beginning of strife*.¹ To neither element can we say--"Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further!" (Job, xxxviii. 11.) As well might we command the raging storm, as the uncontroled passion--"Peace! be still." (Mark, iv. 39.) The dam may restrain a large body of waters; but cut the sluices, and *the letting out of water* may be a sweeping inundation.* Thus fearfully *has the beginning of strife* issued in the murder of thousands,² and, even in the desolation of kingdoms.³

No less destructive is it in ordinary life. One provoking word brings on another. Every retort widens the breach. Seldom, when we have heard the first word, do we hear the last. An inundation of evil is poured in, that lays desolate peace, comfort, and conscience. Does not grace teach us the Christian victory, to keep down the expression of resentment, and rather to bear provocation than to break the bond of unity?

Truly it is a wise rule to stop the evil at *the beginning*. The bank is much more easily preserved than repaired. The breach once made, if it only *let out* a drop of *water*, is *the beginning* of an evil, the fruit of which cannot be calculated. How soon was the indignation of the ten apostles moved against the two; which, but for the immediate intervention of their Divine Master, might have been productive of serious issue! (Matt. xx. 24.) For—as one strongly observed—'Man knows the beginning of sin; but who bounds the issues thereof?'† Abraham nobly yielded in the *contention* with Lot, and the evil was stayed. (Gen. xiii. 8, 9.) Paul and Barnabas--neither would yield; "and *the contention* was so sharp between them, that"--sad record!—"they departed asunder one from the other." (Acts, xv. 39.) Moses restrained himself in the rising provocation with his wife. Israel wisely refrained from contention with Edom in the churlish refusal of water.⁴ David answered gently to his brother's irritating suspicion.⁵ He "was as a deaf man" to his enemies, who were seeking contention with him.⁶

¹ Chap. xxvi. 21. Judg. ix. 19, 20. Jam. iii. ² Judg. xii. 1-6. 2 Sam. ii, 14-27.

³ 2 Chron. x. 14-16; xiii. 17; xxv. 17-24. ⁴ Num. xx. 14-21.

⁵ 1 Sam. xvii. 23, 20,

⁶ Ps. xxxviii. 12-14.

* See Virgil's elegant picture, *AE*n. ii. 496-499.

† Francis Spira.

The prompt decision of the Apostles in the ministration of the widows, preserved the infant Church from a serious schism.¹ Under similar threatening circumstances, would it not be well to consider, whether we are contending for a shadow, or for substance? if the latter, whether it might not be rather an exercise of forbearance than an handle of dissension (Rom. xiv.); or, if its importance justified the dissension (Gal. ii. 5), whether our judgment and conscience were fully and intelligently decided on the real principles involved. "Peace and holiness" are the main points we are commanded to follow (Heb. xii. 14); and so combined are they, that in vain can we expect to advance in holiness, except we "follow the things that make for peace."² In watching against the baneful issue of *contention*: be it well remembered, that the time to *leave off* is not when we see its worst, but its *beginning*; yea, *before it be meddled with*; restraining the first rising in ourselves; mortifying our own proud tempers, and cultivating our Master's meek and self-denying spirit.*

15. He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are an abomination to the Lord.

Judicial iniquity is an awful abuse of God's authority. (Exod. xxiii. 7.) The judge or magistrate "is a minister of God for good." (Rom. xiii. 4.) The appeal is to him for justice, as the Representative of God. (Deut. xxv. 1.) If the great Judge "loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity,"³ this unrighteousness *justifying the wicked must be abomination* to him.† This guilt of Samuel's sons, so contrary to his own integrity, was the immediate cause of the abolition of the Theocracy.⁴ The judges in David's time seem to have been guilty of both these branches of injustice.⁵ Ahab's house was ruined by *his condemnation of the just*.⁶ "Not this man, but Barabbas"⁷--combined the double sin. It was the perfection of injustice, the most aggravated abomination.

Not however to confine the application to official iniquity--Do we not all need great watchfulness, that we may "judge righteous judg-

¹ Acts, vi. 1-4.

² Rom. xiv. 19. Col. iii. 12-15. Jam. iii. 18.

³ Ps. xlv. 7. Deut. xxxii. 4.

⁴ 1 Sam. viii. 3-5, with xii. 3.

⁵ Ps. lxxxii. 2; xciv. 20, 21.

⁶ 1 Kings, xxi. 13-19.

⁷ John, xviii. 40.

* The following remarks from Mr. Burke are well worth consideration — 'The arms with which the ill dispositions of the world are to be combated, are moderation, gentleness, a little indulgence of others, and a great distrust of ourselves; which are not qualities of a mean spirit, as some may possibly think them; but virtues of a great and noble kind, and such as dignify our nature, as much as they contribute to our repose and fortune. For nothing can be so unworthy of a well-composed soul, as to pass away life in bickerings and litigations, in snarling and scuffling with every one about us.'—*Letter to Barry*. PRIOR'S *Life of Burke*. See an admirable Chapter in PALEY'S *Moral Philosophy* (Book iii. Chap. vii.) —a work however not to be recommended without very many reserves, on account of its false philosophy and unsound principles.

† Isa. v. 23. Comp. SOPHOCLIS *OEdip. Tyr.*, verses 622, 623, also Chap. xxiv. 23, 24.

ment" (John, vii. 24); that no corrupt bias may prejudice the exercise of our private judgment, either in favour of *the wicked*, or in the *condemnation of the just*?

But let us place ourselves before the "Judge of all" accused by Satan, our own conscience, and the righteous law of God; convicted of every charge; yet justified. Does God then in thus "justifying the ungodly" (Rom. iv. 5) contravene this rule? Far from it. If he *justifies the wicked*, it is on account of righteousness. (Ib. iii. 25, 26.) If he *condemn the just*, it is on the imputation of unrighteousness. Nowhere throughout the universe do the moral perfections of the Governor of the world shine so gloriously as at the cross of Calvary.¹ The satisfaction of the holy law, and the manifestation of righteous mercy, harmonise with the justification of the condemned sinner.² And this combined glory tunes the song of everlasting praise.*

16. Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?

A question of wonder and indignation! We often find this reckless infatuation in temporal things. A young man will spend a large income at the university in the *professed* purchase of wisdom, and yet idle away all his time! Is not *the price* manifestly in the hand of a fool, who *has no heart* to the advantages? The thoughtless rake might be warned even by his worldly friends. He is losing important opportunities, revolting his best friends, involving himself in debt, injuring his constitution, blasting his character. Is not this throwing away a valuable *price* by reckless *folly*?

Yet much more affecting is it to see the picture of this folly in religion. Why is *a fool* so blessed, *seeing he hath no heart* to improve his blessings? Birth, religious privileges, talents, time, influence, opportunity—all are a *price to get wisdom*. If the *fool* throws it away, the account of unprofitableness seals his sentence. (Matt. xxv. 24-30.) The grand *price* of inestimable value is in our hands.³ Yet how many thousand *fools* have *no heart* to buy, would rather lose it, than labour for it; rather go sleeping to hell, than toiling to heaven! The remnant of the ten tribes despised the opportunity put within their reach of coming up to the feast of the Lord.⁴ The town where Jesus was brought up,⁵ the cities where he wrought his miracles,⁶ wilfully

¹ Isa. liii. 5-10. 2 Cor. v. 21.

² Ps. lxxxv. 10. Isa. xlii. 21; xlv. 21.

³ Chap. viii. 4, 6; ix. 4-6. Isa. 1v. 1-3. Rom. x. 8. Rev. iii. 20.

⁴ 2 Chron. xxx. 10.

⁵ Luke, iv. 28.

⁶ Matt. xi. 21.

* Bishop Davenant justly quotes this text, as an example of the forensic use of the term justification—'not the infusion of a quality, but the pronouncing a sentence.' (Discourse on Inherent Righteousness, chap. xxii. Allport's Translation.) In this true sense it is used in reference to our justification before God—pronounced just in God's own court of judgment.

despised the price of wisdom. The Gadarenes threw away the pearl.¹ Herod eyed it with curiosity;² Pilate with indifference;³ the Jews with scorn.⁴ The rich youth preferred his own "goodly pearls" to it.⁵ Felix hoped to turn it to his own selfish purpose.⁶ Agrippa dared not purchase it.⁷ Were not all these pictures of the *fool*, that every day meets our eye? "That which "is more precious than rubies" (chap. iii. 15) is to him more worthless than a pebble. That which "is more sweet than honey," is tasteless as the white of an egg.* He lives for himself, as if there was no God in the world. His heart is given to the world, as if it could *be a God* to him, or could fill up God's vacant place in his heart! Yet thus the realities of eternity—the mighty things of the Gospel—things that should drink up our spirits, are like "a tale that is told." Enough that they should have a place in our creed, though never in our hearts. The world is preferred to heaven, time to eternity; and the immortal soul, for which such a cost has been paid, and such prospects prepared, perishes in folly. But lingerers will stop short of heaven. And will it not be a sword in the awakened conscience —' I might have been enriched, had I not wasted the golden opportunities of salvation, and fooled away the glorious days of the Sort of man?' Yea—will not this be the sting of the never-dying worm --'Had I come to Christ when I might, I should not have been in this place of torment. I would not come then.'⁸ I cannot come now.'⁹ 'Lord, save me' --- cries the pious Howe —'from trifling with the things of eternity.'†

But if I have *a heart to this wisdom*, there can be no doubt *the price will get it*. I shall find the inestimable blessing by trading with my talent, by the diligent improvement of my privileges. I shall find Him whom my soul needeth above all, and desires to love above all; whose lovely names are not empty names, but full of truth. Brother—Husband—Saviour—would but the fool ponder, might not the picture attract his heart; as One "able to promote him to honour," to give him an infinite compensation for his toil or loss; whose very upbraidings are pity, whose strivings are tenderness; whose rebukes are love, whose smile is heaven.

17. A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

This beautiful picture of friendship has been drawn by moralists, sentimentalists, and poets. But the reality is only found, where Divine grace has melted away natural selfishness into disinterested love. If virtue is the best ground of friendship, then is this most heavenly virtue

¹ Matt. viii. 34.

² Luke, xxiii. 8. Comp. Acts, xvii. 21, 32.

³ John, xviii. 38.

⁴ Acts, xiii. 46.

⁵ Mark, x. 22.

⁶ Acts, xxiv. 25-27.

⁷ Ib., xxvi. 28.

⁸ Matt, xxiii. 37. John, v. 40.

⁹ Matt. xxv. 10. Luke, xiii, 25-28; xvi. 26.

* Lawson.

† Works, iii. 130.

the firmest ground of all. What passes under the name is too often, as Bishop Hall* describes it, 'brittle stuff.' This fickle excitement cools by distance, or by the coldness of our friend. Degradation of worldly circumstances converts it into indifference (Job, vi. 14, 15), or even into hatred.† The friend, who hath left the right path, is forsaken, instead of being followed, watched over, and every opportunity improved for reclaiming him. But the true *friend loveth at all times*, through "evil as well as good report." He does not change, when circumstances change. He is the same, whether we are in wealth or need. He proves himself in adversity, by rising in warmth, and exerting every nerve, in proportion as his aid is needed.¹ He is not ashamed of poverty or of a prison.² In any jarrings of the flesh, *adversity* cements love.‡ The loving friend becomes now *a brother born for adversity*.§ Such was the love of Joseph to his brethren; unshaken by vicissitudes, unabated by ingratitude.³ Such was the firm cleaving of Ruth to her desolate mother;⁴ the unity of heart between David and Jonathan;⁵ the affectionate sympathy of the beloved disciple to the Mother of his Lord (John, xix. 27); the faithful love of the brethren to the great Apostle in his adversity.||

We must not indeed look for perfection. Can we doubt the sincerity of the disciples, while we are humbled, instructed, and warned by their frailty? (Matt. xxvi. 40, 41.) For frailty it was; not wilfulness, nor hypocrisy. "Ye are they, that have continued with me in my temptations"--was their Master's kindly acknowledgment at that season of infirmity, when they all forsook him, and fled.⁶

But--Ah! it is to him that we must look as the perfect; exemplar. To see the Son of God in our nature, that he might be our *friend and brother*--(Heb. ii. 14); to hear him "not ashamed to call us brethren" (Ib. verses 11-13) — this is a mystery of *friendship* -- unsearchable. Truly is this Friend—he alone, worthy of our unlimited confidence. Such is the constancy of his *love--at all times* (John, xiii. 1) even unto death¶--unaltered by the most undutiful returns--"turning and

¹ 2 Sam. xv. 19-22 ; xvii. 27—29.

² Phil. ii. 25. 2 Tim. i. 16-18. ³ Gen. xlv. 5-8.

⁴ Ruth, i. 16, 17.

⁵ 1 Sam. xviii. 3; xix. 2; xxiii. 16.

⁶ Luke, xxii. 28, with Matt. xxvi. 56.

* *Works*, viii. 38. *Meditations and Vows*.

† Chap. xix. 7. Job, xix. 17-20. Comp. Ovid's elegant lines, *ex Ponto*. Lib. ii. Ephes. Hi. 5-10, 231-28.

‡ See the melancholy dispute between Bishop Hooper and Ridley upon ceremonials, and the cementing influence of the prison; with Foxe's beautiful remarks, vi. 640, 641.

§ Bishop Patrick. Comp. Job, ii, 11-13. Eccclus. vii. 18 ; v3. 7, 8, 10, 16.

|| Aquila and Priscilla. Rom. xvi. 3, 4; Epaphroditus, Phil. ii. 25, 26—when a prisoner; the Philippian Church, Ib. iv. 15.

¶ John, xv. 13.

'Mine is an unchanging love;
Higher than the heights above;
Deeper than the depths beneath;
Firm and faithful, strong as death.'—COWPER.

looking upon "the disciple (a look so full of tenderness and power!) (Luke, xxii. 61) whom we should have excommunicated. Such the sympathy of his love--*born for adversity*; so united to us--the friend and the brother we need; never nearer to us than when in our lowest depths of trouble; and, though now our glorified *Brother* in heaven, yet still "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Heb. iv. 15); still "afflicted in all our afflictions" (Isa. lxiii. 9); presenting us to, his Father, as his own elect, the purchase of his blood, "the members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." (Ephes. v. 30.) Here is sympathy in all its fulness, and all its helpfulness. 'Here is indeed a *Brother born for adversity*. "Trust him," O ye trembling believers, "at all times," and in all places. You will then be possessed of the happy art of living beyond the reach of all disappointment.'*

18. *A man void of understanding† (heart, marg.) striketh hands, and becometh surety in the presence of his friend.*

Though we are to feel ourselves *born for adversity*, ever ready to "bear one another's burdens" (Gal. vi. 2): yet we must not befriend our brother at the risk or expence of injustice to our family. We have therefore another warning against imprudent suretyship. (Chap. vi. 1-5; xi. 15.) Beware of *striking hands* in agreement without ascertaining, whether we can fulfil our engagement, or whether *our friend* is not equally able to fulfil it himself. This spews a *man void of understanding*; specially to do this *in the presence of his friend*. For why is not his word taken, but from the suspicion of insolvency or dishonesty? A prodigal, thoughtless kindness may gain us a popular name. But the principle, closely examined, will be found to be another form of selfishness. There is no true benevolence in rash engagements, which may involve our name and family in disgrace or ruin. True indeed—had not those *hands* that were nailed to the cross, *been stricken* in suretyship, the handwriting that was against us could never have been cancelled. (Col. ii. 14.) Yet the eternal counsel is no pattern for our simple folly. Nor is infinite love combined with perfect wisdom, a plea for our rash generosity. Religion, though it warns its professors against imprudence, yet too often unjustly bears the blame of them. If we

* HOWELL'S *Sermons*, ii. 252. 'Though solitary and unsupported, and oppressed by sorrows unknown and undivided, I am not without joyful expectations. There is one *Friend who loveth at all times: a Brother born for adversity*—the help of the helpless; the hope of the hopeless; the strength of the weak; the riches of the poor; the peace of the disquieted; the companion of the desolate; the friend of the friendless. To him alone will I call, and he will raise me above my fears.'—*Memoir of Mrs. Hawkes*, pp. 1.7, 128. The ancient Jews applied this Proverb to Christ, adducing it as a testimony, that the Divine Messiah would by his incarnation become the Brother of man. Gill *in loco*.

† Chap. vii. i; x. 13; xi. 12; xv. 21; xxiv. 30 'It denotes the want of all the faculties of the soul, through ignorance, carelessness, and the prevalence of evil propensities various kinds.' SCOTT on xi. 12.

would adorn the Christian profession, and avoid occasions of stumbling to the ungodly, we must "provide for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of man." (2 Cor. viii. 20, 21.)

19. He loveth transgression that loveth strife; and he that exalteth his gate seeketh destruction.

We may indeed fall into *strife* without *loving* it. (Gen. xiii. 7, 8.) But let us always look at it as a branch from the root of sin (Gal. v. 19-21), and the prolific source of sin. (2 Cor. xii. 20. Jam. iii. 16.) The love of it is therefore *the love of transgression*. Ye who will own the charge? The man engaged in *strife* protests that he loves peace; only his neighbour's perverseness drives him into *strife*. And yet if we are frequently in it; if we take no pains, make no sacrifice of self-will or interest (1 Cor. vi. 1-7), to avoid the occasion of *strife*—does not conscience bring home the charge? Ah! *the love of transgression* lies deeper than we often see. It shews itself in forms, that the world may overlook, but which prove its nature to be "carnal."*

Very generally it proceeds from the root of pride.¹ The man *exalts his gate*† above his neighbour, and affects a style beyond his rank. Or his ambition would tread his neighbour under his feet. Nay, he will sometimes rise against his Sovereign,² or even stand in defiance of his God.³ The sluggard sees his ruin before him, and indolently waits for it, without making any effort to avert it.⁴ But the proud man *seeketh destruction*. He puts himself in the road and sooner or later his day comes; and his name, glory, and honour are swept away.⁵ Watch over me, O my God, to preserve me from the first rising of my proud heart. Or if my frailty yield to it, O keep me from the prevalence of this presumptuous sin, that hurries me as a rival against thy throne into the pit of *destruction*.

20. He that hath a froward heart findeth no good; and he that hath a perverse tongue falleth into mischief.

The history of God's ancient people is a picture of *frowardness* with all its barren results. Let their long-suffering God do what he would to them and for them, they *found no satisfying good*. (Ps. lxxviii.) Self-will, even in its fullest indulgence, instead of bringing the desired *good*,

¹ Chap. xiii. 10. Mark, ix. 33, 34. ² 2 Sam. xv. 1. 1 Kings, i. 5; xvi. 9-18. ³ Rom. 1, 2

⁴ Chap. vi. 11.

⁵ Chap. xvi. 18. Isa. xxii. 15-19. Jer. xxii. 13-19.

* 1 Cor. iii. 3, 4. 'I never loved those salamanders that are never well, but when they are in the fire of contention. I will rather suffer a thousand wrongs, than offer one. I will rather suffer an hundred, than inflict one. I will suffer many, ere I will complain of one, and endeavour to right it by contending. I have ever found, that to strive with my superior is furious; with my equal doubtful; with my inferior sordid and base; with any, full of unquietness.'—Bishop HALL, *Meditations and Vows*, Works, viii. 18.

† An allusion to *the gates* of splendid palaces in the East, generally elevated according to the vanity of their owner.—MORIER, quoted in BURDER'S *Oriental Customs*.

always ends in disappointment; and, when, the *perverse tongue* breaks out, in frightful *mischiefs*.¹ The best of us are too often governed by this waywardness. Even when we seek to walk with God, how does the *froward heart* struggle to walk by its own inclination! The good Lord give us a mortified spirit, to restrain us from the guidance of our corrupt fancies! Many an erratic course in the Church we trace to some unhappy bias, not disciplined by the Divine Spirit, not moulded to reverential faith. Most graciously therefore does our God assert his own right to supremacy; promising us—not freedom from restraint, but a yoke (Matt. xi. 29), a binding law, a strict obligation, and—above all—the heart to love and obey.² Here is now self-controul and stability; not impulse and feeling, but fixed and steady principle. Shall not we then cry with filial simplicity--‘Not my will, O Lord. Let me have anything but my own way. Leave me not to my perverse heart.’ In proportion as *the froward heart* is thus subdued, the *perverse tongue* is bridled; and we have the "perfect man" in Christian consistency, humility, and love.

21. *He that begetteth a fool doeth it to his sorrow; and the father of a fool hath no joy.*

Among "the vanities, to which the creature is made subject," Solomon elsewhere enumerated one, of which he probably had a feeling experience—leaving the labour of his hand—he knoweth not to whom—whether he shall be a wise man or a *fool*. (Eccles. ii. 18, 19.) The latter prospect is here realized. The weeping parent not only finds *no joy* in the fondly cherished object of his expectation; but a cankering grief embitters all his joys, and often brings him "down with sorrow to the grave."* And how is this sorrow aggravated, should there be an unhappy humbling consciousness, that undue indulgence or severity, injudicious treatment, and more than all--neglect of real prayer for the child,† and of the diligent improvement of God's appointed means, virtually suffered the evil propensities to grow to a direful harvest of ruin!

Yet let the godly parent expect everything from prayer—*provided*

¹ Chap. xi. 20; xviii. 6, 7. Num. xvi. Acts, xiii. 8-11. ² Jer. xxxi. 33. Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27.

* Gen. xlii. 38. Has not many an afflicted parent fellowship with the impassioned cry of Augustus—‘Would that I had lived single, or died childless?’

† Bishop SANDERSON'S Sermon on Rom. xv. 5. ‘Think none of you, you have sufficiently discharged your parts towards those that are under your charge, if you have instructed them, corrected them when they have done amiss, and rewarded them when they have done well, so long as your fervent prayers for them have been wanting. In vain shall you wrestle with their stubbornness and other corruptions, (though you put forth all your strength) so long as you wrestle with them only. Then, or not at all, shall you wrestle to purpose, when you enter the lists with the Father of Spirits, as Jacob did: wrestling with him by your importunate prayers; and not giving him over, till you have wrung a blessing from him, either for yourselves, or them, or both.’

it be not palsied by despondency. (Gal. vi. 9; John, xi. 40.) In the deepest distress never lose hold of the covenant of grace. (Gen. xvii. 7.) Let the determined faith of a praying mother encourage perseverance. (Matt. xv. 22-28.) God exercises faith; but he never fails to honour it. He delays to answer prayer but every word, every sigh, is registered for acceptance in his best time. Let Solomon's word be a quickening—not a discouraging—word; "*profitable*" indeed "for reproof, and for correction;" but not less so "for instruction in righteousness." (2 Tim. iii. 16.)

22. *A merry heart doeth good like a medicine; but a broken spirit drieth the bones.*

This is not true of all *merriment*. The wise man justly describes the loud and noisy mirth of fools to be, no *medicine*, but "madness;"¹ a transient flash, not an abiding source of enjoyment. Probably this merriment here means nothing more than cheerfulness, which, in its proper measure, on proper subjects, and at a proper time, is a legitimate pleasure, especially belonging to religion. Our Lord thus made a *merry heart* by his message of Divine forgiveness (Matt. ix. 2-7); and this doubtless was a more healing *medicine* to the paralytic, than the restoration of his limbs. If I be a pardoned sinner, an accepted child of God, what earthly trouble can sink me? "Paul and Silas sang praises to God in the inner prison, with their feet made fast in the stocks." (Acts, xvi. 25.) The martyrs "glorified God in the fire." They were "tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection." (Heb. xi. 35.) All earthly enjoyments are now doubly blest with heavenly sunshine. (Eccles. ix. 7-9.)

There is also the Christian flow of natural spirits. For when consecrated to the Lord, they become a means of enjoyment, not only to ourselves (Chap. xv. 13), but to those around us. Often has the mourning saint been encouraged, often also has the worldling been convicted, by a brother's cheerful words or looks.² To the former it has been a *medicine*; to the latter a lesson.

A *broken spirit* in an evangelical sense is God's precious gift; stamped with his special honour, and always constituting an acceptable service. But here it describes a brooding spirit of despondency; always looking at the dark side; and, if connected with religion (which is not always the case), flowing from narrow and perverted views, a spurious humility centering in self. The influence *drieth up the bones*. The bodily system is sensibly affected. 'It contracts and enfeebles the animal spirits; preys on our strength; eats out the vigour of the constitution. The radical moisture is consumed; and the

¹ Eccles. ii. 2. Comp. 1 Sam. xxv. 36, 87.

² Chap. xii. 25. Eccles viii. 1.

unhappy subject of this passion droops like a flower in the scorching heat of summer.*

Not less baneful is its influence upon the spiritual system. Hard thoughts of God are induced, as if he had forsaken, neglected, or forgotten us. From doubting, the soul comes to chilling fear; thence to gloomy despondency. The power of the telescope fails in bringing distant objects nigh. Hence the present hold of the grand object is feeble. The hope of future enjoyment is dark. Distance too often lessens communication. Prayer is, less frequently or powerfully sent up. The answers therefore, and the supplies of cheering grace from this source, are more scanty. Thus we are not only weakened in comfort, but cut short in strength. The mind is clothed in sable. The chariot's wheels are taken off; so that we "drag heavily." Discontent, and a querulous unbelieving sadness, take possession of the soul, and wholly unfit us for the service of God.

Most watchful therefore should we be against this withering influence. Allow not the imagination to dwell needlessly in gloom. Constitutional temperament will have its influence. External things act upon the body, and through the body upon the mind. We are some of us creatures even of weather, not the same on a misty as on a bright day. There is much in our physical economy rather within the province of the physician than the Minister; much perhaps that we may be inclined too hastily to censure in a brother, when a more accurate knowledge would open our sympathy. When outward and inward troubles unite, what wonder, if the vessel, like Paul's ship, "where two seas met" (Acts, xxvii. 41). give way?† Yet, let it be remembered, that every indulgence increases the evil; and that allowed prevalence may end in a fixed melancholy.

Turn and see what materials can be gathered for resistance to this ruinous evil, and inducing a well-regulated cheerfulness. 'Why am not I at this moment utterly overwhelmed with distress? How seldom, if ever, am I in pain all over at the same time! How faithfully do our greatest supports combine with our greatest trials!' (2 Cor. i. 5.) Surely in these recollections some excitement of pleasurable feeling might be directed into the channel of gratitude to God! How many rays of collected mercy shine from the great centre of joy!

But to come more immediately to the gospel—Unquestionably there is abundant matter for the deepest humiliation. No words can adequately describe the shame, that we ought to feel for our insensibility even on account of one single act of infinite love. Yet the

* Bp. HORNE's *Sermon on a Merry Heart*. Our English proverb is—'Dry sorrow drinks the blood'—sorrow that cannot weep!

† Chap. xii. 25; xv. 13. Job, xxx. 30. Ps. xxxii. 3, 4; cii. 3-5; cxix. 83. Comp. Eccus. xxx. 22; xxxviii. 18. Ovid's beautiful lines, Lib. i. ex Ponto. This mixture of bodily and mental anguish formed the completeness of our Lord's sufferings. Ps. xxii. 15; lxix. 3.

gospel encourages humiliation, not despondency. It deals in the realities, not of woe and despair, but of hope, peace, and joy. Its life and glory is he that "bindeth up the broken-hearted" (Isa. lxi. 1), who "will not break the bruised reed" (Ib. xlii. 3), or crush under his feet "the prisoners of hope."

If then—Christian—you believe the gospel to be "glad tidings," shew that you believe it, by lighting up your face with a smile; not by "bowing down the head as a bulrush," and as it were "spreading sackcloth and ashes under you." (Ib. lviii. 5.) Shew that it is the day-light of your soul; that you really find its ways to be "pleasantness and peace" (Chap. iii. 17); that you believe their joys, not because you have read and heard of them, but because you have tasted them. If they are happy, be happy in them. "Lie not against the truth," by suffering your countenance to induce the belief, that religion is a habit of inveterate and incurable gloom. Joy is indeed a forbidden fruit to the ungodly.¹ But let it be the adorning of thy profession.² It is a sin against thy God to be without it.³ The gloom of the servant reflects unjustly upon the Master, as if thou "knewest him, that he was an hard man."⁴ Resist then all sorrow, that suggests such dishonourable thoughts of him. Disparage not his heavenly comfort, by laying unduly to heart his counter-balancing afflictions. No cloud can cover you, but the "bow may be seen in the cloud." And in all this world's afflictions, one beam of his love might scatter all the clouds, and fill the heart with "joy unspeakable and full of glory." "Let the Lord then be magnified, which hath pleasure," not in the misery, but in "*the prosperity of his servants.*" (Ps. xxxv. 27.) He giveth liberty to be cheerful, ground to be cheerful, and he will give thee an heart. to be cheerful with animated gladness.

After all, however,—let each be careful to cultivate a just and even balance. Liveliness needs a guard, lest it should degenerate into levity. Be much in secret with God. Cherish a solemn, reverential spirit before the throne of grace. Christian joy is a deeply serious thing. The froth and lightness that passes for it deserves not the name. The carnal element must be destroyed, to introduce the heaven-born principle, that comes from God, and maintains communion with him.

Yet on the other a grave temperament must be resisted, lest it should sink into morbid depression. Gloom is not the portion, and ought not to stamp the character, of the children of God. It may often be a conflict with a man's own self, either in body or mind. But yet a little while, and, instead of *the broken spirit which drieth up the bones*, our spirits will be so high, that another body must be formed to contain them. Meanwhile Christian discipline on both sides will be the principle of enlarged happiness and steady consistency.

¹ Hos. ix. 1.² Isa, lii.1, 2 ; lx. 1.³ Deut. xxviii. 47.⁴ Matt. xxv. 24.

23. *A wicked man taketh a gift out of the bosom, to pervert the ways of judgment.*

Again we are warned of the corruption of gifts. (Verse 8.) No sin has a deeper stamp of wickedness; none a more awful mark of Divine visitation. (Isa. i. 23, 24. Ezra, xxii. 13.) The temptation is the test of principle. Sir M. Hale (as his Biographer writes) 'had learned from Solomon, that *a gift perverteth the ways of judgment*.'* He always therefore rejected it with courteous integrity. Not even a good cause will justify the evil practice. The Apostle, though restrained in bondage from his great and blessed work, would not gratify his covetous judge by purchasing his release. (Acts, xxiv. 26.) The rules of the gospel are clear and decisive. Let us not "do evil, that good may come. Let not your good be evil spoken of. Abstain from all appearance of evil." (Rom. iii. 8 ; xiv. 16. 1 Thess. v. 22.)

Even a corrupt world is ashamed of this sin. *The gift is in the bosom* (Chap. xxi. 14), concealed from the eye of man. But how fearfully uncovered is it to the eye of God, who will not wink at the endeavour *to pervert his ways of judgment*! How will he one day vindicate his Omniscience from all the insults put upon it in the world by those foolish men, who were not ashamed to do those things in the face of God himself, in which they would not have wished the meanest of his creatures to detect them!†

Let every child of Abraham hear the command given to his father—"Walk before me, and be thou perfect." (Gen. xxii. 1.) "He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly—he that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes---he shall dwell on high." (Isa. xxxiii. 15, 16. Ps. xv.)

24. *Wisdom is before him that hath understanding; but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth.*

Let us trace our interest in wisdom from the beginning. It first "enters into the heart." (Chap. ii. 10.) There it "rests in *him that hath understanding*" (Chap. xiv. 33), as his principle of conduct. Now it *is before his eyes* in the Book of *Wisdom*, as his rule of faith and life. (Ib. verse 8.) It is the centre, to which all his thoughts, motives, and pursuits tend. All is now order. Every faculty, desire, and affection, finds its proper place. '*He that hath understanding* fixeth his eyes upon wisdom, and contenteth himself with that object; whereas *the eyes of a fool* are constantly wandering everywhere; and his thoughts settle upon nothing that may avail to his good.'‡ *His eyes are in the ends of the earth*, rolling and wandering from one object to another. His

* Bishop BURNET'S *Life*. What a degrading contrast did Lord Bacon's character display!

† Lawson *in loco*.

‡ Bishop Hall.

thoughts are scattered. He has no definite object, no settled principle, no certain rule. Talent, cultivation of mind, improvement of opportunity—all are frittered away. He cares for those things which are furthest from him, and with which he has the least concern.

An original writer thus vividly portrays this inconstancy—"To-day he goes to the quay to be shipped for *Rome*. But before the tides come, his tide is turned. One party thinks him theirs; the adverse theirs; he is with both; with neither; not an hour with himself. Indifference is his ballast, and opinion his sail; he resolves not to resolve. He knows not what he doth hold. He opens his mind to receive notions, as one opens his palm to take an handful of water. He hath very much, if he could hold it. He is sure to die, but not what religion to die in. He demurs, like a posed lawyer, as if delay could remove some impediments.--In a controverted point, he holds with the last reasoner he either heard or read. The next diverts him, and his opinion dwells with him perhaps so long as the teacher of it is in his sight. He will rather take dross for gold, than try it in the furnace. He receives many judgments, retains none.—He loathes manna after two days' feeding.—His best dwelling would be his confined chamber, where he would trouble nothing but his pillow. He is full of business at Church; a stranger at home; a sceptic abroad; an observer in the street; everywhere a *fool*."*

This diversion is a great engine of the enemy. His great object is to turn the mind aside from what is immediate to what is indefinite, from what is plain and important to what is, unsearchable;¹ from what is personal to what is irrelevant.² Many trifles take the place of the "One thing needful." And is not this waste of time often a temptation to the Christian? Where are *his eyes*, or his thoughts, at prayer? Alas! too often, instead of "looking unto Jesus" (Heb. xii. 2), his great object, the life of prayer, the only way to God--are they not *in the ends of the earth*, as if there was no nearer, no better object of attraction? Oh! do not we want simplicity of spiritual *understanding* to keep him, the great untreated Wisdom, constantly *before our eyes*? Lord! I am ashamed of my base inconstancy. But it is thou alone canst heal it. "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity." (Ps. cxix. 37.) Fix them—O fix them—on him, on whom all heaven, all the redeemed, delight to gaze for ever.

25. *A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him.*

Surely the Divine Spirit did not repeat the proverb (Verse 21) for nought. Was it not to deepen our sense of parental responsibility and

¹ Deut. xxix. 29. Col. ii. 18.

² Luke, xiii. 23, 24. John, xxi. 21, 22.

* *Works* of Rev. THOMAS ADAMS. Folio, 1630--*The Soul's Sickness*.

filial obligation? Can parents be insensible to the prospect of this grief? Can children be hardened into the unnatural selfishness of piercing a parent's heart with such *bitterness*? (Chap. xix. 13.) The mother's anguish is here added to the *father's grief* (Gen. xxvi. 35.) "As a sword in her bones," is the apprehension of having "brought forth children to the murderer." (Hos. ix. 13.) How uncertain are the dearest comforts of earth! Our fallen mother anticipated the joy of "having gotten a man"—perhaps the promised seed—"from the Lord." (Gen. iv. 1.) Yet to the *bitterness* of her soul "he was of that wicked one, and slew his brother." (1 John, iii. 12.) Her daughter naturally "remembereth no more her sorrow, for joy that a man is born into the world." (John, xvi. 21.) Already she grasps the delightful vision of his infant training, and ripening maturity. And yet too often he proves in the end *a foolish son, and bitterness to her that bare him*.

Absalom was named 'His father's peace.' Yet was he the source of his most *poignant grief*. This is not the "weeping of a night," succeeded by a "joyous morning" (Ps. xxx. 5); but the "heaviness that maketh the heart stoop" (Chap. xii. 25), perhaps for years, perhaps to the end of days. Its connexion with eternity gives to the trial its keenest edge. To see *a foolish son* hurried irrevocably into his eternal doom—Oh! this to the godly parent is an awful conflict. (2 Sam. xviii. 33.) Strong indeed must be that faith (*yet such faith has been vouchsafed*)¹ which bows reverentially to the Divine Sovereignty, and maintains the serenity of peaceful submission.

But parental anxieties and sorrows must stimulate the enquiry--'How may this piercing thorn be spared, this bitter *grief*—the bitterest that ever a parent's heart can know—averted?' The primary root of this sorrow is the indulgence of the will.² The vast power of parental influence must be used wisely, at once, at any cost. We must not instruct, or entreat only, but command.³ We must allow no appeal from our authority, no reversal of our decision. This discipline in the spirit of love, and enforced by example, is God's honoured ordinance. Then to give power to all other means, there must be a living faith in the word of God. For if I really believe that awful fact, that my child is "a child of wrath," that Satan claims a right in him, and that if he die unconverted, hell must be his everlasting portion; shall not I apply myself with ceaseless energy to all the means for his soul's salvation; under the clear conviction, that if he be not saved, "good were it for him that he had not been born?"

But this faith brings encouragement fully proportioned to the tremendous anxiety. For, if I be a Christian Parent, may I not claim a place for my child in the covenant of God? (Gen. xvii. 7.) May I

¹ Lev. x. 1-3. 1 Sam. iii. 18.

² Chap. xxix. 15.

³ Gen. xviii. 19. 1 Sam. ii. 23-25.

not plead with him, and for him as a covenanted child? Here I desire to exercise a sound balance of well-disciplined confidence; encouraging parental hopes, and moderating parental anxieties. The law of the kingdom is, "that men should pray always, and not faint." (Luke, xviii. 1.) The fondest desires may not be accomplished till the eleventh hour. There may be many haltings, many withering blasts, many windings of the path. But "the bread cast upon the waters shall be found," though it be not till "after many days." (Eccles. xi. 1.)

Only let us see to it, that our faith proves its soundness as a *practical principle*. Do parents never pray, that God would take their children as his own, while yet they train them, as if they were for the world? Are we sure, that we desire nothing for them besides, or unconnected with, eternal life? * One such desire stirs up another; till at length these few little things thrust down the primary blessing from its place, and it becomes a nullity.

In fine—would we look for rest in our beloved children? (Gen. v. 29, marg.) Hold them loose for ourselves; fast for God. Connect them early with his Church. Train their first years in his yoke. Instead of a sinking *grief* to us, they will then be "the restorers of our life, and the nourishers of our age." (Ruth, iv. 15.) Instead of being our *bitterness* as rebels against God, he will own and seal them, as "a seed to serve him, to declare his righteousness," to set forth his praise. (Ps. xxii. 31; xcii. 13.)

26. *Also to punish the just is not good, nor to strike princes for equity.*

Often is the wise man's meaning much beyond his words. *To punish the just* not only *is not good*,† but it is "the abomination" (Verse 15)—"an evident token of perdition." (Philip. i. 28.) If rulers are "a terror to good works," they are Ministers of God in authority, but Ministers of Satan in administration.¹ And how will such injustice "abide the day of his coming," when he shall "lay judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet!"²

Not less wicked is the sin of the people. *To strike princes* is high treason against God.³ The Apostle confessed the unwilling sin of his *smiting* words.⁴ Much more guilty is it *to strike them for equity*. A godly king—ruling in *equity*, "scattering away all evil with his eyes"⁵—will raise to himself many and powerful enemies. The evil-minded will undermine his influence,⁶ or resist his authority.⁷ If they dare not strike him openly, they will "curse him in their thoughts."⁸ *To strike*,

¹ 1 Kings, xxi. 11-13. Matt. xxvi. 3, 4. Acts, iv. 1-3.

² Isa. xxviii. 17, with Mal. iii. 2, 5.

⁴ Acts, xxiii. 5. Comp. 1 Sam. xxiv. 5, 6; 2 Sam. xvi. 5-7.

⁶ 2 Sam. xv. 1-6.

⁷ Ib. xx. 1.

³ Job, xxxiv. 18.

⁵ Chap. xx. 8.

⁸ Eccles. x. 20.

* Mark the golden rule, on which all hangs, Matt. vi. 33.

† See this same meiosis. Chap. xvi. 29; xviii. 5; xx. 23. Ps. li. 17. Ezek. xxxvi. 31.

even in word, is our sin.¹ To pray is our duty. And who knoweth what a prayer-hearing God would send--a righteous administration, a covert and blessing to the land?²

27. *He that hath knowledge spareth his words; and a man of understanding is of an excellent (cool, marg.) spirit.* 28. *Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise; and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.*

The wisdom of these proverbs will be acknowledged by those, who know the sins of the tongue, and the immense difficulty of restraining the unruly member. *A man of knowledge will spare his words*, when the probable prospect is harm rather than good. (Ps. xxxix. 1, 2. Matt. vii. 6.) The good treasure is far too valuable to be unprofitably spent. Silence is often the best proof of wisdom.* Our Lord in his divine *knowledge*, careful as he was to improve every opportunity for instruction, sometimes *spared his words*. (Matt. xvi. 4.)

This restraint is most important under provocation.³ Passion demands immediate judgment. A *cool*, well-tempered *understanding* asks further time for consideration. The fiery ebullition of the Apostles, their Master judged to be the want of *an excellent understanding*. (Luke, ix. 54, 55.) Nehemiah, by repressing the first vent of his righteous anger, gave a reasonable and convincing answer for the occasion.† The prophet wisely refrained even a message from God to a king in the moment of passion. (2 Chron. xxv. 16.) ‘A little spark blows up one of sulphureous temper; and many coals, greater injuries, and reproaches are quenched, and lose their force, being thrown at another of *a cool spirit*.’‡ Indeed *a fool* may purchase to himself the reputation of wisdom, if only he *shut his mouth*, instead of exposing his folly to common observation. (Contrast chap. xv. 2; xxix. 11.) ‘He cannot be known for a fool, that says nothing. He is a fool, not who hath unwise thoughts, but who utters them. Even concealed folly is wisdom.’§

How infinitely momentous is the account, which God takes of the

¹ 2 Pet. ii. 10. Jude, 8, ² 1 Tim. ii. 1-3. 2 Sam. xxiii. 3. Isa. xxxii. 1, 2.

³ Num. xii. 1, 2. Ps. xxxviii. 12-14. Isa. M. 7.

* Chap. x. 19. Job, xiii. 5. Comp. Ecclus. v. 12, 13; xxxii. 7-9. Dr. Good in his note on Job, xiii. 5, gives a translation of an Arabic poetical proverb.

Keep silence then; nor speak, but when besought;
Who listens long, grows tired of what is told:
With tones of silver though thy tongue be fraught,
Know this—that silence of itself is gold.

† Neh. v. 6-11. Cicero advises his brother Quintus (a proconsul in Asia) most diligently to restrain his tongue under anger, which—he adds—is no less a virtue, than freedom from anger itself.—*Epist. ad Q. FRATREM*, lib. i. 1.

‡ LEIGHTON on 1 Pet. iii. 9.

§ Bishop HALL. *Works*, viii. 83.

tongue! "Death and life are in the power of it." (Chap. xviii. 21.) Our eternal acceptance or condemnation will—in part at least—hang on it. (Matt. xii. 36, 37.) How could we endure the judgment for "every idle," no less than for every wicked "word," if there were not for the self-abased penitent a covering from this condemnation, a cleansing from this guilt, a seal of acceptance? (Isa. vi. 7.)

CHAPTER XVIII:

1. Through desire a man, having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom. 2. A fool hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself.

DESIRE is the chariot-wheel of the soul, the spring of energy and delight. The man of business or science is filled with his great object; and *through desire he separates himself* from all lets and hindrances, that he may *intermeddle with* its whole range. "This one thing"—saith the man of God—"I do." (Philip. iii. 13.) This one thing is everything with him. *He separates himself* from all outward hindrances, vain company, trifling amusements or studies, needless engagements, that he may *seek and intermeddle with all wisdom*. John *separated himself* in the wilderness,¹ Paul in Arabia,² our blessed Lord in frequent retirement,³ in order to greater concentration in their momentous work. Deeply does the Christian Minister feel the responsibility of this holy separation, that he may "give himself wholly to" his office. (1 Tim. iv. 15. 2 Tim. ii. 4.) Without it—Christian—thy soul can never prosper. How canst thou *intermeddle with the great wisdom* of knowing thyself, if thy whole mind be full of this world's chaff and vanity? There must be a withdrawal, to "commune with thine own heart" and to ask the questions—"Where art thou? What doest thou here?" Much is there to be enquired into and pondered. Everything here calls for our deepest, closest thoughts. We must walk with God in secret, or the enemy will walk with us, and our souls will die. "Arise, go forth into the plain, and I will there talk with thee." (Ezek. iii. 22.) "When thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee." (John, i. 48.) Deal much in secrecy, if thou wouldst know "the secret of the Lord." Like thy Divine Master, thou wilt never be less alone than when alone. (Ib. xvi. 32.) There is much to be wrought, gained, and enjoyed. Thy most spiritual knowledge, thy richest experience will be found here. Men who live without retirement may be fluent talkers, and accurate preachers. But nothing comes as from a broken and contrite heart. The want of unction paralyses all spiritual impression. No intelligent,

¹ Luke, i. 80.

² Gal. i. 17.

³ Mark, i. 35; vi. 31. Luke, vi. 12.

self-observant Christian but feels the immense moment of combining holy solitude with active life, as the nourishment of his faith, and with it of every Christian grace. Sir M. Hale left this testimony--'I have endeavoured to husband this short, uncertain, important talent (time) by dedicating and setting apart some portion of it to prayer and reading of thy word; which I have constantly and peremptorily observed, whatever occasions interposed, or importunity persuaded to the contrary.*

And then, when we look around us into the infinitely extended field of the Revelation of God, what a world of heavenly *wisdom is there to intermeddle with!* In the hurry of this world's atmosphere how little can we apprehend it! And yet such is the field of wonder, that the contemplation of a single point overwhelmed the Apostle with adoring astonishment. (Rom. xi. 33.) Here are "things, which even the angels desire to look into." (1 Pet. i. 12.) The redeemed will be employed throughout eternity in this delighted searching; exploring "the breadth, and length, and depth, and height," until they be "filled with all the fulness of God." (Eph. iii. 18, 19.) Surely then if we have any *desire*, we shall *separate ourselves* from the cloudy atmosphere around us, that we may have fellowship with these happy investigators of the Divine mysteries.

Yet *the fool hath no delight in his understanding*. All his desire is to pour out his own frivolity, to come abroad from public observation, *that his heart may discover itself*—an humiliating discovery, indeed, at once of the scantiness of his knowledge and the vanity of his mind.

3. *When the wicked cometh, then cometh also contempt, and with ignominy reproach.*

Selfishness is the character of the wicked. 'Wheresoever he cometh, he is apt to cast *contempt and reproach* upon every man's face.'[†] His neighbour's circumstances or infirmities furnish materials to hold him up to scorn. The word of God has no favour in his eyes. His people are the objects of his *reproach*. Their seriousness he calls gloom, their cheerfulness levity. (Matt. xi. 18, 19.) If "none occasion or fault can be found" (Dan. vi. 4), invention forges it with unwearied ingenuity. "As saith the proverb of the ancients, wickedness proceedeth from the wicked." (1 Sam. xxiv. 13.) We must calculate upon, this furnace, though the fires of martyrdom are extinguished. Our blessed Lord bore all the evils of the world without flinching. But *contempt and reproach* pierced his soul more keenly, than the "nails did his hands and his feet." "*Reproach*," saith he--"hath broken my heart."¹ And

¹ Ps. lxi. 20. Matt. xxvii. 39-44.

* *The Good Steward. Contemplations*, pp. 238, 239,

† Bishop Hall. *Comp.* chap. xxix. 16.

must not the servant expect to be as his Master?¹ Often however does retributive justice overwhelm the wicked themselves with *ignominy and reproach*.² A scornful spirit against the godly is never forgotten. Every bitter word is registered against the great day.³ And what a sight will it then be, when the reviled shall stand forth, clothed with all the glory of "the King of saints," and the faces of their persecutors shall be covered with "everlasting shame and *contempt*!" (Dan. xii. 2.) The sight of that day will never be blotted out! The rebuke of his people shall be taken away from off all the earth, "for the Lord hath spoken it." (Isa. xxv. 8.)

4. *The words of a man's mouth are as deep waters, and the well-spring of wisdom as a flowing brook.*

'This sentence expresses the depth, the, abundance, the clearness, and the force of the counsels of *the wise man*.'* The last clause gives this restriction to wisdom. When "a man has intermeddled with all wisdom," his *words* are in themselves deep waters, and in their communication fruitful *as a flowing brook*. His wisdom is a well-spring, 'which sends up full brooks, that are ready to overflow their banks. So plentiful is he in good discourse and wholesome counsel!'† So *deep were the waters* from the wise man's spring, that his words nearly overwhelmed the capacity of his royal hearer. (1 Kings, x. 4-8.) One "greater than Solomon" "astonished the people" by the clearness, no less than by the *depth of the waters*. (Matt. vii. 28, 29.) No blessing is more valuable than a "rich indwelling of the word," ready to be brought out on all suitable occasions of instruction.⁴ If the wise man sometimes "spares his words,"⁵ it is not for want of matter, but for greater edification. The stream is ready to flow, and sometimes can scarcely be restrained.⁶ The cold-hearted, speculative professor has his *flow*--sometimes a torrent of words, yet without a drop of profitable matter; chilling, even when doctrinally correct; without life, unction, or love. Lord! deliver us from this barren "talk of the lips." (Chap. xiv. 23.) May our *waters be deep*, flowing from thine own inner sanctuary, refreshing, and fertilizing the Church of God!

This *well-spring* is specially invigorating, when, as in Chrysostom, it gives an heavenly glow to outward eloquence. Consecrated mind and talent are the gifts of God. Oh! let them be improved in simplicity, not for the creature's honour, but for the glory of the Great Giver.

¹ Matt. x. 25. John, xv. 20.

³ 1 Pet. iv. 4, 5. Jude, 14, 15.

⁵ Chap. xxvii. 27.

* Calmet.

² 2 Sam. vi. 20-23. Esth. vii. 9, 10.

⁴ Col. iii. 16; iv. 6.

⁶ Job, xxxii. 19. Jer. xx. 9. Acts, xvii. 16.

† Bishop Hall. Comp. chap. x. 11; xvi. 22; xx. 5.

5. *It is not good to accept the person of the wicked, to overthrow the righteous in judgment.*

Were not "the foundations of the earth out of course," should we hear of so gross a violation of the rule of right? (Ps. lxxxii. 2-5.) But in a world, of which Satan is "the god and the prince;" injustice is a natural principle of administration. The godly king of Judah pointed his judges to the Divine example—'Look—and be like Him.' (2 Chron. xix. 7.) Everything revolting is connected with *wickedness*. There is no one so noble, that it does not degrade so lovely, that it does not deform; so learned, that it does not befool. *To accept therefore his person, is indeed not good.*¹ "Abomination," is its true name -- the stamp of God.² 'Whatever excuses man may make for its course, it is an offence to God, an affront to justice, a wrong to mankind, and a real service done to the kingdom of sin and Satan.* *In judgment* let the cause be heard, not the person. Let the person be punished for his wickedness, not the wickedness be covered for the person's sake. When, as in the case of Naboth, *the person of the wicked was accepted, to overthrow the righteous in judgment*, it overthrows the throne of judgment in the land. The Shechemites were sharply punished for their sin, in *accepting* Abimelech to the overthrow of the righteous claims of Gideon's house. (Judg. ix.) No wonder. In such wickedness the rights of God are despised; the claims of his justice are cast off. "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." (2 Sam. xxiii. 3.) Such was our Divine pattern in the flesh: "of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord," and therefore "judging in righteousness." (Isa. xi. 4.) Such will be his judgment, when "he shall judge the world in righteousness." (Acts, xvii. 31.) His decision will be exact; his sentence unchangeable.

6. *A fool's lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes.*

7. *A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul.*

It is not a little remarkable, that the Apostle, when giving the anatomy of man's depravity, should dwell chiefly upon "the little member" with all its accompaniments—the throaty--the tongue—the lips—the mouth. (Rom. iii. 13.) Such a world of iniquity is it, defiling the whole body! (Jam. iii. 6.) We often see its mischief to others; here is the mischief to the man himself. *The fool's lips enter into contention*. This is folly indeed. The wise man may be drawn into it by infirmity of temper,³ or by the force of circumstances.⁴ But

¹ Chap. xvii. 26; xxiv. 23; xxviii. 21.

² Chap. xvii. 15. Comp. Lev. xix. 15; Deut. i. 16, 17.

³ Acts, xv. 39.

⁴ Gen. xi i. 8.

* Henry.

"as much as in him lies, he will live peaceably with all men,"¹ quenching even the first rising of *contention*.² *The fool enters into it, by intermeddling needlessly with strife,*³ or wilfully stirring it up,⁴ 'like the alarum of war, and drums beating up to the battle.'* And thus he makes a rod for himself.⁵ He puts a weapon into the hands of Satan, with which to beat his own head, and hammers him with fearful *strokes*.⁶ The wilful *contention* of the men of Succoth and Penueel with Gideon called for *strokes*.⁷ The scoffing mouth of the little children was their merited *destruction*.⁸ The slanderous *lips* of Daniel's persecutors were *the snare of their soul*.⁹ There is no need to dig a pit for the *fool*. He digs it for himself.¹⁰ The mouths of wild beasts devour each other. *The fool's mouth is his own destruction.*" The fowler's snare is not wanted; for "he is snared by the transgression of his lips." (Chap. xii. 13.) He is not only the cause, but the agent of his own *destruction*.

And shall not the child of God watch in godly fear, lest his *folly* should call for his Father's *stroke*? Sharply may he "hew" by the sword. (Hos. vi. 5.) He may be as if he would seem to kill, in order to make alive. All this is, that he may embitter sin, and endear returning mercy. Always is it wise and gracious love, as one of the Fathers says—'threatening, that he may not strike: and striking, that he may not destroy.' If shewing the rod will effect the purpose, gladly will he forbear to strike. But if our folly—as Leighton speaks pulls punishment out of his hands,[†] whom but ourselves have we to thank for the smart?

8. *The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.*

Do men deny, question, or soften clown the depravity of our nature? Mark again how the virulent poison of only one member destroys practical godliness, social order, and mutual friendship. *The talebearer* was expressly forbidden by the law (Lev. xix. 16), and not less is he opposed to the spirit of the gospel. (1 Cor. xiii. 6.) No character indeed is more despicable; no influence more detestable. It is right indeed, that we should exercise interference with each other, and mutual inspection. It is a hard selfishness only, that asks the question—"Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. iv. 9.) The rule is clear—"Look not every one on his own, but every man also on the things of others." (Philip. ii. 4.) The rule is at once illustrated and enforced by an example magnificent and constraining. It is "the mind that was in Christ Jesus himself." Had the Son of God "looked at his own things,"

¹ Rom. xii. 18; xiv. 19.

² Chap. xvii. 14.

³ Chap. xx. 3; xxvi. 17.

⁴ Chap. xvi. 27, 28.

⁵ Chap. xiv. 3; xix. 19, 29.

⁶ Chap. xxvi. 21.

⁷ Judg. viii. 4-17.

⁸ 2 Kings, ii. 23, 24.

⁹ Dan. vi. 13.

¹⁰ Ps. vii. 15; lxxiv. 8.

¹¹ Chap. x. 8, 14; xiii. 3. Eccles. x. 12, 13.

* Cartwright *in loco*.

† Works, v. 114.

and not "at the things of others," would he have emptied himself of his divine glory? Would he have humbled himself to the accursed cross? (Ib. verse 5-8.)

Again—the bond of the interference will be determined by the principle of the love of our neighbour. It is right therefore to "bring an evil report,"¹ for the prevention of sin. Eli was thus enabled, though without effect, to remonstrate with his sons.² The life of an Apostle was by this means preserved.³ Serious evils in the Church were restrained or corrected.⁴ But no good results can arise from the spirit of *the talebearer*, because with him it is pure selfishness,⁵ without a principle beyond the love of sin for its own sake. He lives upon the scandal of the place, and makes it his hateful business to carry about tales, or slanders of his neighbour's faults.* Such reports are eagerly devoured, and the mischief-maker feeds with greedy appetite upon the fruit of his cruel indulgence. To him this may appear harmless play. But if it draws no blood, and no outward hurt is shewn, an internal, and often incurable, *wound* is inflicted. (Chap. xxvi. 22.) We may seem to make light of *the tale* brought to our ears, and wholly to despise it, But the subtle poison has worked. 'Suppose it 'should be true. Perhaps, though it may be exaggerated, there may be some ground for it.' The thought indulged only for a moment brings suspicion, distrust, coldness; and often it ends in the separation of chief friends.⁶ So dangerous a member in the frame is the tongue without stern determined controul!

The tale of an unguarded moment may be a tremendous irreparable injury. The evil humour may meet with a welcome audience in good society, where but for the food which scandal supplies, conversation would drag heavy. But no favour can alter its real character, as an abomination both with God and man. Ah! what but the power of holy love, opening freely the channels of kindness and forbearance, can overcome this mischievous propensity? And what will bring this spirit of love, but a true interest in Christian privileges, and a corresponding sense of Christian obligations? (Col. iii. 12-14.)

9. *He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster.*

Observe the affinity of the different principles and workings of corruption. The sluggard and the prodigal belong to the same family.

¹ Chap. xxiv. 11, 12. Gen. xxxvii. 2. Lev. v. 1.

² 1 Sam. ii. 23, 24.

³ Acts, xxiii. 13. Contrast Jer. xl. 13-16; xli. 1, 2.

⁴ 1 Cor. i. 11; xi. 18.

⁵ Jer. xx. 10.

⁶ Chap. xvi. 23; xvii. 9. 1 Sam. xxiv. 9; xxvi. 19. 2 Sam. xvi. 1-4.

* The word properly signifies a pedlar, who buys goods (stolen ones it may be) at one place, and sells them at another, taking care to make his own market of them. So a tale-bearer makes his own visits, to pick up at one place, and utter at another, that which he thinks will lessen his neighbour's reputation, that he may build his own upon it.--

M. HENRY's *Sermon on Friendly Visits*. Comp. chap. xi. 13; xx. 19.

The man who "hid the Lord's talent," was equally unfaithful with him who "wasted his goods." (Matt. xxv. 25. Luke, xvi. 1.) *The slothful* has no heart for *his work*. Important opportunities slip by. His stock, instead of increasing by trade, gradually dwindles into penury. 'God hath a bountiful "hand, and filleth all things living with plenteousness." (Ps. cxly. 16. P. T.) But unless we have a diligent hand, wherewith to receive it, we may starve. He that by the *sloth* of his hand disfurnisheth himself of the means of getting, he is as near of kin to a *waster* as may be.* *He is the brother of a great waster*—the lord of a large estate, who, instead of husbanding, improving, and enjoying it, *wastes* it away in extravagance and folly.

It is the same in religion. The one is content with heartless orthodoxy. His secret prayer brings no after remembrance. His family worship is a routine of formality, not the influential ordinance of the day. "Communing with his heart" is mere barren generality, bringing no accurate and humbling knowledge of himself. And wherein does he differ from the careless *waster* of his privileges? Where is the important distinction between him who prays, reads, and works formally, and him, who utterly casts these high privileges away? Both take the same course, though by a somewhat different track. The one folds his arms in sloth. The other opens his hands in wastefulness. The one gets nothing. The other spends what he gets. The one rushes into beggary. The other sits still, and waits its arrival. (Chap. vi. 11.) The one dies by a rapid and violent disease. The other by a slow, subtle, but sure, consumption. Thus fearful is the guilt, solemn is the account, certain is the ruin, of both. God gives talents, not only to enrich, but to employ. And whether they be selfishly neglected, or carelessly thrown away—"Thou wicked servant" will be the condemnation; "outer darkness" will be the just and eternal doom. (Matt. xxv. 26-30.) Servant of Christ! let thy Master's life be thy pattern and thy standard. Not a moment with him was *slothfully* neglected; not a moment unprofitably *wasted*. Equally fervent was he in daily work, as in nightly prayer. Follow him in his work, and thou wilt be honoured with his revard. (John, xii. 26.)

10. *The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous rwnneth into it, and is safe* (set aloft, marg.) 11. *The rich, man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit.*

Consciousness of danger induces even the animal creation to seek for a refuge.¹ To man, *a strong tower* offers such a covert.² But man as a sinner—does he realize his imminent peril, his threatened ruin? Oh! let him believe his welcome into the *strong tower* set before him.

¹ Chap. xxx. 26. Ps. civ. 18. ² Judg. ix. 51. 2 Chron. xiv. 7; xxvi. 9.

* Bishop SANDERSON's *Sermon on 1 Cor. vii. 24.*

Such is *the name of the Lord*; not the bare outward words, operating as a charm, but his character; that by which he is known, as a man by his name. The full "declaration of *this name*" sets outmost powerfully *the strength of the tower*. Every letter adds confirmation to our faith. (Exod. xxxiv. 5-7.) Every renewed manifestation brings a fresh sunbeam of light and blessing.*

Take the sinner in his first awakening conviction. He trembles at the thought of eternal condemnation. He looks forward—all is terror; backward—nothing but remorse; inward—all is darkness. Till now, he had no idea of his need of salvation. His enemy now suggests that it is beyond his reach; that he has sinned too long and too much, against too much light and knowledge ; how can he be saved? But *the name of the Lord* meets his eye. He spells out every letter, and putting it together, cries—"Who is a God like unto thee?" (Mic. vii. 18.) He runs to *it, as to a strong tower*. His burden of conscience is relieved. His soul is set free, and he enjoys his *safety*.

Take—again—the child of God—feeble, distressed, assaulted. What, if I should return to the world, look back, give up my profession, yield to my own deceitful heart, and perish at last with aggravated condemnation?" You are walking outside the gates *of your tower*; no wonder that your imprudence exposes you to "the fiery darts of the wicked." Read again *the name of the Lord*! Go back within the walls—See upon the *tower the name*—"I am the Lord; I change not." (Mal. iii. 6.) Read the direction to trust in it—"Who is there among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant: that walketh in darkness, and path no light? *Let him trust in the name of the Lord*, and stay upon his God." (Isa. i. 10.) Mark the warrant of experience in this trust—"They that know *thy name* shall put their trust in thee; for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them, that seek thee." (Ps. ix. 10.)

Thus sense of danger, knowledge of the way, confidence in *the strength of the tower*—all gives a spring of life and earnestness to run into it.† Here the *righteous*—the man justified by thine grace, and sanctified by the Spirit, of God--*runneth* every day, every hour; realizing at once his fearful danger, and his perfect security. Within these walls, who of us needs to fear the sharpest or swiftest, dart that may be shot against us? We realize our security from external trouble,¹ and in trying exercises of faith! We are *safe* from his avenging justice,

¹ Deut. xxxiii. 27-29. Ps. lxi. 3; xci. 2. Isa. liv. 14.

* See the New Testament names of God. Rom. xv. 5, 13. 2 Cor. i. 3; v. 19. 1 Pet. v. 10.

† See the examples of Jacob, Gen. xxxii. 11, 28, 29. David, 1 Sam. xxx. 6. Ps. lvi. 3. Asa, 2 Chron. xiv. 11; Jehoshaphat, xx. 12. Hezekiah, 2 Kings, xix 14-19. The Apostles, Acts, iv. 24-33.

from the curse of his law, from sin, from condemnation, from the second death.¹ We joy in our *safety*²--yea--in our exaltation.³ Our best interests are beyond the reach of harm;⁴ and "the righteous nation" takes up the song of triumph—"We have a strong city; Salvation will God appoint for walls and for bulwarks."⁵

But only *the righteous* are found here. What know the ungodly of this refuge? 'Our God's mercy is holy mercy. He knows how to pardon sin, not to protect it. He is a sanctuary to the penitent, not to the presumptuous.* Yet what joy is it, that the gates of this city are always open! No time is unseasonable. No distance, no feebleness, hinders the entrance. The cripple may run, like "Asahel, swift of foot." (2 Sam. ii. 18.) All that enter are garrisoned to salvation. Satan is raising batteries against the fort, using all means to take it, by strength or stratagem, unwearied in his assaults, and very skilful to know his advantages.† But notwithstanding all his disturbing power, "the peace of God" daily fortifies our hearts from fear of evil.⁶ Such is our *strong tower*! What owe we to our gracious Saviour, who has made our way to it so free, so bright?⁷ We repose in the bosom of God, and are at peace.

But the rich man has his strong city yea--and his high walls. (Chap. x. 15.) Well does the wise man add—in *his own conceit*. Little does he think, that in a moment they may crumble to the dust, and leave him in the fearful ruin of an unsheltered state. 'Trouble will find an entrance into his castle. Death will storm, and take it. And judgment will sweep both him and it into perdition.‡

The histories of David and Saul contrast most strikingly trouble with or without a refuge.⁸ An affecting contrast does our Lord draw between a real and an imaginary refuge!⁹ Every man is as his trust. A trust in God communicates a divine and lofty spirit. We feel that we are surrounded with God, and dwelling on high with him. Oh, the sweet security of the weakest believer, shut up in an impregnable fortress! A vain trust brings a vain and proud heart, the immediate forerunner of ruin.

12. Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility.

We have had both these Proverbs separately. (Chap. xvi. 18; xv. 33.)

¹ Job, xiii. 15.

² Ps. xviii. 1-3. Isa. xxv. 4.

³ M. R. Isa. xxxiii. 16.

⁴ Col. iii. 3.

⁵ Isa. xxvi. 1-4.

⁶ Philip. iv. 7. Gr. Comp. chap. i. 33; xiv. 26.

⁷ Matt. xi. 27. John, i. 18; xiv. 6.

⁸ 1 Sam. xxx. 6; with xxviii. 15. Comp. Isa. i. 10, 11.

⁹ Matt. vii. 24-27.

* Bishop REYNOLDS on Hos. xiv. 1, 2.

† 1 Pet. i. 5 Gr. Leighton on the passage.

‡ Scott. Comp. Ezek. xxviii. 1-10. Luke, xii. 18-20. See also a fine passage in the *Rambler*, in Dr. Johnson's best style of solemn instructiveness. No. 65.

Surely this repetition, like our Lord's often-repeated parallel,* was intended to deepen our sense of their importance. It is hard to persuade a man that he is proud. Every one protests against this sin. Yet who does not cherish the viper in his own bosom? Man so little understands, that dependence upon his God constitutes the creature's happiness, and that the principle of independence is madness, and its end—destruction. (Gen. iii. 5, 6.) The *haughty* walk on the brink of a fearful precipice; only a miracle preserves them from instant ruin. The security of the child of God is, when he lies prostrate in the dust. If he soar high, the danger is imminent, though he be on the verge of heaven. (2 Cor. xii. 1-7.)

The danger to a young Christian lies in an over-forward profession. The glow of the first love, the awakened sensibility to the condition of his perishing fellow-sinners; ignorance of the subtle working of inbred vanity, the mistaken zeal of injudicious friends—all tends to foster self-pleasing. Oh! let him know, that *before honour is humility*. In the low valley of Humiliation special manifestations are realized.¹ Enlarged gifts, and apparently extending usefulness, without growing more deeply into the humility of Christ, will be the decline, not the advancing of grace. That undoubtedly is the most humbled spirit, that has most of the spirit of Christ. The rule of entry into his school--the first step of admission to his kingdom is--"Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." (Matt. xi. 29.)

The spring of this *humility* is true self-knowledge. Whatever may be seen of a man externally to his advantage, let him keep his eye looking within; and the real sight of himself must lay him low. When he compares his secret follies with his external decency—what appears to his fellow-creatures with what he knows of himself--he can but cry out—"Behold I am vile! I abhor myself!" (Job, xl.4.) The seat of this precious grace is not in words, meltings, or tears, but in the heart. No longer will he delude himself with a false conceit of what he has not, or with a vain conceit of what he has. The recollection—"Who maketh thee to differ?" (1 Cor. iv. 7) is ever present, to press him down under the weight of infinite obligations. Its fruit is lowliness of mind, meekness of temper, thankfulness in receiving reproof, forgetfulness of injury, readiness to be lightly regarded. No true greatness can there be without this deep-toned *humility*. This is he "whom the King delighteth to honour." "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people." (Matt. v. 3. Ps. cxiii. 7, 8.)

¹ Job, xlii. 5,6. Isa. vi. 5-7. Dan. ix. 20-23.

* Matt. xxiii. 12. Luke, xiv. 11; xviii. 14. See Hoyt. *Od.* i. 34.

13. *He that answereth a matter* (returneth a word, marg.) *before he heareth it, it is folly and a shame unto him.*

Too often is this Proverb verified in common life. Men will scarcely hear out what is unacceptable to them. They will break in upon a speaker, before they have fully heard him, and therefore *answer a matter*, which they have little weighed, and but imperfectly understood. The eager disputant prides himself on his acute judgment. He interrupts his opponent, and confutes arguments, or contradicts statements, before he *has fairly heard them*.¹ Job's friends seem to have erred here.¹ Elihu, on the other hand, considerably restrained himself, till he had thoroughly *heard the matter*.² Job himself prudently "searched out the cause that he knew not."³ This impatient spirit tells (little for candour or humility, and only stamps a man's character with *folly and shame*. It is fraught with injustice in the court of law. (Jahn, vii. 45-52.) Here at least the judge must carefully hear and weigh both sides for a satisfactory verdict. The wise man thoroughly heard his difficult case, before he gave judgment.⁴ Job was scrupulously exact in thus "contending with his servant."⁵ "The rich man, when his steward was accused to him, that he had wasted his goods," did not turn him away upon the mere report, but he examined his account.⁶ On the other hand, Potiphar, from the want of this upright considerateness, was guilty of the most flagrant wrong? The Eastern autocrats seldom cared to sift accusations. Even "the man after God's heart" grievously sinned in this matter. But their hasty decisions brought *shame* upon them, being either covered over, or virtually retracted as our Lord's *matter was answered, before it was heard*.⁹ The Apostle met with similar treatment,¹⁰ though at other times he found a more impartial judgment.¹¹

This *folly* was directly forbidden by God's law.¹² It was no less contrary to his own procedure. He examined Adam, before he pronounced judgment.¹³ He came down to see Babel and Sodom, previous to their destruction, for the more clear demonstration of his justice.¹⁴ While on earth, patient investigation marked its decisions.¹⁵ "All his ways are judgment; a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he."¹⁶

¹ Job, xx. 1-3; xxi. 1-6.

² Ib. xxxii. 4, 10, 11.

³ Ib. xxix. 16.

⁴ 1 Kings, iii. 16-28. Comp. chap. xxv. 2.

⁵ Job, xxxi. 13.

⁶ Luke, xvi. 1, 2.

⁷ Gen. xxxix. 17-20.

⁸ Esth. iii. 8-11; viii. 5-13. Dan. vi. 9, 14, 24. 2 Sam. xvi. 1-4; xix. 26-30.

⁹ Luke, xxii. 66-71.

¹⁰ Acts, xxii. 21, 22; xxiii. 2.

¹¹ Ib. xxiii. 30-35; xxiv. 1-22; xxv. 1-5, 24-27; xxvi. 30-32.

¹² Deut. xiii. 12-14; John, vii. 24.

¹³ Gen. iii. 9-19.

¹⁴ Ib. xi. 5; xviii. 20, 21

¹⁵ Matt. xxii. 15-33, with Isa. xi. 3.

¹⁶ Deut. xxxii. 4. Comp. 1 Sam. ii. 3.

* See the wise rules, Eccles. xi. 7, 8.

14. The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity: but a wounded spirit who can bear?

Man is born in a world of trouble, with considerable power of endurance. Natural courage and vivacity of spirit's will bear us up even under the pressure of ponderous evils, poverty, pain, sickness, want. Instances of heathen fortitude abound in the records of history.* Christian principle strengthens the natural strengths. David, in the most fearful extremity, "encouraged himself in the Lord his God." (1 Sam. xxx. 6.) Job could bless God under accumulated external trials. (Job, i. 21.) The Apostle "took pleasure in *infirmities*." (2 Cor. xii. 10.) The martyrs "were more than conquerors" under the most cruel tortures. (Rom. viii. 37.) Outward troubles are tolerable, yea—more than tolerable, if there be peace within. *The spirit of a man may sustain his infirmity*. But if *the spirit be wounded*—if the prop itself be broken—all sinks. 'If the strength that is in me be weakness, how great is that weakness.'† The wound of the spirit is so much the more piercing, as the spirit itself is more vital than the body. The grief gains the victory, and becomes intolerable.

The most powerful minds are easily vulnerable. Even our great Newton, 'endowed with an intellectual strength, which had unbarred the strongholds of the universe,' and distinguished also by 'unbroken equanimity,' in middle life was a prey to mental dejections, that, as he informs us, shook his 'former consistency.'‡ Boyle describes his wounded *spirit*, as so overpowering for many months, that, 'although his looks did little betray his thoughts, nothing but the forbiddenness of self-dispatch hindered his committing it.'§ So long as the evil is without us, it is tolerable. Natural courage can bear up. *But a wounded spirit who can bear*.

In the spiritual system—the pressure is yet more sinking. When he who made *the spirit wounds*, or permits Satan to wound, we might challenge the whole creation—*Who can bear it?* The suffering of the soul is the soul of suffering. Spiritual wounds, like the balm that heals them, can never be known, till they are felt. It is sometimes, as if the arrows of the Almighty were dipped in the lake of fire, and shot flaming into the very midst of the soul, more sensitive than the apple of the eye. (Job, vi. 4.) The best joys of earth can never soothe the envenomed sting. Mirth is madness and vexation. (Eccles. ii. 2.)

There is a hell for the wicked on this side eternity. Man becomes a burden to himself. Cain's "punishment was greater than he could bear." (Gen. iv. 13.) Saul was given up to the blackness of despair

* See Virgil's fine picture of Aeneas.—*AEne.* i. 208, 209.

† Bishop SANDERSON'S *Sermon on Heb.* xii. 3. Comp. chap. xv. 13; xvii. 22.

‡ Sir D. BREWSTER'S *Life*, pp. 224, 232-235.

§ JONES'S *Christian Biography*—Article, Boyle."

(1 Sam. xxviii. 15.) Zimri in rebellious madness threw himself into the flames. (1 Kings, xvi. 18.) Pashur was made a terror to himself. (Jer. xx. 4.) Ahithophel and Judas "chase strangling rather than life." (2 Sam. xvii. 23. Matt. xxvii. 5.) Thus are the torments of eternity antedated. One hell is kindled within, before entering into the other. Such is the foretaste of hell—only a few drops of wrath—for a few moments. What will be the reality--the substance—for eternity!

Observe the poignancy of the *wounded spirit* in the children of God. Job, delivered "for a small moment" into the enemy's power, "cursed the day of his birth." (Job, iii. 1.) David "roared for the disquietness of his heart." "The arrows of the Almighty stuck in him, and his hand pressed him sore." (Ps. xxxviii. 1-8.) The martyrs* in a moment of temporary apostasy, could not endure the anguish of *the wounded spirit* and chose the flames as the less bitter alternative. Such is the sharpness of the Lord's sword, and the weight of his hand, that every stroke is deadly. Conscience is the seat of guilt, and its vivid power turns,—so to speak—"the sun into darkness, and the moon into blood" (Joel, ii. 31)—the precious promises of free forgiveness into arguments of hopeless despondency. Many a penitent is thus held back awhile from the full apprehension of Divine acceptance, and from the settled enjoyment of the peace of the gospel. And but for the gracious restraint of the Lord's power and love, hardened despair would be the successful advantage of Satan's devices." (2. Car. ii. 11.)

But let us gaze at the meek and glorious sufferer in Gethsemane. Look at *the wounded spirit there*--the fainting humanity of the Son of God—"his strong crying and tears," his prostrating sorrow, his "exceeding great and bitter cry," under the darkness of desertion. (Matt. xxvi. 38.) Human nature, even when exalted to a personal union with the divine, is human nature still; forced to confess its native weakness in the conflict with Almighty wrath. If all the support of the indwelling Godhead was demanded for this passion of unknown weight and infinite intensity; with trembling astonishment we cry--A *wounded spirit who can bear?* Irresistible. is the inference--"If they do these things in the green tree, what shall be done it the dry?" (Luke, xxiii. 31.) The flame, that could but scorch the one, must consume the other to the uttermost.

Yet is not this *wounded spirit* the Christians first seal of mercy; the preparation for all future and eternal mercy? (Acts, ii. 37.) Bitter indeed is the anguish, when the mass of sin is raised from the grave of oblivion, and "set in order before our eyes." (Ps. L. 21.) But is not this the sight, that makes Jesus and his fret salvation inexpressibly precious? (Acts, xvi. 29-33.) And does not this spirit place us within

* Bainham —Bilney— Crammer. See FOXE's *Records*.

the sphere of his healing commission? (Isa. lxi. 1, 2.) We ask now—not, *who can bear*, but who can heal? Well did Luther say (and there is no better judge on such matters), 'It is as easy to make a world, as to ease a troubled conscience.' Both are creation-work, requiring the Almightyness of God. (Gen i. 1. Isa. lvii. 19.) To him that "wounded must we return for healing." (Hos. vi. 1.) His remedy is the sight of himself wounded for us. (Isa. liii. 5.) And that sight--so healing--so reviving—how does it quicken the soul to a cordial and animated faith, issuing in the song of everlasting praise!*

15. The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge.

Knowledge is gathering its rays on every side. But all that is intrinsically valuable centres in Divine *knowledge*. 'All arts'—as Bishop Hall teaches—'are Maids to Divinity. Therefore they both vail to her, and do her service.'† Indeed it is of the first moment that she should go before, to imbue and impregnate the mass. For while we readily admit the importance of intellectual knowledge; the grand object is the salvation of the soul. And all knowledge that is not grounded upon this primary conviction, or that does not directly or indirectly subserve this great end, is worse than valueless. It is power for evil. It is a weapon of mighty influence, that will ultimately turn against the man's own self. Never let us forget, that unsanctified knowledge is still, what it was at the beginning, gathering death, not life, and that, if "the tree seem to be good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise" (Gen. iii. 6), it is only

* In these days of deteriorated Church doctrine, when other remedies than that of the gospel are applied to the wounded spirit, it is worth putting upon record the mode of healing in the British Church, so far back as the time of the Conquest, which it will be seen, was not the baptism of tears, auricular confession, penance, or man's working, but the simple view of the great sacrifice, as the one object of faith. In the form of a prayer for the Visitation of the Sick in the time of Anselm (Abp. of Canterbury, A.D. 1080),—the priest asked the sick person, 'Dost thou believe to come to glory, not by thine own merits, but by the virtue and merit of the passion of the Lord Jesus Christ? Dost thou believe that our Lord Jesus Christ did die for our salvation, and that none can be saved by his own merits, or by any other means than by the merits of his passion?' On the sick person answering—'All this I believe'—the priest is directed to give him the following instruction and comfort, as a true physician of souls—'Give thou therefore'-- saith he to the sick --'as long as thy soul remaineth in this place, thy whole confidence in his death only. Have confidence in no other thing. Commit thyself wholly to this death, with this alone comfort thyself. If he say—'Thou deservest hell'—say—'I put the death of our Lord Jesus Christ betwixt me and this judgment, and no otherwise do I contend with thee.' And if he say to thee—'Thou art a sinner'—say—'Lord, I put the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between thee and my sins.' If he say to thee—'Thou halt deserved damnation'—say—'Lord, I set the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between', thee and my bad merits; and I offer his merits instead of my merits.' If he say—he is angry with thee, say—'Lord, I interpose the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between me and thine anger.'—This is indeed the sovereign specific for a case aggravated by the application of any other remedy of man's devising.

† *Works*, viii. 107.

the enticement to the unwary, flattering them, that they "shall be as gods," that, "being lifted up with pride, they may fall into the condemnation of the devil." (1b. verse 5. 1 Tim. iii. 6.)

And yet in the sphere of Revelation the value of knowledge is estimated by its character. When it is Speculative, not experimental; general, without practical influence; it is mere listening to a sound. It is not the sight, like that of the brazen serpent, that brings life from the dead, with its blessed accompaniment of transformation into the likeness of Christ. Lamentable is it to think of the mass of triflers in this heavenly knowledge; hearing without retaining; retaining without intelligence, or without personal application. So often "is the price in the hands of a fool, who bath no heart for it." (Chap. xvii. 16.)

But here is *the prudent*. He has pondered, and formed a just estimate of the blessing. *His heart* has fastened upon it (Chap. xv. 14), and, as the means are free, and success sure,¹ he has gotten it. As the proof of his possession, he *seeks* for more. For who that has a treasure, will be satisfied with his store; content with a lesser measure, while a larger is within his reach? *His ear* is now (wakened to seek the ministry of the word, and the conversation of experienced Christians. (Chap. i. 5; ix. 9.) Every avenue of instruction is diligently improved.

A word to the young—Think how much important *knowledge* is to be *gotten*. Be up early in its pursuit. Let it have your most, your first, your best, time. Begin before your minds are corrupted with false principles; before you have learned) too much, that must be unlearned as disciples of Christ. Enquire what is the tone of your prayers? Is it the concentration of the soil, filled with one desire, and carrying it, where it will be accepted and satisfied? The only saving *knowledge* cometh down from heaven, and is fetched thence upon our knees. What—again—is the pulse of 'your exertions? Does it chew the heart to be delighting in the object? Or is it only a start for a moment, and then a sinking back to the slumber of the sluggard? *Knowledge* from heaven leads thitherward. Clearer knowledge sweeps away many clouds. A better sight of your work will make it more easy. With a more intelligent knowledge of the road, you will walk more pleasantly. You will not only guide yourselves, but be "able to admonish one another." (Rom. xv. 14.) "Grow in knowledge." (2 Pet. iii. 18.) Follow your convictions. Let nothing divert you. In particular--be considerate and *prudent* in your application of knowledge. Remember its valuable use to regul to the judgment. "Walk wisely "before God" in a perfect way." (Ps. cix 2.) Let "your love abound more and more in knowledge, and in all judgment." (Philip. i. 9.) Hasten onwards then. Happiness and usefulness, light and glory, are before you; and while, sitting at Your Master's feet, at every

¹ Chap. ii. 8-6. Hos. vi. 3. Jam. i. 5.

step you will enter more fully into the spirit of the confession of Ignatius---'I am now beginning to be a disciple.'*

16. A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men.

We have before spoken of the corrupting influence of *gifts*.¹ But we may justly apply this proverb to their legitimate use. Eliezer's *gifts made room for him* in Rebekah's family.² Jacob's *gifts made room for him* in his brother's heart.³ Nor was it inconsistent with his integrity, by sending his present to the governor of Egypt, *to bring his sons with acceptance before the great man*.⁴ Ehud's *gifts made room* for his errand.⁵ Abigail's for the preservation of her house.⁶ Often indeed were they presented simply as a tribute of respect;⁷ as now, in some parts of the East, without them an inferior would scarcely have any claim upon his superior for favour or protection. †--The Minister of the Gospel recognises their value, *making room for him*, perhaps also for his message. Sympathy gives weight to his instruction, when, after the example of his Divine Master, he combines kindness to the body with love for the soul. Great wisdom and discrimination are however obviously required to prevent the serious evil of air well-intentioned charity. A wise consideration may also *make room* for us with *great men* for the advancement of the Christian cause. But in this most delicate exercise, let our own principles be fully acknowledged; else even in the service of God, we shall be "carnal, and walk as men" (1 Cor. iii. 3); not as the dignified servants of a heavenly Master.

Blessed be God! We want no *gifts to bring us before him*. Our welcome is free; our door of access ever open; our treasure of grace in his unchanging favour unsearchable.

17. He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him.

We have lately had a rule against judging others. (Verse 13.) Here we are warned against justifying ourselves. Self-flattery is our cherished nature; highly valuing our fancied excellences; very blind to our real imperfections. So ready are we to place *our own cause* in a strong light; and sometimes, almost unconsciously, to cast a shade over, or even omit, what might seem to balance on the opposite side. It is so difficult to state facts and circumstances with perfect accuracy, where our own name, or credit is concerned. Hence, *our cause*, coming *first, seemeth just*. But, according to the proverb, 'the first tale is good,

¹ Chap. xvii. 8, 23. Comp. xix. 6.

² Gen. xxiv. 30-33.

³ Ibid. xxxiii. 1-11.

⁴ Gen. xliii. 11.

⁵ Judg. iii. 17, 18.

⁶ 1 Sam. xxv. 18-27.

⁷ Ib. ix. 7.

* Nuñ gar ałxhñ ełw toumaqhteuesqai> † See PAXTON'S *Illustrations*, ii. 29.

till the second is heard.' Our *neighbour*, acquainted with the real case, cometh and *searcheth* us, exposes our fallacy, and puts us to shame. Often has the tale of wrongs from a hard-hearted overseer, landlord, or creditor, roused our indignation, and perhaps provoked our remonstrance. But the *searching* process of the story on the other side has shewn us the wrongness of a hasty, one-sided judgment. Saul made himself appear *just in his own cause*. The necessity of the case seemed to warrant the deviation from the command. But Samuel *searched him*, and laid open his rebellion. (1 Sam. xv. 17-03.) Ziba's cause *seemed just* in David's eyes, until Mephibosheth's explanation *searched him* to his confusion.* Job's incautious self-defence was laid open by Elihu's probing application. (Job, xxxiii. 8-12.) An eloquent advocate may easily make a bad *cause coming first seem just*. But the plaintiff is always right, till the defendant's case has been opened. Yet the true rule of justice would be, to judge neither to be right, till both sides have been heard. Let the whole evidence be sifted; and often the plausible cover is swept away by a more *searching* investigation. (Acts, xxiv. 5, 12.) Judges are bound to "consider, take advice, and speak," (Judg. xix. 30); carefully guarding against prejudging the cause, till the whole has been fully before them; else he that is last *in the cause* comes with disadvantage, though it may be to cause of right. In our *own cause*, always be alive to conviction. Watch against a self-justifying spirit. Cultivate the spirit of self-distrust. Balance our enemy's statement against our own prejudices. Judge as under the eye of God, and with the sincere anxious prayer to lay ourselves open to his searching disclosure of hidden evil. Deceit ill any form never answers its end. "A conscience void of offence both towards God and man" must be our great exercise. (Acts, xxiv. 16.)

18. *The lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty.*

The general use of the lot has been before explained. (Chap. xvi. 33.) It is here adverted to, as an ordinance of peaceful settlement. Whether from the evenness of the balance, or from want of confidence in the judgment, a legal appeal might be of doubtful authority. Contending parties therefore agree to abide by the decision of the lot. Important matters of order under the Divine Theocracy were thus determined.¹ How many *contentions* would there have been *between the mighty*, in settling the respective boundaries of the tribes, had not this means been adopted to *make them cease*?² When Saul was thus chosen to the Kingdom,³ and Matthias "numbered among the Apostles,"⁴ the

1 I Chron. vi. 63; xxiv. 31. Neh. xi. 1. 2 Num. xxxiii. 54.

3 1 Sam. x. 20-24.

4 Acts, i. 26.

* 2 Sam. xvi. 1-4; xix. 26. Comp. chap. xxviii. 11. See Bishop SANDERSON's *Sermons on Job*, xxix. 14-17. Prov. xxiv. 10-12.

election was acquiesced in, as the voice of God. There seems therefore no scriptural prohibition to the use of this ordinance; provided it be exercised in a reverential dependence upon God,¹ and not profaned for common purposes or worldly ends.

At the same time, as we have before observed, the word of God appears to be, more fully recognized as the arbiter of the Divine will, All *contentions cease* in a simple, childlike, unreserved readiness to be guided by this "more sure rule." The extent of forgiveness is here clearly defined (Matt. xviii. 21, 22), and the principle and motive for its exercise effectively supplied. (Col. iii. 13.) Perhaps it is more easy to abide by the decision of the lot than of the word. The last requires more self-denial, humility and patience, and therefore is more practically useful.

19. A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle.

Adverting to *the ceasing of contentions*, how affecting is this case of special difficulty! A *brother*—not an enemy—is harder to be won than a strong city; as if the nearer the relation, the wider the breach.* The thread, once snapped, is not easily joined. 'What a view does it give us of our corruption, that the natural love implanted in us should degenerate into Satanic hatred!† Such was the *contention* of Cain with Abel; of Joseph's brethren with himself;² of Absalom and Amnon;³ the civil wars between Benjamin and his brethren,⁴ in later times between Judah and Israel;⁵ in our own country, the long-continued and ruinous contentions between the Houses of York and Lancaster. Cities in olden times were strongly fortified with *bars* of iron against a siege. (See Isa. xlv. 2.) What a long siege did Esau's *strong city* stand, before it was won by the power of love, and *the bars of, his castle* opened their avenues for conciliation!‡

Nowhere is concord so important as in the Church. Never can she prosper, except she maintain the form of Jerusalem—"a city compact together." (Ps. cxxii. 3.) Begotten as we are by the same word, living on the same food, animated by the same life, ought we not, with all our lesser differences, to hold "the unity of the Spirit?"§ If ties so close

¹ Acts, i. 24, 25. ² Ib. xxxvii. 3-5, 18-27. ³ 2 Sam. xiii. 22.

⁴ Judges, xx. ⁵ 2 Chron. xiii. 16, 17.

* 'A cerrima firma proximorum odia sunt.'—TACITUS. † Geier *in loco*.

‡ Gen. xxvii. 41-45; xxxiii. 5-11. The rooted enmity of the nation seems to render doubtful the cordiality of the reconciliation. See Num. xx. 14-21. zek. xxxv. 5. Obad. 10-14.

§ Two reasons made a godly and learned man (Strigelius) long to leave the world. '1. That I might enjoy the sweet sight of the Son of God and the Church of God. 2. That I may be delivered from the cruel and implacable hatred of Theologians.' Melchior Adam *in vita*. Chrysostom gives this rule—'Have but one enemy—the devil. With him never be reconciled; with thy brother never fall out.'

cannot unite us; at least let our common welfare, and common danger, quench this unholy fire; just as the fear of the enemy without, might allay mutual misunderstanding within. But how painfully did *the contentions* between Luther and Calvin (not to mention others of more recent date in the Church) shew the fearful difficulty of *winning a brother offended!*

Yet the extreme difficulty does not diminish the obligation. Let it not therefore paralyze the effort. Nothing can be more plain and decisive than the Gospel rule. Yet so repugnant is it to flesh and blood, to all nature's pride, feelings, and high notions, that we cry with the disciples of old — "Lord, increase our faith." (Luke, xvii. 5.) Call in this only principle, that can constrain the heart and the Christian victory is ensured. Grace reigns triumphant.

20. *A man's belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth: and with the increase of his lips shall he be filled.* 21. *Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.*

Who would not be careful, what seed he puts into a fruitful field when he knows that his harvest will be according to his seed? (Gal. vi. 7, 8.) Here is not a field, but "a world" (Jam. iii. 6), to be cultivated so that we may be *satisfied with the fruit, and filled with the increase*. What this fruit and increase may be, is a fearful alternative. The fruit of our lips—the power of our tongue—will be, poisonous or wholesome, death or life.¹ Evil words tend to death,² good words to life³—to the comfort of the speaker, as well as to the blessing of the hearer. There is no mean; nothing but extremes. It is either the worst of evils, or the best of blessings.

This is clearly manifested in public responsibilities. The testimony of witnesses, and the legal decision of the judge, fearfully spew, that *death or life is in the power of the tongue*. Take even a more important field of illustration — the Ministry of the gospel--the doctrine of false and true teachers. Suppose the sinner's conscience to be awakened. Eagerly he longs for an answer to that immensely momentous question -- "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts, xvi. 30.) Let him be blinded to his own state; soothed with false remedies, or the true remedy concealed or obscured. Or let him be directed to the cross as the one object, compared with which all other objects are vanity and delusion — do not we see, that, according to the use of *the tongue, death and life is in the power of it?* Nay—in another--perhaps a more solemn, apprehension of the great work, when all is simply and fully exhibited; when man's helplessness and Divine sufficiency — sin and the Saviour

¹ Verse 7. Ps. L. 20, 21. Matt. v. 22; xii. 36. Jude, 14, 15.

² Chap. xiii. 2. Comp. Ecclus. xxviii. 18.

³ Chap. xii 14; xiii. 2. Ps. xxxiv. 12, 13.

—the ruin and the restoration — are clearly displayed; according as the message is rejected or welcomed, it becomes "a savour of death unto death, or of life unto life." (2 Cor. ii. 16.) Thus again, *death or life is in the power of the tongue*.

In the common intercourse of life, also is *the tongue* "the fountain both of bitter waters and sweet;" as powerful to destroy as to edify; the poison, or antidote, as it may be used. 'A man by using his tongue aright, in talking, exhorting, witnessing, counselling, may save; and, by abusing it in any of these ways, or any other, may destroy.'* Either way he will be *filled with the fruit*. The curse of destroying others will return upon himself. In administering a blessing to his neighbour, his own soul will be fed. (Chap. xi. 25.) *They that love it shall eat the fruit* of it. It is, however, the habitual, not the occasional, use of this little member, that determines *its fruit*. A saint may "speak unadvisedly"—a sinner acceptably—"with his lips." Neither would thus determine his true character.

Born as we are for eternity, no utterance of our tongue can be called trifling. A word, though light as air, scarcely market, and soon forgotten, may rise up as a witness at the throne of judgment for *death* or *for life* eternal. (Matt. xii. 37.) When I think of this awful power, shall I not—as Chrysostom warns—"guard this little member more than the pupil of the eye?"† Are not the sins of *the tongue* an overwhelming manifestation of the long-suffering of God? 'Woe is me'—exclaimed a man of God--' for I am a man of unclean lips.'¹ Shall I not cry to my God, that he would restrain my tongue;² yea, cry more earnestly, that he would consecrate it³ as a sacred gift, stamped with his image, that it might be my glory, not my shame; my organ of praise, my exercise of joy?⁴ In the inner man the heart is the main thing to be kept (Chap. iv. 23); in the outer man the tongue. (Clap. xxi. 23.) O my God! take them both into thine own keeping, under thine own discipline, as instruments for thy service and glory.

22. *Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing,‡ and obtaiheth favour of the Lord.*

This is obviously to be taken with limitation. Manoah *found a good thing in his wife*. (Judg. xiii. 23.) So did not Job. (Job, ii. 9, 10.)

¹ Isa. vi. 5.

² Ps. cxli. 3.

³ Ib. li. 15.

⁴ Ib. lvii. 7, 8.

* Muffet *in loco*.

† Homily 62 on Matt.

† Dr. Keunicott elaborately insists upon supplying the distinctive limitation from the reading of the LXX Vulgate, and some old Chaldee paraphrase. (*Second Dissertation on the Hebrew Text*, pp. 189—192.) But, the general term, frequently used by the wise man for the obvious limitation, sufficiently explains his meaning, Chap. xv. 10; xvi. 10; xxii. 1; xxix. 4. Eccles. vii. 28. The LXX adds—"He that casteth out a wife, casteth out good things: but he that retaineth a strange woman is foolish and ungodly."

Some find "a crown to their head;" others, "rottenness to their bones." (Chap. xii. 4.) That which alone deserves the name is indeed a *good thing*. If in a state of innocence "it was not good for a man to be alone" (Gen. ii. 18); much more in a world of care and trouble "two are better than one" for mutual support, helpfulness, and sympathy.* *The good thing* implies godliness, and fitness. Godliness is found, when the man marries "only in the Lord" (1 Cor. vii. 39), and only one, who is the Lord's. The "unequal yoke with unbelievers" (2 Cor. vi. 14)--the union for life of a child of God with a child of Satan, is a most awful anomaly. 'I wish'--said pious Bishop Hall, that Manoah could speak so loud, that all our Israelites might hear him—"Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all God's people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?" If religion be any other than a cipher, how dare we not regard it in our most important choice? Is she a fair Philistine? Why is not the deformity of the soul more powerful to dissuade us, than the beauty of the face to allure us?†

There may however be godliness on both sides, without that mutual fitness which makes the woman "a helpmeet for the man." *The good thing* is, when he honours her, not as the wisest for the holiest of women, but as the person, whom God saw to be the best and fittest for himself in the whole world, a comfort for life, a help for heaven.‡. Thus she becomes the one object of his undivided heart. Mutual faith is plighted in the Lord. Such a communion spiritualizes his affections, and elevates him from earth to heaven.

But how is this *good thing found*? Isaac *found it*, where every Christian looks for his blessing, as an answer to prayer. (Gen. xxiv.) A man's choice for his own indulgence will bring a curse upon himself and his family. (2 Chron. xviii. 1, 2; xxi. 1-6.) "Choose thou mine inheritance for me" (Ps. xlvii. 4)—is the cry and confidence of the child of God. Then truly will he *obtain* the gift, not as the result of fortune, or as the proof of his own good discernment; but, as Adam received his wife, "from the Lord" (Chap. xix. 14), a token of his special *favour*.

* Eccles. iv. 9, 10. See the Marriage Service.

† *Contemplations*, x. 3. Bp. Beveridge's Resolution is well worth recording—"I shall always endeavour to make choice of such a woman for spouse, who hath first made choice of Christ as a spouse for herself; that none may be made one flesh with me, who is not made one spirit with Christ my Saviour. For I look upon/ the image of Christ as the best mark of beauty I can behold in her, and the grace of God as the best portion I can receive with her. These are excellences, which, though not, visible to our carnal eyes, are nevertheless agreeable to a spiritual heart; and such as all wise and good men cannot choose but be enamoured with. For my own part, they seem to me such necessary qualifications, that my heart trembles at the thoughts of ever having a wife without them.' Resol. ii.

‡ Luke, i. 6. See the beautiful picture. Chap. xxxi. 10-31. Comp. also Eccles. xxvi. 1-3, 13-16; xxxvi. 24.

23. *The poor useth entreaties: but the rich answereth roughly.**

It is natural to *the poor*, sensible of their dependence, to use *entreaties*. And this humiliation may be the discipline for that poverty of spirit, which the Lord sealed with his first blessing. (Matt. v. 3.) Yet shame is it to *the rich*, that he should often *answer these entreaties* roughly. Instead of the kindly feelings flowing out, he seems to be bound against them with iron chains. He hears with indifference the tale of woe; and having never himself tasted the bitter bread, he has no heart of sympathy and helpfulness. The well-bred man of the world, who is all courtesy and refinement in his own circle, to those under his feet is often insufferably rude and unfeeling. His good breeding indeed is often only the polish of selfishness. The proud worm knows so little the true use of his power, that the exercise of it only transforms him into a tyrant. Instead of scattering his blessings around, he only makes himself feared and hated by his misused responsibility. (1 Sam. xxv. 17.) Would he but study the character of his Divine Master, he would see the exercise of power enlivened with true greatness. Was he not as considerate to blind Bartimeus, as to the nobleman of Capernaum? (Mark, x. 49. John, v. 48.) All ranks alike shared in his tenderest sympathy.

And yet, as the rich in their conscious superiority may be overbearing, so *the poor*, in using *their entreaties*, may shew a servile, crouching spirit (1 Sam. 11. 36), shrinking from that bold integrity of character, which gives dignity alike to the lowest as to the highest of men. To all of us our Providential circumstances bring their besetting temptations. Close walking with God is our only safeguard.

But surely *the rich*, in his rough answering of *the poor*, would do well to consider, how much more dependent is he upon his God, than his meanest brother is upon himself! And when he comes before his God, must he not then wear the garb of *poverty*, though he be a king (Ps. xl. 17; lxxxvi. 1); using *entreaties*, not advancing claims? Yes--all of us alike are *poor* before the throne of grace. All of us must use *entreaties* here. Yet when does our gracious Father *answer his poor* suppliant child *roughly*; except as he wisely disciplines his faith, while his heart is full of yearning parental love towards him? (Matt. xv. 26. Comp. Gen. xlii. 6, 7.)

24. *A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.*

To be without a friend, marks a state of painful desolation. (Ps. lxxxviii. 18.) On the other hand, a true friend is no common acquisition. (Chap. xvii. 17.) There are many pretensions, many professions,

* This and the succeeding verse are omitted in LXX.

of friendship. But the jewel itself is as rare as it is precious. Yet what is life without this cheering, enriching blessing? Kings have left awhile their royalties for its enjoyment. (Ps. Iv. 14.) To Alexander the conquered world without his Hephæstion would have been a wilderness.* But if *a man hath friends*, and would keep them, he must *shew himself friendly*. To throw them away by neglect, caprice, unreasonable disgust, or needless offence, is to shew himself utterly unworthy of the blessing. Observe Ruth and Naomi--each with warm reciprocity of interest laying herself out for the other.¹ David practically acknowledged the kindness of his friends in distress.² The Apostle dealt most delicately with his friend's wounded sensibility,³ and manifested the most considerate care for his companion's comforts.⁴ It is by such kind offices that the bond is mutually cemented. *A man having friends shews himself friendly*. Love begets love, and is accompanied with love.⁵ Not that this will shew itself in extravagant professions, or lavish praise, gratifying to the weak, but revolting to an intelligent mind. The true expression will be in that unmistakable integrity, which at once shews the man, and makes the Christian shine.

Thus we shall take care to base our friendship upon the true foundation. Otherwise it may be snapped asunder by the veriest trifle, or it may become idolatrous love, usurping God's place in the heart. Sanguine and affectionate dispositions are much exposed to sudden fancies and mistaken impressions. But the charm is broken by the cold return or empty professions of the misplaced love; and the illusion is swept away in humbling disappointment. Wise men will refrain from the choice of many bosom friends, or involving a multiplication of duties, and too often of entangling difficulties.

The bond of real friendship is often closer than the natural tie. "The friend is as one's own soul." (Deut. xiii. 6.) Such was Jonathan unto David--*a friend that sticketh closer than a brother*†--tender and sympathizing, while his *brother* was fraught with unkind suspicion.‡ He dared the deadly displeasure of his father by open adherence, while his wife shewed her love at the expense of his name.⁶ Hiram's cordial kindness to Solomon, contrasts with *his brother's* unjust endeavour to

¹ Ruth. i, 16; ii. 11, 18, with iii. 1-14, 16; iv. 16.

² 1 Sam. xxx. 26-31.

³ Philem. 8-20.

⁴ Tit. iii. 13.

⁵ Comp. Eccclus. xxii. 25.

⁶ 1 Sam. xviii. 20, 28; xix. 12-17, with xx. 24-33.

* . . . Friendship's the wine of life.

A friend is worth all hazards we can run.

Poor is the friendless master of a world:

A world in purchase for a friend is gain.--YOUNG.

† Bishop Coverdale's version is very beautiful--'a friend that delighteth in love, doth a man more friendship, and sticketh faster unto him than a brother.'

‡ 1 Sam. xvii. 28, with xviii. 3; xix. 2-4. 2 Sam. i. 26. It is interesting to observe the reciprocity with one exception (2 Sam. xvi. 1-4) on David's part to the end of life, 2 Sam. ix. 1; xxi. 7.

keep him from the throne.¹ Job's friends, notwithstanding their harsh misconceptions, abode fast with the afflicted sufferer, when his wife and family were "strange to him."² And do we not remember, that when the *brethren* of Jesus shrunk from the near position to his cross, "*there stood by the cross the disciple whom Jesus loved,*" gladly receiving from his lips the sacred deposit of his bereaved mother? (John, xix. 25-27.) Even natural minds of a high tone of feeling may exhibit this strength of friendship. But its surest bond is that, which unites the whole family of God. The identity of sanctified taste; sympathy of experience; holy consecration for mutual helpfulness; above all--union as Members of one body to one Head--hence flow magnetic attraction, heavenly, Divine friendship.

But where shall we find the complete filling-up of this exquisite picture, except in Him, who became our Brother, that he might cleave to us *closer than a brother* in tenderness and help? (Heb. ii. 11, 14-18.) Let his people bear witness, whether he be not the greatest, best, most loving, most disinterested and faithful of friends. Truly he "loveth at all times." He is a friend to them that have no other friend; to those who have been his bitterest enemies; a friend who abides, when all others have passed away. Mark him as a present friend, known and tried, able to enter into all that most deeply affects us; in temptation opening, when needed, "a way of escape;"³ in affliction cheering with the Divine Comforter;⁴ "in sickness making our bed;"⁵ in death sustaining us by "his rod and staff;"⁶ in eternity "receiving us to himself."⁷ What *brother sticketh* so close as he, esteeming himself more honoured, the more we lean upon him, "having no confidence in the flesh?"

And then, looking on the objects of his love;⁸ its freeness;⁹ its costliness;¹⁰ its perseverance notwithstanding all the discouragements of our perverseness and folly;¹¹ "loving us to the end,"* as parts and members of himself--how can we duly honour this our faithful, tender, unchanging, unchangeable friend? Are there none, who boast of their faithfulness to the creature, who yet have no sympathy with this Divine friendship, no reciprocal affection to this surpassing friend? Will not our very sensibilities condemn our indifference? For what stronger proof can there be of their depravity and disorder, than that they should be flowing to the creature-objects, cold and dead to the Divine Friend? Oh! let him be the first choice of youth, the tried and chosen Friend of maturing age, the Friend for eternity! Cultivate a

¹ 1 Kings, v. with i. 5.

² Job, ii. 11-13, with xix. 13-17.

³ 1 Cor. x. 13.

⁴ John, xiv. 17, 18.

⁵ Ps, xli 3.

⁶ Ps. xxiii. 4.

⁷ John, xiv, 3; xvii. 24.

⁸ Rom, v. 8.

⁹ John, vi. 37.

¹⁰ Ib, xv, 13. 1 John, iii, 16.

¹¹ Isa. xlii. 4. Hos. xi. 7,8. Mal. Iii. 16.

* John, xiii. 1. See the beautiful Hymn in Olney Collection, B, i. 53.

closer acquaintance with him. Set the highest value upon his friendship. Live a life of joyous confidence on his all-sufficiency and love. Make him the constant subject of conversation. Avoid whatever is displeasing to him. Be found in those places where he meeteth his people. (Isa. lxiv. 5.) Long to be with him for ever. Thus testify all around--"This is my beloved, and this is my friend." (Cant. v. 16.) Is it not because men have no eyes to see him, that they have no heart to love him? Were but the eyes really opened, they would soon affect the heart; and all would be for him in entire devotedness of service.

CHAPTER XIX.

1. *Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips, and is a fool.**

POVERTY is never a disgrace, except when it is the fruit of ill-conduct. But when adorned with godly *integrity*, it is most honourable. *Better is the poor man, than* he whom riches lift up in his own eyes, and he is given up to his *perverseness and folly*. (Chap. xxviii. 6.) Often man puts under his feet those, whom God lays in his bosom. He honours the *perverse* for their riches, and despises *the poor* for their poverty. 'But what hath the rich, if he hath not God? And what is a poor man, if he hath God?' Better be in a wilderness with God, than in Canaan without him.† Was not Job on the dung-hill, *walking in his integrity*, better than ungodly Ahab on the throne? (Job, ii. 7, 8.) Was not Lazarus in his rags *better* than Dives with his "fine linen and sumptuous fare?" (Luke, xvi. 19-21.) Calculate wisdom by God's standard, who judges not by station, but by character. Estimate things in the light of eternity. How soon will all accident distinctions pass away, and personal distinctions alone avail! Death will strip the poor of his rags, and the rich of his purple, and bring them both "naked to the earth, from whence they came." (Job, i. 21. Eccles. xii. 7.) Meanwhile let us hear our Lord's voice to his despised people--"I know *thy poverty*; but thou art rich." (Rev. ii. 9.) How glorious the stamp upon the outcast professors *walking in their integrity*--"Of whom the world was not worthy!" (Heb. xi. 37, 38.) For such is prepared "the honour that cometh from God only"--his seal, his smiles, and his everlasting crown.

2. *Also that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good; and he that hasteth with his feet sinneth.*

Also--seems to trace the *fool's perverse* ways to their source. His

* This and the following verse are omitted in LXX.

† Bishop REYNOLDS on 1 Tim. vi. 17-19.

soul is without knowledge. Ignorance gives perpetuity to folly. *Knowledge* is valuable even to the mind. It expands and sharpens its reasoning powers, and, when rightly directed, preserves from many besetting temptations. 'Be assured'--says a late eloquent Preacher--'it is not because the people know much, that they ever become the willing subjects of any factious or unprincipled demagogue. It is just because they know too little. It is just because ignorance is the field, on which the quackery of a political impostor ever reaps its most abundant harvest.'* *Knowledge* also opens much wholesome enjoyment. The intelligent poor are preserved in their home-comforts from the temptations of the ale-house. The most educated are raised above the frivolities of dissipation. Thus both classes are restrained from the sensualities of ungodliness.

But much more that the soul made for God, *should be without knowledge, is not good.* The blessing is not merely expansion of mind, or restraint of evil, but light and life eternal. (John, xvii. 3.) *Without it*, all is thick darkness--the darkness of death. *Man has no directory for his ways.* He knows not "how to walk and to please God." He knows nothing of spiritual duties, heavenly affections, the life of faith, the entire surrender of heart, or the living to the glory of God. Hence he substitutes services of his own, carnal and unprofitable. He "walks in darkness, and knows not whither he goeth." (Ib. xii. 35.) *He has no remedy for his sins.* Hence he devises penance, or at least repentance or reformation. Not knowing the mystery of the gospel, he cannot come to God by Christ, and wash in "the fountain opened," and therefore can obtain no peace with God, or in his own conscience. (Rom. ix. 31, 32.) *He has no support in his trouble*, nothing better than vain philosophy, or natural hardness. He knows not whence it comes, the love of God in it, its true intent, its humbling, quickening, and sanctifying operation. He cannot "glory in tribulation" from a sense of its beneficial effects (Rom. v. 3-5. Heb. xii. 11, with 5); and therefore he either despises it, or hardens himself against it, or faints under it. *He has no strength for his duties*--none but his own, which is perfect weakness. He knows not how to be "strong in the Lord," to be "strengthened by the Spirit," to use the Christian armour, to mortify sin, to resist Satan, or to overcome the world. He might be endued with unconquerable strength, and be able to "do all things through Christ strengthening him." (Philip. iv. 13.) But he knows not Christ. He has therefore no interest in him; and, "separate from him, he can do nothing." (John, xv. 5.) *He has no hope in his end.* All is fearful uncertainty. He has no knowledge of the free grace of the gospel, no reliance on its promises, no confidence in the Saviour, no title which he can bring to God for acceptance, and no view of God's faithfulness.

* CHALMERS' *Commercial Discourses*, p. 375.

And thus “fools die for want of wisdom.” (Chap. x. 21.) They “perish for lack of knowledge.” (Hos. iv. 6.) “It is a people of no understanding; therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour.” (Isa. xxvii. 11.) The terror of the great day will be, that “the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that *know not God*.” (2 Thess. i. 7, 8.)

What then must we think of the thoughtless trifler, immersed in pleasure, playing with trifles, and despising this inestimable knowledge? What is he, but a man “without understanding,” justly compared to “the beasts that perish?” (Ps. xlix. 20.) Is ignorance then the mother of devotion? Is it not the worst of evils, the centre of all evil (Isa. i. 3, 4. Acts, iii. 17), the parent of irreligion, and the precursor of ruin? (Luke, xix. 42.) Awful indeed are its aggravations--to be ignorant in a time of knowledge, blind in a land of light, unenlightened in “the valley of vision!”

But let us mark the evil of the want of soundly-disciplined knowledge in temporal matters. The uninstructed child or savage acts rashly. The man of impulse is impatient to finish his work before time, and therefore crowds into the day far more than belongs to it, forgetting that ‘things are not done by the effort of the moment, but by the preparation of past moments.’* Our wise moralist has well remarked – ‘He that is in a hurry proves, that the work in which he is engaged is too much for him.’† Certainly this *hasting with the feet* may be considered to be *sin*, inasmuch as it proceeds from a want of simple trust in God, and submission to his orderly arrangements and claims of regular duty.

The true method is to do “the thing of the day in the day.” (1 Kings, viii. 59, marg.) This is all that God requires to be done. The affair of one day at a time is as much as can be quietly committed to God in the daily exercise of faith. This principle should be carried into all important responsibilities. Bp. Burnet's account of Sir M. Hale is most valuable in this view. ‘*Festina lentè*’ was his beloved motto, which he ordered to be engraven on the head of his staff. He was often heard say, that he had observed many witty men run into great errors, because they did not give themselves time to think; but, the heat of imagination making some notions appear in good colours to them, they, without staying till that cooled, were violently led by the impulses it made upon them; whereas calm and slow men, who pass for dull in common estimation, could search after truth, and find it, with more deliberation, so with greater certainty.’‡

But far more serious is this evil in spiritual matters. ‘Where no

* CECIL'S *Remains*.

† Dr. Johnson.

‡ Life of Sir M. Hale.

discretion is, there the soul is not well.* The man therefore *without knowledge*, instead of “pondering his path” (Chap. iv. 26), *hasteth with his feet*, and *sinneth*. Haste, as opposed to sloth, is the energy of Divine grace. (Ps. cxix. 60. Luke, xix. 6.) Here, as opposed to consideration, acting *hastily in sin*. This impatience is the genuine exercise of self-will, not taking time to enquire; “not waiting for the counsel of the Lord.” Godly Joshua offended here. (Josh. ix. 14, 15.) Saul's impatience cost him his kingdom. (1 Sam. xiii. 12.) David's *haste* was the occasion of gross injustice. (2 Sam. xvi. 3, 4.) The prophet, not taking time to ponder the evidence contradicting his own message, was *without a right knowledge*. He *hastened with his feet, and sinned*. (1 Kings, xiii. 18, 19.) Jehoshaphat's precipitancy asking counsel after, instead of before, was sharply rebuked. (2 Chron. xviii. 1-4; xix. 2.) Rash experiments, the result of *haste*, often threaten serious evils in the state. The same spirit rends the Church with schism. The heady professor wanders from Church to Church, and from sect to sect, without pondering. In common life how much *sin* has been the fruit of a few rash words or hasty lines! A sudden impulse has taken the place of considerate principles. Let us ever remember, that without self-discipline there can be no Christian consistency or stability. In a thousand cases *haste* may plunge *our feet into sin* (Chap. xxviii. 20, 22), if not into ruin. The best-intentioned purposes, unwarranted by the will and word of God, are only blind impulses, to be checked, not followed. The real peace of faith, is to stand or sit still, and see how God will appear on our side, to make a way for us through many a deep water of perplexity. (Exod. xiv. 13. Isa. xxx. 7.) “He that believeth shall not make haste.” (Isa. xxviii. 16.)

3. *The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the Lord.*

Such was the *foolishness* of Adam! First he *perverted his way*; then he charged upon God its bitter fruit. “God, making him upright,” made him happy. Had he been ruled by his will, he would have continued so. But, “seeking out his own inventions” (Eccles. vii. 29), he made himself miserable. As the author of his own misery, it was reasonable, that he should fret against himself. But such was his pride and baseness, that *his heart fretted against the Lord*, as if he, not himself, was responsible. (Gen. iii. 6-12.) Thus his first-born, when his own sin had brought “punishment” on him, *fretted*, as if “it were greater than he could bear.” (Ib. iv. 8-13.) This has been *the foolishness* of Adam's children ever since. God has linked together moral and penal evil, sin and sorrow. The fool rushes into the sin, and most unreasonably *frets* for the sorrow; as if he could “gather grapes from thorns, or

*Bishop COVERDALE'S Translation.

figs from thistles." (Matt. vii. 16.) He charges his crosses, not on his own perverseness, but on the injustice of God. (Ezek. xviii. 25.) But God is clear from all the blame (Jam. i. 13, 14): He had shewn the better; man chooses the worse. He had warned by his word and by conscience. Man, deaf to the warning, plunges into the misery; and, while "eating the fruit of his own ways," *his heart frets against the Lord*. 'It is hard to have passions, and to be punished for indulging them. I could not help it. Why did he not give me grace to avoid it?' (See Jer. vii. 10.) Such is the pride and blasphemy of an unhumbled spirit. The malefactor blames the judge for his righteous sentence. (Isa. viii. 21, 22. Rev. xvi. 9-11, 21.)

But let us look a little into this bold impeachment of God's righteousness. 'Why did he not give me grace?' Is then God bound to give his grace? Have we any claim upon God? Is not God's grace his own? (Matt. xx. 15. Rom. ix. 19-21.) Is not the fool following his own will, and therefore responsible for his doing? Why cannot he turn to God? He will not listen or obey. The means are free before him. No force of natural impossibility hinders. His stubbornness alone is his impotency. He cannot, because he will not; and therefore, if he perish, it is not in his weakness, but in his wilfulness. (Matt. xxiii. 37. John, v. 40.) The worst part of his wickedness is his wicked will. It is not only that his nature is wicked, but that he is willing that it should be so. Did he but feel his moral inability, would he but look to him who is "eyes to the blind," "ears to the deaf," "feet to the lame," his healing would be sure.

This perverseness spews itself in every rising of corruption. The Pharisee mocks God by his hypocritical service, and then *frets*, because no good comes out of it. (Isa. lviii. 3. Mal. iii. 14.) The proud worm cherishes a discontented humour with Providence. Either the desired comfort is withheld, or the will has been crossed. If his tongue is quiet, *his heart frets*. Had he been placed differently, he would have succeeded better. God therefore has the blame of his failure. Whereas it is obvious, that if he is not ready now to serve God, he needs a change of heart, not a change of place. The disease is within, and therefore would follow him through altered circumstances with the same result; leaving him as far as ever from happiness. The constant struggle of the will is to be anywhere, but where God has placed us for our best welfare.

Humbling it is to see this *foolishness* in the Lord's people. Our carelessness or waywardness provokes the rod; yet *the heart fretteth* under the rebuke. (2 Sam. vi. 8.) While we shun what is positively sinful, too often we allow occasions of sin. We are found in circumstances or society, which, as experience has taught us, hinder prayer, damp the spiritual taste, and wound the conscience. If therefore we allow this wilful indulgence, at least let us charge on ourselves, not on

God, the bitter consequence. Often also we quarrel with what we cannot alter; thus doubling the burden, by adding guilt to our trouble. If "a fool's contention" with his brother "calleveth for strokes" (Chap. xviii. 6), much more does the "murmurer and complainer" of God (Jude, 16); "the man striving with his Maker" (Isa. xlv. 9); or rather the child kicking against his Father's rod, instead of "humbling himself under his mighty hand." (1 Pet. v. 6.) Did he but know himself, could he but trust his God, he would look, not at the rod, but at the hand that holds it.¹ Could *the heart fret* to see it in his father's hands? Should he not kiss it, even while it smites him; peacefully, yea thankfully, "accepting the punishment of his iniquity?" (Lev. xxvi. 41.)

This turbulent insurrection against Divine Sovereignty brings its own torment. It sets all the powers of the soul out of course. There is no peace or tranquillity, but in complacency with the will of God, being fully reconciled to his disposals and dispensations. While "Ephraim was as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke," it was only the more *fretting*. After that he "was turned, and instructed," and "quieted himself as a weaned child," he found ease. (Jer. xxxi. 18, 19.)

Always, therefore, let us be ready with the cry—"Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me. That which I see not, teach thou me. If I have done iniquity, I will do so no more." (Job, x. 2; xxxiv. 32.) Instead of "complaining for the punishment of our sins; let us search and try our ways, and turn again unto the Lord." "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him." (Mic. vii. 9.) The extent of the evil is little known, till we are brought under the hands of God. It requires no less than his Almightyness to break the stubborn will into ready obedience. "Thy will be done"--is easily repeated, but hardly learned. If things are not "according to our mind," too often is there a struggle to break loose from the affliction; professing indeed to live by faith, yet repining at our hard condition.

So far as we regard our own happiness, our great desire should be, 'that our own will may be annihilated, and the will of God placed in its room.'* The discipline, therefore, that schools the will into subjection, brings with it nothing to excite one murmuring thought. So much does it lay open to us of the secrets of God's heart towards us, and of our hidden corruptions; that, both as coming from his hand, and operating upon us, it is an invaluable blessing. Well satisfied are we, that all that God does, will appear to be right and best when the mystery is finished; that every leaf of his Providence will be expounded with the full manifestation of his glory. It will then be seen that the cross of disappointed wishes was the gracious means of saving us from

¹ 1 Sam. iii. 18. 2 Sam. xvi. 11. Ps. xxxix. 9.

* LEIGHTON *on the Lord's Prayer*.

ruining ourselves, and of exercising us for endurance,* and ultimately for enjoyment. Joy and delight indeed will it be to look back upon every step of "the right way, by which our Father has led us to the city of habitation" (Ps. cvii. 7), and to mark, how needful was the discipline at every point, how suited to every exigency; and what abundant matter of praise does it furnish for that unwearied patience, with which our loving Father "suffered our manners in the wilderness." (Acts, xiii. 18.) Meanwhile let us study God more closely in all his gracious dispensations. 'O Lord, remove our ignorance, that we may know thee; our idleness, that we may seek thee; our unbelief, that we may find and enjoy thee.†

4. *Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor is separated from his neighbour.*

We have had the substance of this Proverb before. (Chap. xiv. 20. Comp. verse 6.) It is nominally true, that *wealth maketh many friends*. But generally they are little worth. 'Riches have them'—says Bishop Hall—'not the man.'‡ The principle is selfishness; no earnest of true and permanent friendship. Few among them will be found "loving at all times, brethren born for adversity." (Chap. xvii. 17.) God has made poverty a gradation of rank; and as such we are bound to regard it. Man makes it a wall of separation. It tries our own faith and patience, and not less the love and sincerity of our faith.§

This want of sympathy with the poor is a serious evil. It *separates* those, whom God had linked together by a mutual bond of reciprocal interest; the rich being the guardians and protectors of the poor; the *poor* being the strength and support of the rich. But too often the poor know their wealthier neighbours, only as living in the most luxurious indulgence, while they themselves are left in the sense of their poverty, unaided and uncared for. This could never be, if the gospel had leavened the mass with its own Divine principle of love. But what—if the Lord's *poor be separated from his selfish neighbour*. (Verse 7.) There is One that "knoweth his soul in adversity" (Ps. xxxi. 7), and that hath pledged his word—"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." (Heb. xiii. 5.) Yes—this is the joy and the stay of his confidence—"I am poor and needy; but the Lord thinketh on me." (Ps. xl. 17.) Poverty may *separate him from his neighbour*. But who or what shall separate him from his God? (Rom. viii. 38, 39.) "Joint-heir as he is with him, whom God hath appointed heir of all things," what can he want?¹ 'If it were possible for him to stand absolutely

¹ Rom. viii. 17. Heb. i. 2, with 1 Cor. iii. 21-23.

* 'Quos Deus amat, indurat et exereet.'--SENECA *De Providentia* c. 4.

† Bishop Hall. ‡ *Works*, viii. 77. Comp. Ecelus. xiii. 22, 23.

§ *Amicus certus in re incerta cernitur*.—CICERO.

in need of the use and service of the whole creation, all the creatures in the world would surely wait on him, and be appropriated to him.* With such an inheritance as his, why should he fret for a few years' poverty or neglect? Earth's short vision will soon be past; and then comes the eternal reality of unclouded joy.

5. A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape.

If "a true witness delivereth souls" (Chap. xiv. 25), *a false witness* destroyeth them. Fearful guilt and responsibility! reaching, without the atoning sacrifice, throughout eternity. Can we wonder that the detection should bring him under certain condemnation? (Deut. xix. 16-21.) It is an offence against both tables of the law. The perjurer takes "God's name in vain." The *false witness* is a direct transgression against the law of our neighbour. This wickedness does not however come to this height at once. But the habit of *speaking lies*, the allowance of untruth under the pretence of a good end (Rom. iii. 8), or only in play, grows to this aggravation.†

In this view a strict attention to truth forms a primary point in a Christian education. The boundary line must never be trifled with. Not even a child can pass it with impunity. It will soon lose its respect, if it be not revered at any sacrifice, and under all circumstances. A child must never be suffered to play with a falsehood. Ever press upon him that anything less than truth is a lie. Even if no one is deceived by it, a habit is fostered, of which we cannot tell to what it may grow. "He that is unfaithful in that which is least, is unfaithful also in much." (Luke, xvi. 14.) The indulgence of a lie soon banishes all fear of an oath. The careless liar, if occasion needs, scruples not to become *a false witness*. But neither in the higher or lower indulgence will falsehood be forgotten. It may escape detection from man. But it lies open and unveiled before the eye of God. It shall *not be unpunished; it shall not escape* there. The liar may perhaps have thought or intended no harm. But no palliation is admitted at the bar of God. "All liars shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone." (Rev. xxi. 8.)

6. Many will entreat the favour of the prince; and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts. 7. All the brethren of the poor do hate him: how

* Bishop REYNOLDS' *Works*, p. 11.

† Jer. ix. 3-5. There is much instruction in the wise reply of Solon on first seeing the rude theatricals of Thespis. Asking him, how he dared to tell so many lies before the people, and receiving for answer, that he only did it in play—"Yes"—said the legislator, striking his staff with force into the ground,—'But if we begin with telling lies in play, we shall end with telling them in earnest.'

much more do his friends go far from him! he pursueth them with words, yet they are wanting to him.

The fourth verse is here further opened with too accurate a description of man's native selfishness. 'A prince never wants suitors for his favour.* Every one loves, or professes to love those from whom they expect a benefit, "having men's persons in admiration, because of advantage" (Jude, 16), valuing them for their possessions, not for their virtues. Yet if "riches make to themselves wings, and flee away" (Chap. xxiii. 5), will not they take their flight with them? If the same person, now fawned on for his gifts, were by Providence brought to poverty, the same *friends would hate* or neglect him. 'Which of them' --asks Bishop Hall--'would dare acknowledge him, when he is going to prison?' † As the winter brooks, filled from the opening springs and the torrents from heaven, are dried up and vanish before the summer heat; so these *friends of the poor go far from him*, cold, distant, and vanishing in the day of his calamity. If *he pursueth them with words*, yet they are deaf to his entreaties for help and sympathy. Job found these "summer" friends a great aggravation to affliction. ‡ Jerusalem in its days of prosperity was "the joy of the whole earth." In the time of after-destitution "they called thee"—said the mournful prophet—"an outcast, saying—This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after." (Ps. xlviii. 2. Jer. xxx. 17.)

But how ought we to *entreat the favour of our Prince? What gifts does he give* to his beloved people? And shall not those who are enriched with them exhibit his rule of mercy to their poorer brethren (Gal. vi. 10. Heb. vi. 10), specially to his poor, the princes and heirs of his kingdom? (Jam. ii. 5.) 'Lord! in my greatest plenty help me to mind and feel others' poverty; and in my most prosperous condition keep me from forgetting the afflictions of thy Joseph.' §

8. *He that getteth wisdom loveth his own soul; he that keepeth understanding shall find good.*

It would seem that self-interest might win us to religion. Careless sinner! little do you- know your loss of solid happiness. If anything is worth *getting*, and, when got, worth *keeping*—"Wisdom is the thing therefore *get wisdom*, and with all thy getting get understanding." (Chap. iv. 5-7.) How this blessing is to be obtained, Solomon had before explained. Apply thine heart diligently to the search; then bring thy

* Bishop Patrick.

† Works, xiii. p. 77.

‡ Job, vi. 15-22; xix. 13-19; xxix. xxx. Comp. Ecclus. xxxvii. 1-4.

Donec eris felix, multos numerabis amicos;

Tempora si fuerint nubila, solus eris.

OID, *Trist.* Lib. i. viii. 9, 10.

§ SWINNOCK'S *Christian Man's Calling*, Part ii. 353.

heart to God for his light and teaching; and the treasure is thine own. (Chap. ii. 1-6.) Yet it requires as much care to *keep* the blessing as to *get* it. Soon may it slip away from a negligent hand. "Keep thy soul diligently" (Deut. iv. 9), and thou wilt keep thy treasure; as the man, who, having found the hidden treasure in the field, buys the field to secure it. (Matt. xiii. 44.) It is no carnal *good*, however, that is found here. The Christian's present portion involves the sacrifice of all. (Luke, xiv., 26, 33.) And yet, as a compensation, abundantly over-paying for all that can be endured, it is real, infinite, heavenly. To *get wisdom* therefore, whatever be the cost, is to *love our own soul*. "Whoso findeth me, findeth life" (Chap. viii. 35)—all in me, all with me. Is not this the chief good, above every earthly good. (Ps. iv. 6, 7); the eternal good, when every earthly good shall have passed away? (Ib. lxxiii. 25, 26.) Whether Christ or the world shall have our highest love, our supreme trust, our first time, and our choicest talent—one should be ashamed to admit the question. Is. not the very mention of it a sufficient answer? It is like comparing pebbles with pearls, dust with diamonds, dross with gold. To follow our own way is then to destroy, not to *love, our own souls*. "Whoso sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul; all they that hate me love death." (Chap. viii. 36.)

9. A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall perish.

"A God of truth, and without iniquity; just and right is he--A. God that cannot lie—Faithful and True." (Deut. xxxii. 4. Tit. i. 2.) Such is the revealed character of Jehovah! We cannot wonder at the repeated denunciations against deceit. So gross a dishonour is it to his unchangeable attribute! One addition is here made to the former sentence. (Verse 5.) The punishment shall not only be certain—"he that speaketh lies shall not escape"—"but it shall be utter ruin—*He shall perish*."¹ "Lies and desolation" are linked together. (Hos. xii. 1.) "I will be a swift witness against false swearers— and them that fear not me--saith the Lord of Hosts." (Mal. iii. 5.)

10. Delight is not seemly for a fool: much less for a servant to have rule over princes.

What has a *fool* to do with *delight*? This world's prosperity, so far as he knows it, can only be a curse to him. (Chap. i. 32.) *Delight* "is comely to the righteous" (Ps. xxxiii. 1), suitable to his character. He has a right and title to it. (Ib. xxxii. 11.) But it *is not seemly for the fool*. He has indeed his merriment and folly.² But solid joy he knows

¹ Jer. xxviii. 15-17 ; xxix. 31, 32. 2 Pet. ii. 1-3. Rev. xxii. 15.

² 1 Sam. xxv. 25. Eccles. vii. 5, 6. Isa. v. 11, 12 ; xxii. 12-14. Hos. vii, 3-5. Amos, vi. 3-6.

not. Far more suitable to him is a chastening rod.¹ And should the Lord graciously sanctify this dispensation—as in how many instances he has done so!—it will introduce him to that "*delight* which will then *be seemly to him*."²

Much less seemly is the exhibition of a servant having rule over princes. Such an elevation is dangerous to the individual.* In the kingdom, it is one of the "things which the earth cannot bear." (Chap. xxx. 22.) The servant has indeed the same rational power with his Sovereign. But contracted habits of mind unfit him to rule. Exceptions there are, as in the case of Joseph. (Gen. xli. 39-45.) But seldom is God's order reversed without anarchy and confusion.³ Such was the reign of our second Edward, when worthless minions *had rule over the prince*; chosen either for their external accomplishments, or for their subserviency to his folly. Peace and happiness belong to godly contentment; (1 Tim. vi. 6.) "Let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God." (1 Cor. vii. 24.) To those whom he has placed in a subordinate station, our Father's voice is full of instruction—"Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not." (Jer. xlv. 5.)

11. The discretion of a man deferreth his anger: and it is his glory to pass over a transgression.

What is *anger*, but temporary madness? To yield therefore to its paroxysm, to act without deliberation under its impulse, is to do we know not what, and what will surely bring work for repentance. (Chap. xiv. 17, 29.) An interval between the inward rising and the outward manifestation of the anger is most important. *The discretion of a man deferreth his anger*. Mindful of his own infirmity, he will guard against indecent sallies of temper, taking time to weigh, and careful not to overcharge the offence.† An affront therefore is the test, whether he has *discretion*, or whether he is the slave of his own passion. The standard of common usage is—"To be *even*, and to return one insult by another.' The Christian standard is to be *above*; "not rendering railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing."‡

¹ Chap. x. 13, 14 ; xxvi. 3.

² 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11-13. Luke, xv. 14-24.

³ 2 Sam. iii. 24, 25, 39. Isa. iii. 5.

* Esth. iii. 1, 2 ; vii. 10. 'Ex insolentia, quibus nova bona fortuna det, impotentes laetitiae insanire.'—Liv. Lib. xxx. c. 42. Comp. Lib. xxiii. c. 18.

† Chap. xvi. 32. Eccles. vii. 9. Jam. i. 19. Comp. 1 Sam. x. 27. Even Heathen moralists acknowledge the value of this *discretion*.—"I would have beaten thee, if I was not angry,"—said the philosopher to his offending servant. Augustus under the impulse of anger was requested to repeat the alphabet, to give him time to cool. 'It is easier'—as Seneca wisely observed—"not to admit the passion, than, when admitted, to govern it." Justin Martyr, when asked what was Christ's greatest miracle, named his so great patience in such great trials.

‡ 1 Pet. iii. 9. The example of Joseph, Gen. xlv. 4-15; 1. 21. David, 1 Sam. lxxiv. 7-19. Ps. xxxv. 7-14; xxxviii. 12-14. The prophet, 1 Kings, xiii. 4-6. Mr. Scott justly remarks upon the identity of the Old Testament standard with that of Christ and his apostles, Comp. Matt. v. 38-42; xxiii. 21, 22. Rom. xii. 17-21, with Chap. xxv. 21, 22.

Again—*To pass over a transgression*—such is the proud folly of man's judgment ! is disgrace, want of courage and proper spirit. But Solomon, a wise man and a King, declares it to be weakness, not strength or greatness, to be able to bear nothing.* *It is glory to pass over a transgression.* So it must be, because it is likeness to God. What a motive! 'Let it pass for a kind of sheepishness to be meek. It is a likeness to him, that was "a sheep before the shearers, not opening his mouth." (Isa. liii. 7.) It is a portion of his spirit.' †

And what a pattern is his long-suffering with such wilful daily, hourly, provocations ! (Eph. iv. 31, 32. Col. iii. 13.) If he create us anew, it must be, as before, in his own image. Forbearance and forgiveness will therefore take the place of resentment and malice. Moral strength may, in some men, curb the outward expression. But the poison lurks within. Forbearance from a pure motive, *passing over transgression* in free love, is a noble triumph of grace, most honourable to God, fraught with the richest spoils to our own souls.

12. The king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion: but his favour is as dew upon the grass.

The monarch of the forest is a just comparison to the monarch of the land.¹ "The lion hath roared; who will not fear?" ‡ The rocks and hills echo the terrific cry. The whole race of the animals of the forest are driven to flight, or petrified to the spot. Such is *the king's wrath* in a land of despotism;² reigning without law, above law, his will his only law; an awful picture of cruelty,³ tyranny,⁴ and caprice!⁵ Unlimited power is too much for proud human nature to bear, except with special grace from above. Just so is *the king's favour* a reviving blessing, *as dew upon the grass*—the nourishment of vegetative life in the East, where the more powerful influence is only partially or periodically known.⁶

But if the *wrath of a king* be so terrible — Oh, my soul, what must be the wrath of God! (Luke, xii. 4, 5.) If it be so terrible in this world, where every drop is mixed with mercy; what will it be in eternity, where it is "poured out without mixture" and without cessation (Rev. xiv. 10, 11); where his power is so fearfully manifested, not only in tormenting, but in preserving and "establishing for correction?" (Hab. i. 12.) Oh ! let this wrath be the grand object of my reverential

* The Roman moralist could say: —

Infirmi est animi exiguique voluptas
Ultio.

JUVEN. Sat. xiii. 190, 191.

† LEIGHTON on 1 Pet. iii. 3, 4.

‡ Amos, iii. S. Rev. x. 1-3. See Homer's fine picture, *Iliad*, U. 164-171.

¹ Comp. Jer. iv. 7; 1. 17. 2 Tim. iv. 17.

² Chap. xvi. 14; xx. 2; xxviii. 15.

³ Matt. ii. 16-18.

⁴ Exod. v. 4-9. Dan. iii. 1-19.

⁵ Dan. ii. 5-12.

⁶ Chap. xvi. 15. 2 Sam. xxiii. 3, 4.

fear. Let me flee from it by the only way of escape, while escape is open to me; and seek his *favour*, as the enriching "dew unto Israel, invigorating and fertilizing my barren soil. (Hos. xiv. 5-7. Ps. lxxii. 6.)

13. A foolish son is the calamity of his father: and the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping.

'Many,' observes an old commentators—'are the miseries of a man's life; but none like that, which cometh from him, who should be the stay of his life.'^{*} As "a wise son maketh a glad father" (Chap. x. 1; xv. 20), *so a foolish son is the father's calamity*[†] — a multitude of calamities meeting in one, such as no earthly portion, no riches, honour, or station, can alleviate or balance. The denunciation—"Write this man childless"[‡] — would be to his heart a comparative boon. The throne of grace to the Christian *father* will be the only refuge for his grief. There will he pour out the bitterness of his soul in humiliation for himself, and supplication for his child; and find rest. (2 Sat. t. xxiii. 5.) Oh! can we be too earnest for the prevention of this *calamity*? Shall we not seek early grace for our children, and--*combined with this*--special grace for ourselves (Judg. xiii. 12), to preserve us from unwittingly sowing the seed in their young hearts, that will afterwards spring up with such deadly fruit?

Another domestic *calamity* is mentioned, not less poignant. *The contentions of a wife are as a continual dropping* (Chap. xxvii. 1, also xxi. 9, 19; xxv. 24) of rain through the roof of an old house. Such *dropping* utterly destroys a man's household comfort, and "wears away" a heart firm as a stone." This trial is the more fretting, because there is no lawful escape. The *foolish son* may be cast out. (Deut. xxi. 18.) The *contentious wife* must be endured. (Matt. v. 32; xix. 9.) Yet would this cross have been, had the plain Scriptural rule of subjection been duly honoured?¹ Or is it not the just chastening for the neglect of the Divine injunction, so essential to secure happiness in the yoke?² Or may it not be the "thorn in the flesh," the needful restraint from some imminent, subtle, and fearful danger? (2 Cor. xii. 7.) Self-will and impatience would flee from the cross. Faith will seek strength to bear it meekly to the honour of God, extracting a solid blessing out of a heavy trial. (Ib. verses 8, 9.) And who knoweth but *the contentious wife* may be given to persevering prayer and patient forbearance, as an help-meet to her husband, and both shall ultimately "dwell as heirs together of the grace of life?"³

¹ Gen. iii. 16. 1 Cor. xiv. 34. Eph. v. 22-24. Col. iii. 18. Tit. ii. 5.

² 1 Cor. vii. 3. 2 Cor. vi. 14. ³ 1 Pet. iii. 7. Gen. ii. 18. 1 Cor. vii. 16.

^{*} Jermin *in loco*.

[†] Heb. Plur. Chap. xvii. 21, 25.

[‡] Jer. xxii. 30. Augustus in a burst of grief in his domestic trials, is said to have applied to himself Hector's exclamation against his effeminate brother—"Would that thou hadst never been born, or never married!" *Iliad*, G. 40.

But surely our God teaches us a valuable lesson of this world's vanity, by fixing disappointment on its most substantial comforts. Let his children beware of building their rest on an earthly portion, of being ensnared by their best blessings; else will their jealous Father embitter their sweetest sources of enjoyment, and teach them by painful discipline to look to enter into no rest but his.

14. House and riches are the inheritance of fathers: and a prudent wife is from the Lord.

"Every good gift is *from the Lord*" (Jam. i. 17); only, some in the ordinary course; others more directly from him. *Houses and riches*, though his gifts, come by descent. *They are the inheritance of fathers.*¹ The heir is known, and in the course of events he takes possession of his estate. But *the prudent wife* is wholly unconnected with the man. There has been no previous bond of relation.² She is often brought from a distance.³ "The Lord brought her to the man"⁴ by his special Providence, and therefore as his special gift. The history of Ruth beautifully illustrates the train of matrimonial Providence. The Moabitess married, contrary to all human probability, a man of Israel, that she might be brought into Naomi's family, return with her to her own land, and in course of filial duty be brought under the eye, and drawn to the heart of Boaz, her appointed husband. (Ruth. i. 1-4; iv. 13.) Often do the wheels of the Lord's working in this interesting matter constrain the admiration of men not well exercised in spiritual observation. (Gen. xxiv. 50.) And how much more endearing and secure is a special gift of God! The bread coming down from heaven was more valued, than if it had been the fruit of labour. Thus is *the prudent wife* honoured, as 'a special blessing of God's immediate choosing, and therefore to be obtained by our prayers at the hand of the giver.*' *The prudence*, however, here described, implies not only her wise governing of her household,⁵ but that godly consideration connected with Divine wisdom,⁶ by which she becomes the joy and confidence of her husband:⁷ as *the contentious wife* is his trouble and disgrace.

But is not the husband, no less than *the wife, from, the Lord*? Let each prospectively seek the blessing of God's ordinance; never trusting to his own judgment and affections, without primary reference to his guidance. (Chap. iii. 6.) Let us realize the responsibility, as well as the indulgent comfort, of the union; ever counting it a talent for God, for his service and glory: and not doubting for ourselves, that 'all

¹ Chap. xiii. 22. Num. xxvii. 7. Deut. xxi. 16. 1 Kings, xxi. 3, 4. 2 Cor. xii. 14.

² 1 Sam. xxv. 39-42.

³ Gen. xxiv. 4, 5.

⁴ Ib. ii. 22.

⁶ Chap. xxxi. 27.

⁶ Chap. viii. 12.

⁷ Chap. xviii. 22; xxxi. 11, 23, 28.

* Bishop Hall.

things shall turn to our commodity and comfort, if we draw the yoke in one concord of heart and mind.*

15. Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall, suffer hunger.

All experience and observation attest the fact, that *slothful* habits destroy mental energy, and idleness is the road to want. What could we expect from a sluggard lying in his bed all the day? As little from the *slothful*, who, goes about his work, as if he was *cast into a deep sleep*. (Chap. vi. 9-11.) And even where the slumber is not *a deep sleep*, its partial influence is the dead palsy upon active perseverance. He has not the thorough use of his wakeful faculties. And if he has (as who has not?) made a false step, there is no energy of effort to repair it. † And if there be any reward of perseverance, sloth will never find it; *the idle soul will suffer hunger*.

Thoughtless sinner! Think how this applies to the world of God. You persuade yourself that all is well, because you will no trouble yourself to open your eyes to the truth; and you are content to let things run their course. You do not rebel against the Gospel. But has not our Divine Master said—"He that is not with me is against me?" (Matt. xii. 30.) You conceive that you have done no harm. But is it no harm to have hitherto wasted every opportunity for eternity? to have wandered about in vanity from your cradle, instead of living to God? You are determined to sleep at any rate. And though the two grand treasures--the favour of God, and your own soul—are in imminent peril; yet still you "say to your soul—Soul, take thine ease." (Luke, xii. 19.) Instead of weeping love, wrestling prayer, and working diligence—you are *cast into a deep sleep*. "Awake, thou that sleepest" (Eph. v. 14); else wilt thou sleep the sleep of eternal death.

Often do we find men active and laborious, all eyes, all ears, all heart in worldly matters, hating sloth, yet themselves devoured by it. They know that something must be done. But in the vital exercises of denying self, crucifying the flesh, coming to Christ, loving the Lord, and devotedness to his service — here it is *a deep sleep*. Is then the grace of God to work as a charm, without, or independent of, means? This were a deadly delusion, *casting into the deep sleep* of presumption. Such an *idle soul shall suffer hunger*! (Chap. x. 4, 5; xx. 4) The enduring meat is the gift of God; but, like every other blessing of the Gospel, it is given only to labour.¹ *The idle mouth*—full only of heart-

¹ John, vi. 27, with Heb. vi. 11, 12. 2 Pet. i. 5—11.

* Homily on Matrimony.

† Marshall Turenne expressed his warm obligation to a friend, who had given him the following advice, when first setting out in life — 'When you have made a false step, spend not a moment in vexing yourself, and moaning over it; but think how it may best be repaired, and instantly set about it.'

less complaints, perhaps sending up a dull prayer for the present quiet of conscience— *shall suffer hunger*. The soul can never flourish, if it be not in earnest with God. It may be roused for a while; but only to be *cast into a deeper sleep* than ever. For godliness can never thrive with this deadly malady. If the slothful may be sincerely religious; so far as he is slothful, he deducts from the privilege and sincerity of his religion. And undoubtedly *a slothful habit* is utterly inconsistent with the vitality of true godliness. Soon nothing will remain, but the dead form of religion, the bare walls of the house, instead of the temple filled with his glory.

And now let us look at the child of God awakened out of *a deep sleep*. He has set out in good earnest for the kingdom; he has begun to fight—yea—to conquer. But sleep has followed; and, instead of improving the advantage, a sudden assault of the enemy has laid him low.* Mind thy work and thy conflict more than thine ease and comfort; else wilt thou be, not a conqueror, but a captive. In time of ease, how naturally, as Bunyan's pilgrim found it, does the air of the plain tend to make us drowsy! And then the soul, instead of being "satisfied as with marrow and fatness" (Ps. lxxiii. 5), *suffers hunger*, and becomes faint for want of its proper nourishment. The heartless externals of godliness will abide. But the spirit that breathed life into them is gone. Nothing but the unceasing prayer and exercise of a mortified spirit can shake off this "evil disease that cleaveth to us." Be thou, Lord, our Helper, our Strength, our Physician!

16. He that keepeth the commandment, keepeth his own soul; but he that despiseth his ways shall die.

The fearing of the commandment is the path of honour. (Chap. xiii. 13.) The keeping of it is our security, *Keep the word*, and the word will keep us securely. Our duties are thus identified with our privileges. (Ps. xix. 11; cxix. 165.) This is the first successful effort to shake ourselves from *the deep sleep of slothfulness*; when we "stir up ourselves to take hold of God, choosing the things that please him, and joining ourselves to him, to serve him, and to love his name."¹ Yet the power to *keep the commandment* is not in a man's self.² Is it not God working in us, through, by, with us?³ Thus "all our deeds are wrought in him;"⁴ and nothing is left us, but the thankful, humbling acknowledgment — "Yet not I, but the grace of God that is with me."⁵ Let then the world know, that we do not exercise obedience in a covenant of works, nor reject it as a system, of bondage and despondency; but that *keeping the commandment* evangelically is *keeping our own souls*⁶ — the way of

¹ Isa. lxiv. 7; lvi. 4-6.

² Jer. x. 23.

³ Isa. xxvi. 12. Philip. ii. 12, 13.

⁴ John, iii. 21.

⁵ 1 Cor. xv. 10.

⁶ Chap. x. 17; xvi. 17; xxii. 5.

* *Invadunt urbem somno vinoque sepultam.*—VIRG *AE*n. ii. 265.

present happiness,¹ the seal of everlasting mercy,² the pathway to heaven.³

But alas! the multitude, instead of *keeping the commandment*, "go at all adventures,"⁴ careless of *their ways*, reckless of their end. It is with them scarcely worth looking into, whether God is displeased or not; whether they be walking in the narrow or broad path; and what the end of that path may be. The sight before our eyes defies illustration. The most momentous realities, that could ever attract the attention of an immortal being, stand before him, not in dreaming visions, but in actual demonstration—the favour or the curse of the ever-blessed God—salvation or damnation. They confront him in the presence of God. He sees them in the light of God. He acknowledges the stamp of God upon them; and yet with this tremendous sight, this fearful responsibility, not a serious thought fixes in his mind. Instead of being overwhelmed with the consciousness of his own interest in it (enough—were it apprehended—to suspend almost the power of thought) he is ready for any trifle or vanity that crosses his path. *He despises his ways, and dies.*

Sometimes men come into this thoughtless world, fresh from the influence of a religious education. For a while they yield alternately to their conscience and their corruptions. They are touched a moment under the convictions of the word, or the corrections of the rod. Yet the want of steadiness and consistency soon sweeps all away into "worse" hardness than before. (2 Pet. ii. 20-22.) They are "carried away unto their idols, even as they were led" (1 Cor. xii. 2); amid, slaves of their wills, their lusts, their fancies, they know not, they care not to know, "that for all these things God will call them to judgment."⁵

Young people—"Ponder the path of your feet." Look to it well at every step, that "your ways may be established" (Chap. iv. 26) in converting grace, the only security for Christian steadfastness. (2 Pet. iii. 17, 18.) Keep the conscience tender, the Divine rule before your eyes, and the promise in the heart. Cherish a pliable spirit for your Father's guidance. How solemn the warning—*He that despiseth his ways shall die!* Sinner! would that thou wouldest ponder this death! It is no creation of a distempered fancy. It is the death, which sin bringeth forth to perfection. (Jam. i. 14, 15.) It is the harvest from that seed. (Gal. vi. 7, 8.) It is the death such as a soul can die—an eternal reality of infinite, unchangeable misery; the extinction, not of thy being (that were a boon indeed !) but of thy happiness. What must it be to be immovably linked with the wrath of God! Yea—to have the wrath of an immortal God filling the conscience of thine immortal soul, with all its power eternally enlarging to receive the hull and

¹ Isa. lxiv, 5. John, xiv. 21-23. ² Ps. ciii. 17, 18. ³ Isa. xxxv. 8-10. Rev. xxii. 14.

⁴ Lev. xxvi. 21, marg.

⁵ Eccles. xi. 9, with 2 Kings, x. 31. Jer. xlv. 17.

eternal impression! And whilst thou art "going on frowardly in the way of thine heart" (Isa. lvii. 17), remember "there is but a step who knows how short a step—how soon taken?"—"between thee and this death." (1 Sam. xx. 3.) "Why " then "wilt thou die," when the oath of thy God testifies, that " he hath no pleasure in thy death," when his gracious voice to thee is—"Turn and live."¹ Consider thy ways."² Oh! listen, ere thou learn the wisdom of fools, to be wise too late.

17. He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.

The ordinance of God is, that "the poor shall never cease out of the land."³ Hence the universal obligation is, to *have pity upon the poor*. This is according to the New Testament standard, which inculcates the spirit, no less than the act.⁴ We must open our heart as much as our hand (Deut. xv. 7, 10), "draw out our soul" as well as our bread, "to the hungry" (Isa. lviii. 10); thus doubling the alms, by giving a part of ourselves. It is possible to "give all our goods to feed the poor," without one atom of the true charity of the heart. (1 Cor. xiii. 3.) But whatever we give, "if we shut up the bowels of compassion from our brother, how dwelleth the love of God in us?" (1 John, iii. 17.) The good Samaritan chewed true practical *pity*. Never let us forget our Lord's application—"Go, and do thou likewise." (Luke, x. 33-37.)

The appointment of the Deacons in the Primitive Church (Acts, vi. 2-6); the anxiety of the Apostles when delegating a commission to their brethren (Gal. ii. 9, 10); the high commendation of the Macedonian churches (2 Cor. iii. ix.), the weekly rule of charity, laid down (not enforcing a fixed standard, but "*as God hath prospered*") (1 Cor. xvi. 2)—all this chews the acceptableness of this. Christian service. Sir Thomas More used to say—"There was more rhetoric in this little sentence, than in a whole library.' The worldly philanthropist however has no conception of the Divine honour of the principle involved in it. If our brother is the object of *pity*, in truth the majesty of Heaven is concerned. The Lord considers it as a loan to himself. It is *lending to the Lord*. Selfishness would evade the obligation under the cover of prudence. But *what we give* is only a loan, to be paid again, and that with such security, as can never fail. The Lord of heaven condescends to be the Surety for *the poor*. He takes the debt upon himself, and gives us the bond of his word in promise of payment. Though he has a right to all, and is beholden to none,⁵ he becomes a debtor to his own. Many acts of kindness have been buried and forgotten. The witness of our conscience is the only fruit. But here is a

¹ Ezek. xxxiii. 11; xviii. 32.

² Hag. i. 5, 7.

³ Deut. xv. 11.

⁴ Luke, vi. 30-36. Col. iii. 12. Comp. chap. xiv. 21.

⁵ Ps. xvi. 2. Rom. xi. 35.

safe deposit in the very heart of God. It can never be lost or forgotten.¹ 'If then'—as Bishop Hall writes—'we will needs lay up, where should we rather repose it, than in the Christian's treasury? The poor man's hand is the treasury of Christ. All my superfluity shall there be hoarded up, where I know it will be safely kept, and surely returned me.'*

And yet would not many rather *lend* to a rich man of known integrity, than *to the Lord*? It is indeed an act of faith, often of naked faith, when there seems no hope of return. (Luke, vi. 38. Coup. chap. xxviii. 27.) But this is the principle, which "the King delighteth to honour." Franke's Orphan Institution stands out before us.† Doubtless if the experience of the Lord's people were fully brought out, it would declare many similar manifestations of his faithfulness to his word. The resurrection-day will bring all to light. (Matt. xxv. 34-40.) Meanwhile let us admire this his wondrous grace. He puts the desire into the heart, disposes the heart, opens the opportunity, and after all accepts the act, as if it had been his own work, without spot or pollution!

18. Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.

Christian parents! carefully study the word of God. See here our Father's wise and loving discipline with his children. "Like as a Father, he pitieth his children." "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you."² Yet when his children need chastening though the flesh cries—*Spare*; though every groan enters into his heart,³ he loves. so well, that *his soul spares them not for their crying*⁴ He uses the rod; yea, if need be, heavily.⁵ He will wither their brightest comforts, children, or property, if they turn them to idols; and this, "not for his pleasure, but for their profit."⁶ And what child has not blessed him, that he did not refrain his discipline, till it had done "its perfect work?"

Is not this then our pattern and our standard; setting out the sound principle of a Christian education? "Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; lest they be discouraged." (Col. iii. 21.) But let not the rule—*chasten—spare not*—be "a hard saying." Is not tenderness for the child a cover for the indulgence of weak and foolish affections? There is much more mercy in what seems to be harshness, than in false tenderness. (Chap. xxiii. 13, 14.) Let the child see, that we are resolved;

¹ Matt. x. 42; xxv. 40. Heb. vi. 10.

² Ps. ciii. 13. Isa. lxvi. 13.

³ Exod. ii. 23, 24. Judg. x. 16.

⁴ Ps. lxxxix. 30-32.

⁵ Ib. xxxix. 10. 1 Pet. v. 6.

⁶ Heb. xii. 10. Com. Lam. iii. 33.

* *Works*, viii. 32. No man is a better merchant, than he that lays out his time upon God, *and his money upon the Poor.*—Bp. TAYLOR'S *Holy Living*, Chap. i.

† See his interesting Life. (Seeleys.)

that we are not to be diverted from our duty by the *cry* of weakness or passion. Far better that the child should *cry* under healthful correction, than that parents should afterwards *cry* under the bitter fruit to themselves and children, of neglected discipline. 'Eli could not have devised which way to have plagued himself and his house so much, as by his kindness to his children's sin. Parents need no other means to make themselves miserable than sparing the rod.'* Yet much less of it would be needed, did they govern, as they ought to do, by the steady decision of a word, a frown, or a look.

But the great force of the rule is its timely application—*while there is hope*. For hopeless the case may be, if the remedy be delayed. The cure of the evil must be commenced in infancy. Not a moment is to be lost. "Betimes" (Chap. xiii. 24; xxii. 15)—is the season, when the good can be effected with the most ease, and the fewest strokes. The lesson of obedience should be learnt at the first dawn. One decided struggle and victory *in very early life*, may, under God, do much toward; settling the point at once and to the end. On the other hand, *sharp chastening* may fail later to accomplish, what a slight rebuke in thy; early course might have wrought.

But is there not too often a voluntary blindness, that does not choose to see what it is painful to correct? The false notion—'Children will be children'—leads us often to pass over real faults, and consider their tempers and waywardness as too trifling to require; prompt correction. And thus sin, winked at in its beginnings, harden in all the strength of deep-rooted corruptions. Whereas—who would neglect their most trifling bodily ailment, which might grow into serious results? If they cannot be argued with, they must be controlled. How often have we found in after-life the evil of fixed habits, which early correction might have subdued with far less cost of suffering! (1 Kings, i. 6; ii. 24.) Oh! what grace and wisdom is needed to discipline our minds, judgment, and affections to that tone of self-government, which will enable us to train our children practically for the service of God, and for their own happiness!

19. A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment; for if thou deliver him, yet thou must do it again.

How often does the unchastened child grow up to a *man of great wrath*, bringing himself into trouble by his boisterous and ungoverned passions! Adonijah, whom "his father had not displeased at any time," rebels against his brother, and *suffers punishment*. (1 Kings, i. 5; ii. 25.) The wretched victim gained nothing by experience. *Delivered* from one broil, he plunges into another. Indeed who knows what will be the end of undisciplined passion? Cain--*a man of great wrath*

* Bishop HALL'S *Contemplations*, Book xi. xii.

—the murderer of his brother--*the punishment that he suffered* was "greater than he could bear." (Gen. iv. 5-8, 13.) The friendly efforts to restrain this wrath must be repeated again and again (1 Sam. xix. 1-11; xx. 32, 33), even though too often ineffectually. Meanwhile the man *suffers his own punishment*--the miseries of a fierce intestine war, driven about by the fury of his raging lust. Truly "it is a man's discretion to defer his anger" (Verse 11), as the first, often the successful, effort to restrain a passion, the indulgence of which leaves him degraded and defenceless. (Chap. xxv. 28.)

After all that a man boasts of his self-government, there is no fermentation within, which restraint may bind, but cannot subdue. Wounded pride and unquelled resentment leave the wretched criminal in his brooding chamber within, *suffering* an intolerable burden of self-inflicted *punishment*. What then is the radical cure? "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." (Matt. xi. 29.) The glory and encouragement of the gospel is, that religion, with all its difficulties, is a practicable thing. (2 Cor. xii. 9.) "My grace is sufficient for thee"—is the cheering word of Him, who sealed the faithfulness of the promise with his blood. Doubt not then, that "he will perfect that which concerneth us" (Ps. cxxxviii. 8), even to the moulding of the *man of great wrath* into his image of meekness, gentleness, and love.

20. *Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise; in thy latter end.*

We have just had a word for parents, directing their Christian discipline. Here the children are exhorted to humility. Again are they awakened to *hear counsel and instruction*.¹ And constantly do they need the word. "Childhood and youth are vanity."² Present gratification is the main object. Oh! remember that the seed, now sown in the season of youth, will produce either blessed or bitter fruit *in the latter end*. Rich indeed was the harvest from Timothy's early attention to *instruction*.³ Fearful indeed was the judgment upon the scoffers,⁴ the awful death of the profligate,⁵ the ruin of the holy nation⁶--- all the fruit of despising timely wisdom and instruction. Might not Rehoboam⁷ and Amaziahs have escaped the ruin of their kingdom, had they *heard counsel*, and thus obtained *wisdom in their latter end*. 'I am going to die,' said a thoughtless King on his death-bed; 'and yet I have not begun to live.' How does the wisdom of mature age depend upon diligence in *hearing counsel and instruction*! Hence we value "the yoke"—specially of affliction--"borne in youth"--a "good" thing indeed, fraught with profit. (Lam. iii. 27.) In this yoke Joseph *heard* from his

¹ Chap. iv. 1, 2; v. 1, 2; vii. 1, 2.

⁴ Chap. i. 26; xxix. 1.

⁶ Matt. xxiii. 37-39. Luke, xix. 41, 42.

² Eccles. xi. 10.

⁵ Chap. v.9-14.

⁷ 1 Kings, xii. 12-19.

³ 2 Tim. iii. 14, 15.

2 Chron. xxv. 15-20.

God much counsel *and instruction*, that eminently qualified him with *wisdom* for his high responsibility. (Gen. xxxvii. xxxix.-xli.) Daniel, thus early instructed, found *wisdom in the latter end* of a life protracted beyond the ordinary term, that enabled him to superintend a hundred and twenty provinces with singular honour to his profession. (Dan. i. 4-9; vi. 3, 4.)

And then as regards *the latter end*—"the end of all things,"—the wisdom to meet the great crisis is not to be found in thoughtless disregard. *Counsel and instruction* are largely given. But alas! of the most the Lord is constrained to complain—"My people doth not consider. (Isa. i. 3.) And who, in the sight of the mass of ungodliness, can refrain from the weeping lamentation of the man of God,—*"Oh! that they were wise! that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!"* (Deut. xxxii. 29.)

21. There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand.

Here is a fine contrast between man and God, setting out the just relative disproportion between the worm and his Maker. Man's most serious, well-digested thoughts are only *devices*—imagination--uncertainty—a poor nonentity. God's mind is counsel,¹ firm and full purpose. Man's *devices are many*; God's *counsel* is like himself—Unity. *Man's devices* are full of anxiety. Many are eventually fruitless.² All of them are vain.³ God's counsel is immutable, and *shall stand* for ever.⁴ "I will work and who shall let it—My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."⁵

Now when God and man were at one, man's devices were identified with *God's counsel*. Then it was "as the days of heaven upon earth." But ever since the fall, *man's devices and God's counsel* are at opposite. Which will triumph, who can doubt? "There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord." (Chap. xxi. 30. Heb. vi. 17.)

We mark this conflict in every day's life. Man's own way is a way devised by human weakness and folly; and it is impossible to make a solid road out of such frail materials. Even in the most plausible path—a well-calculated moderation in their earthly projects, he is only preparing for himself certain disappointment, and increasing the certainty and perplexity of that disappointment by his every movement. He devises his whole way, when not a single step is under his own control; not one step can he take, for one moment in opposition to the *Lord's counsel*. (Lam. iii. 37.) *That shall stand*, though it may be reluctantly to give him up his own *devices*; still—even after he has left

¹ Eph, i. 11

² Ps. xxi. 11.

³ Ib. xciv. 11.

⁴ Ib. lxxxix. 2; cxix. 89.

⁵ Isa. xliii. 13; xlv. 10.

him—seem to send a longing, lingering look after him.¹ The malice of Joseph's brethren was the means of fulfilling the Divine *counsel* in the salvation of his Church.² The plot laid for the destruction of Israel furthered their prosperity.³ The vain attempts at opposition to Christ were subservient to the great end of "the determinate *counsel* and foreknowledge of God."⁴ The *device of man* to prevent the Apostle's journey to Rome was signally defeated.⁵

How vain the impious attempt to "fight against God!"⁶ "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker!"⁷ Our liberty does not interfere with his secret purpose. But let us be careful, that it does not resist his declared will. As his Providence chooses our lot, let his word discipline our desires, as the best means of bringing them to a prosperous issue. After all, it is a cheering hope. All is clear above, however cloudy it be below. All is calm in heaven, however stormy it may be on earth. There is no confusion there. One will alone reign. Every purpose reaches its appointed end. "He is of one mind, and who can turn him? And what his soul desireth, even that he doeth" (Job, xxiii. 13.)

22. *The desire of a man is his kindness, and a poor man is better than a liar.*

The privilege of doing good is within the reach of all. For when the power fails, *the desire of a man is his kindness*, as acceptable! as the most expensive proof of love. If there be a willing mind, it is accepted, according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not. (2 Cor. viii. 12.) The dealings of God with his people are grounded on this principle. David's *desire* to build the temple was as fully accepted and, honoured, as the act itself was appointed for his son.⁸ Such also was our Saviour's estimate of the value of the widow's mite,⁹--of the box of ointment poured upon himself,¹⁰--of the "cup of cold water given to a disciple."¹¹ *The desire was the kindness*, more rich and fruitful than the offerings of self-pleasing abundance.¹² 'It is the comfort of poverty, that our affections are valued, not our presents.'^{*}

Yet *the desire* must be active; not indolent excitement, but "the communication of faith effectual" according to the power given to us.¹³ Such a *desire* is far *better* in the sight of God, in the heart of one of his *poor* people, than a man with large opportunities and hollow profes-

¹ See Ps. lxxxi. 11-14.

² Gen. xxxvii. 19; xlv. 5, 6.

³ Exod. i. 8-12, 20.

⁴ Ps. ii. 1-6, with Acts, iv. 26-28; ii. 23.

⁵ Acts, xxiii 12, 15, with 11.

⁶ Ib. v. 39.

⁷ Isa. xlv. 9.

⁸ 2 Chron. vi. 8; vii. 12-17.

⁹ Mark, xii. 41-44.

¹⁰ Ib. xiv. 8, 9. ¹¹ Matt. x. 42.

¹² Luke, xxi. 4.

¹³ Philem. 6. 2 Cor. viii. 11.

* Bp. Hall. 'Rich men's presents,' said the Venerable Bede when dying—'are old and silver, or other costly things. Mine must be recommended by the affectionate pleasure with which I give them.'

skins, who proves himself to be a *liar*. (Verse 1. Ps. lxii. 9.) *The poor* gives readily. The rich cannot afford. He denies that he has the ability. He promises, and does nothing. *The poor man is better than the liar*. Only take heed to the motive. Men know not the heart. "The Lord weigheth the spirit" (Chap. xvi. 2); and "the fire will try every man's work of what sort it is." (1 Cor. iii. 13.)

23. *The fear of the Lord tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil.*

The fear of the Lord as a legal principle, it is a privilege to be exempt from.¹ As a grace of the gospel, cultivate it to the uttermost.² Threefold fruit is here set before us — *life—satisfaction—security*.³ *It tendeth to life*--not the mere natural life, common to the ungodly — (though this blessing, so far as is good, is included⁴), but a heavenly, yea—an eternal, life⁵ in the favour and enjoyment of God. So far as we are under its influence, we speak, pray, think, and deal with man, as if God was standing by. The genial beams of "the Sun of righteousness" nourish this holy principle (Mal. iv. 2); and soon will it be perfected in the service above. (Rev. xv. 3, 4.)

Meanwhile the *satisfaction* which it imparts is a precious privilege. The service of God is now our delight—our "great delight." The law is no task-master over our heads, but a principle of life and joyous energy within. The worldling's heart is torn with 'an aching void.' He travels from one source of happiness to another, crying—"Who will shew me any good?" "Lord! lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me"—is the cry and solid *satisfaction* of a child of God, above the best portion of earth. (Ps. iv. 6, 7.) Instead of being cast from wave to wave, here is quiet rest. Whoever wants, "they that fear the Lord want no good thing. Their souls dwell at ease." (Ib. xxxiv. 9, 10; xxv. 12, 13.) *He that hath it shall abide satisfied*. Is not this fixed repose and trust in his love the very soul of happiness?

If it be said, that an object of *fear* usually brings dread. 'But add, whom—*He that feareth the Lord*. That touch turns it into gold. He that so fears, fears not.* He has his "confidence and place of refuge high and sure, an impregnable fortress." (Chap. xiv. 26.) We do not begin to inquire the way. "God is known in the palaces of Zion as a sure refuge." (Ps. xiviii. 3.) We go to him as a God, with whom we are acquainted, and who is engaged in covenant to us. And now taking our sanctuary in God, we sit, and sing under his shadow. In this hiding-place how can any *evil*, properly so called, *visit us*? (Chap. xii. 21.) What is *evil* in itself will turn to good. (Rom. viii. 28. Heb. xii.

¹ Luke, i. 74. Rom. viii. 15. 2 Tim. i. 7.

² Heb. xii. 28. 1 Pet. i. 17.

³ See Eccius. xxxiv. 15-17.

⁴ Chap. ix. 11; x. 27.

⁵ Ps. xxxiii. 18, 19; xxxiv. 11, 12.

* LEIGHTON'S *Sermon on Ps. cxii. 7.*

11.) It cannot separate from God. It will tend only to bind us closer to him. We can tread upon scorpions unhurt, when our conscience is kept tender, and our heart fixed in his ways. We fear not his uplifted arm. But his frown of rebuke "enters into our soul." His mercy sweeps away the fear, of terror. His holiness maintains the fear of reverence. Conscious security only tends more than ever to make us dread departure and separation from his love.

24. *A slothful man hideth his hand in his bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again.*

Another forcible figure of the palsy of sloth!* It so grows on its victim, that he has no heart to do even necessary things for himself; as if he could not take *his hand out of his bosom*; and would rather suffer the cravings of hunger, than make the exertion of putting his food into his mouth. A melancholy picture it is of many fair intentions and promises, and apparently good beginnings in religion—all stopped for want of the effort to overcome the least hindrance. Every religious duty is a burden. The struggle necessary for prayer—the only means of receiving our spiritual food—is too hard. The soul, that seemed to have been awakened, sinks into its former lethargy; and the effort to rouse it becomes each time fainter and more hopeless. The hand cannot be stretched out, though it were to lay hold on a crown.

Some, indeed, seem to feel little or no exertion to be necessary; a plain proof, that they have never been really in earnest about this momentous concern. The conflict is not imaginary. "Woe unto those, who," reposing on the lap of indulgence, "are at ease in Zion." (Amos, vi. 1.) A religion without sacrifice, without diligence, will never open a way to heaven. It is treasuring up unavailing repentance against the latter days. If the work of the day, much more the work of eternity, calls for all diligence. If the Emperor Titus could mourn, that he 'had lost a day,' what will be the stinging remorse of having lost a life! To think, that by a right beginning, followed up by "a patient continuance in well-doing" (Rom. ii. 7), we might have effectively "served the will of God in our generation" (Acts, xiii. 36), so as to have been missed in the world after we had "fallen asleep;" to think that we might have sown seed for eternity, so that our "memory," instead of "rotting," would "have been blessed" (Chap. x. 7); that all this was wished, contemplated, nay—even resolved; yet not an atom of it accomplished: will not this be a thorn for a dying pillow, perhaps the tormenting worm for eternity?

The mere waste of time is far from being the worst part of the evil. It is fatal alike to our well-being, and our well-doing, to condemn our energies to rust out in inactivity. Thomson's excuse for reposing in

* See similar figures Chap. xii. 27; xxvi. 15. Eccles. iv. 5.

his 'Castle of Indolence' was, that he had nothing to do. And doubtless the want of an object is sufficient to, make an idler of a man of talent. But can this ever be the condition of any one — even the least occupied, or the least influential among us? Are any of us freed from the responsibility of diligence, if not for ourselves, at least in the service of our fellow-creatures. Much less can the Christian plead as an excuse for "standing idle," that "no man hath hired him." (Matt. xx. 6, 7.) Is not the great object always in sight, always worthy of all the concentration of mind, talent, and energy — "To me to live is Christ?" (Philip. i. 21.)

The special time for the resistance of this deadly disease, is when we are most under its power. When the Bible is uninteresting as a common book, then is the time to live in it with patient diligence. When prayer is cold and heartless, instead of giving up, hold on, however feebly, yet with perseverance. When in a state of listless exertion, be employed for God and for his Church. Form habits of early energy. Beware of a dreaming sentimentalism. Cultivate bodily activity. Regard the incursions of sloth as the effects of those poisons, which, while they cause sleep, unless counteracted by constant resistance, must prove fatal. Yet with all these means, never forget the one only principle, that makes them effectual — prayer, unceasing, believing, "looking unto Jesus," who not only gives life, but liveliness. (Heb. xii. 1, 2. John, x. 10.)

Christian! He who hath awakened you from the sleep of death, will keep you awake, till the Lord come. Still even with you much drowsiness remains, trifling away time in a tame, barren profession, such as your Lord will not tolerate. He will make you feel, that life is a solemn reality, that prayer is not a half-hearted work, but a close dealing with the living God, a warm pulse of the hidden life, a continued conflict with mighty enemies.

Are you then struggling in this conflict? Look for repose only in the arms of victory. While the conflict lasts, there is no time for loitering or for slumber. Yet forget not to thank God for every victory, yea, for the continued strength, enabling you to persevere in the fight; for the wise dispensation also, that appoints this holy conflict, as the means of invigorating our faith, our hope, our meetness for the crown, and our joyful expectation of it. If peace with God is our life, "the joy of the Lord is our strength" (Neh. viii. 10), our health, our happiness, yet not to be found in a listless, enervated habit.

25. Smite a scorner, and the simple will beware; and reprove one that hath understanding, and he will understand knowledge.

There is a difference of opinion upon the profit of punishments. Some will have it, that, if the will does not give way to reason, forced

obedience is of little use. But God's word and ordinance is our standard, though great wisdom is required in the measure and adaptation. Two kinds are here mentioned; each measured out according to the character of the offender, but both wholesome in their results. *The scorner* is a bold sinner. *Smite him, that the simple may beware.* (Chap. xxi. 11. Acts, xiii. 6-12.) It may be a timely warning to those that are led by him. The taking the ring-leader of a mischievous party may put an end to the combination. This is the benefit of laws. Often an example made, though the sinner himself continues hardened, is for the good of the whole body. Thus 'God strikes some, that he may warn all.'*

But a *man of understanding reprove*. There is no occasion to smite. "A reproof entereth more into a wise man, than a hundred stripes into a fool." (Chap. vii. 10; xv. 5.) In the scorner's case, the profit is to others. In the wise man's, it is to himself. He will understand knowledge. (Chap. ix. 8, 9.) His wisdom enables him to profit, and to be thankful for the seasonable check. (Ps. cxli. 5.) Never let us forget the mercy of being kept from sin, or being restored from it, though it be by our Master's sharp and gracious rebuke—"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore, and repent." (Rev. iii. 19.)

26. *He that wasteth his father, and chaseth away his mother, is a son that causeth shame, and bringeth reproach.*

This is, alas! not an ideal picture of recklessness. "Without natural affection (Rom. i. 30, 31)--is an awful mark of unrestrained depravity. Man is the debased slave of his selfish lust. The profligate may waste his father's substance by extravagance, and his spirits and health by his ill-conduct. Absalom wasted his father by his undutiful rebellion. (2 Sam. xv. 1-14.) And often has a mother's tenderness been repaid with crushing unkindness. The insolence of an ungrateful son virtually chaseth her from her home. Her idol has become her curse! Such monsters in human shape, outraging every principle of humanity, have been found in every generation. Yet seldom do they escape without some mark of retributive justice even in this life. (Chap. xxx. 11, 17.) And though they may be callous to public opinion, while causing shame, and bringing reproach on their names; yet conscience will speak (Isa. lvii. 20); and, sooner or later, the stroke will fearfully fall. Children! A parent's sorrows carry a heavy account before the bar of God. If "the commandment be with promise" (Eph. vi. 2), will not the breach of the commandment cut off the entail of the promise, with an awful and aggravated weight of condemnation?

* Bishop Hall. Compare Exod. xviii. 10, 11. Deut. xiii. 11; xix. 20; xxi. 21. Acts, v. 1-11. Rev. xi. 13.

27. *Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge.**

Hear the same caution from the lips of our Divine Master—"Beware of false prophets. Take heed what ye hear." (Matt. vii. 15. Mark, iv. 24.) All *instruction* is not to life. Teachers of evil, "Ministers of Satan,"¹ abound. And their *instruction, causing to err from the words of knowledge*, is more palatable to the perverseness of the heart; more alluring to the inexperience of the young, than solid Scriptural teaching.² The Apostle reprov'd the Galatian Church for listening to teachers, *causing them to err fatally from the words of knowledge*.³ And would he not have warned us against the same teaching, so fearfully prevalent: placing ordinances in the stead of Christ, or conjoined with him; man's proud work of "voluntary humility" and external service in the room of pure simplicity of reliance on the Redeemer's work? When the soul has thus "fallen from grace" (Ib. v. 4), what ground of confidence can we bring before God? What is his service, but the bondage of outward ceremonies, leading to cheerless despondency?

This *instruction* is not generally a bold and direct departure from truth. But, as in the first temptation (Gen. iii. 1-6), it *causeth to err* so gradually, that the deviation from the straight line is scarcely perceptible, till the mischief has been accomplished. Had Eve at once *ceased to hear*, she would not have *erred from the words of knowledge*. But the success of the first attempt has emboldened the seducer to deal out his deadly poison to her enfeebled children. And what faithful pastor does not feel a "godly jealousy" for his flock, lest by the same beguilement "they should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ?" (2 Cor. xi. 3.)

Insinuating infidels, who endeavour to shake the principles of young persons under the pretence of removing heedless scruples, and enlarging their minds, and delivering them from the shackles of bigotry—such persons shun them as the plague. Let us sound a caution also against false teachers of a more plausible, and therefore more dangerous character. Let their devices and disguises be fully laid open. It is the "wolf," not in his native dress, but "in sheep's clothing." (Matt. vii. 15.) "Cunning craftiness" is the distinctive character of the instruction. (Eph. iv. 14.) All that is pleasing is brought out as a cover for the delusion. Perhaps never was the poison commended in so attractive a form. All the charms of elegant fiction are employed to give effect to it. A lovely picture of practical religion is exhibited.

¹ 2 Cor. xi. 18-15.

² Isa. xxx. 10. Jer. v. 31.

³ Gal. i. 6, 7; iii. 1-4; v. 7, 8.

* There is some difficulty upon the rendering of this verse—but Holden concludes the 'least interpretation to be that of our Translators.' Mr. Scott adds, that 'this translation is of so much importance, that it should not be lightly departed from.'

Or the deliverance from the fowler's open snare is pourtrayed with glowing colour of interest. Superficial readers are captivated by the external loveliness. Parents -- sometimes even Christian parents -- commend to their children these pictures as models of domestic religion or Church orthodoxy. But the wise watchman would raise his warning voice--*Cease, my son, from hearing.*--To hear—to regard—is *to err*. All these beauteous sketches of fancy are the framework, that conceal principles most unscriptural. Weigh them in the balances of the sanctuary, and they will be found wanting. Trace them to their source, and it will be found to be a corrupt fountain. The Church, not Christ, is the foundation principle. A human standard, not the word of God, is the rule. *Cease from hearing.*¹

Indeed everywhere we would give the warning, that needlessly to tamper with error, is "entering into temptation." Nay, it is most hazardous to deal with it at all, ere our minds are thoroughly grounded in the truth, and we have obtained "the good thing of the heart established with grace."² Yet we have senses given for discernment. Use increaseth this discernment.³ Increasing clearness should be the matter of daily supplication.⁴ We are bound therefore to exercise our senses by the plainest commands.⁵ Our Divine Master distinctly rebukes indolence.⁶ When the words came with the stamp of an apostle, the appeal to the unerring standard was highly commended⁷ Should we give up our judgment to the Church, be it remembered, that "every one of us shall bear his own burden, and shall give an account of himself to God."⁸ Be the son, not the slave, of the Church, Reverence her just authority; but maintain that right of private judgment, which constitutes our personal responsibility.

This Christian independence however must be held with humility and simplicity. The duty of private judgment must be felt as one's own burden, to be cast on none but God. Hence we must carefully restrain self-will. We must attend the ordinances in the spirit of learners rather than as judges desiring to gather instruction in child-like simplicity, and watching lest the appetite for wholesome food should give place to a spiritual lust. (See 2 Tim. iv. 3.) While the right of judgment is our great privilege, never let us forget, that the licentiousness of it is a cankering evil. If the Romanist enslave the right, let the sound Protestant discipline its exercise.

But what-- if our lot be manifestly cast, and our sphere of Christian obligation opened, where *words of knowledge* are not found? We would suggest at commencement, that particular cases require particular application. There may be cases, when the call would be direct to

¹ Rom. xvi. 17, 18. 1 Tim. vi. 3-5. 2 Tim. ii. 16, 17.

³ Heb. v. 14.

⁶ Luke, xii. 57.

⁴ Phil. i. 9, 10. M.R.

⁷ Acts, xvii. 11. Comp. Isa. viii. 20.

² Heb. xiii. 9.

⁵ 1 Thess. v. 21. 1 John, iv. I.

⁸ Gal. vi. 5. Rom. xiv. 12.

cease from hearing. If the teaching be heretical, or wholly unevangelical, if the teacher's life be immoral or scandalously worldly; if the children and servants of the family are manifestly in danger of being *caused to err*, the path may be made plain to depart. And yet in this case much exercise of mind, much personal sacrifice would be called for to separate from the Minister, not from the Church. And under no circumstances let the ungodliness of the Minister be an excuse for the neglect of Christian ordinances. At the same time, in many more cases than are ordinarily supposed, the mature Christian will remain in his place, continue in prayer, abound in labour of love, meekly use, as occasion may allow, the weapons of admonition and reproof, display a consistent example, and take up his appointed cross. In some cases, when the offence is open, and the error manifest, sound discipline may bring the heretical or ungodly teacher to punishment, and thus open the way for better instruction.

To the mass—who are mainly dependent upon the Ministry for instruction, some forbearance must be admitted, even should they be constrained by hunger to *cease from hearing* those, who would give them a stone for bread. At least the main guilt lies on "the stranger," not on them, that flee from him, for they "know not his voice." (John, x. 5.) Fearful indeed will be the witness of many a soul neglected, if not "destroyed, for lack" of hearing *the words of knowledge*. Assured as we are, that the preaching of Christ is the alone preservation from this tremendous evil, if Christ be preached, and sinners are converted to him by other less accredited teachers, "we do rejoice, yea, and we will rejoice." (Philip. i. 18.) Yet where Christians can abide, let them do so—Let them "trust in the Lord, and do good."* *The words of knowledge* always, will they hear from the Church, if not from her Ministers. The deficiency in privilege will be abundantly supplied. Christian activity will be a quickening means of grace. The constant application of the touchstone will be a preservation from error. The food of the word will be more precious. And who knows but an enlightened Minister may be given to the power of believing prayer, and to the living influence of godly meekness, patience, and consistency?

28. *An ungodly witness* (witness of Belial, marg.) *scorneth judgment, and the mouth of the wicked devoureth iniquity.* 29. *Judgments are prepared for scorers, and stripes for the back of fools.*

Justly is this man called *a witness of Belial*. Satan himself hath suborned him for his own malicious purposes.† *Scorning*, instead of

* Ps. xxxvii. 3. See a remarkable instance in the *Life* of Mr. Walker of Truro.

† 1 Kings, xxi. 13. Such was the keen description of the Roman Satirist—

Tam facile et pronum est Superos contemnere testes, &c.

JUVEN, *Sat.* xiii. 75.

regarding *judgment*, his testimony is worthless. He has "cast the law behind his back." He *devours iniquity* with greediness, feeds upon it as his proper food, and, sinning without remorse, he is always ready to trade in his deceit, either for gain or revenge.

But in this greedy *devouring* he has swallowed the hook with the bait. *For such scorers judgments are prepared.* For such *fools* as thus "make a mock of sin" (Chap. xiv. 9)--*stripes* are ready for their backs, often inflicted by men, the instruments of God. *Scorners* are warned "lest their bands be made strong" (Isa. xxviii. 22) for *judgment*, which, however they may despise, they cannot resist. Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the day that I shall deal with thee? Who shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who shall dwell with everlasting burnings? It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.¹ Oh! that thoughtless, light-minded young-person; would lay such words to heart! When they join in the laugh of their more hardened companions, and learn from them to *scorn judgment*, in spite of the accusings of a conscience not yet silenced; let them tremble, lest from "standing in the way of sinners," they may go on to "sit in the seat of the *scornful*" (Ps. i. 1), and may even exceed their companions in despising the threatenings of God.

And when under these slighted *judgments*, who is to blame for them? 'Our sin'—saith Bishop Hall—'is our own, and the wages of sin is death. He that doth the work, earns the wages. So then the righteous God is cleared both of our sin and our death. Only his justice pays us what our evil deeds deserve. What a wretched thing is a wilful sinner, that will needs be guilty of his own death!*' Blessed—blessed day! should it ever see him bemoaning himself thus—"Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God." (Jer. xxxi. 18.)

CHAPTER XX.

1. Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.

THE history of the world from the days of Noah (Gen. ix. 21) proves, that the love of *wine and strong drink* is a most insidious vice. The wretched victims are convinced too late, that they have been *mocked* and grievously *deceived*. Not only does it overcome them before they are aware, but it promises pleasures which it can never give. And yet so mighty is the spell, that the besotted slave consents to be *mocked*

¹ Ezek. xxii. 14. Isa. xxxiii. 14. Heb. x. 31.

* *Works*, viii. 156.

again and again, till "at last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder." (Chap. xxiii. 29-32.)

Its *raging* power degrades below the level of the beasts. The government of reason is surrendered to lust, appetite, or passion.¹ Ahasuerus, with his merry heart, shewed himself most irrational.² The conqueror of the East murdered his friend. All is tumult and recklessness. The understanding is gradually impaired.* "The heart, uttereth perverse things." (Chap. xxiii. 33.) Other sins of the same black dye follow in its train,† often hurrying into the very jaws of destruction.³ Surely then *whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise*.

Humbling indeed is it to human nature, to see, not only the mass of the ignorant, but splendid talents, brutalized by this lust; that which was once "created in the image of God," now sunk into the dregs of shame! Yet more humbling is the sight even of God's own people "wallowing in this mire." The examples of Noah and Lot are recorded (Gen. xix. 33), not as a laughing-stock to the ungodly, but as a beacon to the saints. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. x. 12.) Even au Apostle had practically learnt, that his security lay not in the innate strength of his principles, but in the unceasing exercise of Christian watchfulness. (Ib. ix. 27.) "Take heed to yourselves"—is the needful warning of our Divine Master—"lest your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and so that day come upon you unawares. Be not drunk with wine"—said the great Apostle—"wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit." (Luke, xxi. 34. Eph. v. 18.)

2. *The fear of a king is as the roaring of a lion; whoso provoketh, him to anger sinneth against his own soul.*

The wrath of the king has been before mentioned under this figure. (Chap. xix. 12.) Here *his fear* is described, the effect for the cause. Even Joab with 'all his valour, trembled at this *roaring of the lion*, and fled for refuge to the horns of the altar.⁴ Jonathan felt the strong necessity for appeasing it.⁵ Such was the power of the king (unknown in our happy land) the sole, the uncontrolled arbiter of life and death;⁶ *whosoever therefore provoked him to anger*, sinned, as Adonijah found to his cost (1 Kings, ii. 23), *against his own soul*. What must then be *the fear* of the Great King! 'Armies of terrors and doubts are nothing to a look of his angry countenance. "O Lord," says that holy man (considering the frailty of poor man, and the power of God) "who knoweth

¹ 1 Sam. xxv. 36. Isa. lvi. 12. Hos. vii. 5.

² Esth. i. 10-12.

³ 2 Sam. xiii. 28. 1 Kings, xvi. 8-10; xx. 16. Jer. li. 39, 57. Dan. v. 1-4. Nah. i. 10.

⁴ 1 Kings, ii. 28-34.

⁵ 1 Sam. xix. 4-6. Eccles. x. 4.

⁶ Chap. xvi. 14. Esth. vii. 8.

* Isa. xxviii. 7. Hos. iv. 11. Plato determines that not only old men, but drunkards, come to childhood.—*De Legibus*, I.

† Gen. xix. 83. Isa. v. 11, 12, 22, 23. See the fine description, 1 Esdras, iii. 13-24.

the power of thine anger? according to *thy fear*, so is thy wrath."* Even "a little kindling" is ruin past conception, and without remedy? (Ps. ii. 12.) Nay—his very "enduring long-suffering," kindles the fire more fiercely for "the vessels of wrath," whose aggravated provocations of it have "fitted them for destruction." (Rom. ix. 22.) Miserable sinner! deprecate his wrath. Seek a Mediator. Beware of continuing to sin.†

3. *It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling.*

The opposition of this precept to the maxim of the world proves it to, be from God. A world of sin must always be a world of *strife*, because governed by "the wisdom that descendeth not from above," the parent of "*strife*, confusion, and every evil work." (Jam. iii. 14-16.) And yet an evil world is a fine theatre for the display of the grace of God, in the fruits of "the wisdom that is from above"—meekness, gentleness. (Ib. 17, 18.) We have been before reminded, that "it is the glory of a man to pass over transgression" (Chap. xix. 11); here—to *cease from strife*. Many from the love of quiet, if not from a better motive, would overlook an injury. Yet if they were embroiled in strife, they would feel their *honour* at stake, not in *ceasing from it*, but in following it up, striking the last blow. Far more difficult is it to gather back the waters once let out, than to restrain them within their proper bounds. To "leave off contention,"‡ especially when we see that we are in the wrong; or—if in the right—that no good will come from it--this "is an high *honour for a man*, a noble triumph over the flesh."¹ Abraham thus *ceased from strife* by disinterested concession. (Gen. xiii. 8, 9.) Isaac spewed himself a man of peace under the vexatious annoyance of the Philistines. (Ib. xxvi. 17—31) The prophet "went his way," to prevent a further kindling of anger. (Jer. xxviii. 11.) But how much more commonly is *strife* fed by the folly of man's pride, than extinguished by a peaceful and loving spirit!² *The meddling fool* rushes into strife as his element:³ and thus becomes a torment to himself, and a plague to those around him. To return "a soft answer" to "grievous words,"⁴ and to keep out of the way of an angry person,⁵ is the path of wisdom. To "put on meekness and long-suffering," and to "let the peace of God rule in our hearts"—these

¹ Chap. xvi. 32. Rom. xii. 21. ² Judg. viii. 1; xii. 1.

³ Chap. xviii. 6; 2 Sam. x. 1-14; 2 Kings, xiv. 8. 4 Chap. xv. 1. 5 Chap. xxv. 8.

* LEIGHTON'S *Sermon on Jer. x. 23, 24.* Ps. xc. 11.

† Geier *in loco*.

‡ Chap. xvii. 14. Indeed—as Schultens remarks—'Solomon is here giving full significance to this former proverb, which however'—he adds—'considered by itself, strongly sets out the disgraceful and most dishonourable lust of quarrelling.'

are the marks of "the elect of God," following the example of our Divine Master. (Col. iii. 12-45.)

4. *The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold: therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing.*

Again (Chap. xix. 15, 24) are we instructed by a vivid picture of a most baneful vice. *The sluggard* always has his excuses ready to shift off any work, that requires exertion. *He will not plough by reason of the cold*; although the season (our autumn) offered no hindrance, where the heart was in the work. And does not the most trifling difficulty hinder, where the heart is *cold* in the service of God? Let the professor ask himself--Have his prayers during his whole life cost him exercise answering to one hour's *ploughing*? What has he given to God but the shadow of duties, when the world has had his full glow and energy? The flesh flinches from suffering; and even, under the wakefulness of temporary conviction, the heart is "sorrowful" at the requisitions of Christianity, which it cannot admit.* Farewell heaven for ever, if it must be obtained at such a cost. How affecting is the contrast between our work for Christ, and his work for us—We grudging exercise for him; He so filled with the absorbing interest of his work—"How am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Luke, xii. 50.)

But *the sluggard* must reap the fruit of his sin. *If he will not plough in the seed-time, he cannot reap in harvest.* At that happy season---the recompense of the labourer's toil—he *shall beg, and have nothing.* 'Men's hearts are justly hardened against that man, who by his own sloth and sinfulness hath brought himself to want.† And what else can the spiritual *sluggard* look for? *The cold* keeps him heartlessly from the house of God. His soul is therefore perishing for lack of good. If wishing would secure heaven, who would miss it? But heartless wishes, without the crucifixion of the flesh, will stop short of the promise. Millions have perished in serious religion, from want of diligence and self-sacrificing devotedness. And what will it be to *beg in the great harvest*, and beg in vain;¹ then to have all wicked excuses silenced, and the fearful doom pronounced upon the unprofitable servant!²

Christian professor! is it time to stand idle, when we stand at the door of eternity? —to be slack, when so near our great salvation? (Rom. xiii. 11.) 'Blessed are those, who have sown much for God in their lifetime. Oh! the glorious harvest that those shall have ! The

¹ Matt. xxv. 3-9. Luke, xvi. 24.

² Matt. xxv. 26-30.

* Matt. xix. 21, 22. The shrinking from *the cold*—(as Melancthon observes in his brief comment on this verse)—is the avoiding the cross.

† POOLE'S *Annotations*.

very angels shall help them to take in their harvest at the great day. And oh! the joy that there shall be in that harvest! The angels will help to sing the harvest-song, that they shall sing, who have been sowers of righteousness!*

5. *Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out.*

The depths in the heart of man are not easily fathomed. Often are they the subtilty of evil.¹ David was duped by the smooth promises of Saul,² and afterwards by the religious hypocrisy of his ungodly son.³ The counsel of Daniel's enemies was too *deep* for Darius to see the bottom of it.⁴ The *counsel* of Herod probably blinded the wise men as to his real intentions.⁵ And yet a man of understanding will often *draw out* the subtle *counsel*, and set it in its true light. David described the *deep counsels* of his enemies, as one who had penetrated the bottom.⁶ Job accurately discovered the true, but indirect, *counsel* of his mistaken friends. (Job, xxi. 27, 28.) Paul *drew out* the secret counsel of selfishness in the schismatical preachers of the gospel. (Phil. i. 15.)

But let us look at the bright side. Observe a man of God, instructed by God. Natural sagacity of intellect is deepened and enlarged by spiritual light. His mind is enriched with the fruits of scriptural study and meditation. Here *are the deep waters of heavenly counsel*.⁷ The talkative professor in his superficial judgment sees nothing. *But a man of understanding* will discover and draw out valuable instruction. The Queen of Sheba thus drew out from the wise man's capacious well *deep* and wholesome *water*. (1 Kings, x. 1-7. Often, however, men of comprehensive mind have little sympathy with general society. We may be in contact with them, without consciousness of their worth. The *waters are deep*; but there is no bubbling up. Yet a well-directed excitement will *draw out* flowing water from the well-spring of wisdom. And often the intercourse, hitherto lost, with a godly and experienced minister, or a soundly-instructed Christian, becomes most precious—"He that walketh with wise men shall be wise." (Chap. xiii. 20.) But above all is to be prized familiarity with *the deep waters of the counsel* of God. Say not—"I have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep." (John, iv. 11.) A thinking habit in the exercise of prayer will enable you "with joy to draw water from the wells of salvation." (Isa. xii. 3.) Nay—will it not bring into your own soul "a well of water, springing, up unto everlasting life?" (John, iv. 14.)

¹ Jer. xvii. 9.

² 1 Sam. xviii. 17-20.

³ 2 Sam. xv. 7-9.

⁴ Dan. vi. 4-9.

⁵ Matt. ii. 8.

⁶ Ps. lxiv. 5, 6; cxix. 98.

⁷ Chap. xviii. 4. Contrast xxvi. 7, 9.

* BURROUGHS on Hos. x. 12.

6. *Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness; but a faithful man who can find?*

The last Proverb spewed *the depth* of the heart; this its deceitfulness and pride. Hear a man's own estimate of himself, and we need no further proof of his want of self-knowledge. (Chap. xvi. 2.) Even the ungodly *proclaims his own goodness*, "Jehu took no heed to walk in the way of the Lord." Still—said he—"Come, see my zeal for the Lord."¹ Absalom, while treason was at work within, "stole the hearts" of the people by his loud pretensions to *goodness*.² The whole nation, while given up to all manner of iniquity, boasted of its integrity.³ The Pharisee *proclaimed his goodness* at the corner of the streets;⁴ yea—even in the presence of his God.⁵ Such is the blindness of a self-deceiving heart! Lord! teach me to remember—"That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God."⁶

After all, however, does not this glass, honestly used, exhibit more resemblance to our own features, than we would readily admit? We all condemn the open boasting of the Pharisee. But too often we eagerly catch at the good opinion of the world. Contrivance is made to gain the shadowy prize! A *seeming* backwardness is only, in order that others may bring us forward. Care is taken, that it be known that we were the authors, or at least, that we had a considerable part in some work, that might raise our name in the Church. Sometimes we are too ready to take a degree of credit to ourselves, which we do not honestly deserve;* while we shrink from real reproach and obloquy for the gospel's sake.

In opposition to this self-complacent goodness, Solomon, an accurate observer of human nature, exclaims almost in despondency--*A faithful man*—as a parent--a reprover—an adviser---one "without guile"--*who can find?* (Mic. vii. 1, 2.) Look close. View thyself in the glass of the word. (Ps. ci. 6.) Does thy neighbour, or thy friend, find thee *faithful* to him? What does our daily intercourse witness? Is not the attempt to speak what is agreeable often made at the expense of truth? Are not professions of regard sometimes utterly inconsistent with our real feelings? In common life, where gross violations are restrained, a thousand petty offences are allowed, that break down the wall between sin and duty, and, judged by the Divine standard, are

¹ 2 Kings, x. 16, 19-31.

² 2 Sam.. xv. 1-6.

³ Jer. ii. 23, 35; v. 1. Comp. Rom. ii. 17-23.

⁴ Matt. vi. 1, 2, 5, 16; xxiii. 5. Comp. chap. xxvii. 2.

⁵ Luke, xviii. 11, 12.

⁶ Ib. xvi. 15.

* Chap. xxv. 14. Thus Lysias, the chief captain, represented to the governor, that he had interposed for Paul from his zeal for a Roman citizen, when the simple truth was, that he was ignorant of the fact at the time, and was about to scourge him as a rebel. Acts, xxiii. 27, with xxi. 33, xxii. 24.

indeed guilty steps upon forbidden ground. Never let it be forgotten, that the sound influence of the social virtues can only be maintained by the graces of the gospel. Never let the Christian professor deem moral integrity to be a low attainment. The man of God bursts forth into fervent praise for upholding grace in this path. (Ib. xlii. 11, 12.) For indeed, what can bring greater honour to God, than the proof manifested in the conduct of his people, that their daily transactions are animated with the soul of integrity, that their word is unchangeable? Never does godliness shine more bright, than in "shewing all good fidelity in all things." (Tit. ii. 10.)

7. *The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him.*

The faithful man is here fully drawn, rich in the blessing of his God. Take the history of the father of the faithful. Abraham was *the just* man, accepted with God, and "*walking before him in his integrity*." And did not the covenant of his God engage an everlasting *blessing for his children after him*? (Gen. xvii. 1, 2, 7.) And thus does every child of Abraham, *walking in the same integrity*, secure "an inheritance for his children's children."¹ It is 'not however for the merits of the parent, that they deserve it: but such is the mercy of God to the root and the branches; that, because the fathers are loved, their children also are embraced.* But we must shew our *integrity*, as did our father Abraham, in the practical habit of faith; not only "taking hold of the covenant" on our children's behalf, but bringing them under the yoke of the covenant."²

Christian parents!—let *integrity*, as before God, be the broad stamp of our family religion. Walk not according to the maxims of the world yourselves, nor allow them in your children. Let us make God's word—his whole word—our universal rule; his ways, however despised, our daily portion. "Let us seek *first*," for our children as for ourselves, "the kingdom of God and his righteousness."† Thus *walking in our integrity*, we may look for the honoured blessing of being the parents of a godly race. *Our children are blessed after us*; perhaps "*after* we, having served our own generation by the will of God, shall

¹ Chap. xiii. 22. Comp. Ex. xx. 5, 6. Ps. xxv. 12, 13; xxxvii. 26; cxii. 2.

² Chap. xxii. 6, with Gen. xviii. 19.

* Muffet *in loco*. 'The branches fare better for the sap of grace in the root.'—Swiss-Nock's Christian Man's Calling, p. 383. 'When God saith—He will be a God to, the godly man and to his children, I believe he intended more in that promise for the comfort of godly parents than most of them think of. Acts, ii. 39. Gen. xvii. 7. The children of believers are heirs apparent to the co'benant of grace in their parents' right.'—Ib. *The True Christian*, p. 193.

† Matt. vi. 33. This was Mr. Scott's grand rule of edification; and the manifest honour, which his Master vouchsafed to his singleness and integrity in acting it out, is well known. 1 Sam. ii. 30. See *Life*, pp. 611-614.

have fallen asleep." (Acts, xiii. 36.) But well may we be content to wait the coming of that great disclosing day, when "the thoughts of many hearts shall be revealed." For then surely will the *children's blessing* be found in the secret records of Heaven, linked with the prayerful, practical exercises of the parents' faith and love.

8. *A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes.*

This is the picture of a godly king, such as the wise man's father described and exemplified; "just, ruling in the fear of God;"¹ making it his great care and business to execute judgment. In those days he *sat himself on the throne of judgment*, and decided the law.* And such might be conceived to be his influence, that the wicked dared not come and sin in his presence. "Will he force the queen also *before me*?" (Esth. vii. 8) —was the indignant exclamation of a sovereign, on feeling not only his own rights, but the reverence for royalty, grossly outraged. David, as a man of God, and a sovereign of his people; could not endure the wicked in his presence. (Ps. ci. 3-8.)

At present, "God standeth in the congregation of princes" (Ib. lxxxii. 1), observing the manner, in which they execute the power delegated to them; but hereafter he shall sit as "a judge" even of them, who, by reason of that delegated power, are styled "gods." The care then of the Magistrate, when he goeth up to the judgment-seat, will be to put on righteousness as a glorious and beautiful robe, and to render his tribunal a fit emblem of that eternal "throne," of which "justice and judgment are the habitation."† And always in proportion as the ruler realizes his solemn responsibility, *evil* will be made to flee, and *scattered away* from him.‡

But what is to be ever standing before the Great King, *who scattereth away all evil with his eyes*? "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight. All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." (Heb. i. 13. Ps. v. 5. Heb. iv. 13.) May the High Priest ever stand between the sinner and the Holy God, that, while we walk in reverence, we "may not be afraid with any amazement!"

¹ 2 Sam. xxiii. 3, with 2 Sam. viii. 15. 1 Kings, xv. 5.

* 1 Kings, iii. 16-28, with x. 9. A Roman commentator (Corn. Lapide) mentions the custom of St. Louis of France to sit twice a-week *in the throne of judgment*, and his dying charge to his successor, not only to appoint the most upright judges, but to overlook them in the discharge of their office. Does not the Court of the *Queen's Bench* suppose the Sovereign to be sitting there in determination of judgment?

† Ps. lxxxix. 14. Bishop HORNE's *Sermon on the Great Assize*.

‡ Verse 26; xxv. 4, 5. Comp. 2 Chron. xv. 16. Plutarch relates of Cato, that such was the reverence of his character, that the bad women of Rome could not bear his look.

9. *Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?*

Behold the Great King *sitteth on the throne of judgment*, and challenging every child of Adam—"Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee; and answer thou me." (Job, xxxviii. 3.) The question is confounding. The answer humbles us in the dust—Who can say—truly say---*I have made my heart clean?* A sinner in his self-delusion may conceive himself to be a saint. But that a saint should ever believe that he *made himself so*, is impossible. *Who can say--I am pure from my sin?* What! no vain thoughts, no sinful imaginations, lodging within! No ignorance, pride, wandering, coldness, worldliness, unbelief indulged! The more we search the heart, the more will its impurity open upon us. "Turn thou yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations" (Ezek. viii.. 13), evils hitherto unsuspected. Vain boasters there are, who proclaim their good hearts. But the boast proves, not their goodness, but their blindness; that man is so depraved, that he cannot understand his own depravity.¹ What say they, who have entered into the presence of the King, whose holiness *scattereth away all evil?* "Behold! I am vile!" said one. "Now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself." "Woe is me"—said another--"for I am a man of unclean lips, for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."² Take again one—counted as the foremost of the saints of God; a very flame of love for Christ and his Church; "in labours more abundant than all;" in tenderness as a mother for her new-born child; in walk "holy, just, and unblameable"--does he speak of his *purity from, sin?* Verily in his highest state of Christian attainment he feels himself to be the chief of sinners—a wondrous "pattern of Divine long-suffering." (1 Tim. i. 15, 16.) Such was the mighty power of depravity, mingled with such shining grace, that but for a miracle of instant Almighty help, he might have been thrown from "the third heavens into the snare of the devil."³ To descend to the level near to our own day. 'Once I thought'—said a holy man of God—'some humiliating expressions of the saints of God, too low for me—proud, blind wretch as I was! Now I can say with Edwards 'Infinite upon infinite only reaches to my sinfulness.' '* And indeed there is not a conscious child of God, that does not drink into this self-abased spirit. But for the clear manifestation of gospel grace, should we not have cause to tremble, lest our sins—after such multiplied engagements on our part, and such tender long-suffering on God's part—should remain in all their hundredfold aggravations uncanceled in the great account, and consign us in just demerit "to everlasting

¹ 1 John, i. 8. Comp. 1 Kings, viii. 46. Eccles. vii. 20. Jer. ii. 35. Hos. xii. 8.

² Job, xl. 4; xlii. 5, 6. Isa. vi. 5. ³ 2 Cor. xii. 2-7, with 1 Tim. iii. 6, 7.

* VENN's *Life*, p. 183.

punishment?" The *clean heart* therefore is not the *heart pure from sin*, but the heart cleansed and renewed by grace. And truly, if none can say---*I have made my heart clean*, myriads can witness to the blood of him, who is the Son of God, cleansing it from guilt (1 John, i. 7), and to the mightiness of the Creator to renew it unto holiness.

But are there not many, who in the house of God will confess themselves miserable sinners, and at the holy table will acknowledge 'the burden of their sin to be intolerable,' who yet will go back to the world, and boast or comfort themselves in the confidence of their goodness? confessing indeed, that they are sinners, but stoutly warding off every charge of sin? Ah! such are not "the heavy-laden," to whom Christ hath promised "rest" (Matt. xi. 28); not "the lost, whom the Son of Man is come to seek and to save." (Luke, xix. 10.) They will lie beside the cleansing fountain, but never care to "wash and be clean." But observe in this proverb the fundamentals of the gospel—man's total corruption ; his inability to make his heart clean; and his grievous tendency to self-deception. Hence his need. Hence, when that need is felt, the value of the cleansing remedy. "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part in me." If this be so, then, Lord, "not my feet only, but my hands and my head." (John, xiii. 8, 9.) "Wash me thoroughly from my transgressions, that I may be whiter than snow. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." (Ps. li. 2, 7, 10.)

10. Divers weights (a stone and a stone, marg.) and divers measures (an ephah and an ephah, marg.) both of them are alike abomination to the Lord.

This probably refers to the iniquitous custom of having *different* weights and measures for buying and for selling—one *stone* too heavy the other too light. Such practices seem to have been among the crying sins of the nation, that brought down the judgment of God upon it.¹ So opposite are they to the character of "a God of truth and without iniquity,"² that the very *stone and ephah were abomination to him*.³ The disuse of barter, and the more accurate system of inspection, have in some measure restrained this gross form of fraud. But the cheats of trickery and close dealing, the evasion of legal duties, taking advantage of the ignorance of the unwary--all those deviations from the scriptural standard are *alike abomination to the Lord*. 'A very grievous thing it is to think of the several kinds of frauds and deceits, wherein men are grown wondrous expert, and so shameless withal, that they think it rather a credit to them, as an argument of their perfect understanding

¹ Hos. xii. 7. Amos, viii. 4, 5. Mic. vi. 10, 11.

² Deut, xxxii. 4.

³ Verse 23; xi. 1; Ps. v. 6.

in their several mysteries and particular professions, than any blemish to them in their Christian profession.* What a fearful disclosure will the great day make, to the "shame and everlasting contempt" of the ungodly trafficker! Every man of moral integrity will scorn the flagrant breach of the golden rule. But let this, as every other temptation, be a matter of prayerful watchfulness. And be not satisfied with abstaining from this hateful vice. But blot out its darkness by the bright, steady shining of an upright profession, full of simplicity, love, self-forgetfulness, and active sympathy with our neighbour's wants. "Let integrity and uprightness preserve me; for I wait on thee." (Ps. xxv. 21.)

11. Even a child is known by his doings,† whether his work be pure, and whether it be right.

Let parents watch their children's early habits, tempers, and doings. Generally the discerning eye will mark something in the budding of the young tree, by which the tree in maturity *may be known*. The child will tell what the man will be. No wise parent will pass over little faults, as if it was only a child doing childish things. Everything should be looked at as the index of the secret principle, and the work or word should be judged by the principle. If a child be deceitful, quarrelsome, obstinate, rebellious, selfish, how can we help trembling for his growth? A docile, truth-loving, obedient, generous child—how joyous is the prospect of the blossom and fruit from this hopeful budding! From the childhood of Samuel,¹ Timothy,² much more of the Saviour,³ we could not but anticipate what the manhood would be. The early *purity* and *right* principles promised abundant and most blessed fruit.

But do we mourn over the evil of our child, specially when tracing it to its original source? Oh! let it be our stimulus to earnest and persevering prayer, and to the diligent use of the appointed means for that entire change of heart and nature, which we so intensely desire. Take the child to the covenant of grace. Put the finger on the parental promise (Gen. xvii. 7), and plead—"Remember the word unto thy servant, whereunto thou hast caused me to hope." (Ps. cxix. 49.) The answer may be delayed. But "though it tarry, wait for it. For at the end it shall come; it shall not tarry." Meanwhile "live by faith" (Heb. ii. 3, 4); work in faith. Never forget that we serve "the God of Hope." Despair not of his grace. Doubt not his faithfulness. Hold on in active energy and patient hope. The tears of despondency

¹ Sam. i. 28; iii. 19, 20. ² 2 Tim. iii. 14, 15, with i. 5. Phil. ii. 20, 21.

³ Luke, ii. 50-52.

* Bishop SANDERSON'S Sermon on I Sam. xii. 3.

† 'A child is known by his conversation.'—Bishop Coverdale.

shall be changed into tears of joy, giving a happy glow of warmth to every tender remonstrance, and animating every prudential effort. Thus the prodigal shall yet return. "The end of the Lord" will put unbelief to shame. (James, v. 11.) Sore indeed was the trial of the faith of Augustine's mother. But most glorious was the crown of her patient wrestling constancy. And ever since has the judgment of the godly Archbishop—"It is impossible that the child of so many prayers could ever perish"—been treasured up in the Church, as an axiom of accredited warrant, and cheering support.

12. The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made both of them.

Seeing and hearing are the two senses, by which instruction is conveyed to the mind, They are component parts of that Divine structure, so "fearfully and wonderfully made."* The natural senses are gifts common to all. The spiritual senses are the special gifts of sovereign power and grace.¹ It was left for man to make the ear that cannot hear, and the eye that cannot see; and then to degrade himself to the senseless level, by worshipping the work of his own hand. (Ps. cxv. 4-8.) But the *hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made both of them.*

Man is deaf and blind in the things of God—"Having ears, he hears not; having eyes, he sees not." (Matt. xiii. 13, 14.) The voice of mercy is disregarded. To his need, and to his remedy, he is alike insensible. His ear is open to sound advice, to moral doctrine, to the dictates of external decency. But as to the gospel, he is a mere statue, without life: All his senses are blinded, deadened, chained. (2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.) His moral disabilities can only be removed by that Almighty power, which on earth gave ears to the deaf, and sight to the blind.² As soon could we create our natural, as new-create our spiritual, self. 'The *hearing ear*, which Solomon intends, is that which believeth and obeyeth what it heareth. The *seeing eye* is that, which so seeth, as that it followeth the good which it seeth.'† But who of us, whose ears are wakened, and whose *eyes* are opened, will not rejoice in the adoring acknowledgment—*The Lord hath made both of them?* Would Lydia have ascribed "the opening of her heart" with a new power of attention and interest to her own natural effort? (Acts, xvi. 14. Comp. Isa. i. 4.) O my God---may the *ears and eyes which thou hast made* be for thyself alone ! to hear thy voice (1 Sam. iii. 9. Ps. lxxxv. 8) —to "behold thy beauty." (Ps. xxvii. 4 ; lxiii. 2.)

¹ Matt. xiii. 16, with Deut. xxix. 2-4. ² Mark, vii. 34; viii. 22, 25, with Isa. xxxv. 5.

* Ps. cxxxix. 14. Comp. Ps. xciv. 9. Exod. iv. 11. The celebrated Galen is said to have been converted from Atheism by an attentive observation of the perfect structure of the eye.

† CARYL on Job, xxxiv. 3.

13. *Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread.*

Use 'sleep, as tired nature's sweet restorer.'* So man requires it. So God graciously gives it. (Ps. iii. 5; iv. 8; cxxvii. 2.) Without it "man" could not "go forth to his work and to his labour." (Ib. civ. 23.) Thus recruited for the active diligence of the day, *he opens his eyes*, "in the sweat of his brow *he eats his bread* (Gen. iii. 19), *and is satisfied with it.*" But *love not sleep* for its own sake. 'Let your sleep be necessary and healthful, not idle and expensive of time beyond the needs and conveniences of nature.'† Otherwise may it become a baneful and ruinous habit, by which the man of talent, who has much responsibility upon his hand, and no heart to act up to it--*cometh to poverty*. Valuable opportunities for improvements are let slip, and "the strong man armed" readily takes possession of his prey. (Chap. v. 9-11.) Strange inconsistency and delusion! Man wishes for a long life, and yet wilfully shortens the life given to him, by dozing it away in sleep!‡ The time given for eternity is wasted. The talent entrusted for trading is hid in a napkin. Nothing is done for God, for the soul, for his fellow-creatures, or for heaven justly is he cast out as a wicked, because a slothful, servant. (Matt. xxv. 14-30.)

Unquestionably the Christian degrades himself from his proper level by needless indulgence; choosing a state common to him with the brutes, before that which elevates him to fellowship with angels. Nor can he set his heavenly privilege of communion with God at a very high estimate, if he be not willing to sacrifice fleshly pleasure for the enjoyment of it. The evil however does not end with the present indulgence. The habits of the day are enervated. The mind is--at least partially--asleep, during the routine of occupation. What is idle, or calling for little effort, is alone agreeable. Every exercise of self-denial is revolting. It is sufficiently obvious that this spirit has little sympathy with the genuine spirit of religion—life and spirit, and joy and energy. It sinks far below the step and obligation of those, whose profession is—"temples of the Holy Ghost,"¹ "children of the light and of the day,"² "virgins with their lamps trimmed"³ for the

¹ 1 Cor. xvi. 19.

² 1 Thess. v. 5, 6.

³ Matt. xxv. 7.

* Young.

† Bishop TAYLOR'S *Holy Living*, Chap. I. Sect. i.

‡ Chap. xix: 15. Dr. Doddridge's life, though far from reaching the age of man (Ps. xe. 10), was yet, by the resistance of this besetting temptation, virtually extended to the ordinary bounds. By his successful energy in redeeming time from sleep he accomplished his invaluable work in the midst of multiplied engagements. See Family Expositor on Rom. xii. 13. 'I take it for granted, that every Christian, *who is in health*, is up early in the morning. For it is much more reasonable to suppose a person up early, because he is a Christian, than because he is a labourer, or a tradesman, or a servant, or has business that wants him.'—Law's *Serious Call*.

bridegroom's coming, animated candidates for an incorruptible and eternal crown.¹

Specially should those of us, who are of a drowsy habit of body, listen to the call—*Love not sleep*. Here perhaps may be the Christian conflict, often most painful in the house of God. But in this solemn assembly—the gate of heaven—may we not hear the gentle rebuke, "What! could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." (Matt. xxvi. 40, 41.) When resisted, it is an infirmity; when allowed, or only feebly opposed, it is sin. At all events, in the service of God it is safer to consider it, not as a weariness to be encouraged, but as an indulgence to be mortified, and that with vigorous energy of conflict. Else, whilst the self-denying Christian will *open his eyes, and be filled with bread*, the power of the flesh may impoverish the spirit by the indulgence of a lifeless habit of prayer, hearing, and meditation.

14. *It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer; but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth.**

The Bible gives abundant proof, that man has always been the same in every generation since the fall. Where is the market, in which the counterpart to this disclosure of fraud and selfishness centuries ago is not found? Commerce, the Lord's providential dispensation to bind man to man, is marred by his depravity. The wise man had before detected the iniquity of the seller. (Verse 10. Comp. Eccclus. xxvii. 2.) Here he lays bare *the buyer*, and, to bring it home more closely, he gives even the market-language—*It is naught—it is naught*—'The article is of an inferior quality. I can get it cheaper elsewhere. If it is worth so much, yet not to me; I have no present want of it, no particular care about it.' And when by these convenient falsehoods he has struck a shrewd bargain, *he is gone his way; he boasteth*, laughing at the simplicity of the seller, and is probably highly commended for his cleverness. (Jam. iv. 16.)

The same principle of fraud applies to the seller. If the one says—*It is naught—it is naught*—the other no less eagerly cries—'It is good—it is good'—'when neither of both speaketh, either as he thinketh, or as the truth of the thing is.'† The one is bent on buying cheap; the other on selling dear. The one decries unjustly; the other praises untruly. He asks one price, when he means to take another, and takes advantage of the confidence of his customer to impose on him a worthless article.‡ In fact, 'no man's experience would serve him to

¹ 1 Con ix. 24, 25.

* Verses 14-19 are omitted in LXX. † Bishop SANDERSON's *Sermon on 1 Sam. xii. 3*.

‡ Amos, viii. 6. Contrast the disinterested transaction Gen. xxiii. 3-18. Augustine mentions a somewhat ludicrous, but significant, story. A mountebank published in the full

comprehend, no man's breath to declare, the infinite variety of those more secret and subtle falsehoods, that are daily invented and exercised everywhere under the sun.*

All of us are engaged in pecuniary transactions. With many it is the main business of life. Yet such are the temptations from our own interest or self-defence, the selfishness of others, and the general example of the world, to deviate from the straight line; that we should be most thankful for this probing analysis of deceit. The man of God stands on the frontier of the line of demarcation, and warns against a single step of encroachment. Passing over the line is bidding defiance to the Great King. The gain may be trifling, but the sin is vast. Enough of guilt was included within the dimensions of a single apple, to 'bring death into the world and all its woe' to successive generations. And here the law of God is deliberately broken;¹ conscience is violated; deceit is practised; "evil is called good, and good evil" (Isa. v. 20); our duty to our neighbour transgressed; and all this—perhaps without a moment of remorse--only to feed man's covetousness.

But do Christian professors always prove themselves clear in this matter? Yet how can we be Christians really, if not relatively and universally; if not in the week, as well as on the Sabbath; if not in our dealings with men, as well as our communion with God? What is our title to the name of disciples of Christ, unless we yield to his authority, and in heart, hand, and tongue, are governed by his laws? Let us each ask—Have we trembled before the solemn warnings of the great Lawgiver?² Are we ready to be tried by his rules of guileless simplicity (Matt. v. 37), and reciprocal justice? (Matt. vii. 12.) Have we always acted as under the eye of God? Are there no money transactions, that we should be ashamed to have "proclaimed upon the house-tops?" Are we prepared to go to the bar of a heart-searching God, with "a conscience void of offence both towards God and towards man?" (Acts, xxiv. 16) —Let us never forget the gospel, as the only principle, expulsive of selfishness, in its active exercise of grateful devoted love, and in its indefatigable spirit of "doing all to the glory of God."

15. There is gold, and a multitude of rubies; but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel.

This is not the standard of the world. There *gold and rubies* are

¹ Comp. Lev. xix. 11; xxv. 14. ² Col. iii. 25. 1 Thess. iv. 6.

theatre, that in the next entertainment he would show to every man present what was in his heart. An immense concourse attended, and the man redeemed his pledge to the vast assembly by a single sentence—'Vili vultis emere, et caro vendere'—'You all wish to buy cheap, and to sell dear'—a sentence generally applauded: every one, even the most trifling (as Augustine observes) finding the confirming witness in their own conscience. De Trin. Lib. xiii. c. 111.

* Bishop SANDERSON, *ut supra*.

far above *the lips of knowledge*. So the young man made his choice, and preferred his "great possessions" to those gracious words, that arrested the admiration of the multitude.¹ But when "gold is our hope and confidence," it will surely be our ruin.² Solomon's estimate was that of one, to whom "the Lord had given a wise and understanding heart."³ *Gold* and precious *rubies* were abundant in his days.⁴ Yet all these earthly treasures were as nothing in his eyes in comparison of heavenly teaching. *The lips of knowledge were a more precious jewel*.^{*} It is Divine *knowledge* only, however, that stands out in this high pre-eminence. Human wisdom may captivate the imagination, and furnish its measure of useful information. But the words for the most part die away upon the ear. They do not feed the heart. They furnish no comfort to the afflicted, no hope to the desponding, no teaching to the ignorant in "those things that belong to their "everlasting "peace." (Luke, xix. 42.) If therefore they be "goodly pearls," at least they are not "the pearl of great price"--that *precious jewel*, which dims the lustre of earth's most splendid vanities. (Matt. xiii. 45, 46.)

How *precious a jewel are the lips of knowledge*, when the messenger of the gospel "brings glad tidings of great joy" to the burdened conscience—to him "that is ready to perish !" Truly the very sound of his "feet" is welcome for the sake of his message.† *Precious* also will be the communications of Christian fellowship. Though falling infinitely short of the grace that dwelt in our Divine Master; yet in proportion as we are taught of him, will our "tongues be as choice silver" (Chap. x. 20), and our "*lips will disperse knowledge*" (Chap. xv. 7) *as a precious jewel*, enriching, and adorning with the glory of our heavenly Lord.

16. Take his garment, that is surety for a stranger; and take a pledge of him for a strange woman. (Chap. xxvii. 13.)

Again and again are we warned against *suretyship for a stranger*,⁵--any new acquaintance, whose company may entice; much more *for a strange woman*, whose character has lost all credit. This is the sure road to beggary and ruin. If a man is so weak as to plunge into this folly, he is not fit to be trusted. Lend nothing to him without good security. Nay, if needful, *take his garment* as his pledge. The letter of the Mosaic law forbade this extremity.⁶ But the spirit and intent of the law

¹ Matt. xix. 22, with Luke, iv. 22.

² Job, xxxi. 24, with 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.

³ 1 Kings, iii. 9.

⁴ Ib. x. 27.

⁵ Chap. vi. 1-5; xi. 15 ; xvii. 18.

⁶ Exod. xii. 26, 27. Deut. xxiv. 12, 13. Comp. Job, xxii. 6. Amos, ii. 8.

* Chap. iii. 15; viii. 10, 11, 19; xvi. 16. Job gave the same verdict, chap. xxviii. 12-119.

† Isa. lli. 7. Rom. x. 14, 15. Such was the delight of hanging upon the lips of the golden-mouthed Chrysostom, that the common proverb was—'Rather let the sun not shine than Chrysostom not preach.'

pointed at the protection of the poor and unfortunate, who were forced to borrow for their own necessity, and, therefore claim pity. The command here touches the inconsiderate, who deserve to suffer for their folly, in wilfully plunging themselves into ruin. Nor does it in any degree incur the just suspicion of covetousness or close dealing. The love of our neighbour does not involve the forgetfulness of ourselves. The path of godly prudence is the safest for all parties. It never can be wise to assist, where kindness only gives advantage to hurry on to ruin. The refusal may be an exercise of self-denial. It is well that it should be so. Let it be clearly seen to be the sacrifice, not the indulgence, of self-prudence, not selfishness. This grace is one of the combined perfections of Immanuel. (Chap. viii. 12.) Let it not be wanting in the profession of his people. It is necessary to the completeness of the Christian profession, and to avoid many occasions of offence to the Gospel.

17. Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel.

'Holiness is sweet in the way and end too. Wickedness is sometimes sweet in the way, but always bitter in the end.* It is with deceit, as with every other sin, Satan always holds out a bait always promises gain or pleasure as the wages of his service, and as surely disappoints the victims of his delusion.¹ If corn be thrashed upon a *gravelly* floor, the grating soil would spoil the *sweetness of the bread*. Oh! how many has this arch-deceiver allured by the *sweetness of his bread*, whose *mouths have been afterwards filled with gravel!* 'The bread, which *a man* hath got by fraud and cozenage, seems sweet and pleasant at the first taste of it but by that time he hath chewed it a little, he shall find it to be but harsh gravel, that crasheth between his teeth, galls his jaws, wounds his tongue, and offends his palate.† Everything gotten wrongfully is here implied.‡ Bitter was Achan's sweet, *deceitfully* hid in the tent, which brought ruin upon himself and his family. (Josh. vii. 21-24.) Look at Gehazi. What profit had he from his talents of silver and changes of garments? Bitter indeed was *the bread of deceit* to him. (2 Kings, v. 20-27.) Look even at Jacob, a true servant of God; and yet chastened heavily almost to the end of his days with the bitter fruits of *deceit*. (Gen. xxvii.; xlii. 36-38.) To the mass of such blinded sinners it is eternal ruin. Whatever be the tempter's proffered advantage, his price is the soul, to be paid in the dying hour. Oh! the undoing bargain! an eternal treasure bartered for the trifle of a moment! Charmed we may be with the present

¹ Chap. ix. 17, 18; xxiii. 31, 32. Job, xx. 12-16.

* CARYL *on Job*, xx. 14.

† Bishop Hall. Comp. Lam. iii. 16.

‡ Bishop Patrick,

sweetness; but bitter indeed will be the after-fruits, when the poor deluded sinner shall cry—"I tasted but a little honey, and I must die." (1 Sam. xiv. 43.) So surely is the bitterness that springs out of sin the bitterness of death.

Not a single step can be trodden in the way if godliness, without an entire renunciation of every accursed practice. Not even the smallest violation of the law admits of palliation. To venture on what we fancy the lesser shades of sin is a most dangerous experiment. The smallest sin breaks down the fence; and this once overstepped, the impulse is beyond our restraint. Universal uprightness is the mark of the true servant of God. Let the man of doctrine exhibit the holiness of doctrine. Never let ours religion be one thing, and our business another. But let the image and glory of the Lord give the pervading expression to our whole history. Every turning aside from the straight path "grieves the Holy Spirit of God," darkens the sunshine of our soul, blasts the consistency of our procession, and wounds the church of God.

18. Every purpose is established by counsel: and with good advice make war.

This is true wisdom—to deliberate before we act, and to establish our purpose by sound and experienced counsel. Even the wisest of men valued this strengthening resource. (1 Kings, xii. 6. God has placed us in society more or less dependent upon each other. And therefore, while it is most important to possess a calm and decided judgment; it is not less so to guard against an obstinate and exclusive adherence to our own opinions. (Chap. xv. 22.) Especially in the national *counsels* the rule is most weighty. With *good advice make war*. (Chap. xi. 14; xxiv. 6.) Wars for the purpose of ambition or aggrandizement can never be wisely made. Fearful may be the result of inconsiderate, self-willed measures. David took counsel of the Lord;¹ Nehemiah, while supporting his courage by faith,² *established his purpose* by counsel, and called his counsel to deliberate in all emergencies.³ Ahab, asking counsel of his false prophets;⁴ Amaziah, despising the sound counsel given to him⁵—both with bad *advice made war* to their own ruin. Even godly Josiah—making every allowance for his circumstances, was probably chargeable with precipitation; and, neglecting to establish *his purpose by the counsel* of the Lord's prophets then living among his people, was chastened with temporal destruction.*

Now ponder Bishop Hall's description of the spiritual *war*. 'It admits of no intermission. It knows no night, no winter. It abides

¹ 2 Sam. v. 17-23.

² Neh. ii. 17-20; iv.

³ Ib. iv. 19, 20.

⁴ 1 Kings, xxii. 6.

⁵ 2 Kings, xiv. 8-12.

* 2 Chron. xxxv. 20-24. Scott *in loco*.

no peace, no truce. It calls us not into garrison, where we may have ease and respite, but into pitched fields continually. We see our enemies in the face always, and are always seen and assaulted; ever resisting, ever defending, receiving and returning blows. If either we be negligent or weary, we die. What other hope is there, while one fights, and the other stands still? We can never have safety and peace, but in victory. Then must our resistance be courageous and constant, when both yielding is death, and all treaties of peace mortal."* Does not this war bring the greatest need of deliberate *counsel*, carefully counting the cost (Luke, xiv. 31, 32); cleaving to our All-wise Counsellor (Isa, ix. 6) and Almighty Helper? Yet fear not, under the conscious direction of his *counsel*, and support of his grace, to take up the song of praise—"Blessed be the Lord, my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight!" (Ps. cxliv. 1.)

19. He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips.

Never let us forget that all intercourse of social life must be based on love. Any breach of this is highly displeasing to God. Witness the talebearer. Unhappily he has much time on his hands unemployed for any good purpose. Hence he spends it on other people's business; ferreting out secrets, or diving into family arrangements. All this is material for scandal, or for idleness. In his visit he talks of the affairs of the last family. His present visit will furnish matter for idle talk in the next house. And thus his name describes his work, indulging an impertinent curiosity; making *a tale* of ever, thing he sees or hears. It is the business of his life, for which all other business is sacrificed, as if the whole man were one tongue, as if, in its restless babbling, it had discovered the grand secret of perpetual motion. Such a one *meddle not with him*. We would not wish him to look over our wall; much less to enter into our houses; least of all, to associate with our family circle, where his whole employment would be, either to draw out, or to put in, what "was not convenient." †

The flagrant blot, however, in this contemptible, yet dangerous character, is his unfaithfulness—*going about--revealing secrets*. (Chap. xi. 13.) This is peculiarly offensive to a God of truth. Even when matters have been given to him under a sea, his restless irritation breaks through the feeble bond. He 'dismantles and rends the robe from the privacies of human intercourse. Who entrusts a secret to his friend, goes thither as to a sanctuary; and to violate the rites of that,

* *Holy Observations*, xxv.

† 'Hic niger est: hunc tu, Romane, caveto'—is the indignant warning of the Roman Satirist.—HOR. *Sat.* lib. i. 4, 81—85.

is sacrilege and profanation of friendship.* Never let us think this to be a trifle. Never let us undertake a trust without the most resolute determination of Christian faithfulness.

Observe his other names—*flattering with his lips*. Thus he insinuates himself into *the secrets* of the unwary, and gains his materials for *tale-bearing*; *flattering* the present at the expense of the absent. Watch and pray earnestly against this deadly evil. Keep thine own vineyard carefully.† Else if thine eye be abroad, when it ought to be at home, it will be, like "the vineyard of the slothful, full of thorns and nettles" (Chap. xxiv. 30, 31); like the 'curious people,' whom Augustine rebuked, who 'pry into another's heart and life, but are slothful to amend their own.'‡ Be diligent in your gown calling, serving the Lord and his church. Study the obligation of Christian character, according to the standard of the Divine Exemplar, whose every word was fraught with the flowing of love. Oh! how many in self-indulgence and forgetfulness of their own obligations, because they have no employment for their hands, set their tongues to work! (1 Tim. v. 13.) Such men bring, as it were, the plague of flies with them (Exod. viii. 24); buzzing from house to house, from one neighbour to another, all the report of evil heard or done. A sharp reproof is their just desert, and an effectual means of driving them away. (Chap. xxv. 123.)

20. *Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness.*

If *darkness* be the punishment, is it not also the cause, of this atrocious sin? For surely even the light of nature must be extinguished, ere the child should curse even those, who under God have taught it to speak—the authors and preservers of its existence; its greatest earthly benefactors. Even an undutiful look, much more a word, is an offence against the commandment. What then must be the weight of guilt involved in the *cursing* of them! The deepest reverence is due to them when they are dead. (Jer. xxxv. 1-10.) What then must be the provocation of sinning against them, while they are living for their children, in all the active, self-denying energy of love and service! This *cursing*, according to our Lord's standard, includes "setting light by father or mother;"§ wilful disobedience--a fearful, palpable mark of the last days.|| How God regards it, let his own curse on Mount Ebal (Deut. xxvii. 16), and his judgment of temporal death,¶

* Bp. TAYLOR's *Sermon on the Good and Evil Tongue*.

† Mark the complaint, Cant. i. 6. Compare our Lord's probing advice, Matt. vii. 3-5.

‡ *Confess.* book x. c. 3,

§ Matt. xv. 3-6. The original words in Deut. xxvii. 16 (*infra*) precisely correspond.

|| 2 Tim. iii. 2. See also the black mark, Rom. i. 30, 31.

¶ Exod. xxi. 15, 17. Lev. xx. 9. Deut. xxi. 18-23. Comp. chap. xxx. 17. The Roman punishment for a parricide was to be sewed up in a sack, and cast into the sea.—CICERO, *pro Sext. Bose. Amorino*, xi.

testify. The present degradation of Africa is a witness, on the confirming page of history, of the frown upon a undutiful son (Gen. ix. 22–25)--*his lamp put out in darkness*.* And if the temporal sentence of death is repealed, the more awful judgment still remains unchangeably upon the Divine statute-book--*obscure darkness*--"the blackness of darkness"—darkness eternal without a ray of light, of which "blackness" is only the shadow, to shew what the substance must be.

21. *An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed.*

The wise man obviously limits his observation to *an inheritance gotten* dishonestly. The advancement of Joseph in the glory of Egypt,¹ of Mordecai in the Persian² courts, of Daniel in Babylon³—was gotten *hastily*; in a moment; yet under the special Providence of God. The *evil eye*, *hasting* to be rich⁴ or great, may get an inheritance at the *beginning; but the end thereof shall be blasted*,⁵ not *blessed*. Absalom⁶ and Adonijah⁷ reached after a kingdom to their own ruin. One king of Israel succeeded another, treading on each other *hastily*; and each hurrying on to destruction. (1 Kings, xvi. 8–22.) In our own history, Richard the Third ended his *hastily gotten* crown in shame. In our own day, Napoleon rose with astonishing rapidity to a magnificent *inheritance*. Yet he finished his course in disgraceful banishment. Less splendid possessions end in the same disappointment. What a curse was that *hastily gotten inheritance* of Naboth's vineyard to the reckless oppressor!⁸ Let not the warning be in vain—"They that will be rich" What is the fruit?—"Many foolish and hurtful lusts, many piercing sorrows." What is the end? "Destruction and perdition." (1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.) Place the cross and crown of Jesus in view. The world fades, selfishness dies, at the very sight. One object only attracts and satisfies. "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord; the portion of mine *inheritance*," (Ps. xvi. 2, 5.) Here is blessing beyond conception; without end.

22. *Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the Lord, and he shall save thee.*

"Vengeance belongeth unto me—is the awful proclamation of God."⁹ Most reverently do his people adore his high prerogative.¹⁰ Who besides is fitted to wield it? He is Omniscient; we know but imperfectly. He is without passions; we are blinded by our selfish

¹ Gen. xli. 14–45.

² Esth. vi. 11; viii. 15; x. 3.

³ Dan. ii. 46, 43.

⁴ Chap. xxviii. 20, 22.

⁵ Chap. x. 2, 3; xxi. 5; xxviii. 3.

⁶ 2 Sam. xv. 10; xviii. 9–17.

⁷ 1 Kings, i. 5–9; ii. 25.

⁸ 1 Kings, xxi. 1–15, 19. Comp. Job xv. 29; xx. 18. Amos, vi. 4–8.

⁹ Deut. xxxii. 35. Rom. xii. 19. Heb. x. 30.

¹⁰ Ps. xciv. 1. Rev. vi. 10.

* Chap. xiii. 9. Job, xviii. 5, 6, 18. Jude, 13. 'The pupil of his eyes shall behold darkness.'--LXX.

lusts. He is just, "without partiality;" we are prejudiced on our own side. What presumption, therefore, not to say impiety, for the angry worm to entrench upon his prerogative! Revenge is indeed a cherished lust of the flesh.* Were it not for the Divine restraint upon it, this world would be an "Aceldama—a field of blood." But never did the Lord allow it in his people.† Not even an Edomite, their most bitter enemy; not even the Egyptian, their most cruel oppressor—was to be abhorred. (Neut. xxiii. 7.) The folly and sin of this passion are alike manifest. 'He that studieth revenge, keepeth his own wounds open.'‡ His enemy could not do him a greater injury. The tongue, "speaking like the piercings of a sword" (Chap. xii. 18; xxv. 18), is here the instrument of this passion. Yet often, when the open purpose is restrained, the passion broods only the more fiercely within.¹ Or at least it is only a reluctant obedience, not the glorious victory exhibited in the history of the men of God—"overcoming evil with good."§

What then is the remedy? In humility and faith lay our matters before the Lord. Put them in his hands. *Wait on him, and he shall save us.* Revenge rises, only because we have no faith. For did we believe that God would take up our cause, should we not leave ourselves implicitly in his hands? How did he plead the cause of "the meekest man upon earth!"² With what confidence did David rest himself in the midst of reproach,³ thus warranting his rule of faith by his own experience!⁴ And thus did David's Lord "commit himself unto him that judgeth righteously." (1 Pet. ii. 23.) After this blessed example therefore, "let those, that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator." (Ib. iv. 19.) 'Let it suffice thee for the "possessing thine own soul in patience," to know, that all shall be righted one day. God will set all straight at the last; but that day is not yet.'|| Be satisfied then with his management. Suffice it, that "he shall deliver and save, because we put our trust in him." (Ps. xxxvii. 39, 40.) Let us stay our souls, as his praying people, on the great consummation. "Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto

¹ Gen. xxvii. 41. 2 Sam. xiii. 22.

² Numb. xii. 1-10.

³ 2 Sam. xvi. 12. Ps. xxxviii. 12-15.

⁴ Ps. xxxvii. 5, 6.

* So even the Heathen acknowledged it

Est vindicta bonum, et vita jucundius ipsa.

JUVEN. Sat. xiii. 180.

† Chap. xxiv. 29. Lev. xix. 18. Observe the identity of this standard with that of the New Testament—the teaching of our Lord—Matt. v. 38, 39, and his apostles, Rom. xii. 17, 19-21. 1 Thess. v. 15. 1 Pet. iii. 9. Comp. Ecelus. xxviii. 1-8.

‡ Lord Bacon.

§ Rom. xii. 21. Comp. Joseph, Gen. xlv. 5; L. 20. David, 1 Sam. xxiv. 18-21.

|| Bp. SANDERSON on Chap. xxiv. 10-12.

him, though he bear long with them? I tell you, that he will avenge them speedily." (Luke, xviii. 7, 8.)

23. *Divers weights are an abomination unto the Lord; and a false balance is not good.*

Here let us search into the mind of God. Thrice does he bring home one point of practical detail. (Verses 10, 14, 23.) Yet doubtless this is not a "vain repetition." (Matt. vi. 7.) There is a "needs-be" for it. Instead of "precept upon precept, and line upon line" (Isa. xxviii. 10), the infinite "treasures of wisdom and knowledge" might have poured forth endless variety of instruction. We wonder not to see the apostolic ministry once and again upon the same argument of a sinner's justification before God.* And we gather from this repetition the primary importance, and the peculiarly offensive character of the doctrine. (Rom. x. 2, 3.) Does not then this continuous inculcation similarly teach the great weight of the principle involved, and the innate resistance to its full operation? If we feel, that we cannot be too often gladdened with the manifestation of the grace of God; and yet shrink from a frequent and probing application of practical obligation; if we love to be told, what we owe to God on the Sabbath, but revolt from the minute detail of the week, the market and the shop; we do not receive the whole revelation of God, and therefore do not savingly receive any part of it. Ours is not "the wisdom that is from above, without partiality and without hypocrisy" (Jam. iii. 17.)

Most palpable is the need for this particular illustration. The evil runs throughout our commercial system. *The diverse weights*, though continually declared to be abominable—yea, *an abomination* (Chap. xi. 1. Mic. vi. 10, 11)—to God, yet how often are they palliated, as of daily occurrence, perhaps even of necessity! But the scant measure will fill up a full measure of guilt, and the light weights bring upon the soul an heavy weight of judgment.† If Job was fearful, lest his "land and furrows cry against him" (Job, xxxi. 38), let the trader beware, lest his weights and measures bear witness against him. Cause, indeed, have we for watchfulness! What means this cumbrous and expensive machinery of administration, with all its checks and counter-checks, its fearful multiplication of oaths, but the humiliating declaration, that man cannot trust his fellow-man? Oh! let me not forget, that of all this deceit my heart is the native soil; that nothing but the culture of Divine principle keeps down these poisonous weeds, and nourishes in their room "the fruits of righteousness to the praise and glory of my God." (Philip. i. 11.) "The love of God constrains his servant. God is true to him; and he will not be false to others. God is merciful to

* See Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians.

† Bp. REYNOLDS' *Sermon on Mic. vi. 1 6-8.*

him, and he will not be unjust to others.* This is the practical influence of the Gospel.

24. Man's goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way?

God's uncontrollable power and sovereignty; man's absolute dependence and helplessness—let these be foundation principles. Here is no infringement of liberty on the one side; no excuse for indolence on the other. Man often acts, as if he were the master of his own purposes; as if *his goings* were of himself. Or else, in the crude notion of the predetermination of every event, instead of diligently working out the Lord's purposes, he fancies "his strength is to sit still." (Isa. xxx. 7.) But the humble, heaven-taught Christian exercises free agency in the spirit of dependence. Though utterly powerless for obedience, he is ever putting forth the effort, as the exercise in which he looks for the strength. The consciousness that *his goings are of the Lord*, gives energy to his faith. It is written—"The way of a man is not in himself." (Jer. x. 23.) It is written again—"This is the way; walk ye in it." (Isa. xxx. 21.) Thus does Scripture guard against Scripture. Here is dependence without passive inertia; diligence without presumption or self-confidence. Antagonal principles thus work together in harmonious combination.

The true liberty of the will is the power of acting according to choice, without external restraint. Divine agency, so far from hindering its freedom, removes the obstacle of a corrupt and tyrannizing bias. This let removed, it acts more freely, and more powerfully. The man is not moved as a machine, unconscious of its operations and results, but acted upon by intelligent principles. He is not carried, along the way, but enabled to walk. He is "drawn," not driven, "with the cords of a man," not of a beast; and those cords are so wisely applied, that they are felt to be "bands of love." (Hos. xi. 4.) He is enlightened, so that he sees; softened, so that he turns; "drawn, so that he runs." (Cant. i. 4. Ps. cxix. 32.) He is moved effectually, but willingly; invincibly, but without constraint. Divine grace acts, not as in a lifeless machine, but as in a purposing, willing, ever-working creature. Nothing is therefore distorted. There is no unnatural violence. It is "the day of the Lord's power," who "worketh in him to will and to do of his good pleasure."† *His goings are of the Lord*, who at once inspires the effort, and secures the success.

The world of Providence chews the same over-ruling agency. Man determines and acts freely in the minute circumstances of the day. Yet

* POLHYLL's *Speculum Theologiae*, p. 438.

† Ps. cx. 3. Philip. ii. 13. Comp. Daille *in loco*, and Disputation between Eck and Carlstadt.—D'AUBIGNE'S *History of Reformation*, Book v. chap. 4.

the active pervading influence, disposing every step at the right time and place, makes it plain, that *his goings are of the Lord*. Rebekah came to the well just at the moment, that Abraham's servant was ready to meet her. "He being in the way, the Lord led him." (Gen. xxiv. 27.) Pharaoh's daughter goes out to bathe just at the crisis, when the infant Moses was committed to the water. (Exod. ii. 1-5.) Was this the working of chance, or some fortunate coincidence? Who can doubt the finger or the leading of God? A curse of extermination was pronounced against Eli's house. The word was fulfilled by a combination of apparently casual incidents. David fled to Abimelech for relief. *That very day* Doeg was there; not in the ordinary course, but "*detained before the Lord*." He gives information to his cruel master, and in a moment of anger the curse was accomplished.¹ Who can doubt but *the goings* of Doeg and of David meeting to ether *were of the Lord*? All parties acted freely. What was false in Doeg was righteous in God, whom we adore as a sin-hating God, even while, as in the crucifixion of Christ (Acts, ii. 23), he makes use of in for the fulfilment of his own purposes.

Man's goings therefore being *of the Lord*, they must often be enveloped in mystery. *How then can he understand his own way?* Often does it run counter to his design. The Babel-builders raised their proud tower to prevent their dispersion: and it was the very means of their dispersion. (Gen. xi. 4-9.) Pharaoh's "wise dealing" for the aggrandizement of his kingdom issued in its destruction.² Haman's project for his own glory was the first step of his ruin. (Esth. vi. 6-13.) Often also is the way, when not counter, far beyond our own ken. Little did Israel *understand* the reason of their circuitous way to Canaan. Yet did it prove in the end to be "the right way."³ As little did Ahasuerus *understand* the profound reason, why "on that night could not the king sleep;" a minute incident, seeming scarcely worthy to be recorded, yet a necessary link in the chain of the Lord's everlasting purposes of grace to his Church. (sth. vi. 1.) Little did Philip *understand his own way*, when he was moved from, the wide sphere of preaching the gospel in Samaria, to go into the desert, which ultimately proved a wider extension of the gospel⁴ As little did the great Apostle understand, that his "*prosperous journey*" to see his beloved flock at Rome, would be a narrow escape from shipwreck, and to be conducted a prisoner in chains.⁵ Little do we know what we pray for. "By terrible things wilt thou answer us in righteousness, O God of our salvation." (Ps. lxxv. 5.) We go out in the morning *not understanding* our way; "not knowing what an hour may bring, forth." (Chap. xxvii. 1

¹ Sam. ii. 30-32, with xxi. 6, 7; xxii. 9-18.

² Exod. i. 8-10, with xiv. 80.

³ Exod. xiii. 17, 18, with Ps. cvii. 7.

⁴ Acts, viii. 5-12, 26, 27.

⁵ Ib. xxvii.; xxviii. 20, 30, with Rom. i. 10.

Some turn, connected with our happiness or misery for life, meets us before night. (John, iv. 7.) Joseph in taking his walk to search for his brethren, never anticipated a more than twenty years' separation from his father. (Gen. xxxvii. 14.) And what ought those cross ways or dark ways to teach us? Not constant, trembling anxiety, but daily dependence. "I will bring the blind by a way that they know not: I will lead them in paths that they have not known." But shall they be left in the dark perplexity? "I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them." (Isa. xlii. 16.) Often do I look back amazed at the strangeness of my course, so different, so contrary to my way. But it is enough for me, that all is in thine hands; that "my steps are ordered of thee." (Ps. xxxvii. 23. Comp. chap. xvi. 9.) I dare trust thy wisdom, thy goodness, thy tenderness, thy faithful care. Lead me—uphold me—forsake me not. "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory."*

25. *It is a snare to the man who devoureth that which is holy, and after vows to make enquiry.*

In every path has the great fowler laid his snares. Perhaps, however, the most subtle are reserved for the service of God. Offerings made *holy* to the Lord often were *devoured* by the hypocritical worshipper, and sacrilegiously appropriated to his own use. Thus Achan, robbing the treasury of the Lord, found *a snare* to his ruin. (Josh. vi. 19; vii. 1.) This was the sin of "the whole nation;" and fearful indeed was the judgment—"Ye are cursed with a curse." (Mal. iii. 8-10.) Voluntary vows were commonly practised;¹ and often inquiry was made after, which ought to have been made before. They were at full liberty not to vow; but having vowed, they were bound to pay.² As the counterpart to this hollow, half-hearted profession—"a man vows in distress to give something to God: but having obtained his desires," *devoureth that which is holy, and after vows makes inquiry*, 'how he may be loosed from this obligation.'† Often too in a moment of excitement—perhaps under the glow of a religious meeting—has a sacrifice been pledged to God; and, the impulse having subsided, *after the vow inquiry is made* how the bond may be retracted. Such evasions

¹ Lev. xxvii. 9, 10, 28—33.

² Deut. xxiii. 21, 22. Eccles. v. 4-6.

* Ps. lxxiii. 24. Augustine mentions the weeping prayers and deprecations of his godly mother, on account of his voyage from Carthage to Italy. Her anxiety was grounded probably on his absence from her control, and the natural apprehension, that, when removed from her influence, he would plunge deeper into sin. But it proved in the end to be the Providential purpose for his conversion—"In thy deep and hidden counsel"—writes the pious Father—"listening to the cardinal point of her desire, thou regardest not what she then implored, in order to accomplish in me what she ever implored."—*Confess.* Lib. v. c. 8.

† Bishop Patrick.

-- what a revolting exhibition do they present of man's deceitfulness He entangleth his soul in the *snares* of death, who resumeth unto a profane use that which is once consecrated unto God, and who, after he hath vowed aught unto the Lord, argues within himself, how to alter that holy purpose, and to defeat God of his due:* Alienation of the gift proves the prior alienation of the heart. Let Ananias and Sapphira testify that God is a jealous God.¹ Take care of rash—be faithful to upright—engagements. *Before* entering into the service of God, *make inquiry* into its full requisitions, Beware of a religion of temporary excitement; far different from deep, solid, permanent principle. And whatever be the cost, be true to the consecration of thyself as "a living sacrifice" (Rom. xii. 1) on the altar of thy God.

26. *A wise king scattereth the wicked, and bringeth the wheel over them.*

Solomon, as *a wise king*, was constantly eyeing his own responsibilities. His standard was not to commit wickedness himself,² nor to allow it in his people; to *scatter*, not to encourage, the wicked. As the husbandman's *wheel*, *brought over* the grain, cut the straw, and separated the chaff;† his sifting administration of justice brought the wheel of vengeance on *the wicked*, and *scattered* them as worthless chaff (Ps. i. 4), or crushed them in ruin. (1 Kings, ii. 25-46.) In the same spirit did his father David destroy them, when they boldly claimed his countenance.³ Godly Asa removed wickedness from the high place nearest his own throne and heart.⁴ Amaziah justly punished it with death.⁵ Nehemiah—that true reformer--rebuked it even in the family of the high-priest.⁶ Our own Alfred appeared to maintain this standard as a witness for God in an age of darkness. But it is the King of kings alone, that can make this separation complete. Often does he sift his church by trial, for her greater purity, and complete preservation. (Amos, ix. 9.) But what will it be, when he shall come with his fan in his hand, and shall thoroughly purge his floor!" (Matt. iii. 12.) What *a scattering* of chaff will there be! Not an atom will go into the garner. Not a grain of wheat will be cast away, O my soul! what wilt thou be found at this great sifting day! "Who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth?" (Mal. iii. 2.)

¹ Acts, v.1-10, with Deut. iv. 24.

² Verse 8. Chap. xvi. 12. Comp. the contrast 1 Kings, xiv. 16,

³ 2 Sam. i. 2, 16; iv. 5, 12. Comp. Ps. ci. 7, 8.

⁴ 2 Chron. xv. 16.

⁵ Ib. xxiv. 25; xxv. 3, 4.

⁶ Neh. xiii. 28; 29.

* Bishop Hall.

† Isa. xxviii. 28, 29. This is an obvious allusion to the war of threshing in the East. One mode was by a wain, which had *wheels* with iron teeth like a saw. The axle was armed with serrated *wheels* throughout. It moved upon three rollers armed with iron teeth, or *Wheels*, to cut the straw. —See Bishop LOWTH'S *note on Isa. xxviii. 27*. Comp. Amos, i. 3

27. *The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly.*

We are placed under a solemn dispensation of Divine government. An infallible judgment is in constant exercise, discerning our principles, estimating their standard, and pronouncing sentence. There ought evidently to be in the soul some sense, that acknowledges the judgment of the Great Sovereign. Such is conscience, aptly called—'God in man.' Thus "God hath not left himself without witness" in his own benighted world. (Acts, xiv. 16, 17.) He brings the searching light of *his candle* into the darkness. At the first creation bright indeed was *this candle of the Lord*, shining in the little world --Man. (Gen. i. 26.) But every faculty partook of the ruin of the fall. Still enough is left in the inner mind and conscience, to shew even in the thick darkness of heathenism the Divine perfections, the just desert of sin,¹ and even some faint glimpses of the standard of right and wrong.² Yet dim indeed is *this candle*, except it be lighted at God's lamp.³ But when the word and Spirit of God give light to it, it will effectually perform its important offices— (as Bishop Reynolds defines them) —'direction, conviction, and consolation;'* not only exhibiting the outward acts, but *searching the innermost parts of the belly*—all the hidden acts and conduct of the inner man. (1 Cor. ii. 11. Comp. Job, xxxii. 8.) This unwelcome intruder follows everywhere, interpreting the dispensation of the rod, not— as men would have it--as the incidents or phaenomena of the day, but as penal retribution. Glad indeed would the man of ungodliness be to extinguish this *candle*. He is too great a coward to venture into his secret chamber in the dark. He "hates the light" (John, 20), which, in spite of all his opposition, drags forth into day many secret lurking evils; never allowing the plea--"Is it not a little one?" Whatever may have been his gay and thoughtless pleasures, the time will come, when he must leave them, and be alone. And then--as the question has been stated in a manner not to be answered —'What is all that a man can enjoy in this way for a week, a month, a year, compared with what he feels for one hour, when his conscience shall take, him aside, and rate him by himself?'+

Most valuable also is *this candle*, throwing the light of God upon the narrow path; so that we 'are not scrupulous and nice in small matters, negligent in the main; we are still curious in substantial points, and not careless in things of an inferior nature; accounting no duty so small as to be neglected, and no care great enough for principal duties; not so tything mint and cummin, that we should forget justice

¹ Rom. 1.120, 21, 32,

² Ib ii. 14, 15.

³ Chap. vi. 23. Ps. cxix. 105.

* Treatise on the Passions, chap. xli.

† SOUTH'S *Sermon on chap.* iii. 17.

and judgment; nor yet regarding judgment and justice, that we should condemn mint and cummin.*

Now let me ask—when God causes *his candle* to shed a clearer light, can I abide it? Do I welcome the hateful discoveries which it brings out? Do I value its light, as opening the secret business of communion between a sinner and a holy jealous God? Do I exercise myself to preserve the light from being dimmed in the atmosphere of sin, and to guard its purity, as the means of establishing my confidence with God?¹ Oh! let there be *no inward part* of my soul, where I am not most willing, most earnest, to bring *the candle of the Lord*, that all secret indulgences may be searched out and mortified. "He that doeth good cometh unto the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God." (John, iii. 21.)

28. *Mercy and truth preserve the king: and his throne is upholden by mercy.*

Punishment is indeed a necessary security against the infringement of the law. (Verse 26.) Yet a wise *King* will follow the example of the Great Sovereign, and "make judgment his strange work," and mercy his "delight."² And so long as *truth* inviolable is his guiding principle, the abuse of *mercy* need be little feared. Nay, *mercy is the upholding pillar of his throne*. (Isa. xvi. 5.) But who does not know, that, while truth commands reverence, it is *mercy* that wins the heart? Solomon himself had a strong body-guard around him, for the safety of his person. (Cant. iii. 7.) Yet were *the mercy and truth* of his government not only the most splendid jewels of his crown, but 'the best guard of his body, and supporters of his throne.'[†]

How lovely is this combination in the administration of the Great *King*! "Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne; *mercy and truth* shall go before thy face." (Ps. lxxxix. 14.) Much more right is the manifestation of these glorious perfections in that great work, by which he sacrificed even his Beloved Son, that man might be saved without the tarnish of one spot upon his infinitely adorable name. (Ps. lxxxv. 10.)

29. *The glory of young men is their strength: and the beauty of old men is the grey head.*

Every stage of life has its peculiar honour and privilege. 'Youth is the glory of nature, and *strength is the glory of youth*. Old age is the majestic beauty of nature, and *the grey head* is the majestic *beauty*, which nature hath given to old age.'[‡] Yet these pictures describe the use, not the abuse. It is their youth usefully exercised, especially

¹ Acts, xxiv. 16. 1 John, iii. 20, 21.

* Bishop HALL'S *Works*, viii. 112.

² Comp. Isa. xxviii, 21. Mic. vii. 18.

† Trapp *in loco*.

‡ Jermin, *in loco*.

consecrated to God, and employed for, his glory. Otherwise, as an occasion of wantonness,¹ or vain-glorious boast,² *its strength* is its shame, and will end in vanity.³ The silver crown brings honour, and reverence, and authority--only "in the way of righteousness."*

Yet *the beauty of the grey head* is most likely to be found, where *the strength and glory of youth* have been dedicated to God. The young plant, stunted, and deformed in its youth, will generally carry its crookedness into advancing growth. But who can calculate upon the extent of fruitfulness, where "the beginning of our strength"—"the dew of our youth"—has been given to the Lord? (Ps. xcii. 13-15.) Let youth and age however each beware of defacing their glory. Each takes the precedence in some things, and gives place in others. Let them not therefore envy or despise each other's prerogatives. The world--the state--the church needs them both--*the strength of youth* for energy, and the maturity of *age* for wisdom.

30. *The blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil: so do stripes the inward parts of the belly.*

Chastisement is the Lord's ordinance—the pain of the flesh for the subjugation of the spirit; sometimes even "the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." (1 Cor. v. 5) It describes not the gentle stroke, but the severity of parental discipline; not in pleasure or caprice, much less in anger, but for profit. (Heb. xii. 10.) The diseased body needs medicine no less than food, and indeed to give nourishment. The diseased soul needs chastening no less than consolation, and as the main preparation for consolation. But if the *blueness of the wound*—the mark of severe chastisement—*cleanseth away evil*, is it not the lesser evil, as the means of subduing the greater? Do not the Lord's *stripes cleanse the inward parts*? Misery beyond measure miserable is the untamed stubbornness of self-will. A gentle stroke is first tried. When this remedy is ineffectual, *the blueness of the wound* is needful. Manasseh's Babylonish chains doubtless prevented the "everlasting chains of darkness."⁴ Similar discipline was effectual with the holy nation, the prodigal son,⁵ and the incestuous Corinthian.⁶ Multitudes have borne witness to the love, wisdom, and power of their Father's discipline—"chastened of the Lord, that they might not be condemned with the world."⁷ *The evil was cleansed away*; and those, who groaned under *the stripes*, to all eternity will tune their harps to the song—"I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness halt afflicted me." (Ps. cxi. 75.)

¹ 2 Sam. ii. 14-16.

² Jer. ix. 23.

³ Isa. xl. 30.

⁴ 2 Chron. xxxii 12, 13, with Jude, 6.

⁵ Luke, xv. 16-20.

⁶ 2 Cor. ii. 6-8.

⁷ 1 Cor. xi. 32.

* Chap. xvi. 31, and references. Comp. Eccclus. xxv. 6, 7.

Child of God! Think of your Father's character. "He knoweth you frame. He doth not afflict willingly." (Ib. ciii. 14. Lam. iii. 33.) Nothing will be given in weight or measure beyond the necessity of the case.¹ But truly blessed are *the stripes*, that humble and break the proud will.² Rich indeed are "fruits of righteousness" from the conflict and suffering of the flesh.³

CHAPTER XXI.

1. The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever it will.

Most reflecting persons acknowledge God as the doer of all things. In inert matter he acts by physical force; in brute animals, by instinct and appetite; in intelligent beings, by motives suited to their faculties; in his redeemed people, by the influence of grace. We are here reminded of one course of his Providential acting. The general truth, before stated, of man's entire dependence, is taught by the strongest illustration—his uncontrollable sway upon the most absolute of all wills—the *king's heart*.

The river of water is an apt emblem of this agency. Its commencement is a single spring; scarcely capable of turning an handmill to grin, a day's corn. But increased by the confluence of other small or great streams, it may turn hundreds of mills, and provide food for thousands. So the thoughts of *the king's heart* are first a single imagination for the good of his subjects; then swelled by the attendant thoughts of his mental resources, till what appeared desirable rises to the full power of accomplishment. But after all, the Great Sovereign turns the most despotic rule, all political projects, to his own purposes, with the same ease, that *the rivers of water are turned* by every inflection of the channel.* While this course is directed, *the waters* flow naturally and enforced on their own level. *The king's heart* he directs as a responsible agent, without interfering with the moral liberty of his will.

Nehemiah fully acknowledged this prerogative, when, having a favour to ask of the king, he "prayed unto the God of heaven."⁴ And indeed Scripture witness is abundant. Abimelech's *heart was in the hand of the Lord* for good.⁵ Pharaoh's heart was turned towards Joseph.⁶ The Babylonish monarchs showed kindness to Daniel and

¹ Isa. xxvii. 8. Jer. x. 24.

³ Job, xxxiv. 31, 32; xxxvi. 9, 10. Isa. xxvii. 9. Heb. xii. 11.

⁵ Gen. xx. 6. Ps. cv. 14, 15.

² Jer. xxxi. 18-20.

⁴ Neh. ii. 4, 5.

⁶ Gen. xli. 37-45.

* The allusion evidently is to channels made for the distribution of waters according to will, for irrigation of gardens or fields. —See PAXTON'S Illustrations, i. 173. Bishop LOWTH'S notes on sa. i. 30. Comp. the beautiful figure, Ecclus. xxiv. 30, 31.

his captive brethren.¹ The Persian monarchs countenanced and assisted in the building of the temple.² The hearts of wicked kings are alike in the *hand of the Lord*;³ yet he hath no part in their wickedness.⁴ The hated of Pharaoh; the ambition of Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar,⁵ were his instruments for his own purposes. Ahab's murderous heart was restrained, and even made to accomplish the downfall of Baal.⁶ the counsels of the kings of the earth against Christ were under Divine control.⁷ Thus does "the wrath of man praise him; and the remainder he restrains."⁸ Thus an Almighty agency is visible by its effecting the minutest affairs. Ahasuerus's sleepless nights;⁹ Nebuchadnezzar's divination;¹⁰ the appointment of the year of general taxation¹¹--these seemingly unimportant events were turning-points in the dispensations of God, fraught with immensely momentous results.

The history of our blessed, though now calumniated, Reformation, chews the same sovereign control of the royal heart. Henry VIII. was employed as an unintentional instrument, and his godly son as a willing agent, in furthering this great work. The recollection encourages us to refer all anxious care for the Church to her great Head; to rejoice that not kings, but the King of kings reigneth. (Isa. ix. 6.) And shall not we be quickened to earnest prayer for our beloved sovereign (1 Tim. ii. 1-3), that her *heart, being in the Lord's hand, as rivers of water*, may be disposed to rule for his glory, as a nursing-mother to the Church (Isa. xlix. 23), and a blessing to her people?

2. *Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the Lord pondereth the heart.*

Let in be thankful for the repetition (Chap. xvi. 2) of this weighty Proverb most valuable for the close probing of my heart, and the testing of the vital spirituality of my profession. So "deceitful is the heart above all things" (Jer. xvii. 9), that it deceives, not others only, but--what even Satan never does--itself. Every intelligent Christian bears painful witness to this self-deception. How differently do we judge of the same action in others, and in ourselves! Often do we palliate, if not justify, in ourselves the very habits, which we condemn in others. Never therefore is the prayer out of season--"Search me, O God; know me, try me; shew me to myself." (Ps. cxxxix. 23.) There are no persons in the world, about whom we make so many mistakes as ourselves. But, Oh! to be approved of God in heart, and in sincerity, is no common mercy!

Hid as the self-deluding professor is from himself, *his way is right in his own eyes*. But is it right in God's eyes? *The Lord pondereth the*

¹ Dan. i. 19; ii. 48; iii. 30; vi. 1-3, 28. Ps. cvi. 46.

² Ezra, i. 1; vi. 22; vii. 27; ix. 9. Neh. i. 11; ii. 4-9.

⁴ Exod. i. 8-2. Ps. cv. 25.

⁷ Acts, iv. 25-28. Comp. John, xix. 10.

⁹ Esth. vi. 1, 2.

⁵ Isa. x. 7. Jer. xxv.

¹⁰ Ezek. xxi. 21.

³ Rev. xvii. 16, 17.

⁶ 1 Kings, xviii. 10, 40.

⁸ Ps. ixxvi. 10.

¹¹ Luke, ii. 1.

heart. Solemn and awakening recollection! He thoroughly reads ever heart. And what defilement does he see in those *ways of a man* that are most *right in his own eyes!* Saul thought that he was serving God acceptably. But the all-searching eye discovered pride, covetousness, disobedient rejection of his God.¹ What more self satisfying than the soul's strict fast and humiliation? But the defective motive marred the sacrifice. "Did ye at all fast *to me, even to me?*"² Little did the self-complacent ruler suspect the spiritual pride, false confidence, and worldliness, which this heart-searching God brought to view.³ And how much base alloy is hidden even in a sound-hearted profession! The disciples covered their own spirit under the pretence of vehement zeal or their Master. (Luke, ix. 54.) *The Lord pondereth the heart.* He "weigheth the spirits" (Chap. xvi. 2); proving exactly what is of himself, and what is of a baser kind; what, and how much, there is of God, what of man. The principles of the heart lie deep. The work may be good in itself. But what are the ends? The same work, according to its end, may be accepted, or be cast away. Jehonadab and Jehu both were engaged in the same exterminating work. With the one it was right service; with the other, vile hypocrisy. (2 Kings, x. 15.) Self-distrust is therefore the wisdom of true godliness (Chap. xxviii. 26); daily, hourly, trembling in ourselves; yet boldly grounding our confidence in God! But for the covering of the High Priest, how could we stand for one moment under the piercing eye of our Judge? Did our dearest earthly friend know what was passing in our thoughts at any one hour, could he ever deem us worthy of confidence? Must not his heart revolt from contact with such vileness? Yet does our gracious *Lord*, while *pondering our hearts*, and privy to all their hidden corruptions, forgive, accept, yea—rejoice in us as his people.

3. *To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.*

Did Solomon mean to undervalue sacrifice? Never did man more highly honour it. (1 Kings, iii. 4 ; viii. 64.) Perhaps the splendour of his sacrificial service may have given rise to the frequent national perverted trust in external forms. *Sacrifice* was appointed as a type of the Great; Sacrifice for sin. (Heb. x. 12.) But never was it intended to take the place of that universal moral obedience, which the law of God had from the beginning indispensably required. Yet how soon did man mistake the intention of the ordinance! How easily did he substitute the offering of bulls and goats for the more self-denying service of the heart.⁴ Israel abounded in the observance of their outward ceremonials, while indulging the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah.⁵ The Corban.

¹ Sam. xv. 13-26.

² Zech. vii. 6. Isa. lviii. 5. Jer. ii. 35.

³ Matt. xix. 21.

⁴ 1 Sam. xv. 22. Ps. i. 13, 14.

⁵ Isa. i. 11. Jer. vii. 22. Hos. vi. 6. Amos, v. 21. Acts, vii. 42. Mic. vi. 6-8.

sacrifice stood in the room of filial obligation. The lesser services of "anise and cummin" were scrupulously observed to the neglect of "the weightier matters of the law--*judgment*, mercy, and faith."¹ Justly therefore did our Lord commend the "discretion" of the scribe, who gave the due place and proportion to the ceremonial and moral service.² Both are his requirements; and a soundly-instructed conscience will aim at both. Yet plainly has he in some instances dispensed with the former;³ ever with the latter.⁴ He has accepted the moral without the ceremonial; but never the ceremonial without the moral, otherwise what would the world be without that *justice and judgment*, which at once "establish the throne" (Chap. xvi. 12), "exalt; the nation" (Chap. xiv. 34), and realize to their disciples a true interest in that richest of all possessions—the love of God! (Chap. xv. 9. Comp. Isa. lxiv. 5.)

We indeed have no *sacrifice* to place in the stead of these invaluable principles. But the same preference, and indeed exaltation, of external service prevail among us. Whether under the proper form of Popery, or the more plausible cover of Tractarian delusion, it is the true religion of man's heart—something to recommend us to the favour of God; something easier and less humbling than the "living sacrifice" (Rom. xii. 1) for his service. Christian professor! mark carefully the character of thy service. Let it be free and cheerful; else is it penance, not acceptable duty. Though it be in weakness, let it ever be in willingness, with the flower and strength of thy love. Look to it— art thou resting in the shell and surface, or art thou worshipping in the spirituality of service? Dost thou hear the voice calling thee, from the dead forms, to seek the living power of godliness? Cain brought the sacrifice, not the heart. If thou speakest more, "what dost thou more than others?" (Matt. v. 47.) Remember those externals, that stand in the place of a consecrated heart, are the delusion of the great deceiver. Let thine heart be with God, walking with him in the sound exercise of Christian obligation; honouring the Divine stamp on every commandment; making conscience of every duty; and though we come short of every one, yet daring not to neglect any. (Ps. c. ix. 5, 6, 128.)

4. *An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing (the light, marg.) of the wicked is sin.*

Another stamp of abomination upon pride!⁵ We cannot mistake the mind of God so continually declared. Yet so many shapes does this sin assume, that, until the Spirit of God chews a man to himself, he rejects the idea, of any concern in it. Nay, he will be proud of his very

¹ Matt. xxiii. 3.

² Mark, xii. 34.

³ Matt. xii. 7. Acts, x. 34, 35.

⁴ Matt. xxii. 3 -39.

⁵ Chap. iii. 34; viii. 13; xvi. 5.

pride, proud of a high spirit; counting a Christian mean and cowardly, who in the true spirit of the Gospel, yields up his right to a stronger hand.¹

But not only the haughtiness, but even the natural actions— *the plowing of the wicked—is sin*. "This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" (John, vi. 60.) How can *the plowing* of the soil, in itself a duty (Gen. iii. 19), become *a sin*? The motive determines the act. The most natural actions are inculcated for Christian ends.² They become therefore moral actions, good or bad according to their own motives. The man, who *plows* the soil, acknowledging God in his work, and seeking his strength and blessing—"does it acceptably to the glory of God." It is essentially a religious action. But *the wicked*, who does the same work without any regard to God—for want of a godly end, *his plowing is sin*.^{*} His idleness is sin against a plain command. (2 Thess. iii. 10.) His industry is the sin of ungodliness, putting God out of his own world. The substance of his act is good. But the corrupt principle defiles the very best actions. (Tit. i. 15) "Every thought, every imagination, of the "natural "heart," is unmixed "evil." (Ge . vi. 5.) If the fountain-head be bitter, how can the waters be pure? Sin indeed defiles every motive in the Christian's heart. But here it is the substance of sin. In the one case it is infirmity of walk in the straight path. In the other, it is an habitual walk in a crooked path. With *the wicked*—'his eating as well as his gluttony; his drinking as well as his drunkenness; his commerce, negotiation, and trafficking, as well as his covetousness, and inordinate love of the world, are if set down and reckoned by God for sins, and such sins as he must reckon for with God.'† Fearful indeed is his condition. Would that he could see it! Whether he prays,³ or neglects to pray,⁴ it is abomination. He cannot but sin ; and yet he is fully accountable for his sin. To die, is to plunge into ruin.⁵ To live in unregeneracy is even worse; it is daily heaping up wrath against the day of wrath." (Rom. if. 5) Ought he then to leave his duties undone? 'The impotency of an must not prejudice God's authority, nor diminish his duty.'‡ What then ought he to do? Let him learn the absolute necessity of the vital change—"Ye must be born again." (John, iii. 7.) The leper

¹ Matt. v. 39-41. 1 Cor. vi. 7.

² 1 Cor. x. 31. Coil. iii. 17.

³ Verse 27. Chap. xv. 8. Isa. i. 13.

⁴ Ps x. 4.

⁵ Ib. lx. 17. Matt. xxv. 41-46.

* Holy intention is to the actions of a man that, which the soul is to the body, or form to its matter, or the root to the tree, or the sun to the world, or the fountain to the river, or the base to a pillar. Without these, the body is a dead trunk, the matter is sluggish, the tree is a block, the world is darkness, the river is quickly dry, the pillar rushes into flatness and ruin, and the action is sinful, or unprofitable and vain.—Bp. TAYLOR'S *Holy Living*, Chap. i. Sec. iii.

† Bp. HOPKINS' Works, ii. 481.

‡ Bp. REYNOLDS' Works, p., 94.

taints everything that he touches. But let him seek to the Great Physician, whose word is sovereign healing (Matt. viii. 3), whose Divine blood cleanses from every spot. (1 John, i. 7.) His nature once cleansed, his works will be clean. His thoughts and principles, all will be for the glory of God; all acceptable to God.*

5. *The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but of every one that is hasty only to want.*

The diligent is usually contrasted with the slothful:¹ here with the *hasty*. *The thoughts* of each work their own fruit, *for plenteousness, or for want*. The patient, plodding man of industry perseveres in spite of all difficulties; content to increase his substance by degrees; never relaxing, ever yielding to discouragement. This care *of diligence* is profitable under the blessing of God. (Chap. x. 22.) 'Thou mayest as well expect' (says an old writer) 'riches to rain down from heaven in silver showers, as to provide for thy family without industry in thy calling.'† *Haste* may have much of *diligence* in the temperament. But as indolence is its defect, this is its excess, its undisciplined impulse. The hand too often goes before, and acts without the judgment. Hence our English philosopher wisely counsels us-- 'not to measure dispatch by the times of sitting, but by the advancement of the business.' A wise man had it for a bye-word, when he saw men hasten to a conclusion—'Stay a little, that we may make an end the so ener. To choose time is to save time, and an unreasonable motion is but "beating the air."‡

The evil of *haste* under a worldly impulse is truly fearful. Often does it drive the man into rash projects; and high-raised delusive expectation he finds to be the short and sure road to *want*.² Need we remark, how rich the harvest of Christian *diligence*, of "patient perseverance in well-doing"—"eternal life?"³ The heavenly race is not

¹ Chap. x.; xii. 24, 27; xiii. 4. ² Chap. xix. 2; xxiii. 5; xxviii. 22.

³ Rom. ii. 7. Heb. vi. 12.

* Tit. i. 15, first clause. Many good commentators, following the old versions, adopt the marginal reading. (Comp. xiii. 9; xxiv. 20. Job, xxi. 17.) But as the word is used in a similar sense, chap. xiii. 23, and as our version is well supported, and gives a most important meaning, we have been content to adhere to it. Bishop Patrick explains the ploughing in the figurative sense of dressing. But as the two first illustrations in the verse are literal, it seems more consonant to unity to take the third on the same ground--'What can they (the wicked) think, say, or do; even when they eat, play, fast, or pray, they are always under the guilt of sin, because all flows from an impure heart, and the bad tree cannot bring forth good fruit?' Matt. vii. 18. Cartwright in loco. 'Whatsoever they devise, or whatsoever they do, inside and outside, the cloth and linings of their garments are all sin.' CARYL on Job, i. 8. 'The wicked man hath a, haughty look and a proud heart. Neither are his misdispositions only sinful. But those his very actions and endeavours, which in another man would be harmless, are in him no other than sin.'—Bp. HALL. See also Scott in loco.

† SWINNOCK'S *Christian Man's Calling*, part i. 365.

‡ Lord BACON'S *Essays*.

to be run by so many heats, but by a steady course. "Run," not with *haste* or speed, but "with patience the race set before us." (Heb. xii. 1.) The seed springing up *in haste* withered. (Matt. xiii. 20, 21.) Excitement is delusion, and ends in disappointment. What so important as to cultivate a deep work of grace, pervading the whole man, and abounding with fruit to the glory of God?

6. *The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death.* 7. *The robbery of the wicked shall destroy (saw, marg.) them, because they refuse to do judgment.*

A graphical picture of *the hasty spirit*--its own crooked ways *tending to want*. Treasures may be gotten by lying; but they become vanity. They are "put into a bag with holes" (Hag. i. 6), and sink away. They are like a ball *tossed to and fro* by a withering blast, or dust and chaff before the wind.¹ Unrighteous gain is a dear bargain. The wrath of God mingles gall and bitterness with the wages of iniquity.² Eagerly did Judas desire to get rid of his ill-gotten treasure as an intolerable curse. Yet he could not fly from his torturing conscience. He *sought death*, and he found it. (Matt. xxvii. 5.)

Indeed it is with the ungodly, as if they *sought death* as their reward. So fondly do they love the way of eternal *death*! Meanwhile their own sin is the seed of destruction. *Their robbery* virtually destroys them.³ And whom can they blame but themselves? It is not ignorance or inconsideration, but wilfulness, that *destroys, because they refuse to do judgment*. "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. vi. 9)? that "the wages of sin," invariably, inevitably---"is *death*?" (Rom. vi. 23.) What else did the robbery of Achan and Gehazi bring to them?⁴ Short indeed was the enjoyment of Ananias and Sapphira in "the part of the price kept back" at the expense of *a lying tongue*. Sudden and everlasting *destruction* was their doom--a beacon to worldly, half-hearted, self-deceiving professors.*

8. *The way of man is froward and strange: but as for the pure, his work is right.*

Observe the striking contrast— man by nature; and man by grace. Who will say that man is now, as he first came from his Maker's hands?

¹ Chap. x. 2; xxii. 8. Jer. xvii. 11.

² Zech. v. 4. Comp. Isa. i. 23, 24. Jer. vii. 9-11, 15. Ezek. xxii. 18, 14. Flab. ii. 6-8.

³ Chap. i. 11, 18, 19; xxii. 22, 23. Hab. ii. 10-13.

⁴ Josh. vii. 21-26. 2 Kings, v. 20-27.

* Chap. xii. 19. Acts, v. 1-10. The marginal reading seems to imply aggravated destruction, probably with shame. Comp. 2 Sam. xii. 31. Heb. xi. 37. Also, Luke, xii. 46. 'Search your chests; search your hearts, all ye that hear me this day; and if any of you find any of this adulterated gold among your heaps, away with it. As you love yourselves, away with it. Else know, that (as Chrysostom wittily says) 'You have locked up a thief in your counting-house, which shall carry away all; and—if ye look not to it the sooner—you soul with it.'—Bp. HALL'S *Sermon on the Righteous Mammon*. Works, v. 109, 110.

(Eccles. ii. 29.) How is he born? *Froward*, "as a wild ass's colt." (Job, xi. 12.) How soon does he develop his nature! "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; childhood and youth are vanity."¹ Need we add, that this is *a strange way*? How *strange* from the God, who made and loved him! Turned from God; "turned to his own way" (Isa. liii. 6); with no law but his lust, no rule but his will (Eph. ii. 3. Tit iii. 3); loving his own liberty, but despising true liberty; made by his own self-delusion "the servant of corruption" (2 Pet. ii. 19); ignorant, licentious, wanton; desiring only to be the fountain of his own happiness, the maker of his own sufficiency.

Take him in his noblest path—the pursuit of wisdom. Here, too, *his way is froward and strange*. Is not forbidden wisdom his delight—wisdom, not as wisdom, but as forbidden; "intruding" into the counsels, prying into the ark, of God? (Col. ii. 18.) Such was the first appetite of frowardness, not desiring to know God, which "is life eternal" (John, xvii. 3); but to know *as God* (Gen. iii. 5), which was pride in its principle, and death in its issue.

But man, by grace made *pure*, new "created in the image of his God" (Eph. iv. 24)—mark him well. His will is now conformed to God; his actions are regulated by this perfect standard. Therefore, his rule and aim being right, *his work is right*. (Tit. i. 15.) He lives now, as does his Divine Saviour, to God." (Rom. vi. 10, 11.) Such is the dignity of his great object! Such his fellowship with his glorious Head! Such his earnest of heaven, and growing meetness for it! Oh! the mercy of being turned from our own *froward and strange way* to the *pure* service of our God! Yet such remains of *the frowardness* still; such intricacies of self-deceitfulness; such twisted workings of depravity! 'O heart, heart'—cries a deep-taught experimental Christian*--'what art thou? The vainest, craftiest, wickedest thing in nature!' And truly, when the stroke goes deep into the soul, when the inner circle, the very centre of being, is reached and probed, what hidden evils come to light O my God! shew me to myself, so far as I can bear the sight, that I may be kept humbled and self-abased; always near my Saviour; always applying his precious blood; always covering myself in his *pure* and perfect work of righteousness!

9. *It is better to dwell in a corner of the house-top, than with a brawling woma in a wide house* (a woman of contention in a house of society, marg)

In the spacious houses in the East, several families lived together in *society*. A *brawling woman* would be a grievous disturbance to the little community; and a peaceable man would prefer the *corner of the*

¹ Chap. xxii. 15. Eccles. xi. 10.

* Rev. John Berridge.

house-top,¹ exposed to all the inconveniences of wind and weather, to the ample accommodation of *a wide house* in the atmosphere of contention. (Verse 19; xxv. 24.) A solitary life without would be better than a quarrelsome life within. Some intervals of comfort might be abroad; nine at home. Infinitely greater is this trial, when it comes from a man's own flesh; when she, who ought to be "a crown to her husband," becomes "rottenness to his bones" (Chap. xii. 4); when she that is bound to be his choicest treasure, becomes his piercing scourge. 'It cannot be but a miserable thing to behold, that yet they are of necessity compelled to live together, which yet cannot be in quiet together.'* The intent of the Divine ordinance is here contravened. For it would seem "good for the man to be alone," rather than that his "help-meet" (Gen. ii. 18) should turn to be his hindrance, and his curse. But how many bring this bitter trouble upon themselves! They plunge into the important connexion on adventure; with no thought of the duties to be done, the temptations to be avoided, the crosses to be borne. They never sought direction in the momentous choice. The wife, not being sought from the Lord, came not from him, and brought no "favour" of him.² Illicit pleasure, avarice, or waywardness, brought a calamity; that no external accomplishments, no advantages of riches or rank, could for a moment counterbalance.

The only safe entrance into this 'honourable estate' is, when each party (as Chrysostom instructs) commit themselves to God--'.Bestow me as thou wilt, and on whom thou wilt.'† The only security for happiness is, when, with due regard of mutual fitness, mutual love is grounded reverentially upon the ordinance, which makes of "twain one flesh." (Gen. ii. 24, with xxiv. 67.) *Contentions* will be restrained by the preventive habit of Christian discipline; each considering that passion improves nothing, and patience much, and that it is far better to "give place" to each other, than "to the devil." (Eph. iv. 27.) The husband in his claim for submission will remember, that he has found, not a servant, but a wife. She, on her side, will not forget the beauty and order of graceful sacrifice and ready concession; and that her glory is departed from her, should she lose "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit;" lovely in the sight of man, and "in the sight of God of great price." (1 Pet. iii. 4.) 'Each severally performs their faithful duties; everything around them acquires firmness and stability.'‡

10. The soul of the wicked desireth evil: his neighbour findeth no favour in his eyes.

A lively portraiture of Satan himself! not only doing, but *desiring*

¹ Comp. Deut. xxii. 8. Josh. ii. 6-8. 2 Sam. xi. 2. Acts, x. 9.

² Chap. xix. 14; xviii. 22.

* *Homily on Matrimony.*

† *Homil. in Coloss.*

‡ CHRYSOST. *in Coloss. Hom. x.*

evil! *Evil* is the very nature of *the wicked*. What wonder, then, if his very *soul desireth it*? His "heart is fully set to do it."¹ He craves it as his appetite, his main delight.² What "fitting for destruction" must there be in vessels thus full of sin, and therefore full of wrath!³ And here lies the difference between the godly and *the wicked*; not that the one is pure from evil, and the other commits it; but that the one does it from constraint, the other from delight. The one testifies--"What I hate"--the other—What *my soul desireth*--"that do I."⁴ As the fruit of this native cherished principle, self to *the wicked* is both his god and his object. Intent upon his own lust, not only his enemy, or a stranger, but even *his neighbour*, who might have a claim upon him, *findeth no favour in his eyes*. His charity does not extend beyond his own door (1 Sam. xxv. 11.) No one is regarded, who stands in the way of his own interest. Friend and brother must give place to selfish gratification.

Such is sin in its hateful character, and baneful fruits. "Men are lovers of their own selves, hateful, and hating one another!"⁵ Look at the man of God, with his heart enlarged and softened with the pervading influence of the gospel. Where is *the neighbour* in distress, that does not *find favour in his eyes*? (Luke, x. 31-35.) "Charity seeketh not her own" (1 Cor. xiii. 5)—is his spirit. "Bear ye one another's burdens" (Gal. vi. 2 —is his rule. "The members of the body have the same care one for another." (1 Cor. xii. 25.) Oh! for a larger measure of this gracious spirit, "as the dew of Hermon descending upon the mountains of Israel" (Ps. cxxxiii. 3), upon the church of God!

11. When the scorner is punished, the simple is made wise: and when the wise is instructed, he receiveth knowledge.

This Proverb in substance has been given before (Chap. xix. 25) as an instructive illustration of the Lord's providential discipline. No stroke of his rod is without its effect. The blow that strikes one, reaches two—the *scorner* for punishment; the *simple* for improvement. *The scorner* describes a character far more common than is usually conceived. It includes much more than the gross outbreaking of the revolting heart. Under a more decent external garb, often do we see the utter want of that awful reverence for God, that humility of mind, that submission of our will, that prostration of desire, which is the glory and happiness of those above, who "cast their crowns before the throne." The very idea of the grace of God is an object of scorn and contempt. We wonder not therefore that the daring offender should be marked out for *punishment*. And yet, if (as is too frequently the case) *the*

¹ Eccles. viii. 11.

² Chap. iv. 16; xii. 12; xiii. 19.

³ Rom. ix. 22.

⁴ Rom. vii. 15-21, with vi. 12, 16, 17.

⁵ 2 Tim. iii. 2. Tit. iii. 8.

punishment be without fruit to *the scorner* (Isa. i. 5. Jer. v. 3), it reads a lesson of *wisdom to the simple*, who had been, or were, in danger of being missed by his evil example. (Ps. lxxiv. 7.) Nay—even the man of God learns a lesson of love mingled with wholesome trembling, from this awful dispensation--"Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross; therefore I love thy testimonies. My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments."¹

The wise, though already taught of God; through his daily teaching thankfully receives increasing *knowledge*. (Chap. i. 5.) Among his most fruitful lessons are the *instructions* of the rod--*instructions* (mark the difference of the term)--not *punishment*. Often does the teaching rod seal the teaching law. And the well-disciplined child is ready with his acknowledgments--"Blessed is the man, whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and *teachest* him out of thy law. I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel; my reins also chasten me in the night season. It is good, for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes."²

12. *The righteous man wisely considereth the house of the wicked: but God overthroweth the wicked for their wickedness.*

The punishment of *the wicked* reads a lesson not only of love and trembling, but of *wise consideration*. Yet many are the perplexing mysteries of Providence. *The righteous man* does not always see with his right eyes. The prosperity of the wicked staggers his faith, excites his envy, and induces hard thoughts of God. (Ps. lxxiii. 2-14.) But when he looks with the eye of faith, he sees far beyond the dazzling glory of the present moment. He *wisely considereth their house*; not its external splendour and appurtenances, but how it will end. He justifies God, and puts himself to shame. (Ib. verses 16-22.) "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. xviii. 25.) Here we rest, until he shall "arise, and plead his own cause," and "with the breath of his mouth, and the brightness of his coming, destroy"³ the very existence of evil. Meanwhile, where the superficial eye sees nothing but confusion, let *the righteous man wisely consider* lessons of deep and practical profit. The shortness of the prosperity,⁴ and the certainty of *the overthrow, of the wicked*;⁵ the assurance of a day of recompense;⁶ the contrast of the substance of the godly for time and for eternity⁷---these are the apprehensions of faith. Do they not marvellously set out the perfections of God, and call to each of his children--"My son, give glory to God?"

¹ Ps. xix. 119, 120. Comp. Heb. x. 26-31.

² Ps. xciv. 12; xvi. 7; cx:ix. 71.

³ Ps. xxiv. 22; lxxxii. 8. 2 Thess. ii. 8.

⁴ Job, xx. 4, 5. Ps. xxxvii. 35, 36.

⁵ Cha. xii. 7; xiii. 3-6; xv. 25. 2 Pet. ii. 4-9.

⁶ Job, xxi. 28-30. Ps. lviii. 10, 11.

⁷ Job, xxii. 15-20. Ps. lxxiii. 23-26.

13. *Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he shall also cry himself, but shall not be heard.*

If there were no poor, much of the word of God, applying to their comfort, and directing our obligations, would have been written in vain. The obligation implies not only an helping hand, but a feeling heart; *hearing the cry of the poor* with sympathy,¹ cheerfulness,² self-sacrifice.* The *stopping the ears* implies cruelty or insensibility;³ turning away from real and known distress;⁴ any kind of oppression; beating down "the hire of the labourer" (Jam. v. 4) beyond the power of earning the necessities of life; and neglecting, so far as is in our power, to defend them against oppression. (Luke, xviii. 2-4.)

Sometimes indeed it might be our duty to *stop our ears*. The law of God discountenances the trade of begging, with all its pathetic cries and appeals (2 Thess. iii. 10.) To retain therefore the poor in idleness, however compassionate or self-pleasing the motive, is to encourage, if not to participate in, sin. Considerate discretion, not feeling, should direct our clarity. (Chap. xxix. 7.) Honest distress taxes most of us to the utmost of our power, considering our responsibility to put out all that we have, whether it be little or much, to the most profitable use. Yet ever let the withholding of charity be a constraint upon our feeling, not the indulgence of our selfishness. Count it a privilege, no less than an obligation, to minister to the poor. Ponder it as conformity to our Divine Master's spirit and work. (Matt. xiv. 14-21.) Consider niggardliness in giving; the useless expenses that abridge our power of helping; luxuries, while our brethren are starving around us; restraining the full extent of what we ought and might give— all this as virtually *stopping our ears against their cry*. Covetousness and sensuality harden the heart; and when the heart is hard, the ear is deaf.⁵ This sin was wrongfully charged upon Job.⁶ But wherever it be found, the stamp of divine displeasure is fearfully marked;⁷ and even the sin of omission the great day will openly mark as the ground of condemnation.⁸

And now, as the selfish hardness shews the man has no love to God,⁹ he will find no love from God. "With the same measure that he meted withal, it shall be measured to him again."¹⁰ Did he *stop his ears at the cry of the poor*? God will stop his ears against his cry.¹¹ He

¹ Deut. xv. 7-1 . Isa. lviii. 6-9.

² Rom. xii. 8. 2 Cor. ix. 7.

³ Chap. xxix. 7 Neh. v. 1-8.

⁴ Luke, x. 30-32.

⁵ 1 Sam. xxv. 10, 11.

⁶ Job, xxii. 5-7, with xxix. 16; xxxi. 16, 17, 20.

⁷ Chap. xi. 24, 26; xxviii. 27. Jer. xxxiv. 10-22. Matt. xviii. 30-34.

⁸ Matt. xxv. 41-45.

⁹ 1 John, iii. 17.

¹⁰ Luke, vi. 38. Judg. i. 6, 7. 1 Sam. xv. 33.

¹¹ Job, xxxiv. 24 -28. Zech. vii. 9-13. See Eccclus. iv. 4-66.

* 2 Cor. viii. 1-4. Howard's rule, so nobly expounded by his own self-denying devotedness— is a fine comment on this example, 'That our superfluities give way to other men's convenience; the tour conveniences give way to other men's necessities; and that even our necessities sometimes give way to other men's extremities.' See his *Life*.

that would not give a crumb on earth, was denied a drop of water in hell.¹ "He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy." (Jam. ii. 13.) Christian professor! study the character of thy God—"pitiful and of tender mercy" (Jam. v. 11); and be like him. remember—"bowels of mercies, kindness" are the ornament of "the elect of God." (Col. iii. 12.)

14. A gift in secret pacifieth anger: and a reward in the bosom strong wrath.

We have before noticed* cases of resentment, where a legitimate and prudent distribution of *gifts* may quell the storm, and restore the calm. But *a gift in secret* implies a perversion;² else why should the tie light be dreaded?³ Both parties are involved in the guilt. The giver acts as a tempter. The receiver wilfully breaks the law of God.⁴ The passions of men are easily charmed. But rarely will a covetous man be so angry with his friends, as not to be *pacified with his gift*, especially when, given in secret, it tells no tales. *A reward in the bosom* to such a man is stronger far than *strong wrath*; and when it has shewn its errand, the melting process is rapidly accomplished. (Eccles. x. 19.) Thus is the wounded pride expelled by another ruling passion--avarice! Who then can excuse himself in the indolent cry—"I cannot help my passion, or gain any power over it!" For if it can be pacified by sordid motives, it leaves us inexcusable, if we do not subdue it by Christian motives. But it is too evident, that secret covetousness cankers many a plausible exercise of forbearance. How do we need a close watch and keeping of our own hearts, in order to a Christian walk with God!

15. It is joy to the just to do judgment: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity.

It is not that *the just does judgment*. Conscience may dictate this, at least externally, while the bias of the heart is on the side of sin. But *it is joy to the just to do it*. His rest, purpose, affections—all centre in it. He has as much delight *in doing judgment*, as "the soul of the wicked desireth evil" (Verse 10), as his own soul desired it.⁵ *It is joy*, but only *to the just*.⁶ To the mere professor of religion it is conviction, an fear; the service of a slave. He knows God only as a Master, and conceives of him as a task-master. He has never known him as a Father, and therefore never served him as a child. But his true service—does it not, Christian?--identifies holiness and happiness, and brings its own smile and income of *joy* with it, as naturally as heat

¹ Luke, xvi. 21, 24, 25.

² Chap. xvii. 28.

³ John, iii. 20.

⁴ Exod. xviii. 8. Dent. xvi. 19. ⁵ Eph. ii. 2, 3. Tit. iii. 3. ⁶ Ps. xxxii. 11; xcvi. 11, 1

* Chap. xviii. 16. Page 295.

accompanies fire, and beams flow from the sun. And thus "the way of the Lord is strength to the upright." (Chap. x. 23.) Was it not so with our beloved Lord? He could say—"I delight to do thy will, O my God. My meat, that the world knows not of, is to do my Father's will, and to finish his work."¹ Oh! that the servant might be in spirit like his Lord!

What, then, is the gloom and sadness charged upon religion? Truly the children of this world have never tasted the clusters of Canaan. How then can they know their sweetness? Christian! look up, and be cheerful, for the honour of your God and his gospel. Live not, as if some affliction had happened to you; but as one snatched from destruction; as a child of God, an heir of heaven. You know more than you can tell. You can tell enough to make the world inexcusable, if they turn away. But you cannot tell half, when all that you can tell is told. Yet let them see, that "the work of righteousness is peace," and "the broke of Christ is easy;"² nay, that the sharpest sacrifices for him are sweet; that there is more pleasure in "plucking out the right eye" for him, than in using it for sin or for Satan. And then for yourself think further, if this be the happiness amidst all the clogging hindrances of sin, what will it be, when these hindrances shall be removed, and we shall serve him without sin for ever!³ If such be the wilderness, what will Canaan be!

But what know the ungodly of this reality? Sin is to them a mockery,⁴ is sport,⁵ even a joy.⁶ But never can it be their *solid joy*. It is their weariness, never their rest.⁷ *To the workers of iniquity* belong only vanity and disappointment, ending in *destruction*.⁸ Hear the testimony of God—"Destruction and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace have they not known. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."⁹

16. The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding, shall remain in the congregation of the dead.

This seems to describe the fearful and irretrievable ruin of apostates. (Ps. cxxv. 5) God has opened *the way of understanding*. The *wandering out of it* implies, that *the man* was once in it; at least that he was instructed, and professed to walk in it. The end of wilful wandering is eternal death. Such was the character and end of the wicked son of Jehoshaphat;¹⁰ and the rebellious children of godly Josiah;¹¹ apostates from the religion "received by tradition from their fathers."

¹ Ps. xl. 8. John, iv, 32-34,

² Isa. xxxii. 17. Matt. xi. 30.

³ Rev. vii. 15; xxii. 3.

⁴ Chap. xiv. 9.

⁵ Chap. x. 23; xxvi. 18, 19.

⁶ Chap. xv. 21.

⁷ Isa. xivii. 13; lvii. 10, 20. Jer. ix. 5.

⁸ Chap. v. 22. Matt. vii. 23.

⁹ Rom. iii. 16, 17. Isa. lix. 7, 8; lvii. 21.

¹⁰ 2 Chron. xxi. 1, 4-6, 18, 19.

¹¹ Ib. xxxvi. 1-17. Jer. xxii. 17-19, 28-30.

But—not to go to olden times—It is no rare sight to see the children of godly parents cast off the privileges of their birthright, as despised in their eyes. Though early instructed in "the Holy Scriptures;" instead of "continuing in the things which they have learned and been assured of" (2 Tim. iii. 14, 15), they have "loved to *wander*." (Jer. xiv. 10.) They have never proved a real apprehension of the substance of truth, or a just appreciation of its value. *The way* has been too strait, and too humbling. Novelties have been preferred: self-confidence indulged; self-pleasing delusions cherished; the want of godly sincerity has darkened the path (Matt. vi. 23); conscientious error, varnished with external holiness, is readily admitted; and *the man*, destitute of a solid scriptural standard, *wanders out of the way of understanding*.

This state of death is often connected (and stands out more strongly by the connexion) with external observance of religion, the practice of many moral duties, and with a certain measure of moral taste, partially formed according to the scriptural standard. But there are also occasional emotions of conviction under the oppressive consciousness that the heart was wanting; and whatever might be the temporary excitement—like Saul under the soothing notes of the harp of the son of Jesse (1 Sam. xvi. 14-23), there is no movement from the state of hardened rebellion against God. The true cause of the death, is that in the full blaze of religious knowledge, a living faith is absent. Hence there is no reality of prayer; therefore no genuine desire, no vital effort, no hearty perseverance. With all his light, knowledge, and privileges, the man is still *a wanderer out of the way of understanding*.

Indeed *wandering* is the character of man's fallen nature. (Isa. liii. 6.) But light, conviction, advantages of instruction, awfully aggravate the responsibility. (Ib. xxviii. 12, 13. Zeph. i. 4-6.) Beware of the first *wandering* step, whether it may be in doctrine or in practice. It may fix in a state of apostasy, like Bunyan's blinded *wanderers* out of the strait path, who were found among the tombs, *remaining in the congregation of the dead*. A special mercy will it be, if the wayward wanderer does not find his last and final abode among 'the mighty dead,' "to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever."* "It had been better for him not to have known the way of righteousness, than; after he has known it, to turn from the holy commandments delivered unto him." (2 Pet. ii. 21.) Let such as he remember, that *remaining among the congregations of the dead* shews their character,

* Jude, 12, 13. 'Mighty dead.' See Dr. Goon's *Note on Job*, xxvi. 5. 'In caeta gigantum.'--MELANCTHON. Parkhurst, and most critics consider intensity to be implied. Comp. Isa. xiv. 9. See on chap. ii. 18, n. Dr. Graves quotes this text with several others in this Book iv. 18, 19; viii. 35, 26; xii. 28; xiv. 32) in evidence of the knowledge of the future state under the old dispensation.—*Lectures on Pentateuch*, Part iii. Lect. iv.

their state, and their home; and that though they be by birth Abraham's children, born of godly parents, yet, *wandering out of the way of understanding*, they are out of the way of life.

One can only wish to view such sad apostates, as Faithful and Hopeful did, with tears gushing out of our eyes, silently pondering. Do they not stand as warnings to us, that we should tremble—yea—"rejoice with trembling?" (Ps. ii. 11.) While we "stand by faith," must we not remember the needful caution—"Be not high-minded, but fear?" (Rom. xi. 20.) Ever let us combine self-distrust with our Christian confidence; "fearing, lest, a promise being left us of entering into rest, any of us should seem to come short of it" (Heb. iv. 1); thankful alike for the warnings to make us fear, and for the encouragements to preserve us from despondency.

But the great mass are also here described. They never profess; they never have professed. They know that "wisdom crieth without," yet they "refuse to hear the voice of the charmer."¹ Many will occasionally bear, yet "they go their way, and straightway forget what manner of men they were."² Noah's mighty generation was of this character; and they *remained in the congregation of the dead*.³ And will not every one, who, with the opportunities to attain wisdom, refuses, departs, turns away, be found to have "died in their trespasses and sins" (Eph. ii. 1) eternally?

17. He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: and he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich.

What then? are we to have no *pleasure*? This were indeed to drive men from religion. Why—*pleasure* is the very character of the ways of God (Chap. iii. 17); *pleasure* infinitely more satisfying "than in the time that corn and wine increased." (Ps. iv. 6, 7.) Are we not, again, to rejoice in our earthly comforts? "The living God giveth us richly all things to enjoy."⁴ This large flow of happiness is more than doubled by the rule of "thanksgiving." (1 Tim. iv. 4, 5.) Yet, strange as it may seem, the way to enjoy *pleasure* is not to *love it*; to live above it;* to "rejoice as though we rejoiced not to use the world, as not abusing it" (1 Cor. vii. 30, 31); never pursuing it as our portion, or as making the happiness of an immortal being. The man, who gives his whole heart and time to *the love of pleasure*, and sacrifices to it all his prudence and foresight, is surely on the highroad to *poverty*.† On the

¹ Chap. i. 20. Ps. lvi. 5. ² Jam. i. 24. ³ 1 Pet. iii. 19, 20. 2 Pet. ii. 5. Gen. vi. 4.

⁴ 1 Tim. vi. 17. Comp. Eccles. ii. 26; iii. 22; ix. 7-9.

* It is a fine remark of Cyprian's—"The greatest pleasure is to have conquered pleasure; nor is there any greater victory than that, which is gained over our own appetites.—*De bono Pudicitiae*.

† Verse 20 The instance of the profligate, v. 10, 11; of Samson, Judg. xvi. 1-21: of the Prodigal, Luke, xv. 13-16.

same road is *he that loveth wine*, under the power of a "mocking delusion."¹ *He that loveth oil*—one of the most precious fruits of Canaan²—may find, that 'those who could not live without dainties came to want necessities.'* But the most melancholy sight in the universe is the man, immured in the prison-house of selfishness, who sacrifices to *the love of pleasure* the interest of his immortal soul. Salvation is thrown away as a thing of nought.³ Fearful indeed is the poverty, the utter, eternal ruin of this wilful infatuation. "Woe unto you that are rich; for ye have received your consolation. Son! remember that thou in thy lifetime receivest thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented."⁴

Youth indeed dreams of uninterrupted *pleasure*, and sees not the illusion of the charming perspective. But earthly joys are vain indeed. They *may* leave us; we *must* leave them. To place our happiness in this, is to build upon the wave, which rolls from under us, and plunges us into the depths of despondency.

But the double-dealing professor asks—"May we not combine the two *pleasures* of the world and religion?" But the object of the man of God is, first to awaken, then to satisfy, a holy appetite. And for this end he knows he must separate himself from all that mixture of worldly pleasure, which, while so far from quickening or nourishing, tends utterly to quench it.

'Thrice fools are we'--exclaims a glowing Christian--'who, like new babes in the cradle, know not that there is a kingdom before them!'+ What wonder, that those who know not heaven should take their portion on earth! But should not the heirs of heaven live above the love of earth, having no more sympathy with the sensual devotee; than with the pleasure of "the sow wallowing in the mire?" Mark well, then, the danger and temptation, the need of unceasing watchfulness, that in the necessary use you keep within its due measure—the heart loosened here, and fixed above. (Luke, xxi. 34.) For should you be growing in the *love of earthly pleasure*, *you shall be a poor man*, indeed; growing indifferent to prayer; heartless and dead to God; fancying shadows to be substance, and despising the true substance as a shadow. Heavenly pleasures will lose their sweetness, as earthly *pleasures* are relished. 'Certainly the more a man drinketh of the world, the, more it intoxicateth.'[‡] Our spiritual character is our glory. Personal holiness is indispensable to spiritual enjoyments. Keep then ever before you, as the witness of your better experience, the emptiness⁵

¹ Chap. xx. 1; xxiii. 21.

² Deut. viii. 8; xi. 14. Judg. ix. 9. PS. xxiii. 1. Mic. vi. 15. Hab. iii. 17:

³ Eccles. xi. 9. 1 Tim. v. 6. 2 Tim. iii. 4. 1 Pet. iv. 3-5.

⁴ Luke, vi. 24; xvi. 25. Comp. Ps. xvii. 14.

⁵ Eccles. ii. 11.

* Henry *in loco*. Comp. Isa. xxiii. 9—12; xlvii. 8, 9. Zeph. ii. 15. Rev. xxiii. 7.

† RUTHERFORD'S *Letters*.

‡ Lord BACON'S *Essays*.

and bitterness¹ of the world's *pleasures*, and the all-sufficiency of your real portion.² And shall a man's appetite and poisoned taste, blot out these records----this solemn judgment of experience? God forbid!

18. The wicked shall be a ransom for the righteous, and the transgressor for the upright,

The *ransom* is here spoken of only in a popular sense, as equivalent to a substitute. (Ps. xlix. 7, 8.) God sometimes, for wise reasons, involves *the righteous* in the same judgment with *the wicked*. Sometimes the punishment of *the wicked* is the ordained means of averting calamity from a righteous nation. (Josh. vii. 24-26.) Often, in the Lord's retributive justice, *the wicked* are brought into the very trouble, which they designed for *the righteous*.* Thus, suffering in their stead, they are as it were *a ransom for them*. God may seem in trouble to "sell his people for nought" (Ps. xliv. 12); yet "so precious are they in his sight," that a whole nation shall, if needful for their preservation, be given to ruin. Egypt and Ethiopia were thus *a ransom* for Jerusalem, when God turned Sennacherib's fury against them, and warded off the threatened strokes from the sacred city,† just as a bait, thrown to a beast of prey, would give opportunity to the devoted victim to escape. Often does God turn the enemies of the church to fight among themselves, so that the destined scourge for his church is turned to another quarter, as if the crushed nation was *a ransom*, a victim in the stead of the innocent. However lowering the prospects of the church may be, yet there is no ground for faintness or trembling for the ark of God. His promises to his church are not empty sounds, but "the munitions of rocks." "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper. He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye." (Isa. liv. 17. Zech. ii. 8.) The night may be dark; but the morn will look forth gloriously.

19. It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman.

Another (Verse 9), perhaps even a stronger, picture of the misery of domestic dissension! *It is better* to be destitute altogether of the communion of social life, if it must be purchased at so dear a rate as the companionship of one, whose *contentions* will turn every comfort into bitterness. *It is better to dwell*, not only "upon the house-top," where there might be alleviation, but even *in the wilderness*; giving up

¹ Chap. xiv. 13.

² Ps. xvi. 5, 6; xvii. 15; lxxiii. 25, 26.

* Chap. xi. 8, and references. See also the first-born of Egypt given for the deliverance of Israel. Exod. xi. 4-8; xii. 29-86.

† Isa. xliii. 3, 4. Ransom, the same word in the original. Comp. 2 Kings, xix. 7-9.

all social indulgences for desolation, solitude, and even dangers.* Oh! it is the poison in 'the sweetest cup of earth's best joy,' where "two are joined to each other, and made one flesh " (Matt. xix. 5); yet not "joined to the Lord," and so "made one spirit." (1 Cor. vi. 17.) The woman only is mentioned. Yet the disruption is as frequent, and at least as guilty, from an imperious husband, as from a scolding wife.† Surely our gracious God here teaches his children a lesson too often neglected to their cost—to put their necks into this sacred yoke, reverently, discreetly, advisedly, solemnly, and in the fear of God.‡ Let them carefully ponder the fact, that a choice influenced by the fascination of beauty, manners, or disposition, by intellect or accomplishments, if made without reference to godliness, can give no promise of the divine blessing, or of individual happiness. Often indeed it issues in a state of degradation, too painful to dwell upon, into which one or both parties are content to plunge, making themselves odious for the sake of indulging their *angry* passions. Nor does this apply only to the matrimonial yoke. All members of the family circle, bound together by natural ties, and living together by providential arrangements, may do not a little towards embittering each other's happiness. The subjects of these uncontrolled tempers must, however, reap the natural harvest of their seed sown, and suffer under the mortifying consciousness, that others recoil from their society, and would readily embrace, if need be, the alternative of *the wilderness*, as a welcome change from perpetual irritation.

'The family,' as Mr. Cecil justly observes, 'is sometimes a fierce fire. Our family comprehends the greatest portion of our world. It is to us the most interesting, and therefore is capable of becoming the most trying portion.'§ The child of God is bound indeed to recognize effectual and fatherly discipline in his trials from the tempers of those around him. Yet not less strange the fact, that even among Canaan's pilgrims, words are often uttered, that must produce pain; and thus thorns, which our heavenly Father hath not planted, are strewn in our brother's or sister's path. Effects still more lamentable are to be traced in impressions made upon the young, or on others watching the exhibition of such inconsistencies, where better things might have been expected.

The matrimonial "thorn in the flesh" may be a needful chastening, overruled as a preventive against self-confidence (2 Cor. xii. 7), and for

* See Mark, i. 13. "I had rather"—said the wise son of Sirach—"dwell with a lion and a dragon, than keep house with a wicked woman."—Ecclus. xxv. 16. Comp. xxvi. 7, 27.

† 'There is somewhat (as I may say) of a particular cut or fashion of the garment of wives towards their husbands. But men ought to wear of the same stuff; yea, so if I may speak, of the same piece, for it is in all one and the same spirit.'—LEIGHTON *on. 1 Pet.* iii. 3, 4.

‡ Marriage Service.

§ See his *Sermon on Hannah*.

the exercise of adorning Christian graces.* Yet much prayer and forbearance are required, to avoid being put out of frame with every trifle; to refrain from needless occasion and subjects of irritation; to keep aloof from the immediate bursting of ungoverned passion; and to realize present support under this heavy cross, in the assured prospect and intense longing for the home of everlasting peace.†

20. *There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up.*

To love an earthly treasure is the way to poverty. (Verse 17.) Yet we may thankfully enjoy the prudent gathering, as the fruit of the Lord's blessing (Chap. x. 22), like *the oil* of Canaan,‡ for refreshment. This is not the forbidden "laying up for ourselves treasures upon earth" (Matt. vi. 19), a hoarding for selfishness and distrust of God. (Luke, xii.

* Hooker's meek endurance of the continual dropping (chap. xix. 13) must have read to George Cranmer and others who witnessed it, a striking lesson on the influence of practical religion. Buxtorf quoted a Jewish saying — 'How will a man prove his spirit? By enduring a bad wife.' When Socrates was asked — 'Why he endured his wife? By this means' — he replied — 'I have a schoolmaster at home, and an example how I should behave myself abroad. For I shall' — said he — 'be the more quiet with others, being thus daily exercised and taught in the forbearing of her.' *Homily on Matrimony*. Chrysostom gives the story, like the Homilist, with a striking application. *Homily on 1 Cor.* xi. 16.

† It is not a grave question — whether divorces or conventional separations, such as we hear of even in the Church of God, are not rather the flinching from, than the enduring and honouring, the cross? The supposition that *it is better to dwell in the wilderness* implies, that the worse alternative of *the contentious and angry woman* may be appointed. This was Job's lot. 'The devil' (as M. Henry observed) 'spared his wife to him, not only to be his tempter, but his tormentor.' Yet did he not put away his matrimonial cross. The endurance of it was doubtless a component part of that patience, which is commended to our imitation, and which was honoured with a double increase of family blessing. (Jam. v. 11; Job, xlii. 12, 13.) Our Lord, in restoring this ordinance to its original sternness of obligation, admits but one exception, thereby excluding every other. (Matt. v. 32; xix. 1-9.) According to this rule, an unfaithful wife must be put away as a sin; but a *contentious* wife restrained, and endured as a cross. The Apostle, in discussing the question of casuistry submitted to him (1 Cor. vii. 2-5), lays down the general law, and admits no revulsion of taste or feeling, much less pretence of religion, to put asunder (save *for a time*, by mutual consent, and for a spiritual purpose, 5) what God hath joined together. If in an extremity the unbeliever was suffered to depart (15), no analogy can be applied from an heathen marriage, where the light of Revelation had never shewn the obligation, to that of Christian professors, where its full force was intelligently understood, and voluntarily recognized. Constrained providential separations, where the hearts are in unity, maintain the principle of the bond. But wilful settled separation rejects the distinct ground, on which the ordinance stands. The woman (save where the primary law of nature — self-preservation — dictates) is obviously bound by the same indissoluble tie. (1 Cor. vii. 10.) If on other side it be defended, as avoiding the open scandal of continual contention; let the duty of humiliation and mortification of the sins, which have produced this painful extremity, be first of all instantly and habitually applied. Let the high offence of the direct infraction of God's ordinance be deeply pondered. And let it be considered, whether such infractions do not shake the foundation of an appointment, expressly framed to "make of twain one flesh;" (Gen. ii. 24 Matt. xix. 5); ordained as a type of the unchangeable relation betwixt Christ and his church (Eph. v. 32); and of which "the Lord, the God of Israel," saith, "that He hateth putting away." (Mark, ii. 16.)

‡ See note on verse 17.

16-22.) This *treasure is in the dwelling of the wise*. For prudence is not worldliness (Chap. x. 5. Gen. xli. 48); an indifference to coming trial, is not faith, but foolish simplicity. (Chap. xxii. 3.)

Even the cottage of the godly poor often contains this desirable treasure, the reward of Christian diligence. Yet poor indeed is the palace, where the Bible with its stores of unsearchable riches is not the grand treasure, and where the oil of gladness, while it poureth out richly, is not his choicest comfort.* Wherever this treasure is pre-eminently prized, this is the dwelling of the wise, whether it be the prince or the pauper. And, as Cecil, Queen Elizabeth's Secretary, said, on leaving Bernard Gilpin's house—'There dwells as much happiness as can be known on earth'—how shall we joy to be found in the same world with such men!

But whatever be *the treasure of the foolish man*, or however obtained, his improvidence is a wide gulf to *spend it up*. All goes one way. Drunkenness, wasteful expenditure, idleness, gambling, devours it all. He serves a master, who will leave him nothing at the year's end, and as the only reward of his drudgery, will bring him to utter destitution. Such was the prodigal's course; yet in the gracious mercy of his Father the means of changing him from his folly into a better mind, and bringing him to *the dwelling of the wise*; a possessor of *a treasure more desirable*, than his earthly appetite had longed for. (Luke, xv. 13-24.)

But there are other *foolish men* besides the drunkard and the spendthrift; and other treasure infinitely more *desirable, that is spent up*. Admission to *the dwelling of the wise*--the opportunity of thus growing rich in knowledge and holiness (Chap. xiii. 20)—what a "price would it be in the hands of a fool," had he but "an heart for it!" But the golden moment is lost; *the treasure is spent up*. Time is wasted in reckless frivolity of pursuit in innumerable ways. The entire absence of an holy aim in his daily employments deadens all sense of responsibility. He lives only as the creature of the present moment, with no object connected with eternity. Oh! my God! leave me not to my own folly, lest I *spend up my treasure*, instead of trading with it, and thus enlarging it for my best welfare.

21. *He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness, and honour.*

Here the *desirable treasure* is not *spent up*, but *followed after* with a distinctness of purpose, that spews a perception of its value. This is the Christian standard--"Not as though I had already attained, either

* *Treasure and oil* are mentioned; first the general term, then one of its valuable items. A similar idiom may be found, Mark, xvi. 7.

were already perfect. But I *follow after*.”¹ Heaven, "the prize of our high calling," is the bright consummating object. But *righteousness and mercy*--all our obligations to God and man--are the pathway to it, and the meetness for it.² Holiness must be our daily habit, as well as our religious service—"in all manner of conversation." (1 Pet. i. 15.) There must be nothing at home or abroad, where the man of God is not seen.³ The true evidence of divine grace on the heart is the practical influence upon the temper and conduct. (Tit. iii. 8.) Our Master's example is our pattern. And he is a self-deceiving professor, who does not labour intensely to *follow after* it.

But this *following after* is not the toiling at a daily task ; not a compulsory law, chaining the conscience against the inclinations of the will. It is delight, freedom, and enlargement (Ps. lxiii. 8) ; the rising flow of the heart filled with fearless love.*

This *following* it finds its own reward.⁴ A reward of grace indeed it must be; so infinitely is it above our faint and sinful efforts. *He that followeth findeth life*⁵—that which is the life of life--the treasure of the best happiness; fellowship with God; the sunshine of his face; the enjoyment of his love.⁶ He *findeth righteousness*--a retributive blessing from a God of grace.⁷ He *findeth honour*. For "if any man serve me"--saith our divine Master--"him will my Father honour." "To them, that by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, he will render eternal life."⁸ Then—to depart in the joy of conscious acceptance--"I have finished my course. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness." (2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.)

Such is godliness with its faithful and precious promises for both worlds! (1 Tim. iv. 8.) Are they not worth *following after*? Yet how many play with this grand exercise, as if it were an easy thing at the next door! How often sloth and drowsiness degrade it into a lifeless task, an "exercise that profiteth little!" Where do we see this strenuous sustained effort; this applying to the real work of the daily cross; this making a business of religion? We look for the picture of men on the stretch; all energy; all pursuit; nothing diverting from the object; pressing all their might with constant urgency in the momentous service; up to a point that they had never before reached. This high

¹ Philip. iii. 12-14.

² Ps. xv. Isa. xxxiii. 15-17; xxxv. 8.

³ 1 Cor. x. 31. Col. iii. 17. Zech. xiv. 20.

⁴ Ps. xix. 11. Isa. xxxii. 17.

⁵ Chap. viii. 35; xii. 28; xxii. 4.

⁶ Chap. xv. 9. Isa. lxiv. 5. John, xiv. 2:1-23.

⁷ Matt. x. 41, 42. Luke, vi. 38. Heb. vi. 10.

⁸ John, xii. 26. Rom. ii. 7.

* 'The will is in love with those charms, which draw us to God. And as no man will complain, that his temples are restrained, and his head is prisoner, when it is encircled with a crown; so when "the Son of God hath made us free," and hath only subjected us to the service and dominion of the Spirit, we are free as princes within the circle of their diadem; and our chains are bracelets, and the law is a law of liberty, and 'God's service is perfect freedom;' and the more we are subjects, the more we "reign as kings;" and the further we run, the easier is our burden; and Christ's yoke is like feathers to a bird; not loads, but helps to motion; without them the body falls.' Bp. Taylor.

standard of perseverance will only just bring us to the goal. (1 Pet. iv. 18.) The half-hearted, temporary professor; the creature of impulse, instead of the child of faith, though for a while he may "run well," will utterly fall short.

22. *A wise man scaleth the city of the mighty, and casteth down the strength of the confidence thereof.*

The art of war has already shewn the pre-eminence of wisdom above strength.¹ Prudent tactics, or a wise application of courage, triumphs over mere personal prowess. Joshua's stratagem in taking Ai was a proof of military *wisdom*.² Solomon seems to have known of a *wise Man* singly delivering his city from the power of a mighty king; a proof of *wisdom* quite tantamount to the strength of an aggressor *scaling the walls*, and thus *casting down its confidence*. (Eccles. ix. 13-18.) Much more therefore will spiritual wisdom, the immediate gift of God, overcome difficulties as formidable as *the scaling of the city of the mighty*. A wise calculation of the cost is eminently serviceable in achieving most important triumphs. (Luke, xiv. 31, 32.) For does not conscious weakness lead to a single dependence upon God? And what difficulties are too great for an Almighty arm? "By thee—said a valiant soldier in the army of faith---"I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall."³ "Weapons of a spiritual, not of a carnal," temper, "are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds" (2 Col. x. 4), impregnable to the power of man. All the promises are "to him that overcometh."* Let the soldier go to the conflict "strong in the Lord," and "putting on his whole armour." (Eph. vi. 10.) The triumph is sure. The heavenly *city will be scaled*. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." (Matt. xi. 12.)

23. *Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.*

How frequently does the wise man remind us of the responsibility connected with the use "of the little member!"⁴ Yet as the test of a sound or unsound religion, can we have it too often before our eyes? (Jam. i. 26.) Indeed the soundness of the regenerate heart is in nothing more manifest, than in making conscience of speech. The corruption of the heart indeed is the main source. But its evil is fearfully increased by the ebullition of the lips. How large a portion of this world's ceaseless *troubles* may be traced to this prolific source! It is the unbridled horse, that brings his rider into fearful jeopardy. *The mouth* has been opened rashly. *The tongue* has flowed unguardedly;

¹ Chap. xxiv. 5, 6. Eccles. vii. 19.

² Jos. viii. 3-22.

³ Ps. xviii. 29. Ps. cxliv. 1.

⁴ Chap. x. 14; xii. 13; xiii. 3; xiv. 3; xvii. 20; xviii. 6, 7, 21.

* Rev. ii. 7, and to all the Apocalyptic churches.

and "behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth!*" "Our neighbour has been injured; God has been dishonoured; and bitter *trouble of soul* has been the fruit.

What then is our preventive from this imminent temptation? Cultivate a deep and watchful sensibility. Walk closely with God. Cherish the tender spirit of his constraining obligations. Keep the *tongue* for his service; asking for, his grace at once to restrain and employ it. (Ps. cxli. 3.) Thus consecrated to God, it becomes "the glory of man" (Ps. lvii. 8); not only *keeping him from trouble*, but elevating him to fellowship in the ceaseless praises of the heavenly world.

24. *Proud and haughty scorner is his name, who dealeth in proud wrath.*

And who gave him this *name*? Even he, who "will destroy the tongue that speaketh proud things, who hath said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is Lord over us?" (Ps. xii4 4.) See how God loads him with disgrace. Man's rebukes may be "the curse causeless, that will not come." (Chap. xxvi. 2.) But God's stamp is indelible. *Proud and haughty scorner!* Such is *his name*. He may pride himself upon his scorning. But contrast him with "the man, to whom God looks, him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word." (Isa. lxvi. 2.)

Look at this vivid picture in Pharaoh--that *haughty scorner* bursting out in his *proud wrath*—"Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?" (Exod. v. 2) in Sennacherib, "reproaching and blaspheming the Holy One of Israel."¹ Haman meets with an affront. His *proud wrath* kindles. He cares neither for God, nor man. The ruin of his single enemy will not suffice. He must glut himself with the blood of a whole unoffending nation.²

Scorner is his name. Not an empty *name*. Never let us separate the *name* which God hath given, from the doom which he hath denounced. "The day of the Lord of Hosts shall be upon every one that is *proud* and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low. Behold! the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and *all the proud* shall be as stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor

* Jam. iii. 5. See how strongly Job protests against the imputation of the injury of the tongue, chap. xxxi. 30. 'The tongue' — says Bp. Taylor, in his bold imagery— 'is a fountain both of bitter water and of sweet. It sends forth blessing and cursing. It is sometimes "set on fire," and then it puts whole cities into combustion. It is unruly, and no more to be restrained than the breath of a tempest. It is volatile and fugitive. Reason should go before it; and when it does not, repentance comes after it. It was intended for an organ of divine praises. But the devil often plays on it, and then it sounds like the screech-owl, or the groans of death. Sorrow and shame, folly and repentance, are the note and forcible accents of this discord.'—*Sermon on the Good and Evil Tongue.*

¹ 2 Kings, xviii. 35 ; xix. 21, 22, 23.

² Esth. iii. 5, 6; v. 9.

branch." (Isa. ii. 12. Mal. iv. 1.) "Now we call *the proud* happy. But how shall they abide the day of his coming?" (Mal. iii. 15, with 2.) Oh! with such a manifestation of the mind of God, never think lightly of a *proud* thought, or a *scornful* feeling or expression.

It may be, that this hateful abomination¹ is indulged in God's own children. Yet he will not wink at this sin, nor spare his rod. The glory of their name shall be darkened. His frown shall be made visible. If "Asa's heart was" in the main "perfect with God all his days," yet for the sin of *haughtiness and proud wrath*, his sun went down in a cloud.² "For our God is a consuming fire."³

25. *The desire of the slothful killeth him: for his hands refuse to labour.*

26. *He coveteth greedily all the day long: but the righteous giveth and spareth not.*

Often have the shame and wretchedness of *sloth* been before us. Here is the finishing stroke. *The desire of the slothful killeth him*. It leads to no effort, therefore to no fruit. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick" (Chap. xiii. 12); and perpetual vexation frets him to death.* 'What he longs for, he does not set his hand to purchase. But he would rather sit still and starve.'† He thinks to live by wishing, not by working.⁴ Some faint *desires* he may have to work. But the effort to "take his hand out of his bosom"⁵ is too great. *His hands* therefore, as if they were given him only to be folded, *refuse to labour*. There is no want of physical power and activity. He could spend his whole time in 'busy idleness;'‡ but for useful *labour* he has no heart. Meanwhile, with all his inactivity, he is a prey *all day long to a greedy covetousness*; tantalized with insatiable desires; while the hope of enjoyment, though not out of sight, yet, from want of exertion, is out of reach. Thus, dreaming of the end without mortification or godly exercise, he dies with his desires in his mouth; envying those, whose industrious diligence enables them to *give, and spare not*.⁶

Such is the temporal evil of sloth; one of the many forms of moral selfishness, that paralyze alike our energy and our comfort. But far more ruinous is it in the higher and deeper concern. The stamp of death is broad and palpable upon the heartless professor. (Rev. iii. 1.) We ask —What is his religion? He hopes he has *a desire*; and he has often heard that 'the desire of grace is grace.' Now this is true, *if the desire be predominant*. Faint as it may be in its first dawn, it "is the day of small things not to be despised." (Zech. iv. 10.) It is "the smoking flax," which the Saviour "will not quench" (Matt. xii. 20),

¹ Chap. vi. 16, 17; viii. 13; xvi. 5. Comp. Eccles. x. 12, 13.

² 1 Kings, xv. 14. 2 Chron. xvi. 10-13.

³ Heb. xii. 28, 29.

⁴ Chap. xii. 27; xx. 4.

⁵ Chap. xix. 24.

⁶ Ps. xxxvii. 26; cxii. 9. Eph. iv. 28.

* Virtutem videant, intabescantque relictæ. PERS. *Sat.* iii. as.

† Bp. Hull.

‡ 1 Tim. v. 13. Strenua nos exercet inertia. HOR. *Ep. Lib.* i. xi. 28.

but kindle into a flame. But if it is always a *desire*, and no more, habitually overcome by a contrary inclination; instead of grace, it is a delusion, a mere sentimental excitement, to lull the conscience asleep. How can an object, which standeth in a fixed distance from the nature which it should perfect, be procured by idle and standing affections? Those affections must have life in them, which would bring life after them. Dead desires are deadly desires.* Beware then of the sluggard's cry. His *desires*, instead of carrying life in them, are cold things, that strike death into the soul. Earnest seeking is the test of godly desire.¹ No quarter will be left unexplored, where we might find our God;² no means of grace unimproved, where we might enjoy his presence. (Isa. lxiv. 5.) It was an excellent prayer of Sir Thomas More — 'Lord! make me to bestow pains in getting those things, for the obtaining of which I am used to pray unto thee.'

If some will call this active energy legal, our Lord's command to "labour"³ proves, that it is scriptural. Whoever does not strive to come near to the standard, has never really apprehended it. Whoever *desires* only, and *refuses to labour* to be a growing Christian daily, gives doubtful evidence whether he be a Christian at all. Some profess to be hindered from duty, because they have no heart for it, like the man whom cold would keep from the fire, which was intended to warm him. The sluggard talks about grace — His "soul desireth, and hath nothing." (Chap. xiii. 4.) Effort is the death of sloth. It sweeps away most, and endures the remaining difficulties, confident of ultimate success.

Not that the power is in ourselves. But when did God ever fail to help the sinner's endeavour? "That thou givest, we gather." (Ps. civ. 28.) 'The ship is like to be steered with best certainty and success, when the pilot's eye is to heaven, and his hand at the stern.'† And thus prayer and diligence, dependence and energy, harmonize in the Bible; however they may be discordant in the crude systems of man's devising. Divine agency is given, not to excuse the neglect of human means, but to encourage their improvement. (Phil. ii. 12, 13.) The means are as much the matter of divine self fore-knowledge and counsel, as the ends with which they are connected.

What then want we for active service, but the continued exercise of faith? This gave power at first; this alone sustains the power. Never let us suppose exertion for the prize to be too late. If ever thou art discouraged—much more— if thou art inclined to sloth—set it down, in your mind, and pray that God would write it there clear as a

¹ Ps. xxvii. 4. Isa. xxvi. 8, 9. Ps. xxiv. 8.

² Job, xxiii. 8, 8, 9.

³ John, vi. 27. Luke, xiii. 24.

* Dr. REYNOLD'S *Treatise on the Passions*, chap. xviii.

† Bp. SANDERSON'S *Sermon on* 1 Cor. xii. 7.

sunbeam— 'It is yours —It is yours for all time, and the fruit of it shall be yours for all eternity.' There is no moment, when the Lord is not giving; when he has not bound himself to give, by infinite and, most loving obligations. Deliberately devote yourselves. Put the resolution into practical form, habit, and place. Make all sacrifices for it. Seize all opportunities for making it good. Our work will be our recompense; our labour our wages. And while the slothful man only covets for himself, *the righteous*, in the flowing of the willing heart, lives for the Church. He has to *give, and he spares not*. "He is a blessing in the midst of the land."*

27. *The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination; how much more when he bringeth it with a wicked mind!* (in wickedness, marg.)

This is the repetition of a former proverb (Chap. xv. 8) with additional intensity. At no time, under no circumstances, can *the sacrifice of the wicked* be acceptable. All the true requisites of holy worship are wanting. *There is no heart*. The service is therefore only formality or hypocrisy. (Matt. xv. 7-9.) *There is no way of access*;¹ no "altar to sanctify the gift."² Therefore it is presumption, self-righteousness, will-worship.³ *There is no "faith*, without which it is impossible to please God." (Heb. xi. 6.) The material act, considered in itself, may be good; but the corrupt principle makes *the sacrifice an abomination*. (Mal. i. 7, 8.)

How much more—the sin is double—*when he bringeth it with a wicked mind!* The mind under the dominant power of sin is like a pestilential atmosphere, which infests all within its sphere of influence. Such was it, when Balaam *brought his sacrifice*, that he might curse Israel;⁴ Saul, in wayward disobedience,⁵ Absalom and Jezebel, to cover their treachery;⁶ the adulteress, as a lulling to her unwary prey;⁷ the Pharisees, as a handle to their covetousness;⁸ Antinomian professors, for the indulgence of their lusts!⁹ What *an abomination*

¹ John, xiv. 6.

² Heb. xiii. 10. Matt. xxiii. 19.

³ Gen. iv. 3-5.

⁴ Num. xxiii. 1-3, 13.

⁵ 1 Sam. xiii. 8-15; xv. 21-23.

⁶ 2 Sam. xv. 7-13. 1 Kings, xxi. 9-12. Isa. i. 13-16.

⁷ Chap. vii. 14, 15.

⁸ Matt. xxiii. 14.

⁹ Jam. iv. 3.

* Isa. xix. 24. The following exhortations are well worth our pondering — 'Our heart being naturally at a distance from God, it is not a single step, that will bring us near to him. Neither will a few minutes of cold prayer suffice to support our souls.—Let us beware of indolence. Many are the hours and days we lose on our road to heaven. These days will soon amount to years; and we shall be too late at last for the marriage supper. We should willingly exert ourselves to climb a mountain for the sake of a fine view, or a pure air. Let us then use all our strength to climb the mountain of Zion, where we, shall breathe a truly vivifying atmosphere, and from whose heights we shall behold the true Eden, the valley of peace, through which flow living waters, and where the tree of life flourishes. May the Lord bestow upon us all the necessary will and energy!'—*Letters and Biography of Felix Neff*—a most interesting supplement to Dr. Gilly's Memorial of a short Life filled up with usefulness, and crowned with glory.

must their service be before him, who is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity!"¹

And yet *apparent* acceptance is sometimes granted to *the sacrifice of the wicked*. God, as the moral governor of the world, externally rewards actions externally good.² But never does he fail to punish the evil principle in those very actions, which are the subjects of his reward. Our Lord's love of the amiable victim of self-delusion was the confession of his humanity, not Divine complacency; and fully consistent with holy abhorrence of his proud rejection of the gospel. (Mark, x. 17-21.)

What then are *the wicked* to do, rejected as they are under the most favourable circumstances? Shall they lie down in despondency, or harden themselves in rebellion? (Jer. ii. 25; vii. 10.) Or shall they wait for better dispositions, and prepare themselves for the gospel? The door of prayer is their only refuge. (Acts, viii. 22.) *That* door opens the gospel to them with a free warrant of faith, abundant encouragement, and sure acceptance.³

28. *A false witness* (witness of lies, marg.) *shall perish; but the man that heareth speaketh constantly.*

The last clause of the proverb seems to fix and restrict the first. A *false witness* often becomes so by the culpable habit of thoughtlessly repeating, without examination or certain knowledge. A man may thus do very serious injury to his neighbour's character or property. It proves a very loose conscience, and an utter want of that "charity, which covers," instead of exposing faults.⁴ It is "rejoicing in iniquity," rather than "rejoicing in truth."⁵ This *false witness* will certainly be punished by God;⁶ and even 'by man he will be confounded and silenced. No one for the future will regard or receive his testimony.'* *But the man that heareth*—the true witness who speaketh only what he *heareth*, and is fully acquainted with--*he speaketh constantly*—to conviction. He holds to his testimony and never contradicts himself. He 'speaks the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.' His word, even if it had been slighted at first, gains more and more credit and authority, when *the false witness shall have perished*. (Chap. xii. 19.)

Thus "the faithful and true witness" declared for himself and his servants—"We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen."⁷ The Apostles, to give solid weight to their testimony, would fill up the vacancy in their body only from among those, "who had companied with them all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among them" (Acts, i. 21,22); as if those only, who *had heard, would*

¹ Hab, i. 13.

² 1 Kings, xxi. 27-29. 2 Kings, x. 29-31.

³ Isa. i. 16-18; lv. 6, 7.

⁴ Chap. x. 12.

⁵ Contrast 1 Cor. xiii.

⁶ Chap. xix. 5, 9.

⁷ Rev. iii. 14. John, iii. 11.

⁸ Poole *in loco*.

speak constantly. They claimed authority to their commission, as having heard from the mouth of God, and therefore being assured of its divine warrant.¹ And indeed this constitutes the main power of testimony. A feeble and hesitating tone is spiritless and ineffective. (2 Cor. i. 17.) A decided accredited presentment of truth--*speaking constantly*—commands conviction. "We believe, and therefore we speak." (Ib. iv. 13.)

29. *A wicked man hardeneth his face: but as for the upright, he directeth his way.*

A *hardened face*, without shame or blushing for sin, is a fearful manifestation of a hardened heart. Cain standing boldly in the presence of his God, with his hands reeking with his brother's blood;² Gehazi with his fearless lie;³ the Traitor, bearing to be pointed out by his Master, without visible emotion,⁴ then afterwards with unblushing effrontery kissing his sacred cheeks⁵—how *hardened* must have been their faces in determined *wickedness*! The adulteress also, clothing her seductive witcheries with an impudent face, stands out before us. (Chap. vii. 10-13.) Sometimes *the wicked man*, bent upon his way, *hardens his face* against the most distinct warning and intimations of the will of God. Nothing would hinder Balaam from his own "perverse way." He even anticipated the conditional permission of God, lest it should ultimately stand in his way.⁶ Ahab determinately *hardened his face* against the clear forbidding will of God.⁷ Jehoiakim, before his whole council, set God at defiance.⁸ His people "ran" with the bravery of madmen "upon the thick bosses of his buckler."⁹ And does not sin stand out before us with a brazen face? (Isa. iii. 9.) The drunkard reels at noon-day. The swearer pours out his wickedness in the open crowd. The sensualist "glories in his shame." (Philip. iii. 19.) Truly this is the spirit of Satan. How near to hell! How awful is the plain stamp of the seal of wrath! (Rom. ii. 5.) Truly 'we have no stay and command of ourselves. So masterful are our wills and headstrong, but that, if God should leave us wholly to the wildness of our unruly nature, and to take our own course, we should soon run ourselves upon our own ruin.'*

Cheering is it to contrast the tender spirit of the child of God. This is rest indeed—to put ourselves in the Lord's hands, fearful of taking one step alone; carefully ordering our steps, lest by inadvertence, much more by wilfulness, they should bring shame upon *his face*. (Ps. cxix. 5, 6, 80.) Godly simplicity greatly clears the eye of the soul.

¹ 1 Cor. i. 23; xv. 3, 4. 2 Pet. i. 16-18. 1 John, i. 1-3.

² Gen. iv. 8, 9.

³ 2 Kings., v. 25.

⁴ John, xiii. 21-30.

⁵ Matt. xxvi, 47-49.

⁶ Num. xiii. 20-22, 32..

⁷ 1 Kings, xxii. 3-6, 18-29.

⁸ Jer. xxxvi. 23, 24.

⁹ Ib. xlv. 16, 17, with Job, xv. 25, 26..

* Bp., SANDERSON'S. *Sermon on Ps. xix. 13.*

Where the heart is set on the duty, there will be seldom any great difficulty in discovering the path. (Matt. vi. 22.) Secret heavenly direction is engaged. (Chap. iii. 6.) An unfixed, unresolved mind gives great advantage to the enemy's assault. Here lies the contrast--*The wicked man hardens his face* against God's ordinances. The godly *directs his way* by them; not waiting in inactivity for miraculous leading, but improving those ordinary means, which throw light upon every step. Temporals, as well as spirituals; trifles, as well as important matters, are brought under the eye of our gracious God. Child-like confidence brings sunshine and acceptance, a brighter and more glorious privilege than the sceptre of the universe.

30. *There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord.*

31. *The house is prepared against the day of battle: but safety (victory, marg.) is of the Lord.*

This proverb is not true in the strict letter. All the *wisdom* and policy of earth and hell are in active operation. But all is in vain *against the Lord*. The history of the Church abundantly proves this. The decrees and counsels of God are firm as adamant; immoveable, notwithstanding all human machinations; no more to be stayed than the course of the sun.* *Wisdom and understanding* and the best-concocted *counsel*, when *against the Lord*, come to foolishness. (Ps. xxxiii. 10, 11.) "He taketh the wise," not in their ignorance, but "in their craftiness;"¹ not when their *wisdom* was fading, but when it was at the utmost zenith. Ahithophel's *counsel* was befooled at the time, when "it was as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God." Pharaoh's *counsel* to depress the chosen nation issued in their increase. (Exod. i. 8-12.) His murderous decree, as a link in the chain of Providence, nurtured the Leader and Lawgiver of the people. (Ib. verses 15, 22, with ii. 1-10.) Balak's desire to curse Israel was overruled for blessing.³ The wise man vainly set up in his darker days his own *wisdom* against the declared purpose of God.⁴ Ahab's project to ward off the threatened stroke against his life;⁵ his determination to avert the extinction of his family;⁶ Athaliah's deep-laid plot to exterminate the family of David,⁷ and so to frustrate the Divine promise; the enmity against the builders of the temple⁸--all this diversified mass of *wisdom, and counsel, and understanding against the Lord*—what was it?—a thing of nought.⁹ "They all signify nothing if they oppose the counsels and decrees of heaven."†

Mark the history of our Lord. It would seem, as if nothing could

¹ Job, v. 13. 1 Cor. iii. 19.

² 2 Sam. xvi. 23; xvii. 7, 14, 23, with xv. 31.

³ Num. xxiv. 10.

⁴ 1 Kings, xi. 11, 40.

⁵ Ib. xxii. 30-34.

⁶ Ib. xxi. 21. 2 Kings, x. 1-7.

⁷ 2 Kings, xi. 2.

⁸ Neh. vi.

⁹ Isa. viii. 10; xiv. 27; xlvi. 10.

* Lavater *in loco*.

† Bishop Patrick.

have hindered the success of Herod's *wisdom and counsel* against his infancy. (Matt. ii. 8, 16.) What a combination of *wisdom* from all quarters vainly to "entangle him in his walk!" (Ib. xxii. 15-46.) How near to failure were the prophecies connected with his death, burial, and resurrection! Stoning was the sentence for the charge laid against him! (Lev. xxiv. 16.) His burial was appointed among the wicked. (Isa. llii. 9.) His resurrection, so far as man could do, was effectually prevented.¹ But God had ordained crucifixion for his death,² his burial among the rich,* his resurrection as the confusion of all their counsel. (Matt. xxviii. 1-15.) The event proved that there *was no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord*. 'God's desire is fulfilled to those who have the least mind to it. All man's wisdom, while it strives for masteries, is overmatched.'†

Let us look at that kingdom of Providence, so finely represented by "the wheels full of eyes round about them." (Ezek. i. 18.) To deny an absolute superintending controul, is to 'place an idle sceptre in the hands of Him, who governs the universe.'‡ How many movements baffle alike previous calculation and subsequent inquiry; effects, for which no adequate cause is producible; anomalies, manifestly intended to remove our eyes from second causes to the First Great Spring of agency, moving alone all, and in despite of all opposition! The raging Dioclesian struck his medal—'Christianity is extinguished.' The Great Author brings out from the very fire the palpable proof that 'the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.' 'Oh! the folly and blindness of men, that think to carry all to their minds, and walk as masters of their own designs, and never have any serious thought of him, in whose hands both they, and all their business, and all the affairs of states and kingdoms of this world, are as a piece of wax, to frame them to what he pleases!§ And do not some of us remember with shame our "striving with our Maker" (Isa. xlv. 9)—how long we endeavoured to defeat his purposes of love, until at length we were brought to cast our weapons at his feet, and to acknowledge, that *there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord?*

But putting away rebellion—beware of vain confidence, scarcely less displeasing to the Lord. *The horse* was a forbidden confidence in *the day of battle*.³ The most glorious days of victory were, when that veto was regarded.⁴ Declension commenced from the transgression of the law; defeat from the very quarter of confidence.⁵ The after-

¹ Matt. xxvii. 62-66.

² Gal. iii. 13.

³ Deut. xxii. 16.

⁴ Josh. xi. 6, 9. Jud. iv. 3-15. 2 Sam. viii. 4.

⁵ 1 Kings, x. 26-28. 2 Chron. xii. 8, 9. Comp. Isa. xxxi. 1-3.

* Isa. liii. 9. Bp. Lowth. Comp. Matt. xxvii. 57-60.

† Trapp. Comp. Acts, ii. 23, 24; iv. 27, 28.

‡ Abp. Magee's interesting Sermon on this text. *Works*, ii. 354. Comp. Job, xii. 21, 22. Isa xlv. 25.

§ LEIGHTON'S *Sermon on Jer. x., 23, 24.*

renunciation of this confidence was a time of gracious acceptance.¹ *The horse* indeed may be legitimately employed as a means of defence. But never let the material of warfare be our confidence. Use the means, but idolize them not. They that "trust in them fall." Those that remember that *safety is of the Lord*, "are risen, and stand upright."² "*The horse* is a vain thing for *safety*."³ "The remembrance of the name of the Lord" was mightier to the young warrior than the strength of the giant. (1 Sam. xvii. 45.) Much more--in the spiritual warfare, let us have the *active* exercise of dependence. "Salvation is of the Lord"⁴--free, complete, triumphant and everlasting victory over all the powers of hell.

CHAPTER XXII.

1. A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving, favour rather than silver and gold.*

BUT what is this *good name*, here commended as a precious jewel? Not the *name*, which the Babel-builders would "make to themselves." (Gen. xi. 4.) Not as Absalom, who reared a pillar to "keep his *name* in remembrance," or rather to commemorate his shame. (2 Sam. xviii: 18.) It is not the popular voice. So different is God's standard from man's, that to have "all men speak well of us," would be *a bad name*!⁵ So apt are men to "put darkness for light; and light for darkness,"⁶ that the reputation too often serves in the place of reality, the false glare for the generous principle, the shadow for the substance, the tinsel for the gold. The *good name* is gained by godly consistency. † The possessor is either unconscious of the gift, or humbled with the conviction, that it is wholly undeserved. The *loving favour* connected with it is often seen in early childhood.⁷ It was the heavenly seal upon the Pentecostal Christians.⁸ And every servant of God values it as a trust and talent for his Master's service and glory.⁹

Such is its value, that it is *rather to be chosen than great riches, than silver and gold*.¹⁰ A bye-word may be attached to *riches*.¹¹ Add to which—"They fly away upon eagles' wings."¹² But *the good name* "will be in everlasting remembrance."¹³ And even now it brings con-

¹ Hos. xiv. 3, 4.

² Ps. xx. 7, 8.

³ Ib. xxxiii. 17.

⁴ Ps. iii. 8; xxxvii. 39, 40; lxviii. 20. Jonah, ii. 9.

⁵ Luke, vi. 26; xvi. 15.

⁶ Isa. v. 20.

⁷ 1 Sam. ii. 26. Luke, ii. 52.

⁸ Acts, ii. 47.

⁹ Neh. i. 10, 11. Philip. ii. 15, 16; iv. 8, 9.

¹⁰ Comp. Ecclus. xli. 12.

¹¹ 1 Sam. xxv. 3, 17, 25.

¹² Chap. xxiii. 5.

¹³ Luke, vii. 4, 5. Acts, ix. 36-39.

* A name—meaning a good name. See chap. xviii. 22,n.

† Heathen intelligence seemed to have some glimpse of this medium. Agesilaus--being asked how a good name was to be obtained—replied—'By speaking the best, and doing the most upright, things.' Socrates to the same question answered-- 'By studying really to be what you wish to be accounted.'

fidence and respect.¹ It largely adds to usefulness; gives authority to reproof, counsel, and example; so that, if the world cannot love, neither can they despise. Hence the Christian obligation to be "blameless, as well as harmless, to shine as lights in the world."² Hence the honour of "having a good report of all men, and of the truth itself."³ Hence the qualification for efficiency in the sacred office—"blameless, having a good report of them which are without."⁴ But how often do the "dead flies" spoil "the precious ointment!" (Eccles. vii. 1; x. 1.) Satan, when he cannot hinder the instruments, will blemish them, to give currency to error, and to stumble the ungodly and unstable. (2 Sam. xii. 14.)

We must not indeed overvalue man's estimation, much less take it as the standard of our principles, or the motive of our conduct. Yet we must not on the other hand indiscreetly underrate it--'I never thought' --said the wise Sir M. Hale--'that reputation was the thing primarily to be looked after in the exercise of virtue (for that were to affect the substance for the sake of the shadow); but I looked at virtue and the worth of it, as that which was the first desirable, and reputation as a handsome and useful accession to it.'*

Some however judge--'So long as my conscience is clear, I care not what the world think or say of me. Other consciences are not my judges.' Now in resisting the efforts of the world to turn us aside from the path of duty, 'we may seasonably comfort ourselves in our own innocency, fly for refuge against the injuries of tongues into our own consciences, as into a castle; and there repose ourselves in security, disregarding the reproaches of evil men.'† But it should be our great care to stop the mouths of gainsayers; and while we count it a "very small matter to be judged of man's judgment," most anxiously to "provide things honest, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men."⁵

Yet precious as this blessing is, take care that it be not purchased at the expense of conscience. Far better that others should blot our name, than that we should wound our consciences. 'Two things there are,' saith St. Augustine, 'whereof every man should be specially chary and tender—his conscience, and his credit. But that of his conscience must be his first care; this of his name and credit must be content to come in the second place. Let him first be sure to guard his conscience well; and then may he have a due regard of his name also. Let it be his first care to secure all within, by making his peace with God and in his own breast. That done—but not before---let

¹ Gen. xxxix. 4, 21; xli. 37. Dan. ii. 48, 49; vi. 1-3.

² Philip. ii. 15.

³ 3 John, 12. Acts, xvi. 2. 2 Cor. viii. 18.

⁴ 1 Tim. iii. 2, 7; iv. 16.

⁵ 1 Cor. iv. 3, with 2 Cor. viii. 21. Comp. 1 Cor. ix. 15; 2 Cor. xi. 12; 1 Pet. ii. 12.

* The account of the Good Steward. † Bp. SANDERSON'S *Sermon on Eccles. vii. 1*, § 30.

him look abroad if he will, and cast about as well as he can, to strengthen his reputation with and before the world.*

But though it be true, that reputation and the affection of others are *better than riches*; yet must we not forget, that they may be in themselves vanity and a snare. And as seeking them is the infirmity, or rather (when made an idol) the sin of a noble mind, the most severe discipline is needed to preserve Christian simplicity and singleness. But "the honour that cometh from God only" is always safe. And that he should register *a good name* in the annals of the church,¹ "in the book of remembrance² in the book of life"³—Oh! is not this infinitely above all this world's glory?⁴ And how gladly will he own these jewels at the day of his appearing!⁵ How sure and glorious is his promise to his faithful servant—"I will not blot out his name out of the book of life; but I will confess his name before my Father and his angels!" (Rev. iii. 5.)

2. *The rich and the poor meet together: the Lord is the maker of them all.*

There is great diversity in the several stations and circumstances of mankind. Yet the difference is mainly superficial, and the equality in all important matters manifest. *The rich and the poor, apparently so remote from each other, meet together.* All have the same birth.⁶ All enter the world naked,⁷ helpless, unconscious beings; all stand in the same natural relation to their God; dependent on him for their birth;⁸ the children of his Providence;⁹ the creatures of his moral government.¹⁰ All are subject to the same sorrow, sickness, infirmities, and temptations.¹¹ At the gate of the invisible world the distinction of riches and poverty is dropped. "All go to one place"¹²--alike having kindred with worms and corruption. And when they shall come forth from the long home at the final consummation, all--"small as well as great--shall stand before God." (Rev. xx. 12.)

We meet together also on the same level as sinners. All are tainted with the same original corruption.¹³ "All, like sheep, have" personally "gone astray." (Isa. liii. 6.) All need alike the same new birth to give them life, the same precious blood to cleanse them, the same robe of righteousness to cover them. (Rom. iii. 21, 22.) It is in fact a common need,† and a common salvation, (Jude, 3.) In all these matters *the rich and the poor are as one.* "God is no respecter of

¹ Matt. xxvi. 13.

² Mal. iii. 16. ³ Philip. iv. 3.

⁴ Luke, x. 20.

⁵ Mal. iii. 17. ⁶ Job, xxxi. 15. Mal. ii. 10. Acts, xvii. 26.

⁷ Job, i. 21. Eccles. v. 15.

⁸ Job, xii. 10. Acts, xvii. 25, 28.

⁹ Ps. cxlv. 9, 15, 16.

¹⁰ Dan. iv. 35. ¹¹ Heb. xiii. 8.

¹² Job, iii. 19. Ps. lxxxix. 48. Eccles. ii. 16; iii. 20; vi. 6; ix. 11. Heb. ix. 27.

¹³ Gen. v. 3. Job, xxv. 4. Ps. li. 5.

* Bp. Sanderson, *ut supra*, § 23.

† In the ordinance of redemption all were to give alike, as an acknowledgment of equal need. Exod. xxx. 15.

persons."¹ The difference appears only as the outward garment.² Yet what a distance it makes! The one scarcely hears of or knows the other!

And when redeemed into the family of God, is not every member of the family our brother?³ Here then *rich and poor* meet on equal standing at the same throne of grace, in the same spiritual body,* at the same holy table.⁴ We communicate to each other the same blessed hopes, feel the same sympathies, and anticipate the same home.

Nor is this a constitution of accident, or of mechanical arrangement. *The Lord is the maker of them all.* Not only does he make us as men; but he *makes us rich and poor.* (1 Sam. ii. 7.) Adored be that divine arrangement, that has knit *the rich and the poor* together so closely in mutual dependence, that neither can live without the other (Eccles. v. 9); neither can say to the other, "I have no need of thee." (1 Cor. xii. 21.) The lower rank may be the feet and the hands, which work out the purposes of the mind. The higher may be the head, the seat of counsel, absolutely necessary for the direction and preservation of the social system. Truly indeed—in contemplating the balance, by which perfect order is educed from the selfish passions of men, we must acknowledge of the moral, no less than of the natural, system—"In wisdom hast thou made them all." (Ps. civ. 24.)

Yet this Christian equality before God does not annihilate the gradation of rank before men. "The servants under the yoke must not despise their believing masters, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved." (1 Tim. vi. 2.) In equality of rank, could men continue for a single day? Difference of mind and talents, industry, self-denial, Providences, would shake the balance before the morning was gone. God never meant to level the world, any more than the surface of the earth. The distinction of *rich and poor* still remains in his appointment, and all attempts to sink it must end in confusion. To each of us are committed our several talents, duties, and responsibilities both to God and man. Let each of us therefore be given to our own work, and "abide in our calling with God." (1 Cor. vii. 24.) "Let the brother of low degree rejoice, in that he is exalted; but the rich, in that he is made low." (Jam. 1. 9, 10.) Soon shall we all be one family in our Father's house—to "go out no more." (Rev. iii. 12.)

3. *A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.*⁵

It is a great part of wisdom to see what God is doing, or about to

¹ Acts, x. 34. Job, xxxiv. 19.

² Luke, xvi. 19, 20.

³ Gal. iii. 28. Col. iii. 11.

⁴ 1 Cor. x. 17; xii. 13.

⁵ Chap. xxvii. 12.

* See this implied in the rebuke, Jam. ii. 2-5.

do. When evil is come, most men can see it. But the *prudent foreseeth* it. Not that God hath given to us the knowledge of futurity. This would only have encouraged presumption. But he has given us *prudence*, naturally *foreseeing evil*, and forecasting the most effectual means of deliverance. David was thus directed to hide himself from Saul;* Elijah from Jezebel.¹ The disciples were taught to flee from impending *evil*.² Paul repeatedly hid himself from threatened destruction.³ Even our Divine Master acted on this rule of *prudence*,⁴ till his hour was come. (Matt. xxvi. 46.)

But to apply it to spiritual *evils foreseen*—"Noah, moved with fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his house." (Heb. xi. 7.) Josiah endeavoured to ward off the threatened judgment by humiliation before God. (2 Chron. xxxiv. 21.) Paul "laboured" for the covering of present acceptance, *foreseeing* the tremendous evil of "appearing" unsheltered "before the judgment-seat of Christ." (2 Cor. v. 9, 10.)

Not that *the prudent man* is gifted with supernatural knowledge. He only uses the discernment which God hath given him. He regards the signs of the times. He studies the word of God in reference to coming judgments; and he acts accordingly. To walk carelessly in the midst of evil, is reckless folly. We stand "not by faith" only, but "by faith" balanced with fear (Rom. xi. 20) yet not the fear of bondage and scrupulosity, but of care, watchfulness, and diligence. (Heb. iv. 1, 11.) Guilty, wandering, tempted, afflicted, dying as we are, common—at least Christian—*prudence*, shews us our need of an *hiding-place*. Except we seek one in time, we are lost for eternity. Did we but realize the huge mass of guilt lying upon us, and the infinite wrath that for that guilt hangs over us, could we rest in an unsheltered state? Should not we tread, upon all that lies in our way to run to shelter? Coming judgments there may be. But let us set our face towards our hiding-place. God will undertake for our danger. His own most loving voice points us to a shelter in the chamber of his own perfections.†

Very different is the course of *the simple*. (Chap. xiv. 15, 16.) Devoid of all *prudence*; *foreseeing no evil*; fearing none; given up to their own ways, and reckless of all consequences, *they pass on, and are punished* by their own folly. (Chap. vii. 7, 22, 23.) Oh! many such are there, who "when the Lord's hand is lifted up, will not see" (Isa. xxvi. 11); who will not hear the distant thunder, betokening the approaching storm; who in their fancied security laugh at those, who are preparing for an

¹ I Kings, xvii. 3; xix. 3.

² Matt. x. 23; xxiv. 15-18.

³ Acts, ix. 23-25; xvii. 14; xxiii. 17.

⁴ Mark, iii. 6, 7. Luke, iv. 29, 30. John, viii. 59; x. 39.

* I Sam. xx. 19; xxiii. 19-21; xxvi. 1.

† Isa. xxvi. 20. 'It is nature which teaches a wise man in fear to hide himself. But grace and faith cloth teach him where. Where should the frightened child hide his head, but in the bosom of his loving Father? Where a Christian, but under the shadow of the wings of Christ his Saviour?'—HOOKER'S *Remedy against Fear*.

evil day; laugh even on the brink of that destruction, which, unless Sovereign grace interpose, will make them wise too late.

4. *By (the reward of, marg.) humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, honour, and life (lives, marg.)*

Who then will say—"It is vain to serve God?" (Mal. iii. 14.) *Riches, honour, and life* to enjoy them—all this accumulation and completeness of happiness belong to his service. But observe the two marks of his ways, *humility and the fear of the Lord*. Humility is not the mere meekness of modesty. (1 Sam. x. 22.) This, though a lovely temper, is not a Christian grace. Nor is it the servility of the hypocrite for his own selfish ends;¹ or the temporary conviction of external humiliation.² We may easily, distinguish the genuine principle by its accompaniment—the *fear of the Lord*—that blessed holy reverence, which none but his children feel, and which, while it represses presumption, establishes *humility*. A just apprehension of God will always lay us in the lowest dust before him. The contrasted sight of his majesty with our meanness, of his holiness with our defilement, constrained the cry from one—"Behold! I am vile; I abhor myself"³--from another--"Woe is me, for I am undone!"⁴ Then *humility* is the truest glory. The most humble is the most triumphant Christian. Depressed indeed he may be; yet is he highly exalted. *Riches* are his, both of grace and of glory. None can deprive him of them.⁵ *Honour* is his---the true fruit,⁶ the gracious reward,⁷ of *humility*---high and glorious; the title and present privilege of a child of God, "as heir of God, and joint-heir with Christ."⁸ *Life* is his⁹--*lives*, every kind of life, not natural only, but spiritual and eternal; life with the Father and the Son, now "hid with Christ in God; and when Christ, who is our life, shall appear," then to be manifested in all its fulness of everlasting joy. (Col. iii. 3, 4.) Shall we look then beyond the narrow limit of time, and search what is the character of the heirs of glory? He "will beautify the meek with salvation." "Blessed" are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of God."¹⁰ How glorious is the end of this lowly path of *humility and godly fear*.

5. *Thorns and snares are in the way of the froward: he that doth keep his soul shall be far from them.*

A forcible image to shew, that nothing stands so much in a man's way, as the indulgence of his own unbridled will. The man, who is most perversely bent on his purposes, is most likely to be thwarted in

¹ 2 Sam. xv. 5.

² 1 Kings, xxi. 27.

³ Job, xl. 4; xlii. 5, 6.

⁴ Isa. vi. 5.

⁵ Chap. viii. 18.

⁶ Chap. xv. 33; xviii. 12.

⁷ Luke, xviii. 13, 14.

⁸ Rom viii. 17.

⁹ Chap. xix. 23. Ps. xxii. 26. Comp. Eccclus. i. 11, 12, 18; ii. 8, 9; xl. 26, 27.

¹⁰ Ps. cxlix. 4; Matt. v. 3.

them. 'He thinks to carry all before him; whereas his *frowardness* makes *thorns and snares* for *his way*.¹ He is as a man on all sides encompassed with *thorns and snares*. His stubbornness brings him into infinite perplexities, out of which he can find no issue.* Sarah,² Jacob,³ Balaam,⁴ found *the way of the froward* full of hindrance and entanglement. A special mercy is it, when the thorns embitter the way, and bring the *froward* sinner as an humbled child, asking and seeking the road to his Father's house. (Luke, xv. 12-20.) If there be difficulties in the ways of God, are there none in the ways of sin? A fair balance would prove, which yoke, which burden, is the more "easy and light." The sting of conscience; the rebukes of Providence; the disappointment of cherished desires, the tyranny of lust--all tend to make "the way of transgressors to be hard." (Chap. xiii. 15.) Nay--not the world only, but even the holy Gospel, is made a *snare in the way of the froward*, Such are "the depths and devices of Satan"⁵ that they "turn the grace of God into lasciviousness," and the occasion or excuse of sin.⁶

Our happiness and security therefore lie in an humble submission to the Lord; desiring nothing so much as conformity to his will; dreading nothing so much as being left to our own waywardness. Thus *keeping our soul*, we shall be *far from the thorn and snare of the froward*; we shall "make straight" and safe, if not smooth, "paths for our feet," and "all our ways shall be established."⁷ "He that is begotten of God *keepeth himself*, and that wicked one toucheth him not." (1 John, v. 18.

6. *Train up† a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*

The hopes of at least two generations hang upon this most important rule. How can we look on a child without thoughtful anxiety? An existence is commenced for eternity. No power of earth or hell can crush it. The whole universe does not afford an object of deeper interest. It is an "arrow in the hand of a mighty man;" a most power-

¹ Jer. xxiii. 12, 13. Judg. ii. 2, 3.

² Gen. xii. 10, 20; xvi. 1-6; xx. 2-14.

³ Ib. xxvii. 4 Num. xxii. 22-32.

⁵ Rev. ii. 24; 2 Cor. ii. 11 ; xi. 14.

⁶ Rom. iii. 8; vi. 1. Jude, 4.

⁷ Heb. xii. 13. Chap. iv. 26.

*Bp. Hall.

† All commentators by their different versions admit the significance of the original term. Imbue--Schultens. Geier--'Give it the first dip, dye, seasoning.' Initia--Begin the first instruction--Lay the groundwork--the first stone. *Instrue*--This is substantially the marg. catechize--like Abraham's servants--instructed (catechized, marg.) alike in the art of war and in the fear of God. Gen. xiv. 14; xviii. 19. The word elsewhere conveys the idea of dedication to the service of God. (Comp. Deut. xx. 5; 1 Kings, viii. 63; 2 Chron. vii. 5; title to Ps. xxx.) In this view a judicious expositor illustrates it--'As a house, altar, or temple, newly built, and not yet profound, is fitted by certain rites and sacrifices for its future use; so a child, as a newly-formed edifice, is fitted by a certain course for the service and the church, and his heart is made meet as an habitation of God, and the temple of the Holy Ghost.'-GEIER.

ful instrument of good or evil, according to the direction that is given to it. (Ps. cxxvii. 4.)

Everything hangs on his *training*. Two ways lie before him--the way in which he *would* go, headlong to ruin; and *the way in which he should go*, the pathway to heaven. The rule for *training* implies obliquity. A young and healthy tree shoots straight upwards and instead of putting forth crooked and deformed branches, gives promise of a fine and fruitful maturity.

But all *training*, save on the principles of the Bible, must be injurious. To expand, without soundly enlightening, the mind, is but to increase its power for evil. Far better to consign it to total ignorance, inasmuch as the uninstructed savage is less responsible, less dangerous, than the well-furnished infidel.

Yet the religious *training* must not be the border of the garment, which might easily be cut off. It must be the pervading substance throughout. Begin, as Hannah did, with the dedication *of the child* to God. (1 Sam. i. 28.) This done--train him as God's child, entrusted to your care. Ask guidance from day to day--"How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?" (Judg. xiii. 12.) Train him, as a baptized child, in the principles of his baptismal engagements. Pray for him. Teach him to pray. Instruct him "from a child in the Holy Scriptures," as the sole rule of faith, end directory of conduct. Indeed, unless you give a child principles, you leave him utterly helpless. And yet too often parents have no established principles of education themselves. The children are theirs. Something therefore must be done for their training for future life. But ignorant as they are of their moral state, and of their besetting evils, they are utterly unable to apply any effectual discipline. The child therefore becomes the victim of his parent's ignorance. His education in all its important departments is neglected. The impulse of caprice gives the only direction, and in this atmosphere of confusion parental authority soon fails to controul the far mightier influence of passion.

Certainly, admitting the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, nothing can be more ruinous than to thrust them out of their place, as the sum and substance of educational principles. Never was Scriptural training more momentous. From a defect here many young persons are tossed to and fro in every vacillation of error; and the anxious attempt to set them right we find to be 'building where there is foundation, or rather, where there is not so much as ground to build upon.'† In fact, the mind, abhorring a vacuum, must have some notions. And the alternative is not between sound principles and none; but between wholesome with and those crude or poisonous errors, which

* 2 Tim. iii. 15. Comp. the wise man's own training, chap. iv. 3, 4.

† SOUTH'S Sermon on the text, vol. i.

the subtle enemy is ever ready to inject, and the corrupt heart equally prepared to receive. Nor let the formation of sound practical habits diligence, industry, and self-government, be forgotten. Let *the child be trained*, like the soldier under arms, to endurance, order, and subjection.

But we must not forget the distinct track of the educational training --*the way in which the child should*, not that in which *he would*, go. Heaven and hell are not more opposite than these two ways. Indeed they are identified with the narrow and broad way, in one of which every child of Adam is walking. The child's will revolting from God is the certain way to ruin. The way back to God, marked out in the Bible, is consecrated by his blessing, and is the sure way to heaven. Wisely does Solomon direct us to begin *at the mouth* or entrance of *his way*,*--at the first opening intelligence. The more early the *training*, the more easy the work, and the more encouraging the results. Our character largely takes the form of that mould into which our early years were cast. Much in after-life, both good and evil, may be traced back to the seed sown in the days of infancy. It is a matter of experience, that what is early learnt, is most tenaciously retained. It stands the friction of time with the least injury. Far better, instead of waiting for; the maturity of reason, to work upon the pliability of childhood.† The gardener begins to graft in the first rising of the sap. If the crooked shoots of self-will and disobedience are not cut off, their rapid growth and rapidly growing strength will greatly increase the future difficulty of bending them. Present neglect occasions after risk and perplexity. We may begin our work too late, but we can scarcely begin it too soon.¹ If the child be too young to teach to read, he cannot be too young to teach to obey. Never let the watchfulness to check the buddings of evil, and to cherish the first tenderness of right feeling, be relaxed. The ceaseless activity of the great enemy teaches the value of early *training*. Be beforehand with him. Pre-occupy the ground with good seed, as the most effectual exclusion of his evil tares. (Matt. xiii. 25-28.) Be *at the mouth of the way* with wholesome food, ere he has the oppor-

¹ Eccles. xi. 6. Isa. xxviii. 9, 10. Lam. iii. 27.

* Heb. See Schult-ens and the general voice of critics.

† Mr. Locke does not hesitate to affirm, 'that of all the men we meet with, nine parts out of ten are what they are, good or bad, useful or. not, according to their education. *Thoughts concerning Education*. The heathen moralists seem well to have understood the subject. Horace, after alluding to the early discipline of the colt and the hound, applies it--

----Nunc adbibe puro

Pectore verba, puer; nunc te melioribus offer.

Quo semel est imbuta recens, servabit odorem

Testa diu.--Epist. lib. i. ii. 67-70.

-----Adeo in teneris consuescere multum est.'-VIRG. *Georg.* ii. 272.

'Udum et molle lutum es; nunc, nunc, properandus, et acri

Fingendus sine fine rota.'--PERSIUS, *Sat.* iii. 23, 24.

tunity of pouring in his "bread of deceit;" ere nature is hardened by the habits of sin, or brutalized by familiarity with vice.

But this training must be practical. The mere talk to a *child* about religion, without bringing it to bear upon his loose habits, and self-willed tempers, is utterly ineffective. None of us liveth to himself *alone*. We are all spreading around us an influence, whether for good or for evil. Here therefore in our families lies the responsibility of Christian consistency. If the child hears of godliness, and sees but wickedness, this is bringing him bread with one hand, and poison with the other; 'beckoning him with the hand to heaven, and at the same time taking him by the hand, and leading him in the way to destruction.* Who would receive even the choicest food from a leprous hand? Neglect is far better than inconsistency; forgetfulness, than contempt of principle. A *child* learns more by the eye than by the ear. Imitation is a far more powerful principle than memory. A well-trained child gladly looks to his parent's godliness as his model picture, to copy after. A wayward child eagerly seeks for the excuse of his own delinquency, and this discovery in parental example will harden him in infidelity and ungodliness.

This training is indeed a work of watchful anxiety, attended with painful, and often long-protracted, exercise of faith and patience. Who could hold on in it, but for the Divine support of the parental promise -- *When he is old, he shall not depart from it?* The man will be, as the child is trained. Education is utterly distinct from grace. But, *when conducted in the spirit, and on the principles, of the Word of God*, it is a means of imparting it. Sometimes the fruit is immediate, uniform, and permanent to the end.¹ But often "the bread cast upon the waters of the covenant is found," not till "after many days" (Eccles. xi. 1); perhaps not till the godly parent has been laid in the grave. Yet the fruit, though late, will not be the less sure. (Hab. ii. 3.) *The child may depart* when he is young. But *when he is old*--in after years, smothered convictions will bring back the power of early impressions. The seeds of instruction will burst forth into life.⁺ He will find it "hard" in a course of sin "to kick against the pricks." (Acts, ix. 5.) The Scriptures, fastened on his memory, will force themselves upon him with many a sharp and painful struggle. Conscience will disturb his pleasures, and embitter the sweetness, which he had found, or fancied that he had found, in his sins. The remembrance of his father's house' brings the

¹ 1 Sam. i. 28; iii. 20; xii 2, 3. Ps. xcii. 13-15.

* Abp. TILLOTSON'S *Sermon on Education*.

¹ 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11-13. 'It is no small mercy,' said Mr. Flavel, alluding to this case, 'to have thousands of fervent prayers lying before the Lord, filed up in heaven for us,'--*Fountain of Life*, Sermon xx.

⁺ Timothy was instructed as a child, but not converted till adult age. Comp. 2 Tim. iii. 15, with 1 Tim. i. 2

prodigal "to himself," and he comes home with shame in his face tears in his eyes, and godly sorrow in his heart. (Luke, xv. 17-20.)

If then the promise is not fulfilled, it is because the duty is not performed. Never does God give a command, but he will give his sincere servant grace to obey it. The duty is not therefore to lie down in despondency, or even in heartless prayer, but to "go forward" (Exod. xiv. 13) in painful obedience. With such a plain promise--the promise of "him who cannot lie, or repent," and who will be true to every tittle of his word (Num. xxiii. 19)--need we ever be cast down?--"Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Gen. xviii. 14.) Cultivate then the exercise of parental faith; trusting, not to what we see but to what God has engaged; like our father Abraham, "against hope, believing "in hope." (Rom. iv. 18-20.) Expect the fulfilment of the parental promise, as confidently as any other free promise of the gospel.* Exercise faith in the full energy of Christian diligence, and in the patience of Christian hope. Leave God to accomplish his own gracious will. If his Sovereignty reserves the time and means to himself, his faithfulness secures the promise to us, which is, and ever must be--"Yea, and Amen"--"I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee I will pour out my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring."¹

¹ 2 Cor. i. 20. Gen. xvii. 7. Isa. xlv. 3-5.

* Such as John, vi. 37--couched in the same grammatical terms--a promise connected with a duty, as the encouragement to the duty--"Him that cometh--he that traineth;--no wise cast out--will not depart." Yet the latter is often considered a general promise, admitting of various and indefinite exceptions. The other is "Yea and Amen." But we might ask--How can we loosen the ground of one promise, without shaking the foundation of all? And do not admitted exceptions in the educational promise give occasion to many an exercised Christian to find his own exception in the Gospel promise? We fully concede, that here the ground is more clear to the exercise of faith. We have the demonstrable certainty of the work of the Son, the faithfulness of the Father, and the agency of the Spirit, drawing the "given to come"--the compact of the Eternal Three unchangeably fulfilled. In this parental promise the manifestly imperfect training of the parent, and the wanton rebellion of the child, clouds the ground of faith to our vision. But this touches only the apprehension of the ground, not the ground itself. If the performance of the parent's duty in the one promise were as certain, as the work of God in the other, would not the assurance of the promise in both cases be equally firm? We cannot indeed anticipate an universal fulfilment of the promise. Yet, as believers in the inspiration of Scripture, we are bound implicitly to receive it. Is it not far safer and more satisfactory to "take all the promises of the Bible upon the same ground? The cases that appear to contravene the educational promise may be fairly explained. The promise is not falsified, but the Lord's time of fulfilment is not yet come. Or--has not some important element of education been omitted? Has not some disproportion of one or other part of the system hindered the efficiency of the whole? Have instruction and discipline been always accompanied with prayer and faith? Or has prayer been always confirmed by consistent practice? Do not man's indolence, self-indulgence, unbelief, unfaithfulness to the conditions implied, wither the blessing? While Abraham, training up his family for God, shall find him "faithful that hath promised" (Gen. xviii. 19, with Heb. x. 23) the Elises and the Davids--good men, but bad parents--(1 Sam. iii. 13; 1 Kings, i. 6) shall know "God's breach of promise." (Num. xiv. 34.) It is too deep for man to reconcile the absolute election of God with weak, imperfect, unfaithful fulfilment of duty. Nevertheless in all cases--"Let God be true, and every man a liar (Rom. iii. 4.)

This is the reward of faith to those, who make the salvation of the soul the primary object of education. But the mass of mankind deal with their children, as if they were born only for the world, with nothing to look to after death. Wholly leaving out the mighty question--the great end of life--'How this or that matter affects their soul'--the only thought is--'Must they not be like others, to make their way in the world?' Thus they fearlessly bring them into contact with the evil around them, set their feet in the "broad road of destruction," and bid them go on with the rest. In all important matters they educate them consistently for time, not for eternity. They concentrate their grand interest on matters, in which the soul has no concern; accomplishments or scholarship, not godliness; refinement of taste and manners, not soundness of faith. Need we say, that this is an education without God, without his promise, without rest? The parents of such children, and the children of such parents, are alike objects of compassion. Eternity will bring a solemn account to both.

7. *The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.*

"The rich and the poor meet together" (Verse 2) for mutual sympathy and helpfulness; yet God has appointed one to *rule*, and the other to submit. And this gradation of rank in all its forms, involves distinct obligations to be carefully sought out and followed. Subjection, on the one hand, is cheerfully acknowledged as God's own ordinance; while the sense of responsibility is enlarged on the other. *The rule* applies to all the domestic relations between dependants and superiors. Yet let it be *the rule* of order, not of pride, caprice, or selfishness. And especially, when exercised over young persons of refined minds and education, let dependence be soothed by "the law of kindness," elevating them to a rank far above the menials of the house. The golden rule of love will diffuse Christian happiness without disorder or compromise of obligation.

Too often, however, it is *a rule* of harshness.¹ And indeed, without a practical submission to God's rule over us, we can scarcely be trusted with power over our fellow-men. Such obligations as that of the *borrower to the lender*, often force the dependant to a *servile* bondage. Man becomes an alien to his brother; the victim of his gratification, not the object of his sympathy.*

Very important is it to maintain an independence of mind, quite distinct from pride, which elevates the mind far above doing or conniving at evil, for the sake of pleasing a patron. Many have been

¹ Chap. xviii. 23. Amos, ii. 6; iv. 1; v. 11, 12; viii. 4-6. Jam. ii. 6; v. 4. Comp. Eccles. xiii. 19.

* 2 Kings, iv. I. Neh. v. 3-5. Matt. xviii. 25, 29. Compare the blessing, Deut. xv. 6; xxviii. 12.

forced to great entanglement of conscience, perhaps to vote contrary to their conscience, rather than lose the great man's smile. Often also the influence of capital is an iron *rule of the rich over the poor*. Many, who profess to resist *conscientiously* state-interference, have little regard for the consciences of their dependants. The monied master exercises a controul over his workmen, which shews too plainly his purpose to make them the creatures of his own will. This gigantic tyranny should be denounced with the most solemn protest.

The true Christian line is to shun that proud independence, which scorns the kindly offer of needful help; but at the same time to avoid all needless obligations. 'Sell not your liberty to gratify your luxury.'^{*} If possible, "owe no man anything' but love." (Rom. xiii. 8.) Guard against that poverty, which is the result of carelessness or extravagance. Pray earnestly, labour diligently. Should you come to poverty by the misfortune of the times, submit to your lot humbly; bear it patiently; cast yourself in child-like dependence upon your God.†]

8. *He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity: and the rod of his anger shall fail* (with the rod of his anger he shall be consumed, marg.)

Scripture often gives the practical illustration of the seed-time and harvest.¹ They are linked together in the spiritual, not less than in the natural, world. The harvest is according to the seed. (Gal. vi. 7, 8.) Such is the transcendant dignity and worth of the soul, that eternity is stamped upon all its actions. Every thought, every principle (is not this a solemn recollection?) is a seed for eternity, issuing in an harvest of eternal joy, or "desperate sorrow." The wise man here adverts to the latter--harvest. All experience and observation testify to the fact, that the diligence of the ungodly *sower* can only end in *vanity*, in utter and eternal disappointment. (Job, iv. 8. Rom. vi. 21.)

The connexion, however, of the two clauses of the Proverb may intimate, that the iron *rod of the rich ruling over the poor*, following the dictates of selfishness, will ensure disappointment. Their abused power will shortly *fail*, and they will reap only the harvest of their injustice. Often may oppressors prosper for a time. God may use them as his chastening rod. But the *seed-time of iniquity* will end in the harvest of *vanity*; and when they have done their work, *the rod of their anger shall fail*. Such was Sennacherib in olden time,² such was Napoleon in our own day. Never has the world seen so extensive a *sower of iniquity*, never a more abundant harvest of *vanity*. The rod of anger was he to the nations of the earth. But how utterly was the rod suffered to *fail*, when the purpose was accomplished! despoiled of empire, shorn of

¹ Pa. cxxvi. 5, 6. Hos. x. 12. Matt. xiii. 8, 24-30.

² Isa. x. 5-12, 24, 25; xxx. 31. Zech. x. 11.

* Henry *in loco*.

† Geier *in loco*.

greatness, an exiled captive. Such is not the harvest from God's seed! "A sure reward" (Chap. xi. 18), not of *vanity*, but of substantial, everlasting joy. (Ps. cxxvi. 5, 6.) Here let us "sow bountifully, that we may reap also bountifully." (2 Cor. ix. 6, 9.)

9. *He that hath a bountiful (is good of, marg.) eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor.*

The heart often looks out at the eye.¹ The bountiful or good eye is contrasted with "the evil eye."² This man can look with indifference, on distress," satisfy himself with the heartless expression of good-will,⁴ and find many reasons for withholding his charity. But the man of a good eye delighteth in contriving acts of kindness. (Isa. xxxii. 8.) He not only relieves what is brought before him, but he looks out for objects, and looks pleasantly on them. Nehemiah, instead of using his ample power for his own aggrandizement, spent his substance in feeding the people at his own table, giving of his bread to the poor. (Neh. v. 16-18.) His great work required a large heart. And such a heart God had given him. Ever remember--Christian--that God's standard is sacrifice, not convenience; giving of our bread; letting the poor share with ourselves. (Job, xxxi. 17.) Nor must it be wrung from us by importunity. "God loveth a cheerful giver."⁵ His "charge is, that we be ready to distribute, willing to communicate." (1 Tim. vi. 17, 18.) This is his own pattern of bountifulness, "He openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing." (Ps. cxlv. 16.) We are only the stewards of his bounty. Of our property, be it little or much, we must be ready to feel of that, as of ourselves⁶--It is 'not our own.' But, let the motive be higher than the mere gratification of kindly feelings. Cherish carefully godly simplicity. "Let your light shine before men for your Father's glory," not for your own.*

This *bountifulness* is a privilege, which earth possesses above heaven. Many a rich *blessing* is sealed to it.⁷ 'Beneficence is the most exquisite luxury; and the good man is the genuine epicure.'† He "hath a continual feast," because his objects are always before him. Man will bless him according to his ability;⁸ and when "they cannot recompense thee, thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just;"⁹ when 'one good work done for God will be seen'--as Luther says--'to shew more glory than the whole frame of heaven and earth.' It is

¹ Luke, x. 33-35.

² Chap. xxiii. 6. Deut. xv. 9; xxviii. 54, 56. Matt. xx. 15.

³ 1 Sam. xxv. 3, 10, 11. Luke, x. 31, 32; xvi. 19-21.

⁴ Jam. ii. 15, 16.

⁵ 2 Cor. ix. 6. Deut. xv. 10.

⁶ 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

⁷ Deut. xv. 10. Isa. lviii. 10, 11. Matt. v. 7. Comp. Ecclus. xxxi. 23, 24.

⁸ Job, xxix. 11-13; xxxi. 16-29. ⁹ Ps. xli. 1, 2. Luke, xiv. 14. 1 Tim. vi. 19.

*Matt. v. 16, with vi. 1-3; xxv. 34-40. It is stated of a munificent Christian, that he strictly forbade the recipients of his bounty to return thanks. Probably the knowledge of his own heart suggested this prohibition.

† Bishop HORNE'S *Sermon on Ps. xli. 1.*

the working of his grace, the following of his pattern, the reflection of his image, the "shewing forth of his virtue." (1 Pet. ii. 9, marg.)

10. *Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out, yea, strife and reproach shall cease.*

This is a word to rulers. *The scorner* is a firebrand of contention in the church. (3 John, 10.) He must be restrained.¹ If restraint be ineffectual, he must: if possible, be cast out.² If "his seat" be allowed in the family,³ *strife and reproach* must be the issue. A jeer or biting taunt is more provoking than a blow. If therefore "peace is to the house," and "the love of peace is to abide there,"⁴ --*cast out the scorner, and the contention will cease.*⁵ He must not be argued with.⁶ We must keep no terms with him. We must meet him with bold and open rebuke, lest his influence should overthrow the faith of the simple.⁷ If God "scorneth the scorner,"⁸ what less can we do, than banish him from our society?⁹ Yet if we *cast him out*, cast him not off. Pray for him. Remember "such were some of you." (1 Cor. vi. 11.) While we abhor the sin, pity the sinner.

But what we should not be able to *cast him out*? He may be a husband or a child. At least give a protest. Shew that you stand not on the same ground. Turn away from his scorning. This will mortify, if not silence. Turn from him to your God.¹⁰ This will bring peace. Dwell with him "sighing, as David in Mesech."¹¹ One greater than David teaches us by his example. Honour your Divine Master by "enduring," as he did, year after year, "the contradiction of sinners." (Heb. xii. 3.) And who knoweth, but this meek and silent endurance, with a loving, bleeding heart, may have power to *cast out* the scorning, and to mould *the scorner* into the lowliness of the cross? Then who would be a more welcome member of the church or of the family? *Strife and reproach* would cease in both, should the persecutor of the faith become a monument of grace (1 Tim. 1. 13-16), a shining witness to the truth. (Gal. i. 23, 24.)

11. *He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend.*

Pureness of heart describes not the natural, but the renewed, man. It is no external varnish, no affectation of holiness; but sincerity, humility, shrinking from sin, conformity to the image of God. He who hath fully attained this *pureness* is before the throne of God. *He who loveth it* is the child of God on earth. His perfection is desire, constant progress, pressing towards the mark. (Philip. iii. 12-15.)

¹ 2 Tim. iii. 8, 9.

² 1 Tim. i. 20. Tit. iii. 10, 11.

³ Ps. i. 1.

⁴ Luke, x. 5, 6.

⁵ Gen. xxi. 9, 10. Comp. chap. xv.18; xvi. 28.

⁶ Chap. xxvi. 4. 2 Kings. xviii.36.

⁷ 2 Tim. ii:1-10.

⁸ Chap. iii. 34.

⁹ Ps. cxix. 115. Comp. Neh. xiii. 28.

¹⁰ Ps. xxxv. 21-24 lxix.11-13.

¹¹ Ib. cxx. 5-7.

"When the fountain is cleansed, it sendeth forth sweet waters. When the tree is made good, the fruit will be good." "Of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." (Matt. xii. 33, 34.)

Pureness of heart sheds such refinement over the whole character, and pours such *grace upon the lips*, as attracts the admiration of those, who do not understand its source, and cannot appreciate its principle. (Chap. xxxi. 10, 26.) Such was the *grace upon the lips* of the holy Saviour, that "the multitude hung upon them, wondering at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth:"¹ The moral influence also of this *purity* of character is to put impurity to shame.

Solomon doubtless spoke his own determination, that *the king should be the friend* of the gracious servant. This had been his father's resolution. This character smoothed the way to royal favour for Joseph," for Ezra," and Daniel.⁵ Nay--we find godly Obadiah in the confidence of wicked Ahab.⁶ So powerful is the voice of conscience, even when God and holiness are hated! Yet this choice of the gracious lips is too often rather what ought to be, than what is.⁷ Well is it for the kingdom, when the sovereign's choice is according to this rule.⁸ Such atone the great *King* marks as *his friends*. Such he embraces with his fatherly love.⁹ Such he welcomes into his heavenly kingdom.¹⁰ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (Matt. v. 8.)

12. *The eyes of the Lord preserve knowledge, and he overthroweth the words of the transgressor.*

The eyes of the Lord often describe his searching Omniscience;¹¹ here his fatherly care.¹² There are so many inlets to false principles; such spacious appearances to warp the judgment, does the subtle enemy pour in; so strong is the natural tendency in the same direction; that but for this gracious covering to *preserve knowledge* in our hearts, *the words of the transgressor* might "overthrow our faith." (2 Tim. ii. 17-19.) Oh! let us seek in close communion with him continued *preservation* from a cloud upon our intellectual faculties, and spiritual apprehensions for our Christian establishment.

But the proverb illustrates upon a wider scale his faithful keeping of the truth in the world. Indeed it may be regarded as a prophecy in the course of fulfilment to the very end of time. For how wonderfully has the *knowledge* of God been *preserved* from age to age; and all the plausible or malignant schemes to blot it out been *overthrown*! The Scriptures, as the words of knowledge, have *been preserved* in a far

¹ Ps. xiv. 2, 7. Luke, xix. 48; iv. 22.

⁴ Ezra, vii. 6, 21-25.

⁶ 1 Kings, xviii. 3, 12. 2 Kings, xiii. 14.

⁹ Chap. xv. 9. 10 Ps. xv. 1, 2; xxiv. 3, 4.

¹¹ Chap. v. 21; xv. 3. Ps. xi. 4.

*Scott in loco.

² Ps. ci. 6; cxix. 63. ³ Gen. xli. 37-45.

⁵ Dan. vi. 1-3, 28.

⁷ Chap. xvi. 12, 13. ⁸ Chap. xxviii. 2; xxv. 5.

¹² 2 Chron. xvi. 9. Ps. xxxiv. 15. Zech. iv. 10.

more accurate state than any other book of corresponding antiquity; though man's wisdom has never been wanting in ingenuity to corrupt it. When *knowledge* seemed on the eve of perishing, a single copy of the Scriptures, found as it were accidentally, *preserved* it from utter extinction. (2 Chron. xxxiv. 14-18.) For successive generations the Book was in the custody of faithful librarians, handed down in substantial integrity. (Rom. iii. 2.) When the church herself was on the side of the Arian heresy, the same watchful *eyes* raised up a champion,* to *preserve* the testimony. In the succeeding dark ages witnesses prophesied, as from the earliest eras of Revelation,† some indeed for a long time in sackcloth,¹ until the dawn of a brighter day. Nor 'was this in peace and quietness. Often has the infidel *transgressor* laboured with all the might of man for its destruction.‡ Often has Rome partian~ suppressed it, or committed it to the flames, or circulated perverted copies and false interpretations. Yet all these *words* and deeds of *the transgressors have been overthrown*. And notwithstanding all heretical corruptions, *the eyes of the Lord have preserved knowledge*. Still is his word continued among us, with its Divine credentials unimpaired, and its unsearchable store undiminished--a standing miracle of the faithfulness of its Almighty Keeper. Full of joy and confidence is the believer's acknowledgment--"Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old, that thou hast founded them for ever." (Ps. cxix. 152.)

13. *The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets.* (Chap. xxvi. 13.)

'This sentence belongs to those who flinch from the cross.'§ Real difficulties in the way of heaven exercise faith. And such there are, far too great for those, who have never "counted the cost," or who "go to the warfare at any time at their own charges."² But imaginary difficulties are the indulgence of sloth. *The slothful man* is a coward. He has no love for his work, and therefore he is always ready to put a cheat upon his soul, 'inventing some vain excuse, because he will not do his duty.'|| He shrinks from every work likely to involve trouble. (Chap. xv. 19; xix. 24.) Fancied dangers frighten him from real and present duties. *There is a lion without; I shall be slain in the streets*--an absurd excuse!--as if public streets, except in special cases, were the haunts of wild beasts. (Ps. civ. 20-22.) He is afraid of being slain without, when he willingly gives himself up to be slain within. (Chap. xxi. 25.) Thus the unbelieving spies, when holding up to view the exuberant fruit of Canaan, added--*But we be not able to go up against the people*. The cities are walled up to heaven; and the giants are

¹ 1 Rev. xi. 3-11; xii. 14-17.

² Matt. viii. 19, 20, with xi. 12. Luke, xiv. 28-30.

* Athanasius.

† Enoch, Jude, 14, 15. Noah, 2 Pet. ii. 5.

‡ Jer. xxxvi. 23. The company of Voltaire and his associates.

§ Melancthon *in loco*.

|| Reformer's Notes.

there. (Num. xiii. 27-33.) As if the promise of God was not a stronger ground of faith, than the giants of fear!¹ But much more sad is it to see Moses shrinking,²--nay--Jonah running away, from the Lord's work.³ All excuses against doing it partake of this cowardly spirit. And who has not felt the temptation, when called to a plain but self-denying duty; to encounter painful opposition to the gospel, or to a faithful rebuke of sin?--*There is a lion without.* True. But hast thou forgotten the promise in the ways of God? "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder; *the young lion* and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet?" (Ps. xci. 11-13.) Does not our Master call us to follow him in a life of self-devoted conflict and energy? Ponder the terms of discipleship. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross *daily, and follow me.*" (Luke, ix. 23.) Godly courage, "endurance of hardness," "standing in the, whole armour of God" *--all this is needed; all this must be daily and hourly sought for, not only by those who stand in the forefront of the battle, but by the meanest soldier of the cross; else, though "armed, and carrying the bow, he will turn back" disgracefully "in the day of battle." (Ps. lxxviii. 9.)

14. *The mouth of strange women is a deep pit; he that is abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein.*

This fearful temptation has been already frequently opened.⁴ But in a book specially for the young, who that knows the power of "youthfullusts" (2 Tim. ii. 22), and the seductive witcheries of sin, will deem a fresh warning needless? Is it not the voice of mercy? For what but unbounded compassion could stand as it were at the edge of *the pit*, and unfold to the unwary its awful peril? A *deep pit* indeed it is,⁵ easy to fall into; hard, next to impossible, to get out of.⁶ So besotting is this sin to the flesh, to the mind, and to the conscience!⁷ It is *the mouth of a pit far deeper.*" For her feet go down to death; her steps take hold of hell."⁸ What more humbling proof can there be of the total depravity of the nature, than the fact, that those affections, originally given as the purest enjoyments of life, should become the corrupt spring of such a defilement. The sin and snare would seem to be a judicial infliction for those, whose wilful rejection of God has made them *abhorred of him.*⁹ They have turned away from instruction, hated reproof, resisted conviction, been given up to their abomination; they give therefore too plain proof that they are abandoned by God, (Chap. v. 37)--*abhorred of the Lord!* Is the embrace of *the strange*

¹ Num. xiv. 6-8 with Gen. xii. 7. ² Exod. iv. 10-14. ³ Jonah, i. 1-3.

⁴ Chap. ii. 16-19; v. 3; vi. 24-29; vii. 5, &c. ; ix. 16-18. ⁵ Chap. xxiii. 27.

⁶ Chap. ii. 19. Eccles. vii. 26. ⁷ Judg. xvi. 19, 20. Neh. xiii. 26. Hos. iv. 11.

⁸ Chap. v. 5; 2 Pet. ii. 10-12. Rev. xxi. 8. 9 Rom. i. 28. Ps. lxxxii. 11, 12.

* 2 Tim. ii. 3. Eph. vi. 11, 13. 'Invictus ad labores; fortis ad periculum; durus adversus illecebras.' Ambrose--a fine exhibition of Christian energy.

woman a compensation for such a judgment? Every curse, eternal frown and banishment, the weight of infinite unmingled wrath, is involved in this awful name. Not that he willeth the death of the vilest sinner. (Ezek. xviii. 32.) But must not his justice and his holiness be in array against those, who of their own will choose evil and reject alike the warnings of his wrath, and the invitations of his love?

15. *Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.*

What parent, what instructor of children, will not bear sad, but decisive, testimony to the *foolishness of the child*? 'A little innocent' --is the mis-called name of fondness and fancy. One only of Adam's race, and he--adored be his name! preserved by his holy conception (Luke, i. 35)--lays claim to it. *Foolishness* is the birthright of all besides. The early development of waywardness and passion,--even before the power of speech;* before the child is capable of observing and imitating those around him--is a touching, but undeniable, evidence of the innate principle. Resistance therefore cannot begin too early. Education should commence even in the cradle.

Observe--it is *foolishness*, not childishness. *That* might belong to an unfallen child. No moral guilt attaches to the recollection "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child." (1 Cor. xiii. 11.) A child is to be punished as Mr. Scott wisely observed--'not for being a *child*, but for being a *wicked child*.'† Comparative ignorance, the imperfect and gradual opening of the faculties, constitute the nature, not the sinfulness of the child. The holy "child increased in wisdom." (Luke, ii. 52.) But *foolishness* is the mighty propensity to evil--imbibing wrong principles, forming bad habits, entering into an ungodly course. It means the very root and essence of sin in a fallen nature--the *folly* of being revolted from a God of love. It includes all the sins of which a child is capable--lying, deceit (Ps. lviii. 3), wilfulness, perverseness, want of submission to authority (Job, xi. 12)--a fearful aptness for evil, and revulsion against good. It is not the sheet of pure white paper; not the innocent, or even the tractable, creature, easily guided by proper means, that we have before us; but a little heart full of sin, containing all the seeds of future evil, multiplying to a fruitful harvest.

We delight in our children's harmless play. We would make ourselves one with them in their sportiveness. But *this foolishness*--

* Augustine mentions a living demonstration of the fall--the sight of an infant, before it could speak, shewing an evident look of envy and passion towards another infant about to share its nourishment. He adds--in reference to himself--'When? I beseech thee, O my God, in what places, when or where, was I *innocent*?'--*Confess.* lib. i. c. 7.

† *Life*, p. 622.

visible every hour before our eyes--never let it be a subject of sport, but of deep and constant sadness. Nor let childhood plead as an excuse for this *foolishness*. Children's sins may not be chargeable with the guilt of adult responsibility; yet God has awfully shewn, that they are sins against Himself. The judgment on the "*little children*" of Bethel is enough to make "both the ears of" thoughtless parents "to tingle." (2 Kings, ii. 23, 24)

But whence the origin of this *foolishness*? "Look unto the rock whence we are hewn." Look unto "Adam" our father, and unto "Eve that bare us." (Isa. li. 1, 2.) As is the root, so ate the branches. As is the fountain, so are the waters. Our nature was poisoned at the spring. Our sinful parent, having lost God's image, could only "beget a son after his image" (Gen. v. 3)--a sinner begetting a sinner. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (John, iii. 6), and could be nothing else. Now "who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" (Job, xiv. 4; xxv. 4.) The creature therefore is produced into being with a radical enmity to God;--"by nature" therefore "a child of wrath." (Eph. ii. 3.) The entail is held from "our first father," and can never be cut off. There is no division of this sad inheritance. Each of his children has the whole. His Maker testifies, that he is "a transgressor from the womb, that his heart is evil from his youth."¹ In shame he acknowledges the testimony--"Behold! I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." (Ps. li. 5.) If the joy of a child's birth blot out the remembrance of its pain and sorrow (John, xvi. 21), yet must not this joy be chastened in the humbling recollection of what the child brings into the world--*foolishness*? That self-will, that proud independence, that shakes the very foundations of society, is the birth-sin of our fallen nature. Nor does it lie only on the surface, like some childish habits, easily corrected. *It is bound in the child's heart, 'held firmly there by chains invincible to human power.'** It is incorporated into his very nature. And so various are its forms, so subtle its workings, that the wisest parent is often at a loss how to detect and treat the evil.

The prescribed remedy, however, is clear. It is vain to bid the *foolishness* depart. And little inclination is there in the child himself to *drive it far away*. *The rod of correction* is distinctly named, and repeatedly inculcated, as God's own means for this important end.² And surely the thought of having been an instrument of producing nature envenomed against a God of love must constrain the parent to use the means thus divinely appointed for destroying the deadly poison.

Only let the child see, that, as with our heavenly Father, love is the

¹ Isa. xlviii. 8. Gen viii. 21.

² Chap. xix. 18; xxiii. 13, 14; xxix. 17.

* Cartwright *in loco*.

ruling principle;¹ that we follow the example of the wisest and best of parents, that we use his rod for *driving men from foolishness*;² that, like him, we "chasten, not for our pleasure, but for our child's profit" (Heb. xii. 10); not from caprice or passion, but from tenderness to his soul. Use the Lord's means, and we can then, what *otherwise* we cannot do, wait in faith for the promised blessing. Many a stirring movement of the flesh will be restrained. Man's will will be put down, and God's will gain the supremacy. Shame of sin will issue in abhorrence; and in this sorrow and humiliation the path of wisdom will be chosen, loved, and followed. (Chap. xxix. 15.)

We have indeed no right to demand to see God's reasons for his ordinance. Yet we may be permitted, in part at least, to trace its workings. Habits are of immense value, as wrought into the character by the Holy Spirit. But there must be a beginning, and the use of means to fix the principle. If a child be punished for falsehood; to avoid future punishment, he abstains, and speaks the truth. As he advances, he finds the blessing and comfort of the right path. He learns gradually to speak truth from a higher motive. Insensibly his conscience acquires tenderness respecting it; and it becomes a principle in his character. Thus the *rod of correction* performs its work with permanent benefit.

16. *He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches, and he that giveth to the rich, shall surely come to want.*

These two cases seem to be at opposites. Yet they meet at the same centre. Both are equally destitute of the love of God, and of their brother. Both alike are seeing their own aggrandizement. The one *oppresseth the poor* to increase his riches. The other *giveth to the rich*, "hoping for" something "again." Both courses--paradoxical as it may appear--are the road to want. "*For the oppression of the poor--now will I arise--saith the Lord. Him that loveth violence, his soul hateth.*" (Ps. xii. 5; xi. 5.) 'Sin pays its servants very bad wages; for it gives the very reverse of what is promised. While the sin of oppression promises mountains of gold, it brings them poverty and ruin. (Jer. xii. 13-15.) Injuries done to the poor are sorely resented by the God of mercy, who is the poor man's friend, and will break in pieces his oppressor.* But if *oppression* is the road to poverty, is not liberality the way to riches? Doubtless it is, if it be for God. (Chap. iii. 9, 10.) But here the man was putting forth a false show of munificence to ensure gifts in tenfold return; while he could at the same time indulge his selfishness in grinding the poor with impunity. Our Lord, therefore, forbids his friends to "make a feast for the rich,

¹ Chap. xiii. 24, with iii. 11, 12.

² 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13.

* Lawson *in loco*. Comp. verses 22, 23.

looking for a recompence."* "If ye do good to them"--said he to his disciples--"that do good to you-if ye lend to them, of whom ye hope to receive-what thank have ye?" (Luke, vi. 33.) *To give to the rich* is perverting our stewardship for the service of the poor. But retributive justice will blast the ill-gotten gains of selfishness;¹ and hypocrisy will meet its just reward of shame and disappointment. (Luke, xii. 1,2.) Oh! let the Christian ever hear his Father's voice--"Walk before me, and be thou perfect."

17. *Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge.* 18. *For it is a pleasant thing, if thou keep them within thee; they shall withal be fitted in thy lips.* 19. *That thy trust may be in the Lord, I have made known to thee this day, even to thee.* 20, 21. *Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge, that I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee?*

Solomon here changes his mode of address. From the tenth chapter he had chiefly given detached, sententious aphorisms in an antithetical form; contrasting right and wrong principles with their respective results. His observations are now more connected and personal, and, like a wise minister, he preaches *to* his people, not *before* them; preaching to them, not only in the mass, but in contact with their individual consciences.

The wise man here 'shews the power and use of the word of God.† He begins with an earnest call to attention. He was speaking no ordinary matters, but *the words of the wise*. *Bow the ear--apply the heart unto my knowledge*² as to a message from God Lord! "waken mine ear to hear as the learned." (Isa. L. 4.)

Observe the attractiveness of wisdom. It is a pleasant, no less than a profitable, *thing*. And who is not alive to the call of pleasure? Yet incomprehensible is it to the world to connect religion with pleasure. It spoils all their pleasure. And what amends can it make? It includes in their view much to be done, but nothing to be enjoyed; something very serious, perhaps important in its place; but grave and gloomy; a duty, not a privilege. Yet how little has our profession wrought for us, if it has not realized it as *a pleasant thing* "if it has not adorned it with somewhat of an angel's face! Often indeed by our own fault it fails to comfort and invigorate us; a body indeed of truth,

¹ Job, xx. 19-22. Isa. v. 8, 9. Mic. iii. 2-5. Zech. vii. 9-14. Jam. ii. 6, 13; v. 1-4.

² Ch.ii 12; xxiii. 12

* Luke, xiv. 12. Martial often alludes to the expectation of a legacy with keen rebuke of selfishness.

† Melancthon *in loco*.

but" a body without the spirit"--cold and lifeless. *It is a pleasant thing only, if we keep it within us.*¹ Heart-religion conveys vital happiness. The fruit is of "the tree of life;"² its taste "sweeter than honey or the honey-comb;"³ "Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and thy word was unto me as the joy and rejoicing of my heart." (Jer. xv. 16.)

Mark also the connection between the religion of the heart and of the lips. Keep it within thee. "Let this word dwell in your heart;" and how graceful will be the furniture of *the lips*, *fitting* them to speak with natural simplicity, and suitable application!⁴ When "the heart is inditing a good matter, the tongue" is as "the pen of a ready writer." (Ps. xlv. 1.) It becomes "as choice silver." The words are fitted like a string of rich and precious pearls.* "The lips of the righteous feed many."⁵ Yet the words will be but little *fitted in the lips*,⁶ "where there is no treasure in the heart." Never let the mouth attempt to "speak of wisdom," until "the meditation of the heart has been of understanding." (Ps. xlix. 3.)

But how powerless are even the words of wisdom without personal application! Let each for a while isolate himself from his fellow-men, and be alone with God, under the clear, searching light of his word. If prayer be cold; graces be languid, privileges be clouded, and profession unfruitful, is it not because religion has been taken up *in the gross*, without immediate personal contact with the truth of God? O my soul, the message of God is *to thee, even to thee†--this, day*. "To-day, while it is called to-day,"⁷ welcome his voice with reverential joy. "Take fast hold of his instruction, for it is thy life." (Chap. iv. 13.) *That thy trust may be in the Lord;* that thou mayest claim thine interest in him; that thou mightest seal his troth upon thine heart--*he hath made it known to thee, even to thee*. Believe, love, obey; be happy here, and for eternity. *And who can doubt the excellency of the things that are written, so rich in counsel and knowledge--*'words fit for a prince to speak, and the best man in the world to hear?'[‡] Such free, such pleading, invitations!⁸ Such deep manifestations of the divine counsels!⁹ Such wise, earnest, parental warning against sin!¹⁰ Such encouraging exhibitions of the service of God!¹¹ Such a minute and practical standard for relative life and social obligation!¹²

But let us not forget the great end of this Revelation--*that we may know the certainty of the things; that we may give an answer concerning*

¹ Chap. vi. 21; vii. 1, with ii. 10.

² Chap. iii. 18.

³ Chap. xxiv. 13, 14. Ps. xix. 10; cxix. 103.

⁴ Ps. cxix. 171; Matt. xii. 34. Col. ill. 16.

⁵ Chap. x. 21. Comp. xv. 23; xvi. 21; xxv. 11.

⁶ Chap. xxvi. 7, 9.

⁷ Heb. iii. 13; iv. 7, with Ps. xcv. 7.

⁸ Chap. i. viii. ix. 9 Chap. viii.

¹⁰ Chap. vi. vii

¹¹ Chap. iii.

¹² Chap. x.-xxii.

*Diodati.

† See the same emphatic reduplication, chap. xxiii. 15. ‡ Chap. viii. 6. Scott in loco.

our confidence. The Gospel itself was written with a special reference to this important end.¹ Yet this confidence is a Divine attainment. "The word must come with power, and with the Holy Ghost," in order to come "with much assurance." (1 Thess. i.5.) That cannot be a sound faith, which does not extend to the whole of the testimony. And even a general admission of the authority of the whole, without an individual application, would, if carefully analyzed, prove to be a want of cordial reception of any part of the revelation. A lodgment in the heart can alone bring that full conviction--"Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard him ourselves." (John, iv. 42.)

Doubts may arise as to the integrity of the foundation. But a candid and intelligent survey of the external evidence would satisfy all reasonable minds.* And a fair trial for ourselves would confirm the mass of proof with all the weight of internal evidences. Far better to make the trial at once, than to paralyze the modicum of remaining strength by unreasonable doubtings. The Bible exhibits a divinely-appointed remedy commensurate with man's infinite distress, and accepted of God in its power and prevalence. Let this at least encourage the effort to fit our case to the remedy, and to apply the remedy to our case. There may be shaking in the exercise, but not in the foundation, of our confidence.

No further proof can be expected. None, in fact, could be given, save a voice from heaven; which the busy enemy, working upon the imagination, would readily convert into a vehicle of doubt. Actual demonstration would leave no room for faith, which is clearly man's discipline in the present dispensation; humbling him in the consciousness of his ignorance and his dependence upon God. We have only therefore thankfully to receive, and diligently to improve, the sufficient evidence vouchsafed to us. Paley has given us a golden maxim of Christian philosophy; when he defines the fortitude of understanding to consist '*in not suffering what we do know to be disturbed and shaken by what we do not know.*'† To delay, therefore, "the obedience of faith" (Rom. xvi. 26), until we shall have solved all the ten thousand objections of a proud infidelity, is to waste the urgent responsibilities of the present moment in an unwarranted expectation of light, which was never intended to be given. Perhaps time was, when these questions were welcome, nurtured by pride or sensuality; rather insinuated, than formally presented. Simplicity was revolting. Imagination was in the stead of faith, not auxiliary to it. But the tossings of the mind in

¹ Luke, i. 1-4; 2 Pet. i. 15, 16.

*See Dr. ALEXANDER'S *Canon of the Old and New Testament Scriptures Ascertained*--a valuable volume from America--reprinted in London.

† See his *Natural Theology*, Chap. v.

speculative uncertainty have been ordained to enhance the value of a soundly-assured confidence.

Indeed the importance of such a confidence cannot be over-estimated. It constitutes the weight and effectiveness of the sacred office. "The priest's lips keep knowledge, and they shall seek the law at his mouth, as the messenger of the Lord of Hosts." (Mal. ii. 7.) But except *he know himself the certainty of the words of truth*, how can he *answer the words of truth to them that send unto him*? Scarcely less necessary is it, for the Christian, that he may "be ready always to give an answer to everyone that asketh him a reason of the hope that is in him." (1 Pet. iii. 15.) Temporary scepticism may be a chastisement of a disputatious spirit; but prayer, and humility, with all its attendant graces, will ultimately lead to Christian establishment. Thus shall we be preserved from the fearful, but alas! too prevalent, danger, of receiving the traditions of men in the stead, and with the authority, of the testimony of God. Ours will not be a blind Romish faith in the priests or in the Church, but *alone* "in the law and the testimony;"¹ "standing not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God;"² stamped by the impress of the Spirit, as "the witness in ourselves."³ No power of Satan or his emissaries will drive us permanently from this stronghold. We "know whom" and what "we have believed" (2 Tim. i. 12), and "testify," for the support of our weaker brethren, "that this is the true grace of God wherein we stand." (1 Pet. v. 12.)

22, 23. *Rob not the poor, because he is poor: neither oppress the afflicted in the gate: for the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.*

Perhaps after so solemn an exhortation, we might have expected something more important. Yet what can be more important than the law of love, and to rebuke the breaches of that law? *Robbery and oppression*, under any circumstances, are a breach of the commandment. (Exod. xx. 15.) But to *rob the poor, because he is poor*, and has no means of protection, is a cowardly aggravation of the sin. (2 Sam. xii. 1-6.) Much more base is it to *oppress the afflicted in the gate*--the place of judgment⁴--to make his only refuge a market for bribery,⁵ and to pervert the sacred authority of God given for his protection.⁶ God is most resisted in wronging those who cannot resist or defend themselves. "The threatenings of God against the *robbers of the poor* are sometimes laughed at by the rich and great. But they will find them in due time to be awful realities.* "Weak though they be, they have

¹ Isa. viii. 20. Acts, xvii. 11. ² 1 Cor. ii. 5. ³ 1 John, v. 10; ii. 20, 27.

⁴ Ruth, iv. 1. 2 Sam. xv. 2; xix. 8. Job, v. 4. Amos, v. 15.

⁵ Exod. xxiii. 6. Amos, v. 12. 6 Ps. lxxxii. 4. Comp. lxxii. 1-4.

* Lawson on Verse 16.

a strong one to take their part.* He *will plead their cause*. And woe to the man, against whom he pleads. "What mean ye"--demands the poor man's pleader--"that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the face of the poor?"¹

The accumulation of divine vengeance is heaped upon this sin.² Ahab's judgment testified to the fearful *spoiling of those who spoil the poor*.³ The captivity in Babylon was the scourge for this wickedness." And when the deeds of secrecy shall be brought to light, how black will be the catalogue of sins of *oppression*! How tremendous the judgments of *the oppressor*!⁵ Meanwhile let the poor commit himself to his God;⁶ yea, take up the song of praise,⁷ in the confidence that the Divine *pleader* will "maintain his cause,"⁸ to the eternal confusion of his *spoilers*.

24, 25. *Make no friendship 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.*

Sin is contagious. Alas! our corrupt constitution predisposes us to receive it in any form, in which it may be presented to us. The unlovely passions of a *furious man* rather repel than attract.⁹ But sin never loses its infectious character. *Friendship* blinds the eye; and where there is no light in the mind, no true tenderness in the conscience, we can see hateful things done by those we love, with blunted sensibilities. Common intercourse *with a furious man* is like living in a house that is on fire. His unreasonable conduct stirs our own tempers. One fire kindles another. Occasional bursts of passion soon form the habit. The habit becomes the nature. Thus *we learn his ways, and get a snare to our soul*. (Ps. cvi. 35, 36.) How soon does a young person, living with a proud man, get the mould of his society, and become imperious and overbearing! (Ecclus. xiii. 1.) Evil ways, especially when they fall in with our natural temperament, are much sooner learnt than good, and are much more powerful to "corrupt good manners" (1 Cor. xv. 33), than good manners to amend the evil. We learn anger easier than meekness. We convey disease, not health. Hence it is the rule of self-preservation, no less than the rule of God--*Make no friendship with an angry man*.

26. *Be not thou one of them that strike hands, or of them that are sureties for debts.* 27. *If thou hast nothing to pay, why should he take away thy bed from under thee?*

Avoid contention, not only *with angry*, but with imprudent, perhaps

¹ Isa. iii. 15. Comp. chap. xxiii. 10, 11. Jer. 1. 33, 34. ² Ps. cix. 6, 16.

³ 1 Kings, xxi. 18-24. Comp. Isa. xxxiii. 1. Hab. ii. 8.

⁴ Ezek. xxii. 29-31. Comp. Jer. xxi. 12. ⁵ Mal. iii. 5. ⁶ Ps. x. 14.

⁷ Ib. cix. 30, 31. ⁸ Ib. cxl. 12. ⁹ Chap. xxi. 24; xxv 28; xxvii. 4.

*Bp. SANDERSON'S *Sermon on 1 Sam. xii. 3.*

unprincipled associates. *Strike not your hands¹ as a surety*, without forethought, perhaps without upright principle. Repeated warnings have been given of this danger.² *Striking hands* for a friend is often striking, and even wounding, our own hearts. The putting your hand to a bill may be almost signing a warrant for your own execution. At all events it is a fraud to give security for more than you are worth; promising what you are unable to perform. The creditor may fairly in this case proceed to extremities³--not with the debtor (whom he knows to be worth nothing, and "whom indeed" the law of God protected⁴--but with the surety. And *why*--the wise man asks--shouldst thou rashly incur beggary and ruin, so as to *have the bed taken from under thee?*

There is, however, so much danger of erring in over-caution, and of indulging selfishness under the cover of prudence, that these wholesome cautions must be considerably applied. Yet, in "devising liberal things" (Isa. xxxii. 8), we must combine scrupulous regard to justice and truth (Philip. iv. 8); else our very charity will prove the scandal, instead of the glory, of our profession.⁵ We may "take *joyfully* the spoiling of our goods," for the testimony of a good conscience. But as the fruit of our own rashness and folly, we cannot but *take it heavily*. Oh! let our Divine Master be honoured in our profession; by well-doing "putting to silence the ignorance of foolish men."

28. *Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set.*

Every one has an undoubted right to his own. He must therefore have the means of knowing and securing his right. Even the heathen admitted the sacredness of *the landmark*. The stone or the staple was honoured as the god, without whose kindly influence every field would be the subject of contention.† *The landmark* was protected by the wise laws of Israel. God himself set the "bounds to the respective parts of his own world, restricting each part within its proper limits."⁷ Thus also he distributed the different nations,⁸ and appointed the same security for the several allotments of his own people.⁹ *The ancient landmark* stood as the witness and memorial of each man's rights, *which his fathers had set*. Its *removal* therefore was forbidden, as a selfish and unjust invasion of property,¹⁰ included in the curses of Ebal¹¹ and noted, in subsequent ages, as the forefront of national provocation.¹²

¹ Chap. vi. 1.

² Ib. verses 1, 2; xi. 15; xvii. 18.

³ Chap. xx. 16.

⁴ Exod. xxii. 26, 27. Deut. xxiv. 12, 13.

⁵ Rom. XIV. 16. 1 Tim. v. 22. Heb. xii. 13.

⁶ 1 Pet. ii. 12, 15; iii. 16.

⁷ Gen. i. 6-10. Job, xxxviii. 10, 11.

⁸ Deut. xxxii. 8.

⁹ Num. xxxiv.

¹⁰ Deut. xix. 14. Comp. chap. xxiii. 10. Job, xxiv. 2.

¹¹ Dent. xxvii. 17.

¹² Hos. v. 10.

* Heb. x. 34. Henry in loco.

† See Ovid, *Trist.* ii. 630-648.

All sound expositors* warn us, from this Proverb, to reverence long-tried and well-established principles, and not rashly to innovate upon them. Some scorn *the ancient landmarks* as relics of bye-gone days of darkness. Impatient of restraint, they want a wider range of wandering, to indulge either their own prurient appetite for novelties, or the morbid cravings of others for this unwholesome excitement. (2 Tim. iii. 7; iv. 3, 4.) Endless divisions and dissensions have been the fruit of this deadly evil. The right of individual judgment oversteps its legitimate bounds; and in its licentious exercise "every man" feels justified to "do" and think "that which is right in his own eyes." (Jud. xxi. 25.)

Rome, on the other hand, charges us with *removing the ancient landmark* of unwritten Tradition, *which our fathers have set*. We ask--What right had they to *set it up*? We do reverence to no unwritten traditions upon the footing of "the law and the testimony." (Isa. viii. 20.) We rebut the charge of Antichrist, and contend, upon the broad ground of historic testimony, that *she has removed the ancient landmarks*, and substituted her own in their place; that Protestantism (in principle, though not in name) is the old religion, and Popery a comparative novelty.† 'We have not removed the ancient landmarks by bringing men back to the true doctrine, because this, being delivered by God, is the ancient doctrine, and the landmarks have been subsequently removed by the subtilty of the devil, and idolatry put in the place of the true worship.‡

Turning to our beloved and venerated Church; the last age witnessed a rude, but by divine mercy an unsuccessful, effort, to root up her *landmarks*.§ We have seen a subtle and invidious attempt to remove them from the place, where *our well-instructed fathers have set* them, and fix them nearer Rome; leaving but a narrow boundary of division between Christ and Antichrist. This is indeed the rooting up of the foundations of the grace of God, which ought, if need be, to "be resisted unto blood." (Heb. xii. 4.) The Lord make us "valiant for the truth," and consistent witnesses of its power!

29. *Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men.*

Seest thou a man? He is marked out for a special notice! And

¹ Chap. xxvi. 12; xxix. 20.

*Bp. Patrick, Scott, Geier, &c. Romish expositors naturally apply it to their own traditions. Este quotes the Venerable Bede. See also Corn. a Lapide.

† The historical dates of the distinctive principles of Popery, accredited as articles of faith are many centuries subsequent to the primitive era. See a valuable tract by Rev. Thomas Lathbury--'Protestantism the Old Religion, Popery the New.' Also 'Our Protestant Forefathers.' By the Rev. Dr. Gilly--As regards our own church--Mr. Soames's interesting and elaborate work on the Anglo-Saxon Church.

‡ Melancthon. *Comment.* 12mo. 1550.

§ The Heathen Association, at Feathers Tavern, supported by men of influence and dignity, with the avowed object of sweeping away the Creeds, Articles, and Subscriptions.

who is it? *A man diligent in his business*; quick, ready, actively improving his time, his talents, his opportunity for his work; like Henry Martyn, who was known in his college 'as the man who had not lost an hour.'^{*} *A mean sphere is too low for such a man. He shall stand*, as Joseph,¹ Nehemiah,² Daniel--all *diligent in their business--did--before kings*. If the letter of the promise be not fulfilled, "the *diligent man* will bear rule" in his own sphere.³ Such was the honour put upon Eliezer's care, forethought and, activity for his master's interest. (Gen. xxiv.) 'Nobleness of condition is not essential as a school for nobleness of character. It is delightful to think, that humble life may be just as rich in moral grace and moral grandeur as the loftier places in society; that as true a dignity of principle may be earned by him, who in homeliest drudgery plies his conscientious task, as by him who stands entrusted with the fortunes of an empire.'[†]

Diligence, even without godliness, is often the way to worldly advancement. Pharaoh chose Joseph's brethren, as "men of activity," to be rulers of his cattle. (Ib. xlvii. 6.) Jeroboam owed his rise in Solomon's house to his "industrious" habits. (1 Kings, xi. 28.) But when a man "serves the Lord in fervency of spirit" (Rom. xii. 11), thriftfully occupying his own talent for the day of reckoning (Luke, xix. 13); not only *the mean man*, but the mighty man of the world, will be too low for him. *He shall stand before the King of Kings* with unspeakable honour, with unclouded acceptance--"Well done! good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." (Matt. xxv. 21-23.)

And if "the servants of this wise king were happy, *which stood continually before him*, and heard his wisdom;" what must be the joy of *standing before the great King*, seeing his face, and serving him for ever!⁴ "This honour have all his saints." (Ps. cxlix. 9.) "If a man serve me," saith our gracious Master, "where I am, there shall also my servant be; if any man serve me, him will my Father honour." (John, xii. 26.)

CHAPTER XXIII.

1. *When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee: 2. And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite. 3. Be not desirous of his dainties: for they are deceitful meat.*

THE book of God is our rule of practice, not less than of faith. It enforces religion not only in our religious, but in our natural, actions.

¹ Gen. xxxix. 3-6; xli. 42.

² Neh. i. 11; ii. 1. Dan. vi. 1-3; vi. 28.

³ Chap. xii. 24. Comp. Eccclus. x. 25. ⁴ 1 Kings, x. 8, with Rev. vii. 15; xxii. 3, 4.

^{*}*Life*, chap. ii.

[†]CHAMMERS' *Commercial Discourses*, p. 107.

(1 Cor. x. 31.) It directs in the daily details of common life. Suppose we are invited, in the way of Providence, to the table of a man of rank --how wise the caution--*Consider diligently what is before thee!* Think where you are; what is the besetting temptation; what impression your conduct is likely to make. Wantonness of appetite, or levity of manner, gives a plausible ground of prejudice to the ungodly, or "stumbling to the weak."¹

But after all, ourselves are mainly concerned. May not the luxuries of the table spread before us stir up disproportionate indulgence? The rule is plain and urgent. *If thou art conscious of being given to appetite*, making it thy first object and delight,--bridle it as by violence. (Matt. xviii. 8,9.) Act as if a *knife was at thy throat*. Be stern and resolute with thyself.² Give no quarter to the lust. Resist every renewed indulgence. The *dainties are deceitful meat*, sometimes from the insincerity of the host;³ always from the disappointment of the anticipated pleasure. (Eccles. ii. 10, 11.) To use them may be lawful. *To be desirous of them* is fearfully dangerous.

Who that knows his own weakness will deem this caution needless? Alas! was not "the lust of the flesh" the first inlet to that sin, which has overwhelmed us all? (Gen. iii. 6.) Often has it tarnished a Christian profession,⁴ and damped the liveliness of spiritual apprehensions and enjoyments.⁵ If Christ's disciples, conversant only *with mean and homely fare*, needed a caution to "take heed;"⁶ much more must it apply to a *ruler's table*, where everything ministers to the temptation.

It is man's high prerogative to "have dominion over the creature."⁷ It is his shame therefore, that the creature in any form should have dominion over him. God gives us our body to feed, not to pamper; to be the servant, not the master, of the soul. He gives bread for our necessities,⁸ man craves "meat for his lust."⁹ We are to "make provision" for the wants, not "for the lusts, of the flesh." (Rom. xiii. 14.) And surely a soul, that "puts on the Lord Jesus Christ," can never degrade itself to be a purveyor of the flesh. If a heathen could say, 'I am greater and born to greater things, than to be the servant of my body'--is it not a shame for a Christian, born as he is, the heir of an everlasting crown, to be the slave of his carnal indulgences?

To go as near as we can to the bounds of intemperance, is to incur imminent danger of exceeding. 'He that takes his *full* liberty in what he may, shall repent him.'† Temptation presses hard. Then put the

¹ 1 Cor. viii. 9. Rom xiv. 21. ² Verse 31. Ps. cxli. 4. ³ Verses 6-8.

⁴ 1 Cor. xi. 21. Phil. iii. 18. 19. Jude, 12, 13.

⁵ Gen. xxv. 28; xxvii. 4, with 26-29.

⁶ Luke, xxi. 34.

⁷ Gen. i. 26, 28; ix. 2.

⁸ Matt. vi. 11, 25-33.

⁹ Ps. lxxviii. 18.

* Seneca.

† Bishop HALL'S *Works*, viii. 101. 'If I see any dish to tempt my palate, I fear a serpent in that apple, and would please myself in a wilful denial.'--*Ib.* Ep. Decad. vi. Ep. i.

strongest guard at this weak point. 'Curb thy desires, though they be somewhat importunate, and thou shalt find in time incredible benefit by it.* Take the prayer of our Church--'Grant unto us such abstinence, that our flesh being subdued unto the spirit, we may ever obey thy godly motions.'† Connect with it the resolution of one Apostle--"I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection" (1 Cor. ix. 27)--and the rule of another--"Add to your faith temperance." (2 Pet. i. 5, 6.) This practical warfare will break the power of many a strong temptation, and triumph over the flesh gloriously.‡

4. *Labour not to be rich; cease from thine own wisdom.* 5. *Wilt thou set thine eyes* (cause thine eyes to fly, marg.) *upon that which is not? for riches certainly make to themselves wings: they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.*

We have now a warning against covetousness. If riches come from the blessing of God, receive them thankfully,¹ and consecrate them wisely and freely for him. But *to labour to be rich*, is the dictate of our *own wisdom*, not of that "which is from above." 'Let them be gotten if they can, and how they can,' without needless scrupulosity.² Solomon, however, describes by a beautiful figure their true nature--a mere nonentity, an illusion--*that which is not*. Folly indeed then is it to *set the eyes* (to cause them to fly, like a ravenous bird upon his prey³) upon this nullity. One moment it seems to be within reach. The next it has eluded our grasp, and *flown away as an eagle towards heaven*.§

And yet practically to acknowledge the stamp of vanity upon this idolized treasure, is a lesson not learnt in a day; learnt only in the school of discipline. The eagerness for the earthly, and the neglect of the heavenly, object shew, either that eternity is a delusion, or that the world is mad. For were the things of eternity *really* believed, would not the thoughts be fixed, and the heart be filled with them, with but little time or room for the engrossing vanities of life? As to intrinsic value, Luther not less truly than boldly declared--that 'the whole Turkish empire in all its vastness was only a crust, which the great Father of the family cast to the dogs.' And then--as to abiding, there is no need to invent *wings*. *Riches make them to themselves*. The man who concentrates all his wisdom, talents, and energy, who sacrifices all his peace; "rising up early, and late taking rest" (Ps. cxxvii. 2), in

¹ Chap. x. 22. Gen. xxxi. 9.

² Chap. xxviii. 20, 22. Ezek. xxviii. 4, 5. Luke, xvi. ³ Jer. xxii. 17. Hos. ix. 11.

* Bp. SANDERSON'S Sermon on Ps. xix. 13.

† Collect for first Sunday in Lent.

‡ Dan. i. 8. Compare Augustine's ingenious and instructive *Confessions*, book x. c. 31.

§ A frequent Scripture illustration of a speedy flight. Comp. Deut. xxviii. 49. 2 Sam. i. 23. Lam iv. 19

the *labour after riches*, often has been at one stroke deprived of all, just when he supposed himself to be secure of all. Divine chastisement,¹ indolence,² extravagance,³ injustice,⁴ robbery,--bring to the lowest poverty.⁵ Their longest stay is but a moment. Eternity is at the door;⁶ and naked shall we go out of the world, as we came into it.⁷ Yet even this palpable consciousness fails to teach men the lessons, to *cease from their own wisdom*, to seek true substance on earth,⁸ and in God's wisdom to lay up enduring "treasures in heaven."⁹

Here then lies the contrast. The world apprehends realities only in the objects before them; the Christian only in invisible things. Therefore if our judgment looks upon the one as a shadow, and the other as a substance; let us see that we proportion our affections accordingly; giving the shadow of love to the things of earth, the marrow and substance of the heart to the things of eternity. Thank our God for the present possession of "a better and an enduring substance." (Heb. x. 34.) But are there not moments of rest and indulgence, when "uncertain riches" become our confidence (1 Tim. vi. 17), and we need a sharp lesson to remind us, how *certainly they make to themselves wings, and flee away?* Oh! think—Christian--of thy heavenly birth, thine eternal expectations; what manner of man thou wilt be in a short moment, when the false pageant shall have given way to the real manifestation of the Son of God, and thou shalt be on the throne with him for ever!¹⁰ With this glory in prospect, what a degradation is it to set thine eyes upon a "fashion that passeth away!"*

6, 7. *Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye, neither desire thou his dainty meats; for as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee.* 8. *The morsel which thou hast eaten shalt thou vomit up, and lose thy sweet words.*

Kindly intercourse with our neighbours is a part of the courtesies of life.¹¹ Yet we ought not to entertain the invitation of a niggardly man, who grudges the very food we eat, or of a deceitful man, whose

¹ Gen. xiii. 5-11; xiv. 12.

² Chap. vi. 9-11.

³ Luke, xv. 12-16.

⁴ Chap. xx.. 21; xxi. 6. Jam. v. 2, 3.

⁵ Job, i. 14-11.

⁶ Luke, xii. 20.

⁷ Job, i. 21. Ps. xlix. 17.

⁸ Chap. viii. 18-21.

⁹ Matt. vi. 20.

¹⁰ Philip iv.5. Col. iii. 1-4.

¹¹ Cor. v. 10, 11; x. 21.

* 1 Cor. vii. 29-31. It is a fine remark of a Heathen philosopher--'Nothing can be called great, which to despise is great. Thus riches, honours, dignities, authorities, and whatever beside may have the outward pomp of this world's theatre, cannot be to a wise man pre-eminent blessings, since the contempt of them is a blessing of no mean order. Indeed those who enjoy them are not so much entitled to admiration, as those who can look down upon them with a noble superiority of mind.'--LONGIN. *De Sublim.* sect. vii. The Roman Satirist adverts to Solon's warning to Croesus, when he refused to admire his immense riches (a warning despised at the time, but remembered when he was bound to the stake)--

--Croesum, quem vox justi facunda Solonis
Respicere ad longrae jussit spatia ultima vitae. Juv. x. 274.

friendship is a cloak for selfish purposes. *The evil eye* will peep through the covers of his *dainty meats*, and betray him, in spite of his effort for concealment. We judge him not by his words; *for as he thinketh in his heart, so is he*. And while *he saith, Eat and drink*, it is but too plain, that *his heart is not with us*. (Luke, xi. 37.) "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is," than his *dainty meat*. "A poor man is far better than such a liar."¹ Every *morsel* at his table is loathsome; and gladly would we retract, and *lose the sweet words*, with which we had unworthily complimented our host.

No such danger attaches to the invitations of the Gospel. There is no *evil eye*,² no grudging--"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." (Isa. lv. 1.) The table is set. The herald is sent to make the proclamation. (Comp. chap. ix. 2, 3.) Hunger is the only qualification. *While he saith--"Eat, O friends; yea, drink abundantly, O beloved"* (Cant. v. 1),--his whole *heart is with us*. There are no repentings, no disappointments here. Every taste increases the appetite for more. And the prospect is near at hand, when we "shall be abundantly" and eternally "satisfied with the fatness of his house." (Ps. xxxvi. 8; xvi. 11.)

9. *Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words.*

Our Lord's rule is to the same purport--"Give not that which is holy unto the dogs; neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under foot, and turn again and rend you." (Matt. vii. 6.) Cast not away your good counsels upon incorrigible sinners. So long as there is any hope of reclaiming *the fool*, make every effort for his precious soul. In the true spirit of our Master, bring the Gospel to the worst and the most unwilling; and never make the rule of prudence the excuse for indolence. Yet "there is a time to keep silence, as well as a time to speak."³ Such a time we shall understand by the trial to our own spirit. We long to speak in compassion. But self-denial, not self-indulgence, restrains.⁴ We have before been warned against untimely rebuke. (Chap. i. 8.) This caution extends further--*Speak not in the ears of a fool*. Such was our Master's silence before Herod. (Luke, xxiii. 9.) If he would hear, there would be hope. But instead of being thankful for instruction, *he will depise the wisdom of thy words* (Chap. 1. 7), and take occasion from them only to scoff and blaspheme the more. Many doubtful cases, however, require much wisdom. And the safe rule will be never to speak without prayer for divine guidance, and simplicity, and love.

¹ Chap. xv. 17; xix. 22.

² 2 Sam. xi. 13; xiii. 26-28.

³ Eccles. iii. 7. Chap. xxvi. 4. 5.

⁴ Ps. xxxix. 1. 2.

10, 11. *Remove not the old landmark: land enter not into the fields of the fatherless: for their Redeemer is mighty: he shall plead their cause with thee.*

The general prohibition to *remove the old landmark* has been before given. (Chap. xxii. 28.) A special warning, and a powerful reason are here added. Many would not dare to touch the rich, while they oppress the poor at their will. But *the fields of the fatherless* are under Almighty protection. Not indeed that there is any licence to trespass upon the rich man's field. But the fatherless having no might, God will plead with the invader for the wrong done to them, as for a wrong done to himself, because done to those, whom he undertook to protect. Beware therefore of arming against yourself the divine vengeance by *entering into it*. Helpless they may seem to be. But *their Redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee*.¹ Was the nearest of kin bound to be the *Redeemer* of his kinsman's wrongs?² Adored be the unsearchable pity, grace, and condescension of Emmanuel! When he could not redeem as--God, he became our kinsman, that he might be our Redeemer!³ And he now bears the endearing title of "the Father of *the fatherless*."⁴ His moral government shews, that "in him they find" not "mercy"⁵ only but justice also. (Ps. ciii. 6.) Here is their strong confidence, when human help is gone.--"The poor committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of *the fatherless*." (Ib. x. 14, 17, 18.) "Pure and undefiled religion is" therefore to follow his heavenly pattern--"to visit *the fatherless* and widows in their affliction." (Jam. i. 27.) Special provision was made in the Apostolical ministration for these friendless objects of Christian help.⁶ The gospel reflects the image of Christ, when native selfishness is thus melted away in sympathizing love.

12. *Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge.*

The frequent repetition of these counsels,⁷ implies an humbling truth, familiar to every day's experience--man's natural revulsion from Divine *instruction*, and his inattention to *the words of knowledge*. It is well to have these injunctions renewed from time to time. We all need "precept upon precept, line upon line" (Isa. xxviii. 13); and that to the very end of our course. The best taught and most advanced Christian will be most earnest in seeking more *instruction*, and wilt most gladly sit at the feet of the Lord's ministers, to hear *the words of knowledge*. Here lies the value of the Bible, as the one source of

¹ Chap. xxii. 22, 23. Jer. 1. 33, 34. Comp. Exod. xxii. 22-24. Job, xxii. 9, 10; xxxi. 21-23; xxxiv. 28. Isa. x. 1-3.

² Lev. xxv. 25. Num. xxxv. 12. Ruth, iii. 12.

³ Heb. ii. 14-16.

⁴ Ps. lxxviii. 5, with 18.

⁵ Hos. xiv. 3. Pa. cxlvi. 9.

⁶ Acts, vi. 1. 1 Tim. v. 3-5, 9, 10.

⁷ Chap. ii. iii. iv. viii. xix. 20.

instruction, and the alone treasure-house of *the words of knowledge*. The simple reference to this standard is the keeping of the soul from Romish errors, whether on Romish or Protestant ground.

Observe the connection between *the application of the heart and of the ears*. (Chap. ii. 2.) *The heart* open to sound advice or moral precept, is yet shut to Christ and his doctrine. It is closed up in unbelief, prejudice, indifference, and the love of pleasure. A listless heart therefore produces a careless ear. But when the heart is graciously opened, softened, and enlightened, the attention of the ear is instantly fixed.¹ This indeed is the Lord's Sovereign creation work;² yet wrought by a God of order in the use of his own means. A wakened desire brings to prayer.³ Prayer brings the blessing.⁴ And precious then is *every word of knowledge*, more "than thousands of gold and silver!"⁵

13. *Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. 14. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.*

Christian parents do not always recognize the scriptural standard of discipline. "Foolishness is bound in the heart" of the parent, no less than "of the child." "The wild ass's colt" (Job, xi. 12) must always need its measure of *correction*. The rule therefore is, notwithstanding all the pleas of pity and fondness--*withhold it not*. Do the work wisely, firmly, lovingly. Persevere notwithstanding apparently unsuccessful results. Connect it with prayer, faith, and careful instruction.

We admit that it is revolting to give pain, and call forth the tears of those we so tenderly love. But while hearts are what hearts are, it is not to be supposed that we can train without discipline. If it be asked--will not gentle means be more effectual? Had this been God's judgment, as a God of mercy, he would not have provided a different regimen. Eli tried them, and the sad issue is written for our instruction.⁶ 'Must I then be cruel to my child?' Nay--God charges thee with cruelty, if thou *withheld correction from him*. He "goes on his own foolishness."⁷ Except he be restrained, he will die, in his sin. God has ordained the rod to purge his sins, and so deliver his soul *from hell*. What 'parent then, that trembles for the child's eternal destiny, can *withhold correction*? Is it not cruel love, that turns away from painful duty? To suffer sin upon a child, no less than upon a brother, is tantamount to "hating him in our heart."⁸ Is it not better that the flesh should smart, than that *the soul should die*? Is it no sin to omit a means of grace, as divinely appointed, as the word and

¹ Acts, xvi. 14.

⁴ Chap. ii 3-6.

⁷ Chap. xx.ii. 15. Eccles. xi.10.

² Chap. xx. 12. Rev. iii. 7.

⁵ Ps. cxix. 14, 72, 127.

⁸ Lev. xix. 17, with Chap. xiii. 24.

³ Ps. cxix. 18; xix. 10.

⁶ 1 Sam. ii. 23-25; ill. 13.

the sacraments? Is there no danger of fomenting the native wickedness, and thus becoming accessory to the child's eternal destruction? What if he should reproach thee throughout eternity, for the neglect of that timely *correction*, which might *have delivered his soul from hell*? Or even if he be "scarcely saved," may he not charge upon thee much of his increasing difficulty in the ways of God?

Yet let it not be used at all times. Let remonstrance be first tried. Our heavenly Father never stirs the rod with his children, if his gentle voice of instruction prevail. Continual finding fault; applying *correction* to every slip of childish trifling or troublesome thoughtlessness, would soon bring a callous deadness to all sense of shame. Let it be reserved, at least in its more serious forms, for wilfulness. It is medicine, not food; the remedy for the occasional diseases of the constitution, not the daily regimen for life and nourishment. And to convert medicine into daily food, gradually destroys its remedial qualities.

Some parents, indeed, use nothing but *correction*. They indulge their own passions at the expense of their less guilty children. Unlike our Heavenly Father, they afflict and grieve their children *willingly*;¹ to vent their own anger, not to subdue their children's sins. Self-recollection is of great moment. 'Am I about to correct for my child's good?' An intemperate use of this Scriptural ordinance brings discredit upon its efficacy, and sows the seed of much bitter fruit. Children become hardened under an iron rod. Sternness and severity of manner close up their hearts. It is most dangerous to make them afraid of us. A spirit of bondage and concealment is engendered, often leading to a lie; sowing the seed of hypocrisy--nay, sometimes of disgust, and even of Hatred, towards their unreasonable parents. 'If parents,'--said a wise and godly father--'would not correct their children except in a praying frame, when they can "lift up their hands without wrath," it would neither provoke God nor them.'*

Other parents freely threaten the *rod*, yet *withhold* it. It was only meant to frighten. It soon becomes all empty and powerless sound. This again contravenes our Great Exemplar. His threatenings are not vain words. If his children will not turn, they will find them faithful and true to their cost. This threatening play is solemn trifling with truth; teaching children by example, what they had learnt from the womb (Ps. lviii. 3), to "speak lies." Let our words be considerate, but certain. Let our children know, that they must not trifle either with them or with us. The firmness of truthful discipline alone can convey a wholesome influence. Any defect here is a serious injury.

We must learn however not to expect too much from our children; nor to be unduly depressed by their naughtiness. Yet we must not

¹ Contrast Lam. iii. 33. Heb. xii. 10.

* Matthew HENRY'S *Life*, chap. xiii.

wink at their sinful follies. We must love them not less, but better. And because we love them, we must *not withhold when needed correction from them*. More painful is the work to ourselves, than to them. Most humbling is it. For since the corrupt root produces the poisoned sap in the bud, what else is it but the *correction* of our own sin? Yet though "no chastening for the present be joyous, but rather grievous" (Heb. xii. 11); when given in prayer, in wisdom, and in faith, the saving blessing will be vouchsafed.* 'Lord, do thou be pleased to strike in with every stroke, that the rod of correction may be a rod of instruction.'† 'It is a rare soul'--said good Bishop Hall--'that can be kept in constant order without smarting remedies. I confess, mine cannot. How wild had I run, if the rod had not been over me! Every man can say, he thanks God for his ease. For me, I bless God for my trouble.'‡

15. *My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even, mine* (I will rejoice, marg.) 16. *Yea, my reins shall rejoice, when thy lips speak right things.*

The wise man now turns from parents, and addresses himself must tenderly to children (chap. i. 8, 10, 15, &c.), perhaps to his own child. What Christian parent but responds? Could we be happy to see our child honoured in the world, admired, talented, prosperous, without godliness? *If thine heart be wise*--this is the spring of parental joy--*my heart shall rejoice, even mine*. His health, his comfort, his welfare, is inexpressibly dear to us. But while we watch over the casket, it is the jewel that we mainly value. The love of our child's soul is the life and soul of parental love.§ None but a parent knows the heart of a parent. None but a Christian parent knows the yearning anxiety, the many tears, prayers, and "travailing in birth again" for the soul of a beloved child; or the fervour of joy and praise, when the first budding of heavenly *wisdom* bursts to view.|| The sight brings joy into the innermost depths of the bosom.¶ Parents, who sympathize not with these sensations, and with whom Solomon's language is

*Comp. 1 Cor. v. 5; xi. 32. The Heathen Philosopher adverts to the subject of punishments as an instrument of healing produced by means apparently contrary--ARIST. Eth. ii. 3.

† SWINNOCK'S *Christian Man's Calling*, ii. 35.

‡ *Silent Thoughts*, xxi.

§ See Solomon's own education, chap. iv. 3, 4.

|| Verses 24, 25; x. 1; xv. 20; xxix. 8. 'Lord, let thy blessing so accompany my endeavour' (were the pleadings of a godly parent) that all my sons may be Benaiahs (the Lord's building); and then they will be all Abners (their Father's light); and that all my daughters may be Bethiahs (the Lord's daughters); and then they will be all Abigail's (their Father's joy).--SWINNOCK'S *Christian Man's Calling*, ii. 29, 30.

¶The reins, as deeply seated in the body, are a frequent scriptural illustration of the inner thoughts and affections. Ps. xvi. 7; xxvi. 2. Jer. xii. 2. Lam. iii. 13.

unfelt and uninteresting, realize neither their responsibilities nor their privileges.

Greatly is the parent's joy heightened to hear *his son's lips speaking right things*; to see him, in a day of apostacy and unstable profession, openly standing forth on the Lord's side; "asking for the old paths of rest," now that "the highways are" too often "unoccupied, and the travellers walking through bye-ways."¹

But surely this child, now the father's joy, is one, *from whom correction has not been withheld*. The "foolishness bound in his heart has thus been driven from him;"² and its place graciously supplied by a *wise heart*--a witness to the subsequent rule and promise--"Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest." (Chap. xxix. 17.)

And are not ministers also partakers of this parental joy? "Paul the aged" was filled with prayerful delight in his "beloved son in the faith."³ The thriving churches were "his glory and joy."⁴ Another Apostle "had no greater joy, than to hear that his children walked in truth."⁵ And may we not rise higher, and adore the manifestation of this joy in heaven⁶--yea, in the bosom of God himself over the return of his *corrected child to a wise heart*--"This my son was dead, and is alive again; he "was lost and is found?" (Ib. verses 13-24.)

17. Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long. 18. For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off.

Exactly similar is David's counsel. He sets out *the end*, and shews how little reason we have to *envy sinners*, and what 'is the true path of duty and quietness.'⁷ He was, however, himself, for a while shaken by this temptation. And though he did not *envy sinners*, so as to covet their worldly prosperity; yet comparing their condition with his own 'chastening,' "it was too painful for the Psalmist until he went into the sanctuary of God. Then understood he their *end*,"* and learned to rest in the assurance--*Thine expectation shall not be cut off*.

What then is the safeguard proposed? Just what the Psalmist had found so effective--"being continually with his God"(Ps. lxxiii.23)--the very spirit of the rule--*Be in the fear of God all the day long*. Here he gathered confidence for both worlds--"Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory." (Th. lxxiii. 24.) With such a portion both for time and for eternity, could his heart then *envy sinners*? "I have set the Lord alway before me. Thou wilt shew me the

¹ Judg. v. 6. Jer. vi. 16.

² Chap. xxii. 15; xxix. 15.

³ 2 Tim. i. 2-5.

⁴ 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20; in. 8, 9.

⁵ 2 John, 4. 8 John, 4.

⁶ Luke, xv. 7, 10.

⁷ Ps. xxxvii 1-9, 35, 36. Comp. chap. xxiv. 1, 2, 19, 20.

* Ps. lxxiii. 8, 17. Even a heathen discovered the power of this temptation. Socrates, being asked,--What was most troublesome to good men? answered--'The prosperity of the wicked.'

path of life, the fulness of everlasting joy." (Ps. xvi. 8-11.) What more could he desire? *His heart*, instead of *envying sinners*, would be drawn out in compassionate pleading for them, who have no portion but a dying world (Ib. xvii. 14. Luke, xvi. 25); no *expectation*, but that which shall quickly be *cut off*. (Chap. xxiv. 20.)

But this habitual *fear of the Lord* is nothing separate from common life. It gives to it a holy character. It makes all its minute details not only consistent with, but component parts of, godliness. Acts of kindness are "done after a godly sort." (3 John, 5, 6.) Instead of one duty thrusting out another, all are "done heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto man." (Eph. vi. 6. Col. iii. 23.) Some professors confine their religion to extraordinary occasions. But Elijah seems to have been content to await his translation in his ordinary course of work (2 Kings, ii. 1-12); an example that may teach us to lay the greater stress upon the daily and habitual, not the extraordinary, service. Others are satisfied with a periodical religion; as if it was rather a rapture or an occasional impulse, than a habit. But if we are to engage in morning and evening devotions, we are also to "wait upon the Lord *all the day*." (Ps. xxv. 5.) If we are to enjoy our Sabbath privileges, we are also to "abide in our weekly calling with God."¹ Thus the character of a servant of God is maintained--"devoted to his fear." (Ps. cxix. 38.)

In this Christian walk with God, all is safe for eternity. The hope of the ungodly,² the hypocrite,³ the worldling," shall perish. But *thine expectation shall not be cut off*.⁵ It is "a hope that maketh not ashamed."⁶ It is grounded upon "the immutability of God's counsels," and "entereth into that within the vail."⁷ *Surely there is an end* for this. If the cross be heavy, thou hast but a little time to bear it. If the way be wearisome to the flesh, *the end* drawing nearer will abundantly compensate.* If the light be not visible, "it is sown" for thee. (Ps. xcvi. 11.) And in waiting for the glorious harvest--"here is the patience and faith of the saints." (Rev. xiii. 10.) Meanwhile judge not the Lord hastily, by sense and feeling. Hold fast by God's word. Give time to his providence to explain itself. Pronounce nothing upon an unfinished work. Wait, and "see *the end* of the Lord." "I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord; thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know"--and not only know--but approve "hereafter."⁸

19. *Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way.*

20. *Be not among wine-bibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh: 21. For*

¹ Ps. lxxxiv. with 1 Cor. vii. 20, 24. ² Chap. xi 7. ³ Job, viii. 13, 14.

⁴ Luke, xii. 19. 20. ⁵ Chap. xxiv. 14. Ps. ix. 18. Eccles. viii. 12. Philip. i. 20.

⁶ Rom. v. 5. ⁷ Heb. vi. 17-19.

⁸ Jam. v. 11. Jer. .xxix. 11. John, xiii. 7.

* 'O passi graviora! dabit Deus his quoque finem.'--VIRG. *AEn.* i. 199.

the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags.

These repeated exhortations to hear, remind us of our Lord's earnest and affectionate call--"Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."

(Matt. xi. 15; xiii. 9.) They shew the great importance of *hearing*, as the first step to *be wise*. For wisdom, no less than "faith, cometh by hearing." (Rom. x. 17, with chap. i. 5.) "*Guide thine heart in the way.*" The promise makes this call effectual--"I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths or judgment." (Chap. viii. 20.)

But the call specially warns against a besetting temptation. God's creature abuses his gifts.¹ *Wine* becomes the occasion of excess. *Riotous eaters of the flesh* degrade the soul, as the slave of the body. Not only be not one of them, but *be not amongst them*. (Chap. xxviii. 7.) Can we be among the leprous without infection? May we not get a stain, that will not easily be wiped out? Do we not insensibly receive the mould of our society?² Did not Lot probably learn his dreadful wickedness by contact with the ungodly?³ The truest love is not to sit down with them, but to labour for their conversion; and, if this be ineffectual, to avoid them. Young people! remember--"Tinder is not apter to take fire, wax the impression of the seal, paper the ink, than youth to receive the impression of wickedness."* Fancy not that the enemy intends even your present happiness. His malice holds out a poisoned bait. *Poverty and shame* are the temporal fruits.⁴ But the eternal ruin of his deluded victims is his far more deadly design.

Noah as a wine-bibber,⁵ and the Corinthian converts, profaning the sacred feast by *drunkenness and gluttony*,⁶ warn the man of God--"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." (Matt. xxvi. 41.) Always however evangelize these parental warnings with the principles of the Gospel. "Walk not in rioting and drunkenness; *but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ*"--the only effectual cover from the wantonness of the flesh.--"Having these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit."⁷

22. *Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old.*

"We have had fathers of our flesh, and we gave them reverence." (Heb. xii. 9.) Such is the rule of nature. Such is the law of God.⁸ The wise man here enforces its special application to an aged parent--

¹ Isa. v. 11, 12, 22; xxii. 13. Hab. ii. 5, with Ps. civ. 14, 15. 1 Tim iv. 3-5.

² Ps. cvi. 35. Comp. Matt. xxiv. 49.

³ Gen. xix. 30-32, with Ezek. xvi. 49, 50.

⁴ Chap. vi. 11; xx. 13; xxi. 17. Isa. xxviii. 1-3. Joel, i. 5. Luke, xv. 13-16.

⁵ Gen. ix. 20, 21.

⁶ 1 Cor. xi. 21.

⁷ Rom. xiii. 13, 14. 2 Cor. vii. 1.

⁸ Exod. xx. 12. Lev. xix. 3. Eph. vi. 1, 2. Comp. chap i. 8; vi. 20.

* GREENHILL on Ezek. xix. 4.

thy mother when she is old. Then surely love and reverence are doubly due. 'A thing comely and pleasant to see'--says Bishop Hall--'and worthy of honour from the beholder, is a child understanding the eye of his parent.'* More lovely still is this filial exercise, when the age of the child has naturally loosened the restraints of authority. Respect is then the effect of principle and gratitude. The child no more feels at liberty to despise his parent's wishes, than if he were subject to their early discipline. The Scripture examples are beautiful patterns for our imitation. Isaac with Abraham;¹ Jacob with both his parents;² Joseph's deference to his aged father, and desiring his blessing on his own children;³ Moses with his father-in-law;⁴ Ruth with her mother-in-law;⁵ Solomon in the grandeur of royalty paying respect to his mother;⁶ the Rechabites hearkening to their deceased father's command;⁷ and--above all the rest--the Saviour's tender care for his mother in his own dymg agonies.†

The contrary conduct is marked with the most awful reprobation.⁸ It forms a part of the dark mass of heathen depravity,⁹ and one of the signs of the "perilous times in the last days." (2 Tim. iii. 1, 2.) The spectacle will ever bring a blot upon the child's name and character. (Chap. xix. 26.)

But is not this trial of neglect the Lord's chastening of foolish fondness of our children when young, of our unwise treatment, or inconsistent conduct? Sinful indulgence will always in the end make us *despised* in their eyes, and lay our authority in the dust for them to trample under foot. Christian dignity and consistency, on the other hand, command respect, even where they fall of producing the full practical results. (Chap. xxxi. 28.) Oh! what need have we of Divine grace and wisdom, honourably to maintain parental responsibility

23. Buy the truth, and sell it not: also wisdom and instruction, and understanding. 24. The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him. 25. Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice.

This is the merchant-man, who purchased the "pearl of great price at the cost of all that he had." (Matt. xiii. 45, 46.) The blessing can indeed only be "*bought without price.*" (Isa. lv. 1.) It is as free, as it

¹ Gen. xxii. 9.

² Gen. xxviii. 1-5.

³ Gen. xlvi. 9-14.

⁴ Exod. xviii. 13-24.

⁵ Ruth, 11. 22, 23.

⁶ 1 Kings, 11. 19.

⁷ Jer. xxxv. 6.

⁸ Chap. xx. 20; xxx. 17. Deut. xxi. 18-21; xxvii. 16. Isa. iii. 5

⁹ Rom. 1. 30.

* Holy Observations, v.

† John, xix. 26, 27. Dr. Taylor's 'godly exhortation to his son,' as Foxe writes in his exquisite Biography, 'is worthy of all youth to be marked'--'When thy mother is waxed old, forsake her not; but provide for her to thy power, and see that she lack nothing, for so will God, bless thee, give thee long life upon earth, and prosperity, which I pray God to grant thee. Vol. VI. 692. Comp. Eccclus. iii. 8-14.

is precious. But the figure sets out the importance of gaining it at any cost. First, however, let us satisfy ourselves that the seller is no deceiver; that he is perfectly upright in his dealings. "*Buy of me*" (Rev. iii. 18)--saith the Saviour. This sets the matter at rest. If we do not really want the article, we shall not pay much heed to the injunction. "Buy those things that ye *have need of*"¹--is the rule. Ponder also its inestimable value. It is *the truth*, the only means of salvation,² the only deliverance from sin,³ the only principle of holiness,⁴ the "One thing needful."⁵ Place the blessing fully in view--"The excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord--that I may win Christ, and be found in him--that I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."⁶ We cannot be defrauded in the purchase. It is a cheap purchase at any price. (Chap. iii. 15.) The "lover of pleasure" values highly the baubles of Vanity Fair. But Bunyan beautifully describes the pilgrims, answering the sneering reproach--'What will you buy?' They lifted up their eyes above--'We will buy the truth.' But, like the well-practised merchant, we must secure the genuine article. Many a counterfeit article is put forth.⁷ Bring everything "to God's standard."⁸ That which brings *wisdom, instruction, and understanding*, is the truth of God.

Then having ascertained its riches and its purity--not only wish for it, gaze at it, commend it; but *buy the truth*. Not only bid, make an offer; but strike the agreement. Make it thine. The man did not *wish* for the field with the "hidden treasure;" but he "sold all that he had, and *bought* it." And let thy purchase be the whole truth. Every particle, the very filings of the gold, are invaluable--"Set thine heart *upon all* that I shall shew thee." (Ezek. xl. 4.) Many are content to be at some pains, but they stop short of the prize. (2 Tim. iii. 7.) Shrink not from the full price; as did Herod;⁹ the young ruler;¹⁰ Agrippa;¹¹ and therefore they *bought* it not. Moses gave up for it "the treasures of Egypt;"¹² Paul, his Jewish privileges, and high reputation.¹³ The Hebrews "took joyfully the spoiling of their goods."¹⁴ The martyrs "loved not their lives unto the death."¹⁵ And who of these repented of the costly purchase?

Having thus made the purchase, shall we part with it? Should we not find it all we expected; or should we after all discover that we did not want it, we should be glad to be rid of it. Many an estate has been bought, and sold again, from disappointed expectations. But though usually what we have *bought*, we are at liberty to *sell*; here is

¹ John, xiii. 29.

⁴ John, xvii. 17.

⁷ 2 Cor. xi. 3, 14. Gal. i. 6, 7.

⁹ Mark, vi. 17-20.

¹² Heb. xi. 24-26.

¹⁵ Rev. xii. 11. Acts, xx. 23, 24.

² 1 Tim. ii. 4.

⁵ Luke, x. 42.

⁸ 1 Thess. v. 21. 1 John, iv. 1. Isa. viii. 20.

¹⁰ Luke, xviii. 23.

¹³ Philip. iii. 4-8.

³ John, viii. 32. 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26.

⁶ Philip. iii. 8-11.

¹¹ Acts, xxvi. 28.

¹⁴ Heb. x. 34.

a command to *buy*, but a prohibition to *sell*. And a merciful prohibition it is ! For those who *sell the truth*, sell their own souls with it. And "what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul!" (Matt. xvi. 26.) Can we look at Esau,¹ Judas,² Demas³ *selling* their treasure for a thing of nought, without sorrowful trembling? Yet their apostacy clearly proved, that they had never "received the truth in the love of it:"⁴ that it was some shining shadow, merely notional and speculative; never engrafted in their hearts. Having therefore never felt the power, or known its price, they could *sell it* for this world's pleasure, or for the more flattering delusions of their own hearts. Reader: have you ever known that apprehension of Divine Truth, that has made it in your eyes worth every sacrifice to *buy it*? No one--be assured--who has really *bought* it, will ever be willing to *sell* it.

A joyous sight it is to see children realizing their parents' fondest hopes; proving "a wise heart," (Verses 15, 16) by a diligent enquiry about this only gainful purchase; not content with receiving it by education, but making the contract for themselves; discovering that religion must be a personal concern, an individual transaction between God and their own souls. Cause is it indeed for *greatly rejoicing*, to see our righteous children thus enriched for eternity, in possession of a treasure which they can never spend, and which no troubles, no changes, no malice of hell, can touch. If the godly parents have had a seed-time of tears, these precious sheaves of joy are an abundant recompense.⁵ The stern exclusive system which recognises little, save the divine purpose and sovereignty, annuls, or at least enervates, the responsibility of means, and thus loses the privilege both of trusting the promise, and witnessing its accomplishment. Will not the child feel the constraining obligation to fulfil his parent's *rejoicing* thus vividly portrayed? Most unnatural must he be, if his heart does not glow with the desire thus to repay *his father's* anxious love, and the yearning tenderness of *her that bare him*. They ask no other requital, than the *joy and gladness of seeing a righteous and a wise son*. Selfishness itself might supply a motive; since parental gladness is the child's own joy, walking in "*wisdom's* ways of pleasantness and peace."

26. *My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.* 27.

For a whore is a deep ditch; and a strange woman is a narrow

28. *She also lieth in wait as for a prey, and increaseth the transgressors among men.*

Solomon here manifestly rises above himself, and speaks in the name and person of Divine Wisdom. (Chap. 1. 20; viii. 1.) For who

¹ Heb. xii. 16, 17.

² Matt. xxvii. 3-5.

³ 2 Tim. iv. 10.

⁴ Thess. ii. 10. 1 John, ii. 19

⁵ Ps cxxvi 6. Comp. chap. x. 1; xv. 20. Contrast xvii. 25.

else could claim *the gift of the heart*--the work of his own hands, the purchase of his own blood? *My son*. Such is the relationship which God acknowledges; including every blessing which he can give, and all the obedience that he can claim. No obedience can be without the believing and practical acknowledgment of this relation--*My son*; not a stranger; not an enemy; not a slave, but a *son!* invited to return. An amnesty of the past, a perpetual jubilee of joy, awaits thee at thy Father's house.

Many are the claimants for *the heart*. Heaven and hell contend for it. The world with its riches, honours, and pleasures; and science with its more plausible charms--cries--*Give me thine heart*. Nay, even Satan dares to put in a loud and urgent plea--"If thou wilt worship me, all shall be thine." (Luke, iv. 7.) The loving Father calls--*My son, give me thine heart*. The answer too often is--'I have no heart for God. It is engaged to the world. I cannot make up my mind to be religious, at least not yet.' And so, even where there is no wickedness--nay, perhaps even some plausible semblance of piety, "the darling is given to the lion;" *the heart* to the murderer. Not one is naturally ready with the gift to him, who alone deserves it. A few only hearken in a moment of conviction; and then, not till they have proved to their cost the falsehood and disappointment of all other claimants.

An honour indeed he puts upon his creatures, in condescending to receive as a *gift*, what is his most rightful debt, and what he might at any moment command for himself. But his call wakens his child to recollection and conscious dependence. It is the Father's striving with his child's will. It is the test of his child's obedience. It is a pointed arrow of conviction to his conscience for wilful resistance to his call; the only hindrance to his *giving his heart* being, that he has already given it to claimants infinitely unworthy of it. 'My guilt is damnable'--exclaimed an humbled saint--'in withholding my heart; because I know and believe his love, and what Christ has done to gain my consent--to what?--my own happiness.*

And yet this call to many is utterly without interest, as if it were to lay up a treasure in the clouds. To others it is rather like the funeral knell than a jubilee sound; as if we were called to surrender all our pleasures, instead of adding to them one of pre-eminent value and pervading influence. Indeed most truly is our happiness bound up in this gracious command. For what else can 'fill up the aching void' within, but "the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost?" (Rom. v. 5.) Created objects only seem to widen the chasm. If our appetite is satisfied, it is but for a moment; while every irritation increaees the general dissatisfaction. The heart, wilfully

*ADAMS' *Private Thoughts*.

remaining at a distance from God, can find its home only in a land of shadows. It grasps nothing solidly; while its incessant conflict with conscience is, "the troubled sea, which cannot rest." (Isa. lvii. 20.)

Little indeed is it thought, who demands the gift. It is claimed by the ever-blessed God, whose smile is heaven, whose frown is hell. To rise to a higher obligation--it is claimed by Him, whose love brought him from the throne of glory to the accursed cross; whose grace will cast out none that come to him; who will find a place for his bitterest enemies near to his heart; who will be to each of them all that a lost sinner, with an immortal soul, can need; who "is able to save to the uttermost;" who has saved countless myriads; who is ready--Sinner! ponder it well--to save *thee*.

But remember--he will never abate one atom of his full requisitions. He asks not for magnificent temples, costly sacrifices, pompous ceremonials, but for the spiritual worship of *the heart*.¹ He demands, not the hands, the feet, the tongue, the ears; but that which is the moving principle of all the members--*the heart*.^{*} Give that; --It is all he desires. Withhold it--He rejects all besides. What the heart does not do, is as if it were not done at all. The cold formality of a lifeless faith is a dead, not "a living," not therefore a "reasonable" or acceptable, "service." (Rom. xii. 1.) "How canst thou say, I love thee, when *thine heart* is not with me?" (Judg. xvi. 15.) The man, who gives his heart to the world, rises above all his difficulties, persevering, resolved, successful. Never can we triumph over the hindrances of the gospel without those supports, known only in the full engagement of the heart to God.

Never will he dispense with this claim of the love of *all our heart*.² We must not deal with him as Lot's wife, moving slowly forward, while the heart is behind;³ or like Orpah, stopping at the very moment that the cross is to be borne.⁴ Dream not of dividing the heart with the world.⁵ He loves a broken heart. He spurns a divided heart. Satan will seem to be content with a part; because he knows that, as God will accept nothing less than all, the whole will thus fall to him. It is far beneath the Majesty of heaven to possess anything less than the throne (Matt. x. 37);--a mean throne at best for the Almighty Sovereign of the universe. But his claims are paramount. And never are we truly our own, till we unreservedly acknowledge ourselves to be his. Indeed all false religions in the world are but vain substitutes for this plain and most happy duty. However plausible the show, if it

¹ Isa. lxvi. 1, 2. John, iv. 23, 24. ² Matt. xxii. 31. ³ Gen. xix. 26.

⁴ Ruth, i. 14. ⁵ Matt. vi. 24.

* 'Non caput, non manum, non pedem, non caetera membra; sed omnium membrorum principium, radicem, et vitae humanae fontem, qui cor est, dari sibi Deus postulat.'--GLASS, Philolog. Sac. lib. ii. pars 1. Tract. ii. sect. iii.

does not lead the heart to God, it is fearful delusion. Whatever principles, practices, or society, turn our hearts from God--it is the high-road of ruin.

And doth he ask his child for *his heart*; and will he refuse to give it? Does it open immediately to Satan and the world--yea--even before they knock? and is the beseeching Father to be excluded? Are there no "bands of love to draw?" (Hos. xi. 4.) Out of what rock was it hewn, that it can be proof against the pleadings of Divine parental love? Canst thou not give it him? Surely hadst thou the will, thou wouldest have the power too. If thou hast the faintest will, at least shew though but the feeblest effort. Offer it, though but with a trembling hand. His hand will meet thine, and take it of thee. The happiest day of life is now arrived; a day, the recollection of which will never be tinged with one shade of regret.

If thou hast not done it, do it now. Let there be no half-giving. To hesitate--to delay--is to refuse. And why should you delay? Has Satan been so good a Master, that you are reluctant to leave him? Can you find a better friend than Him, who hath cared so long for you, than Him who hath died for you? Now then, with the help of the Divine Spirit, without whom this cannot be done--resolve, decide--once for all--for ever. But if thou hast done it, do it daily. He is still the same; still as deserving of *your heart* as ever. Thou canst not give it to him too soon or too often. The command does not hale us (as Saul haled his victims, Acts, viii. 3) to the service of God. The citadel is not stormed, but it opens its gates. A principle of immortal energy constrains the heart; yet only by "making it willing." (Ps. cx, 3.) The reluctancy is melted away, and by the power of love the heart is "compelled to come." (2 Cor. v. 14. Luke, xiv. 23.) What so free as a gift? And never is the will so free, as when it moves towards God. Weak as he is, yet the child can testify, that to give his heart is his first desire; that he never designs or intends anything less; that he longs for the consuming of every corruption, which hinders the full surrender. O my God! thy grace alone can enable me. I am ashamed of the gift. Nothing can be more unworthy. But because it is the purchase of thy death, and thou callest for it, it is thine own, it shall be thine. Take it then as it is. Make it what it is not. Keep it with thyself. Bind it so close to thee with the cords of love, that it may never cast a wishful look away from thee. Had I a thousand hearts, all should be thine. Thou alone canst fill it. Thou alone art worthy of it. Exalt thine own throne in it for ever.

Think how all hangs on this point. Give it; all the blessings of the gospel are yours. Refuse; you trample them under your feet; you live a life of base rebellion to your best friend, and of cruel madness to your own soul; you live without Christ; you will die without hope;

accursed, lost for ever. The command of authority is an invitation of love--Dwell upon it. Think how right, how reasonable, how winning, how much it is beyond everything else, how much worth accepting in spite of every hindrance and objection. How much beyond every other joy is the delight of *giving your heart* to the tender compassionate love of your dying Saviour! And then, having made him the object of your desires, the sum of all your wishes for happiness and for dependence; be determined to seek, and confident to find all in him, and resolute in rejecting every temptation to seek it elsewhere. Having therefore *given your heart, let your eyes observe his ways.* (Chap. iv. 23-25.) Our heart given, gives all the rest. This makes eyes, ears, tongue and hands, and all, to be holy, as God's peculiar.* His word will be our rule;¹ His Providence our interpreter.² The *heart*, no longer divided, is now at full liberty for the service. *The eyes*, no longer wandering, like "the eyes of a fool, in the ends of the earth" (Chap. XVII. 24), are now fixed upon an object supremely worthy and abundantly satisfying.

Here also is our power of resistance to the gross seductions of the enemy (Chap. ii. 10, 11, 16)--"I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot," I will not, go back.³ He hath *my heart*, and he shall have it. So long indeed as we carry about us a body of sin and death, we need a continual supply of "the Spirit to mortify the deeds of the body."⁴ But in our new atmosphere of heavenly light, the mask falls off from the allurements of sin. *The strange woman* appears frightful as *a deep ditch*, or, what is even more, *a narrow pit*, with no room to escape.⁵ Mighty and strong men have fallen into it.† The tempter hides the danger, while *she lays wait for the prey*; and thus she successfully *increases the transgressors among men*.⁶ Blessed be God! if while fleshly lusts "have destroyed their thousands and tens of thousands" (Chap. vii. 26), we have, by *giving our heart* to its Divine Lord, been enabled to abhor the temptation, and to ascribe to our faithful-keeping God the glory of our deliverance.

29. *Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes*
 30. *They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine.*
 31. *Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright.* 32. *At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.* 33. *Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things.*

¹ Chapt. vi. 23 Ps. cxix. 9-11, 105.

² Ps. cvii. 43.

³ Jud. xi. 35. Comp. Gen. xxxix. 9.

⁴ Rom. viii. 13. Gal. v. 16. 11.

⁵ Chap. xxii. 14 ; ii. 19.

⁶ Chap. vii. 6, &c. ix. 13-18.

* Leighton on 1 Pet. II. 4, 5.

† 1 Kings, xi. 1-8, with Neh. xiii. 26. Jud. xvi 4-20. 'He (Samson) broke the bonds of his enemies; but he could not break the bonds of his own lusts. He choked the lion; but he could not choke his own wanton love.' Ambrose quoted by Jermin *in loco*.

34. *Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast.* 35. *They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.*

A warning was lately given against keeping company with sensualists. (Verses 20, 21.) Here it is enforced by the most graphical delineation of the sin in all its misery, shame, and ruin. It is the drunkard's looking-glass! Let him see his own face. Let it be hung: up in his cottage. Fix it in the alehouse. Could he go there? The picture is drawn with such a vividness of colouring! 'No translation or paraphrase can do justice to the concise, abrupt, and energetic manner of the original.'* Drunkenness is a time of merriment. But what must be the stupifying insensibility, that can find a moment's joy, with such an accumulation of *woe*!† Every sin brings its own mischief. But such *woe*! such *sorrow*! in all its multiform misery! who hath it? The brawls and *contentions* over the cup;‡ the *babbling* words of pollution;¹ *the wounds*, often to murder,² *without cause*; the *redness of eyes*, shewing the effect of liquor on the countenance; the impure appetites that are kindled; the infatuation almost incredible--this is sensuality in all its wretchedness.

Whence this world of *woe and sorrow*? It is the curse of indulged will. Not satisfied with their healthful refreshment, many will "add drunkenness to thirst." (Deut. xxix. 19.) *They continue long*, "from morning to night, till wine inflame them." (Isa. v. 11.) *They go to seek the mixed wine*, its strongest and most inebriating drink.§

Wisdom's voice therefore is--Avoid the allurements of sin. Often has a *look*, harmless in itself, proved a fearful temptation.³ *Look not therefore at the wine when it is red.* Its very colour; its sparkling transparency *in the cup*; the relish with which it *moves itself aright*, 'or goes down pleasant'||--all tend to excite the irregular appetite. Crush it in its beginnings, and prove that you have learnt the first lesson in the school of Christ--"Deny yourself."¶ Whatever be its present zest, *at the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.* (Comp. chap. xx. 17.) Did it *bite* first, who would touch it? Did Satan

¹ Dan. v. 4.

² 2 Sam. xiii. 28. 1 Kings, xvi. 9,10; xx. 16-20.

³ Gen. iii. 6; xxxix.. 7. Josh. vii. 21. 2 Sam. xi. 2.

*Scott *in loco*. Comp. Bp. Hall.

† 'Agement malorum colligit, quae ebrietas secum trahit.'--LAVATER. 'Nemini ferme certius ingentia imminere pericula, tam quoad facultates atque famam, quam ipsam quoque valetudinem, vitam, atque animae salutem, neminem etiam subjacere adeo Sp. S. imprecationibus, quam hominem temulentum.'--GEIER.

‡ Chap. xx. 1. 1 Tim. iii. 3. Comp. Hor. Od. iii. 21.

§ Chap. ix. 2, note. Homer describes his celebrated Helen, as mixing exhilarating ingredients in the bowl, to revive the spirits. *Odyss.* D. 219-229.

|| Holden. Comp. Can. vii. 9.

¶ Matt. xvi. 24. Augustine gives an instructive example of his mother's nurse. *Confess.* ix. 8. See also George Herbert's excellent advice in his well-known poem--*The Temple*.

present the cup in his own naked form, who would dare to take it? Yet it comes from his hand as truly, as if he were visible to the eyes. If poison was seen in the cup, who would venture upon it? Yet is the poison less dangerous, because it is unseen? *The adder's sting* is concealed, yet most fatal. The cup of sparkling wine becomes "a cup of fearful trembling in the hands of the Lord." (Comp. Joel, i. 5.)

Seldom does any sensual indulgence come alone. One lust prepares the way for others. The first step is sure to lead onwards. The poor deluded victim cannot stop when he pleases. Drunkenness opens the door for impurity.¹ The inflamed eye soon catches fire with strange women; and who knoweth what the end may be? Loathsome indeed is the heart of the ungodly laid bare. Drink opens it as far as words can do; and through the organ of the tongue it does indeed *utter perverse things*.* 'Blasphemy is wit, and ribaldry eloquence, to a man that is turned into a brute.'†

But the delirium is the most awful feature of the case. The unhappy victim, having lost all will and power to escape, sleeps quietly amid dangers as imminent, as *lying down in the midst of the sea, or upon the top of the mast*.² Nay--even the senses seem to be stupified. Stricken and beaten he may be. But "his heart is as a stone,"³ and he thanks his drunkenness, that *he felt it not*. Therefore "as the dog to his vomit, the fool returns to his folly,"⁴ craving fresh indulgence--*When shall I awake? I will seek it yet again*. More senseless than the brute who satisfies nature, not lust; so lost to shame; his reason so tyrannized over by his appetite, that he longs to be bound again, and only seeks relief from his temporary *awakening* to a sense of his misery, by yielding himself up again to his ruinous sin. (Jer. ii. 25.)

Oh! how affecting is the thought of the multitude of victims to this deadly vice in every age and clime, and among all ranks of society! Perhaps there is no sin which has not linked itself with it; while the unconsciousness in the act of sin only serves, not to palliate the guilt, but to increase the responsibility.

While we see the whole nature so depraved in taste, so steeped in pollution--we ask--"Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Praised be his name for a full deliverance from the captivity of sin, and of all and every sin, even from the chains of this giant sin.⁵ The mighty, though despised instrument is "Christ crucified; the power of God, and the wisdom of God." (1 Cor. i. 23-25.) It is this, which when vows, pledges, and resolutions--all have failed; works secretly, yet most

¹ Gen. xix. 32. Comp. Jer. v. 8. Ezek. xvi. 49, 50. Hos. iv. 18. Rom. xiii. 13. 1 Pet. iv. 3.

² Isa. xxviii. 7, 8. Hos. iv. 11. Comp. chap. xxxi. 4, 5. ³ 1 Sam. xxv. 36, 37.

⁴ Chap. xxvi. 11. Isa. lvi. 12. ⁵ John, viii. 34-36. 1 Cor. vi. 10, 11.

* Ps. lxix. 12. Hos. vii. 5. The libertine poet praises the inspiring excitement of wine to the genius of poesy.-HOR. Ep. i. 19.

† Lawson *in loco*.

effectually; imparting new principles, affections and appetites. The drunkard becomes sober; the unclean holy; the glutton temperate. The love of Christ overpowers the love of sin. Pleasures are now enjoyed without a *sting* (for no *serpent*, nor adder is here) and the newly-implanted principle transforms the whole man into the original likeness to God--"Whatsoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. He that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not."*

CHAPTER XXIV.

1. *Be thou not envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them:*
2. *For their heart studieth destruction, and their lips talk of mischief.*

THIS counsel has been lately given. (Chap. xxiii. 17.) But it is very difficult in the false glare of this world's glory to "walk by faith, as the evidence of things not seen." (2 Cor. v. 7. Heb. xi. 1.) In the confined atmosphere of impatience and unbelief "the spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to *envy*." (Jam. iv. 5.) This evil spirit, if it does not bring the scandal of open sin, curses our blessings, withers our graces, cankers our peace, clouds our confidence, and stains our Christian profession. The full cup in the house of evil men stirs up the *desire to be with them*. (Ps. lxxiii. 10-14.) But if their fearful end did not restrain, their awful character is warning enough.¹ It is the malignity of Satan himself *studying destruction in their heart, mischief in their lips*.² Take away then the delusive veil; and who would envy them? When Haman was *studying the destruction* of the holy nation, the barbed arrow of discontent was corroding his vitals.³ Who would envy Judas, *studying his Master's destruction*? In the agony of remorse, his "soul chose strangling, rather than life."⁴ "Gather not my soul with sinners"--is the prayer of the child of God--"nor my life with bloody men, in whose hands is *mischief*."⁵ Let me, instead of *studying the destruction*, study the salvation, of my fellow-sinners--what can I do to win them to Christ? Let me *desire to be with* the man of God, employed in this God-like work. The Christian is the only enviable person in the world. The seeming blessings of *evil men* are God's heavy curses; and the smart of the stripes is a favour too good for them to

¹ Chap. xxiii. 18. Comp. verses 19, 20, *infra*.

² Chap. i. 11-14; iv. 16; vi. 18. 1 Sam. xxiii. 9. Job, xv. 35. Ps. vii. 14; lxiv. 2-6. Mic. vii. 3.

³ Esth. iii. 8, 9; v. 13. Matt. xxvi. 16; xxvii. 3-5. Job, vii. 15.

⁵ Ps. xxvi. 9; xxviii. 3.

*1 John, iii. 9; v. 18. See an affecting evangelical pleading with this case in that valuable manual, JOWETT'S *Christian Visitor*.

enjoy. To judge wisely of our condition, it is to be considered, not so much how we fare, as upon what terms. If we stand right with heaven, every cross is a blessing; and every blessing a pledge of future happiness. If we be in God's disfavour, every one of his benefits is a judgment; and every judgment makes way for perdition.* Instead of *envying sinners* in their successful wickedness, dread their character more than their end, and rejoice that your Father never counted the poor vanities of this world a worthy portion for you.

3. *Through wisdom is an house builded: and by understanding it is established: 4. And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches. 5. A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength. 6. For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety.*

Why should we envy the prosperity of the wicked? Even if their *house be built*,¹ it cannot be *established*,² by iniquity. 'It is only the snow-palace built in the winter, and melting away under the power of the summer's sun.'† "The wise woman *buildeth her house*" (Chap. xiv. 1) upon piety and prudence--a far more solid *establishment*. Let every chamber of the mind *be enriched with these precious and pleasant* endowments. Without them the man is without strength of character; the creature of accident, circumstance, or society, thinking and living upon the opinion of others. A general irresolution marks his insignificant course; the soul; when consecrated as God's *house* (2 Cor. vi. 16), *is built on* an enlightened *understanding* of divine truth: and every *chamber is filled with the precious and pleasant riches* of godliness. (2 Pet. i. 2-4.) Heresy is restrained by conceding supreme authority to the Bible. The crude professor acts under feverish impulse, a sickly sentimentalist in religion. Instead of retaining a firm hold of truth, he imbibes with ease the most monstrous opinions. He is "carried about with divers and strange doctrines," instead of exhibiting "the good things of an heart established with grace." (Heb. xiii. 9.) "Growth in" spiritual, as distinct from speculative "*knowledge*," will always be accompanied with "growth in grace." (2 Pet. iii. 18.)

And may we not observe, how God has laid the foundations of the spiritual *house*, shaped and framed the materials by his own divine *wisdom*, and *filled all the chambers with his precious and pleasant riches*? Delightful is the contemplation of the building, as it is rising, and as it will be, when it is finished. 'Oh, the transcendant glory'--exclaimed the heavenly Martyn--'of this temple of souls; lively stones, perfect in all its parts, the purchase and work of God!‡

In passing from the universal Church to one section of it, we cannot

¹ Mic. iii. 10.

² Chap. xii. 3. Jer. xxii. 13, 18. Amos. v. 11.

*Bp. HALL'S *Works*, viii. 206.

† Geier in loco.

‡ Life, chap. iii.

but remark *the wisdom and understanding* with which our spiritual *house is builded and established*. It called for no common wisdom in such jarring times, and such imperfect light, to avoid extremes on both sides, and to frame a system, fraught with solid instruction, yet glowing with spiritual exercise; popular yet reverential; conducive to "prayer" alike "with the spirit and with the understanding." (1 Cor. xiv. 15.) Our Reformers were indeed wisely taught, while they cast away the superstition and idolatry of Rome, to apply her primitive treasures for godly use, and when needed, to purify them from their drossy alloy, and to mould the gold in evangelical purity. Truly the *chambers of our house are filled with all precious and pleasant riches*. And did the mass of our worshippers only imbibe the spirit of their *house*, what a prevailing influence of godliness would-spread over our land!

But we take another view of the high advantage of *wisdom*. *A wise man is strong*.¹ Every view confirms Lord Bacon's far-famed aphorism --'Knowledge is power.' The discovery of the mechanical forces, and the power of steam, *has increased strength* in an hundred-fold proportion to physical force. Intellectual *knowledge*, wisely applied, has immense moral ascendancy. It restrains the King from unadvised wars (Chap. xx. 18); and, if forced into the field, instead of treading his perilous path alone, he ensures the *safety* of his kingdom by *multitude of counsellors*.² *The man of spiritual knowledge* is a giant in strength. He combines the power to draw the bow, with a steady hand and eye to guide to the mark. Conscious ignorance is the first principle of knowledge. "I am but a little child"--said the wisest of men; and this humility of wisdom was the *establishment* of his kingdom.³ The Christian, "filled with *wisdom and spiritual understanding*," is also "*strengthened*" in his warfare" with all might according to the glorious power of his God." (Col. i. 9, 11.) For "the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits." (Dan, xi. 32.)

7. *Wisdom* is too high for a fool: he openeth not his mouth in the gate.*

The commendation of wisdom is here continued. The man richly endowed with it comes forth with authority, and *speaks at the gate* among the wise. *The fool*, destitute of wisdom, is debarred from this honour. The simple" and diligent⁵ prove, that the treasure is not really out of reach. But *it is too high for the fool*. His grovelling mind can never rise to so lofty a matter. He has no apprehension of it;⁶ no heart to desire it;⁷ no energy to lay hold of it.⁸ And there-

¹ Chap. xxi. 22. Eccles. vii. 19; ix. 16.

³ 1 Kings, iii. 7; v. 12; x. 23-29. 2 Chron. xxvii. 6.

⁵ Chap. ii. 1-6. John, vii. 17.

⁷ Chap. xvii 16, 24.

² Chap. xi. 14; xv. 22.

⁴ Chap. viii. 9; xiv. 6. Matt. xi. 25.

⁶ Ps. x. 5; xcii. 5, 6. 1 Cor. ii. 14.

⁸ Chap. xiii. 4; xxi. 25.

*Wisdoms, Heb. Ps. xlix. 4. Schultens, &c.

fore, though in the Gospel "it is nigh him, even in his mouth, and in his heart,"¹ it is inaccessible. Its holy spirituality is *too high* for his reach. He commands therefore no respect in his own station of society.² His counsel is not sought. His opinion, if given, is of no account. Though he may have a babbling tongue in the street, yet *he openeth not his mouth* in the gate; utterly unfit to give judgment in the presence of wise and judicious men. Nor is this from natural defect, but from wilful perverseness. His Lord had committed at least one talent to his trust. But he had frittered it away, not traded with it. (Matt. xxv. 24-30.) Oh! let *wisdom* be sought, while it is within reach; while it is so freely promised. (Jam. i. 5.) When found, let it be diligently improved for the great end of life. What! if we should die without it, under the fearful responsibility of having done nothing for our God or fellow-creatures, of having neglected the way of life: and "in the greatness of our folly gone astray" to everlasting ruin? (Chap. v. 23.)

8. *He that deviseth to do evil shall be called a mischievous person.* 9. *The thought of foolishness is sin; and the scorner is an abomination to men.*

What a picture is here of human depravity, in its active working, its corrupt fountain, and its fearful end! Talent, imagination, active mind, is so debased, as to be all concentrated upon Satan's own work--*devising to do evil*.³ He was the first *deviser* (Gen. iii. 1), and he practises his children, till he makes them, like himself, masters of mischief; contriving new modes of sinning, ways of trickery and deceit; like the degraded heathen, "inventors of evil things." (Rom. i. 30.) To do evil is the principle; *devising to do evil* is the energy, of his service. In this craft of evil, Balaam was *a mischievous person*.⁴ Abimelech has earned for himself the same reputation. (Judg. ix.) Jeroboam's subtle *mischief* has stamped his name with the black mark of reprobation--"who made Israel to sin."⁵ Jezebel,⁶ and others of less note, equally industrious in evil, will appear in the same ranks at the great day.

Even when it is not brought out into action, *the thought of foolishness*--giving it lodgment (Jer. iv. 14), instead of casting it out as loathsome--*is sin*. 'But what guilt'--it is asked--'can there be in a *thought*? It is but an airy notion; next to nothing. It can make no impression. A malicious thought cannot hurt. A covetous thought cannot rob. What guilt or danger can belong to so minute a being?' Perhaps did we deal with man, these might be trifling evils. But as *the thought* is the fountain of the act, God counts it in the act, and holds

¹ Rom. x. 6-8.

² Contrast Job, xxix. 7-10.

³ Verse 2. Ps. xxxvi. 8, 4.

⁴ Num. xxxi. 16. Rev. ii. 14.

⁵ 1 Kings, xii. 26-38; xv. 30.

⁶ Ib. xxi. 25. Rev. ii. 20.

us responsible for it.* The smallest sin involves us in the breach of the whole law. (Jam. ii. 10, 11.) This is his decision; and who can answer against it? The most spiritual Christians lay their hands upon their mouths, "and their mouths in the dust."

The awakened sinner admits his total depravity upon the same demonstration as his own existence--*consciousness*. One sin gives birth to another. Countless multitudes follow in rapid and continuous succession. "Every imagination *of the thoughts of the heart* is only evil continually." (Gen. vi. 5.) Did we fully realize this apprehension, the flitting moments of the day, each bringing with it an increase of guilt, could not slide away so pleasantly from us; not at least without shame and humiliation; without habitual application of the divine remedy. Job's sensitive conscience carried his sons continually to the atoning sacrifice. (Job, i.5.) Bunyan (unlike many loose professors, who are never troubled about their thoughts) was deeply afflicted in the remembrance of one sinful thought. Nor let this be condemned as a morbid temperament. Is it not rather the tender sensibility of a heart humbled by the continual view of the great sin-offering? Our sensibilities rise in proportion to our spiritual apprehensions. Even a passing shade of sin, did we suitably realize it--it might well be a matter of poignant bitterness. A believing sorrow for heart-sins--*however involuntary*--is a clear mark of divine grace and teaching: issuing in deep humiliation, not with despondency. (Rom. vii. 15-25.)

But let us follow out this *thought of foolishness* unrestrained. It commits an immensity of folly. The thinking faculty is never wearied out. It is the fruitful principle of sin, which, 'the more it is committed' (as it has been no less truly than philosophically remarked), 'the more it acquireth in the quality of evil.'† The *thought* therefore gathers strength in every acting, till its full influence is developed in the "scorner's seat" (Ps. i. 1)--*an abomination*, not only to God, but to *man*.¹ For however misused wit and talent may gain for the fool a bad pre-eminence; he secures no respect, and is generally avoided or dreaded, and ultimately brought to shame.²

10. *If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small* (narrow, marg.)

Let this be a word of strengthening encouragement. The marvel is, that those who know not where to look for a refuge, when the storm

¹ Chap. xxi. 24. Mal. ii. 8, 9.

² Jer. xxxvi. 23, with xxii. 19.

* Comp. chap. xv. 26. Ps. xciv. 11. Matt. ix. 3, 4; xv. 19. Acts, viii. 22. Rom. ii. 15. Even an Heathen moralist could write--

Nam scelus intra se tacitum qui cogitat ullum,
Facti crimen habet.--Juv. xiii. 209, 210.

† Sir T. BROWNE, Bel. Med. p. 101. Edit. 1642.

is breaking over their heads, do not *always faint*. But natural courage and buoyancy, or a deeper plunge into the world, as a diversion from sorrow, raises them above their troubles for a while, estranging them yet further from God.

But why should the child of God, contrary to his Father's injunction,¹ *faint*? Look at *thy privilege*--"The eternal God is thy refuge; and underneath are the everlasting arms;"² *thy duty*--"Call upon me in the time of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me;"³ *thy security*--"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee."⁴

Yet we "speak not parables." Every Christian's heart responds to the confession, that he is apt to *faint*. "The strongest and holiest saint on earth is subject to some qualms of fear;* not from the greatness of the danger, but from the weakness of his faith. (Matt. xiv. 30.) Even those who had "endured a great fight of afflictions, who had taken joyfully the spoiling of their goods," still needed stirring exhortations and encouragements to Christian steadfastness.⁵ If they had borne the brunt of one battle, there are heavier conflicts before them.⁶ Let each of us be awake to the besetting danger. Remember--when we seek strength from our own resources;⁷ when faith gives way to distrust;⁸ praise to murmuring,⁹ hope to despondency;¹⁰ when relinquished pleasures vividly come to mind,¹¹ and protracted toils press heavily¹²--then we *faint in the day of adversity*.

For this day we must prepare. "Man is born to trouble,"¹³ as his portion inherited from his first father. He may be called to drink a deep draught of the bitter cup, requiring much *strength*, that "patience may have its perfect work." (Jam. i. 4.) *The day* is needful for the trial of our principles. What seemed more promising, than the confidence of the stony-ground hearers, or than the longer endurance of the apostle's companions? But the *day of adversity* exposed their hollow profession.¹⁴ Often also, even when "the root of the matter is found," a painful exhibition of *faintness*,† unable to weather out a bad day, proves the *smallness*, not the vigour, of *strength*.

But why--again we ask--should the child of God *faint*? If "affliction came from the dust, and sprung out of the ground" (Job,

¹ Chap. iii. 11.

² Deut. xxxiii. 27.

³ Ps. l. 15; xci. 15.

⁴ Heb. xiii. 5. Isa. liv. 7.

⁵ Heb. x. 32-36; xi.; xii. 1-3.

⁶ Ib. xii. 4.

⁷ Isa. xl. 30.

⁸ Ps. lxxviii. 19, 20.

⁹ Exod. xv. 1, 24; xvii. 3.

¹⁰ Num. xiv. 3.

¹¹ Exod. xvi. 3. Num. xi. 4-6.

¹² Job, vii. 1-4.

¹³ Ib. v. 7.

¹⁴ Matt. xiii, 20. 21. 2 Tim. iv. 16; i. 15.

* Bishop HALL'S Contemplations, B. xviii. Cont. 8.

† Abraham, Gen. xii. 10-13; xx. 2. Moses, Exod. iv. 10-13; Num. xi. 11; Joshua, vii. 6-10; David, 1 Sam. xxvii. 1; Ps xxxi. 1, 22; cxvi. 11; Elijah, 1 Kings, xix. 3, 4. Jeremiah, xx. 7-18; Jonah, iv. 8, 9; Peter, Matt. xxvi. 35, 69-74: the disciples, ib. verse 35, 56.

v. 6), he might be discouraged by his ill-fortune. But where every minute circumstance has been the fruit of eternal counsel where "the hairs of his head are all numbered" (Matt. x. 30), well may he "stay himself upon his God." If his soul, like Israel of old, "be much discouraged because of the way" (Num. xxi. 4, 5), it leadeth to his Father's house. If he be wearied with his burden, soon will he rest eternally in his Saviour's bosom. Never will he be called to a martyr's trial, without a martyr's faith.* The chastening rod is the seal of everlasting love.¹ The temporal cross comes from the same hand as his everlasting crown. 'Never believe'--Christian--that thy tender-hearted Saviour, who knows the weakness of thy constitution, will mix the cup of affliction with one drachm weight of poison.† *If thy strength be small*, go to the strong for strength. "He giveth power *to the faint*, and to them that have no might *he increaseth strength*." (Isa. xl. 29.) Commit thyself daily to him, for his supply of "grace is sufficient for thee." So go onward, weak and strong at once; weak in order to be strong; strong in thy weakness, "his strength being made perfect in it;" and thou at length "glorying even in thy" depressing "infirmity, that the power of Christ may rest upon thee" (2 Cor. xii. 9); not only sustained, but "strengthened unto joyfulness." (Col. i. 11.)

Oh!--hasten the time, when the dark and cloudy day shall be changed for unclouded sunshine; the crown of thorns for the crown of glory; "the spirit of heaviness" for the garment of "everlasting praise." (Isa. lxi. 3.)

11. *If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain,‡ 12. If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; Doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?*

Suppose a fellow-creature in imminent danger--as it were *drawn unto death, and ready to be slain* unjustly,² or from wickedness. (Luke, x. 30.) The magistrate standing in the place, and invested with the power of God§--*If he forbear to deliver*, on the false pretence that he

¹ Chap. iii. 12. Isa. xlviii. 10.

² 1 Sam. xxiv. 11; xxvi. 18-20. 1 Kings, xxi. 8-13.

*'Be of good heart,' said Ridley to his brother Latimer. with a wondrous cheerful look running to him. and embracing and kissing him--'for God will either assuage the fury of the flame. or else strengthen us to abide it.'--FOX, vii. 548.

† RUTHERFORD'S Letters.

‡ 'To deliver them that are ready to be slain. If thou forbear. First--he layeth down the duty. Then he adds the warniug, armed with a thunderbolt of retributive judgment upon the forbearance.'--SCHULTENS.

§ Ps. lxxxii. 3-6. Comp. Baruch, vi. 35-38--where the idols are proved to be no gods, because they cannot do the work of God here delegated to the magistrates as his representative.

new it not, the Lord will require it. This obligation, with all the responsibility of its neglect, is the universal law of the Gospel. (Luke, x. 29-36.) Whoever knows his brother's danger, and *forbears to deliver*--doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? Will he not render? The Hebrew midwives,¹ and Esther in after-ages,² thus delivered their own *people drawn unto death*. Reuben delivered Joseph from the pit. Job was the *deliverer* of the poor in the extremity, Jonathan saved his friend at imminent risk to himself.⁴ Obadiah hid the Lord's prophets.⁵ Ahikam and Ebed-melech saved Jeremiah.⁶ Johanan attempted to *deliver* the unsuspecting Gedaliah.⁷ Daniel preserved the wise men of Babylon.⁸ The Samaritan rescued his neighbour from death. Paul's nephew *delivered* the great Apostle, by informing him of the murderous plot.⁹ The rule includes all oppression, which has more or less of the character of murder.¹⁰

Excuses are always at hand for slightly passing over their sad condition--*We knew it not*--we knew not your state, how you came into it, or how to help you out of it. But the true reason is, as Bishop Sanderson has stated it--'We want charity, but abound in self-love. Our defect in that appeareth by our backwardness to perform our duties to our brethren; and our excess in this by our readiness to frame excuses for ourselves.* But doth not God, who hath a balance for every thought, know thy brother's wants, the sorrow of his heart, and the grief that presses down his soul? Doth not he *consider* the excuse of ignorance to be the mere cover for selfishness? Vain is it to plead ignorance before the All-seeing God. *He that pondereth the heart* will thoroughly sift; his Omniscience will perfectly know; his retributive justice will *render*. Disinterested kindness will be considered.¹¹ But to *forbear deliverance*--whether from cruelty,¹² selfishness,¹³ or fear of personal consequences¹⁴--involves an awful account.

But how much more guilty to *forbear* the *deliverance* of immortal souls!--in ignorance, ungodliness, or unbelief, *drawn unto death, and ready to be slain!* Ought they not to be the objects of our most yearning anxiety? What shall we then say to that frozen apathy, which *forbears to deliver*? 'We have no right to judge--*we knew it not*--"Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. iv. 9.) It is no concern of mine.' But might not many a soul have started back from ruin, had but the discovery of his danger been made, ere it was too late? Yet the one word, that might have saved, was *forborne*. Is there no brother, child,

¹ Exod. i. 13-17.

² Esth. iii. 6-13; iv. 13. 14; viii. 4-6.

³ Job, xxix. 12, 13, 16, 17.

⁴ 1 Sam. xix. 4; xx. 26-33.

⁵ 1 Kings, xviii. 4.

⁶ Jer. xxvi. 24: xxxviii. 11-13.

⁷ Ib. xl. 13-16.

⁸ Dan. ii. 12-15.

⁹ Acts, xxiii. 16-22.

¹⁰ Comp. Ecclus. xxxiv. 21, 22.

¹¹ Jer. xxxviii 7-13; xxxix. 16-18. ¹² 1 Sam. xxii 9-18.

¹³ Ib. xxv. 10, 11. Luke. x. 30-22. ¹⁴ John, xix. 4-13.

* Bishop SANDERSON'S *Assize Sermon on this text*.

or neighbour, who may pierce the conscience to eternity with the rebuke--'Hadst thou dealt faithfully with my soul, I had not been in this place of torment.' (Jam. v. 19, 20.) If others may charge us with the bodies of our fellow-creatures, God commits their souls to our care. The Lord preserve us from an indictment in the court of heaven for the murder of our brother's soul, by *forbearing to deliver!*

And does not this ring a solemn peal of warning to those, whose special office it is to *deliver them that are drawn unto death?* 'We knew it not.' But ought we not to have been "watching for souls, as those that must give account?" (Heb. xiii. 17.) And what will be the tremendous reckoning for those, who perish by the neglect of their pledged and divinely-appointed guardians! "While thy servant was busy here and there"--upon his own pleasure--the soul "was gone!" "But his blood will be required at the watchman's hand."*

13. *My son, eat thou honey, because it is good; and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste: 14. So shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul: when thou hast found it, then there shall be a reward, and thy expectation shall not be cut off.*

Honey was the choice product of Canaan;¹ the food of its inhabitants,² even of children;³ *good and meet to the taste.* 'So,' when "the spiritual senses were exercised,"⁴ 'shalt thou find the knowledge of wisdom unspeakably delectable to *thy soul*; †--that knowledge of Christ, without which we are undone, and in which we are supremely happy. ‡ Eating only can convey, what the most accurate description fails to give, a just perception of the *sweetness of the honey-comb.* (Judg. xiv. 18.) Experimental *knowledge* alone gives spiritual discernment, and proves the gospel to be, not a golden dream, but a divine reality. And whoever mistakes *honey* for any other substance? Who would not instantly detect a counterfeit? And what intelligent Christian would mistake the semblance of heavenly *wisdom* for its substance? 'Lord! I have long wanted the true manna; all my former food was nothing but empty husks.' § Truly indeed the soul, hungering for bread, and feeding upon an experimental apprehension of Christian doctrine, realizes solidly what no formalist ever knows. He possesses a

¹ Exod. iii. 8. Ezek. xx. 6.

² Judg. xiv. 9. 1 Sam. xiv. 27. Matt. iii. 4. Luke, xxiv. 41, 42. Comp. Ecclus. xxxix. 26.

³ Isa. vii. 15. 4 Heb. v. 14.

* 1 Kings, xx. 39, 40. Ezek. xxxiii, 8. See Doddridge's striking Sermon on this text given from his works in Williams's Christian Preacher.

† Bp. Hall. Chap. xvi. 24. Ps xix. 10; cxix. 103.

‡ Phil. iii. 8. Lo! this' says good Bishop Hall--'is the honey that I desire to eat. Give me of this honey, and I shall receive (like Jonathan of old. 1 Sam. xiv. 29) both clearness to mine eyes and vigour of my spirits, to the foiling of my spiritual enemies.'--*Soliloquies*, liv.

§ Augustine.

plausibly shadow--emotion, impulse, conviction, external reformation. (Heb. vi. 4, 5.) But the living faith carries its own witness with it. 'It is all true--"I believed, and therefore have I spoken."' (2 Cor. iv.13.) The treasure is *found* with the transport of Archimedes--bringing its own reward.*

The expectation of the finder, so far from being *cut off*, shall be infinitely exceeded. "The love" that is manifested "passeth knowledge." (Ephes. iii. 19.) "The peace" that is sealed "passeth all understanding." (Phil. iv. 7.) "The joy" that is felt is "unspeakable, and full of glory." (1 Pet. i. 8.) Shall we then timidly exhibit these privileges, as if they would lower the obligations of holiness, or paralyze exertion? They are not opiates, but cordials. They invigorate, while they refresh. Depression unnerves; fear enchains; but "the joy of the Lord is strength." (Neh. viii. 10.) It inspires energy, elevates hope, and makes our 'service perfect freedom.'

15. *Lay not wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous; spoil not his resting-place:* 16. *For a just man falleth seven times,† and riseth up again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief.*

The wise man breaks off his affectionate counsel to the children of God, with a solemn warning to *the wicked man*. Should we exclude him from the circle of instruction? If he be left unconverted, it is his own guilt. But if he be unwarned, uninstructed, beware lest "blood-guiltiness" be charged.

Hatred *to the righteous* is deeply rooted in *the wicked man*.¹ He imagines, especially if he be in power,² that he can tyrannize over them with impunity. But it is venturing upon a hazardous course--"He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye." (Zech. ii. 8.) "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest!"--struck the most relentless persecutor "trembling"³ to the earth. The plots against their *dwelling*, *the spoiling of their resting-place*, may prosper for a while;⁴--but if *the just man falleth seven times*, overwhelmed with the assault, *he riseth again* (Ps. xxxvii. 24), falling into trouble, not falling under it; yea, rather standing firm under it. Courage, then,--poor afflicted soul! Look thy foe in the face, and sing triumphant--"Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy, *though I fall I shall rise again*." (Mic. vii. 8.) He shall deliver thee in six troubles; yea in seven shall no evil touch thee. Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust, that he will yet deliver. Cast down, but not destroyed."⁵ Here

***Eurhka, eurhka.** Comp. Jer. xv. 16.

† The common quotation of this is seven times a day; for which Bp. Patrick observes there is no authority but some corrupt edition of the Vulgate.

¹ Chap. xxix.. 27. Gen. iii. 15. Ps. xxxvii. 12, 32. 1 John, iii. 12.

² 1 Sam. xix. 11. Acts, xii. 1-3.

³ Acts, ix. 5, 6.

⁴ Ps. lix. Title. Acts, viii. 3, 4.

⁵ Job, v. 19. 2 Cor. i. 10; iv. 9.

is our conflict, and our security: The life is untouched; yea--it is strengthened, and "made manifest," by the successive supplies of upholding mercy.¹ Many trials cannot overwhelm the righteous.² But one is sufficient to sweep away the wicked. *He falleth into mischief;*³ and there is no *rising again*,⁴ no recovery, no remedy. He lies where he falls, and he perishes where he lies. Sinner! whatever be thy wickedness; the Lord save thee from the millstone of condemnation--the persecuting of the saints of God!*

17. *Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth:* 18. *Lest the Lord see it, and it displeases him, and he turn away his wrath from him.*

Yet did the chosen people of God *rejoice* with divine exultation *in the fall of their enemies*. (Exod. xv. 1.) Nay--is not this joy the triumph of the righteous?⁵ Is it not the adoration of heaven, as the manifested glory of God?⁶ But how different is this sublime sympathy in the triumph of the Church, from the malignant joy of private revenge! A secret, if not an avowed, pleasure *in the fall of an enemy*, is nature's impulse.⁷ But what has grace done for us, if it has not overcome nature by an holier and happier principle? David "wept and chastened his soul" in his enemy's affliction.⁸ David's Lord "wept in the prospective ruin of the infatuated race, fraught with malignity against himself. *To rejoice in the fall of an enemy*, would be to fall deeper than himself; to fall not into trouble, but into sin; to break the commandment, which enjoins us to "love our enemies" (Luke, xix. 41-44), and to repay cursing with blessing and prayers. (Matt. v. 44.) This selfish cruelty is most hateful to God. (Chap. xvii. 5. Zech. i. 15.) It has often *turned away his wrath from* the criminal to the mocker at his calamity.† Does the glass of the word shew our character in the sin that is rebuked, or in the contrast of our compassionate Lord?

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 11. ² Ps. xxxiv. 19; xxxvii. 39, 40. 1 Cor. x. 13. ³ Ps. vii. 13-16; ix. 16.

⁴ Job, xv. 30. Amos, viii. 14. ⁵ Chap. xi. 10. Job, xxii. 19. Ps. lviii. 10.

⁶ Rev. xv. 3, 4; xviii. 20; xix. 1-6. ⁷ Ps. xxxv. 15, 16; 2 Sam. xvi. 5-7.

⁸ Ps. xxxv. 13, 14. 2 Sam. i. 11, 12. Comp. Job, xxxi. 29.

**The just man rising* from his fall is most unwarrantably applied to the perseverance of the saints. The word *fall* frequently occurs in this book; but always in reference to trouble, not sin. (Chap. xi. 5, 14; xiii. 17; xvii. 20; xxvii. 27; xxviii. 10, 14, 18.) The antithesis obviously fixes this meaning. "There are plain texts enough to prove every scriptural doctrine. But pressing texts into any particular service, contrary to their plain meaning, not only serves to deceive the inconsiderate, but to rivet the prejudices and confirm the suspicions, of opposers; just as bringing forward a few witnesses of suspicious character would cause all those, however deserving- of credit, who should be examined in the same cause, to be suspected also, and create a prejudice against it in the minds of the court and of all present."--SCOTT.

† 'Lest the Lord be angry. and turn his wrath from him to thee.'--Bp. COVERDALE. Comp. Judg. xvi. 25-30. Micah, vii. 10. Edom, Lam. iv. 21, 22. Ezek. xxxv. 15; xxxvi. 5-7; Obad. 10-14; Tyre, Ezek. xxvi. 2; Babylon, Ps. cxxxvii. 7-9; Isa. li. 22, 23; Lam. i. 21. Moab, Jer. xlviii. 26, 27; Ammon, Ezek. xxv. 1-7.

19. *Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked: 20. For there shall be no reward to the evil man; the candle of the wicked shall be put out.*

This *fretting* must be a deep-rooted disease, to need such repeated discipline. (Verse 1; xxiii. 17.) One moment's recollection of our mercies might shew, how little reason there is for it. Mercies infinitely more than we discover might be sufficient to sweep the clouds from our sky, and to make us ashamed of our despondency. Before--*the envy of the wicked* was checked by the remembrance, that there was *an end* --surely an happy end to the righteous. (Chap. xxiii. 18.) Let them wait for it. It will not disappoint them. Here we are further reminded, that there is *no end,* no reward, to the evil man*. Leave him to his judge. His candle, notwithstanding all his efforts to keep it burning,¹ shall be put out.² Sometimes in bold paring he puts out his own candle. 'I give'--said the infidel Hobbes--'my body to the dust, and my soul to the Great Perhaps. I am going to take a leap in the dark.' Alas!--was it not a leap *in the dark*,--into "the blackness of darkness for ever?"

Take then the balance of eternity. Learn neither to overvalue the fancied sunshine of *the wicked*, nor to undervalue our own real happiness. *Envy not* his lot. Repine not at our own. Ours is far beyond his reach. His is far below our *envy*. 'His candle burneth; his prosperity flourisheth, until it hath kindled hell-fire; and then it is extinguished; whereas the lamp of the godly is put out here, to shine as a star in heaven.'[†]

21. *My son, fear thou the Lord and the king: and meddle not with them that are given to change: 22. For their calamity shall rise suddenly and who knoweth the ruin of them both?*

We have another affectionate exhortation to *the fear of God*. (Chap. xxiii. 17.) And what wonder? Is it not the substance of our holiness and our happiness? Oh! reverence his majesty. Acknowledge thy dependence upon him. Be as careful in "walking before him" in thy secret thoughts, as in thy outward conduct. No more allow the indulgence of a sinful motive, than a gross sin. If there be no rod of outward shame, will not the thought keenly pierce thy heart--how unkindly does this defilement requite such unspeakable love!

The connection between *the fear of God and the King* is not local or accidental. Our Lord and his Apostles have thus linked together the

¹ Kings, xxi. 21, with 2 Kings, x. 1-7. ² Chap. xiii. 9; xx. 20. Job, xviii. 5, 6; xxi. 17.

* Same word in Heb. as chap. xxiii. 18. 'There shall be none end of *plagues* to the evil man.'--*Old version* † Jermin in loco.

throne of his supremacy in heaven, and the throne of his majesty on earth.¹ The one principle indeed is the spring of the other. Disloyalty has often been a libel upon godliness. But the Christian is loyal, because he is godly. (1 Sam. xxiv. 6.) "Subjection to the powers that be" is repeatedly inculcated,² and revolt is visited with the most heavy condemnation.* Yet there is no interference with the primary obligation. Solomon 'puts God before the king, because God is to be served in the first place, and out obedience is to be given to the king only in subordination to God, and not in those things, which are contrary to the will of God.'†

Man's independence however naturally kicks against submission. The popular cry is for the voice and sovereignty of the people; a plain proof, that "there is no new thing under the sun" (Eccles. i. 9); since the picture of those demagogues has been drawn to the life nearly two thousand years ago--"walking after the flesh, despising government, presumptuous, self-willed, not afraid to speak evil of dignities."³ Such men love change for the sake of change. To become leaders of a party, they disturb the public peace by proposing changes, without any promise of solid advantage.‡ They would prefer a storm which would bring them into note, to a calm in which they were already quietly secure. They are more eager to fish for a name in troubled waters, than to cultivate those quiet and social virtues, which, if generally cultivated, would restrain the commotion. "O my soul, come not thou into their secret." (Gen. xlix. 6.) It is dangerous to *meddle with* them. To oppose all change, indeed, is to set up a plea of perfection. Every improvement (and where is there not room for improvement?) is a change. But public evils are not to be mended by railing. To be *given to change*; to undo all that has been done; to alter for the sake of altering; to be weary of the old, and captivated with the new, however untried; to make experiments upon modes of government--is a fearful hazard. It is losing the substance of real good in the dream of imaginary improvements; as if we must undo everything, rather than be idle. This waywardness we see in Korah's sin;⁴ in Absalom's rebel-

¹ Matt. xxii. 21 1 Pet. ii. 17.

² Matt. xvii. 24-27. Rom. xiii. 1-7. Tit. iii. 1. 1 Pet. ii. 13-17.

³ 2 Pet. ii. 10. Jude, 8. Comp. 1 Sam. x. 27. ⁴ Num. xvi. 130-17.

* Rom. xiii. 2. See two valuable sermons by Bishops Horne and Horsley on this text. Agricola's testimony to the submissive obedience of our uncivilised ancestors is interesting. See TACITUS' *Life of Agricola*.

† Poole *in loco*. Comp. 1 Sam. xxii. 17, 18. Dan. iii. 16-18. Acts, iv. 18, 19; v. 27-29.

‡ 'He that goeth about,' saith our judicious Hooker--'to persuade men that they are not so well governed as they ought to be, shall never want attention and favourable hearers.' *Ibid.* Book i. Sallust admirably remarks of these turbulent innovators, that 'they thought the very disturbance of the established order of things a sufficient bribe to set them at work. That which is wanted in the aptness of their speech is supplied by the aptness of men's minds to accept and believe it.' See the whole paragraph opening Hooker's great work, *Eccl. Polit.*

lion;¹ in the continual struggle for royalty in the Israelitish kings.² How *suddenly did their calamity rise*, even when they seemed to be within the grasp of their object!³ *Who knoweth the ruin, which both the Lord and the king* may inflict on the despisers of their authority;*⁴ often fearful beyond precedent, without remedy?

23. *These things also belong to the wise. It is not good to have respect persons in judgment.* 24. *He that saith unto the wicked, Thou art righteous; him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him:* 25. *But to them that rebuke him shall be delight, and a flood blessing shall come upon them.* 26. *Every man shall kiss his lips that giveth a right answer* (that answereth right words, marg.)

We have had a solemn exhortation to the people. (Num. xvi. 29-33.) We have now a word *to the wise*, specially to those in authority. God has given many laws against *respect of persons in judgment*.⁵ It is not good.⁶ Nay--rather he rebukes it as an hateful abomination.⁷ Let truth be considered, not favour. This is an evil in the Church, as much as in the State. No responsibility is more momentous in our sacred high places, than "doing nothing by partiality."† Man, corrupt as he is, often *abhors* unrighteous judgment.⁸ A bad magistrate deprives us of the blessing of good laws.

On the other hand, there is no greater national blessing, than a government *rebuking the wicked*.⁹ This was a part of Job's God-fearing character.¹⁰ *The good blessing that came upon Nehemiah's upright administration is abundantly manifest*.¹¹ Indeed generally *every one will kiss*--pay the homage of love and respect¹²--*to him who giveth a right answer* in judgment. He is a public treasure; "a blessing in the midst of the land." Is not then the responsibility of rulers, and the welfare of thousands depending on them, a quickening impulse to prayer? And may not our want of "godly quietness" be traced to this neglect? (1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.)

But we are not rulers. Yet are not many of us in authority--

¹ 2 Sam. xv. 10-13.

² 1 Kings, xvi. 8-22.

³ 2 Sam. xv. 13; xviii. 9-16.

⁴ 2 Sam. xviii. 7, 8; xx. 1, 2, 22. 2 Kings, xvii. 21, 23. Eccles. viii. 2-5. Acts, v. 36. 37.

⁵ Exod. xxiii. 6-8. Lev. xix. 15. Deut. i. 17; xvi. 19. ⁶ Chap. xviii. 5; xxviii. 21.

⁷ Ps. lxxxii. 2-4.

⁸ 1 Sam. viii. 1-5.

⁹ 2 Sam. xxiii. 3, 4.

¹⁰ Job, i. 1, 8; xxix. 7, 11-17. ¹¹ Neh. v. 7-9; xiii. 8-11, 25, 28, with 31.

¹² Comp. 1 Kings, xix. 18. Ps. ii. 12. Hos. xiii. 2.

* French and Skinner. The best critics (Geier, Dathe, Lavater. &c.) most naturally apply the distinctive term (them both) to the separate persons. The ruin foreboded is thus connected with the persons, who had been described separately as the objects of fear. 'Do not disobey either of them, who knoweth their vengeance?'--LXX.

† 1 Tim. v. 21. Hooker--in 'reverence and awe unto the prelates, whom Christ hath placed in seats of higher authority over me'--suggests, that 'the ancient canon be specially remembered, which forbiddeth a bishop to be led by human affection in bestowing the things of God.'--*Eccl. Pol.* book vii. c. xxiv. 3, 7.

Parents--Heads of Families--Teachers and Guardians of the young? Uprightness and consistency alone can maintain that influence so essential to usefulness. For a spiritual ruler to *say to the wicked--Thou art righteous*, is indeed perfidious dealing with his Divine Master cruel deceit to immortal souls; hiding the ruin, which he is bound to reveal; acting the part of a minister of Satan under the cover of a minister of Christ. *His people* will live to curse and abhor him, perhaps throughout eternity. Even the very people that hate both his Master and his message, will *kiss his lips that giveth a right answer*--a reluctant but honourable witness to his faithfulness.

27. *Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house.*

This rule of prudence applies to all worldly matters. Religion, so far from forbidding, inculcates care and forethought. Much of our domestic comfort hangs upon it. Much inconvenience and suffering flow from its neglect. Acting upon this useful direction, the wise builder first *prepares his work without*. He collects his materials, calculates upon the quantity required; then he makes his work fit by shaping and bringing them into their place; and afterwards, having all things in readiness, *he builds his house*. *The work was thus prepared* for Solomon's magnificent temple, before *the house was built*. (1 Kings, v. 18 ; vi. 7.) The spiritual house is similarly raised of materials *prepared and fitted*; and thus it "groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord." (Eph. .ii. 21, 22.)

But ponder well the care, with which the great *work should be prepared*. Count the cost anxiously. Consider whether the profession will stand the storms. (Luke, xiv. 28-30.) Lay the foundation deep upon the Rock (Ib. vi. 48.) Be much in prayer for divine strength. Avoid that outward display, which shames the inconsiderate builder, who begins to *build his house*, without having thoroughly *prepared his work*.

Has not the minister of the Gospel special need of *preparing his work*? An unfurnished minister cannot be "a wise master builder." Even when the foundation is laid, "Let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon." Let him look well to the day at hand. (1 Cor. iii. 10-15.) And let all the Lord's servants weigh deeply their responsibility. Indigested haste, and crude judgment, have blasted many a Christian project. Let us be guided by the well-considered wisdom of experienced men (Matt. xviii. 17, 18), and collect our materials from their prudence, forethought, and sound-judging energy. *A house will thus be built* to the honour of our God, and for the service of his Church.

28. *Be not a witness against thy neighbour without cause; and deceive not with thy lips.* 29. *Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work.*

The welfare of society may sometimes constrain to *be witness against a neighbour*. But never let it be *without cause*. Yet when compelled to this revolting duty, whatever be the temptation or consequence, *deceive not with thy lips*. Speak plainly, truthfully, the whole truth. Doeg's *witness against his neighbour was without cause*; not from conscience, but from malice. The main fact also was concealed of David's imposition upon Abimelech, which would have cleared him from the suspicion of treason, and saved his life. (1 Sam. xxii. 9, 10; xxi. 1, 2.) This garbled *witness* thus far *deceived with his lips*, and bears the black stamp of "a deceitful tongue." (Ps. lxxiii. 3, 4; cxx. 2-4.)

Profit is the bait to the thief, lust to the adulterer, revenge to the murderer. But it is difficult to say, what advantage redounds to this evil *witness*, or what allurements belong to the sin, save that which Satan himself feels--the love of sin for its own sake, or for the satisfaction that is vainly anticipated from the commission. Should we however be clear from the grosser forms of this sin; yet do we resist the unkind *witness against our neighbour*, in magnifying his failings, and measuring them with a far stricter basis than our own; rashly censuring his indifferent or doubtful actions; and censuring even his sins with an unchristian intention?

And then--as to indulging personal resentment--it is natural to say, though only in the heart--*I will do as he hath done to me*. But shall we dare thus to take the sword out of God's hands, and place ourselves upon his tribunal? "Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will repay--saith the Lord."¹ Let wisdom and grace be set to work to extinguish the fire from hell, before it gets head.* Far sweeter will be the recollection of injuries forgotten than revenged. But grace alone can enable us to "*forgive from the heart*."† And yet too often its exercise is so feebly cherished, that natural feelings gain the ascendancy; and, if there be not an actual recompense of evil, there is merely a negative obedience to the rule, a refraining from the ebullition, rather than an active exercise of the opposite principle. The wise man sets out in this book the true rule,² more lovely, more constraining, as enforced by the divine example.³ Humility and tenderness mark

¹ Rom. xii. 19. Comp. Gen. 1.16-19. 2 Chap. xx. 22; xxv. 21, 22.

³ Matt. v. 44, with Luke, xxiii. 34. 1 Pet. ii. 21-23.

* MATTHEW HENRY'S *Works*, p. 459.

† Matt. xviii. 35, with Luke, xvii 3-5. "The excellency of the duty is sufficiently proclaimed by the difficulty of the practice. For how hard is it, when the passions are high, and the sense of an injury quick, and the power ready, for a man to deny himself in that luscious morsel of revenge! To do violence to himself, instead of doing it to his enemy!" --SOUTH'S *Sermon on Matt. v. 44*.

the self-knowing Christian, who forgives himself little, his neighbour much.

30. *I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; 31. And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. 32. Then I saw, and considered it well: (Set my heart, marg.) I looked upon it, and received instruction. 33. Yet a little I sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: 34. So shall thy poverty come as one that travaileth; and thy want as an armed man, (a man of shield, marg.)*

Everything around us reads an useful lesson to an observant eye. Every particle of creation may be taxed to furnish its quota to our store of knowledge. We--can extract good even from evil, and "gather grapes of thorns, and figs of thistles." Solomon describes with his usual vigour of thought and strength of colouring, an affecting sight, that had passed before his eyes--*the field and vineyard of the slothful, grown over with thorns and nettles, and the wall utterly broken down. Instead of turning away, he considered it well, and received instruction.* In the solemn contemplation of this picture of desolation, he could not but turn his thoughts to the wretched proprietor. He fancied himself in his house, beholding the sottish being stretched on his bed, and crying out under the noonday sun--*Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep.* Stimulated by this effusion of the torpid animal, the response almost unconsciously forced itself--*So shall thy poverty come as one that travaileth, and thy want as an armed man.*

And yet by some strange delusion, the slothful conceives himself to be wise. (Chap. xxvi. 16.) But how manifestly is he *void of understanding; without heart* to improve his many advantages! He might enrich himself by his field and vineyard. But he has never cultivated or weeded it. *The stone wall*, raised by some more industrious hand, is, *broken down*; and he is too indolent to repair it. *His vineyard* is there fore left a prey to every invader; while he lives as a mere animal, in sensual indulgence, bringing himself gradually, but irresistibly, *to poverty*.* Not that he means to come to beggary. He only wants *yet a little sleep, a little slumber* more--and then he will bestir himself. But this *little* insensibly increases. Every hour's indulgence strengthens the habit, and chains the victim in hopeless bondage. His efforts for exertion are only the struggles of the paralytic, without energy or

* Chap. vi. 10, 11. The Roman Satirist gives a lively description of the stirring of the slothful man's excitement of lust--

'Mane, piger, stertis? Surge, inquit avaritia: eja Surge: negas? Instat, surge, inquit. Non queo: surge,' &c.

PERSIUS, *Sat.* 5. 132, 133.

effectiveness. If his dependence is upon his own industry, manual or mental, sloth must hasten on his ruin. In a higher station, it deprives him of the means of using his influence aright, or of employing his talents to any valuable purpose. There is indeed no higher blessing than usefulness; no more affecting lamentation than that of the worn-out labourer, who is conscious that his usefulness is ended. But the *slothful* is satisfied, that his usefulness should never begin. He is content with a life of utter uselessness. He wilfully gives himself up to it; as if indolence was *his* supreme good; and every kind of exercise the object of his shrinking dread. Such a life can never approve itself to conscience, and assuredly will never escape the condemnation of God. (See Matt. xxv. 26-36.) It is *poverty* to himself. He becomes his own enemy. The springs of solid happiness are impoverished, and the true end of life frittered away.

But let us look at the spiritual sluggard. If a neglected field is a melancholy sight, what is a neglected soul! a soul which, instead of being cultivated with the seeds of grace, is left to its own barrenness; *overgrown with the native produce of thorn and nettles*. (Gen. iii. 18.) Time, talents, opportunities have been vouchsafed; perhaps the blessing of a godly education added, every encouragement for hopeful promise. But if diligence is needed; if the man must "labour and strive,"¹ then his field must be left, at least for the present. He must have a *little more sleep first*.^{*} And thus he sleeps on, and shuts both eyes and ears against every disturbance of his fatal slumber. Nothing is done or attempted for God, for his own soul, or for his fellow-creatures. His vineyard is left open. All his good purposes are *the stone wall broken down*. Satan "goes out, and returns at his will."² All is devastation and ruin.

Christian! is there no danger of this evil creeping into our religion? No habit is so ruinous. It enervates, and at length stops, the voice of prayer. It hinders the active energy of meditation. It weakens the influence of watchfulness. The way to heaven is steep, rough, hard to climb, immeasurably long, forbidding in its present exercise and doubtful in its end, full of toll and discouragement, devoid of beaming hope and sunshine. This false apprehension checks every step of progress; so that "the soul"--instead of being "a well-watered garden" (Jer. xxxi. 12), sending forth refreshing fragrance and grateful fruits--relapses into its former wilderness state; laid open to every temptation; and too often ultimately a prey to sensual appetites.³

Let our Father's voice be instantly heard--"Son, go work *to-day in thy vineyard*." (Matt. xxi. 28.) Dost thou not see, that it is *overgrown*

¹ John, vi. 27. Luke, xiii. 24.

² Matt. xii. 45. 2 Tim. ii. 26.

³ Chap xxiii. 21. 2 Sam. xi. 2. Ezek. xvi. 49.

* See Augustine's instructive reference to his own case.--*Confess.* lib. viii. c. 5.

with thorns? Look forward, not backward. Complain not, but decide. Pray not only, but strive. Always connect privilege with practice. Prove the principles of moral character, as well as spiritual experience. Aim at every active exercise, that may strengthen religious habits. 'Surely, if we look to stand in the faith of the sons of God, we must hourly, continually, be providing, and setting ourselves to strive. It was not the meaning of our Lord and Saviour in saying--"Father, keep them in thy name"--that we should be careless to keep ourselves. 'To our own safety, our sedulity is required.*

CHAPTER XXV.

1. *These are the proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out.*

THIS seems to be a third division of this sacred book.¹ The selection was probably made with several repetitions from the former part † from "the three thousand proverbs which Solomon spoke;"‡ and which, having been carefully preserved, *the men of Hezekiah copied out*, nearly three hundred years after. Thus the word of God, brought out of obscurity for the instruction of the people, stamped the reformation of this godly king (2 Chron. xxxi. 21); as it did the reformation of Josiah in, after-times.§ The New Testament fully authenticates this section of the book as a part of the inspired canon.² We are not reading therefore the maxims of the wisest of men. But the voice from heaven proclaims--"These are the true sayings of God."

The Holy Spirit mentions not only the author, but the copyists, of these proverbs. And often has good service been done to the Church, not only by original writers, but by those who have *copied* and brought out their writings into wider circulation. The world usually honours only the grand instruments, and casts the humbler agency into the shade. (Eccles. ix. 15, 16.) But God honours not only the primary, but the subordinate instruments j not only the five-but the one

¹ See Chap. i. and x.-xxiv.

² Verses.6, 7, with Luke, xiv. 7-10; 21, 22, with Rom. xii. 20; xxvi. 11, with 2 Pet. ii. 22; xxvii. 1, with Jam iv. 14.

* Hooker 'On the certainty and perpetuity of Faith in God's Elect'

† Verse 24, with xxi 9; xxvi. 13, with xxii 13; 15, with xix. 24; 22, with xviii. 8; xxvii. 12, with xxii. 3; 13, with xx. 16; 15, with xix. 13; xxviii, with 6. xix. 1; 18, with x. 19; 19, with xii. 11; 21 with xviii. 5; xxiv. 23.

‡ 1 Kings, iv. 32. Comp. Eccles. xii. 9. Does not the divine discrimination, which has withheld the whole of Solomon's writings reprove the indiscriminate publication of all that eminent men may have left; in manuscript? Crudities, and even gross errors, have been thus accredited by the authority of great names, not less unjustly to their memory, than injuriously to the Church.

§ 2 Chron. xxxiv. 14-30. We mark the same Divine stamp of mercy upon our own precious, though reviled, Reformation.

talent--faithfully laid out for him. The blessing is not promised to their number, but to their improvement. (Matt. xxv. 21-23.)

2. *It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honor of kings is to search out a matter.* 3. *The heaven for height, and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings is unsearchable* (there is no searching, marg.)

The great King of heaven and the puny kings of earth are here finely contrasted. *The glory of each is opposite--of God to conceal; of kings to search out.* Whether "he dwelleth in his pavilion of thick darkness,"¹ or whether "clothed in his garment of light, and dwelling in unapproachable light"²--*it is the glory of God to conceal a thing.*

What glory indeed could belong to a God, whose name, and ways, and works were open to the view, and within the comprehension of worms of the earth? What he has brought to light, only shews how much is *concealed*. We look at his works--Lo! these are parts of his ways; but how little a portion "is heard of him!"* We study his dispensations of Providence, feeling that we had need pray over them once and again, ere we venture to interpret them--"Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters; and thy footsteps are not known!"³ We adore also that *glorious concealment* of his great work of forgiveness, of which Dr. Owen most truly remarks--that 'were it not somewhat beyond what men could imagine, no flesh could be saved.'† But so far is it removed from our sight, that no human ken can take the unbounded extent of this vast work. It is forgetfulness of this unsearchable forgiveness, proportioning its limits to our own understanding, that precludes a glowing confidence, and restrains many a sincere penitent from a full apprehension, and habitual enjoyment of the peace of the Gospel. In another department of the widely extended field, we ponder his great purposes of grace; and our hearts only find vent in reverential adoration--"Oh! the depth!" (Rom. xi. 33) -- 'rather standing on the shore, and silently admiring it, than entering into it.'‡ To wade in those depths is the sure way to be overwhelmed in them.

Thus does he educate his children in mystery, that he may exercise them in the life of faith (John, xiii. 7), acting and living upon incomprehensible objects; coming to his revelation without any mind will of their own. Thus in the boundless and bottomless works of his grace--the voice speaks from the inner sanctuary--"Be still, and

¹ I Kings. viii. 12. Ps. xviii. 11; xcvi. 2.

² Ps. civ. 2. 1 Tim. vi. 16.

³ Ps. lxxvii. 19; xxxvi. 6.

* Job, xxvi. 14. 'Lo! these are the outlines (marginal or boundary lines) of his ways, and the mere whisper (opposed to the crashing "thunder" of the next clause) we can hear of him.'--DR. GOOD.

† On Ps. cxxx.

‡ LEIGHTON on 1 Pet. 11. 8.

know that I am God." (Ps. xlv. 10.) And is not this shade of mystery our highest joy, as the dwelling-place of our adorable God and Saviour? Are not the clouds of his *concealment* the effulgence of his glory (Hab. iii. 4), as the most simple, yet the most incomprehensible Being, whom the mightiest intellect can never "by searching find out to perfection?" (Job, xi. 7.) 'As there is'--says Bishop Hall--'a foolish wisdom, so there is a wise ignorance. I would fain know all that I need, and all that I may. I leave God's secrets to himself. It is happy for me, that God makes me of his court, though not of his council. O Lord! let me be blessed with the knowledge of what thou hast revealed. Let me content myself to adore thy divine wisdom in what thou hast not revealed.'*

Thus it is *the glory of God to conceal a thing*--to do many things, of which the full development of their great end is far beyond our sight. The highest glory of earth is at an infinite remove--*God conceals*. For who could bear his full irradiation?¹ *But the honour of kings* is to *search out a matter*.² They must not affect to be like God. By themselves they know nothing beyond their people. Yet as all depends upon them, they must avail themselves of all stores of wisdom, to *search out* the mysteries of true policy, in order to govern by them, the mysteries of iniquity, in order to redress, and the intricacies of individual cases, in order to give suitable judgment. Hence the divine command, that they should write out a copy of the law, for their daily study and direction. (Deut. xvii. 18, 19.) This wise king had himself attained singular discernment in *searching out a matter*, even without external evidence, and with all the perplexity of conflicting testimony. (1 Kings, iii. 16-28.)

And yet the Sovereign must often frame his counsels with much caution anti reserve. Many of his purposes are far beyond the comprehension of the great mass of his people; so that to their minds *the heart of kings is unsearchable*; and they might as soon think of measuring the *heaven for height*, or fathoming *the earth for depth*. Ought not this to teach forbearance in pronouncing judgment? Are not the "presumptuous and self-willed, who are not afraid of speaking evil of dignities,"

¹ Exod. xxxiii. 20. Dan. x. 5-8, 17, Rev. i. 12-17.

² Ezra, iv. 15, 19; v. 17; vi. 1. Comp. Job. xxix. 16.

* Bp. Hall, viii. 5; xi. 8-1. This *glorious concealment* is however no precedent for the Tractarian principle of Reserve, which at once eclipses the freeness and fulness of Gospel, and paralyzes the energy of Christian life and hope. Blessed be God! "The that belong to our peace are brought to light by the Gospel." The doctrine of the atoning cross is "delivered *first of all*" (**en prwtōi**; 1 Cor. xv. 3)--the primary truth in the forefront of the Gospel. With self-abasing humility we acknowledge, that "secret things belong to the Lord our God." But guilty indeed is the presumption of casting a cloud of *concealment* on "the things that are revealed, and which belong to us and to our children for ever"--not only as the foundation of our hope, but as the principle of our obedience. Deut. xxix. 20. Yet do not some of us need to be drawn further from the "secret things" and nearer to the things that are revealed?

convicted of the guilt of "speaking evil of the things that they understand not?"¹ Is not "prayer for kings and for those in authority," a far more fruitful and "acceptable exercise?" (1 Tim. ii. 1-3.)

4. *Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer.* 5. *Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness.*

The finer produces "the vessel unto honour," by *taking away the dross from the silver* (Mal. iii. 2), which mars its beauty and purity. Such is the destructive influence of the wicked in the royal counsels.² *Take them then away from before the king.* Let him purify his court and government from this dross. Let him exclude it from high places. Let him discountenance it in authority at any cost.³ David thus *established his throne in righteousness*,⁴ and commended this resolution by his dying counsel to his wise son.⁵ This is political wisdom on scriptural principles. If "righteousness exalteth a nation,"⁶ the open acknowledgment of it is the sure path to national prosperity.⁷ And will not the throne of our great King *be established* by the entire and eternal removal of the wicked?⁸ In the great day of trial and decision shall I be found reprobate or purified silver? Lord! let me, under the refiner's hand, be "purified, and purged as gold and silver, that I may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness" in that day. (Mal. iii. 3.)

6. *Put not forth thyself* (set not out thy glory, marg.) *in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men:* 7. *For better it is, that it be said unto thee, Come up hither; than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen.*

Our Lord applies this proverb more generally. (Luke, xiv. 8-11.) Who needs not this caution against ambition? Even godly Baruch seems to have "sought great things for himself." (Jer. xlv. 5.) Not even the fellowship of the Saviour, his heavenly instruction, his divine pattern of holiness (Matt. xi. 29), could, restrain the "strife among the disciples--Who should be the greatest;"⁹ repeated even after the most wondrous exhibition of humility;¹⁰ nay, after they had just partaken with him of the holy feast.¹¹ "Loving to have the pre-eminence," is the bane of godliness in the Church.¹²

Wolsey's fall is an instructive beacon to ambitious men, not to *put forth themselves to set out their glory in the presence of the king.** The

¹ 2 Pet. ii. 10; 12. Jude, 8, 10.

³ Chap. xx. 8, 26.

⁴ Ps. ci. 4-8.

² 1 Kings, xii. 10-16. 2 Chron. xxiv. 17-24.

⁵ 1 Kings, ii. 5, 6, 32, 33, 44, 45.

⁶ Chap. xiv. 34.

⁷ 1 Kings, xv. 13. 2 Chron. xiv. 1-7.

⁸ Mal. iii. 17, 18. Matt. xiii. 41-43; xxv. 31-46. ⁹ Matt. xviii. 1-4.

¹⁰ John, xiii. 1-15.

¹¹ Luke. xxii. 19-27.

¹² 3 John, 9, 10.

Comp. Eccclus. vii. 4. The poet elegantly contrasts Daedalus and Icarus--father and son both provided with wings. The father, contenting himself with skimming the ground, was safe. The son, soaring aloft, perished. Hence a lesson of humility. Ovid, *Trist.* lib. iii. el. ii. 21.

usurpation also *of the places of great men* usually subjects man to be *put lower*, to his own mortification. Not that we would discountenance fit and able men from putting themselves forward in public responsibilities. But the eagerness for the outward name, with a manifest incapacity for the discharge of the work, is strongly censurable. "Before honour is humility" (Chap. xviii. 12); shewn in a backwardness to obtrude either our presence or our opinion upon those in higher stations; shrinking from external respect, rather than courting the "vain show." Thus were Gideon,¹ Saul in his early and better days,² and David, advanced to honour.³

Let each of us lay himself to the work of casting down our high tower of conceit; cultivating a deep sense of our utter worthlessness, and carefully pondering that example, which is at once our pattern and our principle. Oh! think of Him, who was "fairer than man," being the most humble of men--nay--of Him, who was infinitely more than man, making himself "a worm, and no man."⁴ Think of that day, which will set us all on our own true base; when each of us shall stand before "the Great Prince" (Rev. i. 5), just that, and that only, which he counts us to be? What will it be to be *put lower*; to be utterly cast out in *his presence*, whom *our eyes shall then see* to our eternal confusion! (Ib. verse 7.)

8. *Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame.* 9. *Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself; and discover not a secret to another:* (of another, marg.) 10. *Lest he that heareth it put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away.*

Dissension under any circumstances is a serious evil. The considerate Christian will rather concede rights, than insist upon them to the hazard of his own soul, and to the injury of the Church. (1 Cor. vi. 1-7.) *Hasty strife* must always be wrong. Think well beforehand, whether the case be right, or, even if it be, whether it be worth the contention. Duly calculate the uncertainty or consequence *of the end*. See the fruits in Gaal's quarrel with Abimelech,⁵ Amaziah's *strife* with his brother king of Israel,⁶ godly Josiah's unadvised contention with Pharaoh.⁷ So little do *we know what to do in the end thereof*! Often has a man brought himself to ruin by a *hasty strife* at law. Instead of triumphing, *his neighbour has put him to shame*. So long as 'meum and tuum' are in the world, sin and Satan will stir up contention. Yet never forget, that not "hatred and wrath" only, but "variance and strife"

¹ Jud. vi. 15.

² 1Sam. ix. 21, 22; xv. 17.

³ Ib. xviii. 18. Comp. Ps. cxxxi. 1.

⁴ Ps. xlv. 2, with xxii. 6.

⁵ Jud. ix. 26-40. Comp. Ecclus. viii. 1.

⁶ 2 Kings, xiv. 8-12.

⁷ 2 Chron. xxxv. 21, 22.

are "works of the flesh," excluding from heaven. (Gal. v. 19-21.) Hence the constraining obligation to "seek peace, and pursue it" (Ps. xxxiv. 14); after the noble example of our father Abraham, who quenched "the beginning of the strife," by yielding to his nephew his natural superiority, and his just rights. (Gen. xiii. 8. Comp. chap. xvii. 14.)

Yet if, after all, *strife* be inevitable, then let us ponder, how much wisdom and rule over our own spirit is needful, to conduct it honourably to our profession. *Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself.* Shew him, that the great object is not to make good thy cause, but to put a speedy end to the strife. Abraham, instead of complaining to others, carried his wrongs straight to the king, who was answerable for them. (Gen. xxi. 25-32.) Jephthah thus *debated his cause* with the king of Ammon himself, as the best means of bringing it to an amicable settlement.* But to *discover secrets to others*, even though we enjoin them to secrecy, is a breach of integrity.† And if, as often is the case, confidence is betrayed, the just consequence must be *infamy* to ourselves, that may *not turn away from us*. Backbiter will be the stamp on our name. And many privacies hitherto unknown may be published in retaliation to our shame.

How many unholy heats would be restrained by the practice of these rules of wisdom and love! Obviously the most faulty is bound to yield. But if, as usually happens, he is too unreasonable to do so; let a generous, self-forgetting kindness deny ourselves the pleasure of a triumph, instead of standing upon punctilious forms, or waiting for an acknowledgment from the offender. And if we find it more easy to talk of our neighbour's faults to others, than wisely and prayerfully to tell him of them alone, ask for self-discipline, and the mind of Christ. "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body." (Col iii. 15)

11. *A word fitly spoken* (spoken upon his wheels, marg.) *is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.* 12. *As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear.*

The allusion is to the curiously wrought baskets of silver network, in which delicious fruits were served up. The beauty of the texture set off the fruit with additional charms. So does a lovely medium enhance the attractiveness of truth.‡ The preacher should strive to find out

* Judg. xi. 12-27. Comp. the rule of the great Lawgiver, Matt. xviii. 15.

† Comp. Eccclus. viii. 17-19. 'To tell our own secrets'--says our great moralist--'is generally folly; but the folly is without guilt. To communicate those with which we are entrusted is always treachery, and treachery for the most part combined with folly. Rambler, No. 13.

‡ See Bishop Lowth's beautiful exposition. Praelect. xxiv.

acceptable words"¹--*words fitly spoken*--giving to each their proper meat and that" in due season,"² suited to their ages and difference of temperament. "How forcible are right words !" (Job, vi. 25.) Our Lord witnessed of himself, as "gifted with the tongue of the learned that he might know how to speak the word in season" (Isa. 1. 4)--a *word upon the wheels*--not forced or dragged, but rolling smoothly along, like the chariot-wheels. His discourses on the living water and the bread of life³ arose naturally out of the conversation,⁴ and therefore were full of arresting application. Paul powerfully charged superstition on the Athenians by an inscription on their own altar; and strengthened his reasoning by quoting from some of their own poets. (Acts, xvii. 22-28.) To a corrupt and profligate judge he preached "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." (Acts, xxiv. 25.)

In general intercourse much depends, not only upon the *word spoken*, but upon the occasion and spirit of speaking. We must not only lay ourselves out to do good, but to watch the fittest seasons of doing it. Under affliction, or tender impressions of conviction, a *word fitly spoken* might be as the descent of our gracious Lord to the soul, "like rain upon the mown grass." (Ps. lxxii. 6.) The plough enters most effectually, when the earth is softened. Under all circumstances our "lips should know what is acceptable." (Chap. x. 32.) Unseemly language makes wholesome truth more unpalatable. As far as possible, let *reproof* be introduced naturally, without formality or constrained effort. Many, who feel strongly the impulse, of being "instant out of season," neglect the not less Christian obligation of being "instant in season." (2 Tim. iv. 2.) We may think to relieve our conscience by speaking our mind. But to do it rudely and harshly, may put a stumbling-block in our brother's way. The *apples of gold* in their beautiful cover, evidently imply good sense, and good taste with good things. A well-meaning absurdity rather brings contempt than conviction. (Chap. xxxi. 26.)

All of us are bound to rebuke broad and palpable sins (Lev. xix. 17); yet on more doubtful individual cases the duty is far more restricted. Some Providence will direct into it. There must be intimate connection, full knowledge of the case, some right from age or station to warrant it. From its extreme difficulty, no duty calls for a more delicacy of feeling, and more "meekness of wisdom." Yet where reproof is well-timed and well-taken, *a wise reproof to an obedient ear is an earring of gold, and an ornament of gold* set out to the best advantage. Such was Eli's word to Samuel;⁵ Abigail's and Nathan's to David;⁶ Isaiah's to Hezekiah.⁷ We see the good fruit in Jehoshaphat, whom,

¹ Eccles. xii. 10. Chap. xv. 23.

³ John, iv. 6.

⁶ 1 Sam. xxv. 31-34. 2 Sam. xii. 1-13.

⁴ Comp. Luke, xiv. 15, 16.

² Luke, xii. 42. Comp. 2 Tim. ii. 15.

⁵ 1 Sam. iii. 11-18;

⁷ 2 Kings, xx. 14 19.

instead of producing revulsion, it stimulated to higher service of God)¹ The Apostle's probing reproof to the Corinthian Church worked so efficiently, that "in all things they approved themselves clear in the matter."² What a triumph of grace is it, when the kindness of *reproof* is acknowledged,³ and the motive of love appreciated!⁴ Faithful indeed is the blessing, when the gift of *an obedient ear* prepares the Lord's children for a profitable hearing of his *reproof*.⁵

13. *As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that sent him; for he refresheth the soul of his masters.*

Snow itself would be unseasonable *in the time of harvest*. But the *cold* of snow would be most refreshing to the parched and fainting reapers. "*So is the faithful messenger to them that sent him.*" (Chap. xiii. 17.) How did Eliezer *refresh the soul of his masters*, when 'he returned with a true account and speedy dispatch of the important affair committed to him!'^{*} Judge of Isaac's feelings in the evening walk of meditation--his heart full of the great matter under suspense, when "he lifted up his eyes, and behold the camels were coming," fraught with the desired blessing. (Gen. xxiv. 63, 64.) How was Cornelius *refreshed*, when his *messenger* returned with the joy of his heart, and the answer to his prayers. (Acts, x. 4-6, 25.) Often does the Apostle acknowledge this *refreshment* to his anxious spirit, when burdened with "the care of all the churches."⁶ And may we not ascend to the highest, and with reverence mark even God himself condescending to receive *refreshment* through the agency of his *faithful messengers*? "*We are unto God*"--saith the Apostle--"*a sweet savour of Christ.*" He appears to be overwhelmed with the contemplation, and in prostrate astonishment he cries out--"Who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Cor. ii. 15, 16.) Wondrous condescension! Our Great Master acknowledges *the messengers* of his Churches as "the glory of Christ." (Ib. viii. 23.) And as his crown will he honour them at the great consummating day. "They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever." (Dan. xii.3)

14. *Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift, † (in a gift of falsehood, marg.) is like, clouds, and wind without rain.*

The last proverb described an invaluable blessing. This marks a destructive curse. Suppose a drought, as in the days of Elijah, threatening desolation to the land (1 Kings, xviii. 5), and a thick *cloud*,

¹ 2 Chron. xix. 2-4.

² 1 Cor. v. 1. 2 Cor. ii. 1-3; vii. 11.

³ Ps. cxli. 5. Comp. chap. ix. 8. ⁴ Chap. xxvii. 5, 6. ⁵ Hab. ii. 1-3. Chap. xx. 12; xv. 31.

⁶ 1 Cor. xvi. 17, 18. Phil. ii. 25-30. 1 Thess. iii. 1-7.

* Poole.

† 'Whoso maketh greates boastes, and giveth nothing.'--Bishop COVERDALE.

seemingly big with the fruitful blessing, yet passing over--*the wind without rain*. This is a true picture of *the boaster*; rich in promises, but performing nothing; exciting large expectations, then sinking them in disappointment. Whether it be a vain conceit of his own understanding, or an hypocritical desire to maintain a profession, it is a *boasting over a gift of falsehood*. If it be bad to promise and deceive, it is far worse to promise with an intention to deceive. This was the very character of the Great Deceiver. Did he not put before our unhappy parent a *false gift*--a promise, which could never be realized--"Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil?" (Gen. iii. 3-5.) Nay--did he not with a presumption, that hell itself might almost be ashamed of, *boast himself of his false gift*; when he offered the world to his own Maker, as a temptation to the vilest blasphemy? (Matt.-iv. 8-10.)

How sad to find this character in those, who stand in the place of God! The Church has ever been chastened with *false* teachers; ministering delusion, instead of instruction.¹ And are there none among ourselves, feeding the flock with *false gifts*, seeking to maintain their hollow profession even in the sight of Him, whose frown at the great day will banish them for ever from his presence?² Oh! let those that bear the Lord's message, take heed, that, if they be counted "as deceivers," they may be "yet true;"³ not as those, which corrupt the word of God; but as of sincerity, as of God, in the "sight of God," let them "speak in Christ."⁴

15. *By long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone.*

The wise man had before given a general rule for gentleness. (Chap. xv. 1.) Here he takes an extreme case, and shews its power with the *prince*, whose unrestrained anger may rise to immediate revenge.⁵ Yet submission, *long-forbearing*, has mighty power to persuade. David thus wrought upon Saul's enraged temper.⁶ Often by putting a case before an angry prince at a fitting opportunity, he may be persuaded by "the meekness of wisdom" against his present mind.

But the general principle is most instructive. The *soft* member *breaking the hard bone* may seem to be a paradox. But it is a fine illustration. of the power of gentleness above hardness and irritation. Apply it to those who are set against the truth. Many a stout heart has been won by a *forbearing* yet uncompromising, accommodation to prejudice.⁷ In reproof Jehovah shewed what he could do in "the strong wind and the earthquake." But his effective rebuke was in the

¹ 1 Kings, xxii. 11. Jer. v. 81. 2 Cor. xi. 13-15. Gal. i. 7. 2 Pet. ii. 17-19. Jude, 12-16.

² Matt. vii. 22, 28.

³ 2 Cor. vi. 8.

⁴ Ib. ii. 17; iv. 2.

⁵ Eccles. viii. 3; x. 4. 1 Sam. xxii. 17, 18.

⁶ 1 Sam. xxiv. 8-20; xxvi. 13-25.

⁷ 2 Tim. ii. 24-26. 1 Cor. ix. 29-22.

"still small voice;" without upbraiding; sharp, yet tender. (1 Kings xix. 11-13.) So powerful is the energy of gentleness! Indeed among all the graces that adorn the Christian soul, like so many jewels of various colours and lustres, against the day of her espousals to the Lamb of God, there is not one more brilliant than that of patience.* Its enduring spirit is a manifest fruit of regeneration (Jam. i. 18, 19); a clear exhibition of the mind of Christ (Matt. xi. 29), and the practical resemblance of his own *long-forgbearance* amidst our continued and most aggravated provocations. For, when we have been indulged with the privilege of the beloved disciple--'leaning upon Jesus's breast,' nothing have we felt to be there, but gentleness, tenderness, and love.

16. *Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it.*

Solomon lately had invited us warmly to *eat honey*. (Chap. xxiv. 13.) Here, however, he imposes a restraint. The old proverb applies: 'Too much of a good thing.' *Eat so much as is sufficient*. So far it is sweet. Beyond this it is nauseating. Cultivate in all things the wisdom of sobriety, directing to a thankful, but temperate enjoyment of our earthly blessings." Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving." (1 Tim.. iv. 4.) But as a needful balance to this universal privilege--"Let your moderation be known unto all men."² Satisfy the wants, but mortify the lusts, of the flesh.³ Then the gifts of God become blessings to us, and we glorify him in them, and by them. But the most elevated pleasures of earth become in the excess, distasteful and injurious; fraught with disappointment, when separated from the great end. (Eccles. ii. 10, 11.) Our affections can never safely flow out to any object, unless they are primarily fixed on God. "Then we may be sure not to offend, either in the object or measure. No man can in God love whom he should not; nor immediately love whom he would. This holy respect doth both direct and limit him, and shuts up his delights in the conscience of a lawful fruition.'† In earthly pleasure, however, we can never forget, how slight the boundary line is between the lawful and the forbidden path. Sin and danger begin on the extremity of virtue. For does not the legitimate indulgence of appetite to its utmost point bring us to the brink, and often hurry us to the allowance, of gluttony? Does not the undisciplined flow of earthly affections endanger idolatry? Nay, even spiritual luxury may need self-controul; lest it be excitement without deep principle, which must eventually prove unsubstantial and delusive.

¹ John, xiii. 23; xxi. 20.

² Philip. iv. 5. 1 Cor. vii. 29-31.

³ Rom. xiii. 14. Col. iii. 5. Luke, xxi. 34.

*Bp. HORNE'S exquisite Sermon on Patience.

† Bp. HALL'S Works--Select Thought" II.

But in *eating* the *real honey* of the Gospel there is no danger of excess. Never shall we know satiety in this delight. The increasing desire will be fully satisfied only in eternity. 'O God, let me but taste and see how sweet the Lord Jesus is in all his gracious promises; in all his merciful and real performances. I shall want no more to make me happy. This is not the honey, whereof I am bidden not to eat too much. No, Lord, I can never eat enough of this celestial honey. Here I cannot surfeit: or if I could, this surfeit would be my health.'

17. *Withdraw thy foot from* (Let thy foot be seldom in, marg.) *thy neighbour's house; lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee.*

No code of laws enters, as the Bible does, into minute regulations for the courtesies of life. Yet surely we do not mar the sanctity of religion, by spreading it over the face of human society. Daily life is evangelized by the pervading influence of its wholesome principles. This rule illustrates one of our own proverbs, which has lost nothing of its significance by traditionary usage. 'Familiarity breeds contempt.' This maxim was however never intended to give a chill to the flow of neighbourly love, or to restrain its practical exercise. It only suggests, that kindly intercourse cannot be maintained without a considerate feeling. An ordinary acquaintance would give just umbrage in claiming the free and unrestrained intercourse of intimate friendship. And the intruder would probably receive a plain intimation, that he was an unwelcome guest. To *withdraw the foot* is an useful rule to prevent so mortifying a result. "*Make thy foot precious*"† *to thy neighbour*, by not giving it too often. It is far safer to err on the side of reserve, than to incur contempt by the opposite mistake.‡

Nay--even the closer band of friendship requires its measure of prudent restraint. It is worth all our care to preserve this invaluable blessing from interruption. It is the sweet of life. And yet in this *honey* (Verse 16) there may be a surfeit. Without *mutual* respect it may nauseate. Unseasonable interruption to our friend's time; frequent visits without call or object;§ interference with his necessary engagements, or family comforts; inconvenient tax of expense--perseverance in this course might produce *weariness*, if not disgust, or even *hatred*.

Blessed be God! There is no need of this caution and reserve in our approach unto him. Once acquainted with the way of access, there is no wall of separation. Our earthly friend may be pressed too far.

* Bp. HALL'S *Works--Soliloquies*, liv.

† Heb. See Holden. Comp. 1 Sam. iii. 1--precious in both cases, because rare.

‡ Camp. Eccles. xxi. 22. Livy observes, that 'the perfection of behaviour is for a man to retain his own dignity, without intruding on the liberty of another.'

§ See a valuable paper, *On the Robbery of Time*, in "The Idler." Vol. I. No. 14.

Kindness may be worn out by frequent use. But never can we come to our heavenly Friend unseasonably. Never is *he weary* of our importunity.¹ His gates are always open; "blessed are they that are watching and waiting there." (Chap. viii. 34.) The more frequent the visits, the more welcome, and the more fruitful. What with man would be intrusion, with God is confidence. Earnestly does he invite to his closest and most endearing fellowship. (Cant. v. 1.) And does his child presume upon this most gracious privilege? Far from it. While he has the "boldness of access;"² he seeks for "grace, whereby he may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." (Heb. xii. 28.)

18. *A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow.*

False witness is universally condemned. But where, save in the word of God, are its true character and deep aggravation of guilt adequately set forth? What a picture is here of cruelty and malice--even of intentional murder! Three murderous instruments are before us, identifying the sixth and ninth commandments. The tongue, intended as "a tree of life," becomes a weapon of death.³ Who can bear the sin involved in this fearful perversion? Often does the open perjury, *as a sword and sharp arrow*, pierce the fountain of life.⁴ And little better are those calumnies and unkind insinuations--all breaches of charity--uttered so freely in common conversation. Consider, ye that deal in such conversation, whether you could think of treating the objects of your defamatory discourse, as Jael did Sisera (Judg. iv. 21), or as Joab did Abner. (2 Sam. iii. 27.) Would you shrink with horror at the thought of beating out your neighbour's brains with an hammer, or of piercing his bowels with *a sword, or a sharp arrow*? Why then do you indulge in the like barbarity; destroying as far as you can that reputation, which is dear to men as their life, and wounding all their best interests, by mangling their character? Other injuries a man may wear away or outlive. But defamation, notwithstanding all retrieving circumstances to heal the wound, too often leaves a scar to the dying day.

Truly affecting is it to think of the multitude of these *mauls, swords, and sharp arrows* even in the Church of God. It is not "setting the, battle in array against the Philistines, army against army" (1 Sam. xvii. 21), but brother against brother. The Shibboleth of a party, not the standard of the cross, is the watchword for the destructive conflict. (Judg. xii. 6.) "How long! Lord! how long?"

¹ Luke, xi. 5-9; xviii. 1.

² Eph. iii. 12. Heb. iv. 16; x. 19, 20.

³ Chap. xv. 4, with xii. 18. Jer. ix. 3, 8.

⁴ Gen. xxxix. 14-20. 1 Kings, xxi. 10-13. Matt. xxvi. 60-66. Acts, vi. 13, 14.

* Lawson *in loco*. See God's estimate and threatening. Ps. 1. 19-21. Ezek. xxii. 5.

19. *Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint.*

The broken tooth and disjointed foot are not only useless for their respective offices, but a source of pain and uneasiness. So is *an unfaithful man in time of trouble*. "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born to adversity." (Chap. xvii. 17.) But many have the name only. Very friendly are they, when they are not needed; when we are dispensing, not receiving, our gifts; when there is no cost to pay. But in *the time of trouble*, "a faithful man who can find?" (Chap. xx. 6.) Keenly did Job feel this to be a sinking *confidence in his time of trouble*. (Job, vi. 14-17.) David was sorely tried by this affliction (Ps. lv. 12-14), even at the very last stage of life. (1 Kings, i. 19, 25.) The brethren came out to meet the Apostle at Appii Forum. Yet he records a time, when their support would have been specially cheering--"At my first answer no man stood by me, but all men forsook me."¹ Need we wonder at this appointed cross? His Master had endured it before him; and "it is enough for the servant, that he be as his lord."²

The world abounds with instances of this disappointment. Micah's Levite ungratefully repaid the trust reposed in him.³ Mephibosheth's trust in Ziba;⁴--and Israel's dependence upon an arm of flesh; shewed the broken reed, not the staff of support.* Truly, when has the world ever answered its fair promises? When has it ever given a faithful *confidence in time of trouble*? When has it failed to make the soul "ashamed of its hope?" A merciful correction to the child of God, when he turns aside from his true *confidence* to vain dependences.

But whoever be *unfaithful*, God is true. Who ever trusted in him, and was confounded? Who has ever built upon his sure foundation, and not witnessed its unshaken security? (Isa. xxviii. 16.) Though he has pledged himself never to forsake his servants (Heb. xiii. 5); yet specially--"I will be with him *in trouble*--a very present help in time of trouble."⁵

20. *As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart.*

What could be more inhuman than *taking away* a poor man's garment, or the coverlid of his bed, *in cold weather*? Such an act of cruelty was forbidden by the God of the poor.⁶ Again--what could be more unfitting than pouring *vinegar upon nitre*; which, instead of

¹ Acts, xxviii. 15, with 2 Tim. iv. 16.

² Matt. xxvi. 56, with x. 24, 25.

³ Judg. xvii. 7-12; xviii. 20-24.

⁴ 2 Sam. xvi. 1-4; xix. 24-28.

⁵ Ps. xci. 15; xlvi. 1. Jer. xvii. 5-8.

⁶ Deut. xxiv. 12, 17. Job, xxiv. 7-10. Isa. lviii. 7.

* See also Assyria. 2 Chron. xxviii. 20, 21. Hos. v. 13. Egypt, Isa. xxx. 1-3; xxxi. 1-8. Jer. xxxvi. 5-7. Ezek. xxix. 6, 7.

being serviceable, would only dissolve it with violent effervescence?*

Not less unseasonable would be the merriment of *singing songs to an heavy heart*. (Eccles. iii. 4.) "Give wine"--is the inspired rule--"unto them that be of *heavy hearts*."¹ But however great be the charms of music,² they are ill suited to soothe the pangs of sorrow.³ A constrained song was a keen edge of the Babylonish affliction.⁴ And where no unkindness is intended, inconsiderate levity, or even excessive cheerfulness, is as "a sword in the bones." The tenderness, that shews a brother's tears; that knows how to "weep with them that weep,"⁵ as members of the same body;⁶ and directs the mourner to the mourner's friend and God--this is Christian sympathy--a precious balm for the broken heart. The outward expression of this sympathy may not be always needful. But oh! let its spirit be deeply cherished, specially by Christians of a buoyant or frigid temperament; most of all by the minister of Christ, that he may take his chair by the mourner's side, and "comfort him with the same comfort, wherewith he himself is comforted of God." (2 Cor. i. 4-6.) Much may be done to correct a constitutional deficiency. Redundancy of feeling, no less than coldness, needs self-controul. But never let us forget, that our divine Saviour for this end "took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses," that "he might be touched with the feeling of them."⁷ Yes--"he knoweth our frame;"⁸ and his work is not to *take away the garment* from his child *in the cold weather*, but to cherish him with all the tenderness of his own bosom.⁹ Instead of unsuitably *pouring vinegar upon nitre*; like the good Samaritan, he "pours in his oil and wine for the healing of the wound."¹⁰

21. *If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: 22. For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee.*

In what heathen code of morals shall we find this perfection of love? Every system concedes largely to selfishness. None reach beyond "loving those that love us," of which the true Lawgiver justly asks, "What reward have ye?" (Matt. v. 46, 47.) Nay--the corrupt Jewish teachers could not rise to this sublime standard. "They did not, it seems, perceive anything to be disapproved in hatred, more than in good will. And, according to their system of morals, "our enemy" was the proper natural object of one of these passions, as "our neigh-

¹ Chap. xxxi. 6. Ps. civ. 15.

³ Job, xxx. 31. Dan. vi. 18. Comp. Eccles. x.x.ii. 6.

⁵ Rom. xii. 15. Comp. Job, ii. 11-13.

⁷ Matt. viii. 17. Heb. iv.15.

⁹ Isa. xl. 11. 10 Ib. lxi. 2, 8, with Luke, x. 84.

² 1 Sam. xvi. 23. 2 Kings, iii. 15

⁴ Ps. cx.xxvii. 1-4.

⁷ 1 Cor. xii. 26. Heb. xiii. 3.

⁸ Ps. ciii.14.

* The nitre of Scripture is not that salt that commonly goes by the name, but a soda or mineral alkali (the Roman *natrum*) which strongly ferments with all acids. Dr. Blayney remarks on Jer. ii. 22 (the only other example of the word), 'In many parts of Asia it is called soap-earth, because it is dissolved in water, and used like soap in washing.'

bour" was of the other.* They could not come up to the law: and therefore, perverting the rule of judicial, to authorize private, vengeance,¹ they brought the law down to their own level.

The agreement between the Old and New Testament codes† is most complete. Both were dictated by the same Spirit. Each stamps the other with divine authority. "The law of love is not expounded more spiritually in any single precept either of Christ or his Apostles, than in this exhortation.‡ We need not therefore disparage one system, in order to exalt the other. "The new commandment is that which we had from the beginning;" old in its authority; "new" only, as enforced by a new principle and example.² To suppose that the gospel stretches beyond the measure of the law, would imply, either that the law demanded too little, or the Gospel too much. Neither supposition honours the law, as the unchangeable transcript of the divine perfections. There may be no open breach of the law, while yet the heart revolts from its high standard. Circumstances may hinder open retaliation. Our enemy may be out of our reach, or may be too great to offend with impunity. But the grudge remains.³ There would be a pleasure at his misfortune.⁴ We think of him only in connection with our injuries. The spark may be confined for years, and on some favourable opportunity burst out into a murderous flame. (2 Sam. xiii. 23, 28.) How many haltings and shiftings are there at best, before we fully embrace the obligation! How much of a retorting spirit, or measuring our conduct towards our enemy by his towards us! And if on any point we have constrained our selfish hearts to return good for evil, what ministering to self-complacency, or self-righteousness!

We are not bound to trust our enemies; but we are bound to forgive them. And yet too often our "love" to them is only ceasing to quarrel with them. If we put off revenge, as inconsistent with our Christian name; yet do we "put on, as the elect of God, bowels of mercies--forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any?" (Col. iii. 12, 13.) 'Love is of too substantial a nature to be made up of mere negatives; and withal too operative, to terminate in bare desires.'§ We may profess our good-will towards *our enemy*, that we forgive and pray for him from our heart. But unless we are ready with the practical exercise of sympathy--*feeding him when he is hungry, and giving him to drink*, when thirsty--we are only the victims of our

¹ Matt. v. 43. Deut. vii. 1, 2; xxiii. 6; xxv. 17-19.

² John, xiii. 34. 1 John, ii. 7, 8. 2 John, 5.

³ Lev. xix. 18. Jam. v. 9.

⁴ Chap. xxiv. 17, 18.

* Bp. BUTLER'S *Sermons at the Rolls*. Ser. VIII.

† Comp. Rom. xii. 20, 21, with text. Exod. xxiii. 4, 5, with Matt. v. 44. Our church has not neglected to imbue her worshippers with this blessed spirit. See the Litany and Collect for St. Stephen's day.

‡ Scott *in loco*.

§ SOUTH'S *Sermon on Matt. v. 44*.

own self-delusion. 'O noble revenge of Elisha'--exclaims Bishop Hall, 'to feast his persecutors! To provide a table for those, who had provided a grave for him! No revenge but this, is heroical, and fit for Christian imitation.* To *feed our hungry enemy* with the tenderness of a nurse, who breaks the portion into morsels for her infant's nourishment--What a splendour does nature's opposition give to this victory of grace!

No man ever conquered his enemy's heart by revenge; many by love. Was it not thus, that the Almighty Saviour dissolved the hardness of our unyielding hearts? Let the effort be tried. Surround the intractable metal beneath and above; not only putting it over the fire, but *heaping coals of fire upon it*. Few hearts are so obdurate, as not to melt under the mighty energy of patient, self-denying, burning love. (1 Sam. xxiv. 16-20; xxvi. 25.) Or even should it be dross, that resists the vehement flame, all will not be lost. If thine enemy will not recompence thee for all the good done to him, concern not thyself with that. *The Lord shall reward thee*. The God of love will honour his own image on his own children. (Matt. v. 44,45.) David in this confidence restrained the rising vengeance in his zealous servants;¹ and in similar forbearance found his "prayer for his enemy's good returned into his own bosom."² We are directed to return "blessing for railing, knowing that hereunto are we called, that we should inherit a blessing." (1 Pet. iii. 9.) Our chief aim therefore must be to gain the victory of meekness and love. The perverseness of our enemies will thus become a great advantage to us. We shall be indebted to them for some measure of conformity to our Divine Master.

To dispute the reasonableness of the precept is to say, that 'man is the proper object of good-will, whatever his faults are, when they respect others; but not when they respect myself. I am sure,' (adds Bishop Butler-probing this principle to the bottom) 'there is nothing in it unreasonable. It is indeed no more, than that we should not indulge a passion, which, if generally indulged, would propagate itself, so as almost to lay waste the world.'⁺

But most reasonable as this precept is, it is infinitely removed from man's native power. The rules, no less than the doctrines, of God, are "foolishness to him." (1 Cor. ii. 14.) Let those, who look to "enter into life be keeping the commandments," begin with this. They would soon see, that they might as soon turn the sun backward; that they could as readily cut "off a right hand," as reach it out *to feed an enemy* in distress. Such an exhibition of love would be in their eyes an

¹ 2 Sam. xvi. 9-12. Ps. vii. 4.

² Ps. xxxv. 13. Comp. Matt. x 13.

*Contemplations, Book xix. Cont. 2, on 2 Kings, vi. 22, 23 See another equally noble example in the most degenerate times of Judah. 2 Chron. xxviii. 12-15.

| **Ywnize**. LXX. Rom. xii. 20. Comp. Sehlesner.

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ideal perfection; or at least, like an exquisite piece of workmanship, which every one admires, but no one attempts to imitate.

Yet is it really impracticable? So the world counts it. So my own corrupt heart finds it. But "I can do all things"--this then among the rest--"through Christ which strengtheneth me." (Philip. iv. 13.) It shall then be done willingly, joyfully. My enemy has no claim upon my life; yet he that bids me love him, claims and deserves my full obedience. (John, xiv. 15.) We are the disciples of him, who died for his enemies.* Did we but drink more largely into his spirit, this impracticable precept would be not our task or our cross, but our delight and indulgence.

23. *The north wind driveth away rain: so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue.* (The north wind bringeth forth rain: so doth a backbiting tongue an angry countenance, marg. †)

Who should tolerate *the backbiter*? He is a pest in society;¹ in the circle of friendship;² in the church of God.³ Neither his plausible garb, nor the good company who give him the hearing, can hide his real character. If the *north wind driveth away the rain*, let an angry countenance frown him from our presence. *If it brings the rain*, let the very sight of him bring a rebuke of holy indignation. This is to "be angry, and not sin."[‡] Indeed not to be angry here, would be to sin. Holy anger is a property in God.⁴ It was manifested in the humanity of Jesus.⁵ When God's name was dishonoured, "the meekest man upon earth waxed hot"⁶ in anger, even while his heart was melting in love to the rebels. (Exod. xxxii. 30-32.) And should not we feel this, when the *backbiting tongue* breaks his law of love, dear to him as his own Godhead? And yet rare indeed is the exception--if alas!--even with Christians, when the faults of others, real or imagined, do not occupy the conversation: or at least, when some lowering of the absent, or some ridicule of their infirmities, is not admitted!

This *tongue* wounds four at one stroke--*the backbiter* himself, the object of his attack, the hearer, and the name of God. All involves the Christian professor in the fearful guilt of "offending the little ones."

¹ Chap. xxvi. 20.

² Chap. xvi. 28.

³ 2 Cor. xii. 20.

⁴ Deut. ix. 8. Ps. vii. 11. Nah. i. 2. ⁵ Mark, iii. 5; viii. 33.

⁶ Exod. xxxii. 19 with Num. xii. 3

* Bishop Wilson (Sodor and Man.) Rom. v. 10. Comp. Luke, xxiii. 34. Was not this his own obedience to his own law? Matt. v. 44.

† Many valuable critics, after the LXX, prefer the marginal to the received reading. The ordinary meaning of the Hebrew word is to produce or bring forth, chap. viii. 24. And yet Comp. Job, xxxvii. 22. Homer also speaks of the north wind bringing fine weather.--Il. 0. 170. The meaning however is the same with either rendering.

‡ Eph iv. 26. 'You know,' said Philip Henry--'what an angry countenance doth; and we may sometimes we a reproof by our looks, when we have not opportunity of giving it otherwise. See his Life.

(Matt. xviii. 6.) For how can the weak and inexperienced but be stumbled at so inconsistent an exhibition of the gospel of love? But if he be rather welcomed than repelled, is not the willing listener thus partaker of his sin? Flee this deadly pest. Keep thine ears, as well as thy mouth, from the poison. Let thine *angry countenance drive away* either the slander from him, or the slanderer from thee. Where remonstrance cannot be given, a marked displeasure of countenance is often an effective rebuke to the shameless offender.*

24. *It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house.*

This proverb has been given before. (Chap. xxi. 9.) Scriptural repetitions shew not want of matter, but the deep importance of the matter laid out. Such is the vexation connected with this evil, that the most uncomfortable dwelling, where the soul might retire for communion with God, would be a grateful alternative.

This Book presents a graphical picture of conjugal happiness, where "the wife is as the loving hind and the pleasant roe"--her husband's most satisfying delight. (Chap. v. 18, 19.) Here is a vivid contrast of misery, from which the *wide house* provides no refuge, no rest.

The relative position of the parties in the sacred ordinance is wisely appointed. Equality would only have provoked contention for superiority. The divine appointment preserves peace without degradation.¹ If "man is the head of the woman," "the woman is the glory of the man"²--the diadem in his domestic circle,³ and, upon her slightly lowered level; still his support, solace, and "help-meet." (Gen. ii. 18.) *The brawling woman*, revolting against her Maker's rule of subjection, is no less a tormentor to herself than to her husband.

Let the Christian professor beware of trifling with the law of this ordinance--"Only in the Lord." (1 Cor. vii. 39.) If he comes into the world, instead of "coming out;" if, instead of "being separate," he unites himself in the closest bond; if, when forbidden to "touch the unclean thing," he makes himself "one flesh" with it,⁴ let him not wonder, if his God "curse his blessing,"⁵ and leave him to choose for

¹ Gen. iii. 16. 1 Tim. ii. 11-14.

² 1 Cor. xi. 3-7.

³ Chap. xxxi. 28.

⁴ 2 Cor. vi. 14-17, with Eph. v. 31.

⁵ Mal. ii. 2.

* Augustine's biographer mentions of him, that these two lines were written in his dining-room--

'Quisquis amat dictis absentum rodere vitam,
Hanc mensam vetitam noverit esse sibi.'

It is added that he said to a bishop, indulging this habit at his table, 'Either I will blot out these verses on the wall, or begone from my table.' Bishop Burnet, in his *Essay on Queen Mary*, mentions her effectual rebuke of calumny. If any indulged in her presence, she would ask, if they had read Archbishop Tillotson's *Sermon on Evil Speaking*, or give them other pointed reproof.--See the fine description, Ecclus. xxvii. 13-20.

himself an house of contention, unvisited with one ray of heavenly sunshine. Young man! ponder the deep responsibility of the marriage choice. Let it be manifestly the Lord's choice for thee, not thine for thyself. Yea--let him be thy first choice, and he will order the rest. (Matt. vi. 33.) Watch and distrust thine own will. Consult the "lamp and light of thy path." (Ps. cxix. 105.) Mark the Providence of thy God;¹ and "his blessing, that maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow with it," will sanctify his own gift.²

Christian women! Think not these Proverbs unworthy your attention. Be it so, that you answer not to the revolting picture. But surely the repeated exhibition strongly inculcates the cultivation of the opposite graces, the absence of which clouds the female character in painful deformity.³

25. *As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from afar country.*

What were the cold waters to Hagar and her child in the wilderness;⁴ to Israel at Rephidim;⁵ to Samson at Lehi!* Such is the cordial of *good news from afar country*. Solomon had before spoken of the "refreshment pf the messenger" (Verse 13); here of the message. This Proverb, like many others, was probably familiar to his own experience. The return of his fleets sent to *a far country* for precious merchandize were doubtless (like our own merchant ships) welcomed with no common delight. (1 Kings, ix. 26-28.) The exile from his country, or one that has interests in a foreign land--near and dear relatives, from whom the separation has been long--will fully realize this lively illustration. Had Joseph's brethren brought to their sorrowing father as many pieces of gold as grains of corn, it would have been nothing to the *good news from a far country*--"Joseph is yet alive."⁶ Distant intelligence is naturally more cheering, than tidings in themselves equally interesting, nearer home. The long interval of these tidings; the lengthened separation from the beloved object; the anxiety necessarily excited by want of intercourse; the uncertainty of his welfare and prospects--all combine to make these *cold waters* specially refreshing to *the thirsty soul*. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick; but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life."⁷

Reader! if thy light vain heart has ever leaped within thee at the news of some earthly advantage, hast thou heard and welcomed the *good news from the far country*? Dost thou know thy need, thy danger of perishing? Then what refreshment can compare with the "good

¹ Gen. xxiv. 12-60. Ruth, iii. 18.

² Chap. xix. 14; x. 22.

³ 1 Tim. ii. 9, 10. 1 Pet. iii. 1-6.

⁴ Gen. xxi. 16-19.

⁵ Exod. xvii. 1-6. Comp. Num. xx. 11.

⁶ Gen. xlv. 25-28. Comp. xliii. 27-30.

⁷ Chap. xiii. 12. Comp. xv. 30. Contrast Neh. i. 2-4.

* Judg. xv. 18, 19. See Virgil's beautiful image, *Eclog.* v. 46-48.

tidings of great joy" brought to thee from heaven--"Unto you is born a Saviour?" (Luke, ii. 10, 11.) Yet in vain would be these joyous tidings, unless faith could hear their repeated proclamation as from the Seraph's lips, or from the Saviour's cross. But such influence do they bring to the opened heart, as melts away the mass of sin in the glowing splendour of this grand work of God--Yes--sinner--mountains of gold could never have purchased the blessing now brought to thine ears, yea--to the door of thine heart, "without money and without price." (Isa. lv. 1.) Does not then thine heart spring in tile song of praise--"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him, that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace!" (Ib. lii. 7.) Most grateful also are the messengers' tidings from *a far country*, of the welcome reception of their message.¹ The angelic harps strike up the song.² Even the bosom of God is filled with adorable joy!³

26. *A righteous man falling down before the wicked is as a troubled fountain, and a corrupt spring.*

Eastern fountains and springs (where the rains are only periodical, and at long intervals) are of no common price.⁴ The injury of *corrupting* them is proportionate.⁵ The well is therefore a blessing or a curse, according to the purity or impurity of the waters. A *righteous man* in his proper character is "a well of life, a blessing in the midst of the land."⁶ But if *he fall down before the wicked* by his inconsistent profession,* the blessing becomes a curse, *the fountain is troubled, and the spring corrupt*. What a degradation was it to Abraham to *fall down* under the rebuke of an heathen king;⁷ to Peter, to yield to a servant-maid in denying his Lord!⁸ How did David's sin *trouble the fountain*, both to his family⁹ and his people!¹⁰ How did the idolatry of his wise son *corrupt the spring* through successive generations!¹¹

When a minister of Christ apostatizes from the faith¹² (and mournfully frequent have been such spectacles) or compromises his principles from the fear of man,¹³ *the springs and fountains* of truth are fearfully corrupted. When a servant of God, of standing and influence, crouches and *falls down under the wicked*,† the transparency of his profession is grievously tarnished. Satan thus makes more effective use of God's people than of his own. The gross wickedness of the ungodly passes

¹ Acts, xv. 3. Comp. xi. 18, 23. ² Luke, xv. 7, 10.

³ Ib. verses 20-24.

⁴ Gen. xxvi. 18-22. Deut. viii. 7. Josh. xv. 18, 19.

⁵ See Ezek. xxxii. 2; xxxiv. 18.

⁶ Chap. x. 11. Gen. xii. 3.

⁷ Gen. xii. 18-20. Comp. xx. 10; xxvi. 10.

⁸ Matt. xxvi. 69-72.

⁹ 2 Sam. xi. 2, with xiii. 11-14; xvi. 22.

¹⁰ Ib. xii. 14.

¹¹ 1 Kings, xi. 1-8. 2 Kings, xxiii. 13.

¹² Philem. 24, with 2 Tim. iv. 10. 13 Gal. ii. 11-14.

* *Falling down* is to be taken in a moral sense (making a slip). Parkhurst.

† 2 Kings, xviii. 5, 6, with 13-16. Contrast with these humbling instances of infirmity the great Confessor, who would not *fall down before* false Apostles--not even before a true Apostle.--Gal. ii. 4, 5, 11.

in silence. But he makes the neighbourhood ring with the failings of Christian professors. Godly consistency so grates upon the conscience of the world, that at any breach of it they clap their hands with Satanic joy; see the Lord "wounded in the house of his friends." (Zech. xiii. 6.) Principles and practices are sanctioned, that wound our Divine Master. The consciences of the ungodly are lulled. "The lame," instead of being "healed," are "turned out of the way." (Heb. xii. 13.) Thus 'the scandalous falls of good men are like a bag of poison cast by Satan into the *spring*, from whence the whole town is supplied with water'.*

Nor let this be considered as the responsibility only of eminent Christians. All are by profession "the salt of the earth, and the light of the world." Let all therefore see to it, that "the salt does not lose its savour," and that the candlestick gives its clear light. (Matt. v. 13-16.) None of us stand--or act alone. "None of us"--be it well pondered--"liveth unto himself." (Rom. xiv. 7.) The conduct of each has its measure of influence on the body. Each is the centre of a circle more or less extended. Each is either a pure *spring*, or a *troubled fountain*. Lord! "cast the salt into the *spring* of the waters, that they may be healed." (2 Kings, ii. 21, 22.)

27. It is not good to eat much honey; so for men to search their own glory is not glory.

Honey is good; but in moderation. (Chap. xxiv. 13.) *It is not good to eat much honey.* (Verse 16.) A man's own name and reputation is honey to him. Let him carefully preserve it from "the dead fly that spoils it."¹ The honour of God is connected with the honourable profession of his people. But this carefulness is a virtue on the brink of vice; a duty on the borders of imminent danger. To be puffed up by our own endowments, to listen to our praise; to force ourselves upon public attention,² thus *to search out our own glory*,³ *is not glory*. As unseemly is it to seek *our own glory*, as to ascribe to ourselves our own being.

Yet is there no danger of seeking the fame, rather than the substance of godliness, a well-known name in the Church, rather than an unknown name in the book of life? Few ministers, but have been severely exercised here; identifying their usefulness with their honour; cherishing the desire for public approbation, rather than for unnoticed

¹ Phil. iv. 8, with Eccles. x. 1.

² Chap. xx. 6; xxvii. 2.

³ Gen xi. 4; 2 Kings, x. 16. Dan. iv. 30.

* FLAVEL'S Method of Grace. Sermon XXXV.

† Critics seem much perplexed by the difficulty of supplying a negative in the last clause. Yet Professor Lee observes (Heb. Gram. 242: 13), 'The most frequent ellipsis is of the negatives, e. g. Ps. ix. 19. Deut. xxxiii. 6. 1 Sam. ii. 3. Ps. xlv. 17. Prov. xxv. 27; xxx. 3, &c.'

fruitfulness; dreading to be counted upon an ordinary level, as "vessels of wood and earth," rather than of, "gold and silver." (2 Tim. ii. 20.) Oh! it is a mighty victory over self, to trample man's judgment under foot, and eye only God's approval. Nothing is right except it be wrought in the true spirit of the gospel; "doing nothing in vain-glory, but in lowliness of mind each esteeming others better than himself."¹ The great apostle spoke of matters of glorying only by compulsion.* A vain-glorious spirit cankers many a plausible profession. (John, v. 44; xii. 43.). Did we turn from the flattering glass of self-love to the pure and faithful mirror of the law, the inconceivable deformities opening to view would constrain us to take the lowest place among the most unworthy. Most wholesome is the recollection—"That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." (Luke, xvi. 15.)

28. He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.

A former proverb declared "him that had rule over his spirit" to be a mighty conqueror. (Chap. xvi. 32.) And certainly the noblest conquests are gained or lost over ourselves. *He that hath no rule over his own spirit* is an easy prey to the invader. Any one may irritate and torment him. (Esth. iii. 5, 6; v. 13.) He yields himself to the first assault of his ungoverned passions, offering no resistance; *like a city broken down and without walls*, the object of contempt. (Neh. i. 3; ii. 17.) Having no discipline over himself, temptation becomes the occasion of sin, and hurries him on to fearful lengths that he had not contemplated. The first outbreak of anger tends to murder.² Unwatchfulness over lust plunges into adultery.³ The mightiest natural strength is utter feebleness in the great conflict.⁴ How should such an object excite our tenderest compassion!

But there are many cases of this moral weakness, less shameful, and yet scarcely less injurious to the soul. Every outbreaking of irritation, every spark of pride kindling in the heart, before it ever spews itself in the countenance or on the tongue, must be attacked, and determinately resisted. It is the beginning of a breach in *the walls of the city*. Without instant attention, it will widen to the ruin of the whole. (Comp. chap., xvii. 14.) Man may talk of self-control, as if the reins were in his own hand. But he who has been "born of the Spirit," and taught "to know the plague of his own heart," is made to feel, that effective self-control is divine grace, not his own native power. What then is to be done? On the first assault fortify *the walls* by

¹ Philip. ii. 3. Gal. v. 26. ² Gen. iv. 5-8. Comp. 1 Sam. xx. 30-33; xxv. 33. Dan. iii. 13, 19.

³ 2 Sam. xi. 2-4.

⁴ Judg. xvi. 1-19.

* 2 Cor. xii. 1-11. See Lyttleton on *Conversion of St. Paul*.

prayer. Trust not to the strength of the citadel. Have not repeated defeats taught us the need of calling in better strength than our own? How could we enter into the conflict, much less hold on the fight, but for the promise—"Sin shall not have dominion over us?" (Rom. vi. 14.) Oh! for simple—cleaving faith, to draw out from this mighty source, energy, continual watchfulness, perseverance, triumphant victory!

CHAPTER XXVI.

1. As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honour is not seemly for a fool.

THE richest blessings lose their value when unsuitably bestowed. Snow is the beauteous wintry covering of the earth;¹ preserving the seed from the killing cold.² But *in summer*, it is out of season. *Rain* in its season is a fruitful blessing.³ But *in harvest* it is an unsuitable interruption to the reaper's work, and often a public calamity. (1 Sam. xii. 17, 18.) Just so, *honour*, unsuitably bestowed on *a fool*, is *not seemly for him*. 'He neither deserves it, nor knows how to use it.'* Honour bestowed on Joseph and Daniel, suitably, to their wisdom, was seemly to themselves, and a blessing to the land.⁴ But when *a fool*, sometimes a scoffer at religion, is promoted to a public station, how ungracefully does his *honour* sit upon him? In Haman it was only the display of his pride and vain glory, the occasion of his more public disgrace.

Learn then to adorn our profession with consistency. Seek that heavenly wisdom, which will make us worthy of any honour that may be appointed for us. "He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much." (Luke, xvi. 10.)

2. As the bird by wandering: as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come.

Groundless fears are real evils, and often press heavily upon enfeebled minds. A curse flies out of an angry mouth undeserved, unprovoked. 'What if it should curse to pass?' But we need no more fear *the causeless curse*, than *the birds wandering* over our heads. *The swallow flying* up and down never lights upon us; *so the curse causeless shall not come* to hurt us. Powerless was Moab's curse, though attempted to be strengthened with the divination of the wicked pro-

¹ Job, xxxvii. 6.

² Isa. lv. 10.

³ Ib. Job, xxxviii. 26, 27. Ps. lxxv. 9-13; civ. 13, 14. Jam. v. 7.

⁴ Gen. xli. 38-40. Dan. vi. 1-3.

* Poole. Chap. mix. 10; xxx. 21, 22. Eccles. x. 5-7. Comp. Ps. xii. 8.

phet.¹ Goliath's curse against David was scattered to the winds.² What was David the worse for Shimei's curse;³ or Jeremiah for the curse of his persecutors?⁴ Under this harmless shower of stones we turn from men to God, and are at peace. "Let them curse; but bless thou; when they arise, let them be ashamed; but let thy servant rejoice." (Ps. cix. 28.)

But if the *curse* be not *causeless*, it *will come*. Jotham's righteous curse came upon Abimelech and the men of Schechem. (Judg. ix. 56, 57.) Elisha's curse fearfully came to the young mockers of Bethel. (2 Kings, ii. 24.) The curse abides on Jericho from generation to generation!* And—Reader—if thou be an unconverted, unbelieving sinner, without love to thy Saviour, there is *a curse* for thee, not *causeless*, justly deserved; and come it must, *come it will*.⁵ Yea—has it not already come from thy Maker and thy God;⁶ not an impotent threat of evil, but the solemn foreboding of everlasting wrath centering in thy heart? Oh! flee from it while time is given; while the refuge is open to thee!⁷ If thou be under cover, *it shall not come*.⁸ Thou shalt rejoice in "thy redemption from it,"⁹ in thy complete security. (Chap. i. 33.)

3. *A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back,*

This proverb inverts our ideas. We should have given *the bridle for the horse, and the whip for the ass*.† But the Eastern asses are a very superior race, both in beauty and spirit, a valuable property to their owners.¹⁰ The bridle is necessary to curb and to guide them; while the horse, perhaps badly broken in, may need *a whip*; if dull, to accelerate his speed; if fiery, to correct his temper.‡ Every creature subdued for the service of man needs his appropriate discipline. The Lord "guides his children with his eye." But let them cultivate a pliable spirit; "not as the horse and the mule, whose mouth must be held in with bit and *bridle*." (Ps. xxxii. 8, 9.) *The fool* neither hears the voice, nor sees the directing eye. He will be ruled neither by reason nor persuasion. *A rod therefore is for the fool's back*.¹¹ Pharaoh provoked this severe chastisement at the hands of God;¹² the men of

¹ Numb. xxii, 4-6; xxiii. 8. Deut. xxiii. 4, 5.

² 1 Sam. xvii. 43.

³ 2 Sam. xvi. 12.

⁴ Jer. xv. 10.

⁵ Deut. xxviii. 15; xxix. 19, 20. 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

⁶ Chap. iii. 33. Zech. v. 3, 4.

⁷ Gen. xix. 17.

⁸ Rom. viii. 1.

⁹ Gal. iii. 10, 13.

¹⁰ Judg. x 3, 4; xii. 13, 14. 2 Sam. xvii. 23; xix. 26.

¹¹ Chap. x. 13; xix. 29.

¹² Exod. x. 3.

* Josh. vi. 26. 1 Kings, xvi. 34 The city of Palms is described by a recent traveller, as an assemblage of huts, 'so low, that at night one might almost ride over them without being aware of the fact.'—*Three Weeks in Palestine*, p. 89. Such is the unchangeable truth of God!

† Michaelis was so positive on this point, that he altered his version accordingly, contrary to the authority of all versions and MSS.

‡ PAXTON'S. *Natural History of Scripture*, p. 221, and Parkhurst.

Succoth and Penue! at Gideon's hands.¹ Many such *fools* are in the Church, self-willed, full of conceit. They need *the rod*, and they have it.² Discipline is the most probing test. What is its fruit? In the child submission and tenderness;³ in *the fool* (except it beat out his folly,⁴ which is too often a desperate case⁵) hardness and rebellion.⁶ Sad indeed is it, that the child sometimes needs the rod intended *for the fool's back*. Yet never does his loving Father use it, till gentle means have been tried in vain. Oh my God! use thine own wise means, to save me from my own waywardness, folly, and ruin.

4. *Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him.* 5. *Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.*

We are forbidden, and yet commanded, to *answer a fool*. One rule decides—Answer him not—the other—*Answer him*. The reason however attached to each rule explains the apparent contradiction.* Both together are a wise directory for the treatment of the fool, according to the difference of character, time, or circumstances. Suppose a free-thinker or scoffer at religion, shewing the desperate "*folly* of his heart by making a mock at sin" (Chap. xiv. 9), by witty and profane jestings, or specious arguments against the word or ways of God. Generally speaking, it would be better to follow Hezekiah's command concerning Rabshakeh's blasphemy—"Answer him not."⁷ Jeremiah thus turned away in silence from the folly of the false prophets. (Jer. xxviii. 11.) If however we are constrained to reply—*Answer him not according to his folly*; not in his own foolish manner; "not rendering railing for railing." (1 Pet. iii. 9.) Moses offended here. He *answered* the rebels *according to their folly*—passion for passion, and thus *he became like unto them*.⁸ David's answer to Nabal was in the same humiliating spirit.⁹ The answerer in this case *is like* the fool. He appears at the time to be cast in the same mould.

But what may be at one time our duty to restrain, at another time, and under different circumstances, it may be no less our duty to do. Silence may sometimes be mistaken for defeat. Unanswered words may be deemed unanswerable, and *the fool* become arrogant, more and more *wise in his own conceit*.¹⁰ An *answer* therefore may be called for; yet not in folly, but to folly; 'not in his foolish manner, but in the

¹ Judg. viii. 5-7, 16.

² 2 Cor. x. 6-11; xiii-. 2.

³ Jer. xxxi. 18-20.

⁴ Chron. xxxiii. 11-13.

⁵ Chap. xvii. 10; xxvii. 22.

⁶ 2 Chron. xxviii. 22. Ism. i. 5 Jer. v. 3.

⁷ 2 Kings, xviii. 36. Jude. 9.

⁸ Numb. xx. 2-10. Ps. cvi. 33.

⁹ 1 Sam. xxv. 21, 22.

¹⁰ Verse 12. Job, xi. 2.

* Yet the learned Dr. Kennicott was so strangely stumbled by this verbal contradiction, is to propose a rash emendation of the text from the Syriac and Targum, which wholly nisses the point of the text. Dissert. ii. on Heb. *Text of Old Testament*, p. 369.

manner which his foolishness required;* not *according to his folly*, but according to thine own wisdom. Yet here, our words would be sharp as rods. The fool's back needs them. Such was Job's answer to his wife; grave, convincing, silencing—"Thou speakest as one of the *foolish* women speaketh. What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job, ii. 9, 10.)

Oh! for wisdom to govern the tongue; to discover "the time to keep silence, and the time to speak" (Eccles. iii. 7); most of all to suggest the "word fitly spoken" (Chap. xv. 23; xxv. 11) for effective reproof! How instructive is the pattern of our great Master! His silence and his answers were equally worthy of Himself. The former always conveyed a dignified rebuke.¹ The latter issued in the confusion of his captious enemies.² Will not a prayerful meditative study communicate to us a large measure of his Divine wisdom?

6. *He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool cutteth of the feet, and drinketh damage.* 7. *The legs of the lame are not equal: so is a parable in the mouth of fools.* 8. *As he that bindeth a stone in a sling (putteth a precious stone in a heap of stones, marg.), so is he that giveth honour to a fool.* 9. *As a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouth of fools.*

Surely this diversified exhibition of the foolishness of folly is an incentive to the study of heavenly wisdom. *The fool is utterly unfit for service.* When a message is sent by his hands, he makes so many mistakes, careless or wilful, that it is like bidding him go, when we have cut of his legs. Indeed we can only *drink damage* from his commission.³ The employment of the unbelieving spies spread *damage* of discontent and rebellion throughout the whole congregation.⁴ How careful should we be to entrust important business to trustworthy persons! Fools are either unqualified for their mission, or they have their own interests to serve, at whatever cost to their masters. Solomon himself *drank damage*, by employing an "industrious" servant, but a *fool* in wickedness, who "lifted up his hand against the king," and spoiled his son of ten parts of his kingdom. (1 Kings, xi. 26-40.) Benhadad *drank damage*, by *sending a message by the hands* of Hazael, who murdered his master, when the way was opened for his own selfish purposes. (2 Kings, viii. 8-15.)

See—again—how the fool exposes his shame. Never would a lame man shew his infirmity so much, as if he were to pretend to feats of agility or strength. Never does a *fool* appear so ridiculous, as when

¹ Matt. xvi. 1-4 ; xxi. 23-27.

² Ib. xxii. 46. Luke, xiii. 17.

³ Chap. x. 26. Contrast xiii. 17; xxv. 13.

⁴ Numb. xiii. 32; xiv. 1-4.

* FULLER'S *Harmony of Scripture*.

making a show of wisdom. It only creates disgust,¹ 'A wise saying doth as ill become a fool, as dancing does a cripple:* A parable—"an authoritative weighty saying," †--in *his mouth* becomes a jest. "Is Saul also among the prophets? Why beholdest thou the mote, that is in thy brother's eye; but considerest not the beam, that is in thine own eye? Physician, heal thyself. Thou therefore that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?"²

*Place the fool in honour. The sling makes the stone bound in it an instrument of death. The honour given to the fool makes him a curse to his fellow-creatures.*³ The prime favourite of a despot, had not God restrained him, would have been the murderer of the chosen nation. (Esth. iii. 1-5.) Dangerous indeed is it to place unqualified persons in authority. 'It is like putting a sword or a loaded pistol into a madman's hand.'‡

But the fool does mischief also unconsciously to himself. 'It is no more fit for a fool to meddle with a wise speech, than for a drunken man to handle a thorn bush.'§ When *the thorn goes up into his hand*, his insensibility only makes the wound more deadly. Thus *the fool's parable*--his wise sayings, gathered he scarcely knows whence, *go up into him like a thorn*, sharply pricking his conscience. Yet he feels no compunction, no alarm. (Comp. Ecclus. xix. 12.) Sad indeed is the sight (should it not make us tremble for ourselves?) of the ungodly prophet, dealing out from the mouth of God, yet with hardened indifference, words enough to "make both his ears to tingle." (Numb. xxiii. xxiv.)

Such is *the fool*—a pest to his fellow-creatures; awfully responsible to his God! But in the sacred office how fearfully are this evil and responsibility increased! The great *message, sent by the hands* of ungodly servants, brings most serious damage to the Church.|| The parable—our Divine Master's wise and holy instruction—*in the mouth of a fool* is perverted and contradicted by his unholy life. "Unto the wicked God saith—What hast thou to do, to declare thy statutes, on that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth; seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee?" (Ps. 1. 16, 17.)

¹ Chap. xvii. 7. Comp. Ecclus. xx. 20.

² 1 Sam. xix. 24. Matt. vii. 3-5. Luke, iv. 23. Rom. ii. 21

³ Judg. ix. 6. 1 Sam. viii. 1-3.

* Bp. Patrick.

† Parkhurst.

‡ Scott *in loco*. Parkhurst, and other critics prefer the marg. reading—shewing that honour is lost upon a fool, like a precious stone covered up in a promiscuous heap. 'He that setteth a foole in hye dignite, that is even as yf a man dyd caste a precious stone upon the galous.' Bp. Coverdale—alluding to the custom of throwing a stone to the heap, under which the criminal was buried. The reading of the text is however well supported both by the Vulgate and LXX.

§ Bp. Hall.

|| 1 Sam. ii. 17. Jer. xxiii. 15. Hence the solemn responsibility of the Ordination Rule.

1 Tim. v, 22.

'Almighty God, who alone worketh great marvels, send down upon all Bishops and Curates the healthful spirit of thy grace;'* that "stewards faithful" to their trust (1 Cor. iv. 1, 2), "workmen that need not to be ashamed" (2 Tim. ii. 15), true and authorized "ambassadors for Christ," may be multiplied in the Church; and that *fools*—unfaithful ministers—may be rebuked and restrained.

10. The great God, that formed all things, both rewardeth the fool, and rewardeth transgressors. (A great man grieveth all; and he hireth the fool; he hireth also the transgressors, marg.)

It is difficult to fix with certainty the interpretation of this Proverb.† All however expound from it the Divine government, direct or permissive. Suppose *the Great One* to be God, *that formed all things*. He proportions exactly the *reward* of the wicked.¹ *The fool* is responsible for sins of ignorance; not only for the little he knew, but for the much, which, had he not neglected the means, he might have known. The transgressor is much more responsible for his sins against knowledge, warning, and conviction. And at "the day of revelation of the righteous judgment of God, lie will render to every man according to his deeds. The servant, that knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes."²

Or suppose the Great One to be a mighty prince; powerful in *forming* the minds, character, and principles of *all* around him. If he "rule in the fear of God " (2 Sam. xxiii. 3), will not he *reward the fool and the transgressor*, the ignorant and the presumptuous? For how can his kingdom prosper upon the encouragement of the wicked?³

Or if he be a wicked prince, he grieveth all by his countenance of sin: *hiring transgressors* as instruments of his will.⁴ Still is it the government of God. The sceptre is in the hands of unlimited power, wisdom, and goodness. "The wicked are his sword, his hand, the rod of his anger, and the staff of his indignation."⁵ Shall we then "reply against God?" Reverence, faith, humility, patience, expectation, are graces of the Lord's children. "Clouds and darkness are round about him; righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne." (Ps. xcvi. 2.) There is no sleeping of his Providence; no interruption of his Government. We are living only in a preparatory state. The veil

¹ Ps. xxxi. 23. Isa. iii. 11.

² Rom. ii. 5, 6. Luke, xii. 47, 48.

³ Chap. xxv. 5. 2 Chron. xxviii. 1-8; xxxiii. 1-11.

⁴ Judg. ix. 4. 1 Kings, xxi. 10.

⁵ Ps. xvii. 13, 14. Isa. x. 5.

* Liturgy.

† Our venerable translators have supplied with some doubtfulness an ellipsis of the principal term. The word in the original may mean either the Great God, or a great man. Nor does the construction clearly determine either meaning.

will soon be lifted up, and the grand consummation will explain all. *Fools and transgressors* will receive their just *reward*; and one universal chorus will burst from heaven—"Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? For thou only art holy; for thy judgments are made manifest." (Rev. xv. 4.)

11. As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly.

And is this the picture of man—"made a little lower than the angels" (Ps. viii. 5)—yea—"made in the likeness of God?" (Gen. i. 26.) Who that saw Adam in his universal dominion, sitting as the monarch of creation; summoning all before him; giving to each his name, and receiving in turn his homage (Ib. ii. 20)—who would have conceived of his children sunk into such brutish degradation? The tempter's promise was—"Ye shall be as gods." (Ib. iii. 5.) The result of this promise was—"Ye shall be as beasts." The vilest comparisons are used to chew man's loathsomeness in the sight of God. 'Do any feel disgusted at the allusion? Let them remember, that the emblem is far less filthy, than the thing denoted by it; and that the whole race of animals does not afford anything so debasing, as not to be far outdone by the excesses of libertines, drunkards, and gluttons.* We naturally turn away with sickening from this sight. Would that we had the same disgust at the sin, which it so graphically portrays! Would that we might abhor ourselves for that, which God infinitely abhors in us!

The Apostle uses this "true proverb" to describe the awful condition of apostates (2 Pet. ii. 20–22) --- temporary conviction, unaccompanied with real conversion of heart, and falling away to desperate hardness. Many reasons may produce disgust in the sinner's mind to its *folly*. He may loathe, and for a while relinquish it. It has proved so fraught with misery (Chap. xiii. 15); its very pleasures so impregnated with poison; that no wonder if he make an occasional, or even a strong effort to be rid of it. But when the sickness has passed away, the sweetness of the forbidden fruit again comes to mind; the heart and affections are again clasped around the world, *and, as a dog returneth to his vomit*--to the food, which had caused his sickness; *so a fool returneth to his folly*--to that, which had been his hurt and shame..

Thus greedily did Pharaoh return from his momentary conviction;¹ Ahab from his feigned repentance,² Herod from his partial amendment;³ the drunkard from his brutish insensibility⁴—all to take a more determinate course of sin; to take their final plunge into ruin.

¹ Exod. viii. 8, 15; ix. 27, 34, 35.² 1 Kings, xxi. 27–29; xxii. 8, 87.

³ Mark, vi. 20–27.

⁴ Chap. xxiii. 35.

* Scott.

Even a superficial knowledge of Christ is no preservative to an unrenewed heart. The "house may be swept" of outward sin, "and garnished" with external holiness; but if it be "empty," if the Divine inhabitant be not heartily welcomed, the former possessor will quickly return, and tenant it as his fixed home with sevenfold destruction. (Matt. xii. 43-45.)

Is not sin then justly termed *folly*? Does not the God of Truth pronounce it to be so now? Will not every fool confess it to be so at the end, when its wages shall be fully paid in "shame and everlasting contempt?" (Dan. xii. 2.) Child of God! hearken to thy Father's voice of "peace." But ponder also his solemn warning "to his people and to his saints —*Let them not turn again to folly.*"¹

12. Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him.

Seest thou the man? God means to point at him. (Comp. Chap. xxii., 29.) There is something to be learned from him. He castles himself up in *his own conceit*. He holds himself fit to be a standard: The false persuasion that he has gained wisdom, utterly precludes him from gaining it. He thinks himself wise, because he knows not what it is to be wise.² His wisdom is "science so falsely called."³ For he has yet to learn the first lesson in the school—his own folly—a lesson not to be learned without severe exercise. The knowledge of the most intelligent is as nothing compared with his ignorance; and yet how strangely does the smallest quantum "puff up" (1 Cor. viii. 1), and fill a man full of himself! "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise."⁴ *There is more hope of the fool*, who knows himself to be one. The natural fool has only one hindrance—his own ignorance. The *conceited fool* has two — ignorance and self-delusion. He has everything to unlearn (which is the hardest lesson in the school) before he can learn anything right. It shews some improvement, when he becomes less positive.

It was our Lord's cutting reproof to the *conceited* Pharisees — "The publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of heaven before you." (Matt. xxi. 31.) It was his charge against the Laodicean Church— "Because thou sayest—I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not, that thou art wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."⁵ The prodigal *fool*, running into all "the excesses of riot," is more open to conviction, than the man who prides himself upon his decorous religion.⁶ To the profane and

¹ Ps. lxxxv. 8. Comp. John, v. 14; also Eccclus. xxi. 1. ² 1 Cor. viii. 2. Gal. vi. 8.

³ 1 Tim. vi. 20.

⁴ Ib. iii. 18. Comp. chap. iii. 7. Rom xii. 8-16.

5 Rev. iii. 17. Comp. chap. xxx. 12.

⁶ Luke, xv. 11-18, with John, ix. 40, 41,

ungodly we must go. But to warn him, he conceives to be knocking at the wrong door. "God! I thank thee, that I am not as other men are"—is his heart's language before God. "Stand by; I am holier than thou" (Isa. lxxv. 5)—is his haughty rule with his fellow-sinners. Offer him light;—He "walks in the light of his own fire." (Ib. 1. 11.) Offer him life;—He is "alive" in his own eyes. (Rom. vii.) Offer him food;—His "full soul loatheth the honey-comb!" (Chap. xxvii. 7.)

Christian Professor! Dread an ill-grounded judgment of yourself. The more confident a man is in error, the more dangerous his state. Oh! beware of holding fast a delusion, which the word of God, closely applied, would quickly dispel. Suspect your spiritual state, at least till you have given it a most probing search. Is it not possible that you may be deceived; that there may be "a lie in your right hand" that you may have been building upon the sand; and mistaken the shadow for the substance? Consider—it is a matter of infinite and everlasting moment—in which multitudes have been mistaken—in which it is easy to be mistaken—in which our hearts are very deceitful—in which a mistake, not rectified in time, will be ruin for eternity.

Lord! preserve me from this hopeless delusion. Pull down all my pride and fancied wisdom. Take the blindness from my eyes, that I may know what I am in thy sight. "Clothe me with humility" from the sole of the foot to the head.

13. The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets. (Chap. xxii. 13.) 14. As the door turneth upon his hinges, so cloth the slothful upon his bed. 15. The slothful man hideth his hand in his bosom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth. (Chap. xix. 24.) 16. The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason. †

The counterpart to these illustrations may be seen in the man dozing away his life in guilty idleness; without an object, and therefore without a spring for exertion. But let us look at the pictures, as they meet our eye in the Church. The gradation shews the almost incredible increase of the evil — unresisted.

The slothful man is utterly reluctant to his work. When therefore his indolence is disturbed, he is ingenious in inventing excuses, and fancying dangers, which have no real existence. For 'he, who has no mind to labour, never wants pretences for idleness.' ‡ His insincerity lulls his conscience to sleep in his false excuses. Were it as easy to be spiritual as to wish to be so, who would not be a Christian? If it were only one great effort, soon to be accomplished, it would be worth the

* Luke, xviii. 11. See Bunyan's Picture of Ignorance.

† 'Than seven men that sytt and teach.'—Bp. COVERDALE. ‡ Bp. Patrick.

struggle. But to see no end of the toil, duty upon duty, trouble following trouble, no breathing-time of rest--is an appalling hindrance. And therefore *a fierce lion in the way**--*a lion in the streets* ('bugbear rather than a lion'†) excuses him from a decided profession.

We wonder not that he shrinks from his work. He loves his bed of ease. Here *he turneth* himself; *as the door upon his hinges*, moving indeed, but making no progress. He works from one excuse to another, but never removes from his place. Difficulties hinder him from going forward. Conscience keeps him from going backward. And therefore, as *the door upon his hinges*, where he was one day, one year, there he is found the next. He moves within a scanty round of duties, always beginning, never finishing, his work; determining nothing; not *quite* at ease; yet with no heart for exertion. Stretched upon his bed of sloth, he cries—'O that this were working! O that I could raise my heart to heaven But is heaven to be gained by complaining and wishing?

Nay— even the most needful-exertion is grievous to him. Suppose him to have arisen from his bed, his case is not improved. Ease is still his cry. How to preserve it, his only care. *He hides his hand in his bosom for the cold* and never makes an effort to *bring it to his mouth* for his necessary food. (Eccles. iv. 5.) Thus for want of the most trifling exercise he starves his soul, though the bread of life is put before him. No marvel, if his life, instead of "a continual feast," is a constant vexation.

Yet—such is the strange union of self-complacency with folly—this worthless being—a mere "cumberer of the ground"—pronounces himself a genius, prides himself upon his sagacity, and looks down with contempt upon his more industrious companions—generally superior in attainment. This foolish dream of his own shrewdness fixes his standard. He has found the road to learning without any inconvenient exertion. Giving himself no trouble to think, he sees none of the difficulties obvious to a considerate mind, and speedily arrives at most unreasonable conclusions. He will not be beaten out of his sloth. Any wise man could render a reason for his conviction. But he is wiser in his own conceit than them all.‡

In how many striking lights is sloth presented in this book? Do I not think too slightly of it? Let me look closely—in what respect am I influenced by it—bodily, mentally, or spiritually? Does it never follow me throughout my work, to my knees, to my Bible-reading? Do I not excuse myself from work of painful effort? Or when conscience forces me to it, how is it done? May God enable me to resist this paralysis in every shape! If, just about to resolve, let me propose my work to myself, as to be done with full purpose of heart; not,

* Scott.

† Bp. SANDERSON'S *Sermon on Heb.* xii. 3.

‡ Seven men—the number of perfection. Comp. Amos, i. 3, 6, 9, 13; ii. 4, 6.

opposing difficulties to necessity; not allowing heartless despondency. What if after all, my faith be a fancy, my hope a delusion? Self-suspicion is the first awakening of the soul—"Search me, O my God." (Ps. xxxix. 23.)

Well is it, if the slumber be only a little disturbed; far better, if the eyes are fully opened. Active, simple faith carries us onward, in the face of *the lions in the way*, seeming to stand open-mouthed to devour us. It is a special mercy to realize the holy violence of the conflict. Bunyan put his pilgrims under the conduct of Great-heart for their encouragement. Heaven never will be won by folded arms. "The violent take it by force." (Matt. xi. 12.)

17. He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears.

If we would honour our God in our Christian path, we must take time to every step, for prayer, and for the exercise of a sound judgment. Else we shall often rush on unbidden to our loss. To *take a dog by the ears* will bring good reason to repent of our folly. To *meddle with strife belonging not to us* will surely bring its trouble (1 Kings, xxii. 4, 32) -- its own cross, *not our Master's*. A wide difference is made between "suffering as a busy-body, and suffering as a Christian." It is alarming to these who have no adequate sense of the criminality to, find the Apostle classify the one with "murderers, and thieves, and evil-doers." In striking contrast to the other he gives the dignified exhortation—"Let him glorify God on this behalf." (1 Pet. iv. 16.) If we must not "go forth hastily to strive" (Chap. xxv. 8) in our own cause, still less in our neighbour's. This is "entering into contention"—the wantonness of the fool. (Chap. xviii. 6 ; xx. 3.)

Even with Christian intentions many of us are too fond of *meddling with strife not belonging to us*. We constitute ourselves too readily judges of our neighbour's conduct. Neutrality is often the plain dictate of prudence. Uncalled-for interference seldom avails with the contending parties; while the well-meaning mediator involves himself in the strife to his own mischief. Our blessed Master reads us a lesson of godly wisdom. He healed the contentions in his own family. But, when called to *meddle with strife belonging not to him*, he gave answer—"Who made me a judge or a divider over you?"¹

Must we then "suffer sin upon our brother?" (Lev. xix. 17.) Certainly not. But we should ponder carefully the most effectual mode of restraining his sin. Think of the special "blessing to the peace-makers." (Matt. v. 9.) But the true peace-maker, while he deplores the *strife*, well knows, that interference in the moment of

¹ Matt. xviii. 1-6 xx. 24-28, with Luke, xii. 13, 14.

irritation will kindle rather than extinguish, the fire. Yet his self-controul is not indifference. He commits the matter to Him, whose wisdom he so greatly needs. He will seize the first moment for favourable remonstrance; "and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!" (Chas. xv. 23.) Indeed the common intercourse of life much requires that "wisdom, which dwelleth with prudence." (Chap. viii. 12.) "Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom." (Jam. iii. 13.)

18. As a madman who casteth firebrands, arrows and death, 19. So is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am not I in sport?

How little does the thoughtless man consider the misery, which his wantonness occasions to others! He bears no malice. He indulges only the pure love of mischief. He carries on a scheme of imposition as harmless play. His companions compliment him upon his adroitness, and join in the laugh of triumph over the victim of his cruel jest. But "*sporting with their own deceivings*" (2 Pet. ii. 13) is a black mark of ungodliness. What the man calls *sport* (Chap. x. 23), is the madman, scattering murderous mischief—*firebrands, arrows and death*. What are smoothly called 'practical jokes'--such as are practised at school, or even at college--come under this awful charge. 'There is little difference in this case betwixt fraud and fury. He that purposely deceives his neighbour, under colour of a jest, is no less prejudicial to him than a lunatic, that doth wrong out of frenzy and distemper.'* Yet this solemn line of distinction is drawn. The *madman* is irresponsible for his actions; *the deceiver* is accountable to God and his fellow-creatures. 'He that sins in jest, must repent in earnest; or his sin will be his ruin.'†

'What hath a Christian'—saith Bernard—'to do with jesting?' Let him practically observe the wholesome caution against it, as "not convenient." (Eph. v. 4.). Let him cultivate the valuable graces of seriousness, consideration, and self-discipline. Let him study his Master's image, embodying both the spirit and the rules of his gospel.

20. Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth (is silent, marg.) *21. As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife.* *22. The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts* (chambers, marg.) *of the belly.* (Chap. xviii. 8.)

The busy tongue makes work, where it does not find it. Such is the despicable trade of *the talebearer*--employing his time in prying

* Bp. Hall.

† Henry.

into other people's business, ferreting out secrets, diving into family histories, intermeddling with their concerns: all this with the view of putting himself forward, as a keen, intelligent, and active man. Thus in ever) way where he can please himself 'man is naturally his own grand idol. He would be esteemed and honoured by any means; and to magnify that idol self, he kills the name and esteem of others in sacrifice to it.* Real virtue revolts from this base selfishness.

The fire of holy zeal seizes on things nearest home. This is a wild-fire scattering its destruction abroad. The *talebearer* should be looked on as an incendiary. For his "tongue is a fire, itself set on fire of hell."¹ His raking up old and forgotten tales supplies the fuel, without which *the fire of strife, as where no wood is, goeth out*. To quench the flame, we must take away the fuel. We must remove the talebearer; stop him in his words; compel him to produce his authority; face him, if possible, with the subject of his tales. This decisive course will prevent a mass of slander, and put him to shame.²

Near akin is *the contentious man*. His mischief indeed is more open. His determination to have the last word is *as coals to burning coals, and wood to the fire*.³ It keeps up the flame, kindled perhaps by a mere angry word or a contemptuous look; and which, but for this constant succession of fuel, might quickly have been extinguished. Do we never aim at the wit of a sharp answer, that "stirreth up anger," rather than at the wisdom and grace of "a soft answer, that turneth away wrath?" (Chap. xv. 1.)

The talebearer's wounds are however the most dangerous. They go *down into the chambers*—the vitals of the heart; One noiseless word may be the stab of death. But, if he escape for a while, his secret sins shall "be set before his eyes," and his wanton trifling with his brother's character be justly recompensed. (Ps. 1. 20 ; lii. 1-5.)

Are we closely watching against these sins? Do we carefully damp the rising flame of *contention*?⁴ Do we resist the temptation to speak needlessly of the faults of others? Do we dread the character of a polished, well-educated, amusing slanderer? Should we be ready to give up the eclat of telling a good story, from the fear of wounding a good name? We may feel indignant at the charge of *talebearing*. Yet it requires no ordinary exercise of Christian discipline to maintain the silence of charity, and to regulate both the tongue and the ear within its well-advised limits.

23. *Burning lips and a wicked heart are like a potsherd covered with silver dross.* 24. *He that hateth, dissembleth with his lips, and layette up*

¹ Jam. iii. 6. Comp. chap. xvi. 27.

² Chap. xxv. 23. Comp. xxii. 10.

³ Chap xv. 18; xvi. 28; xxix. 22. 2 Cor. xii. 20.

⁴ Chap. xvii. 14. Gen. xiii. 8, 9.

* LEIGHTON on 1 Pet. ii. 17. Comp. Jer. ix. 4.

deceit within him. 25. When he speaketh fair, believe him not: for there are seven abominations in his heart. 26. Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be skewed before the whole congregation. 27. Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him.

The sin here described is a disgrace to society! Yet is it often covered with a flattering garb, as the worthless potsherd with a thin coat of *silver*. "The tongue of the just is as choice silver." Here is only *silver dross*--"the heart of the wicked, which is nothing worth" (Chap. x. 20); *lips burning* with warm affection, yet covering a heart filled with malice and wickedness.* Such were *the lips* of Joseph's brethren, when "they rose up to comfort their father" under the bereavement which they had brought upon him. (Gen. xxxvii. 35.) Such was Absalom's smooth hypocrisy. (2 Sam. xv. 1-9.) Such were the traitor's *lips* and *heart*, uniting with the rest in protestations of faithfulness; yet "betraying the Son of man with a kiss."¹ An open enemy could be much better borne. (Ps. lv. 12.) The cant of hypocrites, the benevolence of infidels, the smooth enticement of the false "angel of light"—all answer to this strong figure. 'Hypocrisy is spun often of a very fine thread; and the heart of man, abounding with so much hypocrisy as it doth, is the most deceitful thing, yea, and the most deceivable too, actively and passively both, of anything in the world.'[†]

Often also, when *the lips* do not *burn*, there is *dissembling of hatred*. "Cain talked with his brother in the field," while murder was in his heart. (Gen. v. 8.) Saul pretended to honour David, while he was plotting; his ruin. (1 Sam. xviii. 17, 21.) Absalom *dissembled* with his brother, by seeming to let him alone, for two years *laying up deceit within him*. (2 Sam. xiii. 22-28.) Joab covered his murderous intentions with peaceable profession.²

Christian prudence will guard against credulity,³ which is in fact; the "harmlessness of the dove," without "the wisdom of the serpent." (Matt. x. 16.) This weakness cost Gedaliah his life.⁴ A sounder spirit saved Nehemiah from the snare of his malignant adversaries.⁵ Thee source of this wickedness gives good reason for distrust. *There are seven abominations*—a great variety‡ of *abominations*—closely folded up *in his heart*, only within the ken of that heart-searching eye, "before whom all secret things are naked and open."⁶ And here lies the root of

¹ Matt. xxvi. 35. Luke, xxii. 47, 48.

² Ib. iii. 27; x. 9, 10. Comp. Gen. xxxiv. 15-25. Ps. xxviii. 3; 1v. 20.

³ Jer. ix. S; ii. 6. Mic. vii. 5. Comp. Ecclus. xii. 10-17.

⁴ Jer. xl. 14; xli. 6, 7.

⁵ Neh. vi. 1-4

⁶ Jer. xvii. 10. Heb. iv. 13.

* Chap. x. 17. Ps. 1v. 21. Comp. Ecclus. xix. 26-28. See Bunyan's description of the town of 'Fair-Speech.'

† Bp. SANDSON's *Sermon on Gal. v. 22, 23*.

‡ Bp. Hall, verse 16; xxiv. 16.

the disease. 'A guileful heart makes guileful tongue and lips. It is the workhouse, where is the forge of deceit and slander; and the tongue is only the outer shop, where they are mended; and the lips the door of it; so then such ware as is made within, such and no other can be set out. From evil thoughts, evil speakings; from a deceitful heart, guileful words, well-varnished, but lined with rottenness.'* Oh! let this despicable character be a beacon to us to shun all approaches to false dealings. Better to risk giving offence by faithfulness (though let this, so far as conscience allows, be avoided) rather than *cover our hatred* by flattering words.

Dissembling never answers in the end. The Providence of God brings dark deeds to light. "The voice of Abel's blood cried from the ground." (Gen. iv. 10.) "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after." (1 Tim. v. 24.) The hand strips off the mask, and exposes the flatterer to shame. *His seven abominations* shall be proclaimed, if not more privately, at last *before the whole congregation*, when all shall appear before men and angels as they really are, and when the hypocrite shall receive his just recompence of "everlasting contempt." (Luke, xii. 2.)

Often however does retribution reach the offender in this world. 'He will fall into the pits, which he has bestowed pains to dig for his neighbour, and be crushed by the stone, which he meant to roll upon him.'† Even the place of sinning is sometimes made the place of punishment.¹ Those who plot mischief for others, will be overwhelmed with it themselves.² Moab, in attempting to curse Israel, fell himself under the curse of God.³ Haman's gallows for Mordecai was his own "promotion of shame."⁴ The enemies of Daniel were devoured in the ruin, which they plotted against him.⁵ Thus does God "take the wise in his craftiness,"⁶ "the wicked in his wickedness."⁷ The death of Christ, which was to be the means of warding off national judgment, was the just cause of the deprecated scourge.⁸ The malice that meditates the evil, is often the cause of its own overthrow. What an Aceldama would this world be, but for the restraining grace of God! Oh! may my heart, my soul, every member, every principle, not only be restrained from hateful passions; but be imbued with the spirit of the Gospel, and consecrated to the service of God!

28. *A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin.*

Rarely do we see a solitary sin. One sin begets another. *Lying*

¹ 1 Kings, xxi. 19, with 2 Kings, ix. 26. Jer. vii. 31, 32.

² Ps. vii. 15.

³ Num. xxii. 6; xxiv. 17.

⁴ Chap. iii. 35. Esth. vii. 10.

⁵ Dan. vi. 24.

⁶ Job, v. 13.

⁷ Chap. xi. 6.

⁸ John, xi. 50. Matt. xxiii. 32, 38.

* LEIGHTON on 1 Pet. iii. 16.

† Scott.

and malice are here linked together. The *lying tongue* against our Lord was the fruit of hateful malice. (John, viii. 44, with 40.) The slander against Stephen originated from the same source. The tacit reproach of his godly profession was intolerable. (Acts, vi. 9, 14.) If men afflict because they hate; much more do they *hate them whom they have afflicted*, and thus made their enemies. Ammon, having *afflicted* his sister Tamar, hated her with greater hatred than his former love, as the witness against his own shame.*

But again and again—watch against the *flatterer*. Alas! where is he not welcomed as a friend? From some favourable position he presents an attractive face. But a nearer view shews him as a subtle, murderous enemy, *working ruin*. (Ps. v. 9; x. 7-10.) His great advantage is, that he has a friend in his own bosom. The sweet song of our own praises lulls us to sleep, and in the moment of security the net is too successfully spread. (Chap. xxix. 5.) *The flattering tongue* worketh *the ruin* of the world. The temptation—"Ye shall be as gods"—proved irresistible.¹ And still in the path of sin,² in the determinate indulgence of the wayward will,³ *flattering* is the snare; *ruin* is the end.

What then should be our treatment of the *flatterer*? Homer puts it into his hero's heart to regard him as a fiend of hell.† Our safety then is in flight,⁴ or at least in frowning resistance. (Comp. chap. xxv. 23.) Be as much troubled'—said a godly man—'by unjust praises, as by unjust slanders.'‡ Shew plainly that they please us least, who praise us most. Give timely warning, that the repetition of the offence threatens the disruption of friendship. Cherish the deepest views of native corruption, such as will at once belie any fair picture of ourselves that may be presented to us. Pray for wisdom to discover the snare; for gracious principles to raise us above vain praises; for self-denial to be content, and even thankful without them. This will be our security. All these Scriptures strongly teach, how hateful to a God of truth is the attempt to deceive. All warn us against the common habit of slight deviations from truth, and of any want of sincerity of expression, as totally inconsistent with a Christian profession, a breach of the law of love, and often leading to habitual deceit.§

¹ Gen. iii. 5.

² Chap. ii. 16; v. 3; vii. 5, 21-23.

³ 1 Kings, xxii. 6, 11, 12. Jer. v. 31; xiv. 14-16.

⁴ Chap. xx. 19.

* 2 Sam. xiii. 5-15. 'Humani est animi odisse quem laeseris.'—TACITUS in *Agricola*.

† *Iliad*, i. 312, 313.

‡ PHILLIP HENRY'S *Life*, chap. x.

§ See the wise caution, Ecclus. xix. 1.

CHAPTER XXVII.

1. *Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.*

Let the Apostle expound the wise man--"Go to now, ye that say --To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there, a year, and buy and sell, and get gain." Both apply the same rebuke to the boast;--*Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth*--Whereas "ye know not what shall be on the morrow." (Jam. iv. 13, 14.) To provide for the morrow is a scriptural duty.¹ The husbandman, when he has reaped his harvest, sows his seed for the next. The Christian in his calling, reposing on God's Providence, walks with God. But to *boast of to-morrow*--"all such rejoicing is evil." (Jam. iv. 16.) Indeed it is absurd to *boast* of what is not our own. *To-morrow* is finely described as an unknown birth. It may be in eternity. And yet the sensualist and the worldling² *boast*, as if it was their own; and thus virtually put God out of his own world. The ungodly reckon upon being religious *to-morrow*, and therefore put off repentance, forsaking the world, and living for eternity, to some infinitely future day. (Acts, xxiv. 25.) Would they do this, if they did not reckon upon to-morrow being given to them? Nay, do we not all naturally cherish this looking forward, which the great enemy works up into practical forgetfulness of God? Yet we must not live, as if to-morrow would not come. Else would the world be in a state of stagnation. The present duties of the day would be absorbed in the instant preparation for the coming eternity. But we start from death, when he enters our houses, as if we did not expect him. How little do we die daily! (1 Cor. xv. 31.) We can even coolly calculate upon the death of others, for our own benefit. Our intense anxiety about earthly, and apathy about heavenly, things, speak but too plainly. The young look to the middle age; the more advanced to the last stage of life. All, in contradiction to their avowed profession, *boast themselves of to-morrow*.

How awfully has this *boasting* been put to shame! In the days of Noah, "they married wives, and were given in marriage, until the very day when the flood came, and destroyed them all."³ Abner promised a kingdom, but could not ensure his life for an hour.⁴ Haman plumed himself upon the prospect of the queen's banquet, but was hanged like a dog before night.⁵ The fool's soul was required of him "on the very night" of his worldly projects "for many years" to come.⁶ 'Serious affairs to-morrow'--was the laughing reply of Archias, warned of a

¹ Chap. vi. 6-8; x.5; xxiv. 27. Comp. Gen. xli. 35. Acts, xi. 28, 29.

² Isa. lvi. 12. Luke, xii. 16-19. ³ Luke, x,ii. 26-29. ⁴ 2 Sam. iii. 9, 10, 27.

⁵ Esth. v.12; vii. 1-10.

⁶ Luke, xii. 19, 21.

conspiracy, which hurried him into eternity the next hour.* The infidel Gibbon calculated upon fifteen years of life, and died within a few months, at a day's warning. *We know not what a day may bring forth.*

How natural is it for the young to be looking for *to-morrow's* prospect! But have you never seen the lovely flower cropped, or faded in the blossom? Is not the robust, as well as the feeble frame cut down in the prime? (Job, xxi. 23.) Have you a lease of your life? If there be a promise of forgiveness to the repenting, where is the promise of *to-morrow* for repentance? Will consideration naturally come with years? Or will not rather long-protracted habits of ungodliness harden into a second nature? What if in the midst of thy boasting, flattering thyself that thou shouldst see another and another day--thou shouldst surprised, unprepared, and be left to lament for ever thy presumption in the lake of everlasting fire!¹ Stop--consider--weep--pray--believe--now--while conscience speaks; while thou art halting between God and the world, between conviction and inclination. Now in this "accepted time" devote thyself to God. Enthroned the Saviour in thine heart.

The universe does not present a more affecting sight than an aged sinner, with one foot in the grave, losing all in the world, infinitely more in eternity. A moment, and he is gone. Heaven and hell are no trifles. *To-morrow* presumed upon, to-day neglected, ruins all. Standing on the brink of the precipice--how precious the moment for prayer--ere the door of mercy is closed for ever!

Has the child of God reason to *boast of to-morrow*. What a change may it make in your worldly circumstances (Job, i. 21), or Christian experience? (Ps. xxx. 7.) Never will you feel more secure, than in the consciousness that you have no security for a single hour. Divide your cares with God. Rest all in his bosom. (Ib. xxxvii. 4.) Let disappointment prepare you for your heavenly rest, and bound all your wishes and pleasures by his gracious will. (Jam. iv. 15.) But have you no need of warning? How speaks the too full current of affections towards earthly enjoyment? Did you practically believe that "the time is short, and the fashion of this world passeth away," would you not "rejoice, as though you rejoiced not?" (1 Cor. vii. 29-32.) Would pleasures of earth be so highly prized, if there was no secret dependence on *to-morrow*. Surely this thought may more than sustain in the loss of them--The shadow only is gone--the body of my happiness remains immovable. To see things temporal, as if we "looked not at them," is the life of spiritual religion. (2 Cor. iv. 18.) To remember 'this world as the grand laboratory for perfecting of souls for the next† to have "our loins girt about" for our Lord's coming; to live, as not to be surprised by the call, and in readiness to "open to him *immediately*"

¹ Matt. xxiv. 48-51; xxv. 10-12. Luke, xiii. 25. Comp. Ecclus. v. 7.

* ROLLIN'S *Ancient History*. Book xii.

† Sir M. Hale.

--this is our secret and our happiness. "Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching." (Luke, xii. 37.)

2. *Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.*

'Praise'--says an old expositor--'is a comely garment. But though thyself doth wear it, *another* must put it on, or else it will never sit well about thee. Praise is sweet music, but it is never tuneable in thine own mouth. If it cometh from the mouth of *another*, it soundeth most tuneably in the ears of all that hear it. Praise is a rich treasure, but it will never make thee rich, unless *another* tell the same.* Indeed --except as the vindication of our character,¹ or our Master's honour connected with it, † may require--nothing so degrades a man with his fellow-men, as setting out his own praise. For though every man is his own flatterer (Chap. xx. 6), yet men usually know how to estimate pride in others, while they cherish it in themselves. "The things that are of good report--think of them to do them." (Philip. iv. 8.) But "let our works," not our tongues, "praise us in the gates."² And while our works shine, see to it, that ourselves be hid. "Confess your faults one to another."³ But leave to *another* to speak our *praise*. 'Scarce any shew themselves to advantage, who are over-solicitous to do so.‡

Our name will lose nothing by this self-renouncing spirit. *If our own mouth* be silent, *another's* will be opened. John was "unworthy" in his own eyes to "unloose the latchet of his Master's shoes." Yet did his Lord's mouth proclaim him as 'the greatest of all that had been born of women.'⁴ The centurion spoke of himself as "not worthy that Christ should come under his roof." Yet did the elders testify, that "he was worthy, for whom he should do this." Yea--the Saviour's own mouth confirmed the testimony--"I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel."⁵ Luke mentions nothing in his records to his own credit. *Yet another praises* him warmly as "the beloved physician," and his sole faithful companion in his trials.§

Self-seeking is a shameful blot upon a Christian profession. What! Shall one that has said before God--"Behold, I am vile!"--be ready to say before his fellow-men--"Come, see my zeal for the Lord"⁶--

¹ 1 Sam. xii. 3. Ps. vii. 3-5. 2 Cor. i. 17-19.

² Chap. xxxi. 31. Ruth, iii. 11.

³ Chap. xxv. 27. Matt. v. 16. Jam. v. 16.

⁴ Matt. iii. 11. John, iii. 30, with Matt. xi. II. John, v. 35.

⁵ Matt. viii. 8, with Luke, vii. 3, 4, 9.

⁶ Job, xl. 4. 2 Kings, x. 16.

*Jermin.

† 2 Cor. xi. 5-12; xii. 11. 'St. Paul was put upon it, to speak of himself more than he chose to do; and when he speaks of things concerning himself he puts in ever and anon, "I speak as a fool"--intimating, that unless there be very great cause, whoever talks much of himself, talks like a fool.'- WHICHCOTE'S *Sermons*. ‡ Bp. Butler.

§ Col. iv. 14. 2 Tim. iv. 11. It was a fine touch in Sallust's portrait of Cato-- 'He would rather be, than seem to be, a good man; so that the less he sought glory, the more he obtained it.'

Come, see how humble I am! Oh! for the self-abased spirit of our glorious Master--ever ready to endure reproach: but never "receiving honour from men;" never "seeking his own glory." (John, v. 41; viii. 50.) Contrast what God shews us of ourselves in the closet with our "fair show in the flesh." And will this not put self-complacency to shame? Surely that we are so little *really* humble, is matter enough for the deepest humiliation.

3. *A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool's wrath is heavier than them both.* 4. *Wrath is cruel (cruelty, marg.), and anger is outrageous (an overflowing, marg.); but who is able to stand before envy*

The wrath even of a wise man in the moment of folly is *cruel*.¹

What then must be a *fool's wrath*, 'where there is not a drop of heavenly water to quench the fire?*' It is indeed the *weight of a stone or sand*²--intolerable, 'being without cause, measure, or end.'† Its abiding sullenness distinguishes it from the temporary impulse, to which the child of God may too hastily yield. Absalom kept it in for two years. David's anger melted away under the first conviction of reproof, and "the sun went not down upon his wrath."⁴

And yet *cruel as wrath* may be,⁵ *overflowing* as the spring-tide, it may be appeased. Esau's wrath was soothed into brotherly love.⁶ The *outrageous* despot was subdued in witnessing the presence and power of God.⁷ But *envy* is an implacable passion, the native principle,⁸ with a fearful train of evils.⁹ *Anger* is stirred up by offence; envy by godliness prosperity,¹¹ or favour.¹² Reason operates rather as the oil to fan the flame, than the water to quench it. 'Proud men would be admired by all, and preferred above all; and if it be not so, a secret enmity invadeth their spirits, and settleth itself. Men cannot endure the real or reputed excellency of others. The proud creature would shine alone.'‡

The wise man had before described the curse of this deadly passion to the man who indulges it. (Chap. xiv. 30.) Here he shews its subtle, and almost irresistible power upon its victims. For indeed, in contrast to the fine description of 'mercy, it is twice' cursed. It curses both its subjects and its object. Like the star called wormwood, that em-

¹ 1 Sam. xxv. 13, 21.

² Exod. xv. 5. Comp, Ecclus. xxii. 14, 15.

³ 2 Sam. xiii. 22, 23.

⁴ 1 Sam. xxv. 32,33. Eph. iv. 26.

⁵ Gen. xlix. 7. Matt. ii. 16.

⁶ Gen. xxvii. 41; xxxiii. 4.

⁷ Dan. iii. 13-30.

⁸ Mark, vii. 22. Gal. v. 20, 21. Tit. iii. 3. Jam. iv. 5.

⁹ Rom. i. 29, 30. 2 Cor. xii. 20. Jam. iii. 14, 16.

¹⁰ Eccles. iv. 4. Dan. vi. 3-5 ¹¹ Gen. xxvi. 14. Ps. lxxiii. 3

¹² Gen. iv. 5-8. 1 Sam. xviii. 6-9, 16, 17.

* Cartwright.

'Ira furor brevis est; animum rege; qui, nisi paret,
Imperat; hunc fraeuis, hunc tu compesce catena.'

HOR. Ep. i. 2 62, 63.

† Poole. Comp. chap. xvii. 12.

‡ MANTON on Ps. cxix. 77.

bittereth all the rivers and fountains of waters on which it fell (Rev. viii. 11), it poisons and bereaves of their sweetness all the sources and streams of human enjoyment.*

Well then might it be asked--*Who is able to stand before envy?* Even the perfect innocence of paradise fell before it. Satan lost his own happiness. Then he envied man, and ceased not to work his destruction. (See Wis. ii. 23, 24.) It shed the first human blood, that ever stained the ground. (1 John; iii. 12.) It quenched the yearnings of natural affection, and brought bitter sorrow to the patriarch's bosom¹ Even the premier of the greatest empire in the world was its temporary victim.² Nay more--the Saviour in his most benevolent acts was sorely harassed,³ and ultimately sunk under its power.⁴ "His servants therefore must not expect to be above their Master."⁵

But--Christian--remember--though the promise is sure, "that sin shall not have dominion;⁶ yet the struggle is sharp to the end. Let us probe this corruption deeply. Men will look at grace, as we have seen, with an envious eye. They will darken the lives, that out-shine their own and defame the holiness, which they have no heart to follow. But 'those who have true worth in themselves, can never envy it in others.'† Do we then love to see a brother's superior eminence, his larger gifts or graces? (Num xi. 28, 29.) Do we take pleasure in his prosperity, in honour paid to him, though to our own disparagement? (John, iii. 30.) Is our tone of praise as decided towards him, as we should wish that of others to be of us? Can we bear to be past by in favour of those, who may seem to be doing our work in opposition to ourselves? (Philip. i. 15-18.) Oh! how hateful would be the exhibition of the hidden depths of our deceitful hearts! "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults." (Ps. xix. 12.)

5. Open rebuke is better than secret love. 6. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

What is the friend, who will be a real blessing to my soul? Is it one, that will humour my fancies, and flatter my vanity? Is it enough, that he loves my person, and would spend his time and energies in my service? This comes far short of my requirement. I am a poor, straying sinner, with a wayward will and a blinded heart; going wrong at every step. The friend for my case is one, who will watch over me with *open rebuke*; but a reprover, when needful; not a flatterer. The genuineness of friendship without this mark is more than doubtful; its usefulness utterly paralyzed. That *secret love*, that dares not risk a

¹ Gen. xxxvii. 3, 4, 23-35. Acts, vii. 9. ² Dan. vi. 6-17. ³ John, xii. 10, 11.

⁴ Matt. xxvii. 18-20.

⁵ Acts, v. 17. Marg; xiii. 44, 45; xvii. 4, 5, with Matt. x. 2-1.

⁶ Rom. vi. 14.

*WARDLAW on Eccles. iv. 4.

† Sir Philip Sidney's Aphorisms.

faithful wound, and spares *rebuke*, rather than inflict pain, judged by God's standard, is hatred. (Lev. XIX. 17.) Far better the wound should be probed than covered. *Rebuke*, kindly, considerately, and prayerfully administered, cements friendship, rather than loosens it.¹ The contrary instances only prove, that the union had never been based upon substantial principle.

Many indeed profess their value for a true friend; and yet in the most valuable discharge of friendship, they "count him their enemy." The Apostle had some just apprehension on this account, though so wise and affectionate, and speaking from the mouth of God. (Gal. IV. 12-16.) As if the rule of friendship was, that we should absolutely "please," without reference to the Divine restriction--"for good to edification." (Rom. xv. 2.) Christian faithfulness is the only way of acting up to our profession. And much guilt lies upon the conscience in the neglect.

But this *open rebuke* must not contravene the express rule of love--"telling the fault between thee and him alone." Too often, instead of pouring it secretly into our brother's ear, it is proclaimed through the wide medium of the world's ear; and thus it passes through a multitude of channels, before it reaches its one proper destination. The *openness of the rebuke* describes the free and unreserved sincerity of the heart, not necessarily the public exposure of the offender; save when the character of the offence, or the interests of others, may appear to demand it. (1 Tim. v. 20.)

But never let a false tenderness be suffered to dilute a paramount obligation. Could Paul have answered to God for his *secret love* to a brother apostle, when the compromise of a fundamental principle called for *open rebuke*? (Gal. ii. 11-14.) Obviously however the sin should be brought to view, ere we *rebuke*. Nor should we vehemently reprove involuntary slips (See Eccles. xix. 16); much less forget the exercise of a loving spirit. Leighton's gentleness gave such a power to his reproof, that rare was the repetition of the offence; rather however from shame, than from the new principle. The mark of true godliness is an anxiety to have our faults pointed out; and a thankfulness to those who undertake the self-denying office.* A faithful reprover is a very great help in our Christian course. He is to be valued above the greatest treasure.' 'He that would be safe'--says one of the ancients--'must have a faithful friend, or a bitter enemy, that he may fly from vice by the monitions of the one, or the invective of the other.'† Much

¹ Chap. ix. 8; xxviii. 23. Matt. xviii. 15.

* Neh. v. 7-13. Even when given most rashly and unkindly, one of the meekest of men could say--I was thankful to God for admonishing me, and my gratitude to the man was, I think, unfeigned.' In his journal, the reprover's name was found specially remembered in prayer. MARTYN'S Life, chap. iii.

† Bp. Kidder.

more valuable is this *faithfulness*, than the smooth politeness of the world's intercourse. Nay, some defect in this courtesy may be excused for the sake of the sterling quality.

The truest friend of man--*his wounds are faithful*. He will not pass by a single fault in his people. He acts upon his own rule from the most considerate regard to their best welfare. And who would not choose this *faithful wound*, however painful at the moment of infliction, rather than the *deceitful kisses of the enemy*?¹ The kiss of the apostate was a bitter ingredient in the Saviour's cup of suffering.² His foreknowledge of the treachery,³ in no degree weakened those exquisite sensibilities, which, from their intimate union with the Godhead, rendered him susceptible of suffering beyond all comprehension.*

7. *The full soul loatheth (treadeth under foot, marg.) an honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.*

This is true, as regards the enjoyments of this life. Abundance, instead of increasing the happiness of the possessor, deprives him of the rest, which often belongs to a more scanty portion. (Eccles. v. 11.) The man, whose appetite is cloyed with indulgence, turns with disgust from the sweetest dainties; while *every bitter* and distasteful thing is keenly relished by *the hungry soul*, perhaps just saved from starvation.† This healthful appetite is one of the many counterbalancing advantages of poverty. The stated epicure might well envy the luxury of a homely meal Israel, after "eating angels' food to the full," *loathed and trod it under foot* as "light bread."⁴

And is not this so in spiritual things? The Laodicean professor--"rich and increased in goods, and having need of nothing"--*loathes the honeycomb* of the gospel.⁵ Christ in his bitter "sorrow is nothing to him, while he passeth by." (Lam. i. 12.) His love excites no tenderness; his hope no interest. "The consolations of God are small," of little account, "with him." (Job, xv. 11.) He can spare them without sensible loss. He reads the Bible only to carp at its most precious truths; offensive, as implying a ruin, of which he has no apprehension, and which he has no heart to contemplate. Thus he nauseates the most nourishing food; having no relish, because he feels

¹ Chap. xxvi. 23-26. Neh. vi. 2.

² Matt. xxvi. 48, 49, with Ps. xli. 9; lv. 12, 13.

³ John, vi. 70; xiii. 18-26. .

⁴ Ps. lxxviii. 25. Num. xi. 4-20; xxi. 5.

⁵ Rev. iii. 17, 18. Matt. ix. 12. Rom. ix. 30, 31.

* Philip Henry beautifully describes the proper offices and uses of Christian reproof. 'To reprove a brother is like as, when he is fallen, to help him up again, when he is wounded, to help to cure him; when he hath broken a bone, to help to set it; when he is it out of the way, to put him in it; when he is fallen into the fire, to pluck him out; when he hath contracted defilement, to help to cleanse.'--*Life*, chap. x.

† Job, vi. 16, 11.

'Jejunus stomachus raro vulgaria temuit.'

Hor. lib. ii. Sat. ii. 38.

no need. Another case presents itself, not less affecting. "Fulness of bread"--richness of spiritual ordinances--does not always bring its corresponding appetite. May not satiety be as great a curse as famine? Is it not fearfully written upon many a Christian professor--*The full soul loatheth the honeycomb.*

Far more enviable is *the hungry soul*, feeding upon unpalatable truths; yea--welcoming even *bitter* dispensations, as medicine for the soul's health. (Ps. cxix. 67, 71.) And is not *the sweet* of the gospel known by this *bitterness*? Does not this bitterness make Christ sweet to the soul? A sinner in all his guilt; a Saviour in his perfect merit and love--well does the one answer to the other. Every view of Christ embitters sin. Every view of sin endears Christ. Nor is there any terror in the conviction, that thus endears the Saviour. Rather does it prepare the way for a solid confidence in the glad tidings of the gospel.

What then is the pulse of my religion? Am I willing to receive the word in its full completeness--the bitter as well as the sweet? Do I love its humbling spirituality, its self-denying requirements, subordinating every desire to an unreserved obedience to my God; ready to walk in his narrowest path, to have my most secret corruption exposed; to have my conscience laid open to the "sharp piercing of the two-edged sword?" (Heb. iv. 12.) Oh! may my soul be preserved in this vigorous devotedness!

8. *As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth his place.*

Instinct teaches *the bird*, that *the nest* is the only place of safety repose. Here God has provided her special cover. (Deut. xxii. 6, 7.) Nothing therefore but danger awaits her in her *wanderings* and seldom does she, return without some injury to herself or her nestlings. Perhaps *her nest* is cold and inconvenient. But her *wanderings* make her it more restless and dissatisfied. She is safe and happy only while she keeps *her nest*.

Not less senseless and dangerous is it lightly to leave the place, society, or calling, which Divine Providence has marked out. Here man is 'in God's precincts, and so under God's protection;'^{*} and if he will be content to remain in his place, God will bless him with the rich gain of "godly contentment." (1 Tim. vi. 6.) But *the man wandering from his place* is 'the rolling stone, that gathers no moss.' He is always restless, as if he had a wind-mill in his head. Every new crotchet puts him into a new course.'[†] His want of fixed principles

^{*} SWINNOCK'S *Christian Man's Calling*, i. 346.

[†] Bp. SANDERSON'S *Sermon on 1 Cor. vii. 24.*

and employment exposes him to perpetual temptation. (Chap. xxi. 16.) Always wanting to be something or somewhere different to what and where he is, he only changes imaginary for real troubles. Full of wisdom is it to know and keep our place. The soul, the body, the family, society--all have a claim upon us. This feverish excitement of idleness is the symptom of disease, wholly opposed to religion, the bane both of our comfort and usefulness.

The plain rule cannot ordinarily be broken without sin --"Let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God." (1 Cor. vii, 24.) Would we then abide in fellowship with God? We must "abide in our calling." Every step of departure, *without a clear Scriptural warrant*, is departure from God. We are safe in following Providence. But to go before it; much more to break away from its guidance (Jonah, i. 1-4)--*a man thus wanders from his place* to his own cost. Never can we put our foot out of God's ways, but we shall tread the path back with a cross.

It is often the wayward impulse of idle pleasure; but always with the same fruit. Dinah was safe in the bosom of her family, *as the bird in her nest*. But when she "went out to see the daughters of the land" (Gen. xxxiv. 1, 2), the fowler's snare soon entangled the unsuspecting *wanderer*.

Let us look at this spirit in the Church. *The "idler wandereth* about from house to house" (1 Tim. v. 13), neglecting his own duties, and therefore with plenty of time upon his hands to "meddle with what doth not belong to him." (Chap. xxvi. 17.) So busy is the enemy in finding his own work for those, "Who have no heart to work for God! *The discontented professor* unhappily is shut up in so obscure a corner, that he will die, before the world knows his worth. He wants a larger sphere. The world is scarcely wide enough for him. Thus he *wandereth from his place*, "seeking rest, and finding none." The gifted professor is full of zeal for God and his church. His gifts were not intended to run to waste. What he can do, he thinks he ought to do. He sees the minister of God neglecting his flock--Why should not he, as he deems himself well able, step into his room? But is not *the man wandering from his place*? Our Master's charge is--"Give an account of thy," not of thy neighbour's, "stewardship." (Luke, xvi. 2.)

If grace gives the desire for usefulness. Providence must open the path. Our "wisdom is to understand *our own way*" (Chap. xiv. 8); our duty, to "*do our own business*." (1 Thess. iv. 11.) Not a single talent need be wasted. Every Christian has his own field, large enough for the exercise of his measure of gifts, "without removing the ancient landmark," that separates the sacred office, as the Lord's consecrated service. Many might be found to perform competently the ambassador's

office; but who would venture upon it without the accredited authority of his sovereign? *The unsteady professor* has no spiritual home. church is sound enough for him; none wholly moulded to his taste. Like the *wandering bird*, he is always on the wing. Any one place is too strait for him. The accustomed food, even though coming down from heaven, is "loathed as light bread." (Num. xxi. 5.) His vitiated appetite leaves him often on the Sabbath morning undecided whom to hear, his own will being his only guide. He is anxious to hear from all; and, as the sure result, he learns from none. (2 Tim. iii. 7.) In this self-willed delusion the form and substance of the Church is destroyed. It is not a few wandering sheep, but a fold and a shepherd; not a heap of loose scattered stones, but stones cemented, fitted into their several places; and the building thus fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord." (Eph. ii. 21, 22.) The Church is "terrible" not in her single members, but "as an army with banners" (Cant. vi. 10); close in rank, where each soldier keeps his own place. The individual profession, in the stead of collective unity, is a purely schismatical spirit, the essence of pride and selfishness.

And is not this spiritual vagrancy the history of many, who under the pretence of conscience have separated from the Church, which had "nourished and brought them up as children?" *After their own lusts* "they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears." The end of this *wandering from their place*, like that of *the bird from her nest*, is the loss of everything valuable--"They shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." (2 Tim. IV. 3, 4.)

Christian professor! Beware of this tampering with simplicity and godly steadfastness. This *wandering* spirit proves, not expansive Jove, but latitudinarian indifference; freedom, not from prejudices, but from settled principles. Our Lord restrained his disciples from "forbidding" the man, "who was doing a good work." But he did not direct them to *wander from their own place*, and follow him. (Mark, ix. 38-40.) The rule to "prove all things" is coupled with--"Hold fast that which is good." (1 Thess. v. 21.) Christian establishment is the result of a scriptural balance. "Order and Steadfastness"--"Beauty and Bands"--are the two staves of the Good Shepherd; the strength of the Church, the "joy" of her ministers. (Col. ii. 5. Zech. xi. 7.) If the "order" be broken, "the steadfastness" soon fails. Confusion reigns, instead of peace and unity. The enemy's watchword prevails--'Divide and conquer.' Let every man therefore be in *his own place* in the Church; not weakening his minister's hands to please his own fancy; but marking carefully "the footsteps of the flock;" and seeking to find "him whom his soul loveth," by "feeding beside the shepherds tents." (Cant. i. 7, 8)

9. *Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel* (from the counsel of the soul, marg.)

Most refreshing are *ointment and perfume* to the senses.¹ Not less so is the cordial of friendship to the soul.² Who does not feel the need of a brother's or sister's bosom, their hand, their heart? Cold indeed is social intercourse without individual sympathy. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." (Verses 5, 6.) But his very faithfulness alone would crush. *His sweetness* and tenderness soundly heal the wound. Sympathy is the balm of friendship. "My friend is to me as my own soul,"* the sharer of my joys and my sorrows.³ How, without him, could I more than half enjoy my pleasures? How could I bear my sorrows alone? What *ointment and perfume must have rejoice the heart* of the two bosom-friends "in the wood," when their *hearty counsel* "strengthened each other's hand in God!"†

The heartiness of a friend's counsel constitutes its excellence. It is not official, or merely intelligent. It is the counsel of his soul. He puts himself in our case, and counsels, as he would wish to be counselled himself. Moses's *heart was thus rejoiced* by Jethro's *counsel*, relieving him from a heavy and needless burden. (Exod. xviii. 17-24.) Many cases of spiritual perplexity have been thus opened. When unable to see the needful consolation, *a friend's counsel*, like the angel of old, has pointed to the well of water near at hand for our support. (Gen. xxi. 17.) Often has the sympathy of a brother's experience cleared our path,⁴ and turned the stumbling-block into a way-mark set up for our direction and encouragement. Ought we not then to "comfort" our fellow-sufferers "with the same comfort, wherewith we ourselves have been comforted of God?" (2 Cor. i. 4.) 'The Lord give us, as he did our Divine Master, the gift of "the tongue of the learned!"' (Isa. l. 4.) Matchless teacher! that teachest more in one hour than man can do in a whole age! that we may be learned in real living Divinity, we sit down at thy feet! What I know not teach thou me.‡

But the real unction and blessing of this *hearty counsel*, will be in proportion as we are living in communion with our Lord. Then indeed will there be *ointment and perfume to rejoice the heart*. That beloved "name which is above every name" will be "as *ointment* poured forth," and "the house will be filled with the odour of the *ointment*." (John, xii. 3.)

¹ Comp. Ps. cxxxiii. 2. Cant. i. 3; iii. 6; iv. 10. John, xii. 3. Dan. ii. 46.

² Chap. xvii. 17. Comp. Eccles. vi. 14-16. ³ Rom. xii. 15. Job, ii. 11, 12; xlii. 11.

⁴ Ps. xxxiv. 2; lxvi. 16.

*Deut. xiii. 6. Philem. 12. Horace calls Virgil, -- 'Animae dimidium meae.'-- Carm. i. 3.

† 1 Sam. xviii. 1-3; xx. 17. 2 Sam. i. 26, with 1 Sam. xxiii. 16. Similar must have been the joy of Peter from his brother Andrew's counsel John, i. 40-42.

‡LEIGHTON'S *Sermon on Job*, xxxiv. 31, 32.

10. *Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not; neither go into thy brother's house in the day of thy calamity: for better is a neighbour that is near, than a brother far off.*

Man without principle is the creature of caprice. His friendships have no warranted stability. *The ointment* soon loses its fragrance. *The sweetness of hearty counsel* (Verse 9) is forgotten. New friends gain influence; and even *the father's friend*--the long-tried family friend--*is forsaken*. Solomon exemplified his own rule by cultivating kindly intercourse with Hiram, *his father's friend*. (1 Kings, v. 1-10.) The unprincipled contempt of this rule cost his foolish son his kingdom. (1 Kings, xii. 6-19.) If other things are better when new, a friend is better that is old and tried. (See Eccus. ix. 10.) For how can you trust an untried friend? Never forget his rare price. Never be tempted by the lure of advantage to incur the risk of losing him. His house, *not thy brother's*, may be thy shelter *in the day of thy calamity*. (Chap. xviii. 24.) For though relationship ought to be the closest bond; yet, without a higher principle, selfishness will too often predominate. Joseph found far greater kindness among foreigners, than from his own kindred.¹ Jonathan's affection afforded to David, what his brothers' jealousy would never have given him.² The Saviour found his most soothing sympathy *in the day of his calamity*, not *in his brethren's house*, but in the persevering attachment of his devoted friends.³ *One friend and neighbour* closely knit in unity, near at hand, and in readiness to assist, is *better than a brother as far off* in affection, as in distance.*

'But if it be an indecency, and uncomeliness, and a very unfit thing--that is--contrary to the precept of studying "whatsoever is lovely, and thinking of these things"--to forsake *my friend and my father's friend*: how much more horrid must it be to forsake my God, and my father's God. "My father's God shall not be my God."† But was not I solemnly given up to this God at my first coming into the world? And was this transaction a trifle at the time, and to be regarded as a trifle at the end of life? How could Solomon ever forget the injunction of his aged parent--"Thou, my son, know thou the God of thy father?" (1 Chron. xxviii. 9.) Exquisitely beautiful is the picture of the venerable Patriarch, commending *his friend and his father's friend* to his children for his heavenly blessing--"God, before whom *my fathers* Abraham and Isaac did walk--*the God which fed me* all my life long unto this day--the Angel which redeemed me from all evil--bless the lads." (Gen. xlviii. 15, 16.) Here is a *wise friend*, who knows

¹ Gen. xxxix. 4, 21; xli. 39-45, with xxxvii. 4-18.

² 1 Sam. xx. with xvii. 28.

³ Luke, xxii. 28, with John, vii. 3-5.

* Rp. Patrick.

† HOWE'S Works, vii. 529.

our need;¹ *a sympathizing friend* who feels our distress:² *a mighty friend* able to cover and provide;³ *a faithful friend*, true to his word;⁴ a fast friend, who will never leave. (Heb. xiii. 5.) Young people, do you know him as *your father's friend*? Make him your own in the hearty receiving of his Gospel. Cleave to him. He will never disappoint you.

11. My son, be wise, and make my heart glad, that I may answer him that reproacheth me.

The Christian Parent takes his full share of the Minister's "greatest joy" to see "his children walk in truth." (2 John, 4. 3 John, 4.) Then indeed are they "the olive branches round about his table" (Ps. cxxviii. 3)--the ornament of his family--yea, "plants of renown"--the glory of the Church and of the land. Every other portion for them we rest with the Lord, for "surely we know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him." (Eccles. viii. 12.) *Gladdened is our heart* by their godly wisdom; and strengthened are we by what flows from, this wisdom--their holy prayers. And truly will we put our seal to the choice of a parent thus honoured and blessed--'I had rather have my house filled with my children's prayers, than filled with gold.'

But an ungodly child is indeed the parent's *reproach*. He can but take up the father's weeping under different circumstances. "Alas! my child! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me." (Judg. xi. 35.) On this account the offending damsel was "stoned at the door of her father's house." (Deut. xxii. 21.) The graceless children of gracious parents are a special *reproach*, even upon the name of God.⁵ The world will charge it (however in many cases most wrongfully) to their parents' example or neglect. Here therefore *a wise son makes the heart glad*.⁶ He is his father's weapon of defence, "When he speaketh with his enemies in the gate."⁷ Should not the children of the Church ponder this deep responsibility, to carry such a profession, as may *answer him that reproacheth*, and stop the mouth, ever ready to open with taunts against the Gospel? Specially should this responsibility be felt by children of Ministers; to 'adorn' (as Mr. Richmond affectionately inculcated upon his children) 'not only their Christian profession, but their parents' principles; shewing, that the principles of their father's house and Ministry are the rules of their conduct, and their real delight?'

¹ Col. ii. 3.

² Ps. xxxi. 7.

³ Isa. lxiii. 1. Matt. xxviii. 18.

⁴ Num. xxiii. 19. Rev. xix. 11.

⁵ Gen. xxxiv. 30. 1 Sam. ii. 17.

⁶ Chap. x. 1; xxix., 3

⁷ Ps. cxxvii. 5

*Life, pp. 294, 295. The Mosaic law severely punished the sins of the priest's daughter for the disgrace brought upon the holy office, Lev. xxi. 9. "Faithful children" is a ministerial qualification. 1 Tim. iii. 4, 5. Tit. i. 6. It was a frequent petition in Philip Henry's family worship, that ministers' children might have grace to carry it, that the Ministry might in nothing be blamed.--See the Author's Christian Ministry. Part iii. chap. ix.

12. *A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished.* (Chap. xxii. 3.)

Even animal instinct is the exercise of prudence. (Jer. viii. 7.) Every intelligent man acts upon it. It is natural to see the evil when it is come, or close to our door. But *the prudent man foreseeth the coming evil*. God is the same unchangeable God of holiness and justice. Sin is the same abomination to him as ever. There must therefore be *evil* to the sinner. The *prudent man* sees the effect in the cause, the consequent in the antecedent. He must therefore provide himself with a shelter. We often see the Christian's patience, security, and hope. Here is his *prudence*, securing a refuge. *The evil* is imminent. But "God in Christ" is to him "the munition of rocks;" not a cold and barren refuge, safe from enemies, but exposed to hunger; but a storehouse of food, as well as a citadel of defence. "Bread shall be given him, and his water shall be sure."¹ The man, who has never realized the evil, is without an *hiding place*. The man outside the gate perishes, as if there were no refuge. Only he, who "runneth into the strong tower, is safe." (Chap. xviii. 10.) A mighty blessing is any dispensation, that awakens from slumber, and brings care, *prudence*, confidence!

The Israelites, warned of the destruction of the firstborn,² and many ages after, of the ruin of their city, *hid themselves*.³ This prudence combined with faith, rouses us as the man-slayer to flee from impending danger, and to "lay hold of the hope set before us."⁴ For him there were six cities.⁵ For us there is but one.⁶ Nothing short of vital faith brings us into it.

But the simple--the wilfully foolish--let things take their course. God is so merciful. All will be well at the last. They will not be warned. The fooleries of the world engage their heart. All besides is forgotten; they *pass on, and are punished*. The *prudent* *hide* themselves in God. *The simple* rush blindfold into hell. Oh! sinner, does not thy ruin lie at thine own door? What will it be to take the mad pleasures here, and to "lie down in everlasting sorrow?" (Isa. 1. 11.) The tears of the penitent are but for a moment, and end in everlasting joy. (Ps. i cxxvi. 5, 6.) Thine will be for eternity, "the weeping" of utter despondency. (Matt. viii. 12.) Wilt thou scorn this warning? The ox is driven to destruction. The sinner plunges into it, in despite of every effort to restrain him.

13. *Take his garment that is surety for a stranger, and take a pledge of him for a strange woman.*

This proverb also we have had before. (Chap. xx. 16.) 'But what conduces to the happiness of life it is needful to inculcate again and

¹ Isa. xxxiii. 16. Comp. Ps. cxlii. 5. ² Exod. xii. 12, 13, 21-23. ³ Matt. .xxiv. 15-21.

⁴ Heb. vi 18.

⁵ Num. xxxv. 11-13.

⁶ Acts, iv. 12.

again, to fix it deep in the mind.* This may be an illustration of the prudence just described; *foreseeing evil*, and, instead of rushing into it, avoiding it. For what can be more imprudent, than to trust a man, *that is surety for a stranger, or for a strange woman*? Such folly is utterly unworthy of confidence. And therefore *take his garment*, full security for a debt. Rather incur the charge of selfishness, than by imprudence hinder yourself from helping more worthy objects. It is the perfection of Christian graces, that they do not entrench on one another. Kindness loses the name of virtue, when shewn at the expense of prudence. Yet caution is needed, lest in repressing an impulse, we crush or hazard a valuable principle. We would not too hastily frown upon a generous act; because it may have overstepped the bounds of prudence. Time, growing consideration, and, experience, will correct the error. Meanwhile let not the discipline of prudence chill the glow of active, self-denying love. Let every grace be in its: order, proportion, and combination, "that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Tim. iii. 17.)

14. *He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him.*

Is it a sin then to *bless our friend*? Our Lord openly acknowledged the love of his friends. (Luke, xxii. 28.) And yet a loud voice, and extravagant praises, bring insincerity into question. When a man exceeds all bounds of truth and decency, affecting pompous words and hyperbolical expressions, we cannot but suspect some sinister end. (Chap. xxvi. 23-25.) Real friendship needs no such assurance. One act of love is more than many *loud blessings*. "There is no wise man, but had rather have one promise than a thousand fair words, and one performance than ten thousand promises. For what charge is it to spend a little breath, for a man to give one his word, who never intends to give him anything else?† He may be *rising early in the morning*, lest some one be before him, lest there should be scarcely time to finish this great business; and yet, while harping upon the same string, he may be secretly condemning me all the day. Contrast David's *early rising* for the service of God, with his son's *early rising* for the hypocritical *blessing of his friends*.¹ The Apostle could not endure this exaggerated praise.² Indeed every intelligent man must look upon it rather as *a curse to him*. For the supposed encouragement of such fulsome flattery would stamp him as a fool. And the including *blessing* would end in a fearful *curse*.³

¹ Ps. v. 3; cxix. 147, with 2 Sam. xv. 2-7.

² 2 Cor. xii. 6. Comp. Rom. xii. 3.

³ 2 Sam. xvi. 16-19; xvii. 7-13. Acts, xii. 22, 23.

*Lavater.

† South's Sermon on Matt. v. 44. Some of Mr. Scott's early friends at the Lock painfully reminded him of this Proverb. *Life*, pp. 225, 226.

The rule towards our friend is--"Love not in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." (1 John, iii. 18.) The rule for ourselves is--"Walk before God," not before men. (Gen. xvii. 1.) Let worldly things and worldly men be little in your eyes. Man's day will soon have passed away. (1 Cor. iv. 3, marg.) Eternity in all its substance and glory is at hand.

15. *A continual dropping in a very rainy day, and a contentious woman, are alike.* 16. *Whosoever hideth her hideth the wind, and the ointment of his right hand, which bewrayeth itself.**

The figure of the *dropping* has been given before. (Chap. xix. 13.) The time is here added--*a very rainy day*, shutting us up at home.† There is rain without and within, both alike troublesome; the one preventing us from going abroad with comfort; the other from staying at home in peace. The storm within is however much the most pitiless. Shelter may be found from the other. None from this. The other wets only to the skin; this even to the bones. *Contention* with a neighbour is a sharp shower, over and gone. This is a *continual dropping*, the bane of a house, even though replete with every luxury.

Whether the woman lusts for rule, or repines under the obligation to submit; either principle breaks the rank, in which God has placed her. Occasions always present themselves for the display of this unhappy temper. After the attempts to soothe and pacify her, the "return of clouds after rain" betokens more showers, and dispels the hope which a passing sunbeam may have raised. Unrestrained by Divine grace, she becomes her husband's torment, and her own shame. For as soon might we *hide the wind* that it should not be known, or the *ointment of our right hand*, that it might not *bewray itself*; as restrain her tongue, or *hide her* turbulence. Nay--as *the wind* pent up howls more frightfully; so the attempt to still her noise only makes her more clamorous.

Such repeated warnings seem to be needful. "Fleshly lusts" too often rule conscience and judgment in the important choice. "Such shall have trouble in the flesh." (1 Cor. vii. 28.) Prudence and prayer, not blind affection, give the only security of happiness and peace.

17. *Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.*

Man was framed not for solitude, but for society. (Gen. ii. 18.) It is only as a social being, that his powers and affections are fully expanded. *Iron sharpeneth iron*. (1 Sam. xiii. 20, 21.) Steel, whetted against a knife, sharpens the edge. So the collision of different minds

* 'He that refrayneth her, refrayneth the wynde, and holdith oyle fast in hir honde.'--
Bishop COVERDALE, † Holden.

whets each the edge of the other.* We owe some of the most valuable discoveries of science to this active reciprocity. Useful hints were thrown out, which have issued in the opening of large fields of hitherto unexplored knowledge. In the sympathies of friendship, when the mind is dull, and the countenance overcast, a word from a friend puts an edge upon the blunted energy, and exhilarates the countenance. (Job, iv. 3,4.) The commanding word in the field of battle puts a keen edge upon *the iron*. (2 Sam. x. 11-13.) The mutual excitation for evil is a solemn warning against "evil communications."¹ But most refreshing is it, when, as in the dark ages of the Church, "they that feared the Lord spake often one to another."² *Sharpening* indeed must have been the intercourse at Emmaus, when "the hearts of the disciples burned within them."³ The Apostle was often so invigorated by the *countenance of his friends*, that he longed to be "somewhat filled with their company."† Upon this principle--"Two are better than one"--our Lord sent his first preachers to their work.⁵ And the first Divine ordination in the Christian Church was after this precedent. (Acts, xiii. 2-4.)

"The communion of saints" is an Article in our Creed. But is it practically acknowledged in its high responsibility and Christian privilege? Gladly let us take up the bond of brotherhood. If a brother seems to walk alone, *sharpen his iron* by godly communication. Walk together in mutual "consideration" of each other's infirmities, trials, and temptations; and mutual "provocation"⁶ of each other's gifts and graces. "If the iron be blunt, the edge will thus be whetted." (Eccles. x. 10.) were this high obligation and privilege more realized; were we walking with God more closely in this holy atmosphere (1 John, i. 7), we should not so often complain of social intercourse, where much might have been communicated, and yet all ended in barrenness and disappointment.

18. Whoso keepeth the fig-tree shall eat the fruit thereof: so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured.

An encouragement to diligence in our calling! The *fig-tree* was a valuable product of Judrea.⁷ The cultivation was probably a profitable labour, and therefore illustrated the general reward of faithfulness. The dresser's industry was recompensed by *eating the fruit thereof*.⁸ The

¹ Chap. 10-13. 1 Kings, xxi. 25. Isa. xli. 6, with 1 Cor. xv. 33.

² Mal. iii. 16.

³ Luke, xxiv. 32.

⁴ Acts, xviii. 5; xxviii. 15. 2 Cor. vii. 6.

⁵ Luke, x. 1-3, with Eccles. iv. 9-12.

⁶ Heb. x. 24, 25; also iii. 13.

⁷ Mic. iv. 4. Hab iii. 17. Luke, xiii. 6

*. . . Ergo fungar vice cotis, acutum

Reddere quae ferrum valet, exsors ipsa secandi.'--HOR. Ars Poet. 304.

† Rom. xv. 24. Even a Heathen could say-- 'Ipse aspectus viri boni delectat.'-- SENECA.

fidelity of the attached servant will be similarly *honoured*.¹ Eliezer's uprightness,² and Deborah's long and faithful services,"³ were suitably *honoured*. Elisha's affectionate devotedness to *his master was honoured* with a double portion of his spirit. (2 Kings, ii. 3-5.) The Centurion's care for his servant was probably an acknowledgment of diligent waiting *upon his master*. (Luke, vii. 2.) The exceptive cases of ingratitude (Gen. xxxi. 7) do not invalidate the rule.

There are no exceptions, however, in the service of the Divine *Master*. Our happiness is in receiving his word, and studying his will. Our honour is secured by his promises--"If any man serve me, him will my Father *honour*." "Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching. Verily I say unto you, that he shall"--adorable condescension!--"gird himself and make them sit down to meat, and will come forth, and serve them."⁴ Their *honour* will be proclaimed to each before the assembled world--"Well done! good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of your Lord." (Matt. xxv. 21, 23.) It will seal their portion in eternal bliss--"His servants shall serve him; and they shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads." (Rev. xxii. 3, 4.)

19. *As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man.*

This proverb does not confound all in one indiscriminate mass; as if all were alike under an endless diversity of condition. We cannot identify infancy with age, or all the proper individualities of constitution and education. But under the same circumstances, and on the same level, the coincidence is most remarkable and instructive. As in the reflection *of the water face answereth to face*; so in another heart we see the reflection of our own. (Ps. xxxiii. 15.) Human nature has suffered no change since the fall. The picture of man's corruption, drawn above four thousand years since, is man, as we see and know him now.⁵ The Apostle's graphical delineation of the Christian conflict is as if we had been sitting before him for our own likeness. (Rom. vii. 14-25.) This identity of Christian experience is most valuable. 'No one'--exclaims a tried child of God--'has ever felt as I do.' Let him open his case to a brother or a sister, compare notes with their exercises, and who will not subscribe their own name to his complaints? Thus, instead of "thinking it strange concerning this fiery trial," he learns that "the same afflictions are accomplished in his brethren that are in the world." (1 Pet. iv. 12 ; v. 9.) The same features and "measures of the stature in Christ," mark the whole family; inasmuch as "all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will." (1 Cor. xii. 11.)

¹ Chap. xxii. 29,

² Gen. xxiv.

³ Ib. xxxv. 8.

⁴ John, xii. 26. Luke, xii. 37.

⁵ Gen. vi 5. Ps. xiv. 2, 3. Rom. iii. 10, 11.

Scripture history also illustrates this unity. Ishmael's mocking shews the enmity of the heart in all ages. (Gal. iv. 29.) Who of us does not find something answering to Jonah's evil temper in our own fretfulness, waywardness, or ingratitude? Job shews us our impatience, our mistaken judgments of God's dealings with us, and the special trial of Satan's temptations. David's *heart* in all its varied exercises *answereth to our heart*. Else how could we take up his confession, praises, conflicts, and triumphs, and feel that no words of ours could more entirely and accurately express our own selves? It is these Scripture portraits, that make the word of God so "profitable for reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness." (2 Tim. iii. 16.)

Hence we learn sympathy with the members of Christ. We share their joys and sorrows, the confidence and temptations. Self-knowledge also instructs us thus to know human nature,¹ and to deal wisely and profitably with our fellow-sinners. The practical lesson of humility and forbearance is also deeply taught. A man observes *a face* reflected in *the water*, not thinking that it is *his own face* which is the actual object of disgust. He exclaims with vain self-preference against the ungodliness of the sinner, or the infirmities of the saint. Why! it is thine own self thou art reviling! Change then thy language of scorn for self-abhorrence and shame!

20. *Hell and destruction are never full: so the eyes of man are never satisfied.*

A striking picture of the two great devourers--*hell and destruction* (Chap. xv. 11)--*never full!* *Hell*--the grave--ever since Adam's sin has been insatiable. It has opened its mouth to receive countless millions; and still it yawns, craving for more.² Generations have sunk into *destruction*, doing the work, and earning "the wages, of sin." Still the pit is not full. The broad mouth still opens for more.

Thus insatiable are *the eyes*--the desires (1 John, ii. 16)--*of man*, always requiring new gratification. "He enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and *cannot be satisfied*." His "eye is *not satisfied* with seeing, nor his ear filled with hearing."³ Curiosity, love of novelty, covetousness, ambition--all these desires, like thirst in the dropsy, are aggravated in their indulgence. (Eccles. vi. 7.) Man is always seeking for what he can never find, satisfaction in earthly things. He toils after his object, and when he has grasped it, he toils still; the possessor of abundance, not of happiness.* His best efforts only bring him a

¹Ps. xxxvi. 1. P. T. ² Chap. xxx. 15, 16. Isa. v. 14.

³ Hab. ii. 5. Eccles. i.8. Comp. ii. 1-11.

* Eccl. v. 10-12.

'Crescit amor nummi, quantum ipsa pecunia crescit.'--Juv. *Sat.* xiv. 139.

'Crescentenl sequitur cura pecuniam,

Majorumque fames.'

Hor. *Carm.* iii. 16. Comp. ib. 24.

meagre enjoyment, not deserving the name. The summit of ambition, when reached, is not his resting-place; only the point, whence he stretches after something higher. All the affections of fallen man are filled with unquenched thirst. He may fancy his desires to be moderate. He may set bounds to them, and flatter himself, that he shall never overpass them. But give him a world, and, like the far-famed conqueror, he will weep for another, and sink at last into a wretched eternity of unsatisfied desires.

Nor is this altogether the effect of his depravity. Corruption indeed leads us to seek rest in something short of God. But it is our nature not to find it. How can an immortal being quench his thirst but from an infinite source? The soul was originally created to find a suitable and infinite gratification in the love of its Creator. And now that it is turned aside by the fall, it has an immortal depth, that craves to be filled. Nor do we speak here of refined and educated minds. The most unlettered being, awakened to a sense of his consciousness, might breathe out Augustine's confession--"Thou hast made us for thyself; and our heart can have no rest, till it rests in thee."* And here the gospel meets the case--"Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden; and I will give you rest." (Matt. xi. 28.) So often as the eager question starts up--"Who will shew us any good?" (Ps. iv. 6) --listen to the voice--"Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters. If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that cometh to me shall never thirst."¹ Here our *desires* are at once increased and *satisfied*. A fountain of infinite fulness is at our door. We are bid welcome to a haven of rest, to a bosom of peace and love. And when new-created in the image of God, and made capable of communion with him in grace, and of enjoying him in glory, can our *desires be satisfied* with anything less, with anything beside? Is he not now our supreme delight, our satisfying object, never leaving us without complete satisfaction for a single moment? (Ps. xvi. 5. Lam. iii. 24.)

Now let me ask--Have I seen God, as that, which alone is sufficient for my soul? Have I made the important discovery, that all my uneasy cravings from morning to night arise from not seeking him as my only satisfaction? Let me sit down to the richest banquet of life, and every dish will be tasteless, and without nourishment, if he is not above all, and in all. To delight in anything independent of him (Ps. lxxiii. 25), is as if we cast him down from his throne. All is misery and delusion. Delighting in him, all ministers to our comfort, flowing from this great centre. At the grand consummation how will the *satisfaction of the eyes and heart* be complete!--The eternity of being will be an eternity of joy--"Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty.

¹ Isa. lv. 1, 2. John, vii. 37; vi. 35.

* *Confess.* book 1. chap. i.

As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; *I shall be satisfied*, when I awake, with thy likeness." (Isa. xxxiii. 17. Ps. xvii. 15.)

21. *As the fining-pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise.**

The fining-pot and furnace have been before mentioned, as the Lord's "trial of the heart."¹ The most searching furnace is here shown. He that is praised is not only much approved, but much proved. The courting of the praise of our fellow-creatures is the world within. Praise is a sharper trial of the strength of principle than reproach. 'If a man be vain and light, he will be puffed up with it. If he be wise and solid, he will be no whit moved therewith.' † A haughty and supercilious deportment; "loving to have the pre-eminence" (3 John, 9); forwardness to give our opinion, and offence, if it be not taken--this is the dross brought out of the furnace. Count the discovery a special mercy. Know thy need of purifying, and let the great Refiner do his perfect work. (Mal. iii. 2, 3.)

But see *a man* humbled by praise, in the consciousness how little he deserves it, and "who maketh him to differ." (1 Cor. iv. 7.) See him made more careful and diligent, bearing his honour meekly, and the same man as before; here *the furnace* proves the real metal, and brings out "a vessel of honour, meet for the Master's use." (2 Tim. ii. 21.)

Absalom was tried in *this fining-pot*, and found "reprobate silver."² Herod, under the shouting praise of his flatterers, "gave not God the glory," and was blasted in shame.³ Joseph⁴ and David⁵--maintained their humility; Daniel his consistency;⁶ the apostles their singleness for their Master's glory. Here was the bright *gold* in the heated *furnace*. Fearful often is the trial to a minister of Christ. When he becomes the object of popular applause--his people's idol;⁷ when men of strong impulse and weak judgment put the servant in the Master's place[‡]--then he is in *the fining-pot*. He that is but dross consumes. Even if

¹ Chap. xvii. 3. Comp. Eccles. ii. 1, 5.

² 2 Sam. xiv. 25; xv. 6, with Jer. vi. 30. Ezek. xxii. 18.

³ Acts, xii. 21-23.

⁴ Gen. xli. 41-43; xlv. 5-8.

⁵ 1 Sam. xviii. 7, 8, 15-18.

⁶ Dan. vi. 3-5.

⁷ Acts, iii. 11-16; x. 25, 26; xiv. 11-15.

* Gesenius (Gibbs) translates this verse--'What a crucible is to gold, that let a. man be to the mouth that praiseth him '--i.e. let him examine the praise carefully.

† Bishop Hall.

‡ 'We should feel'--said the venerable Mr. Simeon in his own way--'as if our ears were stung with blasphemy, when we discover any attempt to transfer the crown of glory from the head of the Redeemer to that of any of his servants.' Henry Martyn--continually expresses his sensitive conscience upon this besetting temptation.--*Life*, chap. ii, iii. Dr. Payson--a careful self-observer--mentions among his trials--'well-meant, but ijudicious, commendations!' When I am praised--'God! humble me,'--was the prayer of one marvellously preserved in the fearful furnace.--*Life of Mrs. Godolphin*, p. 22. See also Author's *Christian Ministry*, part iii. chap. vii.

there be true metal, the man of God "is saved, yet so as by fire." Without painful discipline his usefulness would be withered, his spirituality deadened, his soul lost. (2 Cor. xii. 7.)

Two rules strongly present themselves--*Be careful in giving praise.* Even the children of the world can discover the deadly tenacity of pride in our nature. 'Do you know '--remarked M. de Stael on her death-bed--'what is the last thing to die in man? It is self-love.' We cannot therefore do our brother a greater injury, than by supplying fuel for pride by irregular praise. Even if he be a public man, he is not always before God as in the eyes of the Church. It may be that the most eminent servant of God is one, of whom the Church has taken little cognizance. And at best we are far too short-sighted to take the accurate measure of our brother's piety. We cannot weigh it aright without the balances of the sanctuary, which are *fully* in his hands alone, who searcheth the heart. Therefore till the day appointed for manifestation, it is well to judge each other, whether for good or evil, with becoming moderation. And to which--is it merciful to expose a weak fellow-sinner to the frown of a jealous God, by stirring up the innate corruption of his heart? For put even the finest *gold into the furnace*, how humbling is the spectacle of the dross that yet cleaves to it!¹ *Be not less careful in receiving praise.* While our taste revolts from extravagant flattery, yet we are apt to think it kindly meant, and it is very rare not to take unconsciously a drop of the poison. But the praise of the church is by far the most insidious poison,--so refined, so luscious! Specially when we feel it to be lawfully obtained, how hard to receive it with self-renouncing consecration to God! 'Christian! thou knowest thou carriest gunpowder about thee. Desire those that carry fire to keep at a distance. It is a dangerous crisis, when a proud heart meets with flattering lips.'† May not even the habit of speaking humbly of ourselves be a snare of the devil? Would it not be safer not to speak of ourselves at all? At least--to confine our conversation in *strict sincerity* to what we are, not what we appear to be, would be a "wise refraining of our lips." (Chap. x. 19.) Guard against dwelling even in thought upon anything, that brings man's approving eye upon us. Delight mainly in those works, that are only under the

¹ Isa. xxxix. 2. 2 Chron. xxxii. 31.

* 'I do not know'--said Neff--'that I ought to thank you so very warmly for what I have too much reason to fear the old man will be ready to take advantage of; his life being, you know, principally supported by praise.'--*Biography*, p. 369. 'Everyone here' --writes Dr. Payson to his mother--'whether friends or enemies, are conspiring to ruin me. Satan, and my own heart, of course will lend a hand; and if you join too, I fear all the cold water, which Christ can throw upon my pride, will not prevent it from breaking out into a destructive flame. As certainly as anybody flatters and caresses me, my Father has to scourge me for it, and an unspeakable mercy it is, that he condescends to do it.'

† Flavel.

eye of God. Value alone his approbation. Ever think of the love of human praise as the most deadly bane of a Christian profession, to be resisted with intense energy and perseverance. (John; v. 44; xii. 1 43, 44.)

22. *Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him.*

The allusion is to the Eastern mode of beating off the husk from the corn by *braying it in a mortar*.* Yet the husk sticks not so close to the grain, as *foolishness to the fool*. The beating of the mortar may separate the one. The other *will not depart* by repeated strokes. Much is said of the effectiveness of correction.¹ But of itself it works nothing. What can it do for *the fool*, that despises it?² "The rod "as an ordinary means, "will drive *foolishness* out of the heart of a child."³ But the child is here become a man in strength of habit, and stubbornness of will. As soon, therefore, "can the Ethiopian change-- his skin, or the leopard his spots," as those can do good, "who are accustomed to do evil." (Jer. xiii. 23.)

Examples of this incurable *hardness* abound. The deluge--that besom of divine vengeance destroyed the race, not *the foolishness*, of man. Nay--God himself declared its inefficacy for this end. (Gen. viii. 21.) Pharaoh was once and again *brayed in the mortar; yet did not his foolishness depart from him*.⁴ Ahaz under the same infliction "trespassed yet more against the Lord," and stands out as a beacon to all ages--"*This is that king Ahaz!*"⁵ "Why should ye be stricken any more?"--was the desponding complaint of God concerning his Israel.⁶ The deepest infliction of chastisement produces only the fruit of blasphemy and hardened impenitence.⁷ If Manasseh's *foolishness*, when *brayed in the mortar*, departed from him;⁸ this was not the innate power of affliction, but the superadded power of Sovereign Grace, which can turn any evil, even sin itself, to eternal good. The belief in the necessary working of affliction for our saving good is a fatal delusion. Never did it *of itself* bring one soul to God. In all cases, it is only what God is pleased to make it. It may even be tenfold more severe. The blows may be so mighty, as to make the most stupified soul quiver with intense feeling. Still if the rock be broken, the broken pieces will retain all their native hardness. The man may be crushed, yet not humbled. Still will he cling to his *foolishness*; and part with

¹ Chap. xxiii. 13, 14; xxix. 15, 17.

² Chap. xii. 1; xv. 10.

³ Chap. xxii. 15.

⁴ Exod. ix. 27; x. 16; xii. 29-32; xiv. 5.

⁵ 2 Chron. xx.--iii.22.

⁶ Isa. i. 5. Compo ix.13. Jer. v. 3; xlv. 9, 10, 15, 16. Ezek. xxiv. 13. Amos, iv. 11, 12.

⁷ Rev. xvi. 10, 11.

⁸ 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13.

* Many commentators conceive a reference to this mode of punishment still practised in the East. See Calmet-Parkhurst. HORNE'S *Introduction*, iii.157. BURDER'S *Oriental Customs*. But perhaps the figurative allusion is more simple.

Christ and heaven, rather than with that which is interwoven into every part of his nature. Was it not thus--Christian--with thyself, till Omnipotent love awakened, what chastisement alone could never have stirred, the cry of unreserved submission?--'Lord! spare me not; bruise me; humble me; do anything with me, but leave me under my sins. Who can deliver me, if thou dost not?' Most welcome is the "bemoaning" of the penitent child to his yearning father. "Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth. Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels are troubled for him: I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord."¹

23. *Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well (set thy heart, marg.) to thy herds.* 24. *For riches are not for ever: and doth the crown endure to every generation.?* 25. *The hay appeareth, and the tender grass sheweth itself, and herbs of the mountains are gathered.* 26. *The lambs are for thy clothing, and the goats are the price of the field.* 27. *And thou shalt have goat's milk enough for the food of thy household, and for the maintenance of thy maidens.*

"This declareth the great goodness of God towards man, and the diligence that he requireth of him for the preservation of his gifts.* It is a lively picture of the occupations, advantages, and responsibilities of rural life in olden days. It is specially appropriate to a nation, whose chief riches were, in its early origin, in *pastures and flocks*. Their father Jacob admirably exemplified this rule. He *knew well the state of his flocks and herds*.² Even King David, mindful of his ancient employ, kept his *flocks and herds* under constant inspection.³ Uzziah also deemed a pastoral charge no degradation to his royal dignity.⁴ The rule inculcates personal attention. All should not be left to servants. The master's eye, like Boaz,⁵ should, as far as possible, overlook the work. Riches are a fickle possession. *They would not be for ever.* (*Chap. xxiii. 5.*) *Even the crown might not endure to ever generation.* Native produce is more permanent wealth. Honest industry secures a more certain maintenance, springing up out of the earth, a more immediate gift of God.

The Bible is thus a directory for all the diversified employments of

¹ Jer. xxxi. 18-20. Comp. Hos. xiv. 1-i. Luke, xv. 18-24.

² Gen. xxx. 32-42; xxxi. 38-40; xxxiii. 13.

³ 1 Chron. xxvii. 29-31, with 1 Sam. xvi. 11. Ps. lxxviii. 70, 71.

⁴ 2 Chron. xxvi. 10. 5 Ruth, ii. 4, 5; iii. 1.

* Reformers' Notes.

life. It teaches that every man ought to have a business, and rebukes the neglect of practical every-day duties. God may be glorified by a single eye and purpose in every station; by-the labourer, the farmer, the servant, no less than by the master. (Col. iii. 22-24.) We must "serve the Lord in fervency of spirit." But a part of this service is, that we be "not slothful in business." (Rom. xii. 11.) Indolence would make the cares of life an excuse for a low standard of religion. But to retire from the burden would be to neglect "serving the will of God in our generation" (Acts, xiii. 36); to "put our light under a bushel, instead of upon a candlestick;" to cover it, instead of "letting it shine." (Matt. v. 14-16.) Our own calling is the way of God for us and in this way, let us commit ourselves to God, and be at peace. (1 Cor. vii. 20, 24.) His Providence extends to little things, as well as to things of greater moment. The least is under his care, as if there was nothing else. There is no weariness, perplexity, or labour. A single glance is sufficient. Nothing escapes his all-seeing eye. He that "tellethe the number of the stars," numbereth "also the hairs of our head."¹ Sweet balm for that cankering care, which is the bane of all godliness!

This picture also exhibits the fruits of industry, as far preferable to those of ambition. The comparison with those, whose station places them beyond the need of labour, affords no matter for envy; much for thankfulness. The various produce of the field--the *hay and grass* in the pastures; *the herbage on the mountains*;* the suitable *clothing from the lambs* (Job, xxxi. 20); the goats paying the price of the field; the sufficiency of wholesome food *for the household and maidens*--all is the overflowing bounty of our gracious God. "How excellent is thy I loving-kindness, O God!" (Ps. xxxvi. 7.) Thus "man goeth forth; unto his work and unto his labour until the evening, singing his song of praise--"O Lord, how manifold are thy; works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches." (Ib. civ. 23, 24.)

CHAPTER XXVIII.

1. *The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion.*

The wicked may appear *bold* in facing danger, so long as they drown reflection, and stupify conscience. But when conscience is roused, guilt is the parent of fear. Adam knew no fear, till he became a guilty creature. *Then*, to the searching question--"Where art thou?"--he replied--"I

¹ Ps. cxlvii. 4. Matt. x. 30.

*Ps. civ. 14. The word translated hay properly means grass. Where vegetation was so abundant, they have seldom occasion to make hay.'--Holden. Comp. Parkhurst.

was afraid, because I heard thy voice in the garden, and I hid myself." (Gen. iii. 9, 10.) But *the wicked flee*, not only when their enemies pursue,¹ but *when no man pursueth*.² Yet is not conscience an invisible *pursuer*, following close, the harbinger of the wrath of God? And there are times, when "the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them;"³ when "the shadows upon the mountains" shall make their hearts melt away.⁴ Cain was terrified with the apprehension of murder, when there was no man, save his own father, living on the earth. (Gen. iv. 13, 14.) Many a daring infidel has shewn himself a coward in a moment of sudden danger. In unwelcome thoughts of judgment to come, conscience has turned pale at the question--"Where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Pet. iv. 18.)

But if guilt brings fear, the removal of guilt gives confidence.⁵ *The wicked flee; the righteous are bold as a lion*. Fearless as the King of the forest,* they dare to do anything but offend their God. The fear of him has drowned every other fear. "Though an host should encamp against me"--saith the man of God--"mine heart shall not fear."⁶ Moses "feared not the wrath of the king."⁷ Caleb and Joshua stood firm against the current of rebellion.⁸ Elijah dared Ahab's anger to his face.⁹ Nehemiah in a time of peril exclaimed--"Should such a man as I flee?"¹⁰ The three confessors stood undaunted before the furious autocrat of Babylon.¹¹ The Apostles' *boldness* astonished their enemies.¹² Paul before the Roman governor,¹³ and even before Nero himself, "witnessed a good confession."¹⁴ Athanasius before the Imperial Counsel of Heresy; Luther at the Diet of Worms, finely exemplified the *lion-like boldness*. Nor is this the character of individuals only. The faithful and constant Christian will be *bold* to walk contrary to the course of this world; outfacing the scorn of men; valiant for despised truth; glorying in a persecuted name. Fearless is he of men. "For if God be for him, who can be against him?"¹⁵ Not less fearless is he of Satan. If he be a "roaring,"¹⁶ he is a chained, lion. "Resist him," and--coward-like, "he will flee from you." (Jam. iv. 7.) If there be a want of *boldness*, is there not a wound of conscience, neglect of prayer, or want of faith? The *boldness* itself is the sense of weakness, and

¹ Deut. xxviii. 25.

² Lev. xxvi. 17. Ps. liii. 5.

³ Lev. xxvi. 36. Job, xv. 21.

⁴ Judg. ix. 36.

⁵ Heb. x. 22. 1 John, iii 21.

⁶ Ps. xxvii. 3; iii. 6; xlv. 2; cx.ii.7.

⁷ Heb. xi. 27. Exod. x. 28, 29.

⁸ Num. xiv. 6-10.

⁹ 1 Kings, xviii. 10, 17, 18; xxi. 20. 2 Kings, i. 15.

¹⁰ Neh. vi. 11.

¹¹ Dan. iii. 16. 12 Acts, iv. 13.

¹³ Ib. xxiv.; xxvi. Rom. i. 15, 16.

¹⁴ 2 Tim. iv. 16, 17.

¹⁵ Rom. viii. 31.

¹⁶ 1 Pet. v. 8.

* Comp. chap. xxx. 30. 2 Sam. xvii. 10. This noble animal is the most perfect model of boldness and courage. He never flies from the hunters, nor is frightened by their onset. If their number forces him to yield, he retires slowly, step by step, frequently turning upon his pursuers. He has been known to attack a whole caravan, and when obliged to retire, he always retires fighting, and with his face to his enemy.'--PAXTON'S *Illustration of Natural History of Scripture*, pp. 295, 296. Pindar refers to the lion as the figure of courage, Isth. iv. *Antistr.*

divine "strength made perfect in it." (2 Cor. xii. 9.) When God intends us to do great things, he makes us feel, that "without him we can do nothing." (John, xv. 5.) Thus pride receives its death-blow and he receives all the glory to himself.*

2. *For the transgression of a land many are the princes thereof: but by a man of understanding and knowledge the state thereof shall be prolonged.*

Is God concerned in the falling of a sparrow? (Matt. x. 29.) Surely then much more in the control of kingdoms. (Dan. iv. 25.) Did we realize more deeply our national dependence, we should see the clouds of anarchy and confusion working his wise, mysterious, or gracious purposes. Rival *princes* desolate the land with the horrors of civil war. (1 Kings, xii. 16-21.) A quick succession of *princes* rises by treason, usurpation, or natural course. (Zech. xi. 8.) Hence a change of laws, spoliation of privileges, imposition of new burdens, or wasteful expenditure of treasure or blood. Man traces these evils to political causes. But God's voice speaks from the cloud--"This thing is from me." (1 Kings; xii. 24.) *For the transgression of a land many are the princes thereof.* The bloody contentions in our early history, which swept away the flower of our nobility; and those of a later date, which overturned for a time our long-established institutions--did they not betoken the same awful scourge of national *transgression*. Would that the nation had learnt from her own records of by-gone days, the sound and practical lessons of repentance with all its blessed fruits! †

* Bishop Hall has finely worked out this contrast--"The *wicked* is a very coward, and is afraid of everything; of God, because he is his enemy; of Satan, because he is his tormentor; of God's creatures, because they, joining with their Maker, fight against him; of himself, because he bears about with him his own accuser and executioner. The godly man contrarily is afraid of nothing; not of God, because he knows him his best friend, and will not hurt him; not of Satan, because he cannot hurt him; not of afflictions, because he knows they come from a loving God, and end in his good; not of the creatures, since "the very stones in the field are in league with him;" not of himself, since his conscience is at peace."--*Medit. and Vows*, Cent. ii. lxxiv.

† Thus wrote Jeremy Taylor of his own sorryful times, in his fervid colouring, and deep-toned instructiveness; and with some solemn application to later times. 'It is a sad calamity to see a kingdom spoiled, and a Church afflicted; priests slain with the sword, and the blood of nobles mingled with the cheaper and; religion made the cause of trouble, and the best of men most cruelly persecuted; government turned, and laws ashamed; judges decreeing in fear and covetousness, and the ministers of holy thing's setting themselves against all that is sacred. And what shall make recompense for this heap of sorrows, when God shall send such swords of fire? Even the mercies of God, that shall then be made public when the people shall have suffered for their sins. For I have known a luxuriant rule swell into irregular twigs and bold excrescences, and spend itself in leaves and little rings, and afford but little clusters to the wine-press. But when the Lord of the vine has caused the dressers to cut the wilder part, and make it bleed; it grew temperate in its vain expence of useless leaves, and knotted into fair and juicy branches, and made account of that loss of blood by the return of fruit. It is thus of an afflicted kingdom, cured of its surfeits, and punished for its sins. It bleeds for its long riot, and is left ungoverned for its disobedience, and chastised for its wantonness. And when the sword hath let forth the corrupted blood, and the fire hath purged the rest, then it enters into the

But not less must we acknowledge the Divine Hand in the *prolongation of the state by men of understanding and knowledge*. By a man of this high character *the state of Egypt was prolonged* by preservation from famine. (Gen. xli. 38, 39.) The long and prosperous reigns of the godly kings of Judah strongly contrast with the records of Israel after the revolt.¹ And perhaps this may be a mark of the Lord's controversy with us; that the detached political parties present few--if any--master-minds--*men of understanding and knowledge*--men--like Mr. Pitt--of surpassing power or grasp of mind; evidently raised up at a grand national crisis for *the prolongation of the state*. Such men guided by Christian principle, we would pray might be the counsellors of our beloved Sovereign, that her *state be prolonged* "in all godly quietness." (1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.)

3. *A poor man that oppresseth the poor is like a sweeping rain which leaveth no food* (with food, marg.)

Unrestrained power is often an engine of *oppression*;² never more so, than when in the grasp of the *poor*. Place an unprincipled spendthrift in power, and he is a destructive flood in his sphere: greedily serving every advantage by *oppression* to redeem his substance. *A poor man* suddenly raised to power, instead of sympathizing with grievances familiar to his former recollection,³ is usually pre-eminently distinguished by selfishness. Only a fool will admire the splendour of his power, reckless of the mischief, that it is spreading all round. Esther, when raised to a throne from an obscure station, was well reminded to use her power for God; for that some great work was surely intended by the remarkable Providence. (Esth. iv.14.) But a base mind becomes more corrupt from a hasty elevation. The man's necessities inflame his desires; and being without a spark of generous humanity, he is only bent upon improving his uncertain opportunities for selfish aggrandizement.* Some of the rulers in the French Revolution were raised from

double joys of restitution, and gives God thanks for his rod, and confesses the mercies of God in making the smoke to be changed into fire, and his anger into mercy.'--*Works*, vi, 182.

¹ 1 Kings, xv. 25-34; xvi. 8-29. 2 Kings, xv. 8-31, with 1 Kings, xv. 10. 2 Chron. xvii. 1-5; xxxii. 20-26

² Gen. xxxi. 29. Eccles. iv. 1. 3 Matt. xviii. 28-30.

*'It is in matter of power'--as Bp. Sanderson admirably observes--'as it is in matter of learning. They that have but a smattering of scholarship you shall ever observe to be the forwardest to make ostention of those few ends they have; because they fear there would be little notice taken of their learning, if they should not now show it when they can. It is even so in this case. Men of base spirit and condition, when they have gotten the advantage of a little power, conceive, that the world would not know what goodly men they are, if they should not do some act or other, to shew forth their power to the world. And then, their minds being too narrow to comprehend any generous way whereby to do it, they cannot frame to do it any other way, than by trampling upon those that are below them; and that they do beyond all reason, and without all mercy.'--*Sermon on Chap. xxiv.* 11, 12. Comp. also on 1 Sam. xii. 3.

the lowest ranks. And their *oppression* was indeed a *sweeping rain*, leaving no food in fertile districts.

Cheering is the contrast of Him, once poor himself by his voluntary abasement, now raised to honour and glory; yet pitying, not ashamed of, his "poor brethren."¹ Truly his administration is not the *sweeping rain* of desolation, but "the rain upon the mown grass," rich in mercy. "He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence; and precious shall their blood be in his sight." (Ps. lxxii. 12-14.)

4. *They that forsake the law praise the wicked: but such as keep the law contend with them.*

How responsible is the influence of our profession, acting upon all around for evil or for good! Congeniality of taste directs the choice of our companions. Those who love sin, naturally "have pleasure in them that do it." (Rom. i. 32.) *They praise the wicked*, because, like themselves, *they forsake the law*, and "cast it behind them."² "The world loveth its own."³ Each countenances his brother in sin. (Isa. xii. 6.) Each makes the other's conduct, not *the forsaken law*, the standard of action. *The wicked* may possess some praiseworthy qualities. (Luke, xvi. 8.) But to *praise them* for their wickedness, identifies us with them. 'It is fearful to sin; more fearful to delight in sin; yet more to defend it.'⁴

The servants of God maintain the same unity of spirit. They cannot call sin by smooth names, and gloss over an ungodly character. If *they keep the law*, they *contend with them that forsake it*. Noah thus *contended* with the ungodly in his day, condemning them not merely in word, but in life; and though "a preacher of righteousness," he preached more powerfully by his life, than by his doctrine.⁴ But this *contention* must be aggressive. We must "reprove," as well as separate from, "the unfruitful works of darkness."† Our Divine Master's open testimony was the grand offence.¹ So let us plainly shew, that his enemies are ours[‡] that we hold neutrality in his cause to be treason. For "he that is not with me is against me." (Matt. xii. 30.)

Oh! the appalling recollection of our former influence for evil! the deadly, perhaps the eternal, injury, which all our subsequent labours have never undone! the encouragement, which our *praise of the wicked*

¹ 2 Cor. viii. 9. Philip. ii. 7-11, with Heb. ii. 11, 12.

² 1 Sam. xxiii. 23. Neh. iv. 17-19.

³ John, xv. 19.

⁴ 2 Pet. ii. 5. Heb. xi. 1.

⁵ Matt. xv. 10-12. Luke, xx. 19. John, vii. 7.

* Bp. HALL'S Works, viii. 36.

† Eph. v. 11. Elijah-1 Kings, xviii. 18; Elisha-2 Kings, iii. 13. John-Matt. iii. xiv. 3, 4.

‡ Ps. cxxxix. 21, 22. See the rebuke given to a godly king, 2 Chron. xix. 2.

gave to sin, hardening our companions in their wickedness! What would Manasseh have given to have undone his sin in all its evil consequences upon his son and his kingdom!* Intolerable would be the thought of the past, but for the blood which covers the guilt, while it deepens shame and self-abhorrence. (Ezek. xvi. 63.) But let it ever be present before us, as our constraining obligation to redeem what has been lost, as far as may be, by a holy *contention* against sin, and by the convincing protest of consistent godliness.¹

5. *Evil men understand not judgment: but they that seek the Lord understand all things.*

Ignorance and knowledge are here contrasted, and each traced to their proper source. The Apostle draws the same contrast. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things." (1 Cor. ii. 14, 15.) This unity of statement is beautiful and instructive. "The two Testaments, like our two eyes, mutually enlighten us, and assist each other."†

*Evil men understand not judgment.*² They know not the true standard of right and wrong, the true way to God, or the end of God's dealings with them. Their ignorance is wilful. (Job, xxi. 14.) "Having the understanding darkened; *because of the blindness of the heart*. Men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. They call darkness light, and light darkness."³ The most distinguished scholar is a very fool in *understanding judgment*; and, except he be humbled in the consciousness of his ignorance, and seek light from above, he will perish in gross darkness. What a curse are learning and intellect without an humble heart!

Nay--sometimes knowledge, no less than ignorance, hinders a right *understanding*. Where the knowledge of the truth goes before or beyond the power of it, the mind is often perplexed with difficulties, which the less intelligent, but more simple, escapes. When knowledge stands in the stead of faith; when the man reasons, instead of submitting to Divine teaching; knowledge abused becomes a positive hindrance to a correct *understanding*. Nothing is more revolting to our evil nature, than the study of Scripture, with an earnest and sincere desire to follow its light and teaching.

An undisciplined imagination is also a great hindrance to a spiritual judgment. Let this bright faculty be exercised in giving vivid apprehensions of divine things, and clothing the picture with brilliant but

¹ Philip, ii. 15, 16. 1 Pet. ii. 12; iii. 16.

² Ps. lxxxii. 5. Jer. iv. 22.

³ Eph. iv. 18. John, iii. 19, Isa. v. 20.

* 2 Chron. xxxiii. 15-17, with 22. 2 Kings, xxiii. 26, Mr. Cecil had deep cause to regret his ineffectual labour to reclaim from infidelity more than one, whom he had plunged into that gulf of ruin.

† SERLE'S *Horae Solitae*, vol. i. 565.

truthful colouring. It may thus, within its own province, be a valuable handmaid to the Gospel. But a ray of faith is better than a rainbow of fancy. The picture, if it be not in immediate connexion with the reality, fades away without permanent influence. The feeblest faith, grounded upon the fundamentals of the Gospel, proves a steadfast principle of endurance and triumphant energy, even when under the prostration of natural and intellectual power, "the whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint."

But pride fastens upon every faculty of man. And this is indeed the general cause. The source of light is despised. (Ps. x. 4.) Hence "there is none that *understandeth*," because "there is none that *seeketh after God*."* *They that seek the Lord*, babes though they may be in intellect, and ignorant in worldly things--shall have an accurate understanding of all things profitable, such as no "natural man" can attain.¹ "The words are plain to him that *understandeth*, and right to them that find knowledge." (Chap. viii. 9.) Many things, dark to human reason, are simplified to humility.² *The harmony of the divine attributes staggers reason, and can only be apprehended by humble faith.* 'In thinking of the justice of the Deity' (as a reclaimed infidel† describes his own conflict) man 'is at first ready to doubt his compassion. But the gospel answers him by the voice of an Apostle--"God so loved the world" that "he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all."--It is then that the penitent sinner apprehends this ineffable, mystery. His proud and blind reason had rejected it. His humble and contrite heart profoundly feels it. He believes, because he loves; because he is grateful; because he sees all the goodness of the Creator proportioned to the miseries of the creature. Oh my God! all thy mysteries are mysteries of love, and therefore are they indeed divine.'[‡]

Again--*God's working is the spring of diligence, not of inertion.* Man works, but under the Master-worker. He is free, but under the free-making Spirit, giving him a will for the service. Thus, while active, he is kept dependent.³ He works with deeper humility, and more assured confidence. (Philip. ii. 12, 13.) This is a mystery to

¹ Ps. xxv. 9, 12; cxix. 98-100, 130. Matt. xi. 25. ² Ps. xxv. 14, with chap. xxiv. 7.

³ Ps. cxix. 4, 5, 8, 10, 32, 173.

* Ps. xiv. 2. Rom. iii. 11. 'Wickedness'--Bp. Taylor justly observes--'corrupts a man's reasoning, gives him false principles, and evil measuring of things,'--*Sermon before University of Dublin*. 'I regard it as a fundamental error in the study of Divinity'--remarks Professor Franke--'for anyone to persuade himself, that he can study divinity properly without the Holy Spirit. As long as he remains in this error all labour is lost on him.'--*Lect. Paroen*. p. 184. 'A grain of true faith is more estimable than a mass of mere historical knowledge.'--Ib. *Idea Studiosi Theologia*. A man may as soon read the letter of Scripture without eyes, as properly understand their mysteries without grace.'--Bp. BEVERIDGE.

† The French poet and philosopher, De La Harpe.

‡ Quoted in SHEPPARD'S *Thoughts on Devotion*, pp. 308-310.

reason. *But they that seek the Lord understand it.* Practical experience shews it to them. Again--*how dark are the Lord's ways to man's proud reason!* Hard dispensation! a world of sorrow! But the child of God, seeking to know "the end," *understands* them "all to be mercy and truth."¹ Is it not the sharp trial, to probe the wound; the bitterness, to wean from the creature comfort; the burden, to prove "the patience and faith of the saints;" the sifting, to separate the chaff from the wheat; the furnace, to purify the gold? Thus does *seeking the Lord* expound the mysteries of Providence and grace! We are neither stumbled by the stones, perplexed by the labyrinths, or "discouraged because of" the length and weariness of the way. Those who desire the light shall have it. (John, vii. 17.) To those who improve it more shall be given.²

But--*'I cannot seek--that is--I cannot pray.'* Nor can you do anything right of yourself. But does this discharge you from the obligation? Does it not often mean--if the heart would speak out--*'I have no care for the blessing.'* But suppose the confession to be sincere--*'I cannot pray.'* Then do as you are taught. Carry this confession to the Lord. Repeat it again and again upon your knees. Let not inability be indolence, but faith. Not one of the Lord's people, but sympathizes with the complaint. The connexion of your utter helplessness is most profitable, as confirming the divine testimony. (2 Cor. iii. 5.) Yet remember the help provided for weakness and ignorance. (Rom. viii. 26.) If you cannot pray as you would, pray as you can. Desire--*sincere and supreme*--is the heart's real prayer, God's own work upon the soul.* Is this manifest? Wait in the constant use of the means. Be found in the way. (Isa. lxiv. 5.) "Light is sown," and the seed in God's best time will bring the harvest. (Ps. xcvi. 11.) No one fails to make progress, who is really in earnest. It is a grand mistake to suppose, that some impression must be felt, as *the warrant to seek*. The only true warrant is the free invitation and promise of the gospel. You must come, if at all, as a sinner, not as a saint; as you are, not as you would be; now, not waiting for some better time or preparation; seeking your fitness in Christ, not in yourself. And then plead his promise--"Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." (John, vi. 37.) Tell him that you are come on the ground of this promise, and to claim the fulfilment of it--"Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast cause me to hope." (Ps. cxix. 49.) This must prevail. "He cannot deny himself." (2 Tim. ii. 13.)

¹ Jam. v. 11, with Ps. xxv. 10. ² Matt. xiii. 12; xxv. 29. Comp. Ecclus. i. 26, 27.

* Ps. xxxviii 9. Isa. xxvi. 8, 9. See Homer's fine description, 'Prayers the daughters of Jove'--perhaps the most remarkable view of prayer to be found in Heathen literature--as Cowper in his Notes writes--'well worthy of observation, considering where it is found.'--*Il.* I. 502-514.

But if *as yet* you cannot come thus boldly, do not reason or despond about your state. Ask for divine teaching to understand, and divine grace to follow, the light vouchsafed. No depth of learning, no extraordinary inspiration, is needed. Simplicity, humility, diligence, will bring the unction "from the Holy One, by which ye shall *know all things*." (1 John, ii. 20.) In God's best time the heart is given, as well as the mind. "The senses are exercised to discern between good and evil." (Heb. v. 14.) All is light, because the creative word has been given anew--"Let there be light; and there was light."¹ Are Christians then to be despised as fools? They are the most intelligent people in this world. Fixed at Wisdom's gate, their religion is divine wisdom; and "Wisdom is justified of her children."²

6. *Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich.*

This Proverb is repeated* for its valuable instruction. One part of the comparison, implied before, is here expressed--though he be rich. Before, he was described as *perverse in his lips*. A deeper trait of character is here given--*perverse in his ways*, or his principles. This is one of those paradoxes, that sometimes stumble the feet even of God's children. (Ps. lxxiii. 2-16.) *A man may walk in his uprightness*, and yet be *poor*. He may be *perverse in his ways*, and be *rich*. And yet the *poor man*, with all his external disadvantages, is better; more honourable, more happy, more useful *than the rich*, with all his earthly splendour. †

To come to a solid scriptural decision on this point is of great practical moment. For if we are dazzled with the glitter of this world's glory, we shall reverse the golden rule (Matt. vi. 33); and "seek" *first* the world as our grand object: and "the kingdom of God," the interests of the soul, the stake of eternity, will occupy only the second place; that is--virtually they will be thrust out.

¹ Gen. i. 3. 2 Cor. iv. 6. ² Luke, vii. 35. Prov. viii. 34. Comp. Wisd. vi. 11-16.

* Chap. xix. 1. The LXX. translation of this verse, xxviii. 6, is--'A poor man is better than a rich lie'-- the abstract for the concrete. Comp. chap. xix. 22. Ps. lxii. 9.

† There is a fine passage from Cicero, which it is difficult to translate without losing much of its spirit--'A contented mind is as good as an estate. Frugality is itself a revenue. To be satisfied with one's lot is to be really and infallibly rich. If landed possessions are most highly valued by shrewd judges of human affairs, as a property, which is least liable to injury; how inestimably precious must true virtue which cannot be snatched from us by force or by fraud; which cannot be damaged by shipwreck or by fire; which no tempests or political disturbances can change! They alone, who are endowed with this treasure, can be said to be truly rich. They alone possess what is fruitful and durable. What is allotted to them they deem sufficient. They covet nothing. They really want nothing. They require nothing. The wicked and the avaricious, on the contrary, so far from being rich, are in reality miserably poor; inasmuch as they have no certain treasure, and are always impatient for some addition to their stores, never satisfied with their present possessions.'--*Paradox*, vi. 3.

This is a just balance, however counter it may be to common opinion. Dishonesty is the besetting temptation of *the poor*. (Chap. xxx. 9.) Yet in despite of this temptation, he *walks in his uprightness*. Is there not a glory around his poverty, infinitely beyond the vain show of this world? *The rich man is perverse in his ways*; "a double-minded man," endeavouring to walk in two ways;* outwardly following godliness, inwardly deceit; pretending to go one way, walking in another. Who can trust him?

So far then as *concerns character*, the 'comparison is in favour of *the poor*. *As regards condition*--Who would not prefer the lot of Elijah, subsisting upon his barrel of meal, to Ahab in all the glory of his throne?¹ Who does not see a dignity in Paul standing at the bar, that throws the worldly rank of his judges into utter insignificance?² But the truth is of general application. Outward superiority only affects our state before God, as increasing proportionably our responsibilities. (Luke, xii. 48.) How many will wish, that they had lived and died in obscure poverty, with "a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man" (Acts, xxiv. 16); rather than have been entrusted with riches; only in *the perverseness of their ways* to embolden them to sin with a high hand against God and their own souls!

7. *Whoso keepeth the law is a wise son: but he that is a companion of riotous men shameth his father.*

Keeping the law is national wisdom and honour. (Deut. iv. 6.) Invaluable is that training, which leads young persons, under the Lord's blessing, to this happy personal choice. (Isa. lvi. 6, 7.) Such are manifestly taught of God, and guided by his Spirit into true *wisdom*. For suppose a son of polished manners and intellectual endowments, yet without right principle; or one of moderate ability, in an humble walk of life, yet deeply imbued with practical godliness; could we hesitate, which was the *wise son*, bringing honour to his father's name? (Chap. xxiii. 24.) Yet how often is *shame* instead of honour, the father's bitter exercise! For how is his name blotted, when the depraved son, bent upon his own gratification, chooses the companionship of the ungodly, and shortly becomes one with them!³ Young man! in thy noisy mirth hast thou found solid enduring peace?⁴ Let the man of God direct you in the "cleansing thy way, by taking heed thereto according to the word."⁵ Let his choice be thine--"I am a *companion*," *not of riotous men*, but "of all them that fear thee, and of

¹ I Kings, xvii. 13-15, with xxi. 1-4, 19. ² Acts, xxiv. 24-26; xxvi. 27-29. 2 Tim. iv. 16, 17.

³ Chap. xix. 26; xxiii. 19-22; xxix. 3, 15. Luke, xv. 13.

⁴ Chap. xiv. 13. Eccles. ii. 2; vii. 6. ⁵ Ps. cxix. 9, 11.

* Heb. *perverse in two ways*, Jam. i. 8.

them that keep thy precepts."¹ Meet the enticements of thy former companions with a decided protest--"Depart from me, ye evil-doers; I will keep the commandments of my God."² Here is honour to thy father, happiness to thyself, usefulness to the Church, meetness for heaven.

Parents! Do we shrink from this overwhelming *shame*? Let us more diligently, more prayerfully cultivate that wise and holy training of our children, which is God's appointed ordinance; and which, however long or severely he may try our faith, he will not fail to honour in his fittest time. (Chap. xxii. 6.)

8. *He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor.*

What a deadly curse is it to be under the spell of covetousness! Everything that is "honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report," is sacrificed to this idolatrous principle. No laws can bind it. God had fenced in the rights of his poor people with solemn and plain obligations.³ And he will not suffer their rights to be lightly regarded. "I know"--saith the man of God--"that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor." (Ps. cxl. 12.) As a God of equity, often does he make selfishness to punish itself, and even to turn to the advantage of the oppressed.⁴ Ill-gotten gains are a dangerous and uncertain possession.⁵ A man labours for himself, and his harvest falls into better hands; 'not intending anything of himself; but it is so done through God's secret Providence.'* In this, as in every view, godliness "has the promise of the life that now is." (1 Tim. iv. 8.) It brings "the great gain of contentment" (Ib. vi. 6), and restrains those inordinate desires for wealth, which ruin all right principles, and "drown men in destruction and perdition." (Ib. verse 9.) "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." (Luke, xii. 15.) Why should we seek *to increase our substance by unjust gain*, when we have our Father's promise--"All things shall be added to you" (Matt. vi. 33)--yea, when his divine power hath given unto us all things pertaining unto life and godliness? (2 Pet. i. 3.)

9. *He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.*

This does not mark the frailty, infirmity, or temptation, that too

¹Ps. cxix. 63.

²Ib. verse 115.

³Exod. xxii. 24. Lev. xxv. 36. Deut. xxiii. 19, 20. Ezek. xviii. 13.

⁴Chap. xiii. 22. Job, xxvii. 13, 16, 17. ⁵Chap. x. 2; xxi. 6.

*Diodati. Eccles. 11.

often interrupts *the hearing of the law*, and damps the attentive interest; or even the occasional rebellion against the divine commands. The case described is that habitual and obstinate rejection of God, that despises his ordinances, and refuses the instruction of his Ministry. Awful indeed is it, that there should be such a rebel. Yet thus do "the ungodly, while they take God's covenant into their mouth, hate instruction, and cast his words behind them." (Ps. 1. 16, 17.) Nay, even in his church will "they come before him as the people come, and sit before him as his people; *they hear his words, but they will not do them.*" (Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32.) If the subject thus *turneth away his ear from the law* of his Sovereign, every *prayer* that he may present in time of distress his Lord will regard as an *abomination*. (Chap. i. 28, 29. Zech. vii. 11-13.) A fearful thought, that, however speciously and smoothly fashioned, in order to impose upon man, it is no less in the sight of God than a blessing judiciously cursed. Justly is the door of audience closed against the presumptuous hypocrite. 'Great reason that God shall refuse to hear him, who refuseth to hear God.* And what if his language now--"Depart from me"--should be taken out of his mouth at the great day, as the seal of his everlasting doom! (Job, xxi. 14; xxii. 17, with Matt. xxv. 41.)

A strange contradiction, that this open rejection of God should be connected with any form or semblance of religion! And yet often would the self-deceiver compensate for the disobedience of a plain command 'by the performance of some external duty. Israel presented "the multitude of sacrifices" as a price for the neglect of practical obligations. "Vain oblations! Incense that was *abomination!*" (Isa. 11 i. 11-15. Ps. lxvi. 18.) Often now *praying* at home is an excuse for *turning away from hearing the law* in God's own house. Such prayer is solemnly declared to be *abomination*. Often also is the law of charity and even of bounden duty evaded, to maintain a profession of godliness, hateful in his eyes, who will bring to open shame every hypocritical service. (Matt. xv. 8.) Does God trifle with man? Assuredly he will not suffer man thus to trifle with him.

Be it ever remembered, that godliness is God's *whole* service; that "the wisdom from above is without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (Jam. iii. 17); that to extol one ordinance at the expense of another; to decry preaching for the sake of commending prayer; is proof alike of a false judgment and an unsound heart. To reject any divine ordinance is proud will-worship; a plain proof, that the privilege has never been enjoyed. For no beggar would slight the door, where he had been used to receive his blessing. O my God! let me lie in thine own bosom, or at thy feet, that my will may be lost in time, and my happiness found in a whole-hearted devotedness to thyself!

* Bishop REYNOLDS on Hos. xiv. 8.

10. *Whoso causeth the righteous to go astray in an evil way, he shall fall himself into his own pit but the upright shall have good things in possession.*

To delight in the enticing of sinners in *an evil way*, is the very image and aspect of the tempter. But the chief delight, the main effort, is to *cause the righteous to go astray*. No rejoicing is so great, as when "a standard-bearer fainteth." Because, while it shews the seducer's enmity to the truth, it countenances him in his sin. Yet how transient is his joy! Success is his ruin. By the retributive justice of God, he often *falls into his own pit*. (Chap. xxvi. 27.) The snare of Balaam for the people of God ended in his own ruin.¹

The malice of Satan and his emissaries sets out the faithfulness of our Almighty Keeper. "Thou preparest a table for us in the presence of our enemies," who gnash their teeth at the sight. (Ps. xxiii. 5.) Even if they succeed for a while *in leading the righteous astray*, recovering mercy is in store for them;² and brought out of the snare in deep humiliation, *the upright*, instead of the evil meditated against them, *have good things in possession*. What *good things* they are, can never be fully written or thought of. For "eye hath not seen, nor hath ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man." (1 Cor. ii. 9.) But whatever they be--Christian--take them to thee, claim thy right, and be not robbed of thy portion. And if we *have good things in possession*, much more we have in reversion "an inheritance undefiled, unfading," of which none can spoil us. (1 Pet, i. 4.) "Who shall separate us from our Father's love? Neither life, nor death; neither earth nor hell!" (Rom. viii. 39.)

11. *The rich man is wise in his own conceit; but the poor that hath understanding searcheth him out.*

To be truly wise, and *wise in our own conceit*, are two things often confounded, but essentially opposite. But though riches do not always bring wisdom (Job, xxxii. 9), *the rich man* often pretends to it, and ascribes his success to his own sagacity, though he may be manifestly simple and foolish. The Apostle therefore, with a reference to this besetting temptation, directs a "charge to them that are rich in this world that they be not high-minded." (1 Tim. vi. 17.) The prophet brings the wealthy prince of Tyrus on the stage, and shews him to us in *all* the folly of his *conceit*. (Ezek. xxviii. 2.) Obviously indeed *the rich man* has many advantages above *the poor*, in leisure and opportunities of instruction. Yet on the other hand, worldly elevation operates unfavourably. He is shut out from many opportunities of

¹ Rev. ii. 14. Num. xxxi. 15, 16, with 8;

² Ib. verse 3. Luke, xxii. 31, 32.

Christian instruction. The atmosphere of flattery clouds that faculty of self-knowledge, which is the basis of true wisdom. And how natural is it to think himself as wise as his flatterers represent him; as much above his neighbours in understanding as in station! Hence he becomes dogmatical in over-weening conceit, fond every way of displaying his fancied superiority. Yet, as in the case of Naaman's servants (2 Kings, v. 13), the intelligent good understanding of a poor man may search him out, and see through this false gloss. Specially, when endued with a measure of spiritual understanding, the poor man may expose his superior to just mortification. (John, ix. 30-34.) Indeed the universe possesses not a more dignified character than the poor wise man. Did not the incarnate Lord honour this station supremely, by taking it on himself? (Philip. ii. 7.) To walk in his footsteps, in his spirit, is wisdom, honour, and happiness, infinitely beyond what this poor world of vanity can afford.

12. *When righteous men do rejoice, there is great glory: but when the wicked rise, a man is hidden.*

"We are made"--said a *righteous man*--"as the filth of the earth, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day."¹ Yet these are the men, who "bear up the pillars of the state,"² *When therefore they rejoice*--when they are raised to honour,--*there is great glory.*³ The whole kingdom feels more or less the influence of this national blessing. Godliness is countenanced. Men are protected in the free exercise of their religion. "When Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in the king's royal apparel, the city of Shushan rejoiced, and were glad. The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honour; in every province a feast, and a good day," (Esth. viii. 17.) The same result is seen in the experience of the Church. When "the Churches" had rest" from the fiery trial, "they were edified, and walked in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost. (Acts, ix. 31.) And what *glory so great*, as the sunshine of the enjoyment of their God!

But when the wicked rise to honour, how is this *glory* eclipsed! The people of God are removed into corners, silenced, *hidden*. (Verse 28.) The light of upwards of an hundred prophets, and even of Elijah himself, was *hidden* for a while under the tyranny of Ahab.⁴ And in every age the power of *the wicked*, especially under a despotic rule, *hides* much valuable influence. Yet it is *hidden* only to the eye of sense. For of those, who "wander about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, in deserts, and caves of the earth," what greater *glory* could we give, than the divine inscription stamped upon them--"Of whom the world was not worthy?"⁵

¹ 1 Cor. iv. 13.

² Ps lxxv. 3.

³ Chap. xi. 10; xxix. 2.

⁴ 1 Kings, xvii. 2, 3; xviii, 4; xix. 1-4.

⁵ Heb, xi, 37, 38, Rev. xii, 6.

13. *He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.*

God and man each *cover sin*; God in free unbounded grace (Ps. lxxxv. 2); man, in shame and hypocrisy. The sinners here contrasted are chargeable with the same guilt. But how opposite are the remedies adopted, and their several results! The contrast is not between great sins and small, but between *sins covered*, and *sins confessed and forsaken*. *Whoso covereth the smallest sin, shall not prosper. Whoso confesseth and forsaketh the greatest, shall find mercy.* "Love covereth" our neighbour's sins (Chap. x. 12); pride our own. The proud sinner naturally wishes to be; thought better than he is. His sin must have some cover.* He must at least give it a good name. Isa. v. 20.) He would cover it, if possible, from himself; putting it out of mind; banishing all serious thoughts; stifling conviction; and then trying to persuade himself that he is happy. To escape evil consequences, a lie is resorted to.† Or if the facts are too plain to be denied; 'the worst part is unfounded. We were not in it so much as our neighbour.' Ignorance, good, or at least not bad, intentions, custom, necessity, strong temptation, sudden surprisal, the first offence; constitutional infirmity; even the decrees of God‡--one or more are pleaded in palliation. Or to save our honour--rather our pride--the blame must be shifted on another.§ Even God himself is made accountable--a secret but daring charge! carrying with it its own self-contradiction. Indignantly he challenges the proof, and lays the sin at the right door. (Isa. 1. 1. Jam. i. 13.) More commonly, but most wrongfully, it is laid upon Satan. The most of his power is, that he is a tempter. And no claim could he have ever established, had not we willingly sold ourselves to his service. Our father Adam--again--must bear the burden. 'Must our "teeth be set on edge" for the "sour grapes which he ate?" (Ezek. xviii. 2.) Must the unborn children be held responsible for the inheritance, which their father lost? 'But it was the nature that sinned, of which we are a component part. We "were in his loins" (Heb. vii. 10) at the time, and therefore we share his responsibility. Our own personal sin has ratified the deed by our own free and repeated consent. All these

* Cicero stamps *confession* of wickedness as disgraceful and dangerous (*turpis et periculosa. Cont. Verrem, Lib. iii.*) Thus does Heathen morality develope the pride of depraved nature.

† Cain, Gen. iv. 9; Rachel, xxxi. 34, 35; Joseph's brethren, xxxvii. 31-35; David, 2 Sam. xi. 15, 25; the adulteress, chap. xxx. 20. Comp. Jer. ii. 23; Peter, Matt. xxvi. 70; Ananias and Sapphira, Acts, v. 1-8. Is not this a sad propensity in children? The first offence may be trifling. But the fear of punishment induces a lie. Another lie is necessary to cover the first. Every step adds to sin.

‡ Jer. vii. 10. (Comp. *Calv. Instit.* b. iii. c. xxiii. § 12-14.)

§ Adam and Eve, Gen. iii. 12, 13. Comp. Job, xxxi. 33; Aaron, Exod. xxxii. 21-24; Saul, 1 Sam. xv. 20, 21; Pilate, Matt. xxvii. 24 26.

attempted transfers are vain coverings. Conscience bears witness to the truth, that no man takes harm but from himself.

But even this admitted--man with ceaseless ingenuity still attempts to frame a *cover, for his sin*. Some supposed good deeds are put forth as a compensation. (Mic. vi. 6, 7.) And by balancing good and evil respectively against each other, he hopes to establish some preponderance in his favour. Yet all these fig-leaf *coverings* (Gen. iii. 7) for his nakedness only shew his determination to hold his sin, and his pride of heart, which would rather hide it from God himself than submit to receive free mercy as a self-condemned sinner.

These attempts however to *cover sin shall not prosper*. The voice of an offended God summoned Adam from his hiding-place to receive his sentence. (Gen. III. 9.) "The voice of Abel's blood cried from the ground," and the murderer became "a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth." (Ib. iv. 10-12.) Conscience lashed Joseph's brethren with the sin of bye-gone days. (Ib. xlii. 21.) Sauls *covering his sin* cost him his kingdom.¹ "The leprosy of Naaman clave to Gehazi and his seed for ever."² The proud accusers of their fellow-sinner were "convicted by their own conscience."³ "There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves."⁴ Their darkest deed is wrought in the open face of an all-seeing God, and "set in the light of his countenance,"⁵ to "be proclaimed upon the house-tops" before the assembled world.⁶

This unsuccessful attempt to *cover sin*, while it adds to the guilt,⁷ is fraught with misery.⁸ The love of sin struggles with the power of conscience. The door of access to God is barred.⁹ Christian confidence is clouded;¹⁰ and, unless Sovereign mercy interpose, it must end in the sting of "the never-dying worm." The *covering* of the disease precludes the possibility of the cure. Only the penitent confessor can be the pardoned sinner.

Long indeed is the struggle, ere every false *cover* is cut off; ere the heartless general confession--'We are all sinners'--is exchanged for the deep-felt personal acknowledgment, "giving glory to God. Thus and thus" have I done. Behold I am vile. What shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth."¹¹ But glorious is the divine victory over pride and sullenness, when this first act of repentance, this first step of return (Luke, xv. 17, 18), is heartily accomplished. God needs not confession for his own information. But he demands it for our good. It brings no claim on his mercy. But it is a meetness for the reception of it. Christ has fully satisfied the claims of justice.

¹ 1 Sam. xv. 21, 23.

² 2 Kings, v. 27.

³ John, viii. 9.

⁴ Job, xxxiv.-22.

⁵ Ib. xxxiv. 21. Ps. xc. 8.

⁶ Luke, xii. 2, 3. Eccles. xii. 14. 1 Cor. iv. 5.

⁷ Isa. xxx. 1.

⁸ Ib. xxviii. 20.

⁹ Ps. lxvi. 18.

¹⁰ Ib. xxxii. 3, 4.

¹¹ Jos. vii. 19, 20. Job, xl. 4.

But the claims must be acknowledged in the humble acceptance of the benefit. The mercy is ready; but the sinner must sue it out--"Only acknowledge thine iniquity." (Jer. iii. 13.) Our yearning Father is "waiting" for this moment, "that he may be gracious."¹ There is no further keeping of anger. *He shall have mercy*, instant reconciliation.* Words may be few while the heart is full. With David it was but a single sentence; but the closet workings of his heart witnessed to the enlargement and ingenuousness of his sorrow.† Thus man *confesses* the debt; God crosses it out from his book; and sweet is the penitent's song--"Blessed is he, whose *sin, is covered*." (Ps, xxxii. 1.) The dying thief *confesses*, and the condemned malefactor is crowned with life eternal. (Luke, xxiii. 43.)

But we must not overlook the distinctive feature of this confession. It is not that of Pharaoh, extorted on the rack;² or of Saul and Judas,³ the stinging of remorse; or of the Pharisees and Sadducees,⁴ mere formal profession; or of the harlot,⁵ a cover for sin. Penitent faith *confesses* in the act of laying the hand upon the great sacrifice,⁶ and hence draws strength of purpose to *forsake* all that has been here *confessed*. For while the hypocrite *confesses* without *forsaking*,‡ the hearty *forsaking* is here the best proof of tile sincere *confessing*.

And this first act of the penitent is matured into the daily habit of the saint. The further we advance, the deeper will be the tone of *confession*.⁷ The moment sin is seen to be sin, let it be laid on the Surety's Head. Every moment of unconfessed sin adds to its burden and guilt. The thought of a nature estranged front God; a heart full of corruption; sins of youth and age; before and after conversion; against light and conviction, knowledge and love; the sins of our very confessions, their defilement, coldness, and too often self-righteous tendency; all supply abundant material for abasing acknowledgment. Plead the greatness, not the smallness of our sin.⁸ Never deem any sin so trifling, as not to need the *immediate* application of the blood of atonement. Genuine conviction gives no rest, until by the believing apprehension of this remedy the peace of God is firmly fixed in the conscience. As Bunyan so accurately pictured--not at the wicket-gate, but at the sign of the cross, did the Christian find the grave of sin. Here it is lost, forgotten, never found. (Jer. l. 20.)

¹ Luke, xv. 20. Hos. v. 15.

² Exod. ix. 27, 34.

³ 1 Sam. xxiv. 16, 17; xxvi. 3, 4. Matt. xxvii. 4, 5.

⁴ Matt. iii. 7.

⁵ Chap. vii. 14.

⁶ Lev. xvi. 21.

⁷ Job, xl. 4; xlii. 6, Ezek. xvi. 63.

⁸ Ps. xxv. 11. with Luke, xviii. 11. Comp. Isa. xliii. 24-26,

* Ps. xxxii. 5. Comp. similar examples, 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13; Jer. xxxi. 18-20; Jonah, iii. 5-10; Luke, xv. 21-24; xxiii. 40-43. See also the promises, Lev. xxvi. 40-42; 2 Chron. vii. 14; Job, xxxiii. 27, 28; Isa. i. 16-18; lv. 7; Ezek. xviii. 21, 22; 1 John, i. 9.

† 2 Sam. xii. 13, with Ps. li. See also his tender dread of covering sin. Ps. cxxxix. 1, 23, 24.

‡ Pharaoh and Saul, *ut supra*.

This evangelical humiliation lays the only solid ground for practical godliness. It is a sorrow full of joy, and not less full of holiness. No Achan will be reserved;¹ no Agag spared;² no right hand or right eye favoured.³ It will not be "the unclean spirit going out, and returning to his house with sevenfold influence;"⁴ or the man, who leaves his home, but *forsakes* it not, all his heart and joy being still there. Here the *forsaking* will be without the thought of returning; yea, with the fixed determination never to return. (Job, xxxiv. 32.) It will not be the exchange of one path in the broad road for another more attractive; but the relinquishment of the whole road with all its bye-paths. The inner principles as well as the outer walk; "the unrighteous thoughts," no less than "the wicked ways" will be *forsaken* heartily and for ever. (Isa. lv. 7.)

14. *Happy is the man that feareth alway: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief:*

This Proverb fitly follows the last. *Confession* precedes, godly fear follows, the reception of mercy, as the end for which it is given, and the proof of its reception. (Ps. cxxx. 4.) It implies no uncertainty of our safety; but, by guarding us against fresh wounds of conscience, it more firmly maintains our confidence. If we believe and rejoice in the Lord as "our Sun," we would *fear him alway* as "a consuming fire."⁵ This fear is our security.⁶

We may here profitably glance at some Christian paradoxes. *How is happiness to be found in constant fear?* Is fear to be the atmosphere or the spirit of a child of God? Where "love makes perfect," there can be no unquiet rollings or doubtings of heart. (1 John, iv. 18.) But godly fear preserves the sunshine, and seals our special acceptance. (Isa. lxvi. 2.) We walk with our Father in holy watchfulness and peace. Again--*We readily conceive the happiness of trust.* (Chap. xvi. 20.) How do we link with it *the happiness of fear?* So far from fear being contrary to faith, it is a component part of it, or at least its inseparable adjunct (Heb. xi. 7); the discipline, that preserves it from presumption. Faith without fear is self-confidence and self-delusion. Nay--the assurance of our "standing by faith" is balanced by an instant and most needful exercise of *fear*. (Rom. xi. 20.) Who grasped a more triumphant confidence than Paul? Yet without presuming upon a long and consistent profession, self-distrust, watchfulness and diligence established his confidence.⁷ 'If there be truth in the Christian's assurance, not sin itself can disappoint him, it is true. But it is no less

¹ Josh. vii. 1. ² 1 Sam. xv. 20. ³ Mark, vi. 17-20; ix. 43-48.

⁴ Matt. xii. 43, 44. ⁵ Ps. lxxxiv. 11, with Heb. xii. 28, 29.

⁶ Hab. iii. 16. ⁷ Ib. viii. 33-39, with 1 Cor. ix. 27.

true, that if he does not fear sin, there is no truth in his assurance.* Instead of being afraid to mix faith and fear, dread their separation. Again--the righteous is bold as a lion (Verse 1); yet *he feareth alway*. But Christian courage, though opposed to slavish, forms the very essence of godly *fear*. The three confessors were bold before the Babylonish autocrat; yet they so feared to offend against God, that "the burning fiery furnace" was the better alternative in their eyes.¹

Thus is holy *fear* every way identified with happiness. It is a fear of reverence, not of bondage; of caution, not of distrust; of diligence, not of despondency. In proportion as we are raised above tormenting fear, we cherish a deep reverence of the majesty and holiness of God, a child-like fear of displeasure, a jealousy over our motives, desires, and the risings of our evil propensities, and an abhorrence and shrinking, not only from sin, but from the temptations and occasions of sin. Well does the Christian: know the value of this conservative principle; as far removed from legality as from presumption. One, whose mournful experience gives additional weight to his words, warns us, as "sojourners" in a world of evil, and with hearts so often betraying our steps, to "pass our time *in fear*." † If we be surely, we are "scarcely, saved." (1 Pet. iv. 18.) Though there be no uncertainty in the end, there is appalling difficulty in the way--"Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. x. 12.) The man who stands in his own security, requires the caution more than any. Guard against an unheeding confidence. Keep the sentinel at the door. Watch for the enemy at every turn. Suspect a snake in every path, a snare in every creature. "Feed with fear."² "Rejoice with trembling." Yea--"work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."³ None are so established in grace, but in unwatchfulness they may fall into the greatest sin. Live then in constant fear of yourself. This godly fear proves self-knowledge, preserves from self-confidence, produces self-distrust. In wariness against a fall we are most likely to stand. If weakness be our frailty, the consciousness of it is our strength. "When I am weak, then am I strong." (2 Cor. xii. 10.) The importance of this principle will be seen by the contrast with its opposite. *Fear* keeps the heart tender, and the soul safe. Security and presumption *harden* the sinner, *and he falls into mischief*. Pharaoh's *hardness of heart*, and its consequences, were but the bravery and ruin of the devil.⁴ When David's self-indulgence and carelessness had swept away his tenderness, fearfully did he *fall into mischief* (2 Sam. xi. 2.) The latter

¹ Dan. iii. 16-18. Gen. xxxix. 9. Neh. v. 15.

² Contrast Judg. xii.

³ Ps. ii. 11. Philip. ii. 12.

⁴ Exod. xiv. 5-8, 23.

* LEIGHTON *on. 1 Pet. i. 17*. The Romanists--and how many Roman Protestants with them!--have no other idea of fear, than as excluding the certainty of acceptance; whereas its true influence is not fluctuation in doubt, but carefulness in preservation.

† 1 Pet. i. 17; and Leighton *in loco*.

history of his wise son reads the same awful warning. (1 Kings, xi. 1-11.) Peter's fearlessness, though the fruit of ignorance rather than wilfulness, brought him to the very brink of destruction. (Matt. xxvi. 33-35, 41, 74.)

A deep sensibility of sin is a special mercy. To think what it is what it may be; that, indulged only in thought, if the Lord restrain not, it will end in apostasy--Oh! dare we trifle with it? The man, who presumes upon it, as too harmless for eternal punishment, and promises himself peace in the way of his own heart--a voice from heaven could scarcely describe the tremendous horrors of his case. Every word of God is a thunderbolt levelled at him.¹ Scarcely less pitiable is the man, who makes light of his eternal state: living without prayer; so much better in his own eyes than his more ungodly neighbours; and fully satisfied with a mere external preparation for eternity. Forget not--Christian Professor--we may be strong in confidence, only because we are sleeping in delusion, or hardened in insensibility. From all the *mischief* of self-ignorance and 'hardness of heart, Good Lord, deliver us ! *

15. As a roaring lion, and a raging bear, so is a wicked ruler over the poor people. 16. The prince that wanteth understanding is also a great oppressor; but he that hateth covetousness shall prolong his days.

A godly ruler is to a land the clear sunshine of an unclouded morning; the fruitfulness of the springing grass after the rain.² But what a curse is a *wicked ruler*, where arbitrary despotism takes the place of right! We might as well live among the savage wild beasts of the forest. *The lion roaring* for the prey, and *the bear raging*† in hunger--the terror of their weaker race--are apt emblems of this tyrant over a *poor people*.³ No sentiment of pity softens his bosom. No principle of justice regulates his conduct. Complaint only provokes further exactions. Resistance kindles his unfeeling heart into savage fury. Poor and miserable indeed are *the people*, whom divine anger has placed under his misrule.‡

Thus indeed injustice is suffered to reign upon a wide scale. A whole nation is afflicted by the ruthless tyranny of one man. Perhaps the scourge extends from *the wicked ruler* downwards, through all its gradations, to the petty minions of his caprice, delegated with the sword

¹ Chap. xxix. 1. Deut. xxix. 19, 20. ² 2 Sam. xxiii. 3, 4. Comp. Eccus. x. 4.

³ Chap. xxix. 2. Zeph. iii. 3. 2 Tim. iv. 17.

* Litany. Comp. Eccus. v. 5-7.

† The name seems to be given from his growling noise when hungry.

'Nec vespertinus circumgemit urnus ovile.'

HOR. *Epist.* xvi. 51.

‡ PAXTON'S *Nat. Hist. of Script.* p. 333. Comp. 1 Kings, xxi. 1-7. Neh. v. 15.

of power. The wise man, in pondering all the material that makes up a world of vanity, could not but take this desolating curse into his account. And so bitter was the view to his own mind, that he would have preferred even death itself or non-existence to the alternative of; all virtuous sensibilities crucified by the contemplation of this remediless misery. (Eccles. iv. 1-3.)

The princely oppressor may justly be charged with *wanting understanding*. (Isa. iii. 12.) Even if he had established a previous reputation for wisdom, yet abused power, with all its alluring corruptions, is enough to infatuate his judgment. The struggle of the love of rule with the better principle often shakes the sound balance, till step by step his conduct loses all traits of wisdom, and exhibits a man--if not wholly deprived of *understanding*--yet--what is near akin to it--swayed by the tumult of passion. As one proof of his *want of understanding*, often does his foolish choice of wicked ministers alienate the affections of his people from his person, probably to the shortening of his rule. (1 Kings, xii. 12-19.) And thus his perverted power fearfully recoils upon himself.

Widely opposite is the character of a considerate ruler, hating covetousness, and living only for the good of his people. (Exod. xviii. 21.) He may usually be expected to *prolong his days*. 'He may hope to reign long and happily, having his throne erected in the hearts of his subjects.'*

What need then have *rulers* to seek for *understanding*, that they may rule as the fathers of their people. (1 Kings, iii. 6-9.) And what cause have to bless God for our mild and happy government; preserved as we are from *wicked* despots, who would not stop at any tyranny, that might subserve their selfish purposes!†

17. A man that doeth violence to the blood of any person shall flee to the pit: let no man stay him.

The first law against the murderer must not be broken down. Like the law of the Sabbath, it was in force from the beginning. 'It was enacted and published before him, out of whose loins the whole world after the flood was to be re-peopled; to shew that it was not meant for a national or temporary ordinance, but for all universal and perpetual

¹ 1 Sam. xxii. 17-19. Dan. iii. 6, 19

* Scott.

† Of Tyndal's celebrated work--'The obedience of a Christian Man.'--Henry VIII. declared--'This book is for me, and for all kings to read.' He probably only adverted to those parts, that he might turn to accredit his own selfish rapacity. Well would it have been, had he pondered such important instruction as--'The king is but a servant to execute the law of God, and not to rule after his own imagination.' He is brought to the throne--'to minister unto, and to serve his brethren, and must not think, that his subjects were made to minister unto his lusts.'

law.* The reason given for the command confirms its universal obligation. To destroy "the image of God" must be high treason against God himself. (Gen. ix. 6.) Again did God declare his mind in the Levitical law. No satisfaction must be taken for the murderer. Another reason is given--"Blood defileth the land," and only the murderer's blood can cleanse it. (Num. xxxv. 33.) Nay--even the Heathen judged this awful transgressor to be under the divine vengeance. (Acts, xxviii. 4.) The death therefore of the murderer is an imperative obligation. It is miscalled philanthropy, that protest against all capital punishments. Shall man pretend to be mere merciful than God? Pity is misplaced here. The murderer therefore of his brother is his own murderer. *He shall flee to the pit*, hurried thither by his own horror of conscience,¹ by the sword of justice,² or by the certain judgment of God.³ *Let no man stay him*. Let God's law take its course.

Yet we must not cast off his soul. Visiting the condemned cell is a special exercise of mercy. While we bow to the stern justice of the great law-giver, joyous indeed it is to bring to the sinner under the sentence of the law, the free forgiveness of the Gospel; not as annulling his sin, but shewing the over-abounding of grace beyond the abounding of sin. (Rom. v. 20.)

18. *Whoso walketh uprightly shall be saved: but he that is perverse in his ways shall fall at once.*

This contrast has been lately drawn. (Verse 6.) Indeed the Proverb itself in substance has been given. The "security of the upright," before marked, is here included in his *salvation*. The hypocrite's "known"⁴ ruin is here set out as complete--*at once*.⁵

This *upright walk* will shew itself in extreme carefulness; in all doubtful points keeping on the safer side; not venturing upon a precipice, when we can walk upon even ground. This is indeed Christian perfection--"walking before God." (Gen. xvii. 1.) There is no need for Jacob's vision⁶ to realize his presence. "Faith seeth that which is invisible."⁷ This life may seem to miss much temporal advantage. But what--if the *upright* be not rich, honourable, esteemed? 'If God shall not cease to be; if he will not let go the reins; if his word cannot deceive--he *that walketh uprightly* doth proceed upon sure grounds.'† He is *saved*. This one blessing includes all. It is the substance of time, and of eternity. All besides is shadow and vanity. To dwell in

¹ Deut. xix. 13.

² 1 Kings. ii.32. Exod. xxi. 14. 2 Kings, xi. 15.

³ 1 Kings, xxi. 19; xxii. 38. ⁴ 2 Kings, ix. 33-37

⁵ Chap. xxiv. 16; xxix. 1.

⁶ Gen. xxviii. 17.

⁷ Heb .xi. 1, 27.

* Bp. SANDERSON'S *Sermon on chap. xxiv. 10-12*

† DARROW'S *Sermons*. Ps cxi. 13.

the presence of God; in the sunshine of his countenance;¹ in the light and gladness of his joy,² and at length in his unclouded glory³--such is the *salvation of the upright*. (Ps. cxxv. 4.) Christian! would you part with this portion for kingdoms? What earthly comforts can be a substitute for it? This supplies the place of all.

Any want of *uprightness* will bring the child of God under the rod. *But he that is perverse in his way will fall at once*. None of his many shifts shall prosper. (Ib. verse 5.) His double ways, and his vain attempt to "serve two masters," only bring him to shame. (Matt. vi. 24.) What need have I in the highest walk of conscious integrity still to cry --"Redeem me, and be merciful unto me!" (Ps. xxvi. 11.)

19. *He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread: but he that followeth after vain persons shall have poverty enough.*

This Proverb also has been given before. (Chap. xii. 11.) Such memories and hearts as ours need "line upon line" in the enforcement of practical obligation. (Isa. xxviii. 13.) If labour be a penal ordinance,⁴ such a blessing is included in it, that its removal would diminish our most substantial source of happiness. Man was not born to be a stone without energy; or a machine, to be moved by mere passive force. Our true happiness is active dependence. Habits of diligence are the means of working it out fruitfully. The earth "bringeth forth of itself only thorns and thistles." But *he that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread*.⁵ The blessing comes, not by miracle, to encourage sloth; but in use of means, to stimulate exertion.

The contrast to this *plenty of bread is poverty enough*. The prodigal is a warning beacon. "In his father's house," doubtless engaged in active exercise, "there was bread enough, and to spare." When in his waywardness he left his *plenty*, and *followed after vain persons*, soon he found *poverty enough*--"I perish with hunger." (Luke, xv. 17.) Idleness is a sin against God, against our neighbour, against ourselves. "Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord"--is the rule of prosperity in this world's concerns; much more in the momentous concerns of eternity.⁶

20. *A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent* (unpunished, marg.)

The study of the contrast shews the definite meaning of the terms. *A faithful man* is opposed, not to the rich, but--mark the careful accuracy--to him *that hasteth to be rich*. A man may be rich by the blessing of God.⁷ He *hasteth* to be *rich* by his own covetousness. (1 Tim.

¹ Ps. xi. 7.

² Ib. xcvi. 11.

³ Ib. xv. 1, 2. Rev. xiv. 5.

⁴ Gen. iii. 19.

⁵ Ib. ver. 18. with chap. xiv. 4; xxvii. 23-27.

⁶ Rom. xii. 11. Eccles. ix. 10. ⁷ Chap. x. 22. Gen. xxiv. 35. 1 Kings, iii. 13.

vi. 10.) He may be rich, and yet *faithful*. He *hasteth to be rich* at the expense of *faithfulness*.^{*} The faithful man makes no loud profession. But he bears to be looked at, even in the veriest trifles. (Luke, xvi. 10.) He is true to his word. He fulfils his engagements. He has only one principle--"unto the Lord;" under his eye; in his presence; "to his glory."¹ Try his principle by a worldly bait. He will prefer his conscience to his interest. He would rather be poor by Providence, than rich by sin. This is the man of faithfulness. Who shall find him?"² But when you have found him, mark his *abounding blessing*; blessings covering his head;³ blessings for both worlds.⁴ Is there not infinitely more promise in the ways of God, than in the ways of sin? Be the path ever so tried and perplexed, only let it be a straight path,⁵ and the Lord's sunshine will cheer it. 'In the hand of God'--saith a wise man --'is the prosperity of man.'⁶

But the man who has no faith, can only walk in a crooked path. He leaps over every bound of principle. *He hasteth to be rich*. He cannot wait for God in the path of Christian diligence. The promise does not run fast enough for him. He becomes rich too soon; he scarcely knows or cares by what means; by any means, rather than lose his grasp. Yet all this *haste* is only to his own ruin. Instead of *abounding with blessings*, he shall not be innocent. Jacob, as a *faithful man*, was paid with full wages for his work. Though his master dealt hardly, God dealt bountifully with him. He *abounded with blessings*; while Laban, *hasting to be rich*, was impoverished. (Gen. xxxi. 7-9.) 'I will study more'--said good Bp. Hall--'how to give account of my little, than how to make it more.'

Hard indeed, if not impossible, is it to hold fast innocency in this path of temptation.⁷ 'Yet how does the Scripture combat the vice of covetousness? Not by asserting, that gold is only earth, exhibiting itself under a particular modification, and therefore not worth seeking; but by telling us, that "covetousness is idolatry," that "the love of money is the root of all evil;" that it has occasioned in some even the "shipwreck of their faith," and is always, in whomsoever it obtains, an abomination?'† Even if no criminal means be resorted to, yet the

¹ Col. iii. 23. 1 Cor. x. 31.

² Heb. Chap. xx. 6. Matt. xxiv. 45.

³ Chap. x. 6.

⁴ Ps. xxxvii. 37; cxii. Isa. xxxiii. 15, 16.

⁵ Chap. iv. 26, 27. Heb. xii. 13.

⁶ Eccclus. x. 5.

⁷ 2 Kings, v. 25, 27. Comp. chap. xiii. 11; xx. 21; xxi. 6.

* Verse 22. Chap. xix. 2; xx. 14. Even the heathen moralists could see this--

Oudlej eplouthse taxewj, dikaioj wħ.

MENANDER.

. . . . 'Nam dives qui fieri vult,

Et cito vult fieri; sed quae reverentia legum?

Quis metus, aut pudor est unquam *properant, is avari,*?

Juv. Sat. 14. 176-178.

† Cowper's cursory Remarks on Carrocioli. Works. Southey's Ed. vii. 273.

immoderate desire, the perseverance in every track of Mammon, the labouring night and day for the grand object, the delight and confidence in the acquisition (Job, xxxi. 25)--all prove the idolatrous heart (Ib. verses 24, 28), and will not go *unpunished*. "They that will be rich--*that haste to be rich*--fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, that drown men in destruction and perdition. But thou, O man of God, flee these things." (1 Tim. vi. 9-11.)

21. *To have respect of persons is not good: for, for a piece of bread that man will transgress.*

This Proverb has been more than once repeated.* The act itself is *not good*. It is positive *transgression*. The principle is worse--sordid selfishness. Here is perhaps *a man*, not of slavish or of naturally degraded mind, but--such is the debasing influence of lust!--*a man* of weight and influence; and yet abusing his power for his own ends. It is a rich man, or a relation, or he is under some obligation, and therefore he *has respect of judgment*. Now what is right to the rich, is right to the poor. Thus to trample the poor under foot, the Judge of all counts rebellion against his own just standard.† Principle once overpowered seldom regains its ascendancy. Each successive trial proves its weakness; till he, who once thought himself able to resist a large bribe, for the veriest trifle will break with God and his conscience. *For a piece of bread that man will transgress.*‡

Is not this, alas! a pulpit sin? Is the Minister never drawn away from godly simplicity by some interested motive?--*to transgress* his broadly-marked obligation *for a piece of bread*? In olden times this was a besetting temptation of the sacred office.¹ Let the beacon be solemnly regarded.

In ordinary life, a man's bread hanging upon favour, is a strong temptation to *transgress* upright principles. Cowardice and unbelief shelter themselves under the cover of prudence. Christian reproof is neglected from fear of losing custom or advantage. Our interest is preferred to God's. And a plain scripture obligation is put away *for a piece of bread*. (Lev. xix. 17.) Are Christians wholly guiltless in this matter? Is not conduct sometimes ruled by the fear of man, rather than by "trust in God?" (Chap. xxix. 25.) Let the temptation be resisted at the first step, manfully, prayerfully, in the Lord's strength; and the victory is gained.

¹ Ezek. xiii. 19. Mic. iii. 5. 2 Pet. ii. 3.

* Chap. xviii. 5; xxiv. 23, and references.

† Transgression in this place is the same word as rebellion. Isa. i. 2. See also 1 Kings, xii. 19. 2 Kings i. 1; iii. 5.

‡ Amos. ii. 6. Cato used to say of M. Coelius the Tribune, that 'he might be hired for *a piece of bread* to speak, or to hold his peace.'

22. *He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye* (He that hath an evil eye. hasteth to be rich, marg.), *and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him.*

Another warning word! "Take heed, and beware of covetousness." (Luke, xii. 15.) "The lust of the eye" (1 John, ii. 16) is a deadly blast upon the soul. Abraham was rich without haste, with God's blessing. (Gen.;xiii. 2.) Little did Lot consider that his haste to be rich was the highroad to poverty. But step by step he "entered into temptation."¹ Every worldly prospect was blasted; and he ends his days, a poor, forlorn, degraded tenant of the desolate cave of Zoar. (Ib. xix. 30.) Thus he who sought the world, lost it; he who was ready to lose it, found it. When Ahab's evil eye envied Naboth the enjoyment of his vineyard; when Jehoiakim was grasping by unjust means all that came into his reach, little did they consider, how this haste to be rich would end in disgrace.² But many and loud are the warnings against covetousness, ending in shame, and filled with the curse of an avenging God.³

"Man of God! Make a covenant with thine eyes"⁴ else thou canst never hold thy covenant with thy God. Remember--Not he who knows, but who loves, most the things of heaven, will be most deadened to the riches of earth. The evil eye fixed on earth, can never look above. So much as thou lovest earth, thou lovest of heathen. Is it not thy shame, that if heaven be thy possession, thou shouldest have so much interest there, and yet so few thoughts, so little love? Keep down most carefully thine anxiety to rise in the world. For in its highest glory there is nothing worthy of thine heart. Keep the things of earth as thy outer garment, which thou canst "lay aside," when it entangles thee in the heavenly race. (Heb. xii. 1.) But keep heaven next to thine heart--thy treasure--thy love--thy rest--thy crown. Happy to be of the mind of the holy Bishop, who, when he heard of the ruin of all his property by the plunder of the Goths--looked up--'Thou knowest where my treasure has long been!'

23. *He that rebuketh a man, afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue.*

Too often *the flatterer* finds *more favour* than the reprover.⁵ 'Few people have the wisdom to like reproofs that would do them good, better than praises that do them hurt.'† And yet a candid man, notwithstanding the momentary struggle of wounded pride, will *afterwards*

¹ Gen. xiii. 10-13; xiv. 12. ² 1 Kings, xxi. 2, 18, 19. Jer. xxii. 13-19.

³ Chap. xxiii. 5, with Job, xx. 18-22; xxvii. 16, 17, Jer. xvii. 11. Luke, xii. 19, 20.

⁴ Job, xxxi. 1 Ps. cxix. 36, 37. ⁵ 1 Kings, xxii. 6-8, 27. Jer. xxvi. 7, 8

* Paulinus, Bishop of Nola, in the fifth century. † Dr. South. See his *Life*.

appreciate the purity of the motive, and the value of the discovery. 'He that cries out against his surgeon for hurting him, when he is searching his wound, will yet pay him well, and thank him too, when he has cured it.*

Unbelief, however, palsies Christian *rebuks*. Actual displeasure, or the chilling of friendship, is intolerable. But Paul's public rebuke of his brother Apostle produced no disruption between them. Many years *afterward* Peter acknowledged his "beloved brother Paul" with most affectionate regard.¹ The Apostle's painful rebuke of his Corinthian converts eventually increased his favour with them, as the friend of their best interests.² *The flatterer* is viewed with disgust;³ the re-prover--*afterwards* at least--with acceptance.† A less favourable result may often be traced to an unseasonable time⁴ a harsh manner a neglect of prayer for needful wisdom, or a want of due "consideration" of our own liability to fall. (Gal. vi. 1.) Let us study the spirit of our gracious Master, whose gentleness ever poured balm into the wound, which his faithful love had opened. A rebuke in this Spirit is more like the support of a friend, than the chastening of a rod.

24. *Whoso robbeth his father or his mother, and saith, It is no transgression; the same is the companion of a destroyer.*

The aggravation of sin is proportioned to the obligation of duty. A murderer is an heinous *transgressor*; how much more a parricide! *To rob* a stranger, a neighbour, a friend, is evil; how much more a *father* and mother! The filial obligation of cherishing care is broken. Ingratitude is added to injustice. What length of wickedness will such an hardened sinner stop at! Could we wonder to see him *the companion of a destroyer*? This sin is however often committed without sensibility,⁵ as if the children might dispose of their parents' property at their own will. These *robbers* would ill brook the name of thieves. But God, who sees men as they are, and judges of them in sure balances, ranks them among "the wicked," and will deal with them accordingly. (Chap. xxi. 7.)

Nor is this guilt confined to the grosser outrage. Surely it is no

¹ Gal. ii. 11-14, with 2 Pet. iii. 15.

² 1 Cor. v. with 2 Cor. ii. 1-10.

³ Chap. xxvii. 14.

⁴ Chap. xv. 23.

⁵ Gen. xxxi. 19, 34, 35. Jud. xvii. 2.

* Henry.

† Chap. ix. 8; xxvii. 5, 6. Ps. cxli. 5. Comp. Eccles. vii. 5. Alas! that the example of godly Asa should present an exception to the rule! 2 Chron. xvi. 7-10. When Bernard Gilpin publicly *rebuked* church abuses before his diocesan, instead of incurring his displeasure, the bishop treated him with marked *favour*. 'Father Gilpin'--said he--'I acknowledge you are fitter to be bishop of Durham, than I am to be the parson of your church.' *Life by Bp. Carleton*, p. 58. When the philosopher asked Alexander the reason of his dismissal--'Either'--replied the monarch--'thou hast not marked my error, which is proof of thy ignorance; or thou hast held thy peace, which is a proof of thy unfaithfulness.'--PLUTARCH's *Life*.

better, when the young spendthrift wastes *his father's* property, and counts it *no transgression* to incur debts on his account without his knowledge or consent. (Chap. xix. 26.) Our Lord adverts to another species of *robbery*--the denial of the absolute duty of providing for parents; and this under the pretence of devotedness to God! (Matt. xv. 5, 6.) But the gospel admits of no compounding of one duty for another. (Verse 9.) The upright Christian will place all duties upon the same ground of Christian obedience. (Ps. cxix. 5, 6, 80, 128.)

Young people! As you value your soul, your conscience, your happiness--ponder the wide extent of filial obligation; the honour, deference, and consideration included in it; the clear stamp of God's authority upon it; the mark of his reprobation in despising it (1 Sam. 11. 25); the certain seal of his blessing upon its practical and self-denying acknowledgment.

25. *He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife: but he that putteth his trust in the Lord shall be made fat.*

The contrast between *the proud, and him that trusteth in the Lord*, is very remarkable. It shews that pride is the root of unbelief. The man, having cast off God, expects nothing, fears nothing, from him. He lives as if there was no God. His proud heart is large; not, like the wise man's, in fulness of capacity (1 Kings, iv. 29), but in ambitious grasp, and insatiable appetite.* Never is he content within his own bounds. In the world he would be a Haman (Esth. iii. 1, 2) in the church a Diotrephes--one "loving to have the pre-eminence." (3 John, 19.) It is his nature *to stir up strife*. Every one that does not accord with his own opinion of himself, is supposed to be wanting in respect. Thus "by pride cometh contention." (Chap. xiii. 10.) And always will there be some thorn of mortified ambition (Esth. v. 11-13), or some fresh craving of unsatisfied desire (Eccles. v. 10, 11), wasting him, so that he "fadeth away in his ways." (Jam. i. 11.) What an empty shadow of fugitive happiness! So contrary to the *fatness of him, that putteth his trust in the Lord*. (Chap. xvi. 20. Ps. lxxxiv. 12. Jer. xvii. 7, 8.) 'He shall be filled with good and solid things.'†

Christian! Dread the occasions of *stirring up strife*--the canker of vital godliness. Keep near to thy Lord. It was when the disciples were talking together by the way, *instead of walking in immediate communion with their Master, that strife was stirred up*. (Mark, ix. 33, 34.) Does not this point to the grand preservative? Let it be thine element and thy joy. Here alone we cherish the life of faith. And truly--as Luther says--'Faith is a precious thing.' (Comp. 2 Pet. i. 1.) It rolls away all disquieting care. (1 Pet. v. 7.) Our cause is with him, and we are at rest. (Ps. xxxvii. 5-7.) How much more, when the great

* Heb. Holden. Dathe.

† Diodati.

burden is removed! 'Smite, Lord, smite; for thou hast pardoned.'
 "Healed with the beams of the Sun of Righteousness, we shall *be made fat*, as the calves of the stall." (Mal. iv. 2. Isa. lviii. 11.)

26. *He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered.*

Contrast the sound and fruitful confidence just mentioned, with man's natural *trust*. Our confidence determines our state. (Matt. vii. 24-27.) To *trust* an impostor, who has deceived us an hundred times or a traitor, who has proved himself false to our most important interests is surely to deserve the name of *fool*. This name therefore the Scriptures --"using great plainness of speech"--give to him *that trusteth in his own heart*. Well does Bishop Hall call it, 'The great Impostor.' For has it not been practising a system of deceit upon us from the first moment of consciousness? Yes, verily, the traitor finds his home in our own bosom, prompting, in concert with our deadly enemy, the most elaborate efforts for self-destruction.

The wise man awfully illustrates his own Proverb. It must have been some bitter root of self-confidence, that prostrated his wondrous wisdom in the lowest degradation. (1 Kings, xi. 1-8.) Peter also--how did he *befool* himself in his *trust*! Presuming upon "the willingness of the spirit," and forgetting his Lord's most needful caution against "the weakness of the flesh;" though named a Rock, he fell as a reed before the first breath of temptation. Had not the everlasting arms been underneath, it would have been the fall of Judas into the depths of hell. An instructive lesson to shew us, that all dependence upon feelings, impulse, native strength, sincere purpose or conviction--is vain confidence. Sad experience has convinced us of this. Yet in the blindness of our folly, we are ever ready to *trust* again, if the Lord prevent not, to our ruin.

Truly, as good Bishop Wilson remarks--'there is no sin, which a man ought not to fear, or to think himself capable of committing, since we have in our corrupt will the seeds of every sin.' None of us can safely presume, that his heart may not hurry him into abominations, that he cannot now contemplate without horror. (2 Kings, viii. 13-15.) If Eve in a state of innocence could believe a serpent before her Maker;¹ if "the saint of the Lord" could worship the golden calf;² if "the man after God's own heart" could wallow in adultery, murder, and deceit;³ if the wisest of men, and the warm-hearted disciple just referred to, could sink so low--what may not we do? Surely "all men are liars." The best of men, when left to themselves, are mournful spectacles of weakness and instability.

¹ Gen. iii. 1-6.

² Exod. xxxii. 2-5, with Ps. cvi, 16.

³ 2 Sam. xi. 4, 17.

*Title of Sermon on Jer. xvii. 9. See Bunyan's Discourse between Christian and Ignorance

Blessed be our God! our standing is not on the uncertainty of man's best purpose; but upon the faithful promise, the unchangeable will, the free grace, and almighty power of God; not therefore on ourselves, but on the Rock, on which the Church is immovably built. We value then a deep knowledge of our indwelling weakness and corruption. Painful and humbling as it is, it is establishing to our faith; and grounds us in the gospel far better than walking over the mere surface. This study of the heart strengthens the principle of that holy fear, which enables us to *walk wisely*, and thus *delivers* us from the evils of a self-confident state. Indeed in a path, where every step is strewn with snares, and beset with enemies, great need have we of the caution,--"Walk circumspectly"--"looking on all sides"--"not as fools, but as wise,"¹ A sound confidence is a proof of wisdom. Be willing that the Lord should disappoint us of the most plausible and inviting pleasure, into which we may have been drawn by the dictates of our own heart. Let it be a standing maxim in religion to cultivate self-distrust; never to suppose security, where God warns us of danger, never to trust ourselves with our own keeping. We are too weak needlessly to expose ourselves to hazard. We cannot pray--"Lead us not into temptation"--when we are rushing headlong into it--or--"Deliver us from evil"--when we seem to invite its approach.²

27. *He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse.*

"There is none that desireth want, nor that wisheth to be poor. And therefore the carnally-minded, to save themselves from it, carefully gather together, and enclose so much wealth as they can by any means possible; and they think that by such means they shall avoid lack. And indeed after man's judgment, it is the best way that a man can take. But the Holy Ghost doth teach us another means, clean contrary to natural reason. *He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack.* This is against reason, which saith, that we must gather and hold fast, to avoid poverty. She looketh not to what God can and will do. She is blind in the works of the Lord, and chiefly in those that he worketh according to his free promise.*

However close we may hold our substance, who can give security against coming to want? But this promise gives a security, that no earthly abundance can afford. Covetousness indeed combines with reason to contradict the word of God. Yet the promise is given by him, who hath full power to make it good; who has a thousand ways of repaying what is done or sacrificed at his command. (Ps. xxiv. 1.) The fruit is absolutely certain, 'as the best preventive against poverty,

¹ Eph. v. 15. Comp. chap. iii. 5, 6

² Matt. vi. 13, with xxvi. 41.

* Cope *in loco*.

putting money into the bank of heaven, which can never forfeit credit.* The best securities on earth will not hinder "riches from making to them wings. and flying away." (Chap. xxiii. 5.) But when have the promises of heaven ever been falsified?¹ Yet after all, with the carnal mind, covetousness prevails above faith, and a "trust in uncertain riches makes the living God a liar."²

Do we, the professed followers of Christ, lay these truths really to heart, testing our own principles and practice by them, and honestly intending to take them, instead of selfish prudence and expediency, as our rule and measure of conduct? Most honourable is it to the Christian profession, and a sure seal of blessing upon our family, when we forbear to plead family claims, as an excuse for contracting our liberality. Again and again does God ratify this engagement.† Yet many, who are "earnest in contending for the faith" of the Gospel, and who would resist at any cost the invasion of heresy--we fear--would be ashamed to expose the scanty limits of their liberality.

Did we really believe the promise annexed to this duty, we should not so often hide our eyes from a case of distress. Yet not only do we neglect to look out for objects of compassion, but actually we turn away from them, as the servant of God would turn away from sin;³ and then justify ourselves on the ground of frequent imposition, and the many worthy objects, which mayor may not come before us. Many a curse is entailed upon this grudging spirit, both from God and man.⁴ And is there no danger here of the everlasting curse!⁵ Ponder it well lest, prudence and discrimination check the glow of charity, prove a cloak for selfishness, and obscure the light of Christian benevolence and love, which ought to shine before men in the profession of the true servants of God.

28. *When the wicked rise, men hide themselves: but when they perish, the righteous increase.*

This Proverb has in substance been given before. (Verse 12.) *The rise of the wicked* to power is indeed a national judgment, greatly to be deprecated, as the engine of cruel malice against the Church of God. Thus has it been in all her Pagan and Papal persecutions. And thus it always will be, while she is in the wilderness.⁶ But what a tremendous

¹ Num. xxiii. 19. 2 Cor. i. 20.

² 1 Tim. vi. 17. 1 John, v. 10.

³ Job, xxxi. 1, with Gen. xxxix. 10.

⁴ Chap. xi. 26. 1 Sam. xxv. 17, 25, 26, 38.

Matt. xxv. 41-45. Jam. ii. 13; v. 1-4.

⁶ Chap. xxix. 27. Gen. iii. 15. Rev. xii. 6, 17.

* Lawson *in loco*.

† Chap iii. 9, 10; xi. 24, 25; xiii. 7; xiv. 22; xix. 17; xxii. 9. Deut. xv. 7-10. Ps. xli. 1-3; cxii. 5-9, with 2 Cor. ix. 6-11. Eccles. xi. 1, Isa. xxxii. 8; lviii. 7-11. Matt. v. 7. Luke, vi. 38. Observe the glowing exuberance of this last promise--Not only "shall it be given you"--but *good measure*--justly proportioned to the exercise of love--*pressed down*--to secure it as full measure--*shaken together*--as with corn, that it may lie closer in its place--and as if this were not enough--*running over*--without bounds--*given into your bosom*--so that you shall taste the large indulgence of the blessing.

weight of guilt and punishment is involved in thus fighting against God! (Acts, ix. 4.) Little do *the wicked* know the preciousness of the saints in his sight,¹ their perfect security under his cover,² the sovereign restraint which he has placed upon her enemies,³ and the triumphant issue of all opposition against her."

The power of the wicked even here however is but for a moment; and *when they perish*--as perish they will--*the righteous shall increase*. A great increase was there to the Church in the days of godly Hezekiah, when the doors of the temple, which his wicked father had shut up, were open from a national profession and consecration to God.⁵ The immediate result of Haman's overthrow, was not only toleration and encouragement of the true religion, but a large increase to the number of its professors. (Esth. viii. 17.) In the early ages of the Christian Church, after the death of the persecuting Herod, "the word of God grew and multiplied." (Acts, xii. 23, 24.) And in our own annals, at the removal of Mary from her ill-used power, the Christian exiles returned from their continental hiding-place, bringing with them a large increase of blessing both to the Church and nation. Thus "out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." (Judg. xiv. 14.) The cross is the enriching blessing to the Church, and to every individual member of it.

CHAPTER XXIX.

1. *He that being often reproved (a man of reproofs, marg.) hardeneth his his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.*

THIS is indeed an awful word. The intractable ox, *hardening his neck* against the yoke,⁶ is but too apt a picture of the stubborn sinner, casting off the restraints of God. This was the uniform complaint against Israel,⁷ a true picture of the mass of the ungodly before our eyes. Conviction follows upon conviction, chastening upon chastening. Still the rebel *hardens his neck*, stops his ears against the voice of God, and invites his threatened judgments.

Awfully frequent are these instances among the children of godly parents or the hearers of a faithful minister.⁸ Every means of grace is a solemn but despised *reproof*. Aggravated sin makes the judgment of a righteous God more manifest. The more enlightened the conscience the more *hardened the neck*. Every beating pulse is rebellion against a God of love.

¹ Zech. ii. 8.

² Isa. xxvi. 20.

³ Ps. lxxvi. 10.

⁴ Exod. xv. 1. Isa. li. 9-11. Rev. xviii. 20.

⁵ 2 Chron. xxviii. 24. xxix. ; xxx. 13-25.

⁶ Jer. xxxi. 18.

⁷ Exod. xxxii. 9. 2 Chron. xxxvi. 13-16. Neh. ix. 29. Isa. xlvi. 8. Jer. xvii. 23. Zec. vii. 11, 12. Acts, vii. 51.

⁸ Chap. v. 12, 13. 1 Sam. ii. 12.

Sometimes it is more the immediate voice of God. An alarming illness, a dangerous accident, or the death of a companion in wickedness, is "the rod and reproof" intended to "give wisdom." (Verse 15.) But if the "fool" continue to despise all God's reproof, his destruction will be *sudden*,¹ *and without remedy*.²

Such was the *destruction* of the old world, and of the cities of the plain, long *hardened* against the forbearance of God.³ Pharaoh grew more stubborn under the rod, and rushed madly upon his sudden ruin.⁴ Eli's sons "hearkened not unto the voice of their father, and in one day died both of them."⁵ Ahab, *often reproofed*, by the godly prophet, hardened his neck, and "the bow, drawn at a venture," received its commission.⁶ How must Judas have steeled his heart against his Master's *reproof*?⁷ Onward he rushed, "that he might go to his own place."⁸ Truly Divine patience has its end. And this fearful moment once arrived, "the vessels of wrath, endured with much long-suffering," are now shewn more manifestly, as "fitted for destruction." (Rom. ix. 22.) No remedy--not even the Gospel--can remedy the case. As they lived, so they die, so they stand before God--*without remedy*. No blood--no advocate, pleads for them. As they sink into the burning lake, every billow of fire, as it rolls over them, seems to sound--*without remedy*.

Sinner--Oh! that thou wouldst be wise to consider thy guilt, thy state, thy prospect, while yet "thy judgment and damnation linger!" Is not "the Spirit of grace" pleading with thine heart? Would he not now save thee, wouldst thou but obey his call? Thou art standing upon mercy's ground, betwixt heaven and hell. O thou God of almighty sovereign grace, shew "a pattern" of thy "long-suffering." (1 Tim. i. 16.) Let the sinner sing thy everlasting praise, as "a brand plucked out of the fire" a monument of thine over-abounding grace. (Zech. iii. 2.)

2. *When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.*

"The robes of honour to the *righteous* are the garments of gladness to *the people*. The sceptre of *authority* to the godly is the staff of comfort to *the people*. On the other hand, the vestments of dignity to *the wicked* are the weeds of *mourning to the people*. The throne of command to the one is the dungeon of misery to the other. The titles of honour given to the one are sighs of sorrow wrung from the other.* The contrast of the government of Mordecai and Haman illustrates this *joy and*

¹ 1 Thess. v. 3.

² Chap. i. 22-30; vi. 15; xxviii. 14, 18. Isa. xxx. 12-14.

³ Luke, xvii. 21-29.

⁴ Exod. ix. 21, 34; x. 27, 28; xiv. 28.

⁵ 1 Sam. ii 25, 34; iv. 11.

⁶ 1 Kings, xviii. 18; xxi. 20; xxii. 28, 34.

⁷ John, vi. 70; xiii. 10, 11, 18-27. ⁸ Matt. xxvi. 14-16. John, xiii. 30. Acts, i. 25.

* Jermin. Comp. chap. xxviii. 12, 28. Ecclus. x. 3.

mourning.¹ The special rejoicings at the accession of Solomon might probably be connected with the confidence, that he would "walk in the ways of David his father."² The reigns of *the righteous* kings of Judah were pre-eminently distinguished by national happiness.³ The glorious era yet in store for the world, is, when "the Lord shall bless" his own kingdom, "as the habitation of justice and mountain of holiness."⁴ For what but righteousness can truly bless either an individual, a family, or a nation?*

When therefore *the wicked bear rule--the people--not the godly--only mourn*. The depth of the *mourning* is surely the joy at the removal of the scourge. Meanwhile it is borne by "the faithful in the land" as a national scourge.⁵ And 'if tears be their drink, patience will be their bread, till God have mercy on them.'† What need have we to thank God, that our guilty country, with so much to humble us in shame, should have been so long spared from the curse of *wicked rulers*! The tyrant rules for his own sinful ends. The Christian sovereign for the good of the people.

3. *Whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth his father but he that keepeth company with harlots spendeth his substance.*

These Proverbs in substance have been given before.⁶ Yet the variations are instructive. The wisdom is here more distinctly described as *loving wisdom*. For he is wise not only, who hath arrived at a complete habit of wisdom, but who doth as yet *love it*, or desire it, and listen to it.‡ Do not we hang off too loosely from its heavenly influence? Let it be manifestly our great object, not as a good thing, but the best--"the principal thing."§ The awakened sinner *loves it* from the sense of want; the Christian from its satisfying delight. The taste, gives a keen edge to the appetite. What we have grasped of the blessing bears no comparison to what remains. The day-dreams of a world of vanity engage our affections no longer.

¹ Esth. viii. 15, 16; x. 3, with iii. 15; iv. 1-3. ² 1 Kings, i. 39, 40, with iii. 3. Comp. iv. 20.

³ 2 Chron. xv. 12-15; xx. 27-30. xxix. 36; xxx. 21.

⁴ Jer. xxxi. 23. Isa. i. 26.

⁵ Eccles. x. 5, 6. Isa. iii. 4, 5. Mic. iii. 9-12.

⁶ Chap. x. 1; xv, 20; xxiii. 15, 24, 25; xxvii. 11; xxviii. 7.

*Ps. lxxii. 1-7. Isa. xxxii. 1. It is no peculiar conceit, but a matter of sound consequence, that all duties are by so much the better performed, by how much the men are more religious, from whose abilities the same proceed. For if the course of politic affairs cannot in any good sort go forward without fit instruments, and that which fitteth them be their virtues, let polity acknowledge itself indebted to religion, godliness being the chiefest, top, and well-spring of all true virtue, even as God is of all good things.' Thus admirably docs our great Hooker insist, that 'religion, unfeignedly loved, perfecteth man's abilities unto all kind of virtuous services in the commonwealth.'--*Eccl. Pol.* Book v. c. 1.

† Jermin out *supra*.

‡ Basil, quoted by Bp. Patrick. *Preface to Proverbs*.

§ Chap. iv. 7. See the beautiful description, Eccclus. vi. 18-31; xxiv. Bp. Lowth's elegant translation.--*Lect. on Heb. Poetry*, xxiv.

Let the young man consider" wisdom's pleasantness and peace,"¹ her light and security,² her "durable riches,"³ and glorious inheritance;⁴ and "wilt thou not from this time cry" to the God of wisdom--"My Father! thou art the guide of my youth?" (Jer. iii. 4.) Let him have the flower of thine age. Is not the best sacrifice due to him, who is above the songs of heaven, who has obtained a kingdom for those that love him? No worldly honour, no success of talent, will *rejoice a godly father*, as will this choice for eternity. (Chap. xxiii. 23-25.)

Folly brings its own shame and sorrow. "*The companion of the riotous and vain persons*" is readily found in fellowship *with harlots*, saddening his father, by *spending his substance*. (Chap. xxviii. 7, 19.) One course of vanity leads to another. All end alike in ruin.⁵ He may possess the external endowment. But *the love of wisdom* is the only preservative from "besetting snares."⁶

Deep indeed--is the anxiety--the joy or the sorrow--connected with children.⁷ May it give a deeper tone of simplicity and pleading in dedicating them to God,⁸ and training them up for his service! Let us early present them, as "the children, whom the Lord hath given us;" but as his, more than our own--his property--his inheritance. (Ps. cxxvii.3.) Here are our springs of diligence, of hope, and of ultimate reward.

4. *The king by judgment establisheth the land: but he that receiveth gifts*
(a man of oblations, marg.) *overthroweth it.*

Of what avail are the best laws, if they be badly administered? Partiality and injustice absolutely make them null and void. And yet it requires great integrity and moral courage to withstand the temptations of worldly policy and self-interest. God's own throne is built and *established by judgment*.⁹ This then can be the only *establishment of the land*.¹⁰ The compromise of it to some private ends provokes the anger of God to the chastisement, if not *the overthrow, of the land*. The article in our Magna Charta--"We will sell justice to none"--is but too plain evidence of the recklessness of all social principles, ere the great standard was erected among us.

Under the godly government of Samuel *the land was established by judgment*.¹¹ "But his sons walked not in his ways." They were *men of oblations*. *They received gifts*; and the Theocracy--the great palladium of the land--*was overthrown*.¹² The righteous administration of David "bore up the pillars" of the land, at a time of great national weakness.¹³

¹ Chap. iii. 17.

² Chap. viii. 20; iv. 11, 12.

³ Chap. iii. 14, 15; viii. 18, 19.

⁴ Chap. iii. 35.

⁵ Chap. v. 9; vi. 26. Luke, xv. 30.

⁶ Chap. iv. 6; vii. 4, 5.

⁷ Chap. xvii. 21, 25.

⁸ 1 Sam. i. 26-28.

⁹ Ps. lxxxix. 14; xcvi. 2. Isa. ix. 7.

¹⁰ Verse 14; xvi. 10-12; xx. 8, 26; xxv. 5. 2 Chron. ix. 8.

¹¹ Sam. vii. 3-12, 15-17.

¹² Ib. viii. 2-7.

¹³ Ps. lxxv. 2-6, 10. 2 Sam. viii 15.

The same principles in the godly successors were the source of strength and prosperity.¹ The want of uprightness in Saul shook the kingdom from his grasp;² and the covetousness of Jehoiakim³ destroyed its foundations, and buried him in its ruins. Let the same consistency pervade every grade of official responsibility. No respect will be paid to dignity, temporal or spiritual, except it be *established with judgment*. Let men of God be in our high places; and righteousness will exalt a nation," and our Church will be "the joy and praise of the whole earth." (Chap. xiv. 34.)

5. *A man that flattreth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet.*

Most wisely were Bunyan's pilgrims warned--'Beware of *the flatterer*.' Yet 'forgetting to read the note of directions about the way,' they fell into *his net*, and, even though delivered, were justly punished for their folly. The doctrine of man's goodness, strength, or freedom; innocent infirmities; venial offences; softening down the statements of man's total corruption; a general gospel, without close application; its promises and privileges, without the counter-balance of its trials and obligations--all this is frightful flattery--'the black man clothed in white'--"Satan himself transformed into an angel of light, and his ministers transformed as ministers of righteousness." (2 Cor. xi. 13-15.) Unwary souls are misled. Even unwatchful Christians fall into the net. And while they have to thank their faithful God for deliverance, they cannot forget his sharp and needful chastening of their folly. Where "the root of the matter" is not, heresy, or apostasy, is the baneful fruit of the *flatterer*. (Rom. xvi. 17, 18. 2 Pet. ii. 1-3.)

But let us guard against this net in our daily path. Too readily do the *flatterer's* words pass current. Even when conscious of not possessing the loveliness attributed to us; when we know the *flatterer* to have no faith in his own words; instead of a just indignation at his smooth hypocrisy, is there not sometimes a secret self-satisfaction at being thought of sufficient importance to tempt to the deceit? Nay--even, when it is so gross as to create disgust, is this disgust always unaccompanied with pleasure? Besides--What else is much of the language of smooth courtesy, or lively interest and affection? Who would venture to act with confidence on this heartless profession? Always is *the net spread* to allure into some devious path; often into the grossest wickedness. Thus *the flattering* woman beguiled her prey.⁴ The parasites of Darius deified him for a month, to make him the tool of their malicious plot. (Dan. vi. 6-9.) The enemies of Christ *spread the flatterer's net for his feet*. But here the wisdom of God was infinitely above them, and "took the wise in their own craftiness."⁵

¹ 2 Chron. i. 1; xiv. 2-7; xix. 6, 1, with xx. 21-30; xxxi. 20, 21. Isa. xxxii. 1, 2.

² 1 Sam. xiii. 12. ³ Jer. xxii. 13-19. ⁴ Chap. ii. 16; vii. 21; xxvi. 28.

⁵ Matt. xxii. 15-23, with 1 Cor. iii. 19.

The feet of many strong men have been entangled in this net. Indeed seldom has the frailty of the man of God been more painfully exposed. David honoured his God in the endurance of Shimei's curse. But Ziba's smooth words drew him to an act of gross injustice.¹ Usually some want of integrity has predisposed the mind for this poison. David was struggling to discover a plea for leniency to his murderous son, when the woman of Tekoah plied him with her *flattering* lips. The bribery of passion was far more powerful than her arguments.² But bitterly did the misguided parent reap the fruit of thus entering into *the net spread for his feet*.³ Wilful infatuation fully prepared Ahab, by listening to the *flattery* of his lying prophets, to his own ruin.⁴

Does a man thus load us with immoderate commendation? It is *the flatterer's net*. "Ponder the paths of thy feet."⁵ Exchange confidence for suspicion.⁶ Fearful is the snare to those, whose rank or influence dispose them to walk rather before men, than before God. Indeed religious flattery is a common snare to a Christian profession. It may be natural, perhaps well-intentioned, to be willing to profit by more advanced experience, and to enquire of a brother, by what means he has been able to rise above the ordinary level; nay--even to express our envy at his higher knowledge, faith, or love. But all this tends to cherish self-complacency, "a confidence in the flesh"--the bane to that self-renouncing confidence in his Saviour, which is the clear stamp of the faithful follower of his Lord. (Philip. iii. 3.) Too often is the same *net spread for the feet* of the Minister of Christ, whether to gain his good opinions, or from the genuine but imprudent warmth of affection. But oh!--think--"He is a man as thou art"--beset with temptation--perhaps even "besides those that are common to men." His heart, little thine; is fully susceptible of self-exalting imaginations. And to know that he has a reputation for holiness; that he is a man of influence; that his character is looked up to; that his opinion is valued--this is indeed "a fiery trial," that brings out to view much base dross of vanity. (Chap. xxvii. 21.) Far better would it be, that our Christian intercourse with each other should be moulded by the wise resolution to refrain from "*flattering* titles," as hurtful to the creature, and provoking to God.

¹ 2 Sam. xvi, 1-12.

² Ib, xiv. 4-24.

³ Ib. xv, 1-14.

⁴ 1 Kings, xxii. 11, 12.

⁵ Chap. iv. 26.

⁶ Chap. xxvi. 24, 25; xxvii, 14.

* Job, xxxii. 21, 22. Compo LXX. 22, with Acts, xii. 22, 23. Surely it is enough for us to have foes within and without to contend with, without having snares for our feet laid by our fellow-pilgrims. Oh! it is a cruel thing to flatter. The soul is often more exhausted and injured by disentangling itself from these nets, than by the hottest contest with principalities and powers. Those who have once known the torture the believer undergoes, while this poison is pervading his soul, the bitter, lowering medicines he must take as antidotes, the frightful oblivion of lessons of humility which he has been studying for years, will, I think (unless much under the influence of the enemy of souls), not administer the noxious potion a second time,--HELEN PLUMPTRE'S *Letters*, pp. 43, 44--a most profitable volume.

6. *In the transgression of an evil man there is a snare, but the righteous doth sing and rejoice.*

There is always a snare in the ways of sin; always a song in the ways of God. Which then are "the ways of pleasantness and peace?"¹ The light-hearted sinner goes on in his flowery path. Soon he is "taken captive in *the snare* of the devil;"² often in a snare of his own toil.³ *Transgression* is in fact *the snare* of the soul. Is it not wisdom to avoid a snare? Sinner--Think a moment. What are "the pleasures of sin" to the pleasures of Paradise? Remember--Sin and ruin are bound together; and who can put them asunder?

The righteous may be in the same outward lot with *the evil man*. But wide indeed is the gulf between their respective states. (Isa. lxxv. 13, 14.) Joseph's brethren in prison, under the sting of conscience, sink in despondency. Paul and Silas in prison *did sing and rejoice*.⁴ Little, however, can be judged by their external state. The ungodly are in prosperity, and, the children of God "chastened every morning" (Ps. lxxiii. 14); yet rising triumphant in the deepest exercise--"Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; though I fall, I shall rise again; though I sit in darkness"--my cause apparently forgotten, my light obscured, my character defamed--"the Lord shall be a light unto me." (Mic. vii. 8.) What is it to be possessor of all the promises of God? The wealth of this golden mine no tongue of man can express; no mind of angel comprehend. And how abundant is the solid ground and material of this *rejoicing*! The completeness of the Saviour's work; his constant love; the fulness of his Spirit; the sufficiency of his grace; his faithful promise; his watchful eye; his ready help; his perpetual intercession; and all this joy--not like that of the world, flowing and ebbing; but heightening and overflowing through all eternity.

But *the righteous also sing*--and only they. Yet often they have no skill for the song. Their harp is upon the willows, as if they could not "sing the Lord's song in a strange land." (Ps. cxxxvii. 4.) Unbelief remains unchecked. The promises therefore are so faintly applied, that distrust outweighs all encouragement. Their brighter seasons were enjoyed rather than improved. No materials were laid up as principles of life, love, and devotedness. And therefore "in the cloudy and dark day" they lose their time in feeble complaints, instead of striving for life.

Is it not worth pursuing this dishonourable evil to its sources, whether remote or proximate? Are we incapacitated, or only disinclined, to *sing*? Seek a clearer exercise of faith, to rouse from indolence,

¹ Chap. iii. 17, with xiii. 5.

² 2 Tim. ii. 26. Job, xviii. 9-11.

³ Chap. v. 22; xi. 5, 6; xii. 13. Job, xvii. 8.

⁴ Gen. xlii. 21, with Acts, xvi. 25.

and to remove mistaken apprehensions. And in the active energy of faith, repent, return, watch and pray, mortify besetting sins. Enquire seriously--Are the materials for our song passed away? our stated grounds for praise sunk? Are there not a countless number of mercies yet remaining, and preserved entire, sufficient to swallow up the smart of the most bitter dispensation? Let faith be employed in putting them together, and counting them over; and surely under the deepest gloom that ever could rest upon the soul, the harp would be taken down from the willows, "*and the righteous would sing and rejoice.*"*

Add to which--Not only are these mercies left, while others are removed. But to the watchful eye of dutiful, affectionate faith, the value of our heavenly Father's kindness continued to us, is seen in a clearer light, and more deeply enjoyed. And never is his grace seen so cheering, so triumphant, as when it raises us above our trials" and enables us to take up the song of victory on the field of battle;¹ rebuking unbelief far away, and strengthening our confidence for renewed conflict.

And indeed even in the most sinking frame, when wounded and disheartened with the sense of our own guilt and follies--Oh! we must, be ignorant of the alphabet--of the gospel; if, when we have told up the fearful account, and magnified it to its utmost--we do not grasp the glorious word--"Where sin abounded, grace doth much more abound." (Rom. v. 20.) Can we then want materials for our *song*? Shall not our harp reach an higher pitch? Praised be God! We are hasting to a world, where it will never be unstrung, the heart never out of tune, and the song ever new, when *we shall rejoice and sing* without one faltering note in our song; without one jarring note in the song of our brethren.²

7. *The righteous considereth the cause of the poor; but the wicked regardeth not to know it.*

The original gives to the Proverb a judicial aspect.† To "respect the person of the poor" is no less unjust, than to "honour the person of the mighty."³ But *the righteous* judge or advocate will *consider his cause*, judge it as for God, investigate it thoroughly, and take care that it be not lost from his own inability to defend it. (Ps. lx:xxii. 3, 4.) This was the *considerate* administration of the great King of righteous-

¹ Rom. vii. 24, 25. 1 Cor. xv. 55-57.

² Isa. xxxv. 10. Rev. v. 8-10.

³ Lev. xix. 15. Exod. xxiii. 3.

* To some Christians of a morbid temperament, Bernard's advice may be important--Let us mingle honey with wormwood, that the wholesome bitter may give health, when it is drunk tempered with a mixture of sweetness. While you think humbly of yourselves, think also of the goodness of the Lord.--*In Cant.* Sermon xi. Always are there evil days in the world; always good days in the Lord.--AUGUSTINE *on Ps.* xxxiii.

† Holden. Geier. Bp. Patrick.

ness.¹ The man of God will walk after this divine Exemplar.² 'Let him have the conscience first'--says Bishop Sanderson--'and then the patience too (and yet if he have the conscience, certainly he will have the patience), to make search into the truth of things, and not be dainty of his pains herein, though matters be intricate, and the labour like to be long and irksome.'*

Selfishness however, not truth, justice, or mercy, is the standard of *the wicked*. He considers, first *the poor* man's person, then his cause. "The unjust judge" would not have "avenged the widow of her adversary, but to save trouble to himself. (Luke, xviii. 2-5.) Felix *regarded not to know* the Apostle's cause, only that he might indulge his own covetousness. (Acts, xxxiv. 26, 27.) But fearful is it to sit in the place of God³ as his representative, only to pervert his judgment for selfish aggrandizement.⁴ For 'He that rejecteth the complaint of the poor, and beateth them off with big words, and terror in his looks, either out of the hardness of his heart or the love of ease, when he might have leisure to give them audience (if he were so minded) and to take notice of their grievances, cannot justly excuse himself by pleading -- "Behold, we know it not."†

The maxim however obviously applies more generally to the *considerate regard of the righteous*, and the cruel disregard of *the wicked*, towards *the poor*. The ordinance, that "the poor shall never cease out of the land;" and the inequality of rank, prevailing throughout the economy of Providence, were doubtless intended as an incitement to Christian sympathy and enlargement.⁵ *Consideration of the poor* is the true spirit of Christian sympathy; putting ourselves as far as may be in their place.‡ Oh! how different is this from the impatient, ungracious temper, in which the suit of a poor client is sometimes dispatched, as if we grudged our time and pains. Our beloved Lord not only went about doing good" (Acts, x. 38), but he did it so tenderly, so *considerately*. Always was he ready to yield his own convenience and even necessary comfort to the call of need. (Mark, vi. 31-34.) The same *considerate regard for the poor* marked the Apostolic administration.⁶ Sympathy with the poor is the practical acknowledgment of our own undeserved mercies; specially remembering the Lord's poor,

¹ Ps. lxxii. 2-4, 12-14.

² Job, xxix. 11-16; xxxi. 13, 20. Jer. xxii. 16.

³ Ps. lxxxii. 6. Rom. xiii. 1, 2.

⁴ Chap. xxiv. 11, 12. Jer. v. 28, 29. Ezek. xxii. 7, 29-31. Mic. iii. 1-4.

⁵ Deut. xv. 7-11. 2 Cor. viii. 14, 15. Comp. Eccclus. iv. 8.

⁶ Acts, iv 34, 35; vi. 1-6. 1 Cor. xvi. 2. 2 Cor. ix. 12, 13. Gal. ii. 10.

* *Sermon on Exodus*. xxiii. 1-3.

† Dr. SANDERSON'S *Sermon on chap.* xxiv. 10-12.

‡ Ps. xli. 1. Most striking was *the consideration of the poor* in Bp. Ridley, imploring in his last moments at the stake the queen in behalf of certain poor men's leases in his bishopric likely to become void by his death. FOXE, vii. 545, 546. In the same noble spirit was the remembrance of the dying Scott to his son, of the arrival of the season, when he had been used to plant a root for the supply of the poor.

as the representatives of Him,¹ who is First and Last, and All to us; and who, "though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich." (2 Cor. viii. 9.)

Well do those, *who regard not to know*, deserve their name--*the wicked*. Like Cain, they acknowledge no interest in their brother. (Gen. iv. 9.) Like Nabal--"It is no concern of mine."² 'If the poor must be fed rather than starve'--it is casting food to a dog, rather than holding out an helping hand to a fellow-sinner.³ This total absence of the image of a God of love⁴--this utter casting off his royal law⁵--surely he will require it.⁶

8. *Scornful men bring a city into a snare* (set the city on fire, marg.);
but wise men turn away wrath.

The comparison is here between a "proud and haughty *scorner*,"* and a *wise man*." The one is a public injury; the other a public blessing. The one raises a tumult; the other quells it. The man, who *scorns* to be bound by common restraint, will *bring the city into a snare* by his presumption,⁷ or *set it on fire* 'by blowing the fire of divine wrath upon it.'† Happily wise men are scattered through the land; and their energy and prudence *turn away wrath*.‡ 'Proud and foolish men kindle the fire. Which wise and good men must extinguish.'§

Another instructive illustration of the Proverb suggests itself. Not the tyrant over his fellow-creatures, but the scorner against his God, is the public trouble. Many of the kings of Judah and Israel thus brought *the city into a snare*. Their provocations of divine wrath did more to further its ruin, than the most powerful foreign enemies. Their influence led the people into deeper aggravations of sin, and ripened them for judgment. ||

But wise men stand in the gap, and turn away wrath.¶ Surely it was wisdom in the king and people of Nineveh, instead of *bringing their city into a snare by scornful* rebellion, to avert by timely humiliation the impending destruction. (Jonah, iii. 5-10.) Let the people be gathered; let the Ministers of the Lord gird themselves to their work of weeping

¹ Matt. x. 42; xxv. 40.

² 1 Sam. xxv. 10, 11.

³ Luke, xvi. 21.

⁴ 1 John, iii. 17.

⁵ Jam. ii. 8. Lev. xix. 18, with Luke, x. 31, 32.

⁶ Chap. xxiv. 12.

⁷ 1 Sam. xi. 2, 11. 2 Sam. x. 4; xii. 31.

* Heb, Men of scorn. Chap. xxi. 24.

† LXX. Durell.

‡ 2 Sam. xx. 1, 15-22. Acts, xix. 23--41. Comp. *Virg. Aen.* i. 143-153.

§ Henry.

|| 2 Kings, xxi. 9-15; xxiii. 26, 27. Isa. xxviii. 14-22. 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16, 17. Jer. xxxvi. 23-34. Matt. xxi. 33-43; xxiii. 34-39. 1 Thes 5. ii. 15, 16.

¶ Muses--Exod. xxxii. 10-14. Deut. ix. 8-20. Ps. cvi. 23. Aaron-Num. xvi. 48. Phinehas, xxv. 11. Ps. cvi. 30. Elijah, 1 Kings, xviii. 42--45. Jam. v. 16-18. Jer. xviii. 20. Dan. ix. 3-20. Amos, vii. 1-6. The righteous remnant--Isa. i. 9; vi. 13. Comp. Gen. cviii. 32; Job, xxii. 30; Jer. v. 1; Ezek. xxii. 30, 31. Contrast xiii. 5. 'Nothing therefore can make a man so good a patriot as religion.'--Bp. HALL.

and accepted pleaders for the land. (Joel, ii. 17.) Surely "except the Lord of Hosts had left us a very small remnant" of these powerful intercessors, "we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah." (Isa. i. 9.) Praised be God! The voice is yet heard--"Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it." (Ib. lxv. 8.) The salt of the earth preserves it from corruption. (Matt. v. 13.) Shall not we then honour these *wise men* with reverential gratitude--"My father --my father! the chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof?"*

9. *If a wise man contendeth with a foolish man, whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest.*

It would generally be far better not to meddle with such a fool as is here described. We can only deal with him on very disadvantageous terms, and with little prospect of good.¹ *If a wise man contend* with the wise, he can make himself understood, and there is some hope of bringing the debate to a good issue. But to *contend with a fool, there is no rest*, no peace or quiet. It will go on without end. He will neither listen to reason, nor yield to argument. So intractable is he, that he will either *rage or laugh*; either vent upon us the fury of an ungoverned temper, or *laugh* us to scorn. This *contention* was a point of poignant trial to our Divine Master. What could be more revolting than sometimes their murderous *rage*,² sometimes their scornful laugh,³ both "rejecting his counsel against themselves?" (Matt. xi. 16, 17.) And what if *a contention with such fools* should be appointed for me? Let me remember my days of perversity and *folly*. And while this vivid impression brings me back to their level; can I return their unreasonable provocation, save with tenderness and compassion? (Tit. iii. 2, 3.) Yea--when, as the most effectual means for their benefit, I would commend them to the Almighty and Sovereign grace of God; can I forget, that if this grace has healed my deep-rooted stubbornness, it is not less rich, not less free, not less sufficient, for them?

10. *The bloodthirsty hate the upright: but the just seek his soul.*

This bloody hatred is the fulfilment of the first prophecy from the mouth of God. (Gen. iii. 15.) The first history of the fallen world puts the seal to the prophecy--"Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him." (Ib. iv. 5-8.) Ever since has the same testimony been given.⁴ "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" (was the indignant remonstrance of Stephen to his countrymen) until

¹ Chap. xvii. 12; xxvi. 4. Eccles. x. 13. Matt. vii. 6.

² Luke, iv. 29. John, vii. 1; viii. 59; xi. 53.

³ Luke, xvi. 14.

⁴ Verse 27. Ps. xxxvii 12-14, 32. Gal. iv. 29. 2 Tim. iii. 12.

* 2 Kings, ii. 12. This acknowledgment is sometimes forced from the consciences of the ungodly. Chap. xiii. 10-16.

they" filled up the measure of their fathers," by being "the betrayers and murderers" of the Son of God.¹ The noble army of martyrs stand before us. Such intensity of malice in the contrivance of the variety of their torture! *The bloodthirsty hate the upright.* (Heb. xi. 36, 37.) Their innocency was the only ground of *hatred*; and, on the threatened apprehension of any outbreak of evil, the swelling cry of the *bloodthirsty* multitude was--"The Christians to the lions!" The next picture downward in the annals of the Church is not less illustrative--"I saw the "woman"--awful sight!--"drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus." (Rev. xvii. 6.) We cannot doubt but the fierce elements of the cruelty still lie in slumbering concealment. Nothing but the Gospel can kill the principle. Everything short of this only chains down the violence. In a softer mould it still retains all its substance and power, and waits only for the removal of present restraints to develop the same *bloodthirsty hatred* as ever.

Scripture explains this murderous vindictiveness. "Wherefore slew Cain his brother? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." (1 John, iii. 12, 13.) Darkness cannot endure the light.² The condemning light³ of godliness excites the enmity of the ungodly. They cannot bear the picture. Thus the *bloodthirsty* Ahab hated *his upright* prophets,⁴ and the Jews the holy Saviour.⁵ Conformity to him is the great offence still. 'Such precise--fools, contrary to every one beside, "turning the world upside down"--how can they be endured?' Their removal is a rejoicing riddance from the earth. (Rev. xi. 9, 10.)

And yet their God is not unmindful of their threatening troubles. *The bloodthirsty hate the upright: but the just seek his soul.* Saul sought to murder David; Jonathan covered him.⁶ Jezebel was thirsting to destroy the prophets of the Lord; Obadiah "hid them in a cave, and fed them with bread and water."⁷ The enemies of Jeremiah plotted against him; Ebedmelech saved his life.⁸ Herod was proceeding against Peter's life; the Church shielded him with their prayer.⁹ The bloodthirsty Jews bound themselves to murder Paul; "Priscilla and" Aquila" were ready to "lay down their own necks for his life."¹⁰

What a life of conflict is this, world of sin! Need we be dissuaded from loving it? Need we not rather patience to endure it? But while we are in it, let us be found decidedly on the Lord's side,¹¹ "partakers," if needs be, "of the afflictions of the gospel." (2 Tim. i. 8.) Never let us stand aloof from our brethren's cause. (Ib. i. 16, 17.) To help them, is to be fellow-workers with God himself. If union is so effective

¹ Acts, vii. 52. Matt. v. 12; xxiii. 32.

² John, iii. 19, 20.

³ Heb. xi. 7.

⁴ 1 Kings, xxi. 20; xxii. 8.

⁵ John vii. 7.

⁶ 1 Sam. xviii. 11, 25, with xviii. 1-4.

⁷ 1 Kings, xviii. 1-4.

⁸ Jer. xxxviii. 1-13.

⁹ Acta, xii. 5.

¹⁰ Ib. xxiii. 12. Rom. xvi. 4.

¹¹ Matt. xii. 30.

against the Church, surely its influence would not be of less moment on the Church's side; "strengthening her stakes," establishing her foundations, and enlarging her usefulness.

11. *A fool uttereth all his mind; but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards.*

"There is a time for everything"--the wise man elsewhere writes --"a time to keep silence, and a time to speak."¹ It is a mark of true wisdom to discern the times.² Indeed the discipline, or the want of discipline, upon the "little member," is a sound test of character. The man, who speaks hastily and with conceit, will be put to shame in his folly.³ He might have been "counted" wise in his silence.⁴ But silence is beyond his power--*He uttereth all his mind*--tells all he knows, thinks, or intends, and runs on, until he has "poured out all his foolishness." (Chap. xv. 2.) It is sometimes thought a proof of honesty to *utter all our mind*. But it is rather a proof of *folly*. For how many things it would be far better never to speak indeed to suppress in the very thought!⁵ How much of "foolish talking and jesting;"⁶ how many angry, detracting, uncharitable words do we utter, because we have neglected to watch, or rather to entreat "the Lord to set a watch upon, our lips," as the door of our hearts! (Ps. cxli. 3.) And what wrong judgments we often pass upon men's actions, because we *utter* all our mind as it were in one breath, without pondering, or perhaps without materials to form a correct judgment!

Indeed the words of the fool--as an old Expositor remarks--'are at the very door--so to speak--of his mind, which being always open, they readily fly abroad. But the words of the wise are buried in the inner recess of his mind, whence the coming out is more difficult.* This is the wisdom to be valued and cultivated. Many things we may *keep in till afterward*, which will then be far better spoken than at the present moment. (1 Sam. xxv. 36.) We may find reason afterward to suspect what at the time we were fully persuaded of. There is often a lightness of faith--the fruit of sudden impulse, breaking out in sudden profession. Beware of a loose foundation. Men under the present excitement run through all the sects and parties of the Church, everywhere *uttering their whole mind*; "tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine"--"seeking rest, and finding none." (Eph. iv. 14.) How much better to take time for second thoughts, to wait, and weigh again! We should then, instead of exhibiting a

¹ Eccles. iii. 1-7.

² Ib. viii. 5. Amos, v. 13.

³ Chap. xviii. 13.

⁴ Chap. xvii. 28.

⁵ Chap. xxx. 32. Mic. vii. 5.

⁶ Eph. v. 4.

* Cartwright. Comp. Chap. x. 14; xii. 16, 23; xiii. 16; xiv. 83. Comp. Eccclus. xxviii. 25.

changing and doubtful face, gain that "good thing--a heart established with grace." (Heb. xiii. 9.)

This godly prudence holds in common life. Samson fell a victim to the *folly of uttering all his mind*. (Judg. xvi. 17.) Samuel was restrained by God from this imprudence, from a regard to his own safety. Never speak against our mind. But it is not always necessary *to utter our whole mind*. Take care that we speak nothing but the truth. But the whole truth (as in the instance of Samuel) may sometimes be legitimately restrained. (1 Sam. xvi. 1, 2.) The Apostle was two years at Ephesus, without *uttering all his mind* against the worship of Diana. But was this cowardice shrinking from the truth? His weeping ministry, and unceasing efforts, proved his faithfulness.¹ His open protest *kept in till afterwards* was self-discipline, consistent with Christian courage and decisiveness.

12. *If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked.*

The influence of the *ruler's* personal character upon his people involves a fearful responsibility. A wicked prince makes a wicked people.² In his more immediate sphere, *if he hearken to lies*, contrary to the laws of God and of charity;³ he will never want those about him ready to minister to his folly. 'Lies will be told to those that are ready to *hearken to them*.'† Envy, ambition, malice, self-interest, will always be at hand for prejudice and scandal. The credulous ruler becomes the tool of all manner of wickedness. His corruption pushes away the godly from his presence; and *all his servants are wicked*. Exceptions there are to this maxim (as Obadiah in the court of Ahab;" Ebedmelech in the service of Zedekiah,⁵ Daniel in Nebuchadnezzar's court.⁶) But this is the natural tendency, the general result, to his own disgrace and ruin. If he would therefore rule in uprightness and in the fear of God; instead of lending himself to detraction or flattery, he must carefully close his ears against doubtful characters, lest he should countenance *wicked servants*, and discourage those, that will boldly speak the truth.

How wise was David's determination--both as the sovereign of his people, and the *ruler* of his house--to discountenance lies, and uphold the cause of faithful men! (Ps. ci. 2-7.) Contrast Ahab surrounded with his wicked prophets; all combining in one lie to please

¹ Acts, xix. 10, 23; xx. 31.

² 1 Kings, xv. 30; xvi. 2.

³ Exod. xxiii. 1. M.R. Comp. chap. xiii. 5.

⁴ 1 Kings, xviii. 3.

⁵ Jer. xxxviii. 7-13. 6 Dan. ii. 48, 49.

* . . . Componitur orbis

Regis ad exemplum; nec tantum inflectere sensus

Humanos edicta valent, quam vita regent is.

Mobile mutatur semper cum principe vulgus.

Claud. de Honorii Consul.

† Henry.

their weak and ungodly master. We see how ready he was to *hearken to lies*, and how well the flattery worked; when he punished the only man who was "valiant for--the truth," and who persisted in declaring it--"not fearing the wrath of the king."*

But all in authority may learn a lesson of responsibility. Let Ministers especially, not only hold the truth in its full integrity, and take heed that their character will bear the strictest scrutiny; but let them turn away from the fawning flattery of those, of whose uprightness there is at best but doubtful proof.

13. *The poor and the deceitful man (usurer, marg.) meet together: the Lord lighteneth both their eyes.*

The doctrine of this proverb, as of one similar to it (Chap. xxii. 2), seems to be the real equality of the divine dispensations under apparent inequalities. The rich seem to be intended *by the deceitful*; so called, from the deceitfulness of riches,¹ and of the means, by which they are too often obtained.² The *usurer*³ appears to point to the same purport; implying the oppression too often connected with riches.† Both these classes, so distinct in their relative condition, *meet together* on the same level before God. However *men* may differ; however one may oppress and despise, and the other envy or hate; however *the poor* may be tempted to murmur because of the oppressions of his richer neighbour; however the rich by *usury* or unjust gain may take advantage of the necessities of the poor--*the Lord enlighteneth both their eyes*--"He is no respecter of persons." (Acts, x. 34.) Both are partakers of his providential blessings. (Matt. v. 45.) Both are the subjects of his Sovereign grace; 'members of the same body, animated by the same Spirit, appointed for the same inheritance; partakers of the same "great and precious promises." There was not one prize for the soul of the poor, and another for the rich. There was not one table for the meaner guests, and another for the greater.‡ *The poor* Lazarus and *the usurer* Zaccheus have long *met together* in one common home; both alike the undeserved monuments of wondrous everlasting mercy;--*the eyes of both enlightened*, spiritually, eternally. (Luke, xvi. 22; xix. 9.)

Is it not presumption to judge hastily the ways of God; or to judge them at all by the plummet of our own reason? (Ezek. xviii. 25.) Let us wait the appointed time, and all will be clear, as all is right. How

¹ Chap. xxiii. 5. Matt. xiii. 22. ² 1 Tim. vi. 9. ³ Comp. chap. xxii. 7.

* 1 Kings, xxii. 6, 26, 27. Comp. Hos. vii. 3. 'Many kings have been destroyed by poison; but none has been so efficaciously mortal, as that drunk in by the ear'--SOUTH Massillon well taught his young prince, that the flattery of the courtier was little less dangerous than the rebellion of the traitor.

† Ps. lxii. 9, 10. Jam. v. 1. For the same reason our Lord denominates riches generally the distinctive term of "the mammon of unrighteousness." Luke, xvi. 9.

‡ Bp. REYNOLDS' *Vanity of the Creature*, Sect. 8.

far beyond our narrow conceptions is every exercise and display of this manifold wisdom, grace, and love!

14. *The king that faithfully judgeth the poor, his throne shall be established for ever.*

This maxim has often been repeated in substance. (Verses 4, 7; xx. 28.) The writer of this book was a king. He was naturally led to write for his own benefit, while the Divine Spirit guided his pen for the use of rulers to the end of time. May every king--specially may our own beloved Sovereign--place this picture of a godly ruler constantly before the eyes! It is natural for *the king* to desire *the establishment of his throne*, but not natural for him to seek it in God's own way. Jeroboam sought it by wickedness;¹ Rehoboam by worldly policy;² Ahaz by worldly alliances.³ The far more sure mode is the faithful administration of justice, not neglecting the rich, but specially protecting the poor, who from their weakness were in the greater need of a covering.⁴ David appears to have been a poor man's king, giving the lowest of his people familiar access to him for judgment. (2 Sam. xix. 8.) Solomon, and many of his godly successors, ordered their kingdom in the same principles of justice, and were abundantly honoured of their God. The maladministration of the rulers never failed to bring a curse upon the governments "Them that honour me, I will honour; and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." (1 Sam. ii. 30.)

When our Great Saviour King walked upon earth, his enemies bore testimony, whether in flattery or conviction, to his righteous character. (Matt. xxii. 16.) Not less beautiful than accurate is this description, as applied to the principles of his government, in the connection with the promise of the *establishment of his throne*.⁶

15. *The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.*

Discipline is the order of God's government. Parents are his dispensers of it to their children. The child must be broken in to "bear the yoke in his youth." (Lam. iii. 27.) Let *reproof* be first tried; and if it succeed, let *the rod* be spared. (Chap. xvii. 10.) If not, let it do its work. Eli gave the *reproof*, "but spared *the rod*."⁷ *The rod* is evidently to be taken literally, not metaphorically; corporal, not spiritual chastisement.⁸

¹ 1 Kings, xi. 26.

² 2 Chron. xi. 22, 23; xii. 1.

³ Ib. xxviii. 16-20.

⁴ Chap. xxxi. 9. Ps. lxxxii 3, 4. ⁵ Isa. iii 13, 14; x. 1. Jer. xxii. 13-19. Zeph. iii. 3.

⁶ Ps. lxxii. 7, 11, 15. Isa. ix. 7; xi. 4, 9.

⁷ 1 Sam. ii. 22, 25; iii. 13.

⁸ Chap. xxiii 13, 14. Comp. xix. 29; xx. 30.

*1 Kings, iii. 16-28. Jehoshaphat--2 Chron. xix. 5-11; xx. 30. Josiah--Jer. xxii. 14-19. Comp. Daniel's advice to Nebuchadnezzar, iv. 27.

Some give *the rod* without *reproof*, without any effort to produce sensibility of conscience. From this tyranny or caprice nothing can be expected. The combined influence not only "drives foolishness far away," but, as a positive blessing, *gives wisdom*. (Chap. xxii. 15.) God's own children grow wiser under correction. They see their folly, and in genuine shame turn from it, blessing him for his rod of faithfulness and love,¹ and teaching us the folly of rejecting medicines because they are bitter.

But look at the child *left to himself*--without restraint. A more perfect picture of misery and ruin cannot be conceived. His evil tempers are thought to be the accident of childhood. 'They will pass away, as his reason improves. Time only can mend them.' But in fact time of itself mends nothing. It only strengthens and matures the growth of the native principle. This, being a decided bias to evil, must tend to deadly injury. The mother cannot conjecture the future stature, health, talents, or prospects of her new-born infant. But of one thing she may be absolutely certain--a corrupt and wayward will. The poison however does not appear at first. No special anxiety is excited. The child is not nurtured in wickedness, or under the influence of bad example. He is only *left to himself*. *Left!* The restive horse, with his rein loosened, full of his own spirit, plunges headlong down the precipice. The child, without government, rushes on under the impetuous impulse of his own will;* and what but Almighty sovereign grace can save him from destruction? Many a hardened villain on the gallows was once perhaps the pleasing, susceptible child; only *left to himself*, to his own appetite, pride, and self-willed-obstinacy.†

The sound discipline of heavenly guidance is our father's best blessing. His most fearful curse, is to be given up to our own ways,

¹ 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12. Ps. cxix. 67, 71, 75. Luke, xv. 13-17. Mic. vi. 9.

* 'Puer, cui fraenum laxatum.'--SCHULTENS.

† Comp. 1 Kings, i. 6-9; ii. 23-25. Rousseau inculcated this system to its fullest extent --'That no kind of habits ought to be impressed on children; that you should leave them to the natural consequences of their own actions; and that, when reason comes to exert itself in a maturer state, all will be right.' Upon which the following beautiful apostrophe has been given--'Emilius! how I tremble for thee, while I see thee exposed to the care of thy too ingenious tutor. I see thee wilful to thy parents; domineering in the nursery; surfeiting on meats; inflaming thy body with noxious humours, thy mind with unquiet passions; running headlong into dangers, which thou canst not foresee, and habits which thou canst not eradicate; mischievous to others, but fatal to thyself.'--See Bp. HORNE'S *Sermon on Self-Denial*. 'We pity orphans'--remarked a wise Christian parent--'who have neither father nor mother to care for them. A child indulged is more to be pitied. It has no parent. It is its own master, peevish, froward, headstrong, blind; born to a double portion of trouble and sorrow above what fallen man is heir to; not only miserable itself, but worthless, and a plague to all who in future will be connected with it. What bad sons, husbands, masters, fathers, daughters, wives, and mothers, are the offspring of fond indulgence, shewn to little masters and misses almost from the cradle! Wise discipline gives thought and firmness to the mind; and makes us useful here, and fit for the world of perfect subordination above.'--VENN'S *Life*, p. 257.

"to walk in our own counsels." (Ps. lxxxi. 12.) A *child thus left* is at the furthest point from salvation, in the very jaws of the devouring lion.

Turn we now from the ruined child to the disgraced, broken-hearted parent. *The mother* only is mentioned, as the chief superintendent of the early discipline; perhaps also as the most susceptible of the grievous error. For if the father's stronger character induces him to "provoke his children to wrath" (Col. iii. 21); to rule rather by command than by persuasion; does not *the mother's* softer mould tend to the opposite evil? And so far as she yields to mistaken indulgence, she bears the greater share of the punishment. It is not, that she is brought to trouble, or even to poverty; but to that, which is the most keenly-felt of all distress--*to shame*.^{*} Nowhere is God's retributive justice more strongly marked. *The mother's* sin is visited in the proportioned punishment. What greater neglect of obligation, than *a child left to himself*! What greater affliction, than the *shame to which he brings her*. Parental influence is lost. The reverence of authority is forgotten, as a by-gone name. (Chap. xix. 26.) The child rules; instead of being as a corrected child, in subjection. (Heb. xii. 9.) The parent fears, instead of the child; and thus virtually owns her own degradation. Instead of "the wise son, that maketh a glad father;" it is "the foolish son, that is the heaviness of *his mother*."¹ The sunshine of bright prospects is clouded. The cup of joy is filled with wormwood. The father's mouth is dumb with the confusion of grief. The dearest object of *the mother's* tenderness, instead of being the staff and comfort of her age, *bringeth her to shame*. Truly *children*, thus *left to themselves*, will mingle the bitterest cup that man can ever have to drink, and stir up the saddest tears, that ever eyes can have to weep.

This is not a trial, which, like many others, she might cover in her own bosom. Alas! *the shame* is too public to be concealed. What must have been the open dishonour upon Eli's name, when "the sins of his children made men abhor the offering of the Lord!" When the treason of David's sons *brought him to shame* in the sight of all Israel; surely his own conscience, must have brought his own perverted fondness to mind, as the cause of their ruin; both *left to themselves*--one palliated in the most aggravated sin;² the other having been not even corrected by a word. (1 Kings, i. 5-9.) And if *the shame* before men be so bitter, what will be the overwhelming confusion at the great consummation, when the evil propensities, cherished with such cruel fondness in the parental bosom, shall produce their harvest "in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow!" (Isa. xvii. 11.)

Oh! as our children's happiness or misery, both for time and eternity,

¹ Chap. x. 1; xvii. 21, 25.

² 2 Sam. xiv. 21, 23; xv. 6; xviii. 33.

* Conturbator matris suae.'--SCHULTENS. 'Filius confundens, confusion omni are faciens, et perplexens.'--*Ib. on Chap. x. 5.*

is linked with our own responsibilities; shall not we "watch and pray," and resist "the weakness of the flesh," in self-denying firmness? 'Take this for certain'--says Bishop Hopkins--'that as many deserved stripes as you spare from your children, you do but lay upon your own back. And those whom you refuse to chastise, God will make severer scourges to chastise you.'* At whatever cost, establish your authority. Let there be but one will in the house. And let it be felt, that this will is to be the law. The child will readily discover, whether the parent is disposed to yield, or resolved to rule. But however trifling the requirement, let obedience be, in small as great matters, the indispensable point. The awe of parental authority is perfectly consistent with the utmost freedom of childlike confidence. Nay--it is the very foundation of it (for the child can hardly appreciate the kindness of a parent, whom he thinks afraid to strike), while it operates as a valuable safeguard against a thousand follies of uncontrolled waywardness. But ever let us put the awful alternative vividly before us. Either the child's will, or the parent's heart, must be broken: "Without a wise and firm controul, the parent is miserable; the child is ruined.†

16. *When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increaseth: but the righteous shall see their fall.*

The increase of transgression is obviously proportioned to the increase of transgressors. (Hos. iv.7.) Nor is it merely a numerical increase, but also in power and daring of sin. "The men, who began to multiply upon the face of the old earth, were giants" in wickedness, as in strength, until "the striving of the Spirit of God" could endure no longer. (Gen. vi. 3.) Thus was it with the Babel-builders (Ib. xi. 8), and the cities of the plain. (Ib, xviii. 20.) Combination emboldens in sin. (Isa. xli. 7.) Each particle of the mass is corrupt. The mass therefore of itself ferments with evil. Hence the prevalence of infidelity in our densely-crowded districts above the more thinly-populated villages. There is the same evil in individual hearts; but not the same fermentation of evil.

But for the prospects of faith, the Christian eye could not bear the

* Works, i. 450.

† 'I earnestly entreat you'--writes the wise and experienced Josiah Pratt to his children--'to subdue the wills of your children most tenderly *if you can*? But if not, your duty and your love require measures, which shall enforce obedience. Commit yourselves as little as may be into a contest with your children. But having once done this, you must maintain the contest till the child yields. Every such victory will make the text easier, and in all likelihood deter the child from entering on another contest. And you must make thorough work of it, if you would bless the child. The guile of the heart is seen in combination with its self-will, in trying to evade your authority. A very young child puts forth perhaps his first approaches to sin in acts of cunning and rebellion. Rely with unshaken confidence on that divine maxim--"Train up a child in the way he should, go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it."--*Memoir*, Chap. xix.

sight. *But the righteous shall see their fall.*¹ Noah saw the destruction of the old world,² Abraham the ruin of the devoted cities;³ "Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore." (Exod. xiv. 30.) 'Let not the righteous'--said good Bishop Patrick--'be discouraged; for the wicked men are, the shorter is their reign.' The faithful Minister, conscious of his inability to stem the everflowing torrent of iniquity would sink. In despair, but for the assured confidence, that he is on the conquering side; that his cause, as the cause of his Lord, must eventually prevail. Yes--though now sin seems to triumph, and Satan boasts of his victories; yet "the kingdoms of this world," with all their vast population, shall "become the kingdoms of our Lord and his it' Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever." (Rev. xi. 15.) This is indeed the supporting joy of faith; to realize the glory of this day, when *the righteous shall see the fall* of the now triumphing wicked; and one universal shout shall swell throughout the earth--"Alleluia; salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God; for true and righteous are his judgments--Alleluia; for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth."⁴

17. *Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul.*

Once more the wise man returns to the subject of discipline. These repeated inculcations⁵ strongly shew its importance. The command is positive--*Correct thy son*. How can an upright judgment evade or explain away a plain, literal rule? This, book of Proverbs is not out of date. Like every other part of the Sacred Volume, it is the Book for every age; "given by inspiration of God; profitable for doctrine, and written for our learning."⁶ To try therefore more self-pleasing rules, is to set up our will in opposition to God's; reason or feeling in the stead of faith. It is making ourselves "wise above that which is written."

The measure and mode of *correction* indeed must depend upon the age, sex, temper of the child, the character, the aggravation, or the mitigated circumstances, of the fault. But let it be, like our gracious Father's discipline, never more than can be borne.⁷ Make due allowance for any marks of ingenuous confession. Yet with a wise application of the principle, there must be no exception to the rule. Different tempers, like different soils, require corresponding difference of treatment. But discipline there must be; not relaxed in fondness, not pushed on in harshness; but authority tempered with love.⁸ If a gentle hand cannot controul, a stronger hand must be applied.

¹ Ps. xxxvii. 34; lviii. 11.

² Gen. vii. 23.

³ Ib. xix, 28.

⁴ Rev. xix. 1-6, with xv. 4; xviii. 20, Comp. 18a. lxvi. 24.

⁵ Verse 15. Chap. iii. 24; xix. 18; xxii. 15; xxiii. 13, 14.

⁶ 2 Tim. iii. 16. Rom. xv. 4.

⁷ Isa. XXVII. 8; lvii. 16. 1 Cor. X. 13.

⁸ See Wisd. vi. 17.

We may take *rest* without *correction*; but such rest will bring trouble in the end. The true *rest* is that, which our *child will give*; and that he may *give* it, the rule is--*Correct*.¹ We may be assured, that God would not have so insisted upon it, if a blessing was not with it. If Eli was rejected, it was because in this matter he "honoured his sons above God."² Those then "that honour him" above their sons "he will honour." Pain is the present exercise both to parent and child,³ but the *after* blessing is secured. (Heb. xii. 11.) Ground well tilled, trees carefully pruned, bring forth more fruit."

Observe how the objection of parental weakness is anticipated. 'If I put my son to pain, will he not hate me?' No--when "left to himself," he was a deep and anxious trouble. Now *he shall give thee rest*. Before--he "brought thee to shame." (Verse 15.) Now *he shall give delight to thy soul*." The momentary feelings of the child under *correction* will give way to the conviction of the parent's wisdom and regard for his profit. (Heb. xii. 9.)

Yet the rule against discouragement would not have been repeated, had there not been some parental evil to be corrected. "Provocation" revolts, transfers confidence to most unworthy associates, and brings into ruinous temptations. Children claim a considerate treatment. They must not be driven by brute force. Authority must be tempered with love. The grounds of extraordinary commands should be explained to them. What is good should be liberally commended. The best construction should be put upon defective efforts. The distinction should be carefully drawn between weakness and wilfulness, between heedlessness and obstinacy. Home should be gladdened with the invigorating joy of spring, and replete with every wholesome indulgence. Every attempt should be made to gain confidence, so that the child, instead of a cold trembling reserve, should run into our arms. But in this glowing atmosphere, forget not God's rule. The completeness of discipline is the father's firmness combined with the mother's tenderness; each infusing into the other the quality of each. A wise parent will put his seal to the testimony, that this well-disciplined education is the surest means of securing the children's affection, gratitude, and reverence.

In fine--on this important subject so often enforced--we are not taught to believe without promises, or to obey without precepts. The Book of Proverbs exhibits cause and effect--the certain consequence of a given course of action, whether good or evil. It sets out promise and obligation--promise fulfilled in the way of obligation. The promised blessing to godly parental discipline is written in beams of living light. If the grace of the promise be lost, it is only by unbelief in the promise,

¹ Comp. Eccclus. xxx. 2.

³ Chap. xv. 10.

² 1 Sam. ii. 29, 30. Contrast Gen. xxii. 12.

⁴ Chap. xxiii. 13-16, 24, 25.

or by a presumptuous confidence in it (separating the end from the means) such as brings shame in the issue. It is not that God is untrue, but that we are unfaithful. God has given the promise. Man either slights, rejects or abuses it. He attempts to put aside the Scripture by an appeal to experience, instead of proving the faithfulness of God by "the obedience of faith." The commands--the directions--the promises--the blessing--all are the Lord's. Put his word to the test. The simplicity and perseverance of faith will be richly honoured in his own best time and way.

18. *Where there is no vision, the people perish** (is made naked, marg.);
but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.

The vision--as appears from the contrast--is divine instruction. (1 Sam. iii. 1.) The Ministry is the appointed ordinance to communicate this blessing;¹ and therefore the main instrumentality of conversion,² and subsequent Christian perfection.† No greater calamity therefore can there be than the removal of the *vision*. The temporal famine, affecting only the body, is a light judgment, scarcely to be mentioned, compared with that, by which *the people perish*--"the famine of hearing the words of the Lord."³ For 'when there is none that can edify, and exhort, and comfort the people by the word of God, they must needs perish. They become thrall and captives unto Satan. Their heart is bound up. Their eyes are shut up; they can see nothing. Their ears are stopped up; they can hear nothing. They are carried away as a prey into hell, because they have not the knowledge of God.'[‡]

Often did Israel provoke this most fearful judgment--the removal of the open *vision*.⁴ "The candlestick" of the Apocalyptic Churches has from the same cause been long since removed out of its place;" and for the most part little more remains than the ceremonial of by-

¹ 1 Sam. ix. 9. Mal. ii. 7. Eph. iv. 11.

² 1 Cor. i. 21. Jam. i. 18. 1 Pet. i. 23.

³ Amos, viii. 11, 12. Isa. viii. 16.

⁴ 1 Kings, xii. 28-32; 2 Chron. xv. 3-5. Ps. lx. xiv. 9. Lam. i. 4; ii. 9. Ezek. vii. 26. Hos. iii. 4.

*Comp. Exod. xxxii. 25. 2 Chron. xxviii. 12. Geier and others give--'Dissipantur'--scattered. Matt. ix. 36. Naked. Marg.--without clothing, in which to appear before God. Every view portrays a state of desponding misery.

† 1 Cor. xiv. 3. Eph. iv. 11-14. 1 Thess. iii. 10. And yet this most fruitful organ of divine agency (preaching), which our blessed Lord honoured as the grand medium of his own teaching (Ps. xl. 9, 10. Isa. lxi. 1, 2) is now depreciated as the mark of 'a Church only in a weak and a languishing state, and all instrument, which Scripture--to say the least--has never much recommended.' (*Tracts for the Times*, 87, p. 75.) Far more orthodox is the sentiment of one of our venerable reformers. 'Thus we may learn the necessity of preaching and what inconvenience follows when it is not used. Where preaching fails"--saith Solomon--"there people perish." Therefore let everyone keep himself in God's school-house, and learn his lesson diligently. For as the body is nourished with meat; so is the soul with the word of God.' Bp. PILKINGTON'S *Works*, p. 112. Parker Society's edition. 'The meanest village'--Luther was wont to say--'with a Christian pastor and flock; is a palace of ebony.'

‡ Bishop JEWELL on the Scriptures.

gone days.¹ From the Apostate Church of Rome, *the vision* is well-nigh withdrawn, and *the people perish* in ignorance and delusion. For as our Protestant Cranmer nobly testified—"I know how Antichrist both obscured the glory of God, and the true knowledge of his word: overcasting the same with mists and clouds of error and ignorance through their false glosses and interpretations. It pitieth me"--he I adds, 'to see the simple and hungry flock of Christ led into corrupt pastures, to be carried blindfold they know not whither.'*

In other bodies also, "having a name to live," the complaint is as real, as in days of old--"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. (Hos. iv. 6.) The sun shines not on more wretched objects, than on the awful masses of our fellow-sinners, growing up in habitual estrangement from God.

It has been calculated, that between four and five millions of our countrymen are living in habitual separation from the worship of gods. Whether from the guilty neglect of rulers, the wilful neglect of individuals, or from the population having grown far beyond the extent of instruction provided, certain it is, that in the most enlightened country in the world, to vast masses of our poor *there is no vision, and the people perish* in ignorance--"the things belonging to their peace being hid from their eyes!"†

Take the most awful illustration of this Proverb that can be imagined. If to be without *vision* be the mark of a perishing state, what ray of Scriptural hope dawns upon the Heathen world? Being "without Christ," they are described by infallible testimony as "having no hope." (Eph. ii. 12.) Salvation is indeed free to all, "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord." But how shall they call without faith; believe without hearing; "hear without a preacher?" (Rom. x. 13-17.). If therefore there be *no vision*, how can they but perish? "They perish indeed without law" (Ib. 11. 12) (not condemned under the law of revelation, which they have never known); but still they perish "without excuse" (Ib. i. 20), alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the "blindness of" their hearts." (Eph. IV. 18.) Proud reasoning man revolts, and pre-Burnes to be more merciful than God. But this false charity is only the cover for selfishness. Men deny the danger, because they are too indolent, too self-indulgent, to stretch out the helping hand, or to make one sacrifice for the rescue. True charity is the fruit of reverential faith. And, while it realizes the tremendous peril, it concentrates all the energy of compassionate tenderness, believing prayer, and self-denying effort upon their salvation.

¹ Rev. ii. 1-5, iii. 1-3, 15, 16.

* Preface to *Defence of the True and Catholic Doctrine of the Sacrament*.

† Luke, xix. 42 So far as the mass has been reached, we are deeply indebted to the Pastoral Aid Society, which may well be called our Home Missionary Society.

But the contrast is not between those, who have not *the vision* and those who--have it; but between the destitution and the improvement of the blessing. The mere profession of the Gospel may be a nullity. Of what use is light, if we open not our eyes to see it? So far from becoming a blessing, it will only issue in deeper condemnation.¹ If some are enlightened, multitudes are struck blind. (John, xii. 40.) But this true *vision*--the object really beheld as life and light to the soul --is the spring of that happy *keeping the law*,² which realizes no less a privilege than communion with our God and Saviour here and for eternity.³ Yes, truly--to be interested in the promises of God; to be an inheritor of everlasting glory; to be the present possessor of divine favour; to be secured from the peril of everything against him, and assured of the supply of all things that will work for his good--this is the *happy* portion of the practical disciple. And indeed in the ordinary course of life, as Hooker observes in his godly instructiveness--'what event soever ensue, it breedeth, if not joy and gladness always, yet always patience, satisfaction, and reasonable contentment of mind. Whereupon it hath been set down as an axiom of good experience, that all things religiously taken. in hand are prosperously ended; because, whether men in the end have that, which religion did allow them to desire, or that, which it teacheth them contentedly to suffer, they are in neither case unfortunate.'⁴

Who then can justly cast a cloud of gloom over the ways of God? Let the Pentecostal Christians witness to their gladness. (Acts, ii. 46, 47.) Let every servant of his Lord invite his fellow-sinners to the enjoyment of his privileges by the manifestation of their holiness and joy.

19. *A servant will not be corrected by words: for though he understand, he will not answer.*

Discipline must be carried, not only into the family (Verses 15,17), but throughout the whole household, in order to preserve God's authority and order. An important hint is here given relative to the management of servants. Though it does not apply to all,† it shews a very common temptation to self-will. There is a proud as well as an humble silence; as plain a proof of an unsubdued spirit, as a pert and flippant answer. The patience of Job was sorely exercised by this trial; and that under circumstances, that made the treatment more aggravated. (Job, xix. 16.) We must guard against harshness in our spirit.⁴ But with servants, as with children, authority must be maintained at any cost. And therefore, if *a servant understand* the command, and *will not*

¹ Matt. xi. 20-24. Luke, xii. 47, 48.

² Chap. iii 21-24; iv. 5-9; viii. 32-35; xix. 16. Luke, xi. 28. John, xiii. 17.

³ John, xiv. 21-23. Rev. xxii. 12, 14. 4 Lev. xxv. 43. Comp. Eccclus. xxxiii. 28, 29.

* Eccl. Pol. b v. c. 1, 2.

† The LXX. renders, but without authority from the original--'an obstinate servant.'

answer; if he will not be corrected by words, it were better to dismiss him than to lower our authority, and countenance evil by yielding to his waywardness.

The Scripture fully sets out the duties of servants--"Not answering again. With good-will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to man."¹ Sullen resistance to reproof is most inconsistent with the profession of a Christian; and, if the offender escapes the correction of an earthly master, he will be visited with the rod of his angry Lord, as a self-deceiver, or backslider from his high obligation.²

20. *Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him.*

We have just been warned against sullen silence. The next warning is directed against *hasty words*. When a man flows on in his words, evidently without time for consideration (Chap. xviii. 13); when he gives his opinion, as if it were a loss of time to take counsel, or regard the judgment of others; when you find him forward in pronouncing judgment before men of acknowledged wisdom and experience; this is the "tool uttering all his mind" (Verse 11); the man lately marked out for our warning (Chap. xxvi. 12), as an *hopeless fool*, "wise in his own conceit."

It is very difficult to deal effectively with him. Until the stronghold of his own conceit be shaken, argument and instruction are lost upon him. The man who is conscious of his weakness, distrusts himself and is ready to ask and receive counsel; is more likely to be led right, than he, who thinks himself to be right already.

It is a special mercy to be preserved from *hasty judgments*, or expression of judgments. The first stamp upon a perfect mind is infallibly correct. On an imperfect mind it must be subjected to a careful scrutiny. It is sound, wisdom to admit, that our judgment may be mistaken. Self-control and self-diffidence give solid consistency. This character of mind is most important in religious disputations. Be careful to defend or contravene nothing, till you have tested it by the true standard. Moses deferred judgment on the sin before his eyes, till he had brought the matter to God. (Lev. xxiv. 12.) "Be swift to hear; slow to speak." (James, i. 19.)

21. *He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child shall have him become his son at the length.*

We have another valuable rule for domestic discipline; directing masters to a wise treatment of their servants. It is a grievous error to step ourselves, or to induce another to step out of the path, which a

¹ Titus, ii. 9. Eph. vi. i.

² Chap. xix. 29; xxvi. 8.

God of order has marked for us. Divine Wisdom has framed the constitution of society, assigning to each their station and their duties. If a servant aspire to be *in the house* anything but a servant, his character loses its value. A master acts--to say the least--most unseemly, when he forgets his own place and authority, and *delicately bringeth up his servant* by the allowance of undue freedom. It is a great exercise to preserve the true medium between distance and familiarity. An haughty, menacing demeanour towards our servants forgets the respect justly due to them. (Eph. vi. 9.) An inconsiderate fondness takes them out of their place, greatly to their own injury. Our Lord's distinction shews, that friends--*not servants*--should be admitted to our familiar intercourse, and entrusted with our confidence. (John, xv. 15.) To promote a servant therefore to the rank of a confidant, unfits him for his own condition, and defeats our own end by the natural results of this unnatural treatment. True kindness keeps him in his place. 'Good usage does by no means imply that indulgence, that would ruin a child.* *A servant delicately brought up*--often from a child--if he be not taken down in time, and made to know his place--soon relaxes in respect and attention. Instead of this false kindness stimulating to diligence, and inducing gratitude; he becomes idle, insolent, and ungovernable (Comp. Eccclus. xxxiii. 25-27); assumes the young master --*becomes a son at the length*. This unseemly usurpation is an evil, "that the earth cannot bear--a servant, when he reigneth."† Ish-bosheth must have allowed Abner undue liberty, when he so far forgot the respect due to his sovereign, as to insult him before his face. (2 Sam. iii: 8.) David also must have loosened the reins of proper authority, when Joab murdered the commander-in-chief at the head of his army, without being instantly subjected to the penalty of the law. (Ib. xx. 10.) Even the wise man appears to have forgotten his own prudent caution, when he *delicately brought up* Jeroboam in authority; and promoted him too suddenly. He lived to regret his error, when with the pretension *of a son* he combined the pride of a rebel. (1 Kings, xi. 26-28.) The confusion and anarchy of after years in the kingdom originated in the same false step. (Ib. xvi. 9-12.) The greatest kindness to servants is to "give to them that which is just and equal" (Col. iv. 1)--*but no more*. Any defect in this rule will be sure to bring (as in the case referred to) future trouble, as the just chastening for present folly. What need have we of the daily supply of Divine grace, to rule our house well in due subjection! The resolution to "behave ourselves wisely in a perfect way" can only be accomplished in the

*Scott.

† Chap. xxx. 21, 22. Lord Bacon suggests for the good ordering of servants--1. That we promote them by steps, not by leaps. 2. That we occasionally deny their wishes, 'Sudden elevation'--he adds--induces insolence. The constant granting of their wishes makes them only more imperative in demand.'—*Advancement of Learning*, Book xii

habitual prayer--"O, when wilt thou come unto me?" Then indeed "I will walk within my house with a perfect heart." (Ps. ci. 2.)

22. *An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression.*

Anger is not necessarily a sinful passion. Even *furiousness*--the overflowing of the torrent--is a property in God. (Nah. i. 2.) We can readily conceive of its energy in the unfallen nature of man. Had Satan appeared to Eve in his own open hatefulness, her anger against him would have been a holy principle. But in a fallen nature, to presence its purity is a rare and most difficult matter. It must be confined to points, where God's honour is concerned (John, ii. 15-17); and even on these points the rule must be observed--"Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." (Eph. iv. 26.) The short period of the day is abundantly sufficient to express right motives, and to accomplish holy purposes.

The general tendency of anger is however here most truly described. Its active energy *stirreth up strife*.¹ It quarrels even upon trifles,²--or matters, which a forbearing consideration might have satisfactorily explained. (Acts, xv. 39.) And when suppressed, but not laboriously mortified, how often does it become more intense, and break out more *furiously--abounding in transgression*! Indeed it is difficult to take a full view of the mighty power of this mass of sin. It gives the impetus to every besetting propensity. It may be blasphemy! (Lev. xxiv. 10, 11.) It stops at nothing. How many murders do we owe to this paroxysm of the moment!³ But for the divine restraints, the very foundations of society would be torn up!

Parents! Do we feel the responsibility of early checking this ebullition in our children? And do we diligently watch against the first rising in ourselves, incessantly praying for its subjugation? How beautiful are the instances of Almighty grace--such as Henry Martyn* --transforming *the furious man* into the likeness of his meek and holy Master!

But let us not be satisfied with the outward constraint upon passion. God condemns the deep-rooted principle that gives it birth. Wretched heart! filled with soul-destroying corruption. Every, even the least, indulgence operates fearfully. So much time spent in excitement! So much more in the unquiet waiting for the desired opportunity! And all given to the great Murderer! Oh! for the mystery and doctrine of the cross, to mould our temper into its genuine spirit and influence!

¹ Chap. xv. 18; xxvi. 21; xxx. 33. James, iii. 16. ² 1 Tim. vi. 4.. 2 Tim. ii. 23, 24.

³ 1 Sam. xviii 9, 10; xxii. 5-19. Matt. ii. 16. Acts, vii: 54-59; xii. 19.

**Life*, p. 8. Pref. to 10th edit.

23. *A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit.*

This Proverb--Bishop Hall remarks in his own style--'is like unto Shushan: in the streets whereof honour is proclaimed to the humble Mordecai; in the palace whereof is erected an engine of death to a proud Haman.'^{*} It exhibits the spirit of our Lord's oft-repeated declaration expounded by his daily Providences--"Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted."† The real value of man in himself is so small, that the Psalmist is at a loss where to find it.¹ His undue value of himself is utter delusion; having lost all; stripped of all; yet proud, as if he were the possessor of all. He raises himself to heaven in his airy visions; but soon does he meet with his own punishment--*A man's pride shall bring him low.*[‡] We see this in the world. The proud conceit of rank, talent, or any superiority, subjects to continual mortification;² while on the other hand, humility, at first considered a mean and servile spirit, ultimately comes to its just estimation.

The world counts nothing great without display. But mark the substantial "honour that cometh from God only." "Heaven is my throne; and earth is my footstool; yet to this man will I look--to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit." (Isa. lxvi. 1, 2.) Yea--"I dwell--saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity--with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit." (Ib. lvii. 15.) Humility is indeed true greatness--'the crown'--as Mr. Howels finely remarks--'of finite beings, made and jewelled by the hand of God himself. Supremacy is the glory of God; humility is the ornament of his child.'§ "I am but dust and ashes. I am less than the least of all thy mercies. I abhor myself. Sinners--of whom I am chief"³--such are the self-abasing confessions of men great in Jehovah's eyes. They shine with the reflection of his glory; but they turn away with genuine humility from their own shining.

Men of this stamp" the king delighteth to honour." Their dignity begins on earth, and is crowned in heaven. "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. v. 3; xviii. 4.) Poor they may be in station. But they shine forth as mightier con-

¹ Ps. viii. 3, 4; cxliv. 3; xxxix. 5.

² 1 Kings, xxi. 1-4. Esth. v. 13,

³ Gen. xviii. 27; xxxii. 10. Job, xlii. 6. 1 Tim. 1. 15.

^{*}*Sermon on Text.* Works, v. 270

† Matt. xxiii. 12. Luke, xiv. 11; xviii. 14. The speech of Artabanus to Xerxes before his invasion of Greece, is a striking testimony from an Heathen, 'God delights to depress whatever is too highly exalted. Thus a large army is often defeated by a small one. When God in his jealousy throws them into a panic, or thunders against them, they miserably perish. For God suffers no mortal to think magnificently--HERODOTUS, Book vii c. 10

‡ Job, xl. 12. Ps. xviii. 27. Comp. Zeph. ii. 1. Rev. xviii. 7, 8. and references on Chap. xvi. 18, 19.

§ Sermons, i. pp. 335, 336.

querors than Alexander. Their real glory eclipses the glare of the pomp and "pride of life."

The elevation of *the proud* is often the step to their downfall. But God's *honour*, put upon his own people, *upholds them*, as Joseph and Daniel, in their high eminence, as witnesses for his name. Meekness for heaven is that adorning clothing of humility, which leads us to ascribe all our grace to God, and all our sin to ourselves. This is the prostrate adoration of heaven. (Rev. v. 9-12.) The Lord imbue us richly with this spirit.

Indeed all chastening discipline is for the great purpose, to "hide pride from man" (Job, xxxiii. 17), and *to bring us low* in our own eyes, that his *honour* may "lift us in due time."¹ It is with us as with our Lord--*honour* comes out of humiliation.² "Thou meanest to be not our Saviour only, but our pattern too. If we can go down the steps of thine humiliation, we shall rise up the stairs of thy glory."*

24. *Whoso is a partner with a thief hateth his own soul: he heareth cursing, and bewrayeth it not.*

This is a warning under the eighth commandment. Do we realize the same solemnity of obligation as under the first? Many professors attach a degree of secularity to a detailed application of the duties of the second table. But both stand on the same authority. The transgressions of both are registered in the same book. The place in the decalogue cannot be of moment, if it be but there with the imprimatur --"I am the Lord thy God." The law acknowledges no difference between the *thief and his partner*. Consenting to sin--receiving the stolen goods--involves us in the guilt and punishment.³ The accomplice may be less practised in sin. He may be only commencing his course. But the first step is the way of death,--acting as if he hated *his own soul*.⁴ One step naturally leads on to another. Suppose him to be called to give evidence upon oath concerning his knowledge or privity of the deed. Would not this be a temptation to perjury, rather than to discover his fellow? Under the perverted obligation of his bond of secrecy *he heareth cursing*--the solemn adjuration to declare the truth on pain of the curse of God⁵--*and he bewrayeth it not*. 'He keeps his wicked counsel, and will not betray.'

Oh! how frightful is the history of thousands, whose fellowship with sinners has drawn them into fellowship with sin, and ultimately to take the lead in sin!--whose entrance into the path has led them step by step into the very depths of depravity! And of these thousands,

¹ 1 Pet. v. 6. Job, xxii. 29.

² Chap. xv. 33; xviii. 12.

³ Chap. i. 10-15. Ps. 1.18-21. Isa. 1.23, 24. ⁴ Comp. vi 32; viii. 36; xv. 32.

⁵ Comp. Lev. v. 1. Num. v. 21. 1 Kings, xxii. 16. Matt. xxvi. 63.

* Bp. Hall *ut supra*.

how few--it is to be feared--retrace their steps and become like Onesimus, true followers of Christ, and faithful servants to man!*

25. *The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.* (Marg. set on high.)

A snare brings a man into straits. He is not master of himself. Here Satan spreads *the snare*, and *the fear of man* drives into it. And a fearful *snare* it is, and ever hath been to thousands. Many, once entangled, have never escaped. It besets every step of the path-way to heaven, every sphere of obligation. The king turns aside from strict integrity.¹ The judge wilfully pronounces an unrighteous sentence.² The Minister faints under the cross;³ and too avoid it, compromises the simplicity of the Gospel.⁴ There is a timidity in acting out an unpopular doctrine. The people cannot bear the *full* light. The Sun of righteousness is therefore exhibited under a mist; but dimly visible; shorn of his glowing beams. The strictness of the precepts is unpalatable. It must therefore be softened down modified, or explained away.⁵ Or inconstancy of profession must be quietly dealt with, lest the good opinion of some influential man be forfeited. Such is the power of evil shame! Such low thoughts, not only of God, but of immortal souls, and usefulness to our fellow-sinners! This time-serving shews a man-pleaser, not a true "servant of God" (Gal. i. 10), and brings a blast alike to his work and to his soul.†

The same deadly influence operates in families. Sometimes even parents shrink from the open protection of their child. (John, ix. 22.) They dare not avow a supreme regard to his primary interests, or profess in opposition to many around them, the Patriarch's godly determination--"As for me and, my house"--however evil it may seem to others--"we will serve the Lord." (Josh. xxiv. 15.)

Every class of society exhibits this corrupt principle. Perhaps the highest are bound in the most abject and hopeless chains; and to their tyrant they seem to acknowledge a sort of conscience, or religious obedience. They will set at nought all religion without fear; but such submissive slaves are they to the omnipotency of fashion, that they would "tremble very exceedingly"‡ at the suspicion of godliness

¹ 1 Sam. xv. 24. Matt. xiv. 9. ² John, xix. 8, 13, 16. ³ 1 Kings, xix. 3. Jon. i. 1-3.

⁴ Gal. ii. 12; vi. 12 ⁵ Isa. xxx. 9, 10. Jer. v. 31.

*Epistle to Philemon.

† Zech. xi. 17. 'Remember Dr. Dodd '--writes Mr. Venn to his son--' myself heard him tell his own flock, whom he was lecturing in his house that he was obliged to give up that method of helping their souls because it exposed him to so much reproach. He gave it up, and fell from one compliance to another, with his corrupt nature; and under what reproach did he die!' Let the concluding advice of this excellent Minister be well pondered. --'Be afraid of nothing more than the detestable cowardice of a selfish and unbelieving heart.'--*Life*, pp. 255, 256.

‡ Gen. xxvii. 33. The same word in the original.

attaching to them; thus "honouring" a vain idol above the Lord of heaven and earth. Many would be bold to front danger, who would shrink from shame. They would fearlessly face the cannon's mouth, and yet be panic-struck at the ridicule of a puny worm. Or even if some public excitement roused an impulse of boldness for religion, in the more quiet atmosphere there is a cold timidity of silence. They shrink from the bold consistency of a living witness. They are afraid of the stamp of singularity. They are satisfied with a meagre external decorum, with no spiritual character or privilege. All is heartless delusion.

What--again, makes so many, specially among the young, ashamed to be found upon their knees; to be known as readers of their Bibles; to cast in their lot decidedly among the saints of God? They know the Christian to be on the right side; and oft is there a whisper of conscience--'Would that my soul were in his place!'¹ But they have only half a mind to religion. *The fear of man bringeth a snare.* And therefore they ask--not 'What ought I to do?' but, 'What will my friends think of me?' They cannot brave the finger of scorn. And if they seem for a while to be in earnest, 'their slavish fears' (as Bunyan well describes the case), overmaster them. They betake themselves to second thoughts--namely--that it is good to be wise, and not to run, for they knew not what, the hazard of losing all, or at least bringing themselves into unavoidable and unnecessary troubles.* They would rather writhe under their convictions, till they have worn themselves away, than welcome what Moses "esteemed greater riches than the treasures of Egypt--*the reproach of Christ.*" (Heb. xi. 26.)

But how painful to see the children of God entangled in the *snare*! The father of the faithful twice denied his wife.² His son follows his weak example.³ "Aaron fashions the golden calf,"⁴ "The man after God's own heart" sinks himself into the lowest degradation.⁵ Hezekiah, distinguished for his *trust*, gives way to his *fear*.⁶ The ardent disciple, even after the most solemn pledges to his Saviour, and after all act of great boldness in his defence, yields up his courage to a servant girl, and solemnly abjures his Lord.⁷ Oh! do we not hear the warning voice against "entrance into temptation--against the weakness of the flesh?"⁸ Let us run into our hiding-place, and cry--"Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." (Ps. cxix. 117.) Humbling indeed is the contrast between the boldness of the servants of Satan and the timidity of the soldiers of Christ! Who of us has not cause of painful self-condemnation?

¹ John, vii. 13; xii. 42, 43. Acts. xxvi. 11. 2 Tim. i. 15; iv. 16. ² Gen. xii. 11-13; xx. 2, 11.

³ Ib. xxvi. 7.

⁴ Exod. xx-xii. 22-24.

⁵ 1 Sam. xxi. 10-13.

⁶ 2 Kings, xviii. 13-16. 2 Chron. xvi. 1-7.

⁷ Matt. xxvi. 69-74.

⁸ Ib. ver. 41

* Conversation between Hopeful and Christian.

How different is this servile principle from the godly *fear of sin* which the wise man had lately marked as the substance of happiness! (Chap. xxviii. 14.) *That* is a holy principle; this an inlet to sin.¹ *That* is our keeping grace;² *this* wounds our conscience, and seduces us also from our allegiance. 'By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil;³ by *the fear of man* they run themselves into evil.'^{*} The one is the pathway to heaven. (Chap. xix. 23.) The other, involving the denial of the Saviour, plunges its wretched slave into the lake of fire. (Mark, viii. 38. Rev. xxi. 8.)

But even apart from this tremendous end, observe its weighty hindrance to Christian integrity. Indeed--as Mr. Scott most truly observes--'it is'--often at least--'the last victory the Christian gains. He will master, by that grace which is given of God, his own lusts and passions, and all manner of inward and outward temptations. He will be dead to the pleasures of the world, long before he has mastered this fear of man. "This kind of spirit goeth not out" but by a very spiritual and devout course of life.'[†] The hindrance meets us at every turn, like a chain upon our wheels; so that, like the Egyptian chariots, they "drive heavily." (Exod. xiv. 25.) Oh! for a free deliverance from this principle of bondage; scarcely however to be expected, till we have been made to feel its power!

Thank God--there is a way of deliverance. Faith unbinds the soul from fear. If fear makes the giant tremble before the worm, *trust in the Lord* makes the worm stronger than the giant. Neither the fury of the King,⁴ or of the people;⁵ neither the fire,⁶ or the den of lions,⁷ daunts and hurts him that "believeth in his God." 'He that fears to flinch, shall never flinch from fear.'[‡] Faith gives power to prayer. The strength from prayer makes us cheerful in obedience, and resolute in trial. Here is *safety*, strength, courage, peace. Nothing but faith gives the victory; but the victory of faith is complete.[§] He only, *who putteth his trust in the Lord*, is prepared, when God and man are at contraries, to "obey God rather than man." (Acts, iv. 19.) A secret union with God is implanted in the soul by this faith; an union as righty, as it is secret; a sacred spring of life--the energy of God himself (Gal. ii. 20); triumphant therefore in the mightiest conflict with the flesh. The man, dependent on the world for happiness, is in bondage. The

¹ Gen. xxxix. 9, with Isa. lvii. 11.

² 1 Cor. x. 12 Heb. iv. 1.

³ Chap. xvi. 6.

⁴ 2 Kings, vi. 31, 32.

⁵ Num. xiv. 6-10.

⁶ Dan. iii. 17.

⁷ Ib vi. 10

* FLAVEL'S Treatise on Fear, Chap. ii.

† *Life*, pp. 116, 117.

‡ Hildersham.

§ 1 John, v. 4. 5. Comp. Heb. xi. 27. 'I cannot wield the sword of the Spirit'--said the weak and timid Haller to his friends, when going to the disputation at Berne against the Romanists. 'If you do not stretch your hands to me, all is over.' He then threw himself trembling at the feet of the Lord, and soon rose enlightened, and exclaiming--'Faith in the Saviour gives me courage, and scatters all my fears.'^{-D'AUBIGNE'S Hist. Refor. Book xv. Chap. ii.}

servant of God is in liberty. It matters not to him, whether the world smile or frown. *He is safe*, beyond its reach--*set on high*.¹ Faith brings him to his strong tower. (Chap. xviii. 10.) There he is "kept by the power of God unto salvation." (1 Pet. i. 5.) *Fear brings us into the snare*. Faith brings liberty, *safety, exaltation*. Oh! thou God of power and grace, may my soul praise thee for this mighty deliverance, this joyous freedom! May I never be ashamed of my Master! May I be bound to his people, and glory in his cross! (Gal. vi. 14.)

26. *Many seek the ruler's favour; but every man's judgment cometh from the Lord.*

Therefore seek God to be your friend. "In his favour is life." (Ps. xxx. 5,) Confidence in man is no less sinful² and dangerous³ than the *fear of man*. Yet with what diligence will men seek earthly advantage! *Many seek the ruler's favour*⁴ more than God's, and sacrifice their consciences, and hazard their souls, to obtain it. But when they have bought it at such a price, what is it?--as easily lost, as it was hardly gained. The caprice of an hour may destroy the hard-earned object. (Gen. xl. 1, 2.) And then what have they to live upon? All this is forgetting, that *every man's judgment cometh from the Lord*. Here then is the solid ground of faith. First, begin with God; all judgment is in his hands. "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass."* Let him choose and dispose our lot.⁵ Consider everything that passes as coming from him. In everything, great and small, deal with him. Ponder with him. His favour, unlike the changing *favour of the ruler*, "is without variableness, or shadow of turning." And when, through the fickleness of man, earthly prospects are fading, then rest in quiet--"Surely my judgment is with the Lord."⁶ 'As thou wilt, what thou wilt, when thou wilt.'† This is the shortest, the surest, way of peace--"Only believe."

27. *An unjust man is an abomination to the just: and he that is upright in the way is abomination to the wicked.*

Here is the oldest, the most rooted, the most universal quarrel in the world. It was the first-fruit of the fall. (Gen. iii. 15.) It has continued ever since, and will last to the end of the world. It is always kept up at the highest point. Each party is an *abomination* to the

¹ Ps. lxi. 29; xci. 14. Isa. xxxiii. 16. ² Ps. cxlvi. 3, Isa. ii. 22. Jer. xvii. 5, 6.

³ Isa. xxx. 1-3; xxxi. 1-3. 4 Chap. xix. 6. ⁵ Ps. xlvii. 4. Chap. xvi. 33.

⁶ Isa. xlix. 4. Jon, xxxiv. 29.

* Ps. xxxvii, 5, 6. He needeth not to flatter the ruler; for what God hath appointed, that shall come to him.--*Reformer's Notes*. "The determination concerning a man is from Jehovah."--Bp. LOWTH'S *Prelim. Dissertation to Isaiah*.

† Thomas a Kempis.

other. It is not only, that they are as contrary in character, as light is to darkness; but there is a mutual antipathy, that can never be softened down.

Let us look at each of the parties in this open opposition to each other. *An unjust man is an abomination to the just.* Is it then his sin to be at such contraries with his fellow-sinner? No rather--it is the very holiness of his character and profession. If he have any apprehensions of the holiness of God; if through grace he is delivered from the love and dominion of sin, is not the sight of sin hateful to him? And while he abhors it most of all in himself, yet does not the watching of the evil in his own heart deepen his abhorrence and detestation of it in those around him? He would not spare it in those most dear to him. He appeals to his God in the burst of holy indignation. "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with a perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies."¹

Looking at the other party--*the wicked* hold *the upright* in equal abomination. (Verse 10.) "The carnal mind is enmity against God," and cannot therefore bear his image in his children. (Rom. viii. 7.)² Gladly would the wicked, were not their enmity restrained, root them out of the face of the earth;" as they never rested, till they had nailed the Son of God to the tree. Here however is the main difference. The enmity of the just is against the sins, not the persons, of *the wicked*. How do they with all this principle love their souls, and pray for them! (Rom. ix. 1; x. 1.) How gladly would they win them to Christ and salvation! The enmity of *the wicked* is against the persons--the ways of *the upright*--all that belongs to them. "This is that strong poison in the serpent's seed,"* the murderous spirit of their father the devil!

The soul is wearied with the unceasing struggles with the enemies of truth. How can one forbear the wish for the "wings of a dove to fly away, and be at rest!" (Ps. lv. 6.) And how could we hold on the contest, but for the blessed hope--O Lord! hasten it in thy time--when the woman's conquering "seed shall bruise the Serpent's Head," and the head of all³ his seed, finally and for ever; and he shall reign King and Saviour over his redeemed people.

¹ Ps. cxxxix. 21, 22. Comp. chap. xxviii. 4.

² John, xv. 17-19. 1 John, iii. 12, 13.

³ Ps. xlv. 3, 4. Rev. xix. 11-16.

* LEIGHTON on 1 Pet. iii. 14.

CHAPTER XXX.

1. *The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, even the prophecy: the man spake unto Ithiel, even unto Itiel and Ucal:* 2. *Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man.* 3. *I neither; learned wisdom, nor have (gathered together, marg.) the knowledge of the holy.*

THE two concluding chapters of this Book are an appendix to the Proverbs of Solomon. Nothing certain is known of the writers; and it is vain to speculate, where God is silent. Far better is it to give the full interest of our mind and heart to the matter of instruction, than to indulge unprofitable curiosity respecting the writers. Our ignorance of the writers of many of the Psalms in no degree hinders their profit to us. We know their author, when the penmen are hid. It is enough for us to be assured, that they were "holy men of God," who wrote "*as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*" (2 Pet. i. 21.)

Agur was doubtless one of the wise men found in many ages of the Old Testament Church. *His words* were a *prophecy*;--that is--divine instruction* given *unto Ithiel and Ucal* (*Ithiel* especially) probably two of his scholars, whose names are equally unknown to us. Perhaps they came to him for instruction, and he was led to express himself in the most humbling sense of his own ignorance. 'You come to me for instruction. But *surely I am more brutish than any man*; not having the advantages of *learning wisdom* (Amos, vii. 14, 15), *or the knowledge of the holy God* (Dan. iv. 18), and of the holy revelation of his name.'

His language is indeed strong. Stronger could scarcely have been used. He confesses himself to be, not only *brutish*, as man is by nature; but, though enlightened by heavenly teaching, *more brutish than any; man*. Were these the words of truth? Or were they the affectation of modesty? Or was it false humility, dishonourably denying the work of God? He was now speaking from the mouth of God. And how could he dissemble in his name? He spake the truth as it really is, as consciousness could not but speak; as self-knowledge under; divine teaching dictated. For let a man take "the candle of the Lord;" given him to "search all the inward parts of the belly" (Chap. xx. 27); and what a mass of vanity will he find there! Such folly mixed with his wisdom! such ignorance with, his knowledge! that, instead of pluming himself upon his elevation above his fellow-men, he can but cry out in shame--*Surely I am more brutish than any man!*

¹ Job, xi. 12. Ps. xlix. 20. Jer. x. 14.

* This was a frequent Scripture name for ordinary instruction. Chap. xxxi, 1 Cor. xiv. 1, 3, 4. 1 Thess. v. 20.

Whoever knows his own heart, knows that of himself, that he can hardly conceive of anyone else being so degraded as himself.*

Add to which--it is the child of God comparing himself with his perfect standard. And in the perception of his own short-comings, the most discerning clear-sighted penitent feels, that he can never abase himself as he ought before his God--He would lie low, lower still infinitely lower, in the dust. Holy Paul, comparing himself with the spirituality of the perfect law, exclaims--"I am carnal, sold under sin." (Rom. vii. 14.) Isaiah, in the presence of a holy God--cries out--"Woe is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips." (Isa. vi. 5.) Job in the manifestation of the power of God sinks into absolute nothingness and unworthiness. (Job, xl. 4; xlii. 6.) David in the full view of the wisdom of God is made to see the perverseness of his own folly, and take up the very confession of Agur--"So foolish was I, and ignorant; I was as a beast before thee!"† The nearer our contemplation of God, the closer our communion with him, the deeper will be our self-abasement before him; like the winged seraphs "before the throne, who with twain cover their faces, and with twain cover their feet." (Isa. vi. 2.) Well, therefore, may the wisest and holiest of men, though "renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Col. iii. 10), take up the humiliating confession --*Surely I am -more brutish than any man-*Genuine humility is the only path of wisdom. Unless a man stoops, he can never enter the door.--He must become "a fool, that he may be wise."‡ And when he is humbled in his shame, then let him see the house of his God in its breadth and length (Ezek. xlv. 5); enjoying clearer, and panting still for clearer manifestations of the incomprehensible God.

But how reverently should we approach this divine presence! With what holy hands should we open his revelation! dreading a careless, light, and presumptuous spirit; yet withal cherishing those nobly ambitious desires for deeper and higher knowledge; yea--reiterating them before our God with that repetition, which to a carnal

* Comp. chap. xiv. 10. The following remarks of a profound divine will illustrate this subject--'He that has much grace, apprehends much more than others that great height to which his love ought to ascend: and he sees better than others, how little a way he has risen towards that height. And therefore estimating his love by the whole height of his duty, hence it appears astonishingly low and little in his eyes--True grace is of that nature, that the more a person has of it, with remaining corruption, the less does his goodness and holiness appear in proportion, not only to his past but his present deformity, in the sin that now appears in his heart, and in the abominable defects of his highest and best affections.'--EDWARDS on Relig. Affections, Part iii. sect. vi.

† Ps lxxviii. 1-22, 'a beast.' The original is the plural of excellence conveying an intensiveness, not easy to transfer acceptably into our idiom. Bp. Horsley gives it--'I was as a brute before thee.'

‡ 1 Cor. iii. 18. There is a fine ray of wisdom in that consciousness of ignorance, that led Socrates to confess--'I only know one thing--that I know nothing.' Comp. 1 Cor. i. viii. 2.

mind would be nauseating tautology; but which he who knows our hearts loves to hear, and will beyond our desires abundantly fulfil.

4. *Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment: who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?*

Can we wonder that Agur should have acknowledged, his *brutishness*, now that he was contemplating the majesty of God, so wondrous in his works, so incomprehensible in his nature? The eye was blinded by the dazzling blaze of the sun. To behold Jehovah *ascending and descending* in his own glorious person;¹ afterward in the person of his dear Son² (for in his great work was not his Father's name in him?); to see him holding the loose winds as firmly as a man might hold *in his fists*;* to see his almighty controul of the waters,⁴ and his *establishment of the ends of the earth*.⁵--this is a sight, that might make the highest! and wisest of men sink into nothingness before him. *Who hath done this*, none can doubt. The challenge is thrown out as a demonstration that it was God alone. 'Shew me the man, that can or dare arrogate this power to himself.'†

But when we pass from the works to their great Maker, truly it is an overwhelming view--*What is his name, if thou canst tell?* "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? He dwelleth in the light, which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, nor can see."⁶ How can we express him in words, or conceive of him in thought? Child of God! "Be still, and know that he is God." (Ps. xlv. 10.) Restrain thy reason. Humble thy faith. "Lay thine hand upon thy mouth." Lie in the dust before him. "O the depth!" (Rom. xi. 33)--open only to him whose "understanding is infinite."⁷

But how does the mystery increase! *What is his name, if thou canst tell?* And who *can tell?* "No one knoweth the Son, but the Father." (Matt. xi. 27.) Yet there is a Son in the Eternal Godhead; a Son, not begotten in time, but from eternity (Chap. viii. 22-30); his name therefore, not as some would have it, a component part of his humiliation but the manifestation of his Godhead: co-existent with his Father

¹ Gen. xi.1; xvii. 22; xviii. 21. Exod. iii.8. ² John, i. 51; iii. 13; vi. 62. Eph. iv. 9, 10.

³ John. x. 30. 38; xiv. 10. Comp. Exod. xxiii. 21.

⁴ Job, xxvi. 8; xxxviii 8-11. Isa. xl. 12. Jer. v. 22.

⁵ Job, xxvi. 7; xxxviii. 5. Ps. xciii. 1; cxix. 90.

⁶ Job. xi. 7-9. 1 Tim. vi. 16. Comp. Job, xxxviii. 3, 4. ⁷ Ps. cxlvii. 5. Isa. xl. 28.

* Job, xxviii. 25. Comp. Ps. civ. 3; cxxxv. 7. The Heathens dream of a lower Deity, whom Jupiter appointed as storekeeper, to still or raise the winds at his pleasures. HOM. *Odyss.* K. 21, 22. VIRG. *AEne.* i. 69, 70.

† Bishop Hall.

in the same ineffable nature, yet personally distinct.* *What is his name? and what his Son's name?* Sovereignty--Omnipresence--Omnipotence is his. He too controuls the winds and waters,¹ and establishes the earth,² as one, who is in the visible "form of God, and thinketh it not robbery to be equal with God." (Philip. ii. 6.)

What is his name? The secret name is easily spelt. (Rev. xix. 12,13.) But the mystery is hid. We must not enquire too curiously.³ Be careful that we stop, where Revelation stops. Beyond this bound, every step is a trespass "on forbidden ground," intruding into those things which we have not seen, "vainly puffed up by our fleshly mind." (Col. ii. 8.) Many however are so bewitched by their own fancy, that they conceive themselves to understand this name. They think far higher of their wisdom than Agur did, and are at no loss at all to explain what they conceive in their proud ignorance to be the full meaning of the inscrutable subject. But the genuine disciple acknowledges the nature of the Son to be alike incomprehensible with that of the Father. He humbly lies at his feet, and thankfully adores the mystery, which he cannot "by searching find out." (Job, xi. 7.)

Yet what Revelation hath brought up to us from these untraceable depths are pearls of great price. Let us reverently gather them for the enriching of our souls. So far as our Divine Teacher leads us by the hand, let us diligently follow him. Within his bounds let us freely expatiate, through the length and breadth of the land. The wholesome dread of being "wise above that which is written," must not damp the holy ardour to be wise and wiser continually in that which is written. Curiously to inquire is rashness; to believe is piety; to know indeed is life eternal.† Unsearchable as he is in his greatness; yet so near is he to us, that we can rest in his bosom. Yours--Christian--is the unspeakable privilege to be one with him, who is One with God. And therefore, if you *tell his name*, as you are bound to tell what is revealed, is it not all that is infinitely great, combined with the endearing relations--Husband--Brother--Saviour--King?

5. *Every word of God is pure (purified, marg.): he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.* 6. *Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.*

Nothing is learned solidly by abstract speculation. Go to the book. Here all is light and purity. Though "secret things belong to the Lord our God; yet the things that are revealed" are our holy direc-

¹ Matt. viii. 26; xiv. 32.

² Heb. i. 3.

³ Gen. xxxii. 29. Judg. xiii. 18.

* 'We have a full and clear testimony of the distinction of persons, and that the Son is equal to the Father, and of the same substance with him.' LAVATER. See Scott *in loco*. Mr. Holden considers this interpretation to be 'natural and unforced, and very suitable to the context.'

† Bernard.

tory. Everything is intended to influence the heart and conduct. (Deut. xxix. 29.) How unlike the sacred books of the heathen, or the sensual religion of Mahomet! Here is no license, or encouragement to sin, no connivance at it. All lurking sins, cherished in the dark cavern of pollution, are brought to light, and reproved. *Every word of God is pure.* Of what other book in the world can this be said? Where else is the gold found without alloy? *The word is tried.* (Heb.) It has stood the trial, and no dross has been found in it. 'Having God for its Author, it has truth without any mixture of error for its matter.'* "*The words of the Lord are pure words, as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.*"¹

But if *every word of God is pure*, take care that no word is slighted. How few range over the whole Revelation of God! To take a whole view of the universe, we should embrace not only the fruitful gardens, but its barren deserts, coming equally from the hand of God, and none of them made for nought. To take a similarly comprehensive view of the sacred field, we must study the apparently barren, as well as the more manifestly fruitful, portions. Meat will be gathered from the detailed code of laws, from the historical annals of the kings, and from the "wars and fightings"--the prolific results of "the lusts of men." (Jam. iv. 1.) The whole Scripture is Scripture, and "all Scripture is profitable." (2 Tim. iii. 16.)

Favouritism however is a besetting snare in the sacred study. A part is too often taken instead of the whole, or as if it were the whole. One is absorbed in the doctrinal, a second in the practical, a third in the prophetic, a fourth in the experimental, Scriptures; each seeming to forget, that *every word of God is pure*. Some clear defect in the integrity of profession proves unsoundness. The doctrinist becomes loose in practice; the practical professor self; righteous in principle. The prophetic disciple, absorbed in his imaginative atmosphere, neglects present obligations. The experimental religionist mistakes a religion of feeling, excitement, or fancy, for the sobriety and substantial fruitfulness of the gospel. All remind us of our Lord's rebuke--"Ye do err not knowing the Scriptures." (Matt. xxii. 29.)

The great exercise therefore is--to bring out the whole mass of solid truth in all its bearings and glory. So wisely has God linked together the several parts of his system, that we can receive no portion soundly, except in connexion with the whole. The accuracy of any view is more than suspicious, that serves to put a forced construction upon Scripture, to dislocate its connexion, or to throw important truths into the shade. Apparently contradictory statements are in fact only balancing truths; each correcting its opposite, and, like the antagonal

¹ Ps. xii. 6. Comp. Ps. cxix. 140. Chap. viii. 8, 9.

* Locke.

muscles, contributing to the strength and completeness of the frame. Every heresy probably stands upon some insulated text or some exaggerated truth, pressed beyond "the proportion of faith." But none can stand upon the combined view and testimony of Scripture. Nor let it be sufficient, that our system includes no positive error, if some great truths be lacking. Let it be carefully grounded upon the acknowledgment--*Every word of God is pure*. Some of us may err in presumptuous familiarity with Scripture; others in unworthy reserve. But If the heart be right, self-knowledge will develop the error, and self-discipline will correct it.

Christian simplicity will teach us to receive every Divine Truth upon this formal ground--that it is the word of God. Though it is not all of equal importance; it will be regarded with equal reverence. We acknowledge implicitly God as the Author of every particle of Scripture, and that *every word of God is pure*. To reject therefore one 'jot or tittle is a sufficient demonstration,'--as Dr. Owen admirably observes--'*that no one jot or tittle of it is received as it ought*. Upon whatsoever this title and inscription is--"The Word of Jehovah,--there must we stoop, and bow down our souls before it, and captivate our understandings unto the obedience of faith.'*

This holy reverence is combined with *trust in God*. Blessed trust, which brings a *shield* of special favour over his trembling child!¹ Sometimes indeed is Satan permitted to envelope him in darkness, and to picture, as it were, frightful transparencies upon his prison wall. What would he do in this time of terror, did he not find a *shield* and a covert in the bosom of his God? Yes--if *the word of God be pure*, it must be a sure ground of trust. We may take its dictum with un doubting confidence, that *he is a shield*, as to Abraham of old (Gen. xv. 1), so to Abraham's children, *that put their trust* in him.† In all circumstances from within and from without--when I quake under the terrors of the law, in the hour of death, in the day of judgment--"Thou art my shield." (Ps. cxix. 114.) Nothing honours God, like this turning to him in every time of need. If there be rest, peaceful confidence, safe keeping, here it is. And where is it found beside? Despondency meets the poor deluded sinner, who looks for some other stay. And even the child of God traces his frequent want of protection to his feeble and uncertain, use of his Divine *shield*.

But *the word of God* is not only *pure*, and cannot deceive. It is also sufficient; and therefore, like tried gold, it needs no *addition* for its perfection. Hence to *add to his words*, stamped as they are with his

¹ Ps. ii. 11, 12. Isa. lxvi. 2.

*OWEN on the *Perseverance of the Saints*, chap. x. See *Life of Mary Jane Graham*, chap. v.

† Ps. v. 12. Comp. the same connexion, xviii. 30.

Divine authority, will expose us to his tremendous *reproof*, and cover us with shame.¹ The Jewish Church virtually *added* their oral law and written traditions. (Mark, vii. 7-13.) The Church of Rome is not less guilty, and as a church has been *found a liar*; *adding* to the inspired canon a mass of unwritten tradition, and apocryphal writings, with all their gross errors, and in despite of the clearest proof of their human origin.* The attempt in our own day to bring tradition to a near, if not to an equal, level with the sacred testimony, is a fearful approach to this sinful presumption. A new rule of faith is thus introduced--an addition to the Divine rule, of co-ordinate authority.†

The needlessness of this addition is obvious. For if "the holy Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation" (2 Tim. iii. 15), what want we more? And if this were spoken of the Old Testament Scriptures, the sufficiency of a part confirms the larger sufficiency of the whole, while it excludes all reference to any other sufficiency; just as the sufficiency of the early light for all practical purposes, while it precludes the necessity of the light of a candle, establishes the fuller advantage of the light of perfect day. If "Scripture be profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness;" if the man of God be perfected, and thoroughly furnished by it" (Ib. verses 16,17), what clearer demonstration can be given of its absolute completeness? To reflect therefore upon the integrity of this Divine rule of faith, and to shake confidence in its sole authority, is to bring in a false principle, the source of every evil and corruption of the faith.

Never indeed was it so important to clear from all question the momentous controversy--what is, what is not, the Word of God. The Lord has most carefully guarded his *pure word* from all human admixture. May he preserve his ministers from "teaching for doctrine the commandments of men;" saying, "The Lord hath said it, when he hath not spoken! "What a reverential awe, what godly jealousy, should they exercise, to *add not to the pure word* by the glosses of false interpretation; not to expound their own minds, instead of the mind of God!

7. *Two things have I required of thee; deny me not them before I die: 8. Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty and riches; feed me with food convenient (of my allowance, marg.) for me:*

¹ See Deut. iv. 2; xii. 32. Rev. xxii. 18, 19.

² Ezek. xiii. 7-9, with Matt. xv. 9.

* Mr. Horne has conferred an obligation upon the Church, by publishing separately his valuable *Digest of the Apocryphal Question*, from the last edition of his *Introduction*.

† 'Scripture is not the only ground of the faith' (NEWMAN'S *Lectures on Roman*, p. 369) 'Catholic tradition is a divine informant in religious matters.' (Ib. 329) 'the unwritten word' (Ib. 255) 'We agree with the Romanist in appealing to antiquity as our great teacher (Ib. 47.) 'These two (the Bible and Catholic tradition) *together make up a joint rule* (of faith). Ib. 327. Obviously therefore, while the inspiration of Scripture may be admitted, Tradition claims our equal reverence to its authority.

9. *Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.*

Though Agur had confessed his *brutishness* before his God yet his prayers (the most accurate test of a man of God) prove him to have been possessed of deep spiritual understanding. "We ask, and receive not, because we ask amiss, that we may consume it upon our lusts." (Jam. iv. 3.) How wisely gracious therefore is the teaching of the divine Comforter, "helping our infirmities" in prayer, and by moulding our petitions, "according to the will of God," ensuring their acceptance. (Rom. viii. 26, 27.) Agur's heart must have been under this heavenly teaching; dictating his prayers by a primary regard to his best interests, and by a spiritual discernment of what would probably be beneficial, and what injurious to them.

Two things he especially *required*--not as though he had nothing else to ask, but as being the pressing burden of the present moment. And these he asks--as if he would take no *denial* (Gen. xxxii. 26)--with all the intense earnestness of a dying sinner--*Deny me them not before I die!*

His prayers are short, but comprehensive. Though little is said, yet that little is fraught with matter; framed in its proper order. Spiritual blessings occupy the first place; temporal blessings are secondary, and in subserviency to them.

Remove from me vanity and lies. Is not this the atmosphere of the world? *vanity* its character--*lies* its delusion; promising happiness, only to disappoint its weary and restless victims? How can the heaven-born soul breathe in such a world? Everything deadens the, heart, and eclipses the glory of the Saviour. "The soul cleaveth to the dust." "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father, but is of the world." (1 John, ii. 16.) And therefore "they that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy." (Jonah, ii. 8.) A soul that knows its dangers and its besetting temptations, will live in the spirit of this prayer of the godly Agur--*remove from me--far from me--*as far as possible, *vanity and lies.* "Turn away mine eyes"--prayed a saint of God in the same watchful jealousy--"from beholding *vanity.* *Remove from me the way of lying.*" (Ps. cxix. 37, 29)

But how singular, yet how fraught with instruction, is Agur's second prayer! All are ready to pray against poverty. But to deprecate *riches*--this is not nature's desire, but an impulse of godly fear and trembling, that cometh from above. 'Give me not riches'--is scarce the prayer of one in ten thousand. Agur, as a wise man, desired the safest and happiest lot; not, as Israel of old, "meat for his lust;"¹ but *food convenient for him*, measured out in daily *allowance*,² suitable to his

¹ Ps.lxxviii. 18.

² Comp. 1 Kings, iv. 21. 2 Kings, xxv. 30.

need. This is obviously not a fixed measure. It implies, not a bare sufficiency for natural life, but a provision varying according to the calling, in which God has placed us. 'If Agur be the master of a family, then that is his competency, which is sufficient to maintain his wife, children, and household. If Agur be a public person, a prince or a ruler of the people; then that is Agur's sufficiency, which will conveniently maintain him in that condition.* Jacob when "he had become two bands," evidently required more than when in his earlier life "with his staff he had passed over Jordan." (Gen. xxxii. 10.) What was sufficient for himself alone, would not have been sufficient for the many that were then dependent upon him. The immense provisions for Solomon's table, considering the vast multitude of his dependants, might be only a competency for the demand. (1 Kings, iv. 22.) The distribution of the manna was *food convenient*--nothing too much, but no deficiency--"He that gathered much had nothing over; and he that gathered little had no lack." (Exod. xvi. 18.) And thus, in the daily dispensation of Providence, a little may be a sufficiency to one, while an overflowing plenty is no superfluity to another. Only let Christian self-denial, not depraved appetite, be the standard of competency. Proud nature never stoops so low.¹ The Apostle distinctly traces to the influence of Divine teaching his Christian moderation in his diversified conditions of abundance and of want.† Philosophy may have inculcated the lesson; but Almighty grace alone can command the practice of it.

It is a question'--says Dr. South--'whether the piety or the prudence of this prayer be greater.‡ Agur was well persuaded of the temptations incident to these two opposite conditions--*the vanity and lies* belonging to *riches* (Ps. lxii. 9), the discontent and occasion of sin, which are the snares of *poverty*. Yet he does not pray absolutely against these states, only submissively. It is the prayer of his choice, the desire of his heart, that God would graciously exempt him from both, and bless him with a middle condition. Nor does he ask this for the indulgence of the flesh. He deprecates not the trouble, anxieties, and responsibilities of *riches*, which might betoken an indolent, self-pleasing Spirit; nor *the miseries and sufferings of poverty*; but he cries for deliverance from the snares of each condition--Let me not be *rich*, lest I be full, and deny thee. Let me not be poor, lest I steal, and take the name of my God in vain.

And alas! the danger of these results is but too evident. Both extremes are the borders of fearful temptation. Strange and irrational as

¹ Eccles. v. 10. Hab. ii. 5. 1 Tim. vi 9, 10.

* MEDE'S Sermon on Agur's Choice.

† *I have learned--I have been instructed*--expressions taken from the instruction in the Heathen Mysteries. Phil. iv. 11, 12.

‡ *Sermon on James*, iii. 16.

it may appear, such is the depravity of our nature, that mercies induce neglect, and often, casting off, of God.¹ Lust is too strong for conscience. Rarely does "the daughter of Tyre come with her gift, or the rich among the people entreat the favour" of their God. (Ps. xlv. 12.) Too often, the more we receive from God, the less he receives from us.* The twining thorns choke the heavenly plant. (Matt. xiii. 22.) And as we prosper in the flesh, we are impoverished in the spirit. But not less imminent are the dangers of pinching poverty; nor is it every Christian, that can honourably grapple with them. Dishonesty is a besetting temptation,² followed up by perjury to escape punishment.³ Thus two commandments are broken, and the sinner is in "the snare of the devil, taken captive by him at his will." (2 Tim. ii. 26.)

The 'golden mean' (for so even a heathen could describe it† is recommended by patriarchs,⁴ prophets,⁵ and apostles.⁶ Nay, our Lord teaches us to pray for it in terms identical with this petition. For what else is our "daily bread" *but food convenient for us?*‡

We must however be careful, that we use Agur's prayer in his spirit. Perhaps the Gospel rather teaches us to leave the matter entirely with God. Both *riches and poverty* are his appointment.§ It may please him to place us in a high condition; to entrust us with much riches, or to exercise us with the trials of *poverty*. Many of his children are in both these conditions.|| And shall they wish it otherwise? Let them rather seek for grace to glorify him in either state. Or if it seem lawful to pray for a change of condition, let us not forget to pray for a single eye to his glory, that his will, not ours, may be done in us. 'Whithersoever God gives'--said the pious Bishop Hall--'I am both thankful and indifferent; so as, while I am rich in estate, I may be poor in spirit; and while I am poor in estate, I may be rich in grace.'¶

¹ Job, xxi. 18, 14; xxii. 17, 18.

² Chap. vi. 80.

³ Chap. xxix. 24. Comp. Lev. vi. 2,8; xix. 11, 12. Zech. v. 3, 4.

Gen. xxviii. 20.

⁵ Jer. xlv. 5.

⁶ Philip. iv. 11, 12. 1 Tim. vi. 6-10.

* Deut. vi. 11, 12; viii. 10-18; xxxii. 15. Hos. xiii. 6. What a deep knowledge of the heart is implied in that petition of our Litany for deliverance in all time of wealth! How hard to realize the time of wealth as the time of *special need*!

† 'Auream quisquis mediocritatem

Diligit, tutus caret obsoleti

Sordibus tecti, caret invidenda

Sobrius aula.'--HORAT. Carm. lib. ii. 10.

+ The learned Mede insists upon this identity. Things fit and sufficient, precisely answers to **artion eipiousion**. (Matt. vi. 11) a sufficiency as it were **epi thn ousian**, adequate to our being and support--bread sufficient--the bread we have need of. Thus **periousia** signifies abundance or superfluity--**peri**, ultra or super--as it were, an overbeing.

§ Riches are his gift, 1 Kings, iii. 13. Poverty is his will, Deut. xv. 11. Comp. Job, i. 21.

|| Abraham-David-Solomon-with Lazarus and the heirs of his kingdom, James, ii. 5.

¶ *Work*. viii. 195. 'Our Saviour, in the prayer he taught, directs us to pray in general that God would give us daily bread, and deliver us from evil; without specifying the external comfort we might desire, or the particular disagreeable occurrences we might wish to be secured against: but leaving it to the goodness of our heavenly Father to determine

10. *Accuse not* (hurt not with thy tongue, marg.) *a servant unto his master, lest he curse thee, and thou be found guilty.*

Let not this Proverb be a shelter for unfaithfulness. How much evil goes on in a family, because those that are privy to it, and ought to inform, shrink from *accusing a servant to his master!* 'They must not make mischief in the house, or bring themselves into trouble.' But we owe it alike to master and to servant¹ not to wink at sin. We may owe it to ourselves to *accuse the servant to his master* for injury to ourselves. (Gen.xxi.25,26.) Yet let a fellow-servant first observe our Lord's rule of privacy. (Matt.xviii.15.) Let every exercise of faithfulness be in the spirit of love. Beware of the busy wantonness of the talebearer. (Lev.xix.16.) Never make trouble for trifles; or *accuse the servant*, when he may not have the full liberty and power to defend himself. When conscience does not constrain us to speak, the law of love always supplies a reason for silence. The Jewish *servants* were ordinarily slaves, for the most part crushed by their masters' oppression. Cruel therefore would it be without strong cause to heap degradation upon a sinking fellow-creature, for whom the Mosaic law prescribed kindness and protection. (Deut.xxiii.15.)

The rule however may be more generally applied. David suffered severely from unkind *accusations to his royal master.*² Those who take the most eager pleasure in finding fault are usually those, who can least bear the retort upon themselves. Take heed, lest, while thou art exposing "the mote in thy brother's eye," thou be reminded to thy deeper disgrace of "the beam that is in thine own eye," (Matt. vii. 3-5.) A curse from thy injured brother may not "come causeless to thee."³ The motive, which plainly actuated the accusation of the adulteress, only retorted shame upon the accusers. "The conviction of their own consciences" brought their own *guilt* to mind. (John, viii. 3-9.) Should not this remembrance constrain us to "speak evil" *needlessly* "of no man?" (Titus, iii. 2.) Should not the covering of our infinitely provoking offences induce us gladly to cast a covering over our offending brother, where the honour of God did not forbid concealment?⁴

11. *There is a generation, that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother.* 12. *There is a generation, that are pure in their own eye, and*

what is convenient for us, and what would prove upon the whole really evil. Let us therefore from hence learn to pray, that God would always put us into that condition, which he sees to be fittest for us, and that he would fit us more and more for that condition, in which he places us, whatever it be; granting us wisdom and grace to behave in it after right manner and both to discern and improve the advantages annexed to it. By this means, when there was no appearance but of a barren desert, we shall discover mines of gold.'--*Grave's Sermons.*

¹ Matt. vii. 12. Lev. xix. 17.

² 1 Sam. xxii. 9, 10; xxvi. 19.

³ Comp. chap. xxvi. 2. Deut. xv. 9. 1 Sam. xxvi. 19. Comp. Jam. ii.13.

⁴ Eph. iv. 31, 32. Col. iii. 12, 13.

yet is not washed from their filthiness. 13. There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up. 14. There is a generation, whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw-teeth as knives to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men.

Agur here gives in artificial order (as in some of the Psalms) his observations, probably in answer to his disciples' inquiries. He describes four different masses that came under his eyes--not a few individuals, but *generations*; a race of men, like a large stock, descending from father to son. Truly "the thing that hath been, is that which shall be; and that which is done, is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun." (Eccles. i. 9.) For these four generations belong to every age. They always have been, and always will be, to the end of time.

Take the first *generation*. What a disgrace to human nature! cursing their parents! Solon, when asked why he had made, no law against parricides, replied, that he could not conceive of anyone so impious and cruel. The divine law-giver knew his creature better, that his heart was capable of wickedness beyond conception (Jer. xvii. 9); of this wickedness beyond the imagination of the heathen sage. He has marked it with his most tremendous judgment.¹ The cursing of a parent was visited with the same punishment as the blaspheming of God;* so near does the one sin approach to the other. The rebel against his parent is ready to "stretch out his hand against God" himself, and to "run upon the thick bosses of his buckler." (Job, xv. 25, 26.) Many are the forms, in which this proud abomination shews itself; resistance of a parent's authority,² contempt of his reproof,³ shamelessly defiling his name,⁴ needlessly exposing his sin,⁵ coveting his substance,⁶ denying his obligation.† Most fearful is the increase of this generation among ourselves. Every village bears sad testimony to this crying sin, that brings down many a parent's grey hairs with sorrow to the grave, and spreads anarchy throughout the whole land. No plea of extenuation can be allowed to justify the sin. The authority of parents, even in the lowest degradation, must be respected, when we dare not, must not, follow their examples. But what can be done to stay the threatened invasion of this devastating flood? Once and again let us remember, ere it be too late, *discipline*, wise, tender, early, discipline; *prayer*--pleading, patient, believing prayer; diligence--active, direct, prudently applied. Will not our God bless his own means, and give us yet to praise him? Trust, and doubt not.

¹ Verse 17; xx. 20. Deut. xxi. 18-21; xxvii. 16.

² 2 Sam. xv. 1-10.

³ 1 Sam. ii. 25.

⁴ 2 Sam. xvi. 22.

⁵ Gen. ix. 22.

⁶ Chap. xix. 26. Jud. xvii. 2.

* Lev. xx. 9, with xxiv. 11-16. See the same close connexion, Isa. xlv. 9, 10. 2 Tim. iii. 2.

† Matt. xv. 4-6--shewing the identity between *cursing*, and *not blessing*, the parent.

In what Church do we not find the next *generation--pure in their own eyes, yet not washed from their filthiness?* (Isa. lxxv. 5.) The Pharisees of the Gospel¹ were the living picture, devoted to the externals of religion, and to them exclusively; "washing the outside of the cup and platter," while the inward part was wholly *unwashed from its filthiness*. We see them in the next generation in the Laodicean Church. (Rev. iii. 17, 18.) The family at this distance of time is far from being extinct. Their lineal representatives abound among us. Their religion, as of old, is mere ceremony; rigid in forms, but with an inveterate hatred of vital godliness. In the service of the Church they will go through the exercise of confession of sin, and supplication for mercy, as 'miserable offenders;' still *pure in their own eyes*, with no conscious *filthiness*, from which they need to be washed. Nay--they will even at the Lord's table, engage in a service, as full of contrition and self-renunciation as language could express; yet all this, not to humble the soul in sorrow and confidence, but to feed self-righteousness and delusion. All is formality, and "confidence in the flesh."

Indeed a thin cloak of profession suffices to maintain this self-gratifying judgment. For everywhere it is the great work of Satan, to delude the sinner into a good opinion of himself. His open profession is "according to the course of this world," plunging without scruple into all its follies and pleasures. His baptismal engagement is thrown to the wind. He does not pretend to renounce the devil, the world, or the flesh. Creeds are a matter of indifference. For the hearty service of his God he has no care or concern. And yet, withal, he is *pure in his own eyes*. He estimates himself by some plausible qualities, or some course of external decorum,² while a blind infidel as to the depravity of his nature, which--not the gross acts of sin--gives the stamp to the whole character. Sometimes partial obedience maintains this delusion; while he hides from himself the genuine hypocrisy of secret reserves, which mars all. (1 Sam. xv. 13, 14.) He was once impure; but he has gone through a course of purifying observances, has *washed himself from his filthiness*, little knowing the infinite distinction between being *pure in his own eyes*, and being pure in the sight of God.

We often see this self-deceiver in the spiritual Church, exhibiting a full and clean profession to his fellow-men; while himself--awful thought!--living at an infinite distance from God. (1 Cor. xiii. 1.) He has got notions of the grand doctrines of the gospel, and he finds it convenient to profess them. Salvation by free grace is his creed, and he will "contend earnestly for" its purest simplicity. He conceives himself to distinguish accurately between sound and unscriptural doctrine. He deems it legal to search for inward evidences, lest they should ob-

¹ Matt. xxiii. 25-27. Comp. Luke, xvi. 15; xviii. 10. John ix. 40, 41.

² Matt. xix. 20. Rom. vii. 9. Philip. iii. 6.

scure the glorious freeness of the gospel. All this is a cover for his slumbering delusion. His conscience is sleeping in "the form of godliness," while his heart is wholly uninfluenced by "its power." (2 Tim. iii. 5.) Or perhaps there may be alarming conviction of some powerful corruption, which, if he could master, he would be at peace. But while fixing his eye upon this single sin, he has no conception of the grand fountain of evil within. Sometimes it is the Romish error (common however to human nature) of substituting penance for penitence; some external work of sacrifice for the deep, inwrought principle; or the periodical routine of humiliation instead of the daily habit. But with all this, there is no mourning for his innate guilt and pollution; no sensibility of sin in thoughts, objects, motives, or prayers; no perceptible change from a proud, self-willed, or worldly spirit. All serves only to soothe his conscience. He is *pure in his own eyes*--in his own imaginary view and perverted judgment! Yet until he be disturbed in his complacency, how hopeless his condition! (Chap. iii. 7; xii. 15; xvi. 2.)

Whatever allowance we may make in other cases for the pressure of constitutional temperament, here at least the want of all cheering influence is a plain proof of self-delusion. Vital religion is the sugar in the liquid, which impregnates the whole contents of the cup. The path may be thorny, and our light darkness. But sweetness will be mingled in our sorrow, even till the last drop in the cup of life shall be spent. The formalist's religion is a piece of polished marble in the cup, externally beautiful, but cold and dead; impregnating nothing with an atom of sweetness.

The power of this self-delusion is, that man has no natural conception of the deep stain of sin, such as nothing but the blood of sprinkling can fetch out. The man of God, bathed in the tears of penitence, cries out for this sprinkling alone to "purge him." (Ps. li. 7.) The tears of the purest repentance in themselves are impure and abominable.¹ It is not the exercise of a day to know the full extent of our corruption. As the Lord leads us into the light of our own hearts, we behold "greater and yet greater abominations." (Ezek. viii. 7.) The conscience purged from sin becomes more clear for the discovery of remaining pollution. Those who are the most purified will have the deepest sensibility of impurity,² and will most deeply value "the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness," with its free invitation--"Wash, and be clean." (Zech. xiii. 1.)

Sinner! if thou be found *unwashed from thy filthiness*, must it not be certain exclusion from that "place, into which shall not in any wise enter anything that defileth?" (Rev. xxi. 27.) Awful indeed will be

¹ Job, ix. 30, 31. Jer. ii. 22.

² Comp. Rom. vii. 9 Philip. iii. 6, with Rom, vii. 14-24. 1 Tim. i. 15.

the final sentence--"He that is filthy, let him be filthy still!" (Ib. xxii. 11)

The next *generation* provokes our sorrowful amazement. *O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids lifted up.* Such intolerable arrogance! What greater anomaly does the conscience afford than that of a proud sinner! his *eyelids being lifted up*, instead of being cast down to the ground. Such is his self-confidence even in the presence of his God! (Luke, xviii. 11.) And before men--all must keep their distance from these swelling worms! We may see this pride embodied in a system --"the Man of sin, sitting in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God!" (2 Thess. ii. 4.) We may see it in worldly greatness in the pride of Moab;¹ the prince of Tyre;² the boasting Antiochus;³ Haman in all his glory;⁴ "Herod arrayed in his royal apparel;"⁵ Nebuchadnezzar in his self-pleasing contemplation, before the severe chastening of his God had taught him the wholesome lesson--"Those that walk in pride he is able to abase." (Dan. iv. 30.) In a lower level it is the pride of birth, rank, wisdom, riches, or accomplishments. In every circumstance is this high look specially hateful to God;⁶ and the day is appointed in his own purpose for its prostrate humiliation. (Isa. ii. 12.) Meanwhile little is it conceived, how really contemptible this pride makes its deluded votaries appear before their fellow-creatures. (Ps. ci. 5.) One beam of the divine glory,⁷ and one sight of the cross of Calvary,⁸ must at once dispel their vain splendid illusion.

The last *generation* appears before us as a monster of iniquity. We can scarcely draw the picture in its full colours. Conceive of brutes with iron teeth--a wild beast opening his mouth, and displaying, instead of teeth, *swords and knives*, sharpened ready for their murderous work. (Ps. lvii. 4.) Yet withal, these cruel oppressors are marked by pitiful cowardice. They vent their wantonness, only where there is little or no power of resistance. It is not the wolf with the wolf, but with the defenceless lamb; *devouring the poor and needy from off the earth*,⁹ --"eating up my people"--not like an occasional indulgence, but "as they eat bread" their daily meal, without intermission. (Ps. xiv. 4.) Such cruel oppressors appear from time to time as a chastening curse to the land; nay, they were found among the rulers of God's own people,¹⁰ even among the teachers of religion.¹¹ Cloaking their covetousness under the garb of special holiness. God would thus shew us a picture of man left to himself. When the reins are loosened or given up, is there any length of wickedness, to which he may not proceed? Indeed the four generations teach us this lesson, most valuable, yet

¹Isa. xvi. 6. Jer. xlviii. 29. ²Ezek xxviii. 2. ³Dan. xi. 36.

⁴Esth. v. 11. ⁵Acts, xii. 21. ⁶Chap. vi. 17; xxi. 4. Comp. Ps. cxxxi. 1.

⁷Comp. Job, xlii. 5, 6. Isa. vi. 5. ⁸Phil. ii. 5.

⁹Ib. x. 8, 9. Eccles. iv. 1. Isa. iii. 15. Am. ii. 6, 7; viii. 4. Mic. ii. 1, 2. Hab. iii. 14.

¹⁰Am. iv. 1. Mic. iii. 1-3.

¹¹Matt. xxiii. 14.

most humbling, thoroughly to know. Yet so depraved is man, that he does not understand his own depravity. Nothing is so much hidden from him as himself. (2 Kings, viii. 13.) He keeps a good opinion of himself, by keeping the light out of the heart and conscience. His imagination fancies good, where there is nothing but hateful deformity. Under this self-delusion, we deal so gently and tenderly with sin, that no conflict is maintained with it, no sorrow or burden felt concerning it. How deeply do we need the searching light and convincing power of the Spirit of God, to shew us our abominations; to make us tremble at the sight of them; and to let us see, that our remedy must come from God every moment; that no partial change, no external polish, nothing less than the creating power of God, can reach the case for a cure! (Ps. li. 10.)

Adored indeed be the grace of God, if we be not in one or other of these *generations*! But let us remember--"Such *were* some of us"--either disobedient to our parents, or self-righteous in the church, or proud and contemptuous, or cruel and oppressive. But *we are washed from our filthiness*. (1 Cor. vi. 11.) Therefore--"who maketh thee to differ?" (Ib. iv. 7) is the profitable recollection, when we are disposed to forget from whence we were raised, and to whom we owe all that we have and are for his service.

15. *The horseleech hath two daughters, crying, Give, give. There are three things, that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, It is enough* (wealth, marg.). 16. *The grave; and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water; and the fire that saith not, It is enough.*

Agur describes in an artificial mode of expression,¹ but with forcible imagery, the cravings of human lust. If viewed in reference to the last generation, they form an admirably finished picture of the merciless and avaricious tyrant. They are like the *horseleech, which hath two daughters, crying, Give, give*. They are like the *three and four things, the grave, the womb, the earth, and the fire*.^{*} But with a more general reference the figures are graphically instructive. The horseleech with its two-forked tongue like *two daughters*, sucks the blood with an insatiable appetite.[†] *The grave* opens the mouth for fresh victims.² *The barren womb* eagerly covets the blessing.³ *The parched earth*, after large supplies, still thirsts for more. *The fire*, when the spark first kindles a coal, or lights upon combustible matter, never

¹ See Verses 21, 24, 29; vi. 16. Am. i. 3, 6, 9; ii. 1, 4.

² Chap. xxvii. 20. Hab. ii. 5.

³ Gen. xxx. 1. 1 Sam. i. 6, 11.

^{*}Holden. Comp. Ps. lix. 12, 14, 15.

[†]Reformer's Notes.

"Non missura cutem, nisi plena cruoris hirudo."

HOR. *De Arte Poetica*, 476.

ceases to burn as long as fuel is supplied, and in many a disastrous conflagration, leaves us to cry out in fearful wonder, "Behold! how great a matter a little fire kindleth." (Jam. iii. 5.) And yet these are scarcely adequate representations of that insatiable thirst within, that never says--*It is enough*. The greater the portion, the greater the lust. Every indulgence provokes the appetite.* *'The horseleech hath but two daughters*. But we have'--says Bishop Sanderson-- 'I know not how many craving lusts, no less importunately clamorous than they; till they be served, incessantly *crying, Give, give*; but much more unsatisfied than they. For they will be filled in time, and when they are filled, they tumble off, and there is an end. But our lusts will never be satisfied. Like Pharaoh's kine, when they have eaten up all the fat ones, they are still as hungry and as whining as they were before.†

How blessed then is the state, to which the Gospel brings us "Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content!" What a merciful--deliverance from that "destruction and perdition," the certain end of lawless lust. (1 Tim. vi. 6-10.) Happy child of God--weaned from his old indulgence! disciplined under his father's yoke! satisfied abundantly with his father's love. Whether "he abound or suffer need"--he can say--"*It is wealth*--I am full, and abound." (Phil. iv. 12, 18.) Has he not found that, which answers every demand, supplies every need, and satisfies every desire? What but God can fill the soul, which God hath made, and made for himself?

17. *The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it.*

Agur here returns to the first *generation*--the unnatural despisers of their parents. (Verse 11.) He had before described their character. Now he links it with the punishment. Observe the guilt only of a scornful look, or the *mocking eye*, when perhaps not a word is spoken. Certainly if the fifth commandment is "the first with promise" (Eph. vi. 2), it is also the first with judgment. No commandment in the breach of it is visited with more tremendous threatenings. What a picture is here given of infamy! Perhaps the case of Absalom furnishes the most striking illustration--a self-willed youth or rebel against his father and his sovereign made a spectacle of shame before his people the vengeance of God inflicting the punishment, which was due at the bar of human justice! (2 Sam. xviii. 17.) But we may observe a more general illustration of the frightful picture. How many confessions

*See Augustine's Confession, Lib, iii. c. 1.

† *Sermon on Phil. iv. 11*. 'By the daughters of the horseleech may be understood covetousness and prodigality. Both then cry, *Give, give*. The former cries--*Give*, to keep; the latter cries--*Give*, to spend. Neither of them saith--*It is enough*.' CARYL on Job, xx. 20.

on the scaffold have borne testimony, that the first step towards the untimely end was contempt of parental authority and restraint! The bodies of such criminals were deprived of the rites of burial; exposed either on the gallows, or cast out into the valley, as meat for the fowls of the air.¹ Thus *the eye*, that hath scornfully *mocked his father*, became the choice morsel of the *eagle or the raven of the valley*.*

But even where there is no such literal fulfilment, the curse is not the less sure. Seldom do we see the disobedient rebels prospering, and blessed in their own children. Retributive justice visits them late, but certain; and the poignant anguish of many a disappointed hope, and many an arrow shot from their own bow, may bear to them the message of their chastising Father--"Thine own iniquities shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee." (Jer. ii. 19.)

18. *There be three things, which are too wonderful or me: yea, four, which I know not.* 19. *The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst (heart, marg.) of the sea, and the way of a man with a maid.* 20. *Such is the way of an adulterous woman; she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness.*

The kingdom of nature is full of wonder, and these wonders full of instruction. Where the philosopher cannot give a reason, the humble disciple may learn a lesson. The depths of nature are the figure of the depths of sin--of the unsearchable deceitful heart. (Ib. xvii. 9.) *The eagle soars in the air* with so lofty and rapid a flight, that the eye cannot follow *her way*. She leaves no scent nor footsteps, by which we might trace her, as the beast on the ground. (Job, xxxix. 27.) *The serpent* on the sand would leave its mark. But the serpent on the "rock leaves no slime like the worm, no feathers like the birds; who then can mark its way? *The ship*, like the great monster of the deep, "maketh a path to shine after her."† But while she ploughs *in the midst (in the heart) of the sea*, her furrows are quickly closed up, and her way is untraceable. Not less mysterious is *the way of a man with it maid*. Eminently prac-

¹ See Gen. xl. 19. 1 Rom. xvii. 46. 2 Sam. xxi. 10.

* Bochart conceives the allusion to be to the valley-- Jer. xxxi. 40--where probably the dead bodies of the criminals sent. At all events the denial of the rites of burial was one of the severest marks of divine chastisement. Comp, Jer. vii. 33; xxii. 18, 19. The Heathens felt this deprivation to be a special affliction. Homer represents the dying Hector, as entreating Achilles not to give his body to be torn by his Grecian dogs, but restore it to his parents for burial. Lib. XI: 337-343. Virgil also represents Palinurus begging AEneas either to throw the earth himself upon his body, or to carry it with him through the water, rather than expose it to the birds of prey.--*Aen.* VI. 363-371.

† Job, xli. 32. Comp. Ps. civ. 26; cvii. 23, 24. This figure, and that of the eagle, as images of the rapid course of life, are finely illustrated--Wisd. v. 11,12. Witsius admirably defends these figures as worthy of inspiration, against the sneers of neological critics.--*Misc. Sacra*, Lib. i. c. xviii. 31-33.

tised is the seducer in "the depths of Satan," and a thousand arts does he employ to allure the affections of his unwary victim. And it is often as difficult to penetrate his designs, and to escape his snares, as to trace *the way of the eagle, the serpent, or the ship*. Let this be a warning to young and inexperienced females, not to trust to their own purity, or to the strength of their own resolutions, or to place themselves in unprotected situations.*

Equally unfathomable are the devices of *the adulterous woman* to entangle her prey, and to deceive her unsuspecting husband. Solomon has described the picture with striking and minute accuracy. (Chap. vii; v.6.) Such a course of abomination, wickedness, and hypocrisy, as is scarcely to be conceived; indulging her sin as the sweet morsel under her tongue; feasting greedily upon her "stolen waters and secret bread;"¹ yet keeping up the semblance of innocence and purity;² *wiping her mouth*, to prevent all suspicion, suffering no sign of the action to remain. A woman must be advanced very far in the way of sin, before she can present such unblushing a front. Yet every fresh indulgence of lust gives rise to new artifices, "hardening" the heart more fully in the "deceitfulness of sin." (Heb. iii. 13.) Its fascinations blind it to its real character. Let then the first step be shunned, the most distant path, that may lead to temptation. Where shame ceases to accompany it, the ruin of the victim is accomplished. Abundant warning is given; solemn instruction--many beacons in the path--to show the certain end of this flowery road.³

¹ Chap. ix.17. ² Gen. xxxix. 13-19. ³ Chap. v. 3-5; vii. 24-21; ix. 18.

*Ambrose has treated fully upon these four figures. Assuming the chapter to be written by Solomon, he explains his ignorance of them--'not that he was not able to know them, but because it was not a time for him to know them.' The way of the eagle he understands to be the ascension of Christ, flying back as an eagle to his Father, carrying man plucked from the Jaws of the enemy as his prey with him! And though the ascension was visible, yet what understanding could grasp the apprehension of such Majesty retiring to heaven! *The way of the serpent on the rock* shadowed the assaults of Satan upon Christ--on whom, as *on a rock* (unlike the first man, who was earth and dust) he could leave no mark, no footsteps of his malice. The pious father seems to be in some doubt upon the third image. *The way of the ship in the sea* is the way of God's church through the sea of persecution. This ship cannot miscarry, because Christ is lifted up in the mast of it --that is--on the cross. The Father sitteth as pilot at the stern of it. The Comforter preserved its prow! Or--Christ is the ship, into which the souls of all true believers do go up; which, that it may be carried more strongly in the midst of the waves, is made of wood, and fastened with iron: this is Christ in the flesh. And who can tell the way of this ship, either into the womb of the Virgin, or the heart of believers? *The way of a man in his youth* (LXX. and some other versions) illustrates the ways of our Saviour Christ in his youth upon the earth!

Such puerile crudities are calculated to bring ridicule rather than reverence to the sacred book. Yet a combined and powerful effort is now made to palm the Fathers upon the church as the primary expositors of Scripture, and the standard of faith! Many patristic expositions of the Proverbs equally gross might have been produced. Apart from higher ground--Can we forbear surprise, that men of taste and learning should affix their imprimatur to such undisciplined folly of interpretation?

21. *For three things--the earth is disquieted, and for four, which it cannot bear: 22. For a servant when he reigneth; and a fool when he is filled with meat: 23. For an odious woman when she is married: and an handmaid that is heir to her mistress.*

Next to things which were unsearchable, Agur now mentions some things that were intolerable--*things, for which the earth is disquieted*, bringing confusion wherever they are found. Who does not naturally condemn things out of place, as unsuitable and unseemly? Order is the law of the works of God in the world, no less than in the Church;¹ and any breach of order is to be deprecated. *Four* such evils are here mentioned--two connected with men, two with women; the one class in the community, the other in the family.

The first evil mentioned is--*a servant, when he reigneth*. This is a serious evil in the family, whether it arises from the mismanagement of the master,² or from his own intrigue. (Verse 23.) He is obviously out of place; and ruling, where he ought to serve, he must bring disorder. (Gen. xvi. 4.) The evil is far greater in a kingdom. Men of low birth may indeed rise honourably by their own merit to a high station. God may call them, as he did Joseph (Ib. xli. 41), to *reign*. The evil is the advancement to power of ignorant, unprincipled minions.³ Men of mean spirit cannot bear to be raised. Intoxicated by sudden elevation, these upstarts shew themselves not only fools, but tyrants;* swelling with all the insolence of their unseemly honour. Such was the enmity of Tobiah the Ammonite⁴ and the misrule of Haman.⁵ What national evil resulted from the elevation of Jeroboam!⁶ What anarchy from the successful usurpation of Zimri!⁷ Well therefore might the *reign of servants* be deplored, as a component part of the calamity of disconsolate Zion! (Lam. v. 8.) In the ordinary course it can only be viewed as a chastening dispensation. (Isa. iii. 4, 5.) Let us acknowledge with thankfulness our deliverance from it.

Then look at *the fool* (not an idiot, but a wilful sinner) *when he is filled with meat*. Can we wonder that he should be a trouble and a curse; giving the reins to his appetite, and becoming yet more devoid of understanding than before? The history of Nabal, sunk into brutishness by his own sensual lust (1 Sam. xxv. 36); Elah murdered by his servant, whilst "drinking himself drunk in his steward's

¹Eccles. iii. 11. 1 Cor. xiv. 40. ²Chap. xxix. 21. ³Chap. xix. 10. Eccles. x. 5-7.

⁴Neh. ii. 10.

⁵Esth. iii. 1.

⁶1 Kings, xi. 26-28; xii. 30,

⁷Ib. xvi. 9-20. Comp. 2 Kings, viii. 12.

*Chap. xxviii. 3. This danger is accurately drawn by one of the Classic moralists:--

Asperius nihil est bumili; cum surgit in altum,
Cuncta ferit, dum cuncta timet; desaevit in omnes,
Ut se posse putet; nec bellua tetrrior una est,
Quam servi rabies, in libera terga furentis.

CLAUDIAN. Lib. i. in *Eutrop*.

house;"¹ Belshazzar giving himself over to the lust of ungodliness² --all these were evils, *for which the earth was disquieted, and which it could not bear*. Filled with meat--"with surfeiting and drunkenness" they dig as it were their own graves with their teeth, and are set forth as an example in the just punishment of their wicked folly.

Look again into the inner room of the family. What is the origin of discord and palpable misery? *An odious woman* is in rule. She quarrels with all around her. Her ungoverned tongue and temper are an unceasing source of agitation. Had she known herself, much better for her never to have entered into the marriage bond, than to become the inseparable tormentor of her husband and family.³ Woman is to man either his greatest curse or blessing. If love be not the earnest of the sacred union, truly will it be a bond of misery, from which only the special mercy of God can deliver. Let the worldly portion of the wife be the last consideration. Take heed, lest worldly glitter open a door for remediless misery."

The odious woman, when she is married, if she be in authority, becomes a national evil. Jezebel was a scourge to Israel, the spring of all Ahab's wickedness, that brought the heavy judgment of God upon the and.⁴ *The earth was disquieted for her*, and at the last cast her out. (2 King, ix. 30-37.) Herodias brought upon her husband and his nation the guilt of the blood of the murdered prophet "crying from the ground." (Matt. xiv. 8.) If marriage be the ordinance of lust, not of it godliness, what wonder if an *odious woman* should be the result, a canker to every domestic comfort?

The last evil noticed is a frequent source of family trouble--an *handmaid, that is heir to her mistress*. Want of discipline, simplicity, or integrity, leads to waywardness and self-indulgence; and the house, instead of being under wholesome rule, becomes a prey to envy and strife. The ill-regulated connection between Abraham and Hagar, when *the servant became heir to her mistress*--occupying her mistress's place with her husband--became the source of most baneful contention. (Gen. xvi. 4.) Our own history presents sad illustration of this intolerable evil. Anne Boleyn and Jane Seymour were *handmaids*, and unhappily *heirs*, to their respective mistresses while living, in the affections of the sovereign. The royal example of selfishness and lust was a national grievance, in which *the handmaids* were not wholly guiltless.

And thus in modern society, *an handmaid*, treated with that familiarity, which breaks down the Divine barriers between the several ranks, has sometimes become *heir to her mistress*; either succeeding to her property--perhaps to the exclusion of more rightful claimants

¹ 1 Kings, xvi. 9, 10. Hos. vii. 5.

² Dan. v. 1-4, 30. 1 Sam. xxx. 16. 1 Kings, xx. 16.

³ Chap. xxi. 9, 19; xxvii. 15.

⁴ 1 Kings, xvi. 31; xxi. 25.

(Chap. xxix. 21); or rising into her place by an ill-assorted union, like those above-mentioned, usually productive of much family dissension. Or again, in the higher ranks, she is the *heir to her mistress's dresses*. This encourages in her the love of dress and vanity, habits unsuitable to her situation in life; and too often hurtful to her solid respectability and eternal interests.

How needful is it to preserve consistency in every part of our profession! Oh! let us look carefully to it, that no want of wisdom, godly contentment, or self-denial, brings reproach upon that worthy name by which we are called; that there be no spots, to mar that adorning beauty, which might attract those around us to the ways of God.

24. There be four things which are little upon the earth: but they are exceeding wise: (wise, made wise, marg.) 25. The ants are a people not strong: yet they prepare their meat in the summer; 26. The conies are but a feeble folk yet make they their houses in the rocks. 27. The locusts have no king; yet go they forth all of them by bands. 28. The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in king's palaces.

The mind of man spreads over the length and breadth of creation, and draws instruction from every part of the universe presented to his senses. Everywhere God teaches us by his works as well as by his word;* by his works, small as well as great. He instructed Job by Behemoth and Leviathan. (Job, xl. xli.) Here he instructs us by *the ants and the conies*. And indeed in the minute creation his splendour shines as gloriously as in the more majestic. 'At one end' (of the scale) (as Dr. Paley finely draws the contrast) 'we see an intelligent power arraying planetary systems; fixing, for instance, the trajectory of Saturn, or constructing a ring of two hundred thousand miles diameter, to surround his body, and be suspended like a magnificent arch over the head of his inhabitants; and at the other, bending a hooked tooth, concerting and providing an appropriate mechanism for the clasping and re-clasping of the filaments of the feathers of the humming-bird.' †

Agur had before mentioned four things, that seemed great, but were really despicable. Here he produces *four things little upon the earth, but exceeding wise*. Therefore despise them not for their littleness: but admire the wonder-working hand, which hath furnished these little creatures with such sufficient means of provision, defence, and safety. As has been beautifully remarked--'God reigns in a community of ants and ichneumons as visibly, as among living men or mighty

*The stupid beasts reprove our ingratitude (Isa. i. 3.) The fowls of the air, our inattention (Jer. viii. 7); our unbelieving carefulness (Matt. vi. 26); and anxious fears (Ib. x. 29-31.)

† *Natural Theology*. Conclusion.

seraphim.* Truly nothing was made for nought. The world of instinct shews that which will put to blush our higher world of reason. Yes,--these four remarkable instances of Almighty skill, the natures and habits of these four little animals, teach many useful and important lessons, to which the greatest philosopher might attend with profit, and "he that hath ears to hear may hear" words of suitable wisdom, rebuke, direction and encouragement for himself.

'Industry is commended to us by all sorts of examples, deserving our regard and imitation. All nature is a copy thereof and the whole world a glass, wherein we may behold this duty represented to us. Every creature about us is incessantly working toward the ends for which it was designed; indefatigably exercising the powers with which it is endued; diligently observing the laws of its creation.'† *The ants* have already brought the lesson before us (Chap. vi. 6-8)--a *people not strong*; ‡ indeed so weak, that thousands are crushed by one tread of the foot; yet *wise in preparing their meat in the summer*. A quickening sermon do these little insects preach to us! They make preparation for the coming winter. What must be the thoughtlessness of making no provision for the coming eternity! whiling away life in inactivity, as if there was no work for God, for the soul, or for eternity! Shall not we learn to be wise betimes; to improve the present moment of salvation; not to wait for the winter--the verge of life, when that grace, offered now, shall be offered no more? Sinner! if all be lost by thy indolence, wilt not thou be the great loser? What else hast thou to do, but to prepare for eternity? What hope canst thou have of heaven at the last, if thou hast never seriously thought of heaven before? Oh!--ere it be too late, throw thyself at his feet, whose heart over-flows with love. If thou art ready, "all things are ready." Exclusion is with thyself, not with thy Saviour.¹

The ants are a people not strong. Yet--apart from their wisdom--what people more diligent, more persevering, or more effective? Indeed the union of so many noble qualities in so small a corpuscle is one of the most remarkable phenomena in the works of nature.§ Weakness, then, is no excuse for indolence, no occasion of despondency. Is it not rather the cheering exercise of faith? (2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.) "The worm shall thresh the mountains." (Isa. xli. 15.) To the diligent "labourer shall be given the meat, that endureth to everlasting life."

¹Luke, xiv. 16-24. John, vi. 37.

*McCheyne's *Life*, p- 34.

† BARROW'S *Sermon on Industry*.

‡ The term--nation or people--is applied to the animal creation, Joel, i, 6; ii. 2. This is a frequent classical allusion. Homer spoke of a nation of bees (Ib. B. 1. 87); of hogs (73); Virgil of fishes, *Geor.* iv. 430.

§ PAXTON'S *Natural History of the Scripture*, p. 97.

(John, vi. 27.) "Working out his salvation in helpless dependence," his "labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."*

As the ants prepare their meat, so do the conies their refuge. Feeble folk as they are, they secure themselves from impending danger, by making their houses in the holes of inaccessible rocks.† Thus what they want in strength they make up in wisdom. Not less feeble are we; not less exposed to assault. And is not our refuge like theirs "the munition of rocks?" (Isa. xxxiii. 16.) Are we then, like them, making our house, our home, there? in the foresight of evil hiding ourselves? abiding in our shelter in conscious security? (Chap. xxii. 3.)

Observe again the instinct of the locusts. Some insects, like the bee, are under monarchical government. But the locusts have no king. Yet how wonderful is their order, going forth all of them by band; like an army with unbroken ranks, and under the strictest discipline!‡ Jerome mentions what he had lately seen--'When the swarms of locusts came, and filled the lower region of the air, they flew in such order, by the divine appointment, and kept their places as exactly, as when several tiles or party--coloured stones are skilfully placed in a pavement, so as not to be an hair's-breadth out of their several ranks.'§ Do not these little insects read to us a lesson on the importance of unity and unanimous movement? Here is not an ungoverned, disorderly multitude flying in different directions. But all go forth by bands. All keep their ranks. Many professors, instead of going by bands, prefer an individual course. They belong to no cohort. They are under no discipline. This unsettled principle can never issue in a Christian steadfastness. Unity, not diversity, brings "the good thing of the heart

*Phil. ii. 12, 1, 3. 1 Cor. xv. 58. Chrysostom ingeniously remarks upon the wonders of divine wisdom, in inspiring so minute a body with such a perpetual desire for labour; teaching us so strongly the lesson, not to affect softness and delicacy, or to fly from toil and labour. He adds--that the wise man, sending us to learn of these little creatures, is just as we should in our families put to shame the disobedience of the elder children, by pointing to the little ones--Behold one much younger and smaller than yourself; yet how pliable and ready he is to do as he is bid! Hom. xii. ad Pop. Antioch.

† Ps. civ. 18. There is much difficulty in determining this animal, which was reckoned among the unclean (Lev. xi. 55. Deut. xiv. 7.) Dr. Shaw (with whom Parkhurst agrees) considers it to be 'the Daman of Mount Libanus, though common in other parts of Syria and Palestine, of the rabbit size and form. As its usual residence and refuge is in the holes and clefts of the rocks, we have so far a presumptive evidence, that this creature may be the coney of the Scriptures.' Travels, vol. ii. 160, 161. Mr. Bruce strongly confirms this account from his own observation--adding--'He is above all other animals so much attached to the rock, that I never once saw him on the ground, and from among large stones in the mouth of caves, where is his constant residence. He is in Judaea, Palestine, and Arabia, and consequently must have been known to Solomon.' See his Travels, v. pp. 139-147. 'Gaudet in effossis habitare caniculus antris.'

MART. Epig. Lib. xiii. Ep. 58.

‡ See the picture, Joel, ii. 7, 8, 25.

§ Quoted by Lowth on Joel, *ut supra*. The mystical locusts have a king. Comp. Rev. ix. 3-11.

established with grace." (Heb. xiii. 9.) The strength of the Church is --not as an army of irregular soldiers, a regiment in loose disorder, unconnected with each other; but when she *goeth forth by bands*, united, concentrated, well disciplined, every officer at his post, every soldier in his ranks, each under rule, helpful to each other and to their great cause! (Num. 11.) "When shall It once be. "Lord, heal our unhappy divisions. Unite our energies' in one holy bond of Truth and Peace, of Faith and Charity.'*

And what lessons does *the spider* teach, of ingenuity, patience, and untiring labour and perseverance! 'Its claws or spinning-organs serve both as hands and eyes to the animal.'† She forms her web against *the walls*, as if *she took hold of them with her hands*. She frames her fine-spun house with such exactness of proportion, as if conversant with mathematical rule.‡ She steals her way alike into the cottage of the poor and *king's palaces*; as if God would instruct even the great-ones of the earth by this pattern of diligence. Such assiduity; such "diligence" in the work of our high calling, if it shall not bring us into the *king's palaces* (Chap. xxii. 29), will ensure the full reward of the man, whom the Great "King delighteth to honour."§

The general lesson to learn from these diminutive teachers is the importance of acting wisely according to the principles of our nature," as the best means to secure the greatest quantum of happiness, of which they are capable. God has provided happiness for every nature, and for each its own happiness. In more particular detail how many of us stand condemned by the sermons of these little insects! Let us not be too proud to learn, or too careless to attend to, the humbling but most valuable lessons taught in this school of instruction: "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning." (Chap. i. 5.)

29. *There be three things which go well, yea, four are comely in going:*
 30. *A lion which is strongest among beasts, and turneth not away from any;*
 31. *A greyhound (a horse--girt in the loins, marg.), an he-goat also; and a king, against whom there is no rising up.*
 Agur naturally lingers upon this vast field of natural wonders:

* *Prayer for Unity in the Service of Accession*--a most suitable and spiritual pleading with the God of Peace.

† KIBBY'S *Bridgewater Treatise*, vol. ii. 186.

+ Who made the spiders parallels design,

Sure as Demoivre, without rule or line.'--Pope.

§ Interpreter expounded this figure to Christiana; that, as the venomous spider hung by her hands by the wall; so, how full of the venom of sin soever we be, 'yet we may by *the hand* of faith lay hold of, and dwell in the best room, that belongs to *the King's house* above.'-- *Pilg. Prog.* part ii. Important as this truth doubtless is; yet our inimitable allegorist we judge to have here pressed his imagination beyond due bounds. Accommodation may admit of far greater latitude than exposition; though even in this department--as the Writer would desire to remember for himself--a sober discipline must be exercised.

such a splendid exhibition of--the divine perfections! the source of so much light to the world, before the Book of Revelation was fully opened. (Job, xii. 7-10.) After having mentioned some striking instances of wisdom, he now singles out a few objects, which appeared to him remarkable for their *comeliness in going*--the firm and stately walk of the lion,* fearless and proud, *not turning away for any*; the graceful form, and the elegant and swift movements, of *the greyhound*;† the he-goat at the head of the Hock, as their guide and protector; and the majesty of the king, inspiring all who approach him with reverence for his authority, and not suffering *any rising up against* the exercise of his power. (Eccles. viii. 2-4.) From all these many practical lessons may be learned by the man, "who will be wise, and observe these things."

Let us have regard, not only to the various duties of the Christian life, but also to the manner and spirit of their performance. Cultivate not only the integrity, but the *comeliness* of the Christian character--"the beauty" and uniformity "of holiness;" that there be nothing misshapen or distorted; that there be just proportion in all the parts and features. Christians should be attractive and engaging by the courtesy of their general demeanour. It is not enough to observe "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure." But "whatsoever things are lovely, *whatsoever things are of good report*, think on these things." (Philip. iv. 8.) Any manifest want of *comeliness in our going* repels the world from the gospel of Christ. 'If we desire to reign in heaven, we must present ourselves there with this beautiful crown, from whence radiate all kinds of virtue and praise.'‡

Nor let us forget to imitate the features of this *comeliness* here portrayed; to be fearless as *the lion*, when pursuing the path of duty, not *turning away from any* (see Neh. vi. 3, 11); to desire the eager spring of *the greyhound* in our heavenly course: to be useful as *the he-goat*, as the leader of a godly band; and to maintain our proper authority in any place of trust, as parents or guardians of families; and not to allow any *rising up against it*.

32. *If thou hast done foolishly in, lifting up thyself, or if thou hast thought*

*See Homer's fine description, *Il. M.* 299.

† This name is, as Mr. Holden remarks, 'of doubtful import.' The Hebrew is 'girt in the loins'--a general phrase--admitting of a great variety of conjecture; so that Poole (*Synopsis*) considers him to be wisest, 'who confesses he knows not what it is.' Our translation is however as well supported as any other. Some conceive it to be a leopard. And perhaps this conjecture, combined with *the lion and the he-goat*, has given rise to the absurd ideality of some Rabbinical and Romanist expositors (not wholly discountenanced by more respectable names), who consider these four creatures to be prophetic of the four great monarchies. Dan. viii. The reader may readily conceive--the extent of fancy requisite to maintain this interpretation.

‡ Daille on *Phil.* iv. 8.

*evil, lay thine hand tpon thy mouth. 33. Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife.**

This evidently applies to the preceding illustration--a king, *against whom there is no rising*. But *if thou hast lifted up thyself* in despising his authority (Rom. xiii. 1, 2); or even *if thou hast but thought evil; lay thine hand upon thy mouth*, restraining the ebullition in silent and humble submission.¹ As a general rule, however, we may be thankful for the caution. If we have *done foolishly* by provoking irritation, in lifting up ourselves, even in some *evil thought*, against a brother; quench the rising spark, ere it kindle into a flame. "*The thought of foolishness is sin.*"² Yet it is more sinful, when it forces its passage to the mouth. Words increase the sin, shew more of its power, and are more hurtful to others. Obviously it is wise to *lay our hand upon our mouth*, and to restrain the expression, when we cannot prevent the thought. Better to keep in the infirmity, than to give it vent. But when, instead of *the hand laid upon the mouth*, there is no discipline, guard, or restraint; "*the mouth of the fool poureth out foolishness,*"³ overflowing at the lips, and bringing a flood of trouble upon the soul.⁴

How much more, when the lying, heartless, proud worm *lifts up itself* against the Great King! *The foolishness* even of an *evil thought* against him is such, as no tongue can express. The Lord humble us in a tender sensibility of this sin! "Behold! I am vile: what shall I answer thee? *I will lay mine hand upon my mouth.*" (Job, xl. 4, 5.)

Towards man however it is often the forcing of wrath, not natural irritation. A peaceable man may be goaded to anger;⁵ as the violent shaking of the milk in the *churn bringeth forth butter; or the wringing of the nose bringeth blood*. The action of force works, what would not otherwise have been done. But fearful is *the strife of this forced wrath*. Sihon thus provoked his own ruin;⁶ the Ephraimites stirred up a murderous strife;⁷ Asahel sharpened Abner's spear by his wilful waywardness;⁸ Amaziah plunged into destruction *by the strife of the forced wrath* of Joash, who was disposed to peace and quietness.⁹ How multiplied are the sources of misery--the fruit of ungovernable temper and self-will! "Only by pride cometh contention" (Chap. xiii. 10); and where that contention may end, who can say? 'I am, and profess to be'--said the godly Bishop Hall--'as the terms stand, on neither, and yet on both, parts; for the peace of both; for the humour of neither.'

¹Chap. xvii. 28. Job, xxi. 5. ²Chap. xxiv. 9. Jer. iv. 14. ³Chap. xv. 2.

⁴Chap. xv. 18; xvi. 28, 29; xvii. 14; xviii. 7. ⁵Chap. xv. 1; xxvi. 21; xxix. 22.

⁶Num. xxi. 23, 24.

⁷Judg. xii. 1-6. ⁸2 Sam. ii 22, 28.

⁹2 Chron. xxv. 17-23.

* 'Whoso chyrneth mylck maketh butter; he that rubbeth his nose maketh it blede, and he that causeth wrath bryngeth forth strife.'--Bp. COVERDALE.

An humble heart will repress the sparks of this unholy fire. A sorrowful spirit for the evil of our thoughts is a component part of the cure. (Eccles. vii. 4.) We should not readily indulge the sin, for which we had been truly humbled before our God. Whereas in the want of this genuine spirit, how reluctant we are to acknowledge our offence towards each other! We can always find some good reason for *lifting up ourselves, or for thinking evil*. And how hard it goes with our proud tempers to be the first *to lay our hands upon our mouths*! How much more ready are we to open our mouths in self-justification, than in self-abasement. Thus, instead of quenching, *we force, wrath*. Instead of the "meekness of wisdom," there "is envy and strife, confusion, and every evil work" (Jam. iii. 13, 16); enmity between nominal professors of the gospel, and distance even between those, who believe themselves to be members of the same body, heirs of the same inheritance,¹ and bound by the same obligation to love one another.² Oh! hasten the blessed time, when the Church shall be fully transformed into the image of her Divine Lord; when it shall be a Church of perfect love in a world of love!

CHAPTER XXXI.

1. *The words of King Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him.* 2. *What, my son? and what the son of my womb? and what, the son of my vows.*

OF King Lemuel we know no more than of the prophet Agur in the last chapter.* All that we know is, that he was endowed, like many of God's people (Ps. cxvi. 16. 2 Tim. i. 5; iii. 15), with the invaluable blessing of a godly mother; who, like Deborah of old (Judg. v. 1), was honoured of God to be the author of a chapter of the sacred; volume.

What an animating burst from the yearning of a mother's heart! *What! my son-the son of my womb-of my vows!* Happy mother-

¹ Eph. iv. 4-6.

² John, xiii. 34, 35.

*Both have been identified with Solomon, though without any historical evidence. It seems unlikely, that Solomon, having given his own name more than once in this book (chap. i. 1; x. 1,) should give two mystical names at the close, without any distinct personal application. Nor is there any scriptural testimony in favour of Bathsheba, that would lead us to stamp her with this peculiar honour as one of the writers of God's word. 'The admonitory verses composed for King Lemuel by his mother, when in the flower of youth and high expectation, are an inimitable production, as well in respect to their actual materials, as the delicacy with which they are selected. Instead of attempting to lay down rules concerning matters of state and political government; the illustrious writer confines herself, with the nicest and most becoming art, to a recommendation of the gentler virtues, of temperance, benevolence, and mercy, and a minute and unparalleled delineation of the female character, which might bid fairest to promote the happiness of her son in connubial life.'--Dr. GOOD.

when *the son of her womb is the son of her vows!* like Samuel, a dedicated child, a child of many prayers; "asked of the Lord, let into his service." (1 Sam. i. 11.) If there were more Hannahs, would there not be more Samuels? If thou wouldst have, Christian mother, thy child a Samuel or an Augustine, be thyself a Hannah or a Monica. The child of thy prayers, of thy vows, and of thy tears, will be in the Lord's best time the child of thy praises, thy rejoicings, thy richest consolation. Yet thy faith will not end with the dedication of thy child. *Lemuel--the son of her vows--his mother taught him.* And such is the practical habit of godliness, that faith in vowing quickens diligence in teaching. The child, *truly consecrated*, will be "brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." (Eph. vi. 4.)

3. *Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings.* 4. *It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine: nor for princes strong drink:* 5. *Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert (alter, marg.) the judgment of any of the afflicted,* (all the sons of affliction, marg.) 6. *Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts* (bitter of soul, marg.) 7. *Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.*

Solomon has given us his father's wise counsels. (Chap. iv. 4.) Lemuel gives us his mother's. Both have an equal claim to reverence. (Chap. i. 8.) Filled with deep anxiety, the impassioned tenderness bursts out in this godly mother, as if some besetting enticements were imminent, perhaps already working poison in her beloved son. *What! my son--the son of my womb--of my vows?* My heart is full. I must give vent. Have I endured all this travail in vain? Beware--*Give not thy strength unto women.* What a beacon had Solomon set up! (Chap. ii. v. vii.) What a beacon had he himself become! (Neh. xiii. 26.) These forbidden gratifications were *ways that destroy kings*. Such was the judgment upon David. His kingly authority was shaken. (2 Sam. xii. 9, 10.) Solomon's sin *destroyed* his kingdom. (1 Kings, xi. 11.) The fruit of this sin is shame. The end of it, without repentance, is death.

The anxious mother next warns against another cognate sin--intemperance. (Hos. iv. 11.) The vice that degrades a man into a beast, is shameful to all, specially unseemly *for kings*. They are "the city set upon a hill." Men look, or ought to look, to them for guidance and example. What a sight *for kings to drink wine and strong drink--to be given to it!* Witness Elah¹--Benhadad²--Belshazzar--"the princes of Israel made sick with bottles of wine!"³ How was their high office

¹ 1 Kings, xvi. 8, 9.

² Ib. xx. 16.

³ Hos. vii. 5.

and glory covered with shame! Sometimes it is pleaded as an excuse for sin. But if the drunken king *forgets the law, and perverts the judgment*,* will he not be held responsible? Ahasuerus was doubtless responsible for his unseemly conduct to Vashti.¹ Herod murdered the Baptist at an ungodly feast.² Priest and prophet "err through *strong drink*."³ A wise veto therefore is set for the rulers of the Church--"not given to wine."⁴

And yet the abuse of God's blessing does not destroy their use. Wine is the gift of God. "It maketh glad the heart of man." (Ps. civ. 14, 15.) Yea--by a bold figure of its refreshment--it is said to "cheer God" also. (Judg. ix. 13.) Yet it is *not for kings*--for their indulgences and sinful excitement, but for those that need it. As restoratives and refreshments cordials are seasonable in the hour of need. *Give strong drink to him that is ready to perish*, as the Samaritan gave it to the wounded traveller (Luke, x. 34); as Paul prescribed it for "the infirmities" of his beloved son in the faith. (1 Tim. v. 23.) Many a sinking spirit may be revived, and *forget his misery* under a well-timed restorative. The rule therefore of love and self-denial is--Instead of wasting that upon thyself, in the indulgence of appetite, which will only debase thy nature; see that thou dispense thy luxuries among those, who really require them. Seek out cases of penury and wasting misery. Let it be an honour to thee to bring in the poor that is cast out into thine house, *that he may forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more*.† May not this remind us of the Messenger of love, dealing with those *that are ready to perish*? (Isa. lxi. 1, 2. Matt. xi. 28.) Their conscience is loaded with guilt. Their *hearts are heavy* with a burden which they can neither bear nor be rid of. He tells them of God's love to sinners; the ransom found for them; the welcome assured to them. This is a cordial of *strong drink*, and wine such as they need. The heavy *heart* becomes "no more sad." (1 Sam. i. 18. Acts, xvi. 34.) The former *poverty is forgotten*, and his *misery is remembered no more*, and "the blessing of him that was ready to perish comes" upon him "that bringeth the good tidings." Happy minister, gifted like his divine Master, with the "tongue of the learned, that he should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary." (Isa. 1. 4.)

¹ Esther, i. 10, 11.

² Mark, vi. 21-28.

³ Isa. xxviii. 7; lvi. 12.

⁴ 1 Tim. iii. 3. Titus, i. 7.

* A woman wrongly condemned by Philip of Macedon, when drunk, boldly exclaimed --'I appeal to Philip, but it shall be when he is sober.' Roused by the appeal, the monarch examined the cause, and gave a righteous judgment.

† This was the classical idea of the power of wine,--'Huic calix mulsi impingendus. *ut plorare desinat*.--CICERO, Tuscul. 3., 'Nunc vino pellite curas.'--HOR. *Od.* 1. i. 7. 'Vinum obliviosum' (blotting out the remembrance of evil).--Tb. *Od.* l. ii. 7. 'Tunc dolor et curae rugaque frontis abit.'--Ovid. The mixed wine which Helena gave to Telemachus, called Nepenthes, had such an effect as to remove sorrow, and to bury in forgetfulness past evils. --*Odyss.* D. 220, 221. Comp. Mark, xv. 23.

8. *Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction.* 9. *Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.*

Very soundly does the wise mother inculcate mercy upon her royal son. This is one of the pillars of the king's throne. (Chap. xx. 28.) He must be the Father of his people, employing all his authority to protect those, who cannot protect themselves. (Ps. lxxii. 12-14.) No case of distress, when coming to his knowledge, should be below his attention. Thus our law makes the judge the counsel for the prisoner, who is unable to plead for himself--*opening his mouth for the dumb*. Thus should magistrates more carefully consider, that no one should lose his just right from want of ability to defend it.¹ Those who are, or appear to be, *appointed to destruction*, should have their fair and open course to plead, and save their lives.²

This it was, that made the difference between the prosperity of godly Josiah and the ruin of his wicked son. (Jer. xxii. 15-19.) How repeatedly did Jonathan *open his mouth* for his friend *appointed for destruction*!³ How effectively did Esther plead the cause of her helpless and devoted people! (Esth. vii. 3,4.) To descend into lower ranks (for why should we restrict these wise injunctions within the narrow limits of royalty?) what a complete pattern of this mercy does Job exhibit! "Eyes as he was to the blind, and feet to the lame," doubtless he perfected his character as "a father to the poor, by being *a mouth to the dumb*. (Job, xxix. 15, 16.) How was Ebedmelech honoured for this merciful advocacy of the condemned!⁴ How awful is the threatened vengeance for the neglect of this mercy!⁵ Alas! Jesus, though he had found an advocate in earlier times, yet stood as a sheep before his shearers--*dumb, appointed for destruction*. None was found to *open his mouth* for the divine afflicted victim.⁶ And yet how does he reverse this picture of pitiless neglect, in his powerful effectual pleading *in the cause of those*, whom the voice of justice so loudly, so justly *appoints for destruction*! Let his representatives on earth study the character of their king in heaven, and be conformed more fully to his image of forgiveness and love.

10. *Who can find a virtuous woman! for her price is above rubies.*

We now come to the principal part of the chapter. The wise mother of Lemuel had warned her royal son against the seduction of evil women, and its attendant temptations, and given him wholesome rules for government. She now sets before him the full-length portrait of a

¹ Deut. xvi. 18-20. Ps. lxxxii. 3, 4.

³ 1 Sam. xix. 4-7; xx. 32; xxii. 14, 15.

⁵ Chap. xxiv. 11, 12. Jer. v. 28, 29.

² Contrast 1 Kings, xxi. 9-13, with John, vii. 51.

⁴ Jer. xxxviii. 8, 9; xxxix. 15-18.

⁶ Isa. liii. 7. Matt. xxvi. 59, 63.

virtuous woman--that choicest gift, which is emphatically said to be "from the Lord." (Chap. xix. 14.) It is an elegant poem of twenty-two verses--like the hundred and nineteenth Psalm, artificially constructed --each verse beginning with one of the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet.* It describes a wife, a mistress, and a mother. 'All mothers and mistresses should teach the female pupils under their care to read and learn it by heart.† The more deeply it is studied--provided only it be *practically* studied--the more will its beauty be understood and felt. Genuine simple fact without colouring or pretensions commends the character to our warmest interest.

So rare is this treasure, that the challenge is given--"*Who can find a virtuous woman?*" (Comp. chap. xx. 6.) Abraham sent to a distant land for this inestimable blessing for his beloved son. (Gen. xxiv. 3, 4.) Perhaps one reason of the rarity of the gift is, that it is so seldom sought. Too often is the search made for accomplishments, not for *virtues*; for external and adventitious recommendations, rather than for internal godly worth.

The enquiry also implies the value of the gift when found. Even Adam's portion in innocence was not complete, till his bountiful Father "made him a help-meet for him." (Ib. ii. 18.) Truly *her price* is above *rubies*. No treasure is comparable to her.¹ It is not too much to say with the prince of heathen philosophy--'If women be good, the half of the commonwealth may be happy where they are.'[‡]

11. *The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.* 12. *She will do him good, and not evil, all the days of her life.*

The price of the virtuous woman has been told. Her different features will now be given. The first lines of the portrait describe her character as a wife. Her fidelity, oneness of heart, and affectionate dutyfulness, make the *heart of her husband safely to trust in her.*§ He feels

¹ Comp. Eccus. vii. 19; xxv. 13-18.

* Comp. also Ps. cxlv. The Lamentations of Jeremiah.

† Bp. HORNE'S *Sermon on the Female Character*. See the counterpart of "the virtuous man" in the exquisite picture, which the sorrowful patriarch drew of the simple habit and feelings of his own life. Job, xxix.-xxxi.

‡ ARIST. *Rhet.* i. 5. Comp. *Polit* ii. 9.

§ Such was Luther's description of his wife --'The greatest gift of God is a pious amiable spouse, who fears God, loves his house, and with *whom one can live in perfect confidence.*' D' AUBIGNE'S *Hist. of Reformation*, book x. chap. xiii. Contrast with this picture, chap. vii. 18-20. Gen. xxxix 19, 20. Isaac Walton's account of Bp. Sanderson's wife was much after Solomon's pattern--'A wife, that made his life happy, by being always content, when he was cheerful; that was always cheerful when he was content; that divided her joys with him, and abated of his sorrow by bearing a part of that burden; a wife that demonstrated her affection by a cheerful obedience to all his desires during the whole course of his life.'--*Life of Bp. Sanderson*. Ambrose expounds the woman to be the Church, and explains *the confidence of her husband* as the ground of her perseverance--adding--'that it is not the heart of her Lord, who may be deceived, but of her husband, which cannot be mis-

his comfort to be regarded, his burdens relieved, and his mind exempted from many teasing vexations. He is at ease in constrained absence from home, having left his interests safe in her keeping; while he is sure, that his return will be welcomed with the gladdening smile. A faithful wife and a confiding husband thus mutually bless each other. With such a jewel for his wife, the husband has no misgivings. His home is the home of his heart. He needs not to look into the matters entrusted to her with suspicious eye. He has no reserves or jealousies. Ruling in this sphere without, he encourages her to rule in her sphere within. All is conducted with such prudence and economy, that he *has no need of spoil*, no temptation to unjust gain; *no need* to leave his happy home, in order to enrich himself with the soldier's *spoils*. The attachment of such a wife is as lasting, as the time of their union--constant--consistent. Instead of abusing confidence, she only seeks to make herself daily more worthy of it; not fretful and uncertain, caring "how she may please her husband" (1 Cor. vii. 34), *doing him good, and not evil, all the days of her life*. Would that it were always so! But look at Eve--the help-meet¹ becoming a tempter; Solomon's wives drawing away his heart;² Jezebel stirring up her husband to abominable wickedness;³ Job's wife calling upon her husband to "curse God, and die;"⁴ the painful cross of "the brawling woman"⁵--this is a fearful contrast--*evil, not good*. Often again is it a mixture of *evil with the good*. Rebekah caring for her husband in the act of opposition to God, yet wickedly deceiving him;⁶ Rachel loving Jacob, yet bringing idolatry into his family;⁷ Michal *doing good* to David at first in preserving his life, *evil* afterwards in despising him as a servant of God.⁸ Often we hear of prudent management, but not in the fear of God, connected with a teasing temper. But in this picture it is *good, and not evil*.

Her husband's comfort is her interest and her rest. To live for him is her highest happiness. Even if her minute attentions to this object are not always noticed, yet never will she harbour the suspicion of indifference or unkindness; nor will she return fancied neglect with sullenness, or by affected or morbid sensibility force on a feverish interchange of expression, which has little substantial foundation.

This course of disinterested regard and devoted affection, when conducted on Christian principles, commends most graciously the 'holy and honourable estate of matrimony.' If it implies subjection, it involves no degradation. Indeed no greater glory could be desired, than that

taken.' In loc. Would such a conceit with any other name escape severe castigation? Augustine's Exposition is much in the same character--fancy, not judgment.--*De Temper. Serm.* p. 217. Many Romish commentators apply this description to the Virgin."

¹ Gen. ii. 18, with iii. 6.

² 1 Kings, xi. 1-5.

³ Ib. xxi. 25.

⁴ Job, ii. 9.

⁵ Chap. xxi. 9; xxv. 24.

⁶ Gen. xxvii.

⁷ Ib. xxxi. 19; xxxv. 1-4.

⁸ 1 Sam. xix. 12. 2 Sam. vi. 20-22.

which is given to it, that it should illustrate "the great mystery,"--
 "Christ and his Church,"¹ the identity of interest between them; her
 trials his;² his cause hers.³

13. *She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands.*
 14. *She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar.*
 15. *She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her house-*
hold, and a portion to her maidens. 16. *She considereth a field, and*
buyeth it; with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. 17. *She*
girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms. 18. *She*
perceiveth (tasteth, marg.) that her merchandize is good: her candle
goeth not out by night. 19. *She layeth her hands to the spindle, and*
her hands hold the distaff. 20. *She stretcheth out (spreadeth, marg.)*
her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.
 21. *She is not afraid of the snow for her household, for all her house-*
hold are clothed with scarlet (double garments, marg.) 22. *She*
maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple.
 23. *Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the*
elders of the land. 24. *She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and*
delivereth girdles unto the merchant. 25. *Strength and honour are her*
clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. 26. *She openeth her*
mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. 27.
She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread
of idleness.

This lovely character is drawn according to the usage of ancient times; though the general principles are of universal application. It describes not only the wife of a man of rank, but a wise, useful, and godly matron in her domestic responsibilities. It is "a woman professing godliness, "adorned" with good works" (1 Tim. ii. 10); a Mary no less than a Martha. 'It may be necessary to retouch the lines of the picture, that have been obscured by length of years; in plain terms --to explain some parts of the description, which relate to ancient manners and customs, and to shew how they may be usefully applied to those of our own age and country.'*

One thing however is most remarkable. The standard of godliness here exhibited is not that of a religious recluse, shut up from active obligations, under the pretence of greater sanctity and consecration to God. Here are none of those habits of monastic asceticism, that are now extolled as the highest point of Christian perfection. One half at least of the picture of the *virtuous woman* is occupied with her personal and domestic industry. What a rebuke also does this convey to a

¹ Eph. v. 32.

² Acts, ix. 4.

³ Ps. cxx.xix. 22.

* Bp. Horne, *ut supra*.

self-indulgent inactivity! Her several employments admirably illustrate genuine simplicity of manners, and practical, yet liberal economy. This is indeed a difficult and rare attainment, economy without a niggardly spirit; seen and felt as little as possible, and conducted with all care and consideration of the comfort of the family.

But let us look more minutely into the features of the portrait drawn before us. *Her personal habits are full of energy.* Manual labour, even menial service, in olden times was the employment of females in the highest ranks.* Self-denial is here a main principle.--*The virtuous woman* goes before her servants in diligence, no less than in dignity; imposing nothing upon them, which she had not first bound upon herself, ruling her household most efficiently by the government of herself. Thus *she seeks* out her materials for work. Her needle is at the service of her family. Instead of a suppressed murmur at some inconvenient demand, she sets the pattern of *working willingly with her hands*. Instead of loitering herself, while they were labouring, she counts it no shame to be employed at the *spindle and distaff*.† She is early and late at her work, *rising in the night*.‡ The fruit of her work she turns to good account. She exchanges it in commerce for food *brought from far*. Her merchandize is good in quality--*tapestry, fine linen, and girdles delivered to the merchant*.§ Her whole soul is in her work--*girding her loins with strength, and strengthening her arms*--ready to do any work befitting her sex and station. The land has also her due share of attention. Ever careful for her husband's interests, she *considers* the value of *a field*; and, if it be a good purchase, she *buys* it, *and plants the vineyard* for the best produce.

One more particular connected with her character as a wife is mentioned--*her dress*. This in a woman of superior rank, fit for a king, is

* Sarah, Gen. xviii. 6-8; Rebekah, xxiv. 18-20, with 12-14; Rachel, xxix. 9, 10; the daughters of the Prince of Midian, Exod. ii. 16: the daughter of a king. 2 Sam. xiii. 5-9.

† Compare PAXTON'S *Illustrations*, ii. 418-420. HOM. *Il.* I. 128. Z. 490, 491. XI. 440. *Odyss.* A. 357. E. 62. Ovid advises maidens, if they would have the favour of Minerva, to learn to use the distaff, to card, and spin (*Fasti*, Lib. iii.) Comp. Met. L. iv. v.34. VIRG. *Georg.* iv. 348. Classic writers mention Lucretia found spinning with her maids, when her husband paid her a visit from the camp. The wool spun by Tarquin's wife long remained with a distaff and spindle in the temple. Alexander the Great is said to have shewn to the Persian princesses his garments made by his mother. Augustus--it is said--would wear no clothes, but such as were made by the members of his own family. (BURDER'S *Oriental Customs*.) Our English records of female royalty furnish similar proofs of hand-industry. The magnificent far-famed tapestry of Bayeux was the work of William I.'s queen. The messengers of Henry to Katherine of Arragon, announcing her divorce. found her with a skein of red silk round her neck being at work with her maids. Beautiful memorials are still preserved of Queen Katherine Parr's manual skill. See Miss STRICKLAND'S *Queens of England*--a work however, not to be read without caution from the unsound principles pervading it.

‡ See Parkhurst--Virgil's beautiful picture of the industrious wife. *Aen.* viii. 407

§ See PAXTON'S *Illustrations*, ii. 420.--Girdles, a rich article of dress both of men (2 Sam. xviii. 11), and women. Isa. iii. 24. *The Merchant*--'The Canaanite.' Heb. LXX.

of course according to her station. *Her clothing is silk* and purple.* Nor does this contravene the New Testament rule of sobriety.¹ It only commends her station in consistency with the purest simplicity of godliness. In a more general application, the dress should be suitable, so as to maintain the rank of presidency in the house. It is possible to pay too little, as well as too much, attention to this point; and it is not always that Christian women pay to it the regard *precisely* due, separate from both extremes. No increase of active exercise can excuse the neglect of those graces, which, trifling as they seem, when set out on right principles, form a component part of an attractive profession. The primary respect inculcated to the inward "adorning"² in no way renders the exterior grace a nullity. Even in isolated seclusion some regard would be due; much more, as suited to the gradation which Providence has assigned; and as commanding an husband's respect, who justly claims, that his wife's exterior, *so far as she is concerned*, should continue to be not less pleasing, than when at first his heart was drawn to her.

We now again observe her conduct as a mistress. And here also her praise is not, that she spends her time in devotional exercises (though these, as "a woman that feareth the Lord" (Verse 30), she duly prizes); but that, according to the Scriptural canon, "she guides her house" (1 Tim. v. 14), watching carefully over her charge, distributing both her meat and her work in due proportion, and "in due season." This is her responsibility. If "man goeth forth to his work, and to his labour till the evening" (Ps. civ. 23), the woman finds her work as "a keeper at home." (Tit. ii. 5.) And beautiful indeed is it to see, how by her industry, self-denial, and heartiness she "buildeth her house." (Chap. xiv. 1.) *She rises while it is yet night*, not for the sake of being admired and talked of, but to *give meat to her household*. The delicacy also, with which she preserves her own sphere, is remarkable. For while she provides food for the whole *household*: she *giveth the portion*--that is--of work--not to the man-servants (these with great propriety she leaves to her husband), but *to her maidens*.† Their clothing is also provided with every regard to their comfort. *She is not afraid of snow for them*. They are clothed with scarlet, or rather with double garments,[‡] well clad for a severe winter. *So well does she look to the ways of her household*, such untiring energy does she shew in every department, that none can accuse her of *eating the bread of idleness*. In

¹ 1 Tim. ii. 9. 1 Pet. iii. 3.

² 1 Pet. iii. 4. 1 Tim. ii. 10.

* Parkhurst translates it, 'Fine white linen.' Holden doubts whether the article of silk was known to the Jews at this early age. Gibbon mentions it as not known beyond the Chinese territories, whence it originally came, till the reign of Justinian. Chap. xl.

† See Foxe's beautiful picture of Anne Boleyn as the mistress of her household, v. 63.

‡ 'Duplicibus penulis'--such as the wife of Hector made. HOM. II. XI. 441. 'All her household folks are double clothed.' Bp. COVERDALE.

her household, order is the principle of her rule. Timely orders are given, and they must be obeyed. Nothing is neglected, that belongs to order, sobriety, economy, or general management. Well does she understand the exact work of each under her care, and their different abilities; when they need to be directed, and when they may be left to their own responsibility; what belongs to, and what is beyond, her own province of superintendence.

But never let the mistress contract her inspection within the sphere of a mere housekeeper, with her whole time and mind employed in the external routine of her household. While she exercises sound discipline and maternal anxiety, her primary principle is a Christian conscience for their highest interests; *looking well* to their moral habits, their religious instruction, and attendance on the means of grace; giving them time for secret prayer, and reading the word of God,* bringing them to the daily ordinance of family worship; inculcating the careful observance of the Sabbath; anxiously watching over their manners, habits, and connections. While we would be careful not to over-work them, yet never let them *eat the bread of idleness*. If they have nothing to do for us, let them work for God. In short; let us consider them, not as beasts of burden, not as mere mercenaries; but as a solemn and responsible trust for God and for eternity. Who can have the claim to *a virtuous woman*, who does not feel this weight of family responsibility?

Nor is her provident care limited to her own dependants. Her *spindle and distaff* are worked, not for herself only, or *for her household*, but for *the poor and needy*. And, having first "drawn out her soul" (Isa. lviii. 10), *she stretcheth out her hands* (Deut. xv. 7, 8), to embrace those at a distance from her with the flow of her love; and thus "the blessing of those that were ready to perish cometh upon her." (Job, xxix. 13. Acts, ix. 39.) Her spirit and manner also are of the same character; all in full accordance with her professions. Clever, brisk, and managing minds are often deficient in the softer graces. Their tongues are unrestrained, and lawless under provocation. Children, servants, and neighbours, suffer from this revolting hardness, and find "it better to dwell in a corner of the house-top, than with a brawling woman in a wide house." (Chap. xxi. 9.) But *the godly matron* has not only the law of love in her heart, but *wisdom in her mouth, and in tongue the law of kindness*. The same love that binds her heart, governs her tongue, not with the caprice, but with the *law, of kindness*--a law, which she receives from *wisdom*, and which gives the mould to her

*Esther must surely have been in the habit of instructing her maidens; else they could not have been girded for the extraordinary services of the fast, iv. 16. Thus it is recorded of one, who shone as a sparkling jewel in the licentious court of Charles II., that 'she provided her servants books to read, prayers to use by themselves, and constantly instructed them herself in the principles of religion.'--*Life of Mrs. Godolphin*, p. 195.

whole spirit, so that 'she says nothing that is foolish, nothing that is ill-natured.* Richly endued with "the wisdom that is from above, she is "gentle, and easy to be entreated; pitiful, courteous." (Jam. iii. 17. 1 Pet. iii. 8.)

Thus indeed "*a virtuous woman* is a crown to her husband." (Chap. xii. 4.) *He is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land*; as blessed with no common treasures of happiness; 'as indebted perhaps for his promotion to the wealth acquired by her management at home, and, it may be, for the preservation and establishment of his virtue, to the encouragement furnished by her example and conversation.'†

For herself--manifest and manifold blessings rest upon her. *Strength is the clothing* of her inner man. Christian courage and resolution lift her up above appalling difficulties. *The clothing of honour* stamps her with the Lord's acceptance, as his faithful servant, the child of his grace, and the heir of his glory. She rejoices, not only in her present happiness, but *in time to come*. Having been so wisely provident for the morrow, she is not overburdened with its cares. Having lived in the *fear of God*, and honoured her God with the fruits of righteousness, there is sunshine in her hour of trial, "in the valley of the shadow of death," in the unclouded day of eternity. *She shall rejoice in time to come*, when the ministering angels, and with them the blessed recipients of her bounty (Luke, xvi. 9), shall welcome this daughter of Jerusalem "into the joy of the Lord."

28. *Her children arise up, and call her blessed: her husband also, and he praiseth, her.* 29. *'Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.'* 30. *Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.* 31. *Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.*
The *virtuous woman* is obviously subserving her own interest. For

* Bp. Horne. Comp. Eccclus. xxxvi. 23. Hooker probably had the portrait before his eyes, when in his exquisite funeral sermon for his '*virtuous* gentlewoman' he enumerates 'among so many virtues hearty devotion towards God, towards poverty tender compassion; motherly affection towards servants; towards friends even serviceable kindness; mild behaviour and harmless meaning towards all.'--*Remedy against Sorrow and Fear*. Bp. Taylor's finely-drawn portrait of Lady Carbery is after the same pattern of completeness. 'If we look on her as a wife, she was chaste and loving, discreet and humble. If we remember her as a mother, she was kind and severe, careful and prudent, very tender, and not at all fond; a greater lover of her children's souls than of their bodies, and one that would value them more by the strict rules of honour and proper worth, than by their relation to herself. Her servants found her prudent and fit to govern, and yet open-handed and apt to reward; a just exalter of their duty, and a great rewarder of their diligence.'--*Funeral Sermon*. Mrs. Godolphin's Biographer mentions her 'employing herself (especially in Lent) in working for poor people, cutting out and making waistcoats, and other necessary coverings, which she constantly distributed among them, like another Dorcas, spending much of her time, and no little of her money in relieving, visiting and inquiring of them out.'--*Life*, pp. 176, 177, 182.

† Bp. Horne.

what greater earthly happiness could she know, than *her children's* reverence, and her husband's *blessing*? We may picture to ourselves her condition--crowned with years; *her children* grown up; perhaps themselves surrounded with families, and endeavouring to train them, as themselves had been trained. Their mother is constantly before their eyes. Her tender guidance, her wise counsels, her loving discipline, her holy example, are vividly kept in remembrance. They cease *not to call her blessed*, and to bless the Lord for her, as his invaluable gift. No less warmly does *her husband praise* her. His attachment to her was grounded, not on the *deceitful and vain* charms of beauty, but on *the fear of the Lord*. She is therefore in his eyes to the end, the stay of his declining years, the soother of his cares, the counsellor of his perplexities, the comforter of his sorrows, the sunshine of his earthly joys. (Ecclus. xxxvi. 23, 24.) Both *children and husband* combine in the grateful acknowledgment,-- *Many daughters have done virtuously; but thou excellest them all*.

But why--it may be asked--do external recommendations form no part of this portrait? All that is described is solid excellence; and *favour is deceitful*. A graceful form and mien often end in disappointment, more bitter than words can tell. Often do they furnish a cover for the vilest corruptions. And then *beauty*--what a fading *vanity* it is!* One fit of sickness sweeps it away. (Ps. xxxix. 11.) Sorrow and care wither its charms. (Ib. vi. 7. P. T.) And even while it remains, it is little connected with happiness.¹ It proves itself the fruitful occasion of trouble, the source of many hurtful temptations and snares;² and, without substantial principle, to a well-judging mind it becomes an object of disgust rather than of attraction. (Chap. xi. 22.)

The portrait, here pencilled by divine inspiration, begins with the touch of a *virtuous woman*, and fills up the sketch with the lineaments of a *woman, that feareth the Lord*. (Verses 10, 30.) For the lovely features described--her fidelity to her husband, her active personal habits, her good management and diligence in her family, her consideration for the necessities and comforts of others, her watchfulness of conduct, her tenderness for the poor and afflicted, her kind and courteous behaviour to all--this completeness of character and grace could only flow from that *virtue*, which is identified with vital godliness. They are the good fruit, that "prove the tree to be good." (Matt. vii. 17.) They are such fruit, flowing from a right principle, as the natural corrupt stock of man could never produce.

The virtuous woman seeks not the praise of men. Content to be known and loved within her own circle, she never presses herself into

¹ Gen. xxix. 17; xxx. 1, 2.

² Chap. vi. 25, 26. Gen. xii 11-19; xx. 1. 2, 11; xxvi. 7. 2 Sam. xi. 2; xiii. 1.

*Gen. xii. 14, with xxiii. 4. 1 Pet. i. 24. Comp. Virg. Eclog. ii. 17, 18.

notice. But as a public blessing, she cannot be hid. (Acts, ix. 39.) And if she has no herald to sound her praise, all will say--*Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates.* 'Let every one'--says Bishop Patrick--'extol her virtue. Let her not want the just commendation of her-pious labours. But while some are magnified for the nobleness of the stock, from whence they sprung; others for their fortune; others for their beauty; others for other things; let the good deeds, which she herself hath done, be publicly praised in the greatest assemblies; where, if all men should be silent, her own works will declare her excellent worth.' Add to this--as *her works praise her in the gates*, so will they "follow her. The memory of the just is blessed." (Rev. xiv. 13. Chap. x. 7.) All will see in her the light and lustre of a sound and practical profession; that the promises of godliness are the richest gain, the grace of God the best portion, and his favour the highest honour.

If this picture be viewed as an exhibition of godliness, we observe that religion does not slacken attention to temporal duties. It rather renders a woman scrupulously exact in all her household obligations, in everything within her province; careful not by her negligence to bring reproach upon her holy profession. Why should she be careless or slovenly, putting her important duties out of time and out of place? Of her it is specially expected, as the summing up of all her practical exercises, that "she should have diligently followed every good work." (1 Tim. v. 10.)

How valuable also is this picture, as a directory for the marriage choice! Let *virtue*, not *beauty*, be the primary object. Set against the *vanity of beauty* the true happiness, connected with *a woman that feareth the Lord*. Here is the solid basis of happiness. 'If'--says Bp. Beveridge--'I choose her for her *beauty*, I shall love her no longer than while that continues; and then farewell at once both duty and delight. But if I love her for her virtues; then, though all other sandy foundations fail, yet will my happiness remain entire!† The external choice was the cause of the destruction of the world. (Gen. vi. 2-7.) A flood of iniquity came into a godly man's family from the self-pleasing delusion. (2 Chron. xviii. 1 ; xxi. 5, 6.) The godly choice is uniformly stamped with the seal of divine acceptance.

In fine--'if women'--says pious Bishop Pilkington--'would learn what God will plague them for, and how; let them read the third chapter of the prophet Esay. And if they will learn what God willeth them to do, and be occupied withal, though they be of the best sort, let them read the last chapter of the Proverbs. It is enough to note it, and point it out to them that *will* learn.‡ That which is last to be

* *In loco.*

† Resolution ii.

‡ Works, Parker Society Edit. p. 381.

done'--concludes an old Expositor—' is to mark it well and let every woman strive to make it agree to herself as much as she can. Let every man be ashamed, that any woman shall excel him in virtue and godliness.'*

'Thus--and once more'--says pious Matthew Henry, in his quaint style--'is shut up this looking-glass for ladies, which they are desired to open and dress themselves by; and if they do so, their adorning will I be found to praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.†

We would conclude with a brief summary of a few prominent points involved in the study of this most instructive Book.

Let us observe the connection between inward principle and outward conduct. Never let it be forgotten, that the exercises, here described or inculcated, suppose an internal source. It is the light within, that shines without. The hidden life is thus manifested. "The fountain sendeth forth" its wholesome waters. The good tree bringeth forth good fruit. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things." (Matt. xii. 33, 35.) These therefore are the manifestations, not the innate principles. They flow from the cultivation of the source within. Nothing permanent is produced by change of opinion, excitement of feeling, conviction of conscience, but by a new mould of the heart. The "soft answer" (Chap. xv. 1) is the outward exhibition of the softened and humble heart. The religion of sincere purposes, however promising, withers away, "having no root in itself." (Matt. xiii. 21.) The ways and fashions of the world therefore rule with a far mightier power, than the dictates of God's word, or the voice of conscience. The external apprehensions of the Christian system also are powerless without the internal principle. They exhibit a body of truth indeed, but a body without life, without any spring of influence or consolation. Religion, grounded in the heart, will regulate the outward conduct, and put everything in its proper place and proportion.

Let us mark also the flow of true happiness throughout the whole sphere of godliness. Often has the wise man painted this connection with the most glowing interest.¹ Most important is it to leave this impression upon the minds of all, specially of our young, readers, that religion is a joyous thing. With the world it is a matter to be endured, not to be enjoyed. The Pharisaic professor conceives of much to be done, but nothing to be enjoyed. With him it is a serious and most weighty concern. But no gleam of sunshine has he ever found in it. The man of pleasure has no conception of religion, except as the atmosphere of

¹ Chap. iii. 13-18; iv. 4-13; viii. 17-21, 32-36.

*Jermin *in loco*.

† *In loco*.

gloom; as absurd as to speak; of the darkness of noonday. But notwithstanding all these misconceptions, no reality is more undoubted than this--Holiness is happiness. It is not indeed the mirth of the fool, or the giddy gaiety of the thoughtless. But it is the only thing, that deserves the name of happiness; the only solid, permanent principle of enjoyment.

'Happy the believer '--as an eloquent Preacher forcibly puts it--'who in his warfare with the enemies of his salvation, is able to oppose pleasure to pleasure, delight to delight; the pleasures of prayer and meditation to the pleasures of the world; the delights of silence and retirement to those of parties of dissipation or of public amusement. Such a man is steady and unmoved in the performance of his duties; and because he is man, and man cannot help loving what opens to him sources of joy; such a man is attached to religion by motives like those, that lead men of the world to attach themselves to the objects of their passions, because they procure him unspeakable pleasure.'* In fact the world's contracted vision little qualifies them to pass judgment on what they have never apprehended. They see our infirmities, not our graces; our cross, not our crown; our affliction, not the "joy in the Holy Ghost," which compensates and infinitely overpays for all that we can endure.

We wonder not, therefore, that the unenlightened mind naturally associates religion with restraint, never with freedom or confidence. But in fact actions, that are valued according to their conformity with the will of God, though they be secular in their character, are a part of his service, and ensure his acceptance. Taking up this tight standard, we shall be able to resist our ruling passion. We shall occupy no doubtful position. We shall adopt no questionable course. We shall not lend the influence of our character to the spirit of this world. We shall feel, that we have only one object--only one obligation--to maintain the honour of our God. And yet this yoke of strict discipline is our happiness, not our burden. It is linked with a foretaste of heavenly happiness, of which none of us have an adequate conception. Speculative religion is indeed dry and barren. Practical godliness is rich in its delights.¹ And while the defect of earthly joy is, that it comes to an end; the perfection of this happiness is, that it will endure throughout eternity. Yes, truly--it is not a mere temporary privilege. It is not a provision for drying our eyes, and diverting our sorrow for a time. It is "everlasting consolation." (2 Thess. ii. 16.) It is consolation, of which the present joy arises from the belief, that it will be everlasting, from looking forward and foretasting that which should be everlasting. Surely then in our most sorrowful hours we have far

¹ See Ps. xix. 11; cxix. 14, 127. Isa. xxxii 17. Jam. i. 25.

* Saurin's *Sermons*, quoted by Alexander Knox, *Remains*, iii: 365.

more reason for joy than for mourning; and we are hasting onward to the home, where "the days of our mourning will be ended" (Isa. lx. 20) for ever.

It is of great moment to remark the wise man's estimate of real good. Every particle of the chief good he centres in God. To find him is life.¹ To fear him is wisdom.² To trust him is happiness.³ To love him is substantial treasure.⁴ To neglect him is certain ruin.⁵ Now man is naturally an idolator. Himself is his centre, his object, his end. Instead of submitting to guidance, he guides himself. He disputes the sovereignty with God. He would amend the laws of the Great Law-giver. Need we add--"This his way is his folly?" (Ps. xlix. 13.) What then is the true good? "Acquaint thyself with God, and be at peace." (Job, xxii. 21.) Not real, but known excellence quickens the desire. Our known God will be our portion.⁶ He will claim our entire service.⁷ He will shew himself to us as our chief good--a privilege worth ten thousand worlds to know--a satisfying portion for eternity. For indeed so intense is his divine love towards us, that he cannot be satisfied without accomplishing for us the whole eternal duration of enjoyment, that he hath laid up for us in himself. All that we could look for here in the most full and conscious enjoyment of our portion, we should "reckon as not worthy to be compared" with a single moment in heaven, when "we shall see face to face, and know even as also we are known." (1 Cor. xiii. 12.)

Let us study Christian completeness and consistency. The elements of this character will be brought out by a diligent and prayerful study of this important Book. Let them be put together in their due connection and proportion; and "the man of God will be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Tim. iii. 17.) We want religion to be to the soul, what the soul is to the body--the animating principle. The soul operates in every member. It sees in the eye, hears in the ear, speaks in the tongue, animates the whole body, with ease and uniformity, without ostentation or effort. Thus should religion direct and regulate every thought, word, and act. In this day of light and knowledge, ignorance of our duty too often implies neglect of the means of instruction, and therefore is an aggravation of our fault, rather than our excuse. The grand object is, that the conscience be intelligently instructed under divine teaching. Then let the daily course be carefully regulated by it. Never turn aside a single step from its guidance. Never admit the maxims or habits of this world. Guard against everything that damps vital spirituality, lowers the high Scriptural standard, or slackens the energy of unremitting Christian watchfulness. Let our path be steadily balanced between

¹ Chap. iii. 35.

² Chap. i 7.

³ Chap. xvi. 20.

⁴ Chap. viii. 18-21

⁵ Ib. ver.36.

⁶ Ps. xvi. 5. Lam. iii 24.

⁷ Ps. xlv. 11. Matt. xxii.37.

compromising concession and needless singularity. Let the Christian only walk with God in the way of the Gospel. He will never be satisfied with appearing to maintain his ground. But he will acknowledge the wisdom of the discipline, which allows him no enjoyment of the present moment, except in grasping at something beyond him. (Phil. iii. 12-14.) We want not a profession, that will give us a name in the Church, or even a stamp of reproach in the world; but one which places the divine image before our eyes, and animates us to a growing conformity to our standard. (Matt. v. 48.) The conscience thus enlightened, and the heart readily following its voice; the sins that carry less reproach with the world will be resisted, not less than those which are more revolting. We shall no more indulge an uncharitable spirit, than a course of profligacy. An angry tone, lowering look, sharp retort, or disparaging word, will cause grief to the conscience, and will be visited by its rebuke, as severely as those gross ebullitions, which disgrace our character before men. "Walking thus before God," not before men, is Christian "perfection." (Gen. xvii. 1.) His eye is our restraint--his judgment our rule--his will our delight.

But "*Who is sufficient!*" Child of God! let the trembling of insufficiency in thyself be stayed by the recollection of all-sufficiency in thy God.¹ What he demands of thee, that he works in thee. His covenant secures thy holiness, no less than thine acceptance--thine holiness, not, as some would have it, as the ground, but as the fruit, of thine acceptance. Let the one then be primarily sought; and the other will assuredly follow.

"I WILL PUT MY LAW IN THEIR INWARD PARTS, AND WRITE IT IN THEIR HEARTS. . . . FOR I WILL FORGIVE THEIR INIQUITY, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE." (Jer. xxxi. 33, 34.)

¹ Comp. 2 Cor. ii. 16, with iii. 5; also xii. 9.

THE END.

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