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1251  
*Finishing the CHRISTIAN COURSE,  
considered and argued.*

A F U N E R A L

S E R M O N,

Occasion'd by the DEATH

Of the late Reverend

*John Evans, D. D.*

Who deceased *May 16, 1730.* in the  
Fifty-First Year of his AGE.

P R E A C H ' D at

*New Broad-Street in Petty-France.*

To which is added the

P R A C T I C A L I M P R O V E M E N T.

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By *W. HARRIS, D. D.*

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Published at the Desire of the Congregation.

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ACTS XX. 24.

*But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the Grace of God.*

**I** Think myself very unhappy this day, that the first time I am called to preach in this place, should be upon this mournful occasion.—But I must not touch this tender point too soon, lest I prevent myself in what I have further to say.

The words are part of the Apostle's discourse to the elders of *Ephesus*, in which he declares to them his past course and manner of life, and what was the temper of his mind, and his doctrine and ministry among them; *Ye know after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears and temptations which befell me: i. e.* with a great sense of his own unworthiness, which he always kept in view; and an affectionate concern for the success of

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- his service, and with many tryals from his  
 20. enemies. *And how I kept back nothing  
 which was profitable unto you; but have  
 shewed you and taught you publickly, and  
 from house to house:* He withheld no part  
 of the Christian Doctrine from them, nor  
 27. *shunned to declare all the counsel of God;*  
 and took all occasions to inculcate it in  
 their publick assemblies, and in their own  
 houses. But he kept to things *profitable to  
 them*, and of great importance, and did not  
 trouble them with impertinent curiosities,  
 and unprofitable nicety. These he sums up  
 21. *in repentance towards God, and faith in our  
 Lord Jesus Christ;* which were absolutely  
 necessary to the salvation of a *Jew*, and  
 sufficient to save a *Gentile*.

22. He further declares to them the prospect  
 he had of suffering before him: *And now  
 behold I go bound in spirit to Jerusalem, not  
 knowing the things which befall me there;*  
*i. e.* by the impulse and direction of the spi-  
 rit; foreseeing by the spirit, and assured by  
 the prediction of inspired and prophetic  
 men, which he calls in the next verse, the  
 witnessing of the Holy Ghost; *save that the  
 Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying,  
 that bonds and afflictions abide me.* He  
 testified this by some who had the spirit of  
 prophecy, as we find particularly, *Chap. xxi.*  
*4, 11. q. d.* Tho' I don't know what my  
 particular sufferings will be, and what the  
 circum-

22.  
 δεδεσμε-  
 νος τῷ  
 πνεύματι.

circumstances and issues of them; yet I am well assured that wherever I go, I shall meet with sufferings of one kind or another.

The words of the text describe the temper of his mind in this state and prospect of things. They consist of two parts;

I. His stedfast *resolution* and firmness of mind under present tryals; *None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself.*

II. His great *desire* and aim in it; *so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord, &c.*

I shall consider them both, and apply them in the close.

I. Here is his stedfast *resolution* and firmness of mind under present tryals. And this lies in two things.

1. That he was not *moved* by them: he was immoveable at the threatening prospect. *None of these things move me*, ἔθενός λόγον ποιῆμαι, I make no account of any of them; literally, I don't make a word of them, or think them worth mentioning. The expression imports not only a fixed resolution, but a wise and rational determination

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of mind, upon a due weighing and comparing things together, and considering the reasons on either hand. It was a deliberate purpose upon a certain prospect; *q. d.* I know that *bonds and afflictions abide me*, and am fully persuaded by the revelation of the Spirit; but this does not shake my faith and resolution, or deter me from my duty, or discourage me in it. I am not *moved from my steadfastness* by the certain prospect of suffering; tho' I see my danger before me, I am *in nothing terrified*, or oppressed with the apprehension; neither brought to make a stand in my way, or consult my safety by a timely retreat. I find myself in full heart, and am determined with unshaken resolution to go on in my way, and stand the shock of all assaults from every quarter: I have counted the cost, and am prepared for all events.

This was the heroick courage, and undaunted bravery of the Apostle's spirit in the face of danger, and the nearest views of it. Nor was this a vain boast; for we find him steady and unmoved, preserving a firmness and composure of mind, and expressing a noble triumph and joy, in the greatest tryals he met with. He *gloried in tribulations*, and in the *cross of Christ*; *2 Cor. xii.* took *pleasure in infirmities and distresses* *10.* *for Christ sake*; and reckoned the *sufferings of the present life not worthy to be compared* *18.* *with the glory to be revealed.* *2.* He

*considered and argued.*

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2. He did not value his *life*. *Neither count I my life dear to my self.* Here the Word *οὐκ* is understood, as appears by the *ως* in the latter clause; *q. d.* I count not my life so dear as to finish my course; I reckon that of more consequence than my life. The expression is an *hebraisme*, often used in the old testament. A man's life is said to be dear to him when he is careful of it, and willing to save it from danger, and loth to part with it. So the captain of the third fifty said to *Elijah*; *O man of God,* <sup>2 King i.</sup> *I pray thee let my life, and the life of these fifty, thy servants, be precious in thy sight.* <sup>13, 14.</sup> On the contrary, 'tis not precious, when 'tis not spared, and is ready to be laid down; so we read, after the translation of the Seventy, which best expresses the sense of the *Hebrew*, *They despised their lives;* <sup>Ezek. xxxvi. 5.</sup> which we render obscurely, *with despiteful* <sup>ἀπυλά- μινδς.</sup> *minds.*

So the sense here is, I know the worst which can befall me, and the utmost my enemies can do; they can *only kill the body*, and take away my life; and I am so far from being afraid of suffering, that I am not afraid of dying. I am ready to spend or part with my life in the service of Christ, or for his cause. My life is devoted to him, and 'tis the same thing to me, to lay it out, or lay it down for him, to spend it in painful service, or lose it by violent suffering.

Ezek. xxxvi. 5.  
ἀπυλά- μινδς.  
ουχας.  
למשפך  
שׁוֹפָר



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And we find this was actually the case, and the temper he expressed upon the trial. When the Disciples of *Cesarea* dissuaded him from going to *Jerusalem*, upon *Agabus's* prophecy of his suffering there; he says, *What mean you to weep and to break my heart?* to move the tender passions of my nature, by your immoderate affection to me. *I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus.* He tells the Philippians, *According to my earnest expectation and hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness — Christ may be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death; by service, or suffering.* And what a noble unconcern does he express in the Views of a violent death! *I am ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand: I am not only near it, but prepared for it, σπένδομαι* to be poured forth as a drink-offering, alluding to the blood of the sacrifice.

Act. xxi. 13.  
Philipp. i. 20.  
2 Tim. iv. 6.

II. His great *desire* and *aim* in it, or what he proposed to himself, and had in his eye, in this resolution of mind: *That I may finish my course, &c.* This is what I would particularly consider at this time. And here it will be necessary, 1. To settle the sense of the expressions, and state the meaning of them. 2. To represent the grounds of it, or the reasons of such a desire. §. 1.

§. 1. To settle the *sense* and meaning of the Expressions. They are allusions to the olympick Games among the antient *Greeks*, to which the Apostle often refers, especially in his epistles to the *Gentile* christians. *To finish my course*, *Ἰελαιῶσαι τὸν δρόμον*, to perfect my course, and bring it to an end; to run out my race: for the allusion is to racers who run within the lines mark'd out to the appointed goal. *And the ministry I have received of the Lord* *διακονίαν*: If this word is *agonistical*, and signified the servants who attended in the race, the allusion is still preserved, and the expression the more beautiful. It plainly refers to the apostleship, or his extraordinary ministry immediately receiv'd from Christ. *To testify the gospel of the grace of God*: *To testify* was proper to the Apostles, who were peculiarly the *witnesses of Christ*. They openly declared the doctrine of the Gospel to the world, and confirmed it by the miracles they wrought themselves, and by those which they testified concerning him. It was the *Gospel of the grace of God*, as it contained the greatest instance and display of the favour of God to the guilty world, and was bestowed upon any place by a special favour. *With joy*; with cheerfulness and satisfaction of mind. The sense is, That I may fully execute the extraordinary

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nary commission immediately received from Christ, and have the satisfaction of a faithful discharge of it. So that it directly relates to the *apostolical* office, and his immediate commission to his extraordinary work, and is most properly applicable to the *ministers* of the Gospel in their ordinary and standing work. Nevertheless I conceive, they may fitly be considered in a larger view, and as they respect the common *christian*, as well as the *ministerial* course; and perhaps the expressions here of *my course and the ministry*, may be design'd to have a distinct respect to each; as he had himself a *christian*, as well as an *apostolical* and *ministerial* course. And this will render the consideration of them the more profitable, and fit for common benefit.

Now the finishing our course, whether *christian* or *ministerial*, may be consider'd to signify, either,

1. The *entireness* and compleatness of it; or the performing every part of our proper work. The Apostle was always exceeding careful of this. He tells the Elders, That he had *kept back nothing which was profitable to them*, nor *shunned to declare all the counsel of God*. He tells

<sup>2</sup> Tim. iv. *Timothy*, That he had *kept the faith*, as  
7. well as *finish'd his course*, i. e. preserved the doctrine of the Gospel entire and uncorrupt,

rupt, without any main or mixture. He exhorts *Archippus*, *To fulfil his ministry*; Colofs. iv. 17. and *Timothy*, *To make full proof of it*; to fill it up with proper duty, and attend to every part of it. πλεροφῶ- ρησον. 2 Tim. iv.

We must have a proper regard to every part of the christian duty, and not dispense with the neglect of any. He cannot be said *to finish* his course, or to perfect it, who leaves any part of it untouched; as he who runs a race must go over all the ground mark'd out. In this sense we finish our course when we perform all the work which is cut out for us, and fill up the several capacities and relations of life with answerable duty, according to the circumstances of our condition, and abilities of usefulness, and opportunities of good: when we have a *respect to all his com- mandments*, and *walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless*. So the Apostle prays for the *Thessalonians*, That he might *perfect that which was lacking in their faith*: and *Epaphroditus* prays for the *Colossians*, That they might *stand perfect and compleat in all the will of God*; where there are both the words *τέλειοι ἢ πεπληρωμένοι*. We leave our course unfinished in this view of it, when 'tis *defective*, and we live in the neglect of any part of the christian duty, or

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suffer any divine command or appointment to be disregarded. Or

2. *Perseverance* unto the end. He who runs a race must reach the goal, and come to the mark prescribed, before he can be said to have finish'd the course; and then 'tis most properly finished, or perfected, when 'tis brought to an end. The Apostle's meaning plainly is, that he might conclude, as well as compleat it, and continue faithful to God in the whole course of his service, thro' all the difficulties in the way to the end of his life. So he says, I have *fought the good fight*—and *finished my course*; he finished by fighting and overcoming. In this sense our Lord says of himself, *I have finished the work thou gavest me to do*; and

Joh. xvii. 4.

— xix. 30.

cried out upon the cross, *It is finished*: where the word is the same in both places.

A Christian must continue in the way prescribed him to the end of it. 'Tis not enough to enter upon the christian state, or go a considerable way in it; but he must go thro' it, and reach the end of it. So

Luk. i. 15.

we are required, *To serve the Lord without fear, in righteousness and holiness before him, all the days of our life*; to stand *perfect and compleat—unto the end*; to be

Luk. viii.

Heb. xii. 1.

*stedfast and unmoveable, and bring forth fruit, and run our race with patience*; i. e. with perseverance under all tryals and dangers. The promise is always to him

who

who *endureth unto the end*; and is *faithful to the death*; and *overcometh and keepeth his work unto the end*. And so it stands opposed to *looking and drawing back*, to *fainting and growing weary*, to *forsaking our profession and falling away*, to *failing of the grace of life*, and *coming short of the glory of God*, &c. Or else,

3. The *cheerfulness* and pleasure which ought to attend it. The Apostle was not only concerned to hold on in his way and continue to the end, but to go on with alacrity and delight, without reluctance and despondence, or a backward and discouraged heart: And that he might have comfort upon a review, and find matter of thankfulness to God, and joy of heart in the last stage. He desired to finish his course so that he might have the comfort of it, and find that inward peace which arises from a sense of integrity, and the hopes of divine acceptance. So he says, *This is our rejoicing the testimony of our conscience that in simplicity and godly sincerity— we have had our conversation in the world*. The testimony of a well-informed conscience to the sincerity of our hearts, is a ground of rejoicing in the close of life, and the nearest prospect of death; as 'tis the great comprehensive requirement of the gospel covenant, and the necessary means of interest in all the blessings of it:

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1 John iii. 21. *If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.* So he speaks  
 Rom. xv. 13. *of being filled with all joy and peace in believing, and abounding in hope thro' the power of the Holy Ghost; and, we are*  
 2 Cor. vii. 4. *filled with comfort, and exceeding joyful in all our tribulations.*

A Christian must endeavour to go on in the christian course, with a cheerful mind, and to find a pleasure in the close of life upon the reflection on his own sincerity, and the prospect of approaching glory, without doubtfulness or distress, about the present state of his soul, or his title to the future blessedness.

§. 2. I shall consider the *grounds* of it, or the reasons of such a desire and aim, in all the sufferings and troubles of life. I shall consider them as extending to the common case of christians, and represent and urge them in all the various views referred to in the scripture, the more to impress and affect our minds.

1. Our course is by the *appointment* and will of God. The racer's course was mark'd out by the master of the race, and they were obliged to keep within the bounds and limits prescribed; which the Apostle  
 2 Tim. ii. 5. *calls striving lawfully.* If they run out of the bounds, they lost the prize, as well as if they did not reach the goal. God has prescribed the christian course, and every special and particular service in it, to every  
 ry

ry one. That I may *finish my course, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord*: His christian course was appointed by the Lord, as well as his extraordinary ministry. He is the master of the race, who has marked out the ground, and prescribed the length and limits of the way we are to run. He has cut out our work and service in the stated duties of the christian life, and the special services in which we are engaged. He has made it our duty by the appointment of his will, who is the sovereign Lord of the creature, and has a right to prescribe, and to be obey'd. We are to consider the christian duty as *received* 1 Cor. xi. *from the Lord*, not only by the dictates of <sup>23.</sup> the reasonable nature, and the direction of providence, but by the appointment of his word, and the authority of his law, even when 'tis not by any supernatural and immediate conveyance, as the Apostleship was. 'Tis all mark'd out by the divine law, and the bounds and limits prescribed. So we read of the *path of his commandments*, and *walking in the ordinances and command-* Gal. vi. 16. *ments of the Lord*; and *according to this* Philip. iii. *rule, and by the same rule*: where the word <sup>16.</sup> *κατὰ* signifies the lines by which the race was mark'd out. We must consider ourselves as under a divine direction, and within limits prescribed us by our great Lord; and by which we are properly obliged, antecedently



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tededently to any formal consent or engagement on our part. The will of a sovereign, or superior, immediately binds as soon as it is made known.

Besides, we are under the strongest *obligations* to God. They who are engaged in any special service, and placed in an higher station, are under special obligations of duty, and more particularly bound to faithfulness. The Apostles and Ministers of Christ were not only under the common christian obligation ; but specially devoted to God, as they were specially favoured by him. But all christians are under sacred obligations to God, and actually bound to the performance of the christian duty : For they are early devoted to God by their *baptism*, which like circumcision, obliges to the whole christian law. We have taken the oath of allegiance, and sworn fidelity to this great Lord. And our *engagement* in his service, and acknowledgment of his authority is a standing obligation ; as he who undertakes to run a race, is obliged to exert himself, and do his best to win the prize ; or he who lifts himself in the service, is obliged to fight, and obey orders.

We are not left at liberty whether to finish our course, or break it off. We stand engaged by the highest right, and by solemn oath. *The vows of the Lord are upon us : We have sworn, and we must perform it,*  
that

that we will keep his righteous judgments. Having entered upon the christian course, we are obliged to go on, and never to retreat or go back. Having given up our names to Christ, we have given up all right to our selves, and are obliged to follow him wherever he goes: Having *put our hands to the plough, we must not look back.* Luke ix. 62.

We deal *treacherously* with the Lord, and *falsly in his covenant*, if we don't continue and persevere, for the christian obligation is for perpetuity; and we can never at any period of life desist, without violating the most solemn and sacred bonds.

2. There is a great *favour* and grace attending it. The Apostle had not only the christian course prescribed to him, but a *ministry which he received of the Lord*, that is, the singular favour of the Apostleship: He was an extraordinary minister of the kingdom of Christ, and extraordinarily called and qualified, to plant the gospel in the world, and confirm it by miracles, and settle the affairs of the christian church. It was a great vouchsafement from God, that he was not *behind the chief of the Apostles*, who had 2 Cor xi 5. been among the *chief of sinners*, and was less *than the least of all Saints*; and that he *who before persecuted the church*, should now *preach the faith which he once destroyed.* Gal. i. 23.

And he often speaks of it under this notion.

*Unto me—is this grace given, that I should* Eph. iii. 8.  
*preach*

*preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches*  
 Rom. i. 5. *of Christ. And, We have received grace*  
*and Apostleship.* And when the glorious  
 gospel of the blessed God was committed to  
 1 Tim. i. him, he *thanks Christ Jesus the Lord,* and  
 11. — 14. *says, The grace of our Lord was exceeding*  
*abundant.* And so is the christian ministry  
 a great vouchsafement from God, when he  
 — 12. *enables any, counting them faithful, put-*  
*ting them into the ministry;* when he calls  
 them to this special service, and fits them  
 for it, and enables them in it. 'Tis a special  
 favour and trust, as well as a peculiar service  
 and office.

But the christian course it self is to be con-  
 sidered as a favour. 'Tis a dispensation of  
*grace,* attended with singular privileges and  
 great advantages, and vouchsafed to any  
 place by special favour. So the Apostle  
 Rom. vi. *says, We are not under the law, but under*  
 14. *grace.* And we *receive the grace of God,*  
 2 Cor. vi. 1. *tho' many do it in vain.* And he *testified*  
*the Gospel of the Grace of God:* of his free  
 favour and rich goodness unto the world.  
 We have many merciful assistances of light  
 and grace; clearer discoveries of the will of  
 God, and more powerful influence and aids,  
 than the religion of meer nature, or any  
 former dispensation of God to the world.  
 We have the outward helps of Gospel-ordi-  
 nances, which are wisely fitted to reach  
 their gracious ends, to enlighten and re-  
 fresh

fresh our minds, and recruit our spiritual strength; and the inward succours of the divine presence and spirit, who *strengthens* Eph. iii. *us with might in the inward man, helps* <sup>16.</sup> *our infirmities* in our prayers and afflictions; Rom. viii. *and sheds abroad the love of God in our* <sup>26.</sup> *hearts, and makes us to abound with hope.* Rom. v. 5. —xv. 13.

Good men have many comfortable experiences of divine supports, and gracious assurances of favour and regard; so that tho' our work in any respect is difficult, and our tryals sometimes great, yet our aids and advantages are always proportionable to them; and extraordinary tryals, in any circumstances, are attended with extraordinary aids. *As thy day is, so shall* <sup>Deut. xxxiii. 25;</sup> *thy strength be: my grace is sufficient for* <sup>2 Cor. xii.</sup> *thee, and my strength is made perfect in* <sup>9.</sup> *weakness.* He will not suffer us to be tryed above what we are able; and as our sufferings abound, so our consolations abound by *Christ.* —i. 5;

And how reasonable is steadfastness and perseverance under such encouragements and advantages! We are concerned in gratitude to God, and from a sense of kindness, to perform the christian duty, and finish our course; which is not only a wise and *reasonable service*, but made easy under all its difficulties, by divine aids; to *take his yoke which is easy, and his burden which is light*, and observe his *commands which* <sup>Matt. xi</sup> *are* <sup>29.</sup>

1 Joh. v. 3. *are not grievous.* This will further appear if you consider,

3. The great *danger* we are in of failing and miscarrying. There cannot but be great danger under the disadvantage of our present circumstances from the inward weakness and disorders of our minds, and external temptation and assault. Our present graces and virtues are very imperfect, the appetites and passions of our natures are strong and unruly. The best Men are imperfectly sanctified, and there are great remainders of sin; the one often fails us in the tryal; the other creates us a great deal of trouble. There are many snares of sin round about us, many sensible objects, the baits of concupiscence, suitable to our various inclinations and temper of mind, and every circumstance and condition of life. The Apostle speaks of the *sin*

Heb. xii. 1. *which does so easily beset us,* which like a loose garment clings about our legs, in running the christian race. And there is the *old serpent the devil,* the watchful *adversary,* who is always ready to deceive and ensnare us, to throw a false light upon things, to strike upon the weak side of our nature, to take the advantage of an unguarded moment, and make the best of every opportunity. And when these two things meet together, the weakness of our virtue, and the strength of a well-timed and well-

well-managed temptation ; how great must our danger be? how easily are we drawn into sin, and discouraged in the christian course?

The Apostle uses this consideration in his own case: *I therefore so run, not as uncertainly, or at random, so fight I not as one who beateth the air, brandishes his sword in the air, only for exercise and without doing any execution ; but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.* 'Tis an allusion to boxing; q. d. I beat it black and blue, and use it as a slave or servant: I keep it in order and fit for service, by proper abstinence and labour. And upon this ground he often exhorts the christians to caution and watchfulness: *Let him who thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall. Let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you; lest you be drawn to apostacy by the difficulties of service, or the fear of suffering.* He cautions the christians, *Lest Satan get an advantage of us, for we are not ignorant of his devices ; and, Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil ;* his subtlety

1 Cor. ix.

26.

ὑποτάξω  
καὶ ὡς δούλος  
ἑαυτοῦ.

1 Cor. x.

12.

Heb. iii. 1.

xii. 15.

2 Cor. ii.

11.

Eph. vi. 11.

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and arts. And again, *Be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goes about seeking whom he may devour*; q. d. Watch, for he watches: Be upon your guard, for he is unwearied in his assaults, and cruel in his design.

4. The *honour* of religion and of the divine grace is very much concerned in it. 'Tis the end crowns the work, and gives the glory and perfection to the whole. The skill and strength of the racer is seen in reaching the goal. When a christian finishes his course, and compleats his work, 'tis to the honour of the religion he professes at present, which has enabled and supported him, in all the steps and tryals of it; and it will be to the everlasting honour of the divine grace, which first began a good work in him, carried it thro' all difficulties, and performed it until the day of Christ. They are to *the praise of the glory of his grace*; and the faith of a tryed christian will be *found to praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearance of Jesus Christ*. It gives a credit to religion in the account of the world, to see a good man, under present weakness and disadvantage, and thro' all the tryals and suffering of life, stand his ground, and maintain his constancy to the end.

But now, on the other hand, when a christian *forsakes* his profession, and lets go  
his

his *confidence*; when the prevalence of sin, and the power of temptation, carry him off, and he is again *entangled and overcome*; how dishonourable is it to religion, what a reflection does it cast upon the divine grace? As if all the powers of religion, and the world to come, were not sufficient to preserve and secure him; and he who was the *author*, was not able to be the *finisher* of his faith. It opens the mouth of insulting enemies, and ministers to their reproach and triumph; as if they had prevailed against all the succours of religion, and aids of grace: so the *name of God is* Rom. ii. *blasphemed thro' them.* What an infinite <sup>24</sup> dishonour to religion, and disadvantage to the gospel, to the *gentile* world, and to all after-ages, must it have been, if such a man as the Apostle *Paul* had failed at last, and not *finished his course*? a supposition 1 Cor. ix. which he makes himself. There is a re-<sup>25</sup>venue of glory to God lost for ever from one of his creatures; the honour of his finished salvation, and everlasting praise and triumph in heaven, after all which had been done in order to it. 'Tis a discouragement and stumbling-block in the way to others, whensoever it happens; and tends to lessen their esteem, abate their comfort, and discourage their hope, in the christian course. No wonder a christian is so much concerned to finish his course, when the  
honour



honour of God and Religion is every way so greatly affected by it, and it carries consequences in it of so high a nature, and great importance.

5. Unless we finish our course, all we have done in the mean time will be *lost*, and in vain. We had as good do nothing, as not to do to the purpose. He who stops short in a race on this side the goal, as certainly loses the prize, as he who never set out in it, and only loses the labour of the way he has run. 'Tis a very awful and affecting, but a most certain and undoubted truth, That tho' we have made a great profession, and done many things in religion; have gone a great way, and held out a great while, perhaps thro' many difficulties and tryals; yet if we desist and forsake it, and grow weary and discouraged, all our former labour is wholly lost, and all we have done will go for nothing. So

Ezek. xviii.  
24. God tells us by the prophet, *When the righteous man turneth from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doth according to all the abominations of the wicked; i. e. not only falls into sin, but goes into a course and way of sin; shall he live? All the righteousness which he hath done, shall not be mentioned; in the trespass which he hath trespassed, and in the sin which he hath sinned, shall he die. i. e. He shall perish in his present course*

and way of sin, notwithstanding his former righteousness. So our Lord tells his disciples; *No man having put his hand to the plough, and looketh back, is fit for the kingdom of heaven.* Luke ix. 62. And the Apostle tells us directly, *If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him:* Heb. x. ult. He shall find no acceptance with God, but fall under his displeasure. Upon this ground he warns the christians, *not to receive the grace of God in vain; and to look to themselves, that they lose not those things they have wrought, but that they receive a full reward.* 2 Cor. vi. 1. Ep. of Joh. 8. We lose all we have been doing, as well as all we expect.

We have many examples of this kind in the Scripture: *Judas* went to his own place, when he forsook and betrayed his Lord, notwithstanding his high office, and great advantages. The young man in the gospel *went away sorrowful*, and miscarried at last, notwithstanding his coming to Christ, and keeping the commandments from his youth. *Demas* forsook the Apostles thro' the love of the world, after a fair and forward profession, and long accompanying with them. The Apostle speaks of some, who *putting away faith and a good conscience, concerning faith had made shipwreck*; and of those who were *enlightened*, and had *tasted the heavenly gift*; and yet *fell away*; and who had *escaped*

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*escaped the pollutions of the world thro' the knowledge of Christ, and were again entangled and overcome.* Many hopeful beginnings and fair appearances come to nothing; like fair blossoms in a forward spring, which are blasted by unkindly winds, and never come to ripe fruit. So that all we have already done depends upon finishing what remains, and holding out to the end. The last habit of a man's mind, like his last will and testament, revokes all the former, and makes the final disposition of his spiritual state. Every man is that for ever, which he is at last, not in the present *frame*, which depends very much upon bodily temperature, and accidental circumstances; but, which is constant and invariable, tho' perhaps in different degrees, in the prevailing and governing *bent* of his mind. And it must needs be so, because perseverance to the end is a necessary essential requisite in the gospel-covenant, and can only give the proper denomination: As treason and rebellion against a sovereign prince, cancels all the former loyalty and obedience, and forfeits life and honour for ever. Yea further,

6. It will fare *worse* with us than if we had never begun. We shall not only lose our past labour, but fall into a worse state than we were in before: For he who falls away after good beginnings, and forsakes  
the

the profession and practice of religion, after some tryal and continuance, is in a more *hazardous* state, and of all others most difficultly recovered. The Apostle says of such, *'Tis impossible to renew them again* Heb. vi. 4. *to repentance*; that is, at least, extremely difficult and very rare. And the reason is, they have baffled the convictions of their own mind, resisted and grieved the Holy Spirit of God, defeated all the succours and aids of religion, and all the hopes and prospects it gives them; and what is left to take hold of in them, or to work upon them by? They have laid waste their conscience, and are enslaved by sin, and have forfeited all friendly and gracious regards from God.

Yea, and they fall under a greater *displeasure* from God, as they have abused a greater grace. They have sinned against tryal and experience, *rebelled against the light*, and done *despight* to the *Spirit of grace*. So much is implied in the expressions concerning such, they are *not fit for the kingdom of heaven*; and, *my soul shall have no pleasure in them*. They who are *exalted up to heaven*, and are *not far from the kingdom of God*, will fall into the lowest depths of misery, and be banished to the greatest distance from it. What disappointment and reproach, what confusion and distress, must it cause at last, to *see others enter into the kingdom of God*, and they  
E *themselves*

*themselves cast out?* To see other christians, perhaps of the same standing and advantages with themselves, finish their course, and receive their reward, while they miscarry and are lost for ever? Upon these accounts the Apostle represents it as a worse, and more deplorable case, than that of those who never began the christian course, or once

<sup>2Pet.ii.21.</sup> enter'd upon it: *It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment.* In that case, the *latter end is worse with them than the beginning*; and the *last state of that man is worse than the first.* They perish under greater aggravations of guilt and misery.

Mat. xii.  
41.

7. 'Tis necessary to the *final reward.* He who runs a race cannot obtain the prize, till he reach the goal: He must first finish the course prescribed, before he can lay claim to the reward. He who fights in a warfare must first overcome, before he is crowned and triumphs. A christian has great experience of the divine goodness in a religious course, at present, and great assurances and security of what is to come; but yet the final blessedness and *recompence of reward,* is suspended, and made to depend upon the *finishing his course*; as a servant must do his work, before he has any right to his wages: We must

must be *good and faithful servants*, before we can receive the approbation of our judge. So we see in the example of our Lord; *I have glorified thee on earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do*: I have performed the mediatorial undertaking here on earth: *And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thy own self, with the glory which I had with thee, before the world was*: He lays claim to the promised reward. And he was animated in it by this view, *Who for the joy which was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame*. And in the example of the Apostle, in agonistical terms quite thro'; *But this one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth unto the things which are before, I press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus; and, if by any means I may attain to the resurrection of the dead*. And again in the close of life, *I have fought the good fight, I have kept the faith, I have finished my course*; my christian and ministerial course: He adds in the next words; *Henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness*; from this time of finishing my course: When he had run his race, he reckoned upon the glorious prize.

And so 'tis every where represented in  
 Rom. ii. 7. Scripture, *To them who by patient conti-*  
*nuance in well doing, seek for glory and*  
 1 Cor. ix. 24. *honour, and immortality, He will render,*  
*eternal life. And, He who striveth for*  
 1 Tim. vi. 12. *the mastery, is temperate in all things,*  
 Rev. ii. 10. *that he may overcome: now they do it to*  
 —26. *obtain a corruptible crown, a garland of*  
*leaves, but we an incorruptible. Fight*  
*the good fight and lay hold of eternal life.*  
 Rev. ii. 10. *Be thou faithful to the death, and I will*  
 —26. *give thee a crown of life; and to him*  
 —26. *who overcometh will I give the morning*  
 —26. *star. We have no title to the final blessed-*  
 —26. *ness by the gracious promise of the gospel,*  
 —26. *but upon the supposition of finishing our*  
 —26. *course; and we may certainly depend up-*  
 —26. *on it, when we have finished it. And*  
 —26. *how reasonable is it that we should strive*  
 —26. *and contend, and persevere and overcome;*  
 —26. *that we should so run that we may obtain*  
 —26. *and win the glorious prize, which will*  
 —26. *make a rich amends for all our labour, and*  
 Ep. Joh. ii. 8. *be a full reward?*

8. I would further suggest, especially to  
 elder christians, You are *near* finishing, and  
 have not much of your course to run.  
 Perhaps you have run far the greatest part  
 of your course already, and have but a  
 little way to go. Let me bespeak you in  
 Gal. v. 7. the words of the Apostle, *You have run*  
*well kitherto,* beware of any thing which  
 should

should hinder you. You have held out a great while, perhaps thro' many tryals of life; how sad would it be to miscarry at last! that would be like a ship richly laden, after a long and dangerous voyage, from a far distant country, suffering shipwreck, or bulging upon a rock, in the harbour's mouth.

Christian, hold out a little longer, and thy race will be run, and thou wilt win the prize, and all the labour and the danger of life will be over. Be not weary or discouraged the little remainder of thy course, in which thou hast run so far already. The greatest difficulty of religion is over, the greatest good is to come: rather quicken thy pace, and encourage thy self by the nearer prospect; as the racer exerts all his vigour, and springs forward at the sight of the goal; and even natural bodies move swifter, the nearer the center. The Apostle had the prospect of his change before him, and was the more desirous to finish well: *I am ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.— I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course.* Ministers, who have laboured many years in the vineyard, and Christians of long standing in the christian state, should be often thinking of their end, and speaking of their *decease*, which they are shortly to *accomplish*; and be the



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more concerned, and the more careful to finish the short remainder of their course with joy. I only add,

9. It will make our *passage* out of the world at last, more easy, and our *entrance* into heaven joyful. To this purpose the Apostle directs the christians, *That every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end; that you be not slothful, but followers of them, who thro' faith and patience inherit the promise:* By diligence we arrive to a full assurance of hope, and become followers of them who inherit the promised blessedness. And more directly; *Give diligence to make your calling and election sure;* more evident to others, and more firm to your selves, by the proper exercise of the christian virtues: *for if you do these things you shall never fail, and so an entrance shall be ministred to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ:* They are more secure of their present standing, and of the heavenly kingdom hereafter; and usually they have the easiest passage out of the world, who have been most faithful in it, and a finished course on earth, prepares for the perfect glory of heaven.

And this is a great matter too; for many, we have reason to hope, get safe to heaven at last, who don't go joyfully  
and

and comfortably thither; it may be with many fears, and thro' great darkness; like a man who makes the harbour thro' cross winds, in a cloudy and tempestuous season, when he is often beat back, and in danger of being lost. But a christian who has finished his course, is *looking* and *waiting* for the *coming*, and for the *salvation* of the Lord; he passes thro' the *valley of the shadow of death*, by the divine presence with him, with much comfort, and without fear; and *enters into the joy of his Lord*, with holy confidence and triumph of soul; like a man who runs into the harbour with a fresh gale, and full sails; or one who has reached the goal, and looks with confidence for the prize.

I have no time left for application; the best improvement I can make at present, is to set before you an instance and example of the doctrine I have been considering in my dear deceased Friend and Brother, Dr. *Evans*; of whom I have many things to say, which, I think, may be honourable to religion, and the divine grace, and useful and instructing to others: and I desire to say nothing of him but with this view.

He was *born* at *Wrexham* in *Denbysbire*, and descended from a race of ministers for four generations, and excepting one interruption,

ruption, quite up to the reformation. His Father was ejected for his nonconformity at *Oswestry* in *Shropshire*, in 1662. He afterwards settled with the congregational church at *Wrexham*, where he lived in general esteem among the gentlemen of that country, and was often favoured and screened by them in the troubles of those times, especially by Sir *William Williams*; and Judge *Jefferies*, who had a particular kindness for him. His Mother was the daughter of the eminent Colonel *Gerard*, who was governour of *Chester* Castle, a woman of an excellent spirit; and great understanding.

He had his *education* first under Mr. *Thomas Row* of *London*; and afterwards under Mr. *Richard Frankland* at *Rathmill* in *Yorkshire*. He enjoyed great advantages under both, and made a great proficiency in all the parts of rational and polite literature, which he cultivated and improved all his life. He enlarged his views of several things beyond those of his education, as sincere and inquisitive minds often see reason to do.

His first *settlement* in life was in the family of Mrs. *Hunt* of *Boreatton* in *Shropshire* \*. He was treated with the kindness and respect of a son by that excellent Lady,

\* *She was relict of Rowland Hunt Esq; and Sister of Lord Paget, who was Ambassador to the Ottoman Court.*

and by all the family ; which he always spoke of with a singular pleasure and honour. Here he enjoyed the great felicity of an agreeable retirement in a religious family, and pleasant country, with all the convenience for study and devotion, and proper diversion when he could be persuaded to take it. Being now in the vigour of life, and abounding with leisure, he read over entire Mr. *Pool's* Latin *Synopsis* in five large folio's, which laid the foundation of his great skill in the *Scripture criticism*, without some knowledge of which no man can thoroughly understand his Bible, or make the proper use of it. He read over all the christian writers of the three first centuries, under the direction of the learned Mr. *James Owen*, and made judicious extracts of what related to the doctrine and practice of the primitive church, which were of great use to him ever after.

While he was in this family, he first began to *preach*, before he was quite twenty. After some time he was called to his father's congregation at *Wrexham*, but upon their refusal to join with the other congregation in the town, which became vacant, they desired he would rather settle in the other congregation than leave the town. Here he was *ordained* according to the scripture pattern by *fasting and prayer, and imposition of hands*, by Mr. *Talents* of

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*Shrewsbury*, Mr. *James Owen* of *Oswestry*, Mr. *Henry* of *Chester*, and Dr. *Benion*; and lived several years with great acceptance and high esteem. He was once obliged to dispute the point of *Water Baptism* with one of the people called *Quakers*, before a select number of friends, whom he baffled by the many instances of those converted to christianity in the *Acts*, and even after their receiving the Holy Ghost.

After some time he received an invitation to settle at *Dublin*, but the judicious and sagacious Dr. *Williams*, who was so useful by the labours of his life, and so great a benefactor, at his death, to the dissenting interest, and the interest of religion in the world, though he was not satisfied to remove him from *Wrexham*, which was his own native town, yet rather than to let him leave the kingdom, prevented that design, by sending for him to *London*, where he was several years his Assistant; and afterwards, at his own desire, joint Pastor, and succeeded him at his death. They lived together in the greatest mutual affection and esteem, notwithstanding the disparity of years, and different sentiments in some particular matters, which they sometimes debated with great freedom, and without any offence.

He spent a whole week in a solemn retirement, and in extraordinary exercises of devotion,

devotion, when he first took the whole pastoral charge of this congregation; where he spent the principal part of his life and labours, and which he always reckoned, with great thankfulness and pleasure, was sober, judicious, and peaceable: And God owned his ministry and endeavours many ways to the good of many, younger and elder, and in some instances very singular and remarkable. He was several years concerned in the Lord's-Day *Evening-Lecture* at *Salter's-Hall*; and was chosen one of the six preachers at the *Merchants-Lecture* in that place in the room of Mr. *Jeremiah Smith*.

He published many *Sermons* upon various occasions; and two volumes of very judicious and useful discourses upon the *Christian Temper*; a noble argument, and of standing use, and which has met with uncommon regard in the world. He was once engaged in a controversial writing with a late learned person, concerning the *Importance of scripture consequences*, which was generally allowed to be done in a masterly and christian way, with great clearness and judgment, and with great sobriety and decency.

He had formed a design many years ago of writing *A History of Nonconformity*, from the beginning of the *Reformation* to

the times of the *Civil War* \*; and to trace it from its first rise and spring, through the several steps, and gradual progress of it; to represent the various struggles and suffering of those who contended for a farther reformation, and the principles and methods of those who all along opposed it. He had made a vast preparation of proper materials from all quarters, with great industry, and at great expence, for several years together; and had some assistance from several gentlemen who were skilful that way, and approved the design. He had read over an incredible number of books upon that subject, He thought very few had escaped him during that period; and has filled several quire of paper with proper references under each year. He began to transcribe and finish it some years ago, and has left fairly written about a third part of one of the two folio's he designed. But his constant employment in the ministerial work in a large congregation, the great variety of publick affairs which passed through his hands; the early decays of his constitution; and various disappointments and troubles in his own affairs; prevented the close application the nature of the work required, in the later years of his life. So the work is left un-

\* From that period to the Restoration, where Dr. Calamy's Abridgment begins, a very judicious and diligent account is prepared for the press, and will be shortly published by the Reverend Mr. Daniel Neal.

finished,

finished, to the great loss and disappointment of the learned and curious world. Whether it may be revived and finished by other hands, I am not yet able to say. The design was noble, and would have been of great use several ways. To be sure no one was fitter for the task he had undertaken, or would have executed it with more advantage, or greater satisfaction to the world.

He received the highest marks of respect from two learned bodies, the Universities of *Edinburgh* and *Aberdeen*, with some other of his brethren, without their knowledge, and in the most honourable manner. He sometimes presided at publick ordinations, with great gravity and wisdom, and was greatly delighted in having prayed over three persons, who were all born in this congregation, and distinguished by their piety and worth\*.

His *character* was remarkable for many excellent *endowments*, which were very distinguishing in him, and superiour to most others. He had a great solidity of *judgment*, and uncommon capacity of distinguishing the differences of things, and discerning the true state of a matter. There was a marvellous strength and connexion in his thoughts and expression, upon any subject, in his preaching and his conversation. His

\* Mr. George Smith, Mr. Thomas Newman, Mr. John Oakes.



*vivacity* and quickness joined with so great a judgment, made a very rare and uncommon mixture. He had the solidity of cooler and slower minds, and the life and quickness of those of the warmest imagination. His *industry* and diligence was indefatigable: He could bear hard study, and go through a great variety of business with ease and dispatch: He was peculiarly made for the active life, and was not easily tired or discouraged by the difficulties of an attempt. His *prudence* was often seen in conducting a difficult affair, or managing a debate of consequence; in foreseeing probable difficulties, and finding out proper expedients, in which he was often singularly happy. His vigilance and care made a proper discovery, and prevented a late design in a neighbouring nation, to cramp the Protestant Dissenters, which was equally ungrateful and impolitic, against so great a body of zealous friends to the government, and in circumstances of so great distress in the country.

He excelled in several *vertues* of the christian life. He had great *integrity* and openness of mind: There was an honesty and frankness in his temper, which never suffered him to crouch or dissemble: He knew not how to flinch or flatter: You saw his heart at once, and might depend upon his word. He detested the low methods of slander, and censure, without a sufficient ground,

ground, or any proper call, as a great wickedness. The same greatness and generosity of mind, which led him to do all manner of good to others, set him above doing the least hurt to any. He was steady and *immoveable* in what he apprehended right, and thought of importance. He knew no friend, and feared no danger, in the way of his duty ; tho' no man was a truer *friend*, or had a greater zeal, or a greater pleasure in friendship ; as no man was more generally loved and esteemed. I think I may be allowed to know it, and have a right to say it, after living about six and twenty years in the full confidence and endearments of friendship, in all the services and struggles of life, without the least disgust or distance : God only knows how great a share I bear in the loss, and in the affliction ; and how truly I can say, *I am* 2 Sam. i. 26. *distressed for thee, my brother.*

His *piety* was a steady regular course of serious regard to God, in his daily walk, with great sobriety of mind, and without the least tincture or tendency to *enthusiasm*, notwithstanding some natural warmth and eagerness of temper. His religion was not confined to God, or the mere acts of worship, but extended to all his fellow-creatures : He was of a *publick spirit*, and had a zealous regard to the common good. No man among us bore a greater share in all the

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the affairs of the dissenting interest, or what related to the welfare of his country; or was more ready to do good offices to others, to serve any worthy design, or help any case of distress; and no man ever served the interest of so many others, with greater self-denial, or less advantage to his own. Tho' he had a strange firmness of mind, and oftentimes a noble neglect of what concerned himself, yet he had a greater *tenderness* to others afflictions, than always stood with the comfort of his life, or the convenience of his circumstances. His compassionate heart to others wants and miseries, made him sometimes willing not only *to his power*, but greatly *beyond his power*. His *principles* in religion were sober and moderate, without any zeal for useless speculations, or running into any extreme: He much attended to what was *profitable*. He invariably judged the cause of *moderate Nonconformity* to be a just and a noble cause; and was strong in his sentiments of the scripture perfection, and of christian liberty, against all principles of tyranny and imposition. The *Bible* only was his religion and rule, and the great encouragement and support in all his tryals and conflicts, living and dying. He was soberly *orthodox*, and throughly *catholick*; disposed to think well and to honour those who differ'd from him, who appeared upright and deserving,

deserving, of the several denominations among us. He knew no difference in his affection and esteem between one good man and another, but what the different degrees of their goodness made.

His last *sickness* was a complication of distempers, which gradually broke his constitution, tho' it seem'd built for a longer standing; and became grievous to him, not only as a confinement from active service, which he most dreaded; but as it was sometimes very painful and distressing. He preserved however an immoveable steadiness and composure of mind through so long an exercise, with a profound submission to the divine will, and an exemplary patience under the greatest distress; and was ready to wait the event which God should allot. Indeed the long continuance of the disorder, and frequent intervals of it; the opportunities of extraordinary devotions, and the uncommon concern through the town for so eminent and useful a person among us; sometimes flattered us with hopes of recovery: But the wise Sovereign of the world had determined otherwise.

His lingering illness gave the opportunity of dropping several passages which were instructing and affecting. He had the *sentence of death in himself* a considerable time, and rejoiced in the views of eternity. He would sometimes check himself in the midst of exquisite pain, " But I must not complain :

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“ God is good, and the will of the Lord  
 “ be done. He once said, “ Tho’ I can-  
 “ not say, in the great expression, worthy  
 “ of an Apostle, of a late venerable minister  
 “ \* among us, a little before his death,  
 [‘ I have no more doubt of my accep-  
 ‘ tance with God, than I have of my own  
 ‘ existence,] yet I have good hope thro’  
 “ grace, and such as I am persuaded will  
 “ never make me ashamed.” Tho’ he was  
 sensible, he said, of many failings, he  
 could appeal to God, “ That he had walk-  
 “ ed before him with integrity.” When  
 he was in acute pain, He said to his worthy  
 friends, where he was treated with so high  
 respect, and tender a care, “ The forma-  
 “ lity and ceremony of taking down this  
 “ tabernacle by degrees, is irksome and  
 “ grievous ; how much better were it, if  
 “ it pleased God, that it might tumble all at  
 “ once ! but the will of God be done.”  
 When he looked upon his body, swollen  
 with his distemper, he would often say with  
 pleasure, “ This corruptible, shall put on  
 “ incorruption,—O glorious hope !” He was  
 full of thankfulness to God for any intervals  
 of rest : When he found himself tolerably  
 easy, “ Thank God for this.” When in  
 great pain of body, “ Blessed be God for the  
 “ peace of my mind.”

He told a particular friend who visited  
 him, “ That he was obliged to his friends

\* *The very pious and learned Mr. Will. Lorimore.*

“ who expressed so great a concern for his  
“ life, but it was not so much his own  
“ desire.” He added, “ If I might be con-  
“ tinued for further usefulness in the church  
“ of Christ, I shall be glad to live; but if  
“ not, ’tis my earnest desire to finish at  
“ present.” He said with earnestness and  
tears, “ I have reason to thank God for  
“ an early sense of religion, and an early  
“ dedication to God: I have endeavoured  
“ to order the main part of life as before  
“ God; and have ever desired to be faith-  
“ ful in the ministry: I am conscious of  
“ many failings in publick and private  
“ life; but I can rest upon the gospel-co-  
“ venant for mercy: I am fully persuaded  
“ of the truth of it, and desire no other  
“ salvation.” He said at another time,  
“ I die in the faith and hope of the gospel  
“ I have preached, and find great comfort  
“ in it.” Upon the occasion of the hours  
of prayer on his account, he said, “ I  
“ heartily wish that my affliction may oc-  
“ casion the reviving a spirit of prayer; I  
“ shall not think much of any thing I en-  
“ dure, if it may have that effect.” He  
spent whole nights in prayer to God, when  
he could not sleep, for himself, his family,  
his friends, and the church of God: It was  
the proper breath of his soul. He said to  
an old and intimate friend, “ That the  
“ greatest difficulty he found in the thoughts

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“ of leaving this world, was parting from  
 “ the company of his brethren, whom he  
 “ had always loved, and with whom he  
 “ had conversed with so much pleasure.”  
 He began to write some hints of meditation  
 for the use of himself and his friends, some  
 days before his death, with a trembling  
 hand; the inscription of it was, “ What  
 “ I am as a creature; as a reasonable  
 “ creature; as a sinful creature; as a re-  
 “ deemed creature; as a creature in a state  
 “ of tryal for eternity; as a sociable crea-  
 “ ture, and related to other beings about  
 “ me.” But it was only begun. The last  
 thing remarkable, while he was sensible,  
 and some of the last words he was heard  
 to say, were; he lift up his hands, and  
 cry'd out, “ All is well, all is well.” In-  
 deed he had a firm undaunted spirit upon  
 christian principles, thro' his long illness,  
 and truly *finished his course with joy*. And  
 O may we go and do likewise! Let the  
 instance of the Apostle in the text, and  
 that of your deceased friend and pastor be  
 to every one of us, both a moving exam-  
 ple, and an encouraging motive to do so.  
 I conclude with the words of the Apostle  
 to the christian *Hebrews*; *Remember them*  
*who have had the rule over you, and have*  
*spoken to you the word of God, whose faith*  
*follow, considering the end of their con-*  
*versation.*

Heb.xiii.7.

ACTS

ACTS XX. 24.

*But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus—*

I HAVE already considered these words in a doctrinal way, and have represented both the steadfast *resolution* and firmness of the Apostle's mind under present tryals; and his great *desire* and aim in it: I have shewed distinctly, what it is to finish our course, and upon what grounds 'tis so desirable.

What I propose at present is only to consider the *practical improvement*, and various uses which may be made of it to our selves: and because the subject is of a very serious nature, and great importance in the christian life, I shall endeavour to represent it a little distinctly, and shall reduce what is most material to the following inferences and exhortations.

1. I infer from hence, That every christian has his course of service *appointed* by God. The Apostle speaks here of *his course*  
*and*



*and ministry*; but this was not peculiar to him; for he speaks elsewhere of the *race* Heb. xii. 1. *which is set before us*. The whole compass of christian duty is the common course of every one, however otherwise distinguished. The Apostles of Christ were equally obliged to this, with the meanest christian. The special duties of our particular places, which are proper to our condition and circumstance of life, and the relation in which we stand to others, is a course proper to our selves; so magistrates and ministers, those of publick characters and higher stations of life, and private christians of the lowest rank, and most obscure, have their proper course, and respective work, mark'd out and appointed by God. The *perfect law* of the Lord is the common rule to every one, which the Apostle calls the *royal law*, and the *law of liberty*. Jam. ii. 8, 12.

It would very much contribute to raise our esteem, and dispose to a suitable regard, to consider every part of the christian duty as the will of God, and fixed by a divine direction and appointment; and the higher our apprehensions are of the divine authority and dominion, the more easily they will command our attention, and make the deeper impression upon the heart. How cheerful and ready will all our obedience be, when we are thoroughly satisfied of  
the

the right of the authority, and the reason of the command ?

2. We must be prepared and *resolved* against difficulties and tryals in our way. We may certainly know without the spirit of prophecy, or immediate revelation of the Holy Ghost, that tryals and afflictions of one kind or another, will abide us wherever we go. The christian life is a state of warfare as well as service; there are not only great difficulties in our work, but great opposition from without, and 'tis an observation which extends farther than the Apostles times, and is found true in every age, *That they who will live godly in Christ Jesus, must suffer persecution, or be ready to suffer it.* <sup>2 Tim. iii. 12.</sup>

We must *count the cost* of being disciples of Christ at first setting out, and reckon upon sufferings and tryals before hand, that we may be prepared and fortified against them; and *arm our selves with the same mind* with our suffering Saviour, that we may not be *moved from our steadfastness*, and may stand all assaults, and maintain our ground. Difficulties and tryals always take us at a disadvantage, under an easy carelessness and security of mind, and when they surprize us undetermined and unprepared. Nothing is more necessary in circumstances of danger, or more likely to secure our standing, than a wisely and well

Act. xi. 23. resolved mind: We must *cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart*, and not be *soon shaken in mind*, if we hope to be *steadfast and unmoveable*, and not to *fall from our own steadfastness*.

2 Pet. iii. 17.

3. We must not grudge our *lives* in the service of Christ, or think much to lay them down for his sake. We must not count our lives too dear a sacrifice for his honour, if we are called to it, or consult our safety at the expence of it. It cannot be denied or dissembled, that this is the standing law of the gospel to all the disciples of Christ; *He who findeth his life, shall lose it; and he who loseth his life, for my sake, shall find it*. And, *If any man cometh to me, and hateth not his own life; or as it is in Matthew, loves it more than me; he cannot be my disciple*. And whatsoever appearance or pretence there may be of hardship in the case, 'tis certainly a wise and reasonable choice, to *offer our lives upon the sacrifice and service of the faith*, and to the honour of him, who is the *Lord of life*, and has the greatest right to it; and has greater ends of good to serve by them, more noble and lasting, than our temporal lives amount to; who *gave his own life for us, and redeemed us by his precious blood*; and who will *give eternal life* to all his faithful followers, *an hundred fold in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting*.

Matt. x. 39.

Luk. xiv. 26.

—xviii. 30.

4. We

4. We learn from hence, what to think of those who have not yet *begun* the christian course: Who have never heartily set about the christian life, or been in good earnest in it, but lived in ignorance and careless neglect, in a deep security, and unconcern of mind, or under governing habits and customs of sin; who are taken up with the business or vanities of life, and pursue their pleasures and interests in it; but never made a personal surrender of themselves to God, or made it their daily endeavour to do his will, or be approved of him: Who never made religion the care of their souls, or the business of their lives.

How great are the numbers of such in a christian country, and under the christian profession; who have really no more of a *christian*, than what is contained in their christian name; and are not distinguished from *heathens*, by any thing in their temper, or in their lives? How far are they from finishing their course who have not yet begun it? They have their whole race to run, and have not gone one step in it. When do you intend to begin? *When shall it once be?* If they miscarry who don't finish their course, what must their case be who never enter upon it, or ever made the tryal and attempt? Surely 'tis

high time to begin, if ever you hope to finish it, and to set about it immediately, and make the utmost dispatch; *O think on your ways, and turn your feet to his testimonies; make haste and delay not to keep his commandments. Let the time past of your life suffice to work the will of the Gentiles; and become obedient children, not fashioning your selves according to the former lusts in your ignorance. On the contrary; to-day while it is called to-day, hear his voice, and harden not your hearts.* Bring your minds by close attention to a full persuasion, and a fixed point, that you may have some certain view before you, and be directed and excited by it, in all your measures and conduct of life.

Pfal. cxix.  
59.

1Pet. i. 14.

—iv. 3.

Heb. iii. 7.

The longer you continue in this state, the farther you are from your end: These two are direct extremes, and stand at the greatest distance from one another, the *finishing* our course, and not *beginning* it. And what if you should *die* in the mean time, and be called off the stage of the world, while you are only considering and designing, and before you begin to act a proper part in it, or have done any thing in order to it? What if you had died in their stead who are now removed, and your careless and useless lives had gone in the room of their valuable and useful ones?

ones? What had been the state of your case, and how had you been disposed of for ever? What a figure will you make in the other world? How will you think of your selves, and be thought of by all the World? How sad an end must he make of the natural life, who has not yet made a beginning in the spiritual life? Let me call you to consider, how many uncomfortable thoughts must it necessarily administer to upon a dying bed? What foundation must it lay for future sorrow? What shame and reproach must it occasion upon a review? What anguish and distress in the prospect before you? Sinner, what a favour is it from God to be spared and continued in life after so many trifling neglects and long delays, and that it can yet be said, *Behold* 2 Cor. vi. 2. *now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation;* and that a *space of repentance*, and opportunity of good, the exercise of patience and mercy, are lengthened out, after so many years of provocation, and when, perhaps, many others of thy companions and acquaintance in life, are *silent in the grave*, or in the *place of torments*? What aggravation of thy folly and guilt, how amazing and insupportable must thy shame and condemnation be at last, if thou continuest careless and incorrigible unto the end?

5. 'Tis not enough to begin well, but we must *finish* our course too : Many begin well, and go a considerable way in the christian course, who never finish and hold out to the end. Many hopeful beginnings come to nothing, and are, in the representation of the prophet, as an *untimely birth*,  
 Hof. vi. 4. or as the *morning cloud*, and *early dew*, which soon *vanisheth away* ; is presently scattered and dried up by the rising sun. The Apostle tells the *Galatians*, who were for revolting from *Christianity* to *Judaism*, and mingling the law of *Moses* with the doctrine of *Christ* ; *You did run well, who did hinder you, that you should not obey the truth ?* And, *are you so foolish, having begun in the Spirit* ; entered upon the spiritual religion of the Gospel : *are ye now made perfect in the flesh*, or by the carnal ordinances of the legal dispensation ?  
 Gal. v. 7.  
 —iii. 3.

'Tis very sad to consider, how many have begun betimes, and set out well in religion, who have been discouraged by difficulties, or entangled by sin, and have come to forsake their profession, to grow gradually careless and wicked, and fall at last under a fuller power of the Devil ; like the case represented by our Lord in the Gospel : *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, and walketh through dry places, and seeketh rest, and findeth none ; then*  
 he

*he saith, I will return to mine own house, from whence I came out; and when he cometh he findeth it empty, swept and garnished:* When the Devil is dispossessed for a while, and a man begins to be religious, and grows regular and sober: *Then he goeth and taketh seven other spirits, more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first:* He returns with fresh recruits, and greater force, and if he can find admission, he takes a fuller possession, and makes him worse than he was before. We must not rest in good beginnings, tho' 'tis absolutely necessary to make a beginning; as the meer setting out right in a race will never bring a man to the end of it.

But now a sincere christian is much set upon *finishing* his course, and the true spirit of a christian is much seen in it. Hypocritical and formal professors of religion look no further than present things, and outward appearance; all their care is to be *seen of men, and approved of men.* If they can keep a fair outside, and gain the good opinion of others, and promote and secure their worldly interest and convenience; they trouble themselves no further, and are not solicitous about futurities. But a christian's eye is very much upon his *end:*  
His



His constant care and chief concern is to hold out, and finish well at last: "Let me die the death of the righteous, as I have endeavoured to live his life." "Let my end be peace, like the upright man." He matters not what tryals and troubles he meets with, so that he may *finish his course with joy*.—Indeed finishing work is a great and difficult work, and of another kind from all the former; as the finishing any work gives the beauty and glory to the whole; and it requires the nicest care to give the finishing touches, and last hand to a curious piece. 'Tis the great *business* of life to make a good end, and we should be always doing something towards it. The christian course is not a sudden hasty work, to be done all at once, or in a short space, in a last sickness, or upon a dying bed; but it extends to the whole compass of life, and all our time in this world is little enough for it. There will be always something to do as long as we live, tho' life were extended to never so great a length towards finishing our course, and coming off well at last. And it should be our daily endeavour, That the longer we live, the better we may be, more refined from all sinful and earthly alloy, more improved and confirmed in the divine life, and fitted for the heavenly state; that our last days, may  
be

be our best days, and our *last works more* Rev. ii. 19.  
*than the first.*

And *ministers*, of all men are especially concerned in imitation of Christ, to *finish the work which God has given them to do*; and with the Apostle, to *finish their course* and the *ministry which they have received of the Lord*; for they are under special obligations, and have greater advantages; they stand more in the eye of the world; and are bound by their office, living and dying, to be *examples to the flock.* 1 Pet. v. 3.

6. How *happy* are they who have finished their course! If a christian is so much concerned, and upon so great reason, to finish his course; what a satisfaction must it be, upon the same grounds, to have finished it, or to have the end of it in view? There is a mighty pleasure in any other case, to finish our work, especially if 'tis a work of great labour and cost, which has been long bringing about, and through many difficulties and disappointments in the way; and if it be a matter of great moment, and in which our heart is much engaged. The great God looked with pleasure upon the finished creation; He *rested* or rejoiced in his work, and said, *It was very good.* When the Gen. i. 31. foundations of the earth were laid, the *morning stars sung together, and all the sons of* Job xxxviii. 7. *God shouted for joy.* What a solemn thanksgiving

giving and rejoicing was observed at the finishing *Solomon's Temple*, which was raised with so great magnificence, and at so vast expence; and when it was rebuilt by *Zerobabel*, what *shoutings* were there, when the *top stone* was laid, and crying out, *grace, grace to it?*

1 Kin. viii.  
beg.

Zach. iv. 7.

The satisfaction and joy which arises in a christian's mind, upon the finishing his course, is *unspeakable* and *glorious*, and will recompence all the labour and sorrow he has met with in the way. And there is a great deal of reason for it; for when he has finished his course, he is past all danger of miscarrying, and being lost; and is placed out of the reach of temptation and snare, and every envious and malicious power. They have run the race and won the prize, and after the battle, received the crown: They have got safe through the storm, and are laid up in the quiet harbour: They have reached their native country and proper home, after a long and wearisome passage, in a foreign land, and through a howling wilderness. What they have *sown in tears*, they will *reap in joy*; and how great is the *joy of harvest!* When they have wrought out their salvation *with fear and trembling*, they will *enter into the joy of their Lord*: And what a surprize of joy after the many fears and sorrows of life?

What

What a blessed difference does this make in their case, from that of others! They stand safe upon the shoar, while we are tossed in a tempestuous sea: They are crowned, and they triumph, while we are pursued by powerful enemies, and exposed to many dangers. We bear the *heat and burden* of the day, when they *rest from their labours*, and enter upon their reward; and have many assaults and conflicts to pass through which they have quite escaped.

And what reason have we of *comfort*, and not to *sorrow as those who have no hope*, for them who have *finished their course*, and *sleep in Jesus*? We should *weep for our selves*, and *not for them*, for their *warfare is accomplished*, and they have received their discharge; while we are employed in a difficult service, and engaged in a certain conflict, and a doubtful war. I only add once more,

7. How much should it be our *concern*, that present tryals may not *discourage* us, and that we may *finish* our course with joy. It may be we have long ago entered upon the christian course, and proceeded in it a considerable way: Perhaps, we are some of us, near finishing, and drawing to the close of it: Of what consequence is it to finish well? Let me earnestly recommend this exhortation especially to *elder* persons, mi-

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nisters or christians, who have lived a considerable time in the world, in any state of service and usefulness; and are visibly hastening out of it. Have you any work for God upon your hands, or in your design? leave it not neglected or unfinished, but make all proper dispatch. Is there any part of the christian course, any ordinance of worship or duty of life, which lies neglected? see that it be immediately performed, and attended to. Are there any of the graces of the christian life remarkably defective, or any sins more than ordinary prevalent? labour earnestly to have the one strengthened and improved, and the other mortified and subdued; that what is *lacking* may be *perfected*, and that you may *strengthen* the things which *remain*.

If any serious and concerned christian, from the consideration of the case, as I have represented it, should be ready to say, But how shall we be able to finish our course, and what is necessary in order to it, or may be useful and helpful in it? I answer briefly in the following suggestions, by way of direction.

*Begin* well, and lay the foundation right. If you mistake here, no wonder you miscarry at last. If the foundation be not firmly laid, the building cannot stand. If we *build upon the sand*, the *building will fall* in a time of tryal,

tryal, and *great will be the fall of it*: But if we *build upon a rock*, the *building will stand* all assaults, and *will never fall*. And 'tis he who *heareth his sayings and doth* Mat. vii. *them*, who is like to a man who *buildeth* <sup>24.</sup> *his house upon a rock*, in our Lord's representation of it: *i. e.* Who receiveth the doctrine of the gospel of which Christ is the author, and foundation, and which directs us to the great propitiation for sin, and prescribes the method of our acceptance with God, and pleasing him. Particularly, there must be a hearty *consent* to the gospel *covenant*, and a chusing of God in Christ, for our God, and a giving up our selves entirely to him, absolutely and without reserve, to serve him as our proper Lord, and enjoy him as our chief good and last end. The governing habit and bent of the mind must be set right, taken off from all sensible good, and prevailingly set for God and heaven, against all attempts and opposition. There must be a saving change of heart in order to an interest in the blessings of the gospel, and to our continuance and overcoming in the christian state. This is the *good work begun*, and which is to be *per-* Philip. i. 6. *formed* until the day of Christ.

Again, Look well to your *daily standing*. We are daily employed in the christian service, and in danger from our spiritual ene-

mies: We need daily watchfulness and care. Watch over your own spirits, and often call them to an account. Carefully observe every decay of goodness and declining from God, the first motions and tendency to carelessness and neglects of life, or indifference and unconcern of mind. We grow worse, not all at once, but by gentle steps, and various slow and unheeded degrees. Retrieve a false step, check a rising disorder of heart, before it gather strength by repetition and indulgence, and grow into a habit: Be diligent in your daily work, and keep up a lively sense of God upon your minds, and a governing regard to him in all your ways. See what progress and improvement you have made in the christian life, what ground you have gained, what advances you have made, &c. Our security and standing in circumstances of perpetual danger, depend very much upon daily watchfulness and diligence; and negligence and remissness of spirit will always weaken our hands, and endanger our standing. And therefore the Apostle so oftens calls the christians to caution and fear, and diligence; to *take heed*, and *look diligently*, &c.

Besides, Guard against *hindrances* and discouragement. Be well apprized of the true state of things. There are various assaults from different quarters, and of very different

rent kinds. You may be diverted and drawn off from the christian course by the cares and pleasures of life, and the entanglements and pursuit of worldly good; or terrified and discouraged by present evil, and the fear of danger. Now be always aware of the danger about you, and always upon your guard, that you may not be taken at a disadvantage, or surprized before you are aware. Reckon upon the tryals of the christian course, that you may be prepared and fortified against them. So the Apostle exhorts the christians; *Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset us, and run with patience the race which is set before us; i. e.* all encumbrance about us, which would hinder our running in the christian race, or render it more difficult to us. And again, *Ye therefore beloved, seeing you know these things before, beware lest ye also being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.*

Heb. xii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Pet. iii. 17.

Further, Use the proper *helps* afforded for your farther improvement in the christian life: The greater progress you make in religion, and the more confirmed the habit of your mind is, you will be more secure from falling, and the more likely to hold out to the end, as you gather greater strength, and take a deeper root.

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Attend upon all the ordinances of the gospel, and the means of grace, upon all proper occasions, for your greater establishment of heart, and encouragement and support, in all the difficulties of the christian course.

*Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation. Put on the whole armour of God, and above all, the shield of faith.*

Pro. x. 29. *Renew your strength by waiting upon the Lord, for the way of the Lord is strength to the upright, and they go from strength to strength.*

Pf. lxxxiv.  
7.

2 Pet. i. 5. *We grow stronger, and not weary, the further we go in it. Give all diligence in the duties of the christian life, to add to your graces, and to make your calling and election sure. We must grow in grace and knowledge, that we be not led away, or fall from our stedfastness.*

—10.

i. 17, 18.

Endeavour to revive and strengthen the good impressions which have been made upon your minds, and to raise fresh and deeper impressions, by a regular serious attendance upon every appointment of the christian worship, and all the duties of the christian life. The best way to secure our standing, is to make a gradual progress, and daily improvement, as 'tis by going forward, we arrive to our journey's end. The stronger the convictions and persuasion of our minds are, the firmer the resolution and purpose of our heart, and the greater

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our satisfaction and joy, in the service of God, the surer will our standing be under all our tryals, and the more certain our continuance to the end.

Further, Act in all you do in a constant *dependence* upon God. Beg the supplies of the divine grace, as well as use your daily endeavours, or else your endeavours will be without effect. Our strength will fail in the tryal, and the power of our spiritual enemies will prevail. The observation and experience of serious christians, as well as the testimony and examples of the scripture, confirm this practical truth, That a vain confidence in our selves, and presuming upon our own strength, with a neglect of God, and of divine aids, betrays our weakness, and invites our fall; as we see in the case of *Peter*. The direction therefore here is, Engage the divine presence and spirit, by prayer and dependence. Plead the promise of *sufficient grace*, and proportionable strength to all the circumstances of the case. Engage it by dependence, as well as by prayer. Live in a daily dependence upon it, and always act in every thing, *in the name*, and *in the strength of the Lord*. Our continuance and preservation in all the difficulties and snares of the christian life, depends upon the divine help: *Having obtained help from*  
*the*

Act. xxvi.<sup>22.</sup> *the Lord we continue to this day; and*  
 1 Pet. i. 5. *we are kept by the power of God thro'*  
*faith unto salvation.* The divine grace  
 can be easily sufficient, under the greatest  
 labours and conflicts, and will both sup-  
 port you in the way, and preserve you to  
 the end.

To conclude, Look to the *example* and  
*undertaking* of the Redeemer. When he  
 Joh. xvii. 3. *had finished his work, he prayed to be glo-*  
*riified with the Father.* And the Apostle  
 Heb. xii. 2. *requires us, to look unto Jesus, the author*  
*and finisher of our faith, who for the joy*  
*which was set before him endured the*  
 — 3. *cross, despising the shame; and to consider*  
*him who endureth such contradiction of*  
*sinner against himself, lest we be weary*  
*and faint in our minds.* Eye the example  
 of the patient and faithful redeemer, who  
 always did the will of God, and finished  
 his course thro' the greatest tryals and op-  
 position. Let us keep our end always in  
 our eye: Set before you the *incorruptible*  
*crown*, the glorious prize for which you  
 run, to animate and encourage you; that  
 — xi. 26. *you may have a respect unto the recompence*  
 — 27. *of reward, and endure as seeing him who*  
*is invisible.* Should we tire or faint with  
 such glorious hopes in our minds, and so  
 near and certain views before us?

And especially look to his gracious *undertaking*: His promise and power concur; there is inclination and ability conjunct: He is both a *merciful and faithful high priest*. He has undertaken to keep all the sincere and faithful: He stands charged with the care of them, and is accountable for them to God. He who prayed for *Peter*, That his *faith might not fail* in an hour of temptation; and promised the Apostle *Paul*, *My grace shall be sufficient for thee*, when he was buffeted by a messenger from Satan; has promised to all his disciples, *That he will give them eternal life, and none shall pluck them out of his hands;* <sup>Joh. x. 27, 28.</sup> and will be able to appeal to God at last, *Those whom thou hast given me I have kept, and none of them is lost.* The Apostle encourages himself and other christians with this apprehension, That what he had *committed to him*, he was able to keep to <sup>2 Tim. i. 12.</sup> *that day*; and that he is able to keep us <sup>Jud. 24.</sup> *from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.* Let us put our selves under the conduct of the great Redeemer, and commit our selves to his powerful care: Make a daily use of his *mediation*, looking to him for all supplies of grace, encouragements to our faith, and acceptance with God in all we do. And then we have all

the reason which the nature of the thing,  
and the promise of the gospel, can give us,  
that we shall not fail or miscarry at last,  
but shall *finish our course with joy*, and re-  
ceive the end of our faith in the salvation  
of our souls.

1 Pet. i. 9.

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**F I N I S.**

*Errat. Page 5. in Margin f. 10 r. 10*

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