1786 1786

Dr. *ROGERS*'s

XIX SERMONS.

NINETEEN SERMONS ON Several Occasions.

Publish'd from the ORIGINALS, and never before Printed.

BY

JOHN ROGERS, D.D.
Late Vicar of St. *Giles, Cripplegate*; Sub-Dean and Canon of *Wells*; and Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty.

To which is Prefix'd,

The AUTHOR'S LIFE,

With an

ELOGIUM

Writren by

JOHN BURTON, B.D.
Fellow of ETON-COLLEGE.

LONDON,
Printed for W. INNYS and R. MANBY, at the West End of St. *Paul's*.
M DCC XXXV.

ELOGIUM

Sacrum MEMORIÆ

Johannis Rogers, S.T.P.

CHriſtiane Lector,
Quicunque vel Eccesiæ vel Reipublicæ
Civis vixeris idoneus,
Gratulationis ſimul & Doloris
Accede noſtri Particeps,
Beatam recolens Memoriam
JOHANNIS ROGERS:
Viri,
Inter S. T. Profeſſores
Merito ſuo celeberrimi;
Qui recenſet Titulos,
Idem ſimul laudat Virtutes.

In Scriptis, juxta ac Moribus,
Eminebat Gratia
Pietatis vere Sacerdotalis.
Aderat Animi

Magnitudo, & Moderatio,
Cuilibet Muneri, Fortunæque,
Sive ſuſtinendæ ſive ornandæ,
Par.

Ingenium porro ſingulare,
Cujus Acumen
Invita laudavit Obtrectatio,
Cujus vim auſpicatam
Teſtabitur uſque
Defenſa Veritas,
Refutatus Error.

Scriptor,
Indolis Stylique juxta felix,
Controverſias graviſſimas
Suſcepit, adminiſtravit, exhauſit;
Chriſtianæ Religionis
Et Libertatis Vindex,
Licentiæ Refrænator;
Idem optimus
Et Sacerdos & Civis.
Quod erat Fortitudinis Chriſtianæ,
Deo ſoli placere ſtudens;
Quod erat eximiæ Moderationis,
In Dogmatis ſtatuendis,
Sectæ nullius
Vel Princeps, vel Aſſecla;
In Controverſiarum Actionibus
Non Litigator, ſed Arbiter;
Quod demum miræ erat Felicitatis,
Sine offenſione Partium,
Sine Invidia Victor:
Contentionis potius oblivionem quærens,

Quam

Quam Triumphi gloriam;
Tranquillitatis publicæ ſtudioſior
Quam Famæ ſuæ.

Nihil arripere temere præjudicatum,
Sed ex Meditationis ſeveræ officina
Omnia bene penſitata & explorata
Proferre, tueri;
Veritatem unice
Oculo irretorto inveſtigare:
Antiquæ Stabilitatis Præſidia,
Non Errorum vel Perfidiæ
Involucra quærere:
Non Hominum merita,
Sed momenta rerum perpendere:
Offenſionum materiem
Non ſubminiſtrare, ſed præcidere; —
Diſputanti,
Hæ illi erant Artes.
Quam in CHILLINGWORTHO, jure mireris,
Copiam & Conſtantiam,
Quam in eodem forte deſideres,
Gravitatem & Subtilitatem,
Quæ demum in HOOKERO ſuo
Erant ſumma omnia,
Ad cauſæ conſimilis defenſionem
Conjuncta feliciter adhibuiſſe, —
Hæ Illi erant Laudes.
Politia noſtra Anglicana,
Tum Eccleſiaſtica, tum Civilis,
Incolumis uſque tuebitur
Honoratam Vindicis ſui Memoriam;
Et, quæ rebus novis ſtudentium
Commenta delet,

Sera dies confirmabit Judicia
JOHANNIS ROGERS.

Concionanti
Aderat nervosa, simplex, flexanima,
Et spectabilis quædam
Facundia,
Stylumque neglecta sequebatur Elegantia :
Ita ut nihil ad Docendum aptius
Audiverit Plebs Rustica,
Nihil popularius LONDINENSIS,
Nihil demum gravius subtiliusve
Academici.
Ubique mirabundus agnoscas
Ingenii multiformis hominem,
Inter Oratores Dialecticum,
Inter Dialecticos Oratorem,
Omnimoda dicendi laude cumulatum.

Non Aures leviter delinire,
Sed Corda ferire, perdomare ;
Super rebus arduis consulentium
Animis scrupulos eximere ;
Pontificiorum fraudes & insidias
Simplicitate ipsa eludere, superare ;
Schismaticorum pervicaciam
Benevolentia frangere, expugnare ;
Quoquomodo Dissentientes conciliare ;
Errantes dirigere ;
Vacillantes confirmare ;
Omnes demum Consilio flectere,
Auctoritate moderari ;
Ea erat Illi
Curarum privatarum summa,

Id

Id erat Illi
Eloquentiæ Sacerdotalis Palmarium.
In hac præſertim parte triumphabat
Orator vere Chriſtianus,
Divini Juris Conſultus,
Interpres fidiſſimus.

In *Conſuetudinis Domeſticæ* officiis
Quam amabilis fuerit
Maritus, Parens, Frater, Amicus,
Etiamnum teſtantur ſuorum
Lacrymæ & Suſpiria.
En, laudis inſtar ampliſſimæ,
Commune Deſiderium!

Rei Familiaris
Diſpenſator prudens,
Ab Oſtentatione Luxuque abhorrens,
Ex honeſta Parſimonia
Liberalitatis melius collocandæ
Subſidia quæſivit.
Magni erat inſtar Beneficii
Illum habuiſſe Anteceſſorem,
Quem nulla fere Domus Eccleſiaſtica
Aliquandiu exceperat Incolam,
Quæ non poſtmodo agnoverit
Benefactorem.

Publico
Splendore, Dignitate, Commodo
Guadebat, ut ſuo:
Ptochotrophiis,
Eruditionis Chriſtianæ Scholis,
Clerici nominis

Viduarum, Orphanorum Hetæriis
Aderat
Fautor, Vindex, Patronus,
Consiliis, Eloquentia, Liberalitate.

Otio florebat
Nec inerti nec infructuoso,
Artium etiam Mechanicarum Cultor;
In ipsis studiorum oblectamentis
Ea assecutus,
Quæ Industriæ alienæ
Laudem adæquaverint.

In *Negotiis* obeundis
Ea erat,
Quam in homine Politico laudaveris,
Solertia:
Ea interim,
Quam in Ecclesiastico postulaveris,
Innocentia.

In *Colloquiis*
Inerat vivida quædam, &,
Quæ Sodalem maxime commendat,
Hilaritas facta.

In *Congressibus* porro *quibuscunque*
Ea, quæ hominem Liberalem decebat,
Comitas:
Quæ Academicum,
Simplicitas:
Quæ denique Clericum,
Severitas Reverenda.

Illu-

Illuſtrabat hæc omnia
Animi ingenita Celſitudo,
Laudabilis Superbia,
Generoſa quædam Dignatio,
Poſthabitæ ſecura Famæ:
Qualem profecto
Neque jure quiſquam reprehendere,
Neque forſan ſine reprehenſione
Imitari potuerit.

In Curriculo Gloriæ multiplici
Non fruſtra exercebatur
Hominis tanta Virtus,
Inter Aulicos ſine Ambitione,
Inter Superiores ſine Invidia,
Inter omnes ſine Faſtu ſpectata,
Adulari prorſus indocilis,
Laudum pariter & Obtrectationum
Contemptrix,
Injuriarum ſedulo inſcia,
Sponte immemor,
Ignoſcendo certe pluſquam Victrix.

In hominum frequentia Negotiiſque
Jamdiu multa cum laude verſatus,
Vir pius & ſapiens
Voluit aliquando Otio frui,
Sibi aliquantiſper vacare,
Publicis interim utilitatibus
Non deeſſe.

Verùm (quod Eccleſiæ bene verteret)
Ex amabili ſeceſſu
In urbis celebritatem

Pene

Pene invitum revocavit
Benevolentia ſingularis Patronorum,
Quibus ita placuiſſe
Meritorum erat
Commendatio plane invidenda,
Elogio omni longe honorificentior.

Ibi, cum quod reliquum erat temporis
Deo conſecratum impenderet,
Animæ magnæ plus æquo prodigus,
Et, quod fuiſſet prudentiæ opus mirificæ,
CRIPPLEGATENSIUM etiam ſuorum
Animos aliquando conciliaturus,
In ipſo honorum aditu,
Famæque creſcentis flore,
Temporibus Eccleſiæ certe alieniſſimis,
Conſilia ſua honeſtiſſima,
Et ingentes bonorum omnium ſpes,
Febre præreptus luctuoſa
Fefellit.

Fortiſſimi Vir Animi,
In ancipiti illa trepidatione,
In ſupremo illo diſcrimine,
Sibi conſtans,
Quod ſupererat Spiritûs
In pias pro Eccleſia preces
Moriens efflavit.

Mecum ergo, Lector Chriſtiane,
Hæc damna luge publica;
Tam pretioſi Capitis deſiderio tangi
Pietatis laus eſt non infima:
At æmulari potuiſſe

Illa

Illa fuerit Ingenii,
Illa Morum
Laus pulcherrima.

Faxit Deus
Ut Virtutum tantarum, unde
Ad Ecclesiam, ad Rempublicam
Fructus redundârunt uberrimi,
Honestissima vigeat usque Memoria,
Posterisque prosit Exemplum;
Ut aliquando minus desideretur
Ille quem nunc requirimus,
JOHANNES ROGERS.

AN

AN ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE OF THE *AUTHOR.*

THERE is a natural Curiosity which leads every attentive Reader into Enquiries concerning the moral Character of those Authors, whose Writings he admires.

A nearer

A nearer Acquaintance with their Virtues confirms his Judgment in their Favour: And the Eſteem conceiv'd for the Perſon, brings an additional Value to the Performance.

'Tis obſervable that ſome eminent Men, who have diſtinguiſh'd themſelves in ſome important Points, as no Friends to the Church of *England* by Law eſtabliſh'd, have been honour'd with magnificent Encomiums: Such Marks of Reſpect beſtow'd on their Memory ſeem to have given an Air of Credit and Triumph to their Singularities; and the leſs diſcerning Part of Mankind from having Mens Perſons in Admiration, are apt to be led unawares into the Approbation of their Principles. If then the juſt Praiſe of perſonal Accompliſhments in any Author, does indirectly carry along with it a Recommendation of the Cauſe in which he was engaged, it were to be wiſh'd, on Account of the common Good, that ſome more able Pen was employ'd in doing this Act of Juſtice to the Memory of Dr. *John Rogers*, a moſt true Son of our Holy Church, which he defended by his Wri-

tings,

tings, and adorn'd by his Life. His Works do indeed abundantly ſpeak his Praiſe; but ſtill ſome honourable Teſtimony is due to his diſtinguiſh'd Merit: Something is due to the Satisfaction of the Publick, and the Expectation of his Friends. The Character of a good Pariſh-Prieſt is of general Uſe; that of ſuch a Maſterly Pen in Controverſy, exercis'd with ſuch Chriſtian Moderation is ſingular and uncommon; that of ſo ingenious and orthodox a Divine, and ſo excellent a Defender of our religious Eſtabliſhment in theſe preſent Times appears more eſpecially ſeaſonable and inſtructive.

It has therefore been thought proper to introduce this Volume of Sermons into the World, with ſome Account of the worthy Author. Accordingly for the Entertainment of the *Learned* Reader here is prefix'd a copious Elogium in *Latin*, written ſome time ſince and lately communicated by his Friend the Rev^d. Mr. *Burton* of *C.C.C.* in *Oxford.* And moreover, for the Satisfaction of the common *Engliſh* Reader, the following Narrative is offer'd to the Publick, which, imperfect as it is, will,

will, I hope, not be wholly unacceptable, while it gives ſome Idea of this excellent Man in his private and publick Character, paſſing thro' various Stations of Life with more than ordinary Credit and Reputation.

He was born at *Enſham* in *Oxfordſhire*, *A. D.* 1679, his Father was Vicar of that Pariſh, and Rector of *Wick-Riſſington* in *Gloceſterſhire*, a very worthy Clergyman; a Circumſtance which he always eſteem'd part of his Honour and Happineſs. He was bred up at *New-College* School in *Oxford*, under the memorable Mr. *Badger*. In *Jan.* 1693, he was elected Scholar of *C. C. C.* a Society to be mention'd with Honour on many Accounts, but eſpecially for that exemplary Strictneſs obſerv'd in the Examination of Candidates, and Integrity in their Elections. He was the youngeſt of all the Competitors, who appeared more numerous on this Occaſion than had been remembred; ſo that his Succeſs implies no ſmall Praiſe of his Merit. How he improv'd the Advantages of his Situation in a College remarkable for good Diſcipline, I leave the Reader to judge

judge by the Effects. In this early Time of Life when young Mens Paſſions often ſally out into ſome Kind of Extravagance or other, he ſhew'd in one Inſtance an uncommon Turn of Mind, at once intent on Purſuits in themſelves widely different, Country Diverſions and Academical Studies. I remark this as ſomewhat peculiar to him, and not ſafely to be imitated by others. I ſhou'd not have commended him for a keen Sportſman, if that Circumſtance had prov'd inconſiſtent with the Character of a good Scholar. It was his ſingular Happineſs amidſt all his Excurſions ſtill to keep the main Point in View; in his Recreations he preſerv'd his Innocency, and return'd to his Studies with as much Chearfulneſs, as he had left them. Application in the Night-Time repair'd the Defects of the broken Day; and without the Appearance of much Induſtry he made a conſiderable Proficiency in Learning. With Reputation he proceeded to the Degree of *A. M.* and his Character juſtified the ambitious Hopes of his Friends; which ſoon after, a violent Fever had like to have cut ſhort. The ge-

neral Sollicitude of the whole College for him on this Occaſion, was one Proof of the Eſteem they had of his Worth.

He had a remarkable Briſkneſs of Spirit, ſuch as cou'd contemn and overcome Difficulties; and withal, an Openneſs and Sincerity of Temper, which gain'd the Love and Eſteem of his Cotemporaries: A quick Apprehenſion, a large Capacity, and an unwearied Attention to any Point in View: an happy Frame of Mind which wou'd have render'd him eminent in *any* Profeſſion. But his Inclination, as well as the ordinary Courſe of his Education, determin'd him to the Study of Divinity. Accordingly he went into Holy Orders, with a juſt Senſe of the Dignity of his Office, which he magnified by a ſuitable Behaviour. And We of this Church have reaſon to join with him in giving Thanks to God "*that* "*he was called to the Honour of the Prieſt-* "*hood in the Church of* England, *which he* "*reverenc'd as moſt agreeable in its Do-* "*ctrine and Conſtitution to the pureſt Ages* "*of the Goſpel.*" Thus he expreſſed himſelf in the pious and affectionate Preamble to his laſt Will and Teſtament, which

I may

I may have Occaſion afterwards to cite more at large. Well might the faithful Steward thus enjoy the Remembrance of his important Truſt, and review with Pleaſure the Courſe of a Miniſtry ſo inſtrumental to promote the Glory of God, and the Edification of his Church.

By Reaſon of the ſlow Succeſſion in the College he waited a long Time for a Fellowſhip, in which at length he ſucceeded the very Learned and Reverend Mr. *Edmund Chiſhull*, S. T. B. in *April*, 1706. Such a diſtant Proſpect of a competent Subſiſtence from a Fellowſhip, and in the mean Time an indiſpenſible Obligation to Reſidence above three Parts in the whole Year, are Circumſtances, which I cannot but look upon as the moſt Pitiable in a Society, on other Accounts the moſt Eligible, and in its Conſtitution the beſt Calculated for a Seminary of Divines. But even this Inconveniency was not without its Uſe; Neceſſity may be improv'd into a Virtue: the Advantages of living in the Univerſity were not in vain offer'd to Mr. *Rogers*. As he had too much Vivacity to live an unactive,

ſedentary Life, he had alſo too much Serioufneſs not to follow the Bufineſs of his Profeſſion. Accordingly he took upon himſelf the Care of a * Country Pariſh, about ten Miles diſtant from *Oxford*, in which he continued between five and ſix Years, moſt uſefully and agreeably dividing his Time between the Univerſity and his Country Cure. No one more ſucceſsfully ſtudied the different Tempers and Inclinations of People, or more judiciouſly adapted his Inſtructions to their ſeveral Capacities. His Affability and Condeſcenſion admitted the meaneſt Pariſhioner into his Converſation, while at the ſame Time he preſerv'd his Authority among the greateſt. How popular and acceptable a Preacher he was, is ſtill remembred to his Honour; and of this the Pariſhioners gave a convincing Teſtimony in voluntarily raiſing for his Benefit a handſome Subſcription for a Sermon in the Afternoon every Sunday; which, after his leaving them, was ſoon diſcontinued. The Time ſpent in this Station he uſed to ſay

* The Vicarage of *Buckland* in *Berkſhire*

was

was the happieſt Part of his Life, tending no leſs to his Satisfaction and Improvement, than the Edification of his People. From his Example I cannot help obſerving of how great Conſequence it is to Clergymen in his Circumſtances, to inure and habituate themſelves to the Diſcharge of the ſeveral Duties of their ſacred Function, which is the chief End, to which all their Studies are ultimately to be directed. How far preferable is ſuch an Employment to the Life of a Clergyman wholly ſpent within the College Walls in inglorious Eaſe, or curious Speculation; till at once he is call'd out into the World, a learned unexperienc'd old Man, too regular and ſevere in Life to make Allowance for the Infirmity of his People, or too Profoundly Wiſe to inform their Ignorance?

It was a laudable Ambition that carried him out into the World, free from any Tincture of Vanity, free from any ſordid Deſires, or ſervile Compliances. Accordingly he enter'd upon a different Scene of Life, being in 1712 invited to *London*, and choſen Lecturer of St. *Clement*'s - *Dane*. His Abilities ſeem'd to riſe in Proportion to

the Exigencies of his Station; and he gain'd a Popularity, without courting it. A graceful Gesture, a clear pathetick Elocution recommended his Discourses from the Pulpit; and he appear'd to feel those Impressions which he would communicate to his Audience. Upon the whole, with Regard both to the Matter and Manner of his Performances, he might justly be reckon'd one of the most eloquent and instructive Preachers of his Time. His Reputation in this Respect was so well establish'd, that out of Regard to his singular Merit, the Inhabitants of the United Parishes of *Christ-Church*, and St. *Leonard's Foster-Lane*, unanimously chose him their Lecturer.

Tho' he was naturally a Lover of Ease, and the Amusements of a private Life, yet he had also a Genius suited to any kind of Business incident to a publick Station. He had a deep Insight into the State of Things, and a masterly Address in the Execution; and his Friends have often experienced the Benefit of his good Offices in this Respect. The Easiness and Frankness of his Temper led many into his Familiarity, while his

his discreet Conversation supported the Dignity of his Character. He continued many Years in this Capacity, all the while belov'd and reverenc'd by his Parishioners, to whom he made suitable returns in a conscientious Regard for their spiritual Welfare. A Testimony of his Affection and Piety in this respect the Reader will find in those Farewel Sermons preach'd at the taking leave of his Parishioners, and publish'd at their Request.

In 1716, he was presented to the Rectory of *Wrington* in the County of *Somerset*; the same Year he resign'd his Fellowship of *C.C.C.* in *Oxford*; and was married to the Honourable Mistress *Lydia Hare*, Sister to the Lord *Colerane*, who was his Pupil in the University. He found a ruinous old Parsonage House, and a Parish in no small Disorder; he rebuilt the one, and reform'd the other; being sparing neither of his Money, nor his good Offices; the one was the Effect of a good Fortune join'd with a beneficent Mind; the other was wholly the Work of great Prudence and Virtue. To reconcile contending Parties engag'd in chargeable and

vexatious Lawſuits, to perſuade *Preſbyterians* into Conformity to the Eſtabliſhed Church; to convert the ſtubborn *Quaker*; to conquer the Prejudices of Diſſenters under various Denominations, teaching them to walk in the Houſe of God as Friends, in the Unity of the Spirit, and the Bond of Peace: this was the continual Employment, this the Praiſe of the good Pariſh-Prieſt. He had not in Vain convers'd with Mankind; he underſtood the Workings of Human Nature, as well as the Exerciſe of his Function. Succeſs attended his publick Preaching, and private Application; ſome *Quakers* were baptiz'd; the Number of *Preſbyterians* gradually leſſen'd, the younger People eſpecially coming over to the Church; and the Number of Communicants at the Sacrament much encreas'd. Among other Monuments of his Zeal in this good Work, he had prepar'd for the Preſs a Diſcourſe ſuited, as near as might be, to the Underſtandings of thoſe for whoſe Uſe it was primarily deſign'd, repreſenting the Sin of Schiſm, and perſuading the Diſſenters to Conformity. The Nature of the Subject and the Reputation of the

Author

Author cannot but engage our Wiſhes that this Treatiſe may be communicated to the Publick.

It was the laudable Cuſtom of the late Biſhop of *Bath* and *Wells*, to call up to Preferments in his Cathedral, thoſe Clergymen who were beneficed in his Dioceſe. The Rector of *Wrington*'s Merit was too well known, to paſs long unregarded on this Occaſion. Accordingly by the Favour of the Biſhop, and the Dean and Chapter, he was elected Canon Reſidentiary in the Church of *Wells*. Need I mention his Beneficence in repairing, and adorning an old Prebendal Houſe? Inſtances of more ſubſtantial Merit demand our Praiſe: He was not in vain diſtinguiſh'd by his Dignity in the Cathedral: He look'd upon the Eminence of his Situation as an Incitement to a more exemplary Behaviour, and an additional Call upon him to exert his ſuperior Abilities in the Cauſe of Religion. He in all reſpects did Credit to his Station, not abuſing the honourable Leiſure he there enjoy'd in luxurious Eaſe, or oſtentatious Hoſpitality, but devoting it to the Duties of his Profeſſion, and the Service

vice of Chriſt's Church. He uſed to ſet a juſt Value upon his Time, which he ſo uſefully employ'd. Tho' he was of a generous and chearful Temper, and a lover of innocent Mirth and Converſation, yet he never car'd to proſtitute a large Portion of the Day in officious Trifling and Compliment to the Humours of impertinent and idle Company, leaving the Praiſe of ſuch good Nature and Popularity to thoſe, who did not know how to improve their Hours to greater Advantage to themſelves or others. The great Buſineſs of his Calling, private Reading and Meditation, and Service of his Friends chiefly engaged his Time, even to the Neglect of his own ſecular Affairs, and, what was of more importance, his Health. He paid a regular Attendance at the Cathedral, in which he bore alſo the Office of Sub-Dean; as he never declin'd any Duty belonging to his Station, ſo he diſcharged it to the beſt advantage; *viz.* in his own Perſon, without the Aſſiſtance of a Subſtitute. He was a diligent Preacher, and among other Fruits of his Labour he there delivered a Series of excellent Sermons, which I ſhall take

Occaſion

Occaſion to mention hereafter; the Number of them, the ſubject Matter and Manner of Writing, would incline me to think that they primarily were deſign'd for another Audience. Such they are, as might juſtly add to the Credit of the honourable Mr. *Boyle*'s Inſtitution, and be reckon'd among ſome of the beſt Performances on that Occaſion.

The Praiſe of a good Preacher he may enjoy in common with many others, but in one Point, as difficult in the Execution as it appears eaſy in the Attempt, he had few equals; and that was the Management of Controverſy; in this Reſpect, with a View to the publick Good, I ſhall venture to recommend him as a Pattern of good Writing; a clear Head, and a diſpaſſionate Heart, a comprehenſive Knowledge, and a certain Moderation or Greatneſs of Mind intent on the glorious Purſuit of Truth, and not to be diverted by any perſonal Regards, or any other mean Views, are Qualifications that are but ſeldom found in the ſame Man, and may therefore be juſtly celebrated in the Character of our Author.

He

He that wou'd take a View of the ſeveral Controverſies on foot, and the Manner in which they have been manag'd by ſome Writers, wou'd be apt to impute the Occaſion of them to ſome wrong Motive; ſuch as Ill-Nature, Vanity, and Affectation of Singularity. Some ſeem to have wrote merely to get the Name of Authors, ſome for their own Humour, ſome for the Diverſion of the Reader, and ſome for the Profit of the Bookſeller. 'Tis obſervable that in religious Diſputes, eſpecially which require the greateſt Moderation and Impartiality, Mens Paſſions are moſt apt to be inflam'd; and their buſy Wit is exercis'd, not in calmly ſtating the Queſtion under Debate, but in inſidious Cavils, ſmart Repartees, and perſonal Reflexions. In the Heat of the Diſpute they forget the only juſtifiable End of Controverſy, and accordingly do not appear ſo ſollicitous to eſtabliſh the Truth, as to Triumph over their Adverſaries Weakneſs; to invalidate his Way of Reaſoning, and to juſtify their own; to act the Part rather of Opponents, than Reſpondents; to confute, rather than to convince; to object much, but affirm little.

Some

Some there are, who, like harden'd *Veterans*, delight in this kind of War: Sometimes they ſeem wanton in Boldneſs, and make advances toward a general Attack; at other Times they act over-cautiouſly, covering their Deſigns with a diſingenuous Reſervedneſs, or ſkirmiſh behind ſome Entrenchment; or, upon being hard puſh'd, by artful Evaſions ſhew their ſkill in the modern Science of Defence. Theſe are the ordinary Faults incident to controverſial Writings; and 'tis no common Praiſe of our Author to ſay, that few ever ſtood more free from ſuch Imputations.

'Tis well known what Controverſy diſturb'd the Peace of the Church in 1717, and ſome Years following. The Occaſion of it need not be mention'd; and it were to be wiſh'd, that its miſchievous Effects may not perpetuate its Remembrance. Moſt of the Parties engag'd are ſtill living: And perhaps the deſerved Commendation of a particular Writer may give ſome Offence; yet, I hope, not to thoſe, who always allow'd him the Character of a fair and candid Diſputant. He conſider'd Controverſy about religious

Points

Points eſpecially, as a Matter of Conſcience, in which a ſtrict Regard to Juſtice and Charity was to be obſerv'd. With how honeſt a Deſign he engag'd in it, his management throughout the whole is the beſt Proof. A Chriſtian Zeal prompted him to the Undertaking, a Chriſtian Moderation conducted him in the Execution. He had for ſome Time attentively obſerved the Progreſs of the Diſpute: he obſerv'd, among ſome other Points, certain Propoſitions advanc'd concerning the Church in indefinite Terms, of an exceptionable Meaning, ſuch as in their natural Conſequences were apprehended to be inconſiſtent with the Notion of a regular Society. The Debate ſoon grew warm; on one hand the Charge was urg'd Home with Aggravations; on the other, Complaint was made of Miſrepreſentations, and an Anſwer offer'd, but ſuch, it ſeems, as did not give Satisfaction, or remove the Grounds of Offence. In theſe Circumſtances, ſome Interpoſition appear'd neceſſary in order to reconcile, if poſſible, this variance; at leaſt to give a juſt State of the Point in Debate, by conſidering diſtinctly the

the Aſſertions which had given the Offence with thoſe Reſtrictions and Limitations, under which they were defended; ſo that it might appear upon the whole in what Senſe and what Degree they were true or falſe, and thus the Diſpute might be brought to a fair Iſſue.

With this View he publiſh'd his *Diſcourſe concerning the Viſible and Inviſible Church*, not by Way of perſonal Controverſy, but direct Aſſertion; in which he ſet forth at large thoſe two diſtinguiſhing Relations under which the Church ſtood conſider'd; and the ſeveral Properties which reſulted reſpectively from each. The great End of his Writing was to inform and direct the Judgment of his Readers. Accordingly he has clear'd the Subject from thoſe Perplexities in which ſome had induſtriouſly involv'd it, laying down plain Principles, and tracing them thro' a regular Series of Concluſions; and whenever the Point ſtood in need of a direct and full Explication, he never kept himſelf within the cautionary Reſerves of a Defendent, but endeavour'd to give all poſſible Satiſfaction to the ſerious Enquirer, with Open-

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neſs and Sincerity of Heart declaring the whole Truth. Had thoſe whom he oppos'd been equally explicit in their Declarations, and imitated that impartiality, which they cou'd not but approve, I am perſuaded that this Controverſy, which was carried to ſuch a miſchievous Length, wou'd have been brought into a narrow Compaſs, and have been more amicably determin'd: Miſunderſtandings wou'd have been remov'd, Miſtakes rectified, and falſe Opinions more ſolidly confuted.

This Diſcourſe was favourably received by the Publick, and diſtinguiſh'd by the then Dean of *Worceſter*'s Approbation and Mr. *Sykes*'s Animadverſions. The Oppoſition from this Quarter, however in it ſelf unreaſonable, nevertheleſs prov'd indirectly the Occaſion of ſome Benefit to the Publick, as it was the Occaſion of our Author's Writing his *Review of his Diſcourſe concerning the Viſible and Inviſible Church*; in this Work, he has more fully done Juſtice to his Argument, and more explicitly unfolded and ſupported his Principles, purſuing them through their ſeveral Concluſions, and pointing out their

Application to particular Caſes. And with regard to the Cavils and Objections offer'd againſt his former Poſitions, he has with much Patience conſider'd, and anſwer'd them ſo unexceptionably, as to preclude any farther Oppoſition from thoſe who ſeem'd ambitious of being thought Controverſial Writers. And tho' the very Form of the Diſputation, as it was a Reply to the Exceptions of an Opponent, and of Courſe contain'd many particularities *ad hominem*, was ſuch as he was very unwillingly drawn into, yet has he conſtantly kept the main Point in view, being no farther ſollicitous to confute his Adverſary, than it was neceſſary in order to clear up and eſtabliſh the Truth. And ſo well has he ſucceeded, that this very Performance may hereafter be read as an impartial and ſatisfactory State of the Queſtion under Debate; and Poſterity will have the higheſt Eſteem for our Author, when the Remembrance of all perſonal Circumſtances in the Controverſy ſhall be entirely loſt.

Upon the whole, he may not improperly be ſaid to have put an End to this Diſpute; not only as he was in Order of Time

perhaps the laſt Writer upon the Subject, but as he handled it in ſuch a maſterly and deciſive Manner, and brought it to that Iſſue upon which it has reſted ever ſince.

And I think I ſhou'd do ſome Honour to my *Alma Mater* on this Occaſion, if I call'd him the *Oxford Diſputant*. The Univerſity certainly did not think themſelves unconcern'd in his Credit; they had a juſt Regard for the ſignal Services which he had done the Church, and accordingly expreſſed their Acknowledgments in the moſt handſome Manner by conferring on him the Degree of *D. D.* by *Diploma*, in 1721. This publick and honourable Teſtimony given to his extraordinary Merit, without his Deſire or Knowledge, prevented indeed his Performance of the Exerciſes, which wou'd have done Honour to the Univerſity: However, he was appointed and deſired to preach the publick Sermon, on the *Act Sunday* following, which alſo he publiſh'd at the Requeſt of the Vice-Chancellor.

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We may now consider him for a few Years disengag'd indeed from any Controversies, but not idly employ'd in the Business of his Calling. He was particularly exercis'd in one Branch of a Clergyman's Duty, and that not less difficult than useful; *viz.* that of a Casuist resolving Scruples in Points of Religion. Frequent Applications were made to him on this Account; his singular Discretion in the Manner of Address gain'd Attention; and the Opinion of his Integrity and good Will recommended his Advice, and gave Authority to his Arguments; and the many good Offices done in this Respect were afterwards gratefully acknowledg'd by the Parties concern'd. He was more especially consulted by Persons in Danger of being seduc'd into Popery. Hence follow'd Conferences, or Correspondences: Some small Treatises on several Points were occasionally drawn up for the private Use of his Friends; one of which in the Year 1726, he publish'd bearing this Title, *Reasons against Conversion to the Church of* Rome, *in a Letter to his Guardian a late Convert to that Church, by a Student in the* Temple. In this Treatise only one Part

of the Popiſh Controverſy, but that a fundamental one, is moſt accurately diſcuſs'd, *viz.* the Infallibility of the Church of *Rome*. The Reader will obſerve ſomething new and ſingular in the Manner of Managing the Argument, and the vain Pretenſions of the *Romaniſts* to that Character overthrown by nothing leſs than the Evidence of Demonſtration, ſuch as all their Arts of Sophiſtry cou'd neither reſiſt nor elude.

He diſtinguiſhed himſelf in every Station as a publick-ſpirited Man and a Favourer of all generous Deſigns. He had more particularly at Heart the Intereſt of two Inſtitutions, *viz.* Charity-Schools, and the Corporation for the Relief of Clergymens Widows and Children. He conſtantly exerted himſelf on this Occaſion, and contributed to the Support of both, by the private Influence of his Recommendation among his Friends, by the Example of his own Liberality, and by his Eloquence from the Pulpit. With a peculiar Pleaſure he attended upon all publick Solemnities for the promoting theſe Deſigns; but then to the greateſt Advantage, when he appear'd the

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Oratour of the Congregation; his undissembled Zeal and Emotion of Spirit gave Life and Energy to his Discourse, and enflamed the Hearts of his Audience. His Sermons on those Occasions are publish'd. I am persuaded the Reader will peruse them with no small Satisfaction, tho' he has lost one Advantage which no Description can recall.

In 1726 by the Recommendation of some eminent Persons, who were desirous to call out such Merit into publick View, he was made Chaplain to his present Majesty, then Prince of *Wales*, an Honour unexpected and unsought; which he soon afterwards took Occasion to acknowledge in the most decent Manner, in the Dedication of that excellent Series of Sermons on the *Necessity of a Divine Revelation, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation.*

While these were in the Press, there came out a notable Performance, entitled, *The Scheme of literal Prophecy considered* &c. containing a Defence of some Notions, which he had in those Discourses oppos'd, and withal a Plea for an unbounded uni-

verſal Liberty in Matters of Religion; a Point, which in ſome former Treatiſes, he had attentively conſidered. He therefore thought proper in a Preface to this Volume to beſtow ſome Animadverſions on theſe Principles of Licentiouſneſs; which, being written in much Haſte, and with an honeſt Zeal for the Defence of our religious Eſtabliſhment, and on a Point which requires ſome Tenderneſs and Caution in the handling, ſeem'd liable to ſome Exception, or rather to demand a more full and diſtinct Explication. This gave Occaſion to a Letter from his Friend Dr. *Nath. Marſhall, Dec.* 20, 1727, which with our Author's ſatisfactory Anſwer, dated the 1*ſt* of *January* following, is communicated to the Publick. From this epiſtolary Correſpondence the Reader may obſerve the great Difference there is in the Management of a Debate between Friends jointly engaged in the Purſuit of Truth, and between controverſial Writers impatient of Contradiction, lying in wait for Matter of freſh Cavil, and never willing to come to the Truth.

It is not to be wonder'd that our Author ſhou'd

ſhou'd be attack'd on this Head by ſome zealous Advocates for Liberty, Men diſſatisfied with all Reſtraints, and profeſs'd Enemies to our religious Eſtabliſhment. Accordingly he ſoon receiv'd the expected Compliments from that Quarter. A long Letter was addreſs'd to him by an anonymous Writer; and another Gentleman in a Preface to a Treatiſe foreign to this Purpoſe, has gone out of his Way to honour him with many opprobrious Reflexions. Thereby giving Occaſion to ſome maſterly Strokes of the Doctor's ſuperiour Genius triumphing over the Weakneſs of an acute angry Caviler in the various Expreſſions of Pitying, Adviſing, Reproving, Confuting, Forgiving *. It ſeems the Scheme of Liberty was a ſpecious and plauſible Topick for popular Harangue, and a few noiſy Words might paſs for Eloquence; where ſolid Proofs were wanting 'twas eaſy to advance bold Aſſertions, and to confute by Miſrepreſentations; and as for proper Embelliſhments of the Performance, Scurrility and Ridicule might be plentifully laid on. On the other Hand to hold the Bal-

* Introduct. to Vindicat. Civil Eſtabliſh. *p.* 5.

lance between contending Parties, to adjust the respective Claims of Liberty and Authority, and ascertain the Limits of Right and Wrong in Cases where generally some Pre-engagement of Interest leads Men into Excess on one side or other, is a Work of no less Nicety than Importance, such as requires a comprehensive Knowledge of an abstruse Subject, and an uncorrupted Heart, as well as a distinguishing Head. This was reserv'd for Dr. *Rogers*; this compleated the Praise of the Controversial Writer. He had already establish'd the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation, in opposition to Deists and Infidels: He had fully asserted Ecclesiastical Authority, in opposition to those who seem'd to deny the *internal* Powers and Rights of the Christian Church, consider'd as a *Visible Society*: It now remain'd, that, in Opposition to those, who wou'd deprive the Church of all *external* Advantages arising from the Protection of the *Civil Magistrate*, he shou'd vindicate the *Civil* Establishment of Religion. This he undertook, and successfully executed: he has deduced the Magistrate's Right to this Pow-

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er from ſuch clear Principles, and ſo accurately aſcertain'd its Limits, that it appears to be free from all Objection but what lies equally againſt all Authority committed to fallible Men, *viz.* that it may be abus'd. So that upon the whole, he may not improperly be call'd a Defender of our Church; a Name, ever to be mention'd with Honour among our *Engliſh* Divines, and to be join'd with that of his Maſter *Hooker*, to whom he ſtands moſt nearly allied in the Praiſe of his Performance, as well as the Similitude of his Subject. Whether we regard moral or intellectual Qualities, I am perſuaded he will appear a moſt excellent Writer, and Poſterity, by imitating will Praiſe the good Example. We find in him the Acuteneſs of a Critick, the cloſe Reaſoning of a Logician, the good Manners of a Gentleman, and Charity of a Chriſtian: On all Occaſions a true Greatneſs of Mind, diſdaining every Purſuit but that of Truth; above all party Views, and perſonal Altercations; and uncapable of the common little Arts of Evaſions, Diſſimulations and Miſrepreſentations: A Quickneſs of Wit that gave Life and

Beauty

Beauty to his Compoſitions; a Spirit either inſenſible or ſuperiour to Injuries and Slander, ſuch as cou'd contemn with Silence, rebuke with Gravity, or forgive with Meekneſs: In the Management of his Argument an Honeſty and Sincerity, which few obſerve amidſt the Heat of the Diſputation; an Impartiality and Candour, which his Opponents cannot but allow; a Perſpicuity of Style and Sentiment, which they cannot honeſtly miſinterpret; and a Strength of Reaſoning which they can no more gainſay, than imitate.

In 1726 having reſigned his Lecture of St. *Clement's-Dane*, he retir'd from *London* with an Intention to ſpend the remaining Part of his Life in the Country, and chiefly at *Wrington*, which Place he had doubly endear'd to himſelf, both by a conſiderable Expence of Money, and Merit of Contrivance. He was now return'd to that Situation in Life, to which he naturally was moſt inclin'd; and again commenc'd a good plain Countryman, employ'd in manuring his Land, Planting, and other like Operations of Huſbandry, and with Complacency enjoying the Fruits of his Induſtry

ſtry. Something he wou'd learn from the Converſation of every one; and was no leſs ſollicitous to acquire the Knowledge of other Men in their ſeveral Ways, than communicative of his own. 'Twas obſervable of him that while he liv'd in *London* and had frequent Intercourſes with Tradeſmen of various Denominations, he improv'd that Circumſtance into a Means of getting ſome Inſight into their reſpective Trades, and was eſteem'd in thoſe Matters, which ſeem fartheſt removed from the Notice of a Scholar, a Man of remarkable Underſtanding and Judgment. The ſame curious and inquiſitive Temper, and cloſe Application of Mind, render'd him Maſter of whatever Buſineſs he was pleas'd to take in Hand. He had a Head as well turn'd for the Mechanical as the Liberal Arts; and in Truth he made the Exerciſe of the one ſubſervient to the other. In his Leiſure he was not unactive; and wou'd often uſe ſome manual Trade, by way of Recreation to his Mind fatigued by ſevere Study: His Houſe and Gardens were the Scene of his Labour and Diverſions: He had Tools and Implements of various Kinds, and would often do the

the Work of a Painter, Upholſterer, Turner, and Smith. In his Garden he wou'd dig, mow, plant, prune, and turn his Hand to any Garden-Operation whether laborious or ingenious. The Reader will perhaps ſmile at the mention of ſuch trifling Circumſtances in the Character of a great Man: But even theſe Peculiarities may appear worthy of ſome Notice as they account for the Diſpoſition of the Leiſure-Intervals of his Time fill'd up with ſo innocent and uſeful Amuſements, and are moreover Marks of a rare Genius ſuited to a Variety of Employments ſo different in kind; and eſpecially, ſince they appear to have been ſo far from interfering with his more ſerious Studies, that the two laſt valuable Pieces which he publiſh'd were drawn up amidſt the Series of ſuch mechanical Diverſions.

He was never ambitious of being thought a great Scholar: His Learning was for Uſe, not for Oſtentation: He neither collected nor read many Books, nor was curious in their Editions. A few well choſen and ſtudied to good Purpoſe communicate more real Knowledge, than a copious ſlowly growing Common-Place-Book. Not to mention

mention others he appear'd more particularly conversant in the Writings of the judicious Mr. *Hooker*, and the ingenious Mr. *Norris*, and he made their Excellencies his own. No one more attentively examin'd his own Notions, or digested them more methodically; serious Meditation effected what cou'd never be attain'd by mere Assiduity of Reading. His Attention and Patience in the Pursuit of Truth, were equal to his Quickness and Sagacity; and continual Exercise strengthened and enlarg'd his Capacities. As a masterly Reasoner he paid a just Deference to Authority, yet admitted no Principle implicitly without mature Examination, and regularly work'd out his own Conclusions. In short, he may be truly said to have built upon his own Bottom, being, what few can justly boast of, throughly acquainted with the Extent of his own Abilities, and a compleat Master of his own Knowledge.

In the latter End of the Summer, 1728, his Course of Waiting as King's Chaplain call'd him to *Windsor*, where the Court then resided. He had seldom appear'd on this Stage; few were acquainted with his Per-

son:

ſon: The Courtier was unknown, but the Preacher ſoon diſtinguiſhed himſelf to Advantage: his Performances in the Pulpit were honour'd with the general Approbation; and the new Chaplain engaged the Notice of the Inquiſitive; and was, as I have heard, not leſs honourably than oddly deſcribed by the Character of the *viſible and inviſible* ROGERS. One noble Lord in particular, being more than ordinarily affected with the Matter and Manner of his Diſcourſes, was pleaſed to favour him with ſome ſingular Marks of Kindneſs and Condeſcenſion, and ſuch Expreſſions of Eſteem, as might well have flatter'd the Vanity and raiſed the Ambition of a Mind covetous of Applauſe and Preferment. But all Overtures of this Nature were declin'd with the ſame Generoſity of Spirit with which they were offer'd. The Doctor had always an honeſt Openneſs in his Manners, and on proper Occaſions a Statelineſs of Addreſs, ſuitable to the Greatneſs of his Mind. He was ſo much above many faſhionable Littleneſſes, that, ſome who judge only from Appearance of trifling Circumſtances have thought him a proud Man, from

from which Imputation no one in Reality was more free. And his Behaviour on that Juncture, as it ſhew'd a juſt Senſe of that Lord's Goodneſs, which he ever acknowledged with Gratitude, at the ſame Time alſo diſcover'd an Inſtance of a laudable Pride, not often ſeen in Perſons of his Station, ſtudiouſly refuſing thoſe Advantages, which ſome perhaps wou'd admire with Envy, and moſt wou'd have improv'd with the cloſeſt Application. " As his Duty had " call'd him up to the Court, it now call'd " him away to another place, from which " no other Views cou'd detain him."

So he haſtened into the Country; but he had not been there many Days before he was ſurpriz'd by a moſt generous Invitation to Town from Perſons, whoſe Approbation thus expreſs'd was an abundant Teſtimony of his high Merit. For about this Time died the Rev. Dr. *Tho. Bennet*, Vicar of St. *Giles*, *Cripplegate*, a City-Living in the Patronage of the Dean and Chapter of St. *Paul*'s, very conſiderable in its Value, yet attended with ſome diſcouraging Circumſtances, or rather ſuch as required a great Share of Prudence and ſecular

Wiſdom in the Miniſter as well as other Qualifications.

The Dean of St. *Paul*'s and Dr. *Godolphin* concurred in their favourable Opinion of Dr. *Rogers*; his well known Abilities pointed him out to them as a Perſon moſt worthy of this important Cure. Accordingly upon this laudable Motive an offer of it was made him in the moſt handſome Manner, much to the Doctor's Honour, becauſe without his Sollicitation or Knowledge; nor leſs to the Honour of the judicious and publick-ſpirited Patrons. The Chriſtian Reader will prevent me in my further Reflexions on this Point, and join with me in Wiſhes for the Good of our Church that all Patrons wou'd imitate the Example, which they cannot but approve.

With what undiſſembled Anxiety and Reluctance he accepted this Offer, they well remember who were moſt intimately acquainted with him. The mere Conſideration of a larger Income was a Motive of too little Force to draw him from that Situation of Life, in which he had propoſed to himſelf the greateſt Satisfaction. As

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he had never ſhewn any Diſcontent, while his Preferment was far inferior to his Merit, ſo now the Advantages of a Fortune, which was of late conſiderably advanc'd, were far from making that Alteration in his Manners, which has been obſerv'd frequently to happen on ſuch Occaſions; tho' he was grown competently Rich, yet he aim'd not at farther Acquiſitions. However ſome peculiar Circumſtances of an Invitation, ſo honourable and unexpected, had greater Weight with him than other Conſiderations; and his Acceptance plainly appear'd to proceed not from the Deſire of a lucrative Preferment, but rather out of Obedience to a Call, providentially offering him an Opportunity of doing more good, in Proportion to the Difficulty and large Extent of his Cure. With this View he came to *Cripplegate*, and his Behaviour all along verified his Profeſſions; and if it had pleas'd God to have prolong'd his Life, the People in that place wou'd doubtleſs have enjoy'd the laſting Benefit of his good Offices in all Reſpects, and it wou'd have been no *Hyperbole* to ſay, there was a Vicar of *Cripplegate*, a popular Man in his Pariſh.

The little Time he liv'd among them was wholly devoted to their Service, in Visiting the Sick, Catechizing the Children, and, which he had much at Heart, regulating the Charity Schools; and moreover, which created him no small Trouble, diligently enquiring into the perplex'd State of the Parish Affairs, in order to set them on a better Footing, and to extricate them out of some Difficulties in which they were lately involv'd. A sincere Desire to do Service to his Parish in these Respects engaged his continual Application even to the neglect of his own Health. In truth, he was a Person of a rare Genius, equal to any Kind of Employment, of a Greatness of Mind uncapable of being discourag'd by small Obstacles, or disturb'd by petty Provocations, or any Way diverted from the Pursuit of a laudable End. But this very Vivacity, and unwearied Vigour, which had hitherto carried him thro' every Undertaking, did in reality do Violence to his Constitution, by making him less sensible of any Danger, and gradually wasted away a valuable Life, by not admitting the timely Precautions necessary to its Preser-

vation. ——

—— Δαιμόνιε, φθίσεν σε τὸ σὸν μένος!

In *April* he happen'd to be in Waiting at Court, and on Sunday the 20*th* Instant, after the Fatigue of a long Walk from *Cripplegate*, after officiating in his own Church, he preach'd a Sermon before the Royal Audience, his last Performance in the Pulpit, and Farewel to the World: And tho' he found himself a little indispos'd after the Hurry of the Day, yet that very Night, in compliance with the Desire of some of his Parishioners, at a late Hour he attended and officiated at a Funeral. The Day following he went to Court again, and in the Afternoon he call'd upon his Sister, Mrs. *Bedwell*, not with that Air of Cheerfulness, with which he usually appear'd in that House, but with Looks discompos'd and full of Uneasiness, complaining of an uncommon Disorder that sat heavy upon him, and pathetically express'd his Apprehension of his approaching Fate, with Reflexions on that Point well worthy of a Christian Priest. Finding his Illness encrease upon him after he came Home, he at length patiently took his Bed, without

much Hopes of Recovery. He felt inward Convictions of his Danger, which did not discover it self to his Physicians by any violent Symptoms. And accordingly, when human Assistances fail'd, he had Recourse to the only Fountain of true Comfort. I need not recount many affecting Circumstances in this critical Juncture, which might awaken the Tenderness, and aggravate the Sorrows of those nearest Friends, who attended him during that melancholy Scene. Let it briefly be remark'd, that amidst this Conflict he was not wanting to himself in any Respect; he gave Direction about his Affairs with the utmost Composedness of Mind, and in the most affectionate Manner took Leave of his Friends. He appear'd sensible to the last; and much he labour'd to speak, but his faultring Tongue dropt short imperfect Sentences. But as long as he cou'd articulate Sounds, he was heard to mention with earnestness *Christ* and his Church; and seem'd to be in the Fervency of continual Prayer.—— There is something more than the bare Consideration of our common Mortality that strikes the Mind on this Occasion: The

The Reflection on the Good he has done, the Anticipation of great Things ſtill expected from ſuch Abilities and Virtues, the Diſappointment of theſe Expectations by his untimely Death, are Circumſtances which create a ſerious Sollicitude and publick-ſpirited Sorrow; which, while they redound to his Honour, aggravate the Senſe of our Loſs: In this View we may eſteem his Death a ſort of publick Misfortune; and have Reaſon to wiſh that the Influence of his Example may follow the Reſpect done to his Memory, that our holy Church may never be deſtitute of ſuch worthy Sons, for the Ornament and Defence of its Conſtitution.

Thus died this excellent Man, *May* 1, in the 50th Year of his Age, much honoured and lamented, at a Time when the Cauſe of Religion call'd for the Abilities of ſuch an able Defender. On *Sunday* the 18th at the Requeſt of his Widow, a Sermon on this Occaſion was preached by his Friend Dr. *N. Marſhall* in the Pariſh-Church of St. *Giles, Cripplegate*, out of which I beg leave to tranſcribe or extract his Character as it there occurs ſumm'd up in general Terms, *p.* 29. " I ſhou'd

" not mention among the Praiſes due to
" him, that clear comprehenſive and ſtrong
" Underſtanding God had given him, but
" for the excellent Uſes to which he appli-
" ed it. His Works will praiſe him, when
" our Lips can no longer perform the
" grateful Office: The Infidel and Liber-
" tine may ſtand thence corrected or in-
" ſtructed; as the Serious and Faithful
" may thence derive a farther Support
" and Confirmation in their reſpective Sen-
" timents and Practices. Had he been born
" of a Parentage which had eaſily led him
" to the higheſt Stations in Life, he was
" amply qualified for ſuſtaining and adorn-
" ing them; as in a lower Figure of Life
" and Fortune he was equally fitted for
" improving, or being content with it. A
" Mind ſo exquiſitely form'd for any Situa-
" tion, any Poſture of Affairs, to which
" the Providence of God might have call'd
" him; ſuch an indifference toward the
" Honours and Profits of this Life, with
" ſuch Abilities to have acquired the one,
" and to have adorned the other, are Ta-
" lents rarely to be met with in the ſame
" Perſon, and very hardly to be imitated
" by

" by any other. It fell to my Lot to give
" him that earlieſt Notice of his Invitation
" to this extenſive Cure, which I am mo-
" rally ſure, till then he had never thought
" of, much leſs ſought after, or canvaſſed
" for it. His Anſwer convinc'd me that
" his own Choice wou'd have rather fix'd
" him in a Rural Privacy, than have enter'd
" him upon ſuch a publick Scene of Ac-
" tion: But a Call ſo unlook'd for, ſo ut-
" terly unexpected, he eſteem'd Providen-
" tial; as ſuch he obey'd it, rather than
" embrac'd it. He was an entire Deſpi-
" ſer of Craft and Cunning, that Ape of
" Wiſdom, the uglier for being ſo like it,
" yet with the Simplicity and godlyInce-
" rity of the honeſt Chriſtian, with the
" harmleſs Temper of the Dove, he had
" ſuch a due Proportion of the Serpent's
" Wiſdom, that as he wou'd impoſe upon
" none, ſo he was not himſelf eaſily im-
" pos'd upon. His Religion was pure and
" unaffected, his Piety real and rational,
" zealous without Exceſs, and temperate
" without any faulty Coldneſs, free from
" ſupercilious Reſerves and haughty Ap-
" pearances; but agreeably ſeaſon'd with

" a peculiar Livelineſs of Spirit, as well
" as all fit Urbanity and Freedom of Con-
" verſe. Of his publick Spirit, he has
" left behind him very coſtly Monuments
" in the ſeveral Cures to which he ſtood
" for any time related. Upon the whole,
" in our Loſs of this worthy Man, this
" pious Chriſtian, this vigilant Paſtour,
" Religion in general has loſt an able
" Champion, the Church of *England* in
" particular a prudent and ſtrenuous De-
" fender, this Diſtrict particularly, ſo lately
" committed to his Care, a diſcreet faithful
" and watchful Overſeer; as his Friends
" and Relatives have ſuſtain'd an irrepara-
" ble Misfortune from it. Yet let us not
" ſorrow as Men without Hope, for them
" who dye in the Lord, *&c.*" Thus far Dr. *Marſhall* in the Cloſe of his Diſcourſe, giving this publick Teſtimony to the Honour of his deceaſed Friend, which exactly agrees in Subſtance with the Particulars mention'd here at large.

I have had Occaſion already to quote a Clauſe out of the Preamble to his Will: It may not be amiſs to recite the whole Paragraph, written between three and four Years before

before his Death, which being presumed to express the most serious and sincere Thoughts of the Writer, may perhaps give a fuller Idea of his truly Christian Piety than the Elogium of any Historian. 'Tis as follows,

" I *John Rogers*, Rector of *Wrington*, in " the County of *Somerset*, in the Name " of the holy and ever-blessed Trinity, do " make and appoint my last Will and " Testament in the Manner and Form fol- " lowing,

" *First*, I think my self now and at all " Times oblig'd to return my humble " Thanks to Almighty God, thro' whose " Mercy I have been baptiz'd into the " Christian Faith, and call'd to the Ho- " nour of the Priesthood, in the Church " of *England*, which I reverence, as most " agreeable in its Doctrine and Constitu- " tion to the purest Ages of the Gospel; " Beseeching the divine Goodness to con- " tinue his holy Protection over it; to heal " its unhappy Divisions, to repair the Brea- " ches of its Discipline, and defend it from

" those

" those many Enemies who labour its Sub-
" version. And I earnestly entreat my
" most merciful God to pardon whatever
" in my Life has been less agreeable to
" the Purity of that Religion, which I
" have profess'd, and to the Dignity of that
" Office, which I have taken upon me;
" to accept my weak Endeavours to serve
" him and his Church, and to receive my
" Soul washed and cleansed in the Blood
" of *Jesus Christ* my Saviour, to whom be
" Glory for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Upon review of the whole, I am sensible that this Account, of the Life and Writings of Dr. *Rogers* is far from being perfect. They who were more intimately acquainted with him, will find many Omissions, and perhaps some slight Mistakes in Circumstances of Facts. Others will perhaps, think this Narrative already too circumstantial and tedious. Besides, in praising a controversial Writer, some Reflexions will of Course be dropt, which may be thought exceptionable by those of the opposite Side of the Question. I hope the Reader will excuse Faults which cou'd not easily be avoid-

avoided. As on one Hand it were a needleſs Caution to diſſemble Notice of what is too obvious to be conceal'd, ſo on the other I wou'd not willingly give juſt Ground of Offence to any: And I am perſuaded that Dr. *Rogers*'s Character needs not to be ſet off to Advantage by the Diſparagement of any other.

He was buried in the Pariſh Church of *Enſham* in *Oxfordſhire*, on *Tueſday*, *May* 13, where a very handſome Monument is erected to his Memory by his Widow, with the Inſcription following.

Hic juxta cineres Paternos
Corpus ſuum ſepeliri voluit
JOHANNES ROGERS, S. T. P.
Magni Vir animi,
Ad fortunam omnem,
Ad munus omne,
Sive ſuſtinendum,
Sive ornandum,
Ita inſigniter compoſitus,
Ut illius qui recenſuerit titulos,
Idem quoque ſimul laudaverit Virtutes.

Floruit

Floruit aliquando
In C.C.C. Oxon. Diſcip. & Soc.
Vicariæ de Buckland in Com. Berk.
Per Annos complures Curat.
Apud Londinenſes Concionator;
In Com. Somerſet. Rector de Wrington;
Eccleſiæ Wellenſis Canonic. & Subdecan.
Regiæ Majeſtati à Sacris;
Poſtremo Sti. Ægidii de Cripplegate apud
Londin. Vicarius.

Ingenii Monumenta quæris?
Hic ille eſt qui Scripſit
De Eccleſia Viſib. & Inviſib.
De Relig. Chriſtianæ Verit. Conciones 8.
De jure Magiſtrat. Civil. in Relig. ſtabilienda:
Conciones porro Miſcellan. complures.
En, quod imiteris Scriptor
Concionandi &
Diſputandi
Exemplar conſummatiſſimum.
En! quem in vita Ducem ſequaris,
Eundem optimum
Et Civem, & Sacerdotem.

Hac

Hac in Parœcia Natus 1679
Patre Clerico,
Clericis Majoribus,
Quinquagenarius obiit Maii 1mo, 1729.

Uxorem habuit Lydiam,
Henrici Baronis de Colerane ſororem,
Filias ſuperſtites reliquit Duas.

Quod Viri de Eccleſia, deque Repub. optime meriti memoriam commendaret Poſteris, ſuæque inſuper erga conjugem Amantiſſimum pietatis Monumentum extaret, honorarium hoc Marmor erexit

LYDIA ROGERS.

ERRA-

ERRATA

In the ELOGIUM on Dr. *Rogers.*

Page 3. Line 5. *for* Eccclesiæ *read* Ecclesiæ.

P. 5. the Line following CHILLINGWORTHO,

For Copiam & Constantiam
Gravitatem & Subtilitatem

Read Copiam & Subtilitatem
Gravitatem & Constantiam.

P. 6. L. 10. *for* Londinensis *read* Londinenses.
P. 7. L. 28. *for* gaudebet *read* gaudebat.

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PAGE 4. Line 9. Read *is a Blasphemous*. p. 17. l. 2. dele *and*. p. 43. l. 6. *after given*, read *than that*. p. 47. l. 8. dele *and*. p. 57. l. 7. read *unavoidable*. p. 58. l. 2. read *for our Salvation*. p. 60. l. 2. read *rigorous*. p. 61. l. 24. read *of Duty*. p. 62. l. 5. dele *and*. p. 110. l. 10. dele *of*. p. 111. l. 8. dele *and*. p. 118. l. 25. read *must*. p. 248. l. 16. read *concern*. p. 259. l. 14. read *Cause*. p. 339. l. 23. read *with Christ*. p. 416. l. 4. read *astonished*.

SERMON I.

The Nature and Influence of the Fear of God.

PSALM xxxiii. 8.

Let all the Earth fear the Lord: Stand in Awe of him, all ye that dwell in the World.

OUR Paſſions are the Springs which actuate the Powers of our Nature: If theſe are either too weakly or too ſtrongly moved, or miſled by falſe Apprehenſions of the Object, the Productions muſt be proportionably defective

or irregular. And ſince the Fear of God is a Paſſion of the firſt and principal Influence in Religion, it is of the greateſt Importance that it be formed upon ſuch Views as may give it a proper Force and Direction.

I THEREFORE beg Leave to inquire,

I. WHAT is the proper Awe and Fear, which is due from Man to God.

II. To ſuggeſt ſome Conſiderations which ought to poſſeſs our Souls with this Affection towards the Deity.

III. To obſerve the Influence this Affection will have on the Conduct of our Lives.

FEAR in general is that Paſſion of our Nature, whereby we are excited to provide for our Security upon the Approach of Evil. But when this Deſcription is applied to the Fear of God, we are not to apprehend that God can be the Author of any Effect that is evil in its ſelf, though it may by Accident be evil to us: His ſevereſt Inflictions are in themſelves Acts of Juſtice and Righteouſneſs, and flow from the

the Excellencies and Perfections of his Nature; though with Respect to us, they have the Evil of Punishment, and demand this Regard of our Fear to him. The frequent Mistakes of Men in forming their Apprehensions of this Object of their Fear, and consequently of the Nature of that Respect which is due to him, has given Rise to that necessary Distinction of the Fear of God into a *servile* or *superstitious*, and a *filial* or *religious* Fear. The former we are to avoid as a Dishonour to God; the latter we are obliged to as an indispensable Duty, the true Spring and Motive of our Christian Obedience. When Men represent the divine Nature to their Minds as the Author of Evil, as a Being averse from their Happiness, and armed with Power only for their Destruction; as an austere and rigorous Master, easily provoked, and always lifting up his Hand to take Vengeance; such Conceptions must unavoidably raise in our Minds the Passion of Terror, a Dread of the divine Nature mixed with Abhorrence and Aversion, as from an Enemy whom we hate, but dare not resist. But this is so far from that Fear

which is a Duty required by God, that even the Devils are conſtrained to do this Homage to his Majeſty, who believe and tremble. This is no other than that forced Reſpect a Captive pays to his Conqueror, a Slave to his Lord. And the Worſhip we are induced to offer from theſe miſtaken Apprehenſions of the divine Nature, are a blaſphemous Affront to his Perfections; ſince we worſhip him not as God, but as a cruel and tyrannical Being, the Idol of our Fears and the Creature of our Superſtition; and we might for the ſame Reaſons adore the Malice and Power even of Hell it ſelf.

THE Fear then which is acceptable to God, is a filial or religious Fear: An awful Reverence of the divine Nature, proceeding from a juſt Eſteem and Regard to his Perfections, which produces in us an Inclination to his Service, and an Unwillingneſs to offend him. This is a Duty we owe in ſome Proportion to all who ſtand in a ſuperior Relation to us, and is in the fifth Commandment required towards our Prince and our Parent, under the Name of *Honour*; a Reſpect, which in the

the Notion of it implies a Mixture of Love and Fear; and in the Object equally ſuppoſes Goodneſs and Power. As a Son, though he reverences the Authority of his Father, and is deterr'd by a juſt Apprehenſion of his Diſpleaſure from daring to offend him, yet forgets not at the ſame Time that he is concerned with the tendereſt Affection for his Happineſs, the Protector of his Weakneſs, and the Reliever of his Wants; one who will look on his Failings with Mercy, and even correct his Offences with Compaſſion: So though Religion demands our Reverence of God, as that ſovereign Power from whom we derive our Being, the Judge of all our Actions, and the Author and Diſpoſer of our Happineſs; though it repreſents him cloathed with Majeſty and Honour, as the ſupreme Ruler of the World, to whoſe Authority all Things in Heaven and Earth do bow and obey; yet it teaches us at the ſame Time to adore him as a mild and merciful Being, of infinite Love and Affection to his Creatures; as a Friend and a Father, whoſe Care ſupplies our Wants, and defends our Impotence; to whoſe Fa-

vour we owe all the Happineſs we can receive here, and from whoſe Compaſſion in *Chriſt* we hope for eternal Glory hereafter. This is the proper Character of the Deity; and while we thus repreſent him to our Faith, as his Goodneſs will forbid us to dread him as Slaves, ſo his Majeſty will command us to reverence him as Sons. But from that ſervile Dread we reprove as criminal, we muſt be careful to diſtinguiſh that Terror and Aſtoniſhment which is ſpread over the Conſcience of the Sinner, when he firſt begins to reflect on the Danger of his State, and the Penalties he has incurred from the Juſtice of God. For though this Fear in its firſt Impreſſions, be attended with very uncomfortable Views of the divine Nature, and attends chiefly to the Extent of his Power, and the Rigour of his Juſtice; yet whenever it is effectual to our Converſion, and engages our Applications to appeaſe his Anger, it cannot be without ſome Confidence in his Goodneſs, and a Regard to the more amiable Attributes of the Deity; and muſt conſequently have alſo a leſs perfect Degree of that filial Reverence recommended by Religion.

For

For if this Terror were merely that ſervile Dread which repreſents God as an implacable, inexorable Being, the Soul under ſuch an Impreſſion would ſit down unactive, overwhelmed with an horrible Deſpair; and never engage in a fruitleſs Attempt to appeaſe a Power, whom no Prayers could intreat, no Repentance reconcile. 'Tis plain therefore that though this Fear be not that compoſed Reverence, with which the Soul looks on God in a State of confirmed Piety, yet neither is it that ſervile Dread which flies from him as an hoſtile, unfriendly Being, delighting in the Miſery of his Creatures. And therefore ſome of the Schools have uſed a middle Term to expreſs this Affection, and have called it an *initial Fear of God:* A Diſpoſition ſo far from being offenſive to him, that it ſeems to be properly that broken and contrite Heart, with which a Soul under the Conviction of Sin ought to look upon its Judge; and what the Scripture emphatically calls the *Beginning of Wiſdom*; a Temper, which, in the ſame Proportion as we apprehend the Juſtice of God to be pacified by our Repentance, will gradually

improve into that filial Reverence accompanied with Love, which (as I obſerved) is the proper Affection of a confirmed Piety.

THESE Diſtinctions of the Fear of God give us a clear and eaſy Reconciliation of thoſe ſeeming Inconſiſtences of Scripture, with Reſpect to this Affection: For when St. *John* tells us, *that perfect Love caſteth out Fear* — and again, *that he that feareth is not made perfect in Love*; theſe Aſſertions can no otherwiſe conſiſt with thoſe Scriptures which enjoin the Fear of God, and recommend it as the Whole of our Duty, than by underſtanding the former either of that ſervile Dread which Reprobates and Devils have of God, or rather of that initial Fear which attends the imperfect Converſion of a Sinner; the latter, of that filial Reverence, which is the Strength and Ornament of the Soul, in a compoſed State of Religion.

THE *Nature of the Duty* thus explained, be pleaſed to attend me,

II. IN ſome Conſiderations that ought to poſſeſs our Souls with this Affection towards

towards the Deity. Now every one of the divine Perfections are Arguments for this Reverence towards him. Can we reflect on the infinite Knowledge and Omnipreſence of God, and not ſtand in Awe of that Being, who is conſcious to all our Failings and Infirmities, who is about our Bed and about our Path, who ſees, obſerves, and records every Word and Action of our Lives, and from whom even the moſt ſecret Thoughts and Intentions of the Heart are not concealed? Or can we remember that he is infinitely juſt, without a religious Concern for the Event of that Day, when we muſt appear before his impartial Tribunal? Goodneſs, Holineſs, and Mercy, are indeed the immediate Objects of our Love; but when we reflect on the infinite Diſproportion in which theſe Qualities are poſſeſſed by God, and the moſt perfect of his Creatures; that the Heavens are not pure in his Sight, and that he charges even his Angels with Folly; with how lowly a Reverence muſt we bow down our Souls before ſo excellent a Being, and adore a Nature ſo much ſuperior to our own? But the Attribute which

eſpeci-

eſpecially demands this Affection from us is his Power; none can reſiſt or interrupt the Execution of his Will; our Happineſs and our Miſery, our Souls and our Bodies are in his Hands; he has Power to ſave, and Power to deſtroy; nor is he accountable to any for his Dominion over us. If he be angry, every Creature that he has made is ready to execute his Vengeance; and unleſs his Wrath be appeaſed, an Eternity of Torments awaits the Objects of his Diſpleaſure. Now though a juſt Confidence in his Goodneſs muſt preſerve us from a ſervile Dread of his Power, and Deſpair of his Mercy; yet ſo unlimited, ſo irreſiſtible an Authority cannot be reflected on, without the moſt awful Reverence, even by thoſe whoſe Piety aſſures its Favour to them. But theſe Arguments ariſing from the Perfections of the Deity, will yet more effectually poſſeſs us with this Reverence, if at the ſame Time we reflect with a juſt Humility on our ſelves. That we are indigent, defenceleſs Beings; the Creatures of his Power, and the Dependants of his Providence: So far as we know, the loweſt of all intelligent Beings,

whoſe

whoſe Strength is Weakneſs, and whoſe Wiſdom is Folly. And, what is yet a more mortifying Conſideration, we have provoked this Almighty Power by our Sins, have affronted his Goodneſs, deſpiſed his Counſel, and rebelled againſt his Authority. And if Prophets and Apoſtles, the favour'd of God, fell down with Reverence at the Feet even of his Angels; if *Moſes* himſelf, tho' honour'd with the Character of his Friend, was ſtruck with exceeding Fear and Trembling, at the Glory of his Perfections; if even thoſe holy and unoffending Spirits, the Angels of his Preſence, veil their Faces, and bow down before the Throne of his Majeſty; with what Awe and Reverence ſhould we, ſinful Duſt and Aſhes, approach that infinite Power we have ſo grievouſly offended, with what Humility implore his Pardon? To theſe Conſiderations of Duty, I might add alſo Motives of Intereſt recommending this Affection to us: I might obſerve with *Solomon**, that *in the Fear of the Lord* there *is a ſtrong Confidence*; that 'tis *a Place of Refuge to his Children*; that 'tis the beſt Preſervative from all thoſe temporal Fears

* Prov. xiv. 26.

and

and Diſquietudes which corrupt the Enjoyment, and embitter the Lives of Men; ſince the Malice or Power of all inferior Beings, and even the Wills and Paſſions of Men, are but Inſtruments in the Hand of God, and conſequently are no farther to be feared by us, than we apprehend him provoked to uſe them in our Puniſhment. But I ſhall inſiſt only on one Argument taken from the Effect of this Fear, and that is what I

III. Proposed to conſider: The Influence this Affection will have on the Conduct of our Lives.

In general, the Effect of this Fear will be a ſincere, univerſal Obedience to the Commands of God.

The only Motives that can be imagin'd of our Obedience to the Laws of any Perſon, are either the Value and Certainty of the Rewards he propoſes, together with an Aſſurance of his Inclination and Ability to confer them; or an Apprehenſion of his Juſtice and Severity in puniſhing our Diſobedience. Now neither of theſe, excluſive of the other

other, is the true Principle of our Obedience to God. For, if our Obſervance of the Divine Laws, proceeded merely from an Opinion of his Inclination to our Happineſs, whenever his Providence or Juſtice ſhould think fit to viſit us with any great Affliction, he would no longer appear that kind benevolent Being we before worſhip'd, and conſequently the Motive that engaged our Submiſſion, would loſe its Force on us. 'Twas with this imperfect Principle of Duty, that Satan reproach'd the Integrity of *Job**. *Doth* Job (ſaid he) *ſerve God for nought? Haſt thou not made a Hedge about him, and about all that he hath? Thou haſt bleſſed the Work of his Hands, and his Subſtance is encreaſed in the Land. But put forth thine Hand now and touch all that he hath, and he will curſe thee to thy Face.*

INDEED if the Divine Laws were propoſed to our Obſervance, with no other Motive than the Advantages attending it, they would be little more than an Ad-

* Job i. 9, 10, 11.

vice,

vice, and have but a very weak Influence on the far greater part of Mankind, who are more inclin'd to purſue their Happineſs in the Satisfactions that lie before them in this Life, than to wait on the Promiſes of a diſtant Reverſion. 'Tis therefore neceſſary to engage alſo the Fears of Men by the Annexion of ſuch Penalties as by the Weight and Certainty of them, will over-ballance the Perſuaſions of Temporal Pleaſure.

On the other ſide, If our Obedience were the Effect only of a Dread of the Power and Vengeance of God, it would be no better than the Submiſſion of a Slave to the Tyranny of an inſolent Maſter; and muſt want that Choice and Inclination, which alone can make our Obedience acceptable to God. As he requires a Submiſſion to the Authority of his Commands, ſo he expects that Submiſſion ſhould be accompany'd with an intire Truſt in his Goodneſs, and Affection to his Service; by the former we adore him as the Lord and Governour of the World; by the latter as our Father which is in Heaven. The

proper

proper Motive therefore of our Chriſtian Obedience, is that Fear which is made perfect by Love; that filial Reverence I have deſcribed and recommended, which has in it a juſt Mixture of both theſe Affections, and acts upon our Lives with the Force of both. This is a Principle adapted to every Paſſion and Faculty of our Nature, to every State and Condition of our Life; and, when rightly form'd, will direct us to the juſt Performance of our Duty in all; will equally prepare our Patience for the Day of Adverſity, and engage our Gratitude to the Mercies of God; will ſuggeſt Tears to our Repentance, and Hallelujahs to our Praiſe; will make us receive his Favours as the Bleſſings, his Puniſhments as the Corrections of a Father. The Awe of his Majeſty will keep us from Preſumption, and the Promiſes of his Mercy from Deſpair; for as is his Majeſty, ſo is his Mercy. Both theſe Attributes will be equally in our View, and concur to form the Diſpoſition of the Soul. If this Principle were throughly fix'd in the Minds of Men, we ſhould be aſhamed of Hypocriſy, and tremble at

Prophaneneſs; neither hope our Treachery could eſcape the Notice, nor our Blaſphemies the Vengeance of God. Our ſecret Actions would be as regular as our publick; our Devotions as great in the Cloſet, as they appear in the Temple: We ſhou'd perform every Inſtance of our Duty, not with Eye-ſervice as Men-pleaſers, but with the ſame Sincerity with which we comply with the Deſires of our Friend, or our Father: The leaſt of his Commands would appear venerable to us, and the moſt difficult not grievous. In ſum, this Affection will give Warmth to our Zeal, and Spirit to our Devotions; will animate our Faith, enliven our Hope, and extend our Charity; will deter us from Sin, and encourage us in Duty.

SINCE therefore this is the true Principle of Chriſtian Obedience, the only Foundation on which the whole Superſtructure of Religion can riſe with a proper Strength and Beauty, let us labour to form in our Minds ſuch juſt Apprehenſions of the Deity, as may poſſeſs our Souls with this Reverence towards him.

Such

Such as are our Conceptions of God, ſuch will be our Affection towards him; ~~and~~ and ſuch as is the Affection of the Heart, ſuch will be the Service and Obedience we ſhall pay him. Let us therefore take care neither to affront his Majeſty by want of Reverence, nor diſhonour his Goodneſs by a ſervile Dread of his Power. Both are Defects equally deſtructive of true Religion; the one tending to extinguiſh it, by inclining the Mind to a Contempt of God; the other to corrupt it by Superſtition. As therefore the Reflection on his Goodneſs, ſhould reconcile us with Delight to the Duties he enjoins; ſo muſt we remember that we are to ſerve him with Fear; and, even in thoſe Acts of our Worſhip which principally engage the Mind in contemplating the Wonders of his Love, not forget the Honour due to his Majeſty, but even rejoyce unto him with Reverence; and while we approach him with the Confidence of Sons, humble our ſelves before him with the Reſignation of Creatures, and the Contrition of Sinners. And,

LASTLY, Let it not discourage any of us that our Conversion from a State of Sin to God, is attended with terrible Apprehensions of his Severity and Power, since (as I observed) this is not that slavish Dread which destroys Religion, but the Beginning of Wisdom; an Impression of divine Grace on the Soul, which, duly cultivated, will end in Confidence in the Mercy, and Pleasure in the Service of God. The divine Nature will gradually appear more amiable to us, and even our present Fears will improve our Affection: The Mercy of his Pardon will endear him to our Gratitude, and as we have much forgiven, we shall love much.

IN the present State of our Infirmity, the Soul I am afraid can rarely arrive to that just Temperament of Affection, with which Man in his Innocence adored his Maker. Our imperfect Conceptions of the Deity, and the frequent Failings and Offences to which the best of us are conscious, will debase the Honour we pay him with some Alloys of a servile Mixture. The proper and adequate Reverence due from the Soul to God, is perhaps reserved

for

for the Perfection of that State when we ſhall ſee him as he is in the full Beauty of his Goodneſs, no longer armed with the Terrors of our Judge, no longer offended with our Tranſgreſſions, but appeaſed, reconciled, and united to us thro' *Chriſt*.

LET it be our Care in the mean Time ſo to fear him here, that we may behold him without Dread and Aſtoniſhment hereafter. That when we ſhall be called to the awful Tribunal of our Judge; when the Sinner ſhall deſire the Mountains to fall on him, and the Hills to cover him from the Terrors of his Preſence, we may be able to approach the Throne of his Majeſty with the Confidence of Sons, and be received among the Redeemed of the Lord into that eternal State of Happineſs, where all our Fears and Labours ſhall ceaſe, where everlaſting Love ſhall be our Employment, and everlaſting Peace our Reward.

SERMON II.

A Sufficiency with Regard to Mens Stations in Life adjusted and recommended.

PROV. xxx. 8, 9.

Give me neither Poverty, nor Riches; feed me with Food convenient for me: 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.

AN, says *Eliphaz* to *Job*, *is born unto Trouble*, even *as the Sparks fly upward.* Some Mixture of Uneasiness attends us in every Situation and Period of Life.

But 'tis with great Reluctancy Man is perſuaded to acknowledge and ſubmit to this Neceſſity: What he miſſes at Home, he imagines may be found abroad; what is wanting to Day, he ſtill hopes to Morrow will ſupply. Reſtleſs and impatient to try every Scheme and Overture of preſent Happineſs, he hunts a Phantom he can never overtake; and inſtead of redreſſing the Evil he firſt complained of, he only adds to it the Toil of a fruitleſs Purſuit. The Sorrows he creates to himſelf are the heavieſt Part of his Burden, and his acquired far exceeds his natural Miſery. The only effectual Remedy to both, is what Religion preſcribes; to defer our Expectations of perfect Happineſs to another Life; to conſider the preſent, as a State of unavoidable Imperfection; and to regulate our Deſires of the Things of this World, by their Tendency to promote or diſſerve our Intereſts in another. While we are in the Body indeed, that Part of us will require a Share in our Concern. To be careful for a Proviſion of all Neceſſaries for our ſelves and thoſe who depend on us, is a bounden Duty.

To

To requeſt ſuch a Meaſure of the Conveniencies of Life, as we apprehend to be agreeable to our Station, the Example before us aſſerts to be not only lawful, but commendable. Nay, an Advancement of our Station, and an Improvement of our preſent Circumſtances may be innocently deſired and endeavoured by us, provided the Motives are juſt and virtuous, and the Event be ſubmitted with a due Reſignation to Providence. But ſtill our principal Care muſt be for the one Thing neceſſary, and all our temporal Deſires and Purſuits muſt be governed by that View. And the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God has ſo ordered it, that thoſe Proportions of the good Things of this Life, which are moſt conſiſtent with the Intereſts of the Soul, are alſo moſt conducive to our preſent Felicity. The Requeſt of *Agur* in my Text is formed upon this View, and recommends a Proportion to our Choice and Prayers, the beſt adapted to promote preſent Happineſs, and freeſt from thoſe Temptations which may prejudice our future. *Give me* (ſays he) *neither Poverty*

nor Riches, &c. You will be pleaſed to obſerve with me,

I. THE Import of his Wiſh: And,
II. THE Force of thoſe Reaſons here ſuggeſted for making it.

I. POVERTY and Riches are relative Terms, and the Idea of them varies as they are applied to Perſons of different Condition, Education, Birth, or Figure of Life. The Order of human Society cannot be preſerved, nor the Services requiſite to the Support of it be ſupplied without a Diſtinction of Stations, and a long Subordination of Offices. There muſt be in a Houſe Veſſels of Diſhonour, as well as of Honour; and the one are as neceſſary in their Uſe as the other. There muſt be in the Body a Variety of Members; and unleſs the Offices proper to the meaner and leſs comely Parts be diſcharged, the ſuperior and more honourable will be diſordered. And the Analogy holds with great Exactneſs in publick Communities. Some Members muſt preſide and direct, and others ſerve and obey: And a Diſparity between

these in the outward Condition, Figure, and Ornaments of Life, is necessary to keep the several Orders in a mutual Dependence on each other; to give the Superiors that Authority, and incline the Inferiors to that Submission their several Posts require. Hence therefore it must follow, that those Degrees of Fortune which give Fulness and Affluence to one Station, may be Want and Penury in another; bear no Proportion to the Demands attending it, and disable the Man placed in it from discharging the Duties it requires from him. And consequently, this Wish of *Agur* cannot be understood to propose one certain Size and Measure of Fortune, as the proper Standard of all Mens Desires; but in a Sense accommodated to the various Ranks, Conditions and Characters of Men; and as advising each to request of God such a Measure of temporal Supplies, as may answer the proper Ends and Exigencies of his Station. That he may neither be distressed with the Want of such Things, as are fit and necessary to one in his Position of Life; nor on the other Hand be loaded with such an Abundance, as far exceeds the Demands

mands of it. The former State is to him real Poverty, attended with all the Inconveniencies, and expoſed to the Temptations of Want; the latter a real Burden; like *Saul*'s Armour to *David*, to one of greater Stature it might perhaps be of excellent Service, but to him 'tis not only without Uſe or Defence, but a heavy Incumbrance, rendering him leſs active and ſerviceable in his Poſt, and leſs ſecure in his Perſon, than he would be without it.

In this relative Senſe then I underſtand the Poverty and Riches, which the wiſe Writer here prays to be removed from him.

There is indeed ſuch a State as abſolute Poverty, when a Man is deſtitute not only of the Conveniences, but even of the ſimple Neceſſaries of Life, is diſabled from acquiring them by any Service or Labour, and depends intirely on the Compaſſion of others for his Support. But when I aſſign relative Poverty as the proper Subject of this negative Wiſh, I cannot be underſtood to exclude this abſolute Poverty: For he who petitions God to preſerve him from the Want of thoſe Things,

Things, which are convenient to his Station, more eminently deprecates these Extremities. And therefore to restrain the Petition to this absolute Poverty is without Reason, and must very much contract the Example it proposes to us: For few will under this Supposition think themselves concerned to offer it, neither can such a Restraint consist with the Scope and Coherence of the Text. For if the Poverty here meant be absolute Poverty, then the opposite Branch (Riches) must be absolute too. Now I think it scarce possible to form an Idea of absolute Riches, because we can hardly conceive any Degree of Riches, but what might be agreeable to some Station of Life or other. If therefore the one be relative to the Stations of Men, the other must be so too: And to this Sense the positive Part of the Wish determines us. *Feed me with Food convenient for me*, (i. e.) with such (both for Plenty and Choice) as is suitable to the Number of our Dependents, and the Station of Life we are appointed to fill: (Not merely what is in the strictest Sense necessary to subsist Life, or answer the Demands

mands of Nature; but ſuch a Portion as may become the Rank and Character we ſuſtain, ſupport us comfortably in our Station, and enable us to maintain ſuch Works of Beneficencies as that requires from us.) All this is implied in the proper Notion of Convenience: And though it is our Duty to ſubmit with Patience and Content to more ſcanty Allotments, yet unleſs we exclude temporal Bleſſings from being the Subject of human Petitions, thus much we may reaſonably and lawfully aſk of God.

THIS Petition has indeed been ſometimes explained in another View, which I before hinted, *viz.* as requeſting a Middle Station of Life, within Reach of thoſe Conveniencies which the lower Orders of Mankind muſt neceſſarily want, and yet without Embaraſſment of Greatneſs. But though this is probably a Situation of the greateſt Eaſe and Tranquillity of any in human Life, yet this is by no Means fit to be the Subject of all Mens Petitions to God: Becauſe, as I obſerved, Society cannot ſubſiſt without a Diverſity of Stations and Offices; and if God ſhould grant every

every one this Request of a middle Station, he would defeat the very Scheme of Happiness they proposed in it; and they would find themselves distressed in the Want of those Services, which can only be supplied by a Variety of Orders, both above and below the Condition they desired. To accommodate this Request therefore to general Use and Imitation, it is requisite to understand it in the Sense I have assigned: Not as directing Mens Wishes to any one fixed Point, or determinate Standard of Fortune, but to a Measure fitted and adjusted to the Condition of each. The Medium intended is not an absolute, but a respective Medium: The Proportion recommended to all is the same; but the Things to be desired in this Proportion will vary both in Kind and Measure, according to Mens different Stations, and even to the different Periods and Incidents of Life. In this View the Request is suited to all Characters, Orders, and Distinctions of Men, from the highest to the lowest, and is a proper Comment on that comprehensive Petition enjoined us in our

daily

daily Devotions, *Give us this Day our daily Bread.*

How neceſſary it is to remind Men of this Proportion in their Deſires, will appear if we obſerve how little it is regarded by them. Poverty indeed in all its Degrees Men are eaſily perſuaded to deprecate from themſelves; in this Part of the negative Wiſh, every one is ready to concur with *Agur*; but 'tis with much Difficulty they are induced to join in the other. No Meaſure or Degree of Riches is thought too much; and if Providence ſhould indulge Men in giving as long as they would aſk, how few would interpoſe and ſay to him, *Hold now thine Hand, it is enough.* But in Truth both Extremes above or below the Proportion of our Character, are equally dangerous to our Virtue and Happineſs; and 'tis hard to determine which is moſt uneligible. Conſiderations ariſing from our temporal Intereſts, might convince us of this Truth: (I might enlarge on the Vexation and Diſquiet, the Perils and Fears attending both Poverty and Riches, and obſerve that all the Felicity this Life admits of, is to be found in that adjuſted

Mean,

Mean, that convenient Proportion here recommended to our Choice:) But the Reasons suggested in my Text are sufficient, and more proper to be insisted on in this Place, as they regard our spiritual Concerns, and argue with us from Motives purely Religious.

A DISTINCT Consideration of the Force of them, is what I

II. PROPOSED.

THE Danger apprehended from Poverty is set before us in these Words: *Lest I be poor and steal, and take the Name of my God in vain.* *i. e.* Lest I be tempted to supply my Wants by Fraud or Violence, by Theft or Robbery, by Lying or Perjury. (This last Article may either mean false Asseverations to facilitate the Commission of the former Crimes, or to elude their Discovery when committed, or those more flagrant Methods of unrighteous Gain, false Accusation, and false Witness.) Crimes they are all which no Degree of Poverty can excuse before God. We ought to know how to *want*, as well as how to *abound*; to bear our Cross with Patience,

Patience, and hold faſt our Integrity, tho' every thing elſe be taken from us. But the Temptation to theſe Crimes muſt be acknowledg'd very ſtrong, in a State of Diſtreſs. When a Man finds himſelf ſinking below the Authority and Conveniences of his Station; afflicted with the Senſe of preſent Wants, and the Fears of greater; it requires a peculiar Meaſure of Grace and Firmneſs of Mind to ſtand the Shock, to be content to reduce all his Appetites, and deſcend into a lower Rank of Life, and ſubmit to the Scorn and Neglect that uſually attends ſuch a Change. If in ſuch Circumſtances as theſe a convenient Supply offers its ſelf either to be ſeiz'd by Force, or gain'd by Fraud and Treachery; Human Nature will plead hard to be relieved from its preſent Burden, and perſuade us to hearken to the inviting Overture. A Crowd of importunate Paſſions ſurround the Man, and will not ſuffer him to attend to the Remonſtrances of Juſtice, or the Precepts of Religion. In the Parable of the waſteful Steward in the Goſpel, we have a lively Image of the Force and Proceſs of this Temptation, and the natural

Reaſonings

Reasonings of our Corruption under it. His Lord had declared he would take from him the Stewardship; in Consequence of which Change he foresaw he must fall from a State of Ease and Honour to Indigence and Shame. This he immediately determines, that he could not submit to those Methods of Life, by which the Condition he must be reduced to was usually supported, *Dig he could not, and to Beg he was ashamed.* What then was his next Recourse? Why, he was to make up his Accounts with his Lord, and by an easy undiscoverable Cheat he could provide against the impending Distress. And how readily does he resolve? *This will I do.* He does not so much as hesitate upon the Falshood and Injustice of the Action, but applauds himself in the happy Thought, and sets presently about the Execution of it.

We are assured by many glorious Examples in the Annals of our Religion, that every one in the like Circumstances of Distress will not act and argue thus; but thus will every one be tempted to act. The Representation of our Lord is certain-

ly Natural in all its Parts: In ſuch a State ſuch Temptations will ariſe, and will more frequently be comply'd with, than refuſed; and therefore it concerns the moſt ſecure of his Strength, to pray to God not to lead him into this Temptation, not to expoſe him to an Enemy, by whom there is ſo much danger of his being overcome.

INSTANCES indeed may occur to us in the World, of Injuſtice, Knavery, and Oppreſſion; to which there appears no Inducement from the outward Circumſtances of the Actors; and therefore it may ſeem that this Temptation is not ſo peculiar to Poverty, as has been ſuggeſted. But when theſe Caſes are examined, it will be found that tho' there is not a real, yet there is an imaginary Poverty. Men are diſſatisfy'd with their Station, diſcontented with the preſent, or too apprehenſive for the future, and create to themſelves all the Uneaſineſs of Want. They fancy themſelves poor, and under this perſuaſion feel all the Diſquiet of real Poverty. They are equally impatient of their Condition, equally tempted with the Wages of Unrighteouſ-

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nesſ, as if they were indeed poor; and therefore theſe Inſtances rather confirm, than oppoſe, the ſuppoſition in the Text.

But I go on to obſerve alſo the Dangers apprehended from the other Extream. *Leſt I be full and deny thee, and ſay, Who is the Lord?* A very ungrateful Return indeed to the Author and Giver of all we enjoy, but ſuch as an over-flowing Plenty too much inclines Men to make. While our Fortunes exceed not the Meaſure of real Convenience, and are adapted to the Exigences of our Station, we perceive the Hand of Providence in our gradual and ſucceſſive Supplies; the various Accidents of Life are in our View, which may defeat our Labours, and in a ſhort time reduce us to a Condition of Diſtreſs. We find our ſelves obliged to go on in an honeſt Care and Induſtry in our Callings, and are convinced by daily Obſervation that 'tis to the Bleſſing of God we owe every Succeſs, and to his Protection our Defence from the Calamities to which we are expoſed. Theſe Convictions muſt preſerve in us a lively and conſtant Senſe of our Dependence on him, engage our Praiſes

for the Favours we receive, and our Prayers for the Continuance of his Bleſſing to us: Our Devotion and our Induſtry keep pace with each other, and our Circumſtances help to improve our Religion. But Riches multiplied beyond the proportion of our Character, and the Wants appendent to it naturally diſpoſe Men to forget God. They are apt in ſuch Circumſtances to think themſelves ſecure and independent, out of the Reach of Providence, and no longer concern'd to ſolicit his Favour. Like the rich Fool in the Goſpel, they applaud themſelves in their Treaſures; they have much Goods laid up for many Years, are ſufficient to their own Happineſs, and have no farther Occaſion for God's Aſſiſtance. And 'tis well if they do not diſown their Obligation for his paſt Favours, aſcribe their Acquiſitions to their own Skill and Management, and deny him even the return of their Praiſe. This Apprehenſion *Moſes* very paſſionately repreſents to the *Iſraelites.* * *Beware* (ſaid he) *leſt, when thou haſt eaten and art full, and when thy Herds and thy Flocks multiply, and thy Silver and thy Gold is multiply'd,*

* Deut. viii. 12, 13, 17.

and

and all that thou hast is multiply'd, Then thy Heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, and thou say in thine Heart, My Power and the Might of my Hand hath gotten me this Wealth. Thus does a superfluous Abundance tempt us to forget God, when 'tis hoarded in our Treasures, or consider'd as a safe independent Provision laid up for many Years. And if we take the other Choice, and give Wings to our Riches, and in the Language of the World resolve to enjoy our Fortunes, the Danger is rather greater. For what are the Enjoyments usually proposed in this Choice, but the irregular Pleasures of Vice, the Gratification either of our Lusts or our Vanity? Charity indeed and Works of Munificence are the proper Discharge of such over-proportioned Accessions, and the only virtuous Enjoyment of them: By the Exercise of these Virtues, we may relieve our selves while we relieve our Neighbour; sanctify our own Portion; and double the Pleasures we receive by a Reflection on those we give. But how few comparatively are the Instances of this wise Application? In how much greater proportion

are thoſe, who conſider ſuch Abundance only, as enlarging their Command of ſenſual Pleaſure, who have nothing to ſay to their Soul on theſe Occaſions, but *Eat and Drink, and take thine Eaſe:* Indulge every Paſſion to Satiety, and let nothing be wanting that Appetite calls for, or Wealth can purchaſe. And how naturally does a Man ſtupify'd and immerſed in vitious Pleaſures forget God? 'Tis indeed with Pain and Regret that he muſt remember him, reflect on an Almighty Being whoſe Laws he breaks, and whoſe Vengeance he hourly provokes. Every Thought on God is like the hand-writing on the Wall, to the *Aſſyrian* Prince; it chills the Gayety of his Spirits, and awakens Terrors which he cannot bear; renders all his Fruitions taſtleſs and inſipid, and mingles Gall and Wormwood with his Pleaſures. Before he can reliſh the Life he has choſen, and be indeed an Epicure, he muſt ſilence theſe interrupting Fears; (either drown them by Intemperance, or harden himſelf to a Defiance of them:) Neither can he find any Satisfaction in his Purſuits or Enjoyments, till he arrives at that confirmed State

State of Irreligion described by the *Psalmist*, *that he cares not for God, neither is God in all his Thoughts.*

And if both Poverty and Riches, in that relative Sense, I have explain'd them, are thus dangerous to our Virtue and Religion; the proper Subject of our Petitions to God, with regard to Temporals must be the State between these, that medium of Convenience proportion'd to the several Conditions of Life, which the Example in my Text recommends to our Choice and our Prayers.

It is impossible for any general Directions, precisely to fit and adjust this Measure of Convenience, to the various Cases and Exigencies of Men. Particular Applications must be left to Christian Prudence, under the Guidance of God's Holy Spirit, who knows our Necessities before we ask, and our Ignorance in asking. Perfect Content indeed in the present, and perfect Resignation to Providence for the future, seem to offer an expedient that does all at once. But when we consider, that these Duties are consistent with desiring of God what we apprehend convenient for us; nay, that an Advancement of our

Station, and an Improvement of our Circumſtances are within the Liberties indulged to our Deſires; the Difficulty will appear to be rather placed in another Light, than taken away: For it ſtill remains to be determined by Prudence, what meaſure of Convenience or Improvement we ſhould ask. The wiſe Supplicant in my Text, we may preſume was both contented with his preſent Situation, and tho' he prayed for the Condition he thought moſt deſirable, yet left the Event to God, and was prepared to ſubmit to his Will, tho' either of the Extreams ſhou'd be his Portion: Yet this Diſpoſition neither prevented his making the Requeſt before us, nor aſcertain'd the Meaſure he propoſed to himſelf in it, nor removed his Apprehenſion from the States which he prays to be removed from him: They ſtill appear'd to him States of Danger, expos'd to many Temptations naturally attending them. Theſe Virtues therefore, tho' they will do much, and are of excellent Uſe both for our Direction and Security, ſome prudential Rules it is requiſite to take with them in Practice and Application. And ſome few, I beg leave

to

to suggest, which may in some Measure assist our Choice, or at least guard us against the Dangers of a contrary Event.

1. If we would avoid the Dangers and Temptations of Poverty, it very much concerns us, not to over-rate the Conveniencies of our Station, and in estimating the Proportion fit for us, to fix it rather too low than too high; for our Desires will be proportioned to our Wants, real or imaginary, and our Temptations to our Desires. If we imagine our selves intitled to any thing we have not, we shall be uneasy in the Want of it, and that Uneasiness will expose us to all the evil Persuasions of Poverty. He who can content himself with a little, will probably have enough, and be at Rest: But he who makes much necessary, will want much; and wearied with the Difficulty of the Attainment, will incline to hearken after any Expedient, that offers to shorten his way to it.

2. I would propose it as a great Security to our Virtue from all Temptations on this side, to use our selves sometimes to live

live within the Reſtraints of a lower Condition, than that we are placed in: I mean not that we ſhould ſink our Figure out of Covetuouſneſs, and deny our ſelves or our Dependents the proper Conveniences of our Station, only that we may lay up a ſuperfluous Heap of Treaſure; but that by a voluntary Self-denial, we ſhould ſometimes inure our ſelves to want the Gratifications in our Power. Our Condition in this World is mutable and uncertain, alterable by a thouſand Accidents which we can neither foreſee, nor prevent. Now if this Change happens to a Man, who has always indulged himſelf in the full Enjoyment of his Station, the Burden will lie heavy, and he will difficultly be perſuaded to think any Methods unjuſt, that offer to remove it. But he who has previouſly inured himſelf to thoſe Reſtraints, which ſuch a Change renders neceſſary, can chearfully reconcile himſelf to them: He is reduced only to what has been often his Choice before. The Tempter has no Appetite to apply to, but what he has already learn'd to govern: And he who could want thoſe Conveniences, when he

he might easily have enjoy'd them with Innocence, will easily reject all sinful Methods of acquiring them.

3. To guard against the Temptations from the other Extream, no better Advice can be given that of the *Psalmist*, *If Riches increase, set not thine Heart upon them.* For Riches may be increas'd to a good Man: Nay, 'tis a natural and providential Effect of his Virtues to encrease them. But then he will remember from whom he receiv'd them, for what Purposes they are given, and to whom he is accountable for the Management of them. If these Considerations are present to our Minds, we shall neither forget God, our selves, nor our Neighbour; and be proof against the Temptations of Pride and Pleasure.

After all, no Condition of Life is necessarily Sinful, or necessarily Virtuous. We may pass with Innocence, both thro' Want, and thro' Abundance; and he, whose Fortune is best adjusted to his Station, may be Wicked and Vitious: But still, he has much less Temptation to be

to be ſo, than he who is placed in either of the Extremes. And tho' we are bound to ſubmit to whatever Circumſtances God ſhall allot us, and diligently endeavour to acquit our ſelves with Duty and Fidelity in them, yet Chriſtian Prudence will adviſe us to requeſt a Situation leaſt expoſed. The Honour may, perhaps, be greater of ſtanding in a Poſt of Danger; but when the Stake is ſo great, and the Miſcarriage ſo irretrievable, a wiſe Man would chuſe to act where the Hazard is leſs. And when he conſiders the manifold Temptations both of Poverty and Riches, how vehemently they aſſault the weakeſt Parts of our Nature, and how fatally it will affect his Happineſs to be over-come by them, he will joyn with *Agur* in petitioning God for the ſafer Portion of a moderate adjuſted Convenience; that his Temptations may be ſuch as he is more able to bear; and that he *may ſo paſs thro' things Temporal, that he finally loſe not the things Eternal.*

SERMON

SERMON III.

The Greatneſs of the Salvation offer'd in the Goſpel, and the extreme Danger of Neglecting it.

HEBR. ii. 3. *former part.*

How ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo great Salvation?

ST. *Paul*, in theſe Words, makes an immediate Addreſs to the *Jews*, and pleads with them for a diſtinguiſhed Regard to the Goſpel, from the Dignity of the Perſon by whom it was propoſed. *God* (he obſerves) *had*

had at ſundry Times and in divers Manners ſpoken unto the Fathers by the Prophets; and the Law had been delivered to them by the Miniſtry of Angels, Meſſengers who might juſtly demand their Attention and Obedience. But the Meſſenger of this laſt Diſpenſation had a Character far ſuperiour to theſe, was the Son of God himſelf, the Heir and Author of all things, whom the Angels themſelves adored and obey'd. With equal Advantage was the Meſſage he brought diſtinguiſh'd from all former Revelations, open'd to the Faith of Men, in a clear and diſtinct Proſpect of eternal Salvation, which had been but very obſcurely and partially figured to them in the Shadows of the Law. The Apoſtle then calls upon them, to reflect that if they who diſregarded the former Meſſages of God, felt the Reſentments of his Diſpleaſure; much heavier Effects of divine Vengeance muſt attend the Refuſal or Neglect of this laſt Overture of Grace and Salvation. The Argument, as it appeals to the paſt Experience of the *Jews*, had a peculiar Force in Application to them; but it ariſes from Principles which give

give it a much wider Extent, and sets the Terrors of the Lord before every obstinate Infidel, and every negligent Christian: It reminds the One of the just Condemnation that awaits him for rejecting the Gospel, and the Other for not complying with the Terms and Duties of it; forfeiting so great Salvation, when put in his Power; and and rendring ineffectual all the gracious Care of Providence, for his Attainment of it. As I speak to Christians, I shall chiefly consider the Words before us in this latter View: The Import of them may appear to us more distinctly in these Propositions:

I. THAT God has by the Gospel made so effectual Provision for our Happiness, that nothing but our own Neglect can render us miserable.

II. SINCE God has taken so great Care for our Salvation, it is most reasonable that Men should be careful to perform their part of this Work, and not neglect it themselves.

III. THAT they who do neglect it will have no Excuſe for the Crime, but muſt expect the ſevereſt Reſentments of divine Juſtice.

IF our Attention be duly engaged to theſe Reflections, they cannot, I think fail of a powerful Influence on our Lives.

AND, I. God has by the Goſpel made ſo effectual Proviſion for our Happineſs, that nothing but our own Neglect can render us miſerable. This muſt appear if we but tranſiently obſerve,

1. How great, how glorious a Felicity, how adequate to the Deſires of a reaſonable Nature, is reveal'd to our Hopes in the Goſpel.

2. WHAT Care and Solicitude he has expreſſed for our Attainment of it.

3. UPON how gracious Terms of Duty it is promiſed to us.

1. MAN, under the Diſadvantages of a weak and fallen Nature, was unable even to form an Idea of Happineſs, worthy his rea-

reasonable Ambition. That he was design'd for Happiness, he justly concluded from the Goodness of that Power from whom he derived his Being, and from the strong and restless Desire, by which he was carried to the Pursuit of it. This Happiness, it was presently resolved by all who look'd farther than the common Pursuits of vulgar Minds, must be some one uniform End, proportioned in general to the Capacities of human Nature, attainable by every Man, independent on the Accidents of Fortune, and not confined to any certain Station or Circumstances of Life. But in the various Projects of Happiness devised by human Reason, there still appear'd Inconsistencies not to be reconciled. The Patrons of the several Schemes observed and exposed the Defects of one another, which they could much easier do than defend their own. In the mean Time none was proposed, on which the Mind could rest with an entire Satisfaction; none that appear'd certainly attainable, or of Value enough to reward the Labour of the Pursuit. Neither indeed was it possible there should be, while Men could not

with any ſure Confidence carry their Hopes beyond this Region of Chance and Vanity, where nothing was ſtable, nothing was equal; nothing could be offer'd to Day, but what to Morrow might deprive us of; and conſequently nothing commenſurate to the Deſires of human Nature, on which it could fix as its ultimate End, without being carried on with any farther Deſire. In this ſtate, before the Light of the Goſpel, Mankind travell'd on like People in the Dark, avoiding as well as they could what offended them in their Paſſage, but without any certain Proſpect of the End of their Journey, or of the Way that led to it. The Wiſeſt were diſtracted with Doubts and Uncertainties, while the Generality wander'd without any Rule, following juſt where their preſent Paſſions happened to lead them. But what unaſſiſted Reaſon could not diſcover, that God has ſet clearly before us in the Revelation of the Goſpel: A Felicity equal to our moſt enlarg'd Deſires, a State of immortal and unchangeable Glory, with him in Heaven, aſſured to our Faith by a ſolemn Covenant, for the Performance of which we have the Security

curity of a divine Promise. This is an End, which, at first View, appears worthy our utmost Contention to obtain, and in Comparison with which every other Prospect becomes mean, trifling, and contemptible: A Felicity adapted to every Rank and Order of Men, independent on the various Accidents of this Life; such in short as the Researches of Human Wisdom sought for, but were not able to discover.

2. THE great Care of God for our Salvation must farther appear to us, in the Concern he has expressed for our Attainment of it. The Messenger of these glad Tidings, by whom this Covenant of Mercy was proposed and ratified with us, was no other than the eternal Son of his Bosom, the Ray of his Glory, and the express Image of his Person. And when we consider what this divine Person did and suffered in this stupendous Negotiation, how he was bruised for our Iniquities, and wounded for our Transgressions, and paid down his own Blood the Price of our Salvation, we cannot surely want Ar-

guments to convince us of the Concern of God for our Attainment of it.

3. But the gracious Terms of this Covenant are still a farther Assurance of this Conclusion. The Performances required on our Part, are no other than what natural Reason has endeavoured to recommend, even in the most severe and difficult Instances of Duty: By this Covenant, the tendereſt Provision is made for our Failings and Infirmities; he who falls may again rise to Grace; the contrite Sinner is restored to Pardon, and, through Faith in *Christ*, our Repentance is intitled to Salvation.

And to this we must add the great Assistances vouchsafed us in the Support, Comfort, and Direction of the Holy Spirit; Assistances always attending us upon the easy Condition of our Prayers, and by which the most burdensome Duty will be rendered light and easy.

If we miscarry under so many Advantages, the Fault must be in our selves: God has done all that the most merciful Creator could do, for the Salvation of a free and rational Creature; all that could engage

engage us in the Pursuit, or assist us in the Attainment of it: And it must be owing wholly to our own Neglect, if we come short of it. Since therefore God has taken so much Care for our Salvation, and done so much for our Attainment of it, it must

II. APPEAR most reasonable that we should be careful to perform our Part of the Work, and not be negligent in so great a Concern our selves.

NAY, but say some, God has taken so effectual Care for us, that we need not take any for our selves: He has done so much, that nothing remains for us to do. If we are of the Number of his Elect, we cannot miscarry; both the End and the Means are secured to us, without any Pains or Labour of our own. *Christ* has paid the Price of our Salvation; his Righteousness will be imputed to us: The Reward is not of him that runneth, or of him that worketh, but a mere Act of Grace and Favour. And on the other Side, if we are not of the Elect of God,

all our Labour and Application will be ineffectual, we may run, yet not obtain.

Now 'tis acknowledged theſe Premiſſes are true, when rightly underſtood; but when they are ſo, this Concluſion will not follow from them. God has predeſtinated all whom he has choſen, to eternal Salvation. This is undoubtedly true; neither is it poſſible to conceive infinite Preſcience, without affirming this Doctrine. For ſince all the Works and Acts of God, all that he ſhould do to all Eternity, were known and preſent unto him from all Eternity; theſe Acts of his Mercy or Juſtice towards Men, muſt alſo be known, and conſequently predeſtined or predetermined by him from all Eternity. But in the Idea or Conception of infinite Preſcience, it is alſo included that God ſhould from all Eternity foreknow our Works, as well as his own; and it is utterly inconceivable, that when theſe Works of ours were preſent before him, he ſhould make his Decrees concerning us without any Regard to them. So that the ultimate Allotment of God to Men, is really a Conſequence of their own voluntary Choice,

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in doing Good or Evil: But this Choice of Men, and the Allotments of divine Justice consequent to it, being foreknown and foreseen by the divine Prescience from all Eternity, the final Event of every Man's Conduct is properly said to be predestined or predetermined by God. From the Doctrine of Predestination therefore thus truly understood, it is evident, that no Consequence can be drawn, which can give the least Encouragement to Remissness in Duty: For our Salvation still depends upon our own Conduct. Life and Death are set before us, and in our Election; we shall receive according to what we have done, whether it be good or whether it be Evil; and the final Event will not be one Jot less the Consequence of our own Choice and Actions, for God's having from all Eternity foreseen and determined what that Event shall be.

NEITHER can he who is wanting in his own Applications infer any Security to himself from the Doctrine of Justification. The Righteousness and Merits of *Christ* shall, through Faith in him, be imputed to us. This is certainly a true and most

comfortable Aſſertion of the Goſpel: But the proper Import of it is only this; that ſince our beſt Services will, through the Corruption of our Nature, be attended with great Imperfections; ſince in many Things we ſhall all offend; God by the Mercies of the Goſpel Covenant has promiſed, that he will accept the Satisfaction of *Chriſt* as an Attonement for theſe Failings, impute his perfect Obedience to us to fill up and ſupply what is wanting in ours, and through his Merits and Interceſſion intitle our ſincere Repentance to Pardon and Salvation. And whoever ſeriouſly reflects on his own Imperfections, how impoſſible it is for Fleſh and Blood to pay an exact Obedience to the Laws of God, how often even the beſt of us fail of performing what even natural Conſcience affirms to be our Duty, cannot but acknowledge the Compaſſion of God in theſe merciful Overtures; how inevitably we had been loſt without them, and expoſed to Death, the Wages of every Sin.

When we have done the beſt we are able, our Obedience will ſtill be imperfect, and

and our Salvation will be owing to the imputed Merits of *Christ*, supplying and attoning for this Imperfection; but still it is our strict and bounden Duty to do as much as we are able, and not sin in Confidence of Grace abounding to us. The Merits of *Christ* will make up the anavoidable Deficiencies of our Service, will attone for our Imperfection, will prevail for Pardon to our sincere Repentance; but will afford no Comfort or Advantage to the presumptuous unconverted Sinner: And consequently this Doctrine of Justification cannot be pleaded in Abatement of our Endeavours. We shall be tried and judged according to our Works; neither will it avail us to cry *Lord, Lord*, if we are found among the Workers of Iniquity.

THE exceeding great Tenderness and Concern of God for our Salvation, which appears in these gracious Terms and Means of it, is so far from an Argument for Remissness in us, that it ought to excite our utmost Care and Solicitude, to perform the Part left to our own Endeavours. No Being, not even God himself, can be so immediately, so intimately concerned for

our

our Happineſs, as we our ſelves are. Since therefore God has done ſo much for Salvation, and appeared ſo ſolicitous for the Accompliſhment of that great Work, what amazing Stupidity is it for Men to be negligent of it themſelves? to ſit down lazy and unactive, when ſo ineſtimable a Treaſure is brought even to their Doors, and offered upon ſuch Terms, as even the weakeſt Abilities may comply with?

But how indifferent ſoever Men may be to eternal Happineſs, yet ſurely to eternal Miſery none can be indifferent: And if other Arguments are heard without Impreſſion, yet at leaſt this uſed by the Apoſtle in my Text, the inevitable Deſtruction which awaits our Neglect muſt prevail for our Attention. Every Faculty and Power of our Soul muſt be awakened, when we are called upon to conſider how unpardonable the Refuſal of ſo much Grace muſt render us, how impoſſible it will be for us to eſcape, if we neglect ſo great Salvation. Or,

III. That they who do neglect it, will have no Excuſe for their Crime, but muſt expect

expect the severest Resentments of the divine Justice. It is observable that the Apostle here asserts this as a clear indisputable Conclusion, which could admit of no Question. He appeals to common Sense and Reason, to judge of the Equity of it. For what Excuse can be framed or devised for the Man who slights the Overture of so much Mercy, or neglects the Means prescribed for the Attainment of it? Ignorance he cannot plead, to whom the Gospel has been proposed, and of such the Apostle here speaks: The Measures of Duty and the Event of our Actions, are there so clearly and distinctly taught, that 'tis impossible for him who attends, to be ignorant of them. *Christ* has made so full a Provision for the Instruction of all, who are within the Society of his Church, by the Appointment of a Ministry, attending on this very Thing and the continual Administration of those Ordinances committed to them, that if any one can under these Advantages be ignorant of the Terms of Salvation, his Ignorance itself must be a Crime without Excuse.

WILL it be ſaid that theſe Terms are hard and rigorous, beyond the Capacities of our Nature to perform? Neither can this be pretended. For to do as much as we are able, and to repent of our Tranſgreſſions, is the Sum of what is required from us; Conditions adapted even to the meaneſt Abilities: Eſpecially ſince the Aſſiſtance of divine Grace is always preſent to thoſe who aſk it, and duly attend thoſe Ordinances, which God has inſtituted as Means of it. The Direction then is ſufficiently clear, and the Duty required by it adjuſted to the Powers of our Nature; neither Ignorance, nor Inability can be pretended; and what Plea can we offer to divine Juſtice to prevent Condemnation? But though the Juſtice of this Deciſion cannot but be acknowledged, whenever we impartially reflect on it, yet manifeſt it is, that there are ſome Deluſions or other of Power ſufficient to blind the Eyes of Men that they cannot perceive it, or to harden their Hearts that they cannot attend to it.

AND,

And, 1. It is pretended by the Libertine and Infidel, that he wants Evidence to convince him of the Truth of this Gospel we preach to him, and therefore he must be excused if he regards not the Salvation offer'd by it. But not to enter far into the Detail of this Question here, I would only ask him whether it be not possible for God to reveal his Will to Mankind. This, if he owns a God and is not lost to all use of his Reason, he cannot deny: And let him but consider the manifold Imperfections of human Reason, as diversify'd by the various Capacities, Ignorance, Inattentions, and Passions of Men, and the Distraction that must arise from every Man's being left without Guide or Rule to collect his own Scheme of Duty; and he cannot but confess that 'tis a thing the most desireable to Man, and most agreeable to the Goodness of God, that he should send forth his Light and his Truth, by a special Revelation of his Will direct, and by the Authority of his Command enjoin a Rule Duty to them. Let us then ask him, what Proofs and Evidences he could require of such Declarations coming from God; whether

ther 'tis poſſible to conceive or imagine greater and more determinate than thoſe alledg'd in ſupport of the Chriſtian Revelation; and laſtly, Whether ſuppoſing a divine Revelation to have been made, and and ſuch Facts as are alledg'd in Proof of it, to have been performed above one Thouſand ſix Hundred Years ago, it is poſſible for the Evidences of them, to have been convey'd down to us at this Diſtance, with greater Clearneſs, than the Proofs of the Chriſtian Revelation are convey'd to us; and whether every Objection that now is, or can be made to it, might not have been urged againſt it by ſceptical Men, ſuppoſing it to have come originally from God. If then we have all the Evidence of the Truth of it, that we could have ſuppoſing it to have been true, we have all the Evidence that the Nature of the thing admits, and conſequently all that any reaſonable Man ought to inſiſt on; and therefore no Man can be excuſed before God by the Pretence of wanting Evidence, for refuſing to believe and obey the Goſpel of *Jeſus Chriſt*.

BUT,

BUT, 2. We find even among them who profess to believe the Truth, and hope in the Promises of the Gospel, too many living in a stupid or presumptuous Neglect of those means, which are necessary to the Attainment of them. Now many are the Illusions by which the Enemy endeavours to cheat Men into Security, and Defeat their Title to Salvation; but those by which he seems most generally to prevail, are either persuading them to a Confidence in some partial Works of Obedience, or else to put off the Care of their Salvation to some future and better Opportunities of attending to it. How little the former of these Pretensions will avail us before God, must be obvious to every one who remembers that Decision of the Apostle *, that he who *keeps the whole Law* except *one Point*, and presumptuously offends in that, will incur the Penalty of the whole Law.

AND as to the latter, the Folly of leaving so important a Concern as our Salvation to the Hazard of future Provisions, of deferring the Care of it even for a Day, has been often observ'd and inculcated to you.

* Jam. ii. 10.

Let

Let us only reflect how weak, how trifling an Excuſe it will be, when our Judge ſhall reproach us with neglecting that great Salvation which his Mercy offer'd us, with being Deaf to all the Calls of his Grace, and preferring the tranſient Intereſts or Pleaſures of this Life to that Glory he had reveal'd to us, to ſay, We intended ſome time or other to be wiſer and reform.

Upon the whole, to thoſe who have never heard of the Goſpel, it may be preſumed God will be more favourable in Judgment; the imperfect Direction they are under without any certain Rule of Duty, or any ſure Proſpect of Reward upon the Performance even of what Reaſon approved, will be ſome Mitigation of their Miſtakes and Impieties. But for a wicked Chriſtian, there remains nothing but a dreadful Looking for of Judgment, and fiery Indignation from the Vengeance of God. He ſins in the cleareſt Light, againſt Knowledge and Conviction, againſt a ſolemn Vow and Contract with God, with a full View of the Conſequences of his Actions; eternal Hapineſs is ſet diſtinctly before him on the one Hand, and eternal Miſery on the other;

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other; he is daily call'd upon by the Word, by the Ministers of the Gospel, by the inward Suggestions of the Holy Spirit to his Soul and Conscience, to attend to these Prospects, and mind the Things that belong to his Peace. And his Gratitude is under the strongest Obligations to Duty, from those amazing Instances of Divine Mercy, made known to him in the Mystery of his Redemption. For Sins committed with so many Aggravations of Guilt, the Furnace of Wrath will be seven times hotter, and burn with a distinguish'd Fury. For if he who offends against the Light of Nature, be left without Excuse to the Justice of God; if he who despised the Law of *Moses* died without Mercy; of how much sorer Punishment shall he be thought worthy, who tramples under Foot the Blood of the Son of God, and does despite to the Spirit of Grace? *More tolerable will it be in the Day of Judgment for Tyre and Sidon*, more tolerable even for *Sodom and Gomorrah*, than for those who have heard and known the gracious Gospel of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, and neglected the great Salvation offer'd by it. Let us therefore remember the dreadful Judgment that

hangs over us, from which there is no escaping but by acting up to the great Obligations of Obedience we are under: Let us immediately set about the great Work of making *our Calling and Election sure* *, *lest we be harden'd thro' the Deceitfulness of Sin* †; lest it be in vain for us that a Law is come into the World; lest a Promise of Life being made us, we should not only fail of entring in, but the gracious Overture it self should be objected in Reproach and Aggravation of our Sin: And all the infinite Mercies of the Gospel should bring no other Fruit to us, but only that thereby we might receive the greater Damnation.

* 2 Pet. i. 10. † Heb. iii. 13.

SERMON

SERMON IV.

A Conformity to this World inconsistent with our Duty and Happiness.

ROM. xii. 2. *former part.*

Be not conformed to this World.

WHEN we reflect on the Force and Variety of those Arguments which persuade us to Religion; the Importance of the Rewards which attend our Obedience, and the Terror of those Penalties which are threatned to our Neglect; the Frequency with which they are inculcated, and the Warmth and Affection wherewith

they are propoſed to us; that God has addreſs'd every Paſſion of our Nature, apply'd Remedies to every Weakneſs, warn'd us of every Enemy, and guarded us againſt every external Impreſſion that might divert us from his Service; that our Duty in all the great Lines of it is clear and obvious, the Extent of it underſtood, the Obligation acknowledg'd, and the Wiſdom of complying with it freely confeſs'd: When (I ſay) we reflect on all this affectionate Care of Providence for our Happineſs, with what Wonder muſt we obſerve the little Effect it has on Men? What Charm, what Magick is it which can over-rule the Force of all theſe Motives, and engage us to act againſt our own Convictions? The Scripture has directed us to refer theſe Miſcarriages in our Chriſtian Warfare, eſpecially to the Power and Impreſſion of three Enemies, the *World*, the *Fleſh*, and the *Devil*. Againſt the former of theſe the Apoſtle endeavours to arm his Converts in the Words before us, as an Enemy of the greateſt Danger to our Virtue and Happineſs, whoſe Conqueſt over us is inconſiſtent with that Purity and Tem-

Temperance he recommended, that holy and reaſonable Service we owe to God. By the *World*, we are ſometimes taught to underſtand the Things of this World; that Variety of Pleaſures and Intereſts which are apt to inſinuate into our Paſſions, and ſteal away our Affections from God. Sometimes (as in the Place before us) we are to underſtand the Men of this World, with whoſe Solicitations we are ſo apt to comply, and to whoſe diſſolute Manners and Cuſtoms we are too ill-inclined to conform.

I SHALL hope to prevail on your Obedience to this Precept of the Apoſtle, by repreſenting the great and particular Danger we are expoſed to from this Temptation, which will abundantly appear if we conſider,

I. THE great Proneneſs of our Nature, to comply with this Temptation.

II. THE great Evil which will attend ſuch Compliance: And having from theſe two Conſiderations repreſented our Danger I ſhall endeavour,

III. To ſuggeſt ſome Rules to our Conduct, which may preſerve us from it. And,

I. LET us reflect on the great Proneneſs of our Nature, *&c.*

EXAMPLE is a Motive of a very prevailing Force on the Actions of Men. In the former Part of our Lives, the Rules and Meaſures of our Practice are almoſt wholly taken from the Conduct of ſuch Perſons as fall within our Obſervation. We have indeed Precepts of Duty given us by our Inſtructors; but theſe we imagine are beſt explained by the Actions of thoſe who have learn'd them before us. We are apt to argue that theſe Men have had longer Opportunities of Information, and are equally concern'd in the Conſequences of Obedience with our ſelves; and if their Duty be conſiſtent with the Liberties we obſerve in their Practice, 'tis a fooliſh Superſtition in us to refuſe our ſelves the ſame Indulgences. And the ſame Authority that the Actions of a Man have with us in our Childhood, the ſame in every Period of Life has

has the Practice of all, whom we Regard as our Superiors in Knowledge, Figure, or Station in the World. We perſuade our ſelves they have ſome ſecret Reaſons for what we ſee them do, which however thro' Want of their Information and Capacity may be unknown to us; yet whatever they are, they muſt be equally concluſive for us, as they are for them. Thus we implicitly follow in the Track in which they lead us, and comfort our ſelves with this poor Reflection, that we ſhall fare as well as thoſe that go before us: And what the Example of our Equals wants of Authority, is abundantly ſupply'd in the Inſinuations of Friendſhip, and the repeated Influences of a conſtant Converſation. We are naturally inclined to think favourably of thoſe we love, and our Affection to the Perſon inſenſibly engages us to approve his Actions; and then what we approve in our Friend, we can hardly be induced to think criminal in our ſelves. And if beſides our Proneneſs to imitate thoſe we love and converſe with, we obſerve the Addreſs and Aſſiduity they will uſe to corrupt us; that 'tis a natural Effect of the

Pride of Man to labour to infuſe his Sentiments, and recommend his Practice to others; that this is a Compliment our Superiors will demand to their Authority, and our Equals to their Friendſhip, we have ſtill a farther Argument to convince us of the Danger of this Temptation. 'Tis indeed ſcarce poſſible for a good-natur'd Man to refuſe a Compliance with the Solicitations of his Company, to ſtand out againſt the Raillery of his Familiars, and the continual Reproaches of Affectation and Singularity. We are fond of pleaſing and endearing our ſelves to thoſe we eſteem; and ſince nothing more affectionately recommends one Man to another, than a Similitude of Manners and Diſpoſition, we are irreſiſtibly led into the ſame Inclinations and Averſions with them.

In general, we cannot but obſerve, and in too many Inſtances lament the Power of Faſhion and popular Cuſtom: With what Tyranny it governs the Sentiments and Actions of Men; makes that reputable in one Age, which was a Vice in another; and reverſes even the Diſtinctions of Good and Evil; like brute Beaſts we travel with the

the Herd, and are never ſo ſolicitous for the Rightneſs of the Way, as for the Number or Figure of our Company. With how juſt a Concern therefore does the Apoſtle caution us againſt an Enemy, ſo apt to prevail upon our Weakneſs? A Temptation to which every Period of our Age, every State and Condition of our Life is expoſed: A Temptation of ſtill the greater Danger, becauſe it deceives us under the falſe Similitude of Virtue, is covered with the ſpecious Names of good Nature and good Manners; recommends it ſelf with all the Charms of Friendſhip, and is encouraged by the Eſteem and Applauſe of all about us. But the Conſideration which ſhould eſpecially quicken our Obedience to this Admonition of the Apoſtle, is,

II. THE great Evil that will attend our Conformity to the World. Were they only ſome ſlight and trivial Indiſcretions, to which the Example or Perſuaſions of the World expoſed us, it might perhaps not much concern our Religion, nor affect any important Part of our Happineſs, whether

we

we regarded them or not. But alas! the Intereſt endangered is no leſs than our Title to Heaven, and the Favour of our Creator: The Actions to which the World ſolicits our Compliance, are thoſe very Sins which forfeit our eternal Expectations, and treaſure up Wrath and Vengeance againſt us from the Juſtice of God. The far greater Part of the Examples that occur to us, are ſo many Encouragements to Vice and Diſobedience. *The whole World* (ſaith St. *John*) lieth in Wickedneſs.* And 'twere happy for us if this Complaint of the Apoſtle could be confined to the Age in which he wrote, and were applicable only to the Heathen World. The Purity of our Religion, the Excellence of its Laws, and the Weight of its Sanctions might indeed encourage us to hope better Things from a Chriſtian World; and perhaps in the Days of the Apoſtle, when all who profeſſed themſelves Diſciples of *Chriſt* were Converts of Conſcience, this ſevere Cenſure might with more Reaſon be reſtrain'd to the unbelieving Part of Mankind; but when Chriſtianity came to be taken up by

* 1 John v. 19.

many

many only as the fashionable Religion of their Country, and for the sake of those civil Encouragements which attended their Profession, the Complaint was too visibly applicable to the Lives even of Christians, to excuse them any longer from the Extent of it. Alas! the Enemy of our Happiness has his Servants and Votaries, even among those who are called by the Name of the Son of God. He is styled in Scripture the Prince of this World; and the Conduct of too great a Number will always be influenced by his Authority, and obey his Direction. Let us with all the Charity that can consist with a just Observation, stand still and reflect upon what we daily see practised in the World, and can we believe if an Apostle of *Christ* appear'd in our Streets, he would retract his Caution, and command us to be conformed to the World. Do we find so much Piety, Virtue, and Religion in the publick Example of the Age, as may secure our Imitation, and encourage us to rely on the general Practice for the Measures of our Duty? Shall we not rather be tempted to cry out with the *Psalmist*, *They are all*

gone

gone out of the Way, they are altogether become abominable, there is none that doth good * ? Let us not flatter our ſelves that our Innocence is without Danger of Contagion, from a World where we behold every Inſtance of Lewdneſs and Intemperance, Prophaneneſs and Irreligion, not only committed, but own'd, defended, and gloried in. The World indeed was never without Examples of Vice and Immorality; wicked Men there always were, and always will be. But the publick State of Religion is ſomewhat leſs in Danger of Corruption, while the Sinner acknowledges the Obligations of his Duty, is aſhamed of his Irregularities, profeſſes a Reverence for the Laws of God, and promiſes ſtill to reform, and live agreeably to them. He offends indeed, but 'tis with a Modeſty like the Son in the Goſpel, who own'd the Authority of the Command, and promiſed his Father to go, tho' he went not. But the Caſe is far otherwiſe, and the Danger of the Example much greater, when an open Party is form'd againſt Religion; when Vice has the publick Encouragement of Applauſe, and Prophaneneſs be-

* Pſal. xiv. 1.

comes

comes eſtabliſh'd as a Faſhion; when Men ſhall no longer affect to hide and conceal their Crimes, but make the moſt daring Impieties a Motive of their Vanity; when the Principles of Obedience, and the Authority that requires it are queſtioned, and the very Articles of our Creed diſputed, and ridiculed; when Atheiſm, Deiſm, and Hereſy are confeſs'd, applauded, and ſupported; when the Altar, the Service, and the Miniſters of God are treated with Scorn, and the whole Oeconomy of the Goſpel expoſed to Contempt as Fable and Impoſture. This is not Diſobedience, but Rebellion; 'tis diſclaiming the Sovereignty of *Chriſt*, and renouncing all Allegiance to his Authority, and declaring in Terms we *will not have this Man to rule over us.* And yet theſe are the Crimes, this the Pattern which the World propoſes to our Imitation: Theſe it recommends to us as Arguments of more refined Senſe, and a ſuperior Underſtanding: To theſe we are ſolicited by numerous Examples in every Rank and Order of Men; by the Authority of the Great, and the Intimacies of our Equals; by the Arguments of the Subtil, and the Rail-

leries

leries of the Prophane; by the Reproaches of Enemies, and the Perſuaſion of Friends: While Chriſtian Faith, Piety, and Devotion, are traduced and ridiculed as moroſe unconverſable Qualities, the Effect of Pride or Folly, of Knavery or Superſtition. And can the Miniſters of the Goſpel too frequently remind Men of ſo imminent a Danger, or too earneſtly diſcourage a Conformity to ſo corrupt and diſſolute a World? For be we aſſured, it is not a Trifle that we hazard, but the greateſt Intereſt of our Nature, the eternal Salvation of our Souls, the End for which we were born, and the Reaſon for which we came into the World.

LET me therefore,

III. RECOMMEND ſome Rules to your Conduct, which may preſerve you from the Impreſſions of ſo importunate, ſo dangererous a Temptation. And here,

1. THE moſt effectual Preſervative of our Virtue, is to avoid as far as is poſſible the Converſation of wicked Men. If indeed we would only decline evil Company, we muſt renounce human Society, and (as the

the Apostle * says) *go out of the World.* But 'tis in our Power to confine our Friendships and Intimacies, to Men of Virtue and Religion. The Righteous are not so fail'd from the Earth, but we may find good Men enough for the Support and Entertainments of Society: Men whose Conversation will weaken the Influence of vicious Examples, instruct our Ignorance, relieve our Modesty, and give us Courage and Assurance in the Duties of our Profession. But because the Business and Affairs of Life will sometimes unavoidably engage us in the Conversation of wicked Men. Let us,

2. ARM our selves with an habitual Resolution never to communicate with them in their Vices, not to suffer any Friendship or Relation, any Example or Authority to prevail on us to desert the Truth of *Christ*, or act any thing in Contradiction to our Duty to God. And,

3. WE shall be very much assisted in forming and executing this Resolution, if we inure our selves to express our Abhorrence and Aversion to Vice, and with a decent Freedom reprove every Action

* 1 Cor. v. 10.

that

that affronts the Majesty of God, and encourages Men to think slightly of the Duties of Religion: By this we shall confirm both our own and others Virtue. The Libertine himself will treat us with Reverence and Respect, and instead of attempting to corrupt our Integrity, will conceal and disguise his own Vices, and be afraid of incurrring so venerable a Censure. By this Conduct we may hope to retrieve the publick Credit of Religion, reform the Example of the Age and lessen the Danger we complain of. And that we may never want Courage to attempt and persevere in so glorious a Work, let us above all things possess our Souls with awful Apprehensions of the Majesty and Sovereignty of God, with an habitual Reverence for his Laws, and Zeal for his Honour.

Let us remember that we are born his Servants and Subjects, and whenever we are tempted by the Persuasion, the Example, or Commands of Men to do or approve any thing contrary to the Duties we are enjoyn'd, let us reflect that we have a prior and superior Obligation to the Commands of *Christ*, and the Laws prescribed

ſcribed to us by our Creator; and that the Pattern recommended to our Imitation, is not the mixt and imperfect Virtues even of the beſt Men, but the Purity of our Father which is in Heaven, and the Example of him *who knew no Sin, neither was Guile found in his Mouth.* And let us then reflect on the infinite Power and Juſtice of this Almighty Being, his Ability to reward our Service, and revenge our Contempt of his Authority. Let us conſider the vaſt Diſproportion between the worſt Inconveniences that can attend our Incompliance with Men, and the eternal Diſpleaſure of an offended God.

How trifling an Apprehenſion is the Shame of being laugh'd at by Fools, when compared with that Confuſion of Face, that everlaſting Shame and Aſtoniſhment, which ſhall overwhelm the Sinner, when he ſhall appear before the Tribunal of *Chriſt*, and hear every Sin of his Life produced in the Preſence of God and his Angels? And how deſpicable are the Threats and Reproaches of a Creature, frail, mortal, and impotent as our ſelves;

when compared with the Wrath of an Almighty Judge, whoſe Power extends to eternal Inflictions, who can caſt both Body and Soul into Hell?

And let us then reflect that this great, this holy, this terrible Being is preſent to all our Actions, ſees every treacherous Inclination of our Heart to deſert his Service, and treaſures up againſt the Day of his Wrath the ſecret Cowardice which deters us from aſſerting his Cauſe, which prevails on us to compliment the Vices of the Great, to applaud the Libertine, and laugh with the Prophane. And, laſtly, to theſe juſt and awful Apprehenſions of the Deity, let us add our humble and conſtant Prayers to the Throne of his Grace, that he would lead and ſupport us with his Spirit thro' this Vale of Temptation, give Strength and Courage to our Weakneſs, and enable us ſo to paſs the Waves of this troubleſome World, that we may come to the Land of everlaſting Life; be receiv'd into the bleſt Society of thoſe Servants of God, who have preſerved their Integrity, amidſt all the Difficulties which the Malice or Flattery of Men could add

to

to their Duty; who have fought their Way thro' all the various Solicitations of the World, thro' evil Report and good Report, thro' Shame and Applause, *and are enter'd into the Joy of their Lord.*

SERMON V.

An inordinate Love for this World incompatible with the present and future Happiness of Man.

1 JOHN ii. ℣ 15. former Part.

Love not the World, neither the Things that are in the World.

THE Desire of Happiness being the governing Principle of our Nature, the Spring which gives the first Movement and Direction to all our Faculties, and all our Passions; we might reasonably hope

to find the Warmth of our Affections, and the Intention of our Purſuits, proportioned to the Ability of the Object to gratify this Deſire. That whatever offer'd us the greateſt, the moſt important, the moſt durable Satisfaction, ſhould engage our Affections before any other Being, leſs furniſhed to ſupply our Wants, and ſatisfy our Thirſt of Happineſs: And conſequently, that God the Author of our Being, the ſupreme and only ſubſtantial Good of Man, who alone can anſwer all our Longings, and fill every Vacuity of our Soul, ſhould intirely poſſeſs our Heart, ſhould be the chief, the governing Object of our Deſire. But alas! every Creature that he has made is ſuffered to be his Rival, and is too often preferred before him.

THE World has the unhappy Advantage of pre-ingaging our Paſſions; of furniſhing us with the firſt Sentiments of Pleaſure, at a Time when we have not Reflection enough to look beyond the Inſtrument to the Hand whoſe Direction it obeys. And when we arrive at a Maturity of Reaſon, 'tis with great Difficulty we are perſuaded to part with the Deluſion, and

and renounce thoſe Objects, in the Purſuit of which we have been uſed to place our Felicity.

We may perhaps grow weary of the Trifles, that have ſometime diverted us; but the World has a ſucceſſive Variety of Entertainments to amuſe our Paſſions, and provoke our Appetites, in every Period and Station of our Life; and 'tis with great Reluctancy we are convinced of their Vanity, by any other Argument than our own Experience. But ſince God has aſſured us, that theſe are Paths which can never lead to Happineſs; and to all the Arguments that could prevail on a rational Creature, has added the Authority of a ſolemn Prohibition, give me Leave to perſuade your Compliance with both, and diſcourage your Love of the World, by ſhewing,

I. That the Things of the World cannot make us happy even in this Life.

II. That our Love of them is inconſiſtent with our Expectations in a better.

For nothing can recommend itſelf to our

our Love, on any other Account, but either as it promotes our present, or is a Means to assure to us a future Happiness.

I. THEN the Things of the World cannot make us happy, even in this Life.

THAT we are designed for Happiness, we may justly infer from the infinite Goodness of our Creator; and that we are designed for a more exalted Happiness, than can be derived from the Things of this Life, we may also infer from their vast Disproportion to the Desires and Capacities of our Soul. 'Tis a Maxim in Philosophy, that Nature made nothing in vain; and consequently, since we find in our Nature a strong irresistible Desire of a constant, permanent, and infinite Good; there is certainly a Happiness commensurate to this Appetite of the Soul. Nothing indeed could reflect more severely on the Goodness of God, than to imagine he had given us the perpetual Torment of a Desire, he never intended we should gratify: And since the Things of this World, with whatever Eagerness they engage our Pursuit, leave us still empty and unsatis-

unſatisfied with their Fruition; our own Diſappointments ought to convince us, that they were never deſigned for the proper Felicity of our Nature. *Solomon*, who undertook this Argument with all the Advantages of an inſpired Wiſdom, and a large Experience, after a diſtinct Conſideration of every Project of worldly Happineſs, has at laſt reſolved all his Inquiries into this mortifying Concluſion, *that all is Vanity and Vexation of Spirit.* And whoever, though with leſs Wiſdom and leſs Experience than *Solomon*, ſhall attentively reflect on the Event of his own and other Mens Actions, will find himſelf daily obliged to acknowledge the Juſtice of his Inference, and confeſs all to be Diſappointment and Deluſion.

God has given us Appetites to the Things of this World, to engage us to the Uſe of them as far as they are neceſſary to the Support of the Body, and the Convenience of our preſent Stations: But to convince us that he never intended them for the ſupreme Object of our Love, our Appetite is extinguiſhed with the Satiſfaction, and is ſucceeded by Loathing and Satiety.

Satiety. In vain do we try to remedy the Defects of our present Acquisition, by changing the Scene, and varying the Object; for the same Dissatisfaction pursues us through the whole Circle of created Goods. Our last Attainment proves as insipid as our former: The Charms that engaged us expire, and we soon grow indifferent to what we pursued before with the greatest Fondness and Application.

And what should farther convince us that the Things of this World were not designed for the proper Object of human Affections, the Satisfactions they furnish are not only disproportioned to our Desires and Capacities, but such as are infinitely below the Dignity of our Nature; and such in which when we have indulged our selves to Satiety, the Brutes that perish will have a greater Share than we. The Fowls of the Air and the Beasts of the Field, who are supplied with every Thing agreeable to their State, without any Toil or Labour of their own, unmolested by Hopes or Fears, free from the Solicitude of Expectation, and the Anguish of Disappointment, (if Happiness consisted

consisted only in the Things of this World) would in many Instances have a much fairer Portion than Man; and we should have very little Cause to value our selves, upon the boasted Distinctions of Reason and Reflection. We should, methinks, then be ashamed to rival Beings so much our Inferiors, and dishonour the Excellencies of our Nature, by so degrading a Competition.

THE next Consideration that should disengage our Fondness from the World, and convince us that our most successful Pursuits of temporal Goods can never make us happy, is, that they are uncertain in their Foundation, fading, transient, and corruptible in their Nature; depend upon a Thousand Causes and Accidents, which are not in our own Power; and, as the Apostle † says, perish even while we are using them. How should it check and mortify our Desire, to behold the Image of Death and Corruption, in every Object that is round us? To see every fleeting Moment rob us of some Beloved of our Soul, something we have been used to reckon among the Ingredients of our Happiness;

† Col. ii. 22.

pineſs; and at the ſame Time to feel this Body, the Subject of all theſe Gratifications, and the Seat of our imagined Happineſs, hourly failing and decaying and haſtening on to a Diſſolution? Duration is a Circumſtance ſo eſſential to Happineſs, that if we conceived it poſſible for the Joys of Heaven itſelf to paſs from us in an Inſtant, we ſhould find our ſelves not much concerned for the Attainment of them; and therefore 'tis with Regret that our Corruption is perſuaded to reflect on the Inſtability of temporal Goods: We are willing to conſider them as fixed and permanent, and to ſay with the rich Fool in the Goſpel*, *Eat and drink, my Soul, and take thine Eaſe, thou haſt much Goods laid up for many Years.* But when with Care and Toil we have raiſed and furniſhed this imaginary Treaſure of Happineſs, we find at laſt that the Materials of the Structure are frail and periſhing, and the Foundation itſelf is laid in the Sand; ſupported only by a feeble mortal Body, which the next Hour, the next Moment may deſtroy. All the gay Scene is diſperſed, and vaniſh-

es

* Luke xii, 19.

es like a Dream, or Phantom, at that terrible Voice. *Thou Fool, this Night ſhall thy Soul be required of thee, and then whoſe ſhall all theſe Things be?*

BUT the Goods of this World are not only thus tranſient and precarious in their Duration, but all our Enjoyments of them ſo mixed and alloyed with Miſery, that even their moſt uninterrupted Poſſeſſion is far from a perfect Felicity. I am afraid the happieſt among Men, upon a fair Eſtimate, have ſtronger and more frequent Senſations of Pain than Pleaſure. Nay, thoſe very Objects that moſt affect us with Delight, are generally in ſome Reſpect or other Occaſions of Uneaſineſs to us: Our Intereſts interfere with our Pleaſures, and our Pleaſures with our Intereſts. Even the Friend, in whoſe Aſſiſtance and Affection we place ſo much of our Happineſs, will do ſome Things which will diſcompoſe our Paſſions, and provoke our Reſentments. And the Affluence, the Honours, the Dignities we are ſo fond of, will be attended with ſome Circumſtances of Trouble and Diſquiet, ſomething that will alloy

loy the Pleaſure, and embitter the Satiſfactions we propoſe from them. Nay, ſo much are our Pains over-proportioned to our Pleaſures, that an inſpired * Writer has ventured on this general Inference, from a diſtant Review of this Life, *That Man is* naturally *born to Miſery*, even *as the Sparks fly upward.* Now Pain is ſo uneaſy a Sentiment, that a very little of it is enough to ſpoil the Reliſh of our moſt fortunate Attainments, and corrupt every Enjoyment of Life. And the Effect God intends this Variety of ungrateful and afflictive Sentiments ſhould have on us, is to reclaim our Affections from this Valley of Tears, and direct us to look farther for the Region of our Happineſs.

But ſuppoſing our preſent Enjoyments as pure, as permanent, and in all Reſpects as valuable as our Folly is apt to repreſent them, yet they can be no reaſonable Motive of our Affection to any, but that Bounty from whom we receive them. God, as he is the Author of our Nature and of all our Faculties and Capacities of Fruition, ſo 'tis by his Providence we are ſupplied

* Col. v. 7.

plied with Objects agreeable to them. The Creatures are but Inſtruments in his Hand, by which he conveys grateful Senſations to us; and the returning our Acknowledgments to them is juſt the ſame Abſurdity with theirs, who burnt Incenſe to the Drag, and ſacrificed to the Net, which caught their Prey. 'Tis to God, and him only, our Share of temporal Felicity and all that is pleaſing or beneficial to us in the Enjoyment of the Creatures, is ultimately to be referred. Nay, 'tis an Aſſertion, ſupported by the leaſt diſputable Maxims of Philoſophy, that God is (in a more immediate Manner than is generally imagined) the Author of every ſenſible Perception in us. For 'tis certain all Perception is and muſt be in the Soul. Now 'tis impoſſible to imagine any Powers in the Bodies around us, beſides Figure and Motion; but it cannot be conceived how the Soul is capable of any Impreſſion from theſe in their greateſt Activity. Nothing appears capable of acting upon Spirit, but Spirit: And therefore though God has annext Pain to thoſe external Impreſſions which are injurious to the Body, and Plea-

ſure

ſure to thoſe which are beneficial to it, yet it is not the material Object which produces thoſe Senſations in the Soul, but that eternal, omnipreſent Spirit, in whom we live, and move, and have our Being: And conſequently, 'tis to him only that our Love, our Devotion, and our Gratitude is due, even for all thoſe agreeable Perceptions that engage us to the World.

BUT if the World has ſo little Title to our Affection, even for thoſe temporal Satisfactions it furniſhes us with, how much leſs will it appear to deſerve our Inclinations, if we conſider it

II. WITH Regard to our eternal Intereſts, and the Expectations of Futurity?

WHENEVER we attentively view the World in this Relation, we find Motives not only for our Indifference, but even for our Averſion; all the viſionary Beauties or Glories of the Proſpect, the Paint and Imagery that attracted our Senſes, fade and diſappear, and leave us diſconſolate in the Midſt of a frightful Scene of Guilt, Temptation, and Miſery; a Region where every Path before us appears beſet with

Snares

Snares and Dangers, Ways in which we must walk with Fear and Trembling, and where all our Care and Circumspection will be little enough to secure our Virtue, and prevent our Destruction: For this is the Image which Religion gives us of the World. Every Page of its Precepts represents it as a Place of the greatest Danger to our immortal Interests, a Place which we must pass through, not only with the Indifference of Strangers and Pilgrims, but with the Vigilance and Apprehension of those, who travail through the Country of an Enemy. We are perpetually reminded of the Treachery that lurks under all its Pleasures: We are required to abjure its Pomps and Vanities in our Baptism, and to renounce its Friendship as Enmity with our God. He that *loveth the World* (says the Apostle of my Text †) *the Love of the Father is not in him.* They are two Masters, whose Service can never be reconciled: Every Compliance that we are persuaded to by one, is a Contradiction to the Commands of the other; and our Adherence to one, will

† 1 John ii. 15.

neceſſarily involve us in a Deſertion of the other.

THE Performances to which God has annexed the Promiſes of Eternity, are juſt the reverſe of all the Purſuits of Senſe, and conſiſt in reſtraining thoſe Appetites, mortifying thoſe Luſts, and renouncing thoſe Pleaſures, by which the World ſolicits our Affection. And agreeably our Lord has taught us to rejoice in Affliction, in Poverty, and Diſgraces; and to eſteem the Reproaches of *Chriſt* greater Riches than all the Honours, or Affluence of this World.

As Love is a Paſſion of the ſtrongeſt Influence on the Soul, ſo God peculiarly requires the primary Devotion of the Heart to himſelf; 'tis a Flame we muſt conſecrate wholly to his Altar, and 'tis Prophaneneſs and Sacrilege to rob him of it. He knows that wherever our Treaſure is, there will our Heart be alſo. Whatever we propoſe as our ſupreme Happineſs, to that will every Faculty and Power of our Nature, every Thought of our Soul, and every Action of our Lives be directed. But this is an Honour God has declared

declared himself jealous of, and determined never to resign to another. He will not be content with the Refuse of our Affections, but must rule and govern in the Heart, and preside over all our Desires: And to deny him this Supremacy, is to dethrone the Deity, and give his Kingdom to another; a Crime he has assured us he will resent with the severest Inflictions of his Vengeance. *Those mine Enemies* (says he *) *which would not that I should reign over them, bring* them *out and slay them before me.* So that allowing the Pleasures, the Honours, or Interests of this World all the Advantage they can have from present Perception; yet if they expose us to the Displeasure of God, and prejudice our eternal Expectations, we ought to reject them as the insidious Proposals of an Enemy, who for a Trifle in Hand would cheat us of an infinitely more valuable Reversion. Man, as an immortal Being, is, and, whenever he reflects, must be concerned as well for the future and distant Consequences of his Actions, as for the present and more immediate Re-

* Luke ix 27.

ſult of them: And if he will act rationally, cannot admit any Competition between a mix'd, a fading, a momentary Satisfaction, and an everlaſting Fruition of Happineſs, as great as an obeyed God can give, and our ſpiritualized Capacities receive. Let us then attend to form juſt Ideas in our Minds, of the infinite Diſparity between the Things of this World, and the Promiſes of a better. Let us diveſt the gay Phantom of temporal Happineſs, of all that falſe Luſtre and Ornament, in which the Pride, the Paſſions, and Folly of Men has dreſſed it up, and we ſhall then ſee how withered, how deformed a Carcaſs we with ſo much Zeal and Aſſiduity have courted, and for whoſe Enjoyment we have given up the only valuable Intereſt of our Nature, and ſold our Birthright to Heaven and Immortality. The melancholy Hour will come, when all thoſe Charms, which now bewitch our Affections to the World, ſhall ceaſe and be diſſolved: *When* the World and the Luſts thereof ſhall paſs away*: When every Appetite and Capacity of Pleaſure ſhall

* 1 John ii. 17.

expire,

expire, and Pain and Diſeaſe ſucceed in their Place: When neither Pomp nor Retinue ſhall be able to divert the Great, nor ſhall the Rich be relieved by the Multitude of his Treaſures. How, alas! will he then deſpiſe the Titles and Quality in which he gloried; and with what Shame and Confuſion will he reflect in what Trifles he has placed his Happineſs; no longer to be amuſed by the Obſervance and Flatteries of his Attendants; while amidſt all the Honours that are paid him, he feels nothing in himſelf but a poor, weak, diſpirited Mortal, yielding to the Laws of Corruption? And what is ſtill the moſt afflictive Part of his Miſery, he is now within View of another State, juſt entring into another World, where he has contracted no Friendſhips, made no Proviſion for his Reception: Where thoſe very Purſuits, in which he has placed his Happineſs, will expoſe him to the Reſentments of an Almighty Judge, and be avenged in eternal Inflictions. Let us then *ſet our Affections on Things above*; let our Treaſure and our Heart be in Heaven; and let us regard the Things of this World with the

Indifference of a Guest, that tarrieth but a Day. *Brethren* (says the Apostle †) *the Time is short; it remaineth therefore that they who weep, be as though they wept not; they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; they that buy, as though they possessed not.* We should be easy and unconcerned at all the Accidents of the Way, and regard only the Event of the Journey. Above all, let us be earnest in our Prayers to God, that he would lead and conduct us by his Spirit through this barren and dry Land, this Region of Sin and Vanity; that we may so use this World, as not to abuse it; and so pass through Things temporal, that we finally lose not the Things eternal. *Which God grant*, &c.

† 1 Cor. vii 30.

SERMON

SERMON VI.

An Exemption from Falling not to be expected in our present Militant State.

1 Cor. x. 12.

Let him that thinketh he ſtandeth, take Heed leſt he fall.

THE Number of thoſe who are hardened into a Contempt and Defiance of Religion, is comparatively ſmall, with Reſpect to thoſe who periſh through a falſe and deceitful Confidence in their Expectations from it. Some

depend on Reſolutions of future Repentance; others on a punctilious Obſervance of ſome divine Laws, which they hope will attone for the avowed habitual Tranſgreſſion of the reſt. And 'tis no Wonder if any Preſumption which offers to ſoften the Terms of Duty, or excuſe the Labour and Solicitude of Obedience, finds a Multitude ready to entertain it.

THE Deluſion againſt which we are cautioned by the Apoſtle in the Words I have read, is of equal Danger with either of the former. For ſome reflecting with too much Satisfaction on their own Proficiencies, or preſuming with too much Confidence on their Election by God, are apt to perſuade themſelves into a careleſs Security: They are exempted (they think) either by Perfection or Privilege, from all Poſſibility of miſcarrying: They have paſſed all the Dangers and Difficulties of their Journey, the Way is now all ſmooth and ſafe, and therefore they may ſlacken their Pace, and remit their Attention, and go on without Fear of Miſtake or Falling, and without any Apprehenſion of the Enemy.

BUT

BUT the Scriptures ſpeak of the State of a Chriſtian in this World, in a Language very different from this. It is there frequently compared to a Warfare, the moſt hazardous and difficult Condition of Life: And this Alluſion has appeared ſo juſt, and to anſwer throughout in ſuch exact Correſpondencies, that the Character of Militant here on Earth, has obtained as the common Diſtinction of that Part of *Chriſt*'s Church ſojourning here in this World, from that happy Part of the Family at Reſt from their Labours and Fears, and triumphant in Heaven. And when we reflect on the Subtilty, Strength, and Vigilance of the Enemy we are engaged to contend with, and the many Advantages which our Paſſions and Infirmities, and the various Temptations of the World give him againſt us, we cannot but apprehend this Warfare to be a State of great and continual Peril. We are indeed furniſhed with an Armour from Heaven of Firmneſs ſufficient to reſiſt all his Impreſſions; but if we are remiſs or negligent in the Uſe of it, if we ſuffer our ſelves to be perſuaded to lay by our Arms, and intermit

mit our Guard, we may be surprized at an Hour when we are not aware, and the very Presumption of our Safety may be the Occasion of our Ruine.

To excite our Vigilance, and arm us against this Danger, the wise Caution of the Apostle before us, deserves our constant Attention, *Let him that thinketh he standeth, take Heed lest he fall.* From which Words I shall observe,

I. THIS Point of Doctrine arising from them, *viz.* That in our present militant State we are not capable of such a Degree of Security, as may exempt us from all Apprehension of falling; I shall then

II. INFORCE the Application of this Doctrine, by shewing what practical Inferences it ought to suggest to us.

I. FROM these Words I observe first this Point of Doctrine arises: That in our present Militant State we are not capable of such a Degree of Security, as may exempt us from all Apprehension of falling. Now by Falling is sometimes meant,

1. SUCH

1. SUCH Lapſes and Miſcarriages to which all, even good Men, are ſubject; or,

2. A FINAL irrecoverable Falling, into a State of Impenitence and Apoſtaſy.

As to the firſt Kind of Falling, it is not, I think, diſputed, but that all Men are in Danger of it. Every Man finds in the Examination of his own Life, and is ready enough to obſerve from other Mens, that in many Things we offend all. And if any Man ſhall be ſo vain as to pretend an abſolute Exemption from Sin, the Holy Ghoſt reproves him in that Scripture *. *If we ſay we have no Sin, we deceive our ſelves, and the Truth is not in us.* Nay, ſuch are the Infirmities of our Nature, ſuch the Struggle between the Fleſh and the Spirit, that we are all continually ſubject, not only to thoſe leſſer Failings and Deviations from Duty, which are inſeparable from our preſent State of Imperfection, but the many Examples of God's choſen and approved Servants, who have fallen

* 1 John i. 8.

into

into great and grievous Sins, may convince us, that we are not ſecure even from theſe. For thus have the moſt eminent Inſtances of Human Virtue fallen; the Integrity of *David*, the Wiſdom of *Solomon*, and the Zeal of *Peter*. Thus far then it will not, I preſume, be denied that we are all, even the beſt among us, while we continue in this Militant State, in Danger of Falling: And therefore no Man can ſafely conclude, either from thoſe Meaſures of Grace, with which he has been favour'd, or from his Proficiency under them, that he is exempt from it.

But with regard to the ſecond Kind of Falling, a final irrecoverable Falling, it is contended that the Elect are ſecure from it, and therefore, if this Caution of the Apoſtle be meant of that falling, they are not concern'd in it. Now, tho' this Scripture may be uſefully underſtood and apply'd by us as a Caution to guard againſt thoſe Lapſes and Failings, to which our Infirmities daily expoſe us, and which 'tis our Duty to ſtrive againſt to the utmoſt of our Power; and more eſpecially to excite our Vigilance leſt we fall into any great

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and heinous Crime; yet 'tis evident that the Apoſtle in theſe Words intended principally, if not only, a final falling away into a State of Perdition. For in the preceding Part of this Chapter, he had recited many Examples of Sinners whom God had cut off, in and for their hardned Impenitence, whoſe Fall was certainly final. And having declared that theſe things happened to them for Examples, to be apply'd by us for our Admonition, he immediately infers, *Therefore let him that thinketh he ſtandeth, take heed leſt he fall,* (i. e.) in all Conſtruction thus finally fall as they did. And in this Caution, I conceive all, even the Elect themſelves, in their preſent State are concerned. It is confeſs'd that the Elect of God cannot finally fall, neither ſhall any pluck them out of his Hand; their Names are written in Heaven in the Books of God, and ſhall not be blotted out. But theſe Counſels of God are to us unſearchable; neither has he left us in Scripture any Marks or Signs, by which we may infallibly conclude our ſelves in that happy Number, whom he has finally choſen. Herein then

lies

lies the Error which we would reprove: That Men have pretended to aſſign certain Characters and Evidences by which all who are elected may aſſuredly know themſelves to be ſo, moſt of which reſolve into a ſtrong confident Perſuaſion that they are ſo, which they preſume to call the juſtifying Faith of the Elect. A Doctrine indeed which cannot but gain great Attention and Reverence to the Teachers of of it from their Followers, who look upon them as Men truſted with the Secrets of Heaven, and who know the Impreſſion of God's Seal: Who in truth by pretending to declare the Evidences of it, do in Effect aſſume a Power of fixing it on whom they pleaſe: A Degree of ſpiritual Authority, equal to, if not greater than that claimed by thoſe in the Church of *Rome*, who have carry'd the Doctrine of Abſolution to the greateſt Extravagancy. But what Advantages ſoever the Teachers of this Doctrine may derive to themſelves from it, 'tis to be fear'd their Diſciples are, in Confidence of their Skill and Authority, often led into Concluſions from it of great Danger to their Souls; who are thereby perſuaded

ſuaded to rely with too much Preſumption on their Vigilance, and be leſs apprehenſive of Sin than the Soldier of *Chriſt* ought to be.

BUT far otherwiſe the Scripture declares, that known unto God only are they that are his. He only knows the Heart, the Sincerity and Foundation of our Faith and and Obedience, whether it will abide the Day of Trial, and endure unto the End, or not. It is not deny'd but God may by ſpecial Revelation communicate to any of his Servants, a certain Aſſurance of their Salvation, as he did to St. *Paul*, both concerning himſelf and others. He knew as he tells us, that there was laid up for him a Crown, which he ſhou'd receive in the great Day. And of ſome others he pronounces, that their Names were written in the Book of Life. But theſe muſt be confeſs'd extraordinary Favours, ſuch as no Man can without great Preſumption expect. What we affirm is, that in the ſtanding Revelation of Scripture, the ordinary Rule of our Judgment, and Meaſure of our Expectations, God has not given us any Marks and Criterions, by which

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in particular Applications we can aſſuredly determine who are finally elected, and who are not. All we can arrive to in this Life is a ſtedfaſt Faith in the general Promiſes of the Goſpel, and Hope in particular Applications of them to our ſelves, or others. But Hope in its higheſt Aſſurance acknowledges a Poſſibility, and even ſome Degree of Fear of the contrary. And agreeably we are all in general commanded, to *work out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling* *. They who in Obedience to this Command of the Apoſtle wrought out their Salvation, were certainly elected to it; and yet we ſee they are here commanded to work with Fear and Trembling; far from any ſuch Aſſurance as excluded a Poſſibility of Miſcarrying.

In Sum, of our preſent State with Regard to God's Favour and our Title to his Promiſes, we are capable of ſome determinate Concluſions, becauſe we here judge from a Compariſon of our paſt and preſent Diſpoſitions and Actions, with the Rule of God's Word. The Subjects of this Inquiry are ſomething fix'd and certain;

* Phil. ii. 12.

and

and if in this Examination of our ſelves we find we do Righteouſneſs, love and fear God, and walk in the Way of his Commandments, and are truly penitent for all Deviations from them, we may have a comfortable Aſſurance that we are of God, and thro' the Mediation of *Chriſt* look up to him with the Confidence of Sons; or, in the Words of the Apoſtle, *may think we ſtand.* But what will be our Condition in the future Part of our Life, whether we ſhall draw back to Perdition, or hold on ſtedfaſt unto the End, we can conclude nothing with infallible Certainty. The utmoſt we can do is to hope in the divine Promiſes, and pray earneſtly to God to enable us to perſevere; not *to lead us into Temptation, but deliver us from Evil* †: To go on patiently in every Work of the Lord, ſupporting our Reſolutions with this general Aſſurance, that if our Lord when he comes ſhall find us ſo doing, our Labour ſhall not be in vain.

NOTWITHSTANDING therefore the Aſſertion be very true, that the Elect of God cannot finally fall; yet ſince we have no

† Matth. vi. 13.

 infal-

infallible Marks, by which, while we are in this Courſe of our Pilgrimage, we can conclude our ſelves in that Number, it remains that none (not excepting the Elect themſelves) are in this preſent State capable of ſuch Aſſurance, as excludes all Apprehenſion of falling. And this the Words of my Text evidently imply. For what greater Aſſurance can any one have of his Condition, than to think he ſtands? They whom the Apoſtle here addreſſes, who thought they ſtood, no doubt thought themſelves of the Number of the Elect; at leaſt whoſoever thought himſelf one of the Elect, thought he ſtood; and yet every one without Exception who thought he ſtood, is here admoniſhed to take heed leſt he fall. The Terms are manifeſtly general, and not only incluſive, but even deſcriptive of the Elect, who could arrive at no greater Aſſurance in this Life than to think they ſtood. And if the Apoſtle imagined that every one who thought thus of himſelf, might know it impoſſible for him to fall, how vain was this Caution to guard againſt it? Or if he intended this Direction only to thoſe, who, whatever they appear'd

appear'd or thought of themſelves at preſent, were not Elected, but Reprobates, to what purpoſe does he caution them to take heed leſt they fall, who notwithſtanding all their Care muſt and would fall?

But the Truth is, the Apoſtle knowing that the Diſtinction of theſe Characters was undiſcernible by Men in this Life, admoniſhes thoſe who in appearance ſtood at preſent, and had the moſt comfortable Aſſurances of God's Favour towards them, to be nevertheleſs apprehenſive for the Future, not to preſume on their Security from Danger, but to keep a ſtrict Guard againſt the Enemy, to proceed with the utmoſt Care and Circumſpection in Duty, that they may hold faſt the Beginning of their Confidence ſtedfaſt unto the End; the only Way to make their Calling and Election ſure.

The Doctrine ariſing from this Scripture thus eſtabliſh'd, I go on to obſerve,

II. In the Application of it, what practical Inferences it ought to ſuggeſt to us. And,

1. If none in this Life, not even thoſe who have the beſt Evidences of Grace, and the greateſt Aſſurances of God's Favour, can conclude with Certainty what their Diſpoſitions, and what their State towards God ſhall be hereafter, but are obliged to work on with Fear and Trembling, how vain and dangerous are all Doctrines and Preſumptions which encourage Men to think their Work is already done, and, like the Fool in the Goſpel, to ſay to their Soul, *Soul, take thine Eaſe* *, thy future Proſpects are all ſafe, and no harm can happen unto thee?

There is indeed in the Mind of Man a ſtrange Proneneſs to hearken to any Suggeſtions that offer to aſſure his Expectations, and put a preſent End to his Labours and Fears. Thus it was with the *Corinthians*; many among them (as appears by the Context) rely'd on their Profeſſion of Chriſtianity, their being receiv'd into the Covenant of the Goſpel, and having been Partakers of thoſe Ordinances which were the Seals of it. But the Apoſtle labours with great Application to

* Luke xii. 19.

con-

convince them of their Error. He reminds them of former Examples, and obſerves to them, that the Fathers were Partakers of the like Privileges under the *Moſaical* Covenant; *That they were all baptized in the Cloud, and in the Sea* * : All eat of the ſame ſpiritual Bread, and drank of the ſame ſpiritual Cup, which were Types of the Chriſtian Sacraments; yet all this avail'd them nothing, neither ſecured them from Sin nor from Puniſhment, but they fell into Impenitence, and periſh'd under the Diſpleaſure of God. And we cannot but obſerve the ſame and divers other Preſumptions of Security prevailing ſtill among Chriſtians. Some under the Doctrine I have before conſider'd and reproved, relying on certain Marks and Signatures of their Election: Others on their belonging to ſome particular Church or Sect of Chriſtians. But all Confidence in theſe and whatever other Privileges or Exemptions Men may fancy to themſelves, the Apoſtle here diſcourages, and declares none to be ſecure from Danger of Falling; And, as

* 1 Cor. x. 2.

the Words may emphatically be understood, that the most confident are in the greatest Danger; that he who thinketh he stands is by that very Presumption taken off from his Guard, and particularly concern'd to take heed lest he fall.

THE first Inference then that arises hence, is, That we ought with the greatest Care to avoid and refuse all Doctrines taught by others, and suppress all Suggestions of our own Minds which tend to create in us this dangerous Security; to look upon them as Snares and Artifices of the Devil, by which he would lay us asleep, that he may the more easily surprize us and take us captive at his Pleasure.

2. WE cannot but hence collect what Watchfulness and Assiduity, what Intention of Mind and Application of all our Faculties the State of our Christian Warfare requires from us. It is not enough for us to have attain'd such Measures of Virtue and Goodness, as may encourage us to a present Confidence towards God; but we much proceed in our Labour, and press still forward to the high Mark of our Calling. How justly soever we may hope or believe

believe we ſtand at preſent, yet if we ſtand ſtill, we ſhall be in Danger of loſing Ground, and falling back again. Our Adverſary will not be idle, tho' we are; he watches every Turn of our Soul, and Incident of our Life; and if we remit our Activity, will take Advantage of our Indolence, ſow his Tares while we ſleep, diſpoſe us at firſt by gentle Inſinuations to hearken to his Overtures, till he gradually hardens us thro' the Deceitfulneſs of Sin.

And let it quicken our Care and Vigilance againſt this Danger, to reflect that if after a comfortable Progreſs in Duty we do fall away, all our paſt Labours ſhall profit us nothing; for thus God has aſſured us by the Prophet *Ezekiel*, *When the Righteous turneth away from his Righteouſneſs, and committeth Iniquity; all his Righteouſneſs that he hath done, ſhall not be mention'd; in the Treſpaſs that he hath treſpaſs'd, and in the Sin that he hath ſinned, in them ſhall he die**. Nay, his Crimes will be much aggravated by the Advantages of Light and Grace under which they were committed, and his Recovery be render'd

* Ezek. xviii. 24.

far more difficult by the Height from which he has fallen.

Upon the whole, let those who have hitherto walked with Fear and Reverence in the Path of Duty, or having erred and strayed, have by Repentance return'd to them, hold fast their Integrity, and go on with Diligence, increasing with the Increase of God. Let them hope indeed comfortably of their Condition towards him, and their Interest in his Promises; but let their Hope be such as may not make them ashamed; not a presumptuous Confidence in their Strength and Security from Danger, but such a Hope as will raise and inspirit their Applications; such as the farther they go on and the nearer they approach to the End of their Journey, may render them more lively and active in running the Race that is set before them, and more vigilant against every Enemy that may interrupt their Progress, that they may *so run as to obtain.*

But alas! the unconverted Sinner has other Inferences to make from this Doctrine. For if they who have hitherto persever'd in Duty, who have a comfortable

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Aſſurance that they ſtand in Grace, and are intitled to the Hopes of the Goſpel, if even they muſt thro' ſo many difficulties, ſuch continued Care and Watchfulneſs paſs on to the End of their Pilgrimage, how much more has the Sinner to do, who has gone long aſtray from the Ways of Salvation; who muſt return ſo far back again, and with unexpreſſible Labour and manifold Conflicts with the Enemy, attain the Station on which the Righteous ſtand?

If theſe Reflections are preſent to our Minds, they will by God's Grace enable all, who are in the Way of Life, to hold on their Courſe with Vigour and Circumſpection; and quicken the Repentance of the Sinner; preſerve the one, and reſtore the other; till both having overcome all the Dangers and Difficulties of their Chriſtian Warfare, ſhall from the great Maſter whom they have ſerved receive the End of their Hopes, and the Reward of their Labours, even the Salvation of their immortal Souls.

SERMON

SERMON VII.

The Death and Sufferings of *Christ*, foretold and described.

Preach'd on GOOD-FRIDAY.

ISA. liii. 5.

------ *He was wounded for our Transgressions, he was bruised for our Iniquities: The Chastisement of our Peace was upon him, and by his Stripes we are healed.*

THE Death and Passion of our Blessed Lord, as it is the great Article on which the whole Christian Scheme is built, so our Reflections on it suggest to us the strongest Motives

tives to all those Virtues and Graces, which qualify us to be Partakers of the Benefits of it. The Disciples therefore of the Gospel can never too often contemplate this endearing Instance of their Master's Love: But the Piety of the Church has particularly recommended this Subject to our Meditation in the present Solemnity; we should now more especially employ our Thoughts on what the Son of God endured for the Redemption of a sinful World. And I think there is no Passage in holy Scripture which represents this great Event in more affecting Terms, than the mournful Eloquence of the Prophet in the Chapter before us. So clear and distinct were the Views in which the Holy Spirit reveal'd this Article to the Faith of this his Servant, that even the chosen Witnesses of our Lord's Passion, who saw with their Eyes their Bleeding Master hang upon the Cross, are not more passionate in their descriptions of it: *He is despised* (said he *) *and rejected of Men: He was stricken, smitten, of God, and afflicted. He is brought as a Lamb to the Slaughter, and as a Sheep*

* Ver. 3, 4, 7, 8, 9.

before

before his Shearers is Dumb, so he open'd not his Mouth. He was taken from Prison and from Judgment. He was cut off out of the Land of the Living. And he made his Grave with the Wicked, and with the Rich in his Death; tho' *he had done no Violence, neither was any Deceit in his Mouth.*

The End and Intention of these Sufferings of the *Messiah*, the Prophet reminds us of in the Words of my Text, *He was wounded for our Transgressions, he was bruised for our Iniquities: The Chastisement of our Peace was upon him, and by his Stripes we are healed.*

THIS Scripture may be considered either,

I. As a Prophecy, the manifest Completion of which in the Death and Sufferings of the *Blessed Jesus*, is one of the strongest Arguments to convince our Faith, that he was that very *Messiah*, which should come into the World. Or,

II. WE

II. We may consider it as a Declaration of the End intended, and the Effect obtained by the Passion of the *Messiah*, *viz.* The Atonement of our Sins, and the Restoring us to a State of Peace and Friendship with God. I shall treat each of these briefly, and proceed,

III. To what I principally intend in this Discourse, to suggest those Meditations to our Thoughts, and those Affections to our Souls, which so sublime a Subject, and so amazing an Instance of Divine Compassion requires from us. And,

I. The manifest Completion of this Prophecy, in the Death and Sufferings of our Lord, is a convincing Argument to our Faith that he is that very *Messiah* which should come into the World.

That the Adoration of a crucify'd God should be difficultly receiv'd by the more inquisitive Part of the *Gentile* World, we are not so much to wonder, because 'twas a Doctrine that seem'd at first View contrary

trary to the very Idea of the Divine Nature, and refuted even in its Principle by the Impaſſibility of the Deity. And, what particularly diſcouraged the Reception of it among the common People, it was generally treated with Ridicule, and expoſed them to an obvious and ungrateful Topick of Reproach from every Infidel they met with. And having never been prepared by any previous Revelation to expect a Redeemer in ſo mean and contemptible a Character, 'tis hardly to be imagin'd that their Prejudices ſhould immediately be prevail'd on, to give the Arguments that perſuaded their Belief a ſerious and attentive Hearing. But the *Jews* were ſo expreſsly directed to look for a *Meſſiah* without Form or Comelineſs, a Man of Sorrows, who ſhould make his Soul an Offering for Sin, and be number'd with the Tranſgreſſours; and ſaw all theſe Predictions ſo evidently fulfill'd in the Bleſſed *Jeſus*, that the Completion of no Prophecy concerning the *Meſſiah* can ſeem more wonderful to us, than that of their rejecting him. His Death was typify'd in every Sacrifice they offer'd, in almoſt every Rite and Ceremony

of

of their Law, and deſcribed in ſo lively a Manner, even in the moſt minute Circumſtances of it by their Prophets, that nothing could be wanting to their Conviction, but attentively to compare the Draught with the Original.

For view him only as he was deſcribed in the Prophecy before us. Was it foretold that he ſhould be a Man of Sorrows; and was ever Sorrow like his Sorrow? Was he to be deſpiſed and rejected of Men? Thus came the Bleſſed *Jeſus* unto his own, and his own received him not, but preferred even a Rebel and a Murderer before him. Was he to be led as a Lamb to the Slaughter, patient and reſigned as a Sheep before her Shearers? Behold the Lamb of God, the meek and humble *Jeſus*, who when he was reviled, reviled not again. Though he could have commanded Legions of Angels to his Reſcue, yet dragged to *Calvary* without Oppoſition or Complaint; no Voice was heard from him either to appeaſe the Rage of his Perſecutors, or implore the Pity of the Beholders: *Weep not for me* (ſays he, to thoſe who attended

tended him with Tears) *but weep for your selves, ye Daughters of* Jerusalem. Was he to make his Grave with the Wicked, to be numbered with the Transgressors, and to make Intercession for the Transgressors? Behold him expiring in the Torments of the Cross in the midst of Thieves, and praying for his Murderers. Other Prophets have been so particular as to prefix the very Time, in which the Messiah should be cut off*. The Prophet *Zachary* foretels the Price he was to be sold for, and the Employment of the Money. The *Psalmist* describes the very Manner and Circumstances of his Death; that they should *pierce his Hands and his Feet* †. The very Expressions of Reproach that should be cast upon him: *He trusted in God that he would deliver him, let him deliver him, if he will have him* ‡. The parting his Garments by Lot by the Soldiers; and the giving him Vinegar to drink. Great Part of these Predictions have been understood by the Jews themselves to relate to the Messiah; and this Relation has been affirmed by the Testimony of God,

* Dan. ix. 26. † Zech. xi. 12. ‡ Psal. xxxii. 8. 16.

proved by the beſt direct Evidences that were ever produced for any divine Revelation, as full and concluſive as 'twas poſſible for God himſelf to give: And the Correſpondence of the Death and Sufferings of our Lord to them is ſo punctual and exact, that they ſeem rather like a Hiſtory of Events paſt, than a Prophecy of ſuch as were to come: And if they were not fulfilled in the Perſon of *Jeſus* of *Nazareth*, 'tis impoſſible we ſhould ever know when any Prophecy is fulfilled. And nothing but the Curſe of God denounced againſt that ſtubborn People, *that hearing they ſhould hear and not underſtand, and ſeeing they ſhould ſee, and not perceive*, can account for an Infidelity that could reſiſt the Evidence of ſo clear a Proof. This ſingle Chapter of *Iſaiah* now before us, furniſhed *Philip* with an Argument for the Converſion of the Eunuch; and has been found effectual in the Conviction of ſome modern Examples of Infidelity, where other Arguments have been heard without Impreſſion. But,

II. We

II. We are alſo hence informed in the Occaſion and End of the Meſſiah's Sufferings. *He was bruiſed for our Iniquities: The Chaſtiſement of our Peace was upon him, and by his Stripes we are healed.*

That he ſuffered not for his own Sins, the Piety and Innocence of his Life may abundantly aſſure us. He went about doing good, healing the Infirmities, and correcting the Errors of Mankind: He gave Eyes to the Blind, and Feet to the Lame, and preached the Goſpel to the Poor. 'Twas the publick Confeſſion of the Multitude that he had done all Things well. The Declaration of his Judges, both *Pilate* and *Herod*, that after the ſtricteſt Examination they found no Fault in him. The Teſtimony of the Centurion, an impartial unprejudiced Witneſs, *certainly this was a righteous Man.* Now we could not acquit the Juſtice of God from Partiality in ſuffering ſo innocent, ſo exemplary a Perſon to be thus barbarouſly uſed and murdered, unleſs ſome excellent End were to be promoted by it. And this we are aſſured from Scripture was the redeem-

ing Mankind from a State of Sin and Misery; and that this was accomplished by his taking upon himself the Penalties due to our Impieties, and bearing the Burden of an offending World. For it consisted not with the Majesty and Immutability of the divine Lawgiver, to remit the Penalties of Disobedience without some Satisfaction paid to his Justice. Such a Conduct must have appeared rather like Tameness than Lenity, and have exposed his Authority to all the Insults of Vice and Impudence. Some Satisfaction therefore was necessary: And what was there which offending Man could offer unto his Creator? Could the Blood of Bullocks or Rams take away his Sin? With what imaginable Reason could it be presumed that God should be appeased by the Destruction of his Creatures? Should he multiply his Oblations before him, and pour out upon his Altar Rivers of Oil? Alas! in all this he could give him but his own, and discharge but a Part of that Debt, which the common Mercies of Providence required from him. Should he sacrifice unto him his First-born, the Fruit of his Body for the

Sin

Sin of his Soul? This were in all the Views of Reason but adding one Impiety to another, and the Sacrifice it self must want an Atonement. Should he then offer himself to the Curse of the Law to undergo the Wages of his Sin? This were to bear, and not to divert the Punishment: And even in this Submission, the utmost any one could suffer, could satisfie for no more than his own Offences. No, it must cost more to redeem a World of Sinners, than Man had to pay. But the divine Compassion left us not in this Despair of Redress; himself contrived a Method by which his Justice should be satisfied, and yet the Offender be saved. The eternal Son of his Love took upon him the Burden and Penalties of our Transgressions: He who knew no Sin became Sin for us, and by one Oblation of himself once offered paid a full, perfect, and sufficient Satisfaction for the Sins of the whole World. For he who offers unto the offended Party what he has as great a Value for as he has Hatred for the Offence, may properly be said to satisfie for and undergo the Penalties due to that Offence.

This is implied in the very Terms of Ranſom and Redemption, which ſignifie the Payment of a Price which the offended will receive as an Equivalent, for the Penalties incurred by the Criminal; whether that conſiſts in any Thing of Value depoſited, or ſome Performance which the offended will accept. And thus did our Bleſſed Lord by the Innocence of his Life, the Bitterneſs of his Death, and the Dignity of his Perſon, offer unto God what he had as intenſe a Love for, as he had Provocation from the Sins of the whole World. Thus did he pay down the utmoſt Farthing for our Redemption, and thereby reſcue the Captive into Liberty, and reſtore the Rebel into a State of Grace and Favour. Thus was he wounded for our Tranſgreſſions, and bruiſed for our Iniquities, and by theſe Stripes of the Maſter was the Servant healed. And therefore

III. Let our Devotion employ the preſent holy Seaſon in giving this ſublime Subject, this amazing Inſtance of divine Love, its due Influence, in ſuggeſting proper

per Meditations to our Thoughts and Affections to our Souls. And,

1. LET us with Trembling and Aſtoniſhment reflect how dreadful an Evil Sin muſt be, which nothing could expiate but the Blood of the Son of God. If we conſider Sin in all the terrible Conſequences that had before attended it, as the Parent and Cauſe of all Miſery, as what derived a Curſe on Nature, robbed Man of his Innocence and Felicity: That 'twas Sin which provoked the Almighty to deſcend in ſo many fearful Examples of Vengeance on the World; which broke up the Fountains of the great Deep, and kindled the Flames of *Sodom:* That the Extinction of Nations, and the Deſolation of Kingdoms, that all the Inſtances of Miſery and Affliction which attend Mankind, were but the Effects of this deſtructive Evil: And if we add to all this thoſe Terrors which the natural Preſumptions of Conſcience open to our Proſpect beyond the Grave, what Hatred and Averſion ſhould theſe Reviews give us towards this great Enemy of our Nature, this Deſtroyer of our Hap-

pineſs? With what Paſſion then, with what new Reſentment of Soul muſt the Chriſtian behold it, bringing down the Son of God from the Boſom of his Father, ſpoiling him of his Glory, and expoſing him to the Weakneſs and Indigence of Mortality, to the Shame and Anguiſh of the Croſs? All the former Effects, either known or feared of Sin, fatal as they were, yet affected only the Sinner. The Soul that ſinned that died, and the Offender with the greateſt Juſtice ſuffered the Conſequence of his own Folly. But here we ſee the Author and Fountain of all Good wounded by Sin, and bruiſed by Iniquity: The Innocent oppreſſed by the Burden of the Guilty: The beloved of God ſlain by the Sins of Men. With what Humility and Abhorrence of himſelf ſhould offending Duſt reflect on ſo ſad an Effect of his Impiety? With what Loathing and Deteſtation ſhould he fly thoſe Crimes, which nailed his Friend and Patron to the Croſs, and ſhed the precious Blood of his Redeemer? Let us then,

2. Re-

2. Reflect what Returns of Gratitude we owe to ſo amazing an Inſtance of divine Love towards us: Let it inflame our Affections to conſider diſtinctly what our Lord and Maſter did and ſuffered for our Sakes: Let us attend him in all the melancholy Stages of his Paſſion, and behold him either deſerted or betrayed by his Servants, dragged by a rude Multitude before a partial and enraged Tribunal: The Creator and Governor of the World crowned with Thorns, contemned, reviled, and ſpitted on, the Scorn of the Magiſtrate, the Sport of inſolent Soldiers. Let us behold him fainting under the Burden of his Croſs; the innocent Jeſus numbered with the Tranſgreſſors, led to a curſed Death with Thieves and Malefactors. Let it pierce our Souls to reflect how his Hands and Feet were torn by the Nails, and his Side by the Spear; the Prince of Life expired in Agonies, amidſt the Blaſphemies and Reproaches of his own Creatures; and let us at the ſame Time remember that he endured all this for our Sakes, for rebellious ungrateful Man, his Enemy, his Betrayer, and Murderer. Never was Love like

like this Love, nor Compaſſion like that of our God. Greater Love than this, ſays the Apoſtle *, hath no Man, *that a Man lay down his Life for his Friends*; but greater Love even than this has God ſhewn to his Creatures, in that while we were yet Enemies *Chriſt died for us*. To have reſtored the Rebel to Favour upon his Submiſſion, to have accepted his Repentance, and hearkened to his Intreaties of Pardon, had itſelf been an Act of Mercy, which neither the Prayers of Men could hope for, nor their Obedience return. What Heart then can conceive, or what Tongue expreſs the Affection of *Chriſt* to his Creatures; who, before the Offender made any Overtures of Submiſſion, while he perſiſted in his Rebellion, diſclaimed and rejected the Offers of Grace, and even reviled and perſecuted the Meſſenger of it, not only interceded for the Pardon of this unrelenting Enemy, but even laid down his own Life for the Purchaſe of it? *Lord, what is Man, that thou art thus mindful of him, or the Son of Man that thou ſo regardeſt him?* Thou madeſt him lower than

* John xv. 13.

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the Angels, yet them for their Diſobedience thou haſt reſerved in Chains of Darkneſs, condemned to a miſerable Immortality; but unto Man equally rebellious, equally apoſtate from thee and Goodneſs, thou haſt given a Saviour; even thine only Son to be the Propitiation for our Sins. And ſhall any Thing be too ſevere to be endured, too hard to be performed, or too dear to be parted with for his Sake, who thus loved us, and gave himſelf for us? When the Redeemer of our Souls requires us to reſign the Intereſts or Pleaſures of this Life; to ſubmit to Injuries, Reproach, or Affliction in his Service, can we withhold the one, or decline the other, when we remember that he deſcended from the right Hand of the Majeſty of God, and endured the Shame and Tortures of the Croſs for our Salvation? With what Readineſs ſhould we comply with the Requeſts of ſo great a Benefactor? With what Alacrity obey his Commands? All that we enjoy or hope for we owe to his Favour, and our very Souls are the Purchaſe of his Blood. And ſhould the Friend to whom we are ſo infinitely obliged, require ſome great Thing

Thing of us, ſhould we refuſe to perform it! How much more when he only invites us to purſue our own greateſt Intereſt, when he commands us to be Happy, when he intreats us to be Saved? How monſtrous then muſt be our Ingratitude, if we continue in thoſe Sins which repeat the Agonies of his Paſſion, which make his Wounds to bleed afreſh, and put him anew to Shame? But as the Love of our Maſter and only Saviour *Jeſus Chriſt*, thus dying for us, ſhould engage our utmoſt returns of Gratitude and Obedience, and prevail on us to devote our Lives to his Service and Pleaſure, and to fly with Abhorrence from whatever will grieve and offend him; ſo 'tis farther propoſed to our Meditations as an Example of Patience, Humility, and Charity.

How ſhould it animate us in all the Tryals of our Faith, in all the Miſeries and Afflictions of Life, to reflect that our Lord and Maſter was made perfect thro' Suffering? Are we grieved with the Scorn and Deriſion of the Prophane? Thus was the Bleſſed *Jeſus* deſpiſed and rejected of Men. Is Tribulation, Diſtreſs and Perſecution

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our Portion? Thus was the Captain of our Salvation a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with Grief. And how ſhould it mortify all our Fondneſs and Contention for the Pomps and Honours of this World, to conſider that the Son of God choſe to appear in the meaneſt and moſt ignoble Circumſtances of Humanity? lived an indigent dependent Life, and ſubmitted to the infamous Death of a Slave? And laſtly, how ſhould it calm our Reſentments, and extend our Charity, even to the greateſt Enemies, to remember that our Bleſſed Lord died for his ſinful Creatures? Even the Agonies of his Torments abated not his Love, but he expired interceding for his Murderers. Are the Offences we reſent and complain of, to be compared with the Provocation of a World of Sinners againſt their God? The fierceſt Contentions of Men are between Creatures equal in Nature, and capable by the greateſt Diſtinction of Circumſtances and Authority of but a very ſmall Remove one from another. But the Enemies of God are the Work of his Creation, the Dependants of his Power, and whom he has endeavour'd

to oblige by Wonders of his Love: If therefore God could forgive Injuries heighten'd by ſo many aggravating Circumſtances, Sins againſt his Power and Authority, Sins againſt his Mercy and Goodneſs, and Sins of his Creatures and neceſſary Dependants, and forgive them in a Manner ſo expreſſive of Tenderneſs and Concern, as to ſubſtitute his own Son to ſuffer in their Stead, what Provocations can we ever receive that ought not to command the ſame Pardon and Condeſcenſion from us? Ought not we to be merciful, ſince our Father which is in Heaven is thus amazingly merciful? To conclude, the Son of God has waſhed us in his Blood, has cleans'd and purify'd the Stains of our Nature, and renewed our Title to eternal Happineſs; and ſhall we again return to our Pollution, ſhall we forfeit the Mercies of this ſecond Covenant alſo, and give our own and our Creator's Enemy the Triumph of a ſecond Conqueſt over us? Let us look back and tremble at the Danger we have eſcaped, and let us remember that if we neglect the Overtures of this Grace, there remains no farther Sacrifice for our Sin, no freſh Cove-

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nant of Grace to be propoſed to us, no new Redeemer to be offer'd for us: Even infinite Mercy is exhauſted, and can do no more than has already been done for our Salvation. Let us therefore labour to ſecure an Intereſt in the Merits of this Mediator: Let it not be in vain for us that this *Jeſus*, this Saviour, is come into the World; but let his Doctrine engage our Faith, and his Commands our Obedience. And let us with a lively Devotion joyn the ſacred Hymns of thoſe ten Touſand Times ten Thouſand Voices that ſurround the Throne of God, ſaying, *Worthy is the Lamb that was ſlain to receive Power, and Wiſdom, and Honour, and Glory, and Bleſſing; and therefore Bleſſing, and Honour, and Glory, and Power be unto him that ſitteth upon the Throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever* *.

* Rev. v. 12, 13.

SERMON

SERMON VIII.

The Certainty of our own Resurrection inferr'd from the Resurrection of *Christ*.

1 COR. XV. 23. *latter part.*

Christ the first Fruits, afterwards they that are Christ's, at his coming.

THE Apostle in the former Part of these Words asserts the Resurrection of *Christ*: In the latter Part of the Words directs us to infer immediately from it the Certainty and Connexion of our own: That as the waved

Sheaf in the *Levitical* Law sanctify'd the whole Harvest, so *Christ*, who was sowed in Dishonour, even as we are, being raised in Glory, should derive the same Privilege on all those who are his, at his Coming.

THE Prospect beyond the Grave, and what became of this thoughtful busy Creature, when he was removed from the Scene of this World, has been a Speculation that has amuzed the Vulgar, and puzled the Philosophy of the Wise in all Ages of the World.

HUMAN Nature could not sustain the Reflection of having the Prospect clos'd with this Life, and all its Schemes and Expectations to determine with this frail and and perishable Composition of Flesh and Blood; and therefore the Vulgar supported themselves with Fables, and the Philosophers with some rational Probability of a future State. But their most successful Researches upon this Subject could never rise higher than to a fair Possibility, and the Conclusions they came to were such as they rather wish'd might be true, than such as they could give a firm and confident Assent to; and left the Atheist room

for Diſputation, and even the beſt Men but a diffident Expectation of their Immortality.

But for the Reſurrection of the Body, this was ſuch a Contradiction to their Philoſophy, that the Apoſtle of my Text had no ſooner propoſed it to the great Maſters of Knowledge at *Athens*, but he himſelf was ridiculed as a Babler, and his Doctrine exploded as an incredible Fable. And indeed no Article of Chriſtianity met with a more difficult Reception in the World, than this of the Reſurrection of the Body.

For that this diſſolved and diſunited Frame ſhould ever be reſtored to its firſt Strength and Beauty; that ever theſe ſcatter'd Materials, diſperſed thro' all the Elements, ſhould be recollected into the ſame Form and Comelineſs; that the Urn ſhould reſtore its Aſhes, and the Sea give up her Dead, was an aſſertion ſo amazing and encumber'd with ſo many Difficulties and Objections that bare unaſſiſted Reaſon could never get over them. Even the *Jews* themſelves, who had the Privilege of a nearer Acceſs to God, had yet but very dark

Notices of this great Truth; and the Scripture tells us, that there was a considerable Sect even of those who pretended to Learning among them, (namely the *Sadducees*) who believed neither Resurrection, Angel, nor Spirit. No, 'twas Christianity first clearly proved this noble and important Truth to the World, and this Life and Immortality were brought to Light by the Gospel. *Christ* our Saviour has asserted the Strength of our Nature in its Innocency, and in his Triumph over Death and Hell: He has unbarr'd the Gates of the Grave, and set the Captive free; and has assured us that as he the first Fruits is risen, so shall they also rise who are his at his Coming. 'Tis to be observed indeed, that the Apostle in this Scripture infers no more from the Resurrection of *Christ*, than the Resurrection of the Just, those who are *Christ*'s at his Coming; because this was what the Design of this Chapter made it principally necessary he should prove to the *Corinthians*. The Design is evident from the Inference he makes from the whole in the last Verse, *viz.* to support their Faith under those Discouragements

and

and Perſecutions their Profeſſion in that early Age expoſed them to, that they might be *ſtedfaſt*, *unmoveable*, *always abounding in the Work of the Lord.* Now the proper Argument from which this Effect was to be hoped for, was ſuch as convinced them that *Chriſt* would certainly raiſe them, and reward their Patience and Reſolution, and make them an abundant Satisfaction for all the Afflictions they endured for his ſake. He had therefore no Occaſion to extend his Proof farther than the Reſurrection of the Juſt, ſince this was ſufficient to aſſure their Expectations, and convince them that their Labour ſhould not be in vain in the Lord. And the ſame Reaſons will always Account for thoſe Expreſſions of our Lord himſelf, which ſeem to confine the Reſurrection to his Elect, whom he frequently promiſes to raiſe up at the laſt Day, without any Notice of the reſt of the World. But that the Reſurrection ſhall be general, we are abundantly aſſured from other Scriptures. For thus our Saviour tells us *, *that all that are in the Grave ſhall hear his Voice,*

* John v. 28, 29.

and come forth, they that have done good to the Resurrection of Life, and they that have done evil to the Resurrection of Damnation. And St. *Paul* even in this Chapter makes this also to be a Consequence of our Lord's Resurrection; where he tells us, *that as in* Adam *all* (i. e. just and unjust) *died, so in Christ should all* (just and unjust) *be made alive* †. I shall therefore consider this Subject in general, as it regards the Resurrection of the whole Race of *Adam*; in treating of it, I shall at present look upon the Resurrection of our Lord as a Truth of Fact established upon sufficient Evidence, and acknowledg'd to be true; and endeavour from the latter Part of the Words before us to shew,

I. THE Certainty and Connexion of our own Resurrection. And,

II. DIRECT you to those Meditations this Doctrine ought to suggest to us.

I. THAT our blessed Saviour, who was himself a divine Person, and consequently

† ℣ 22.

endued

endued with the Power of God, might by his own unbounded activity restore the Body he had chosen to its former Union, especially within the Space of three Days, when the Balms and Spices which the Piety of *Joseph* had brought, had kept it so entire, that even naturally it could not have seen Corruption, seems attended with a great many Circumstances that make it reconcileable enough to the natural Apprehensions of Men, or at least abate much of the Difficulties that might withold our Assent: But that a Human Body dissolved and crumbled into Dust, without any Trace or Feature of the Form it once appear'd in, when all its Lineaments are destroy'd, and the whole Mass of its Materials, Bones, and Blood, and Sinews mixed together in an undistinguishable Confusion; that (I say) such a Disorder as this should ever be retrieved, that this blended Mass should resume its former Symmetry and Proportions, is such an amazing Instance of Knowledge and Power, that our most refined Speculations can very difficultly conceive an Art or Artificer that can be equal to so stupendous an Effect. But farther, if we

consider these blended Materials not only confused among themselves or with the neighbouring Bodies, but scatter'd and dispersed over the whole Face of Nature, the Sport of Winds and Rivers, partly evaporated into Air, and partly diluted into Water, and fortuitously shared between all the Elements; who shall find out or recal the wandring Particles Home, and fix them in their old Vicinity? Had we indeed all our different Cells and Apartments in the Earth, did Vaults and Sepulchres keep all Human Reliques divided and separated from the Confusion of other Bodies, 'twould be but like a curious Machine taken into Pieces, which, while the Parts are preserved together, 'tis no great difficulty to the Artificer to reunite to its former Figure and Motions; and whatever may be surprizing to the Ignorant in such a Performance, the Skill of the Workman will easily account for: But what Skill or what Power shall recollect the Dust, which Winds and Waves have dispersed over the Face of the whole Earth? Who shall discern a Human Particle disguised perhaps now under the Appearance of Air, or Water,

ter, or Plant, or Mineral, and, when discovered, command it back to the Poſt it once had?

But the Difficulty will yet increaſe upon us, if we conſider a Human Body not only thus diſſipated and diſperſed, but devoured by Fiſh or Beaſt, and ſo enter'd into the Conſtitution of another Animal; nay and perhaps in, ſome Periods of the ſeveral Revolutions it undergoes, become the Fleſh and Blood of another Man; whoſe then ſhall it be in the Reſurrection? Who ſhall be the Owner of this ſtragling Duſt, and to what Proprietor ſhall it belong?

These are the Difficulties that gave the Doctrine of the Reſurrection ſo cold and diffident a Reception in the World, and rais'd the Scruples of the Weak, and the Contempt and Ridicule of the Pretenders to more accurate Knowledge and Learning. But had they duly conſider'd the unlimited Extent of infinite Knowledge and infinite Power, theſe two Attributes had been ſufficient to have ſilenced their Scruples, and they had adored and not ridiculed the amazing Myſtery. He who ſaw and form'd us in the Womb, whoſe Eyes beheld our Sub-

Substance yet being imperfect, and in whose Book all our Members were written, keeps every Atom of them still under his Eye, and pursues them thro' all the Changes and Revolutions they undergo: Lost and insensible as they are to us, they are to his all-seeing Eye so many distinct Beings, in a fair and regular Order. For tho' they fly up to Heaven, he is there; or if they are thrust down to Hell, he is there also: Tho' they are scatter'd on the Wings of the Morning, and remain in the uttermost Parts of the Sea; even there shall his Omnipresence find them, and thence shall his right Hand fetch them out, and lead them home to their antient Proprietor. Can the least Particle of Matter be so small, as to escape the Knowledge of Omniscience? Can it hide it self from him who created it, by whose Appointment it succeeds into various Stations, and is apply'd to serve different Ends of his Providence, and is employ'd by the great Artificer sometimes in one Part, and sometimes in another of the Works of his Hands? Tho' it runs thro' all the Variety of Bodies in Nature, Earth or Water, Plants or Animals, or even

even different Men; yet it paſſes its ſeveral Stages by the immediate Commiſſion and Direction of the Almighty, and may by him be commanded to return to the ſame Poſt it once fill'd. And as his Knowledge is thus ſufficient to find out the Materials of which we were made, ſo his Power is ſufficient to put them together again. We know that the Power of God can perform any thing, which does not neceſſarily imply a Contradiction. Now 'tis certainly no Contradiction that the ſame Thing which once was ſhould exiſt again: That thoſe Particles of Matter which were once united in the ſame Body, ſhould be reſtored to the ſame Union. Can it be difficult to that Almighty Power, which firſt created Man, and the whole World out of nothing; who can with a Thought reduce it to nothing, and with a ſecond reſtore it to the ſame Form and Order again, to command any Parts of Matter, however ſeparated and divided from each other, into what Order or Appearance he pleaſes, eſpecially to fit them up, into the ſame Symmetry and Lineaments they once had? Nature is the Art of God, and as he can take a Body

to

to Pieces, and dispose of them where he pleases, to us perhaps not without the Appearance of irretrievable Confusion, but with respect to his own Knowledge into the most regular and methodical Repositories; so he can with the same Facility put them together again, and renew their Acquaintance with those Parts to which they were formerly ally'd. 'Tis agreed by those Philosophers who are most inclined to dispute this Article, that Matter is unperishable in it self, and that all the Destruction it can undergo, is no more than a Passing from one Form to another. The Matter therefore of the Body must necessarily remain; and since Matter, as such, is equally capable of all Forms, those Particles which before composed an Human Body, must at least be as capable as any other of being rais'd into that Figure again. 'Tis plain therefore, that the Materials must remain, and remain in a Capacity of being re-united into the same Form; and that the Power of God is able to unite them is also evident, because 'tis no more than he actually has done once before; since therefore God Almighty is allowed to

to have Knowledge and Abilities equal to this great Work, the only Question that can remain is whether he has at any Time assured us that he will perform it: And for this we Appeal to that Revelation God has made of himself in Scripture. In the Old Testament indeed the Discoveries of this Mystery are less frequent and clear, than those he has given us in the New: Yet they were such as to those who duly attended to the Light they gave, afforded a sufficient Conviction of this Truth, and a firm Reliance on the glorious Promises contain'd in it. *I know* (says Holy *Job*) *that my Redeemer liveth; and tho' after my Skin, Worms destroy this Body; yet in my Flesh shall I see God; whom I shall see for my self, and my Eyes shall behold and not another: tho' my Reins be consumed within me**. To this we may add that of the Prophet *Isaiah*, *Thy dead Men shall live, together with my dead Body shall they arise; awake and sing ye that dwell in the Dust, for thy Dew is as the Dew of Herbs, and the Earth shall cast out the Dead*†. Thus also *Daniel* tells us, *They that sleep in the*

* Job xix. 25, 26, 27. † Isa. xxvi. 19.

Dust

*Dust shall awake, some to everlasting Life, and some to Shame and everlasting Contempt**. These are Scriptures of such express and unavoidable Force, that one would think it impossible for so large a Division of the *Jews*, as the *Sadducees* were, to resist the Evidence of so clear an Authority. But the Providence of God, designing the last and most perfect Declaration of his Will under the Gospel, has so clearly reveal'd this Article to our Faith in the Scripture of the New Testament, that no one has ever doubted whether it were an Article of Christianity. 'Tis proposed in almost every Page to the Disciples of the Gospel, as their great Support under all the Difficulties and Persecutions they must expect, from the Malice of a prejudiced World. Thus we find our Blessed Saviour frequently encouraging his Disciples with this Promise, *that he would raise them up at the last Day* †. And St. *Paul* confesses, that without this Expectation, Christianity, under the Disadvantages it then lay, had nothing engaging enough to recommend it to the World: *If in this Life only we had*

* Dan. xii. 2. † John vi. 40, 44, 54, &c.

Hope

Hope, (ſaid he) *we were of all Men moſt miſerable* †. 'Twas the Aſſurance of a Reſurrection that gave Patience to the Confeſſour, and Courage to the Martyr; and inſpired the firſt Chriſtians with that undaunted Reſolution, that they not only deſpiſed, but even gloried in their Sufferings. And the great Argument the Apoſtles appeal'd to for the Proof of this Article, is the Reſurrection of their Lord and Maſter, who is therefore called the *firſt Fruits of thoſe that ſleep*, and an Earneſt of the Reſurrection of the whole Human Species. *Chriſt* has condeſcended to incorporate us into the ſame Body of which himſelf is Head, and has commanded us to depend on him, with this Aſſurance, that as he himſelf is riſen, ſo will he alſo raiſe up thoſe to be his: As the Head is glorified, ſo ſhall alſo the Members be glorified with him: And where the Head is, there ſhall the Members be alſo: *And as in* Adam *all died, even ſo in* Chriſt *ſhall all be made alive* ‡. But I ſhall not detain you with a Recital of thoſe Proofs

† 1 Cor. xv. 19. ‡ Col. i. 18.

which

which might be brought for this Article from the Writings of the New Testament, but look upon it as allowed by every one to be a Doctrine of the Gospel. And proceed,

II. To such an Application of this Subject, as may be in some Measure answerable to the great Importance of it. And,

1. Let us reflect on that great and terrible Day, when the Earth shall be again in Travail with her Sons, and at one fruitful Throw, bring forth all the Generations of Learned and Unlearned, Rich and Poor, Noble and Ignoble Dust, no longer differenced and distinguished by Titles and Quality, but by the Guilt or Innocence of their Lives. Let us frequently consider what Figure we shall make in that great Assembly, and how we are prepared to meet our Judge and our Redeemer. Piety indeed and Innocence soften the Terrors of this awful Prospect, and make even Death and Judgment a desirable Expectation. To the Righteous 'tis the great Strength of his Hopes, the Support and Encouragement of his Obedience: The Hour, in expectation of which he patiently

ly bears the Burden and Heat of the Day, all the Difficulties of Duty, and the Discountenance he meets with from a wicked and prophane World. That Cloud of Witneſſes the Apoſtle mentions, who had Tryals of Mockings and Scourgings, of Bonds and Impriſonment, were ſtoned, ſawed aſunder, were ſlain with the Sword, wander'd in Deſerts and Mountains, deſtitute, afflicted, tormented, not only bore their Tortures with Patience, but would not accept Deliverance, that they might obtain a better Reſurrection. To a Soul, ſupported with an Aſſurance of the divine Favour in that Day, the Honours or Afflictions of this Life, will be equally trifling and contemptible. Is Poverty and Diſgrace his Portion? he knows it will determine in a few Years, and that an Eternity of Glory awaits his Perſeverance. Are the Infirmities of the Body, Pains and Diſeaſes his Complaint? his Faith reminds him of the Day when this Corruptible ſhall put on Incorruption, and this Mortal, Immortality; when this Body ſhall no longer be that burthenſome Incumbrance it now is, ſubject to Pain, and Weakneſs, and Paſſion;

but ſpiritualized to a State of eternal Youth, and Strength, and Beauty, to a Similitude with the glorify'd Body of *Chriſt* our Saviour. With what lively Impreſſions of Gratitude does he reflect on that unwearied Care of Providence which conducts Man from the Womb, and gradually leads him to an Immortality of Glory; who protects him when alive, and guards him when dead, and makes even his Grave but a Repoſitory to preſerve the Reliques and Treaſures of his Body; and from thence, as from a Wardrobe, re-apparels the new Man framed out of the Materials of the old, and fitted for the Fruition of himſelf in Glory? With what Joy does he ſhare in the Triumphs of his Redeemer, and behold the Bonds of Death broken, and the Power and Malice of Hell defeated, our Nature again cleans'd and purify'd from the Stains of original Pollution, and reſtored to that Felicity, that Life and Immortality, which the Sin of *Adam* had ſpoil'd us of? To the Ungodly indeed, and the Sinner, the Proſpect is not thus eaſy and entertaining: 'Tis with Confuſion and Aſtoniſhment he muſt reflect on that Day, when every ſecret Impiety of his

Life

Life, the Sins of his Chamber and his Closet shall be produced before Men and Angels, and an eternal irreversible Sentence be pronounced upon the Actions of Men. Eternity is in its self a Prospect that Human Nature can't look into without a religious Awe and Concern; our Thoughts are lost in the endless View, and return to us weary and unsatisfy'd, without finding either Bounds or Place to fix on. Now to him who may reasonably expect to pass all this endless Duration in Torments, as great as an offended God can inflict, how dreadful must the Approach of it be, and the Terrors of it who can bear? He is tormented even before the Time, and his Damnation is begun on this side Hell. Let us then in this our Day suffer these Reflections to have their proper Efficacy, in exciting us to a due Preparation for that decisive Hour: Let it influence every Thought, Word, and Action of our Lives, to remember that the Judge standeth at the Door; that the Day approaches when all that are in the Graves shall hear the Voice of God, and come forth to Judgment. And above all things let us offer

inceſſant Prayers to the Divine Majeſty, that he would vouchſafe us the Aſſiſtance of his Grace, which alone can direct our Courſe thro' this troubleſome and ſinful World, that when our Lord ſhall appear he may find us intent on the Duties of our Stations, may own us for his Servants before his Father and the holy Angels, and call us to the Poſſeſſion of that eternal and heavenly Inheritance he has promiſed to thoſe *whom when he comes he ſhall find ſo doing*.

SERMON

SERMON IX.

A good Life the beſt Ornament of the Chriſtian Profeſſion.

TITUS ii. 10. *latter Part.*

That they may adorn the Doctrine of God our Saviour in all Things.

THOUGH the Apoſtles of *Chriſt* applied themſelves to the Converſion of Mankind, principally by ſuch Arguments as proved the Reaſonableneſs and Credibility of their Doctrine; though they aſſerted the Authority of their Miſſion, and that they were Preachers ſent from God, by thoſe

Demonſtrations of the Spirit, the miraculous Effects of divine Power which attended their Miniſtry, and might challenge the greateſt Enemies of the Goſpel to object any Thing to the Morality of its Precepts; yet ſtill they appeared farther ſolicitous to enforce theſe Arguments with that great Recommendation to the Eſteem of the World, a correſpondent Purity in the Lives of its Diſciples. This was a Part of their Miniſtry, in which they required their Proſelytes to concur with them: And particularly the Apoſtle of my Text commands *Titus*, not only to be a Pattern of good Works himſelf, but to uſe his epiſcopal Authority in exhorting every Rank and Order of Men, the Young and the Old, the Huſband and the Wife, the Maſter and the Servant to be exemplary in the Duties of their ſeveral Stations, and in every Part of their Conduct to adorn the Doctrine they profeſſed. By this Expreſſion of adorning the Doctrine of our Saviour, 'tis obvious to underſtand advancing the Credit and Eſteem of it in the World; behaving our ſelves in ſuch a Manner, that the Beauty of that Holineſs it

preſcribes

prescribes may appear in our Lives; and even the Enemies of our Religion may be forced to acknowledge the Power and Excellence of so venerable an Institution. I shall endeavour to recommend this Apostolical Precept to your Attention, by shewing,

I. THAT 'tis the Duty of every Christian to be concerned for the Reputation or Discredit his Life may bring on his Profession.

II. I SHALL consider what Conduct will acquit us of this Obligation.

AND I. 'Tis the Duty of every Christian to be concerned for the Reputation or Discredit his Life will bring on his Profession.

FOR though this Epistle be particularly directed to *Titus*, and in him to the Bishops and Pastors of the Flock of *Christ*, yet this Consideration is here rather suggested to him as a proper Argument to persuade the Obedience of those under his Care, than a special Direction to himself. The Apostle

had employed the former Part of this Chapter, in prescribing the Duties which 'twould be proper for him to recommend to every Condition and Relation of Life; and then subjoins this, as an universal Reason for their Compliance, that they might adorn the Doctrine of their Saviour. He had before exhorted *Titus* himself to be an Example of good Works; and he is here commanded to press the same Regularity on his whole Charge from this Consideration, that the Honour of their Religion depended on it. The Ministers indeed of the Gospel are especially required to shine as Lights in the World, because the Distinction of their Station renders their Conduct more observable, and the Presumption of their Knowledge, and the Dignity of their Office gives a peculiar Force and Authority to their Example: But the Light of inferior Christians is also to be visible: And as no Circumstances of Life can place a Man so far below the Notice of the World, but that his Virtues or Vices will render him, in some Degree, an Ornament or Disgrace to his Profession;

on; so none are below the Obligation of this Precept, to promote the Credit of it.

For shall we all think our selves bound to consult the Reputation of our Friend, or our Family, and of the Laws and Constitutions of our Country; and shall the Honour of that God whom we serve, and the Religion by which we hope to be saved, have no Share in our Concern? Can we with Indifference hear the Word of God, and the sacred Name of our Saviour blasphemed; and at the same Time reflect that the Scandal of our Lives gives the Occasion for it? For, after all we can say to disparage the Argument, Men do and will judge of a Religion, by the Influence it has on the Lives of its Disciples; and be inclined to think contemptibly of that Faith which has no apparent moral Effect on the Professors of it. Not all the subtle Objections of Sophisters and *Rabbies*, against the Truth and Credibility of the Gospel, so much prejudiced the Reception of it in the World, as the Reproach of those infamous Crimes with which they aspersed the Assemblies of Christians. And therefore the Apologists of the Church, in their

their Vindications, appeal not ſo much to the Purity of the Rules and Precepts of their Religion, as to the Innocence of their Lives; and defy the Malice of their Adverſaries to produce one impure, unjuſt, or intemperate Perſon, among all who were called by the Name of *Chriſt*. Thus was the Goſpel adorned in the Innocence and Simplicity of its Infancy; and thus were they of the contrary Part made aſhamed, having no evil Thing to ſay of them. And let us not imagine that the Reaſons or Deſign of this Precept, were confined to the primitive State of the Church; or that the firſt Converts only of Chriſtianity were concerned to defend the Honour of their Religion, from the Spite and Detraction of a Heathen World. That Spirit of Unbelief, of Reproach and Blaſphemy, which at firſt oppoſed itſelf to riſing Chriſtianity, continues ſtill, and will always continue, to revile and perſecute the Servants of *Chriſt*. Even in theſe Days of Security and Eſtabliſhment, when the Goſpel has the Defence and Protection of national Laws, have we not ſeen our holy Religion expoſed to publick Scorn as a Farce or Fable,

Fable, every Order of its Ministry vilified, and the Articles of its Faith not only opposed, but ridiculed? Have Examples been wanting, who have owned, and even gloried in Prophaneness and Infidelity? And are we not encompassed by Multitudes, who have Hatred and evil Will at our *Sion?* Who watch every careless Word, every unguarded Action of our Lives; who are ready to aggravate all our Faults, to expose our Infirmities, and traduce even our Virtues themselves? And if the Number and Malice of their Enemies, was an Argument to the first Christians for such a prudent and regular Behaviour as would silence their Calumnies, and procure Esteem and Reverence to the Gospel, the same Reasons should enforce this Duty on us under the same Obligations, as the Apostle enjoined it on them.

CHRISTIANITY indeed will always demand this Tribute from its Disciples. 'Tis implied in every one of its Commands, that we should not only obey them our selves, but use our best Endeavours to recommend the same Performances to others also. And since an exemplary Deport-

ment

ment in the Duties of our Station, is the moſt probable Method to produce this Effect; to reclaim the Diſſolute, convert the Infidel, and win the greateſt Enemies of our Faith to a Reſpect and Veneration for it; this is an Obligation which will never ceaſe, but remain a neceſſary Duty in all Ages and Circumſtances of the Church. Proceed we then,

II. To conſider what particular Conduct will acquit us of this Obligation. In General there is ſomething lovely and endearing in every ſingle Inſtance of Duty, preſcribed by the Goſpel: A Beauty which the moſt diſſolute are forced to acknowledge, and the Libertine himſelf to applaud and admire. How irreſiſtible then are the Charms of Virtue, when the Obedience is univerſal? When the Graces of Religion ſhine with an united Luſtre, and no Crime can be objected to darken the Character, and ſully the Perfection of the Example? But I ſhall content my ſelf at preſent to recommend the Practice of ſome particular Duties, of a more eſpecial Tendency to procure Reſpect to our ſelves, and

and Honour to our Religion; and those are,

First An extensive Love and Charity, the Bond of Peace, and Foundation of all the Comforts of a social Life. 'Tis this most Christian Grace of our Religion which softens our Passions, appeases our Resentments, and extends our Beneficence to the Miseries of our Brethren; which inclines us to support the Needy, compassionate the Fatherless, and relieve the Tears of the Widow, which renders us the Blessings and Ornaments of the Age in which we live, and the Veneration of those which come after. And so lovely and obliging a Disposition of Soul cannot fail of endearing both us and our Religion to the Gratitude and Affections of Men. Let the fierce and implacable Spirit of Revenge be the Character of our Enemies; let them slander and traduce the Innocent; let them rage and persecute the Poor and the Helpless; but let it be our Glory to be pure and peaceable, ready to forgive, and easy to be intreated; compassionate to the Sorrows, and bountiful to the Wants of our greatest

greateſt Enemies. By this ſhall we vindicate the Honour of our Religion; by this ſhall all Men know that we are the Diſciples of *Chriſt*.

A SECOND Virtue I would recommend as of peculiar Efficacy to incline Men to venerable Thoughts of our Religion, is Firmneſs and Reſolution. A Behaviour, which even in the moral Accounts of Virtue, has always commanded the higheſt Reſpect from Men. And as no Inſtitution of Life has ever furniſhed its Diſciples with ſo powerful and generous Motives of Courage as the Chriſtian, ſo nothing can derive ſo much Honour on our Religion, as on all Occaſions to act up to the Spirit and Principles of it. Let a Man's Pretences to Religion be never ſo great, and his Conduct in other Reſpects be never ſo regular, yet if he faint in the Day of Trial, if we ſee him ſhrink from an unacceptable Duty, betray the Cauſe of God, and prevaricate with the moſt avowed Principles of his Conſcience, is it not natural to ſuſpect that there is an evil Heart of Unbelief, a ſecret Reſerve of Infidelity at the Bottom?

Bottom? Especially if he be a Man of any Eminence for his Knowledge or Station; one who is presumed to have formed his Principles upon calm and deliberate Enquiries, and to be a Master of all the Arguments that can plead for Religion: When such an one shall fall away, and act contrary to his most professed Convictions, with what Shame and Confusion must all good Men behold the Example? What Scandal must it give to the Weak, and what Triumph to the Infidel? With what Confidence will he conclude, that either our Religion wants Arguments to convince a reasonable Enquirer, or Encouragements to support its Converts in Perseverance. On the contrary, when we see even the meanest Christian stand firm in his Duty, and hold fast the Integrity of his Profession; when we see him renounce his Interest, his Pleasure, and even Life itself in Obedience to the Commands of his Religion; the most indifferent Spectator must applaud the Courage, the Honesty, and Sincerity of the Man; and confess the Power of that Institution, which can infuse so much Bravery and Spirit in-

to

to the Souls of its Diſciples. 'Twas the Zeal and Reſolution of the firſt Chriſtians; 'twas the Patience of Confeſſors, and the Courage of that noble Army of its Martyrs, that procured Reſpect and Honour to the Goſpel; and prevailed more in the Converſion of the World, than either the Arguments, the Oratory, or even the Miracles of its Preachers.

A THIRD Duty which will be always neceſſary to ſecure the Credit of our Religion, is a due Obedience to the Authority of our Superiors. It was an early Objection, and too ſucceſsfully urged by the Adverſaries of Chriſtianity, that 'twas an Enemy to civil Government: That it pretended to exempt the Servant from Obedience to his Maſter, and the Subject from his Prince. And as nothing could raiſe a greater Prejudice againſt any Religion, than an Imputation of Inconſiſtency with the Laws and Subordinations of Government; ſo there is no Reproach *Chriſt* and his Apoſtles are more careful to obviate than this. Thus we find our Lord on all Occaſions diſclaiming all Pretenſions to a temporal

temporal Kingdom; commanding his Disciples to render to *Cæsar* the Obedience that was due to him: And though in Strictness he tells us he might have pleaded an Exemption from the *Jewish* Tribute required of him, yet rather than countenance the Aspersions that would attend his Refusal, he exerted his divine Power in a Miracle to pay it. And as the same Calumny pursued his Apostles, so we find them equally solicitous to clear themselves and their Religion from the Scandal of it: Inculcating the Doctrine of Subjection for Conscience Sake; and, in their own Persons, submitting to the most unjust and tyrannical Inflictions from the Heathen Tribunals. And though it was some Ages before the Jealousies of the Civil Powers were thoroughly reconciled to the Assemblies of Christians, yet we find them at length so perfectly acquitted from this Slander, that even *Julian* himself, the most implacable Enemy that ever appeared against the Gospel, reproaches his Heathen Subjects with the Fidelity of the Christians. This was the ancient, and is, I hope, yet the unforfeited Glory of our Religion.

The Malice of its Adverſaries has in all Ages laboured to deprive it of this Honour; to expoſe it to the Reſentments of the Magiſtrate as an Encourager of Sedition; and improve the particular Miſcarriages of ſome few, into a general Charge of Diſloyalty upon the whole Church. But Wiſdom will ſtill be juſtified of her Children. That pure and peaceable Wiſdom, which always was and always will be the Character of the Church of *Chriſt*, will in the End refute the Aſperſions of its Enemies: And the meek, the humble, the patient Servant of *Chriſt* will be found the trueſt Friend to *Cæſar*. And,

4. Let us crown theſe Virtues with a prudent, affable, and courteous Behaviour towards all Men. 'Tis indeed the inward Purity and Sincerity of the Heart, that principally recommends us to the Searcher of Spirits: But ſince God has alſo left it upon us as a Duty to render his Service amiable to others, theſe external Decencies and Ornaments of our Conduct, become a very important Part of our Morality. 'Tis in theſe, the Viſibility and Example of

of our Virtues will chiefly consist. The great and more observable Occasions of exercising our Courage, our Justice, or our Charity, occur but seldom: But these are of daily and constant Use, to preserve a general Benevolence, and endear our common Intercourse between one another. Without this Care our best Actions will lose much of their Influence, and our severer Virtues be often discredited with the Appearance of Evil. But how bright and lovely does every Grace of our Religion shine, when adorned with an humble and obliging Behaviour? Beautiful as a Jewel set in Gold; which, though it adds little to the intrinsick Value, yet improves the Lustre, and attracts the Eyes and Affections of the Beholder. And therefore the Apostles of *Christ* have not failed to make it a constant Part of their Instructions to their Converts, to avoid all Unseemliness and Asperity of Carriage; to do nothing that may argue a peevish or froward Spirit; not rendring Railing for Railing; on the contrary, to be gentle and condescending: If any Man asks us to go a Mile, to go with him twain: To be modest and

unaſpiring, in Honour preferring one another; to be tender and compaſſionate, to weep with them that weep, and rejoice with them that rejoice. In general, to be ſtudious of the Peace and Intereſts of our Neighbour, and endeavour, by an affectionate Deportment, to leave Impreſſions of Eſteem and Benevolence on all we converſe with: Whatſoever Things are honeſt, whatſoever Things are lovely, whatſoever Things are of good Report, if there be any Virtue, any Praiſe, to think of theſe Things. Our Duty only muſt be too valuable an Intereſt to be given up in a Compliment, or ſacrificed to the Applauſe of Men. If indeed we thus pleaſe Men, and can be perſuaded to any criminal Compliances to avoid their Reſentments, or engage their Favour, we cannot alſo be the Servants of *Chriſt*. There are proper Occaſions, on which we may be angry without Sin. Somewhat of Warmth and Severity will become us when we rebuke the vicious, and diſcountenance the prophane; and we are expreſly required to appear with Zeal and Earneſtneſs, when we are contending for our Faith. But

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these Duties may be complied with, without offending against that Gentleness prescribed by the Gospel. We may reprove the Libertine, without Rudeness or Bitterness; defend the Articles of our Faith, and resist those who oppose them, with a Meekness and Humanity, which will equally convince the World of our Affection to the Persons, and our Zeal against the Errors of our Brethren. But if passionate and unreasonable Men, will notwithstanding our best Care be offended with us for doing our Duty, God and all good Men will applaud our Integrity, and Shame and Contempt will be the Portion of our Enemies.

LET me then in Conclusion of this Discourse, exhort you seriously to reflect on the great Engagements we are under to assert the Honour of that Religion we profess, by an exemplary Practice of the Duties I have recommended. Let me address you not only as Christians, but as Members of the purest and most Apostolick Church in the World: A Church, whose Doctrines are derived from the clear Fountains of the Scriptures; whose Polity

and Diſcipline are formed upon the moſt uncorrupted Models of Antiquity; which has ſtood unſhaken by the moſt furious Aſſaults of Popery on the one Hand, and Fanaticiſm on the other; has triumphed over all the Arguments of its Enemies, and has nothing now to contend with but their Slanders and Calumnies. The Reproach of Immorality, is indeed a Charge will always lie heavieſt againſt an eſtabliſhed Religion; becauſe thoſe who have no Religion, will generally profeſs themſelves of that which has the Encouragement of the Law. But 'tis ſurely very unreaſonable to infer any Thing to the Diſadvantage of any Church, from the Practice of thoſe who are really of no Church and no Religion at all. But whatever Title we may have to this, or any other Excuſe, let us rather endeavour to want none. Let us ſtrive to vindicate the Honour of our Religion, by a pure and unſpotted Obedience to the Rules and Precepts it enjoins: This will more effectually ſecure the Intereſts, and promote the Credit of it, than either the Eloquence of our Preachers, or the Authority of our Laws.

Laws. And, bleſſed beGod, the righteous are not ſo failed from the Earth, but we can ſtill appeal to bright and numerous Examples of Virtue among us. The Number and Devotion of thoſe who frequent our Altars, and the many great and excellent Works of Piety and Charity promoted among us, are a burning and ſhining Light, ſuch an Evidence of the internal Power of our Religion on the Minds of its Diſciples, as muſt command Reverence from all who behold it, and ought to be allowed in Ballance againſt thoſe Examples, with whoſe Crimes our Adverſaries are ſo ready to reproach us. But let us not content our ſelves with being better than our Enemies repreſent us; let us go on unto Perfection, and improve in every Grace of our Religion. Let us add to our Faith Virtue, to Virtue Knowledge, to Knowledge Patience, Temperance, and Charity. Let us by a meek and quiet Behaviour, cut off all Occaſion from thoſe who ſeek Occaſion, that they may have whereof to accuſe us. And though we have all Encouragements to hope that the evil Day of Perſecution is far

from us, yet let us always live in ſuch a Preparation of Mind, that if God ſhall at any Time call us to a Trial of our Faith, we may acquit our ſelves with a Courage becoming the Hope and Spirit of Chriſtians. In Sum; let the Beauty of our Religion appear in the Holineſs of our Lives. Let our Virtue ſhine forth as the Light, and our juſt Dealing as the Noon-Day. Then ſhall our *Sion* appear fair and comely to her Lovers, and to her Enemies ſtrong and terrible, as an Army with Banners. Then ſhall the righteous reſort unto her Aſſemblies, and even Sinners be converted unto her: And every one that is near, and every one that is afar off, ſhall be induced to give Praiſe unto God, and ſeeing our good Works to glorify our Father which is in Heaven.

To whom with the Son and Holy Ghoſt be aſcribed, &c.

SERMON

SERMON X.

The Advantages of converſing with good Men, and the Inconveniencies of a contrary Conduct.

PSALM cxix. 63.

I am a Companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy Precepts.

THAT the Temper, the Sentiments, the Morality, and, in general, the whole Conduct and Figure of Men, is influenced by the Example and Diſpoſition of

of thoſe they converſe with, is a Reflection which has long ſince paſſed into Proverbs, and been ranked among the ſtanding Maxims of human Wiſdom, in all Ages and Nations of the World. And Mankind ſeem to act with Conviction enough of this Truth, in the Care they take to deter thoſe whoſe Welfare they are concerned for, from the Company of ſuch, the Expence or Infamy of whoſe Vices may endanger their Fortunes or Reputation. But becauſe the Generality of Men appear much leſs ſolicitous for the purely religious Conſequences of Converſation, it is my preſent Deſign to recommend to your Imitation the Conduct which the *Pſalmiſt* here aſcribes to himſelf, both as 'tis itſelf a Part of Religion, and as an effectual Method to ſecure us in the true Profeſſion, and encourage and improve us in the Practice of it. In Order to this it will be neceſſary for us,

I. To aſcertain what Meaſure of Acquaintance or Familiarity is implied in this Notion of being a Companion. I ſhall then,

II. Re-

II. REPRESENT to you the Advantages that will attend our converſing with good Men. And.

III. THE Dangers and Inconveniencies we are expoſed to by a contrary Conduct, by being engaged in Familiarities with wicked Men.

I. THEN by being a Companion of good Men, may be meant either ſimply chooſing Perſons of Virtue and ſound Religion for our Friendſhips and Intimacies, or aſſiſting them in the Promotion of any pious or righteous Deſign: But the latter of theſe is ſo natural and almoſt neceſſary a Conſequence of the former, that we may comprehend them in one View; and underſtand the Reflection in my Text as adviſing us to confine our Converſations, as far as 'tis poſſible, to Men of this Character: And on the contrary, not to indulge our ſelves in any Confidence, or Familiarity with impious and prophane Men; but eſpecially not to communicate with them in their Vices, not to concur in any unjuſt, irreligious or unmerciful Action, and,

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as far as 'tis in our Power, to avoid all Intercourſe with them, and, as the Apoſtle commands, from ſuch to withdraw our ſelves. Not that we can imagine our ſelves prohibited all Manner of Converſation with wicked Men, for this would exclude us from performing the charitable Office of private Admonition or Inſtruction, the moſt ſucceſsful and almoſt the only Method we can take for their Reformation. Perſons of that Character generally keep themſelves out of the Reach of the publick Reproofs and Exhortations of the Miniſtry, or hear with ſuch Inattention or Contempt, as renders them of very little Effect to them, and conſequently will either not be applied to at all, or, if at all, yet without much Hopes of Succeſs; unleſs we are permitted ſo far to converſe with them, as the Diſcharge of this Office requires. This Duty indeed lies with ſpecial Obligations on the Miniſters of the Church, who are bound to watch over every Soul in their Flock, and to be inſtant with them as well in private Applications, and from Houſe to Houſe, as in the more publick Offices of Inſtruction.

But

But since the Prepossessions these Sort of Men have generally conceived against us of the Ministry, the Reproaches of Design or Impertinence, with which they are apt to treat us, give other good Christians, against whom they are less prejudiced, greater Probabilities of Success with them; 'tis to be hoped they will think themselves not only permitted, but obliged to this Sort of Friendship and Conversation with them.

But 'tis farther to be considered, in Abatement of this Restraint, that the great Mixture there is in the Business and Affairs of Life, the Nearness of Relation, or our Acquaintance with such Persons as may have these Occasions of Correspondence with wicked Men, will sometimes ingage us in necessary, and frequently in accidental Conversations with them. But these we cannot reprove as criminal, because they are altogether unavoidable. If we would absolutely decline the wicked, we must abandon human Society, must retire into a Desert, and, as the Apostle says, go out of the World. What we are forbid therefore is receiving such Persons

into

our Confidence and Intimacies, chuſing their Alliance for our Friendſhips, or their Company for the ordinary Entertainments of Converſation; theſe are Acts of Choice, and our own free Election; and to theſe therefore 'tis reaſonable the Prohibition ſhould extend. And even with Regard to that unavoidable Correſpondence with wicked Men, to which the Buſineſs or Accidents of the World may ſometimes oblige us, we are certainly under thus much Reſtraint, not to enter into any farther Familiarity than the Occaſion requires, and to take Care of our Behaviour under them, leſt we countenance the Sin, while we careſs the Sinner.

But I muſt obſerve one Inſtance, in which we are reſtrained from joining with wicked Men, even in ſuch Offices of common Life and civil Intercourſe, which might otherwiſe be indifferent and allowable; and that is when the Perſon is judicially ſeparated from the Communion of the Church; with ſuch an one 'tis the Apoſtle's expreſs Command *no not to eat:* And the Reaſons of this Prohibition are very obvious, becauſe the Deſign of this Sentence

tence will in a great Meaſure be defeated, unleſs the whole Congregation concurs in the Execution of it. For neither will the Sinner be reclaimed, nor others deterred from the like Commiſſions, nor the Infection of the Flock be prevented, if the Criminal be permitted the ſame Freedom and Correſpondence with Chriſtians, as before: His Puniſhment will have no outward Effect, that can lead him to reflect on his Sin; and when he meets with the ſame Countenance and Friendſhip from the reſt of the World as formerly, both he and thoſe he converſes with, will be encouraged to deſpiſe the Authority that inflicted it: And 'tis plain that under the Advantage of ſuch a Reception, he has juſt the ſame Opportunity of corrupting others, as he had before. It may perhaps be imagined that his Excluſion from the Ordinances of Religion, will anſwer all theſe Purpoſes: But *Firſt*, as to his corrupting others, unleſs he be depoſed from ſome publick Office in the Church, he is by this Part of his Sentence deprived of no Opportunity he had before. *Secondly*, as to himſelf, if he be a hardened Sinner, as it

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muſt be ſuppoſed he is whom private and more gentle Applications could not reclaim, this Sentence only excludes him from what he had very little Regard for before: Or if his Crime was Schiſm or Hereſy, his Puniſhment is no more than he voluntarily choſe. Now nothing can affect him in the Nature of a Puniſhment, but what deprives him of ſomething he eſteems and values, and the Loſs of which will render him uneaſy; when therefore he finds himſelf avoided and neglected by his Familiars, this affects him with a Penalty the moſt ſenſible to human Nature: This, if he has any Principle of Shame left in him, will awaken him to more ſerious Thoughts of his Condition, and give ſuch Conſiderations as are properly religious, a more eaſy Acceſs, and a more lively Impreſſion on his Mind. 'Tis therefore, I ſay, not only an Obedience which we owe to the Authority of our Superiors, and the expreſs Command of an Apoſtle in Support of that Authority, but a Charity which is due from us to the Souls of our Brethren, thus to reſtrain our Converſation from an excommunicated Perſon, and by

by ſuch a Behaviour as will expreſs Abhorrence and Deteſtation of his Crime; both deter others from the like Commiſſions, and humble him to ſuch a Senſe of his Guilt as will lead him to Repentance, and ſave his Spirit in the Day of the Lord *Jeſus*. The Meaſure of our Acquaintance or Familiarity thus limited, I proceed,

II. To repreſent the Advantages derived on us by obſerving theſe Limitations, and confining our Converſations to good Men.

As to the religious Reſtraint I laſt mentioned, the Interdiction we are under from the Society of Perſons cut off from the Church, and conſequently our Confinement to ſuch as perſevere in the Terms of its Communion, ſince this is expreſly enjoined us by a divine Command, we might aſſure our ſelves without further Enquiry, that the moſt beneficial Effects will attend our Compliance with it. But the Advantages intended in this Inſtitution are obvious to the leaſt Degree of Reflection: And even thoſe I have already ſuggeſted are ſo great, and ſo naturally reſult from it, that nothing farther need be added to convince

us of our Intereſt, as well as Duty in obſerving it. I ſhall therefore conſider, in a more general View, ſome common Advantages we may hope for while we confine our Converſation to Men of Virtue and Religion. And,

FIRST, I would recommend this Choice as an Evidence of our own Virtue. For 'twill always be preſumed, that Men aſſociate with Perſons of like Diſpoſitions with themſelves. It cannot well be imagined, how Friendſhip can long ſubſiſt between oppoſite Tempers and Inclinations: When Men are ſo widely different in their Sentiments and Principles, in their Purſuits and Averſions, as the Good and the Vicious, 'tis impoſſible but they muſt ſoon grow burdenſom and uneaſy to one another; thoſe Things which are the Mirth and Pleaſure of the one, provoke the Indignation and Abhorrence of the other; and under theſe perpetual Occaſions of Diſaſter, Familiarity muſt grow cold, and each be inclined to ſeek his Entertainment in more agreeable Company. And accordingly 'tis found in Fact and Experience, that the Senti-

Sentiments and Inclinations, the Virtues and Vices of Men, are what range and ſort out Mankind into their ſeveral Clubs and Societies. It will therefore, I ſay, be always and with Reaſon concluded, that he who herds with wicked Men, is himſelf of the ſame Character. Whatever Virtues may appear in him, they will be eſteemed an hypocritical Impoſture on the World; and in his more retired Pleaſures, he will be preſumed as much a Libertine as the reſt of his Company; and conſequently, we can by no other Conduct avoid this Appearance of Evil, and preſerve the Reputation of our Virtue, but by confining our Converſations to good Men. This Argument which diſſuades an Intimacy with wicked Men from its Effect on our Reputation, may perhaps ſeem rather prudential than religious. But if we reflect, what Scandal we give to many weak Men, by ſo offenſive a Conduct; how it unqualifies us for the Inſtruction or Reproof of others; how it corrupts our Example, and gives Countenance to the vicious and profane, we ſhall be convinced that this Motive is properly Chriſtian, and ought

to be regarded from Conſiderations of great Importance to Religion. But,

SECONDLY, Our aſſociating our ſelves with good Men, is not only a Proof and Evidence of our Virtue, but the moſt effectual Method both to retain and improve it. Our Advantage from the Converſation of good Men, may be conſidered more particularly with Reſpect to their Diſcourſe, and their Example. *The Mind of the Righteous* (ſays the *Pſalmiſt*) *will be exerciſed in Wiſdom, and his Mouth will be talking of Judgment.* From him we ſhall learn, and by juſt Arguments be confirmed in true Principles of Faith and Morality: The Maxims that govern his Conduct, are ſuch as equally tend to promote private and publick Happineſs; and even his Mirth is bounded by Innocence and Purity; and the Senſe of his own Duty will engage him to cultivate the ſame juſt Sentiments and good Diſpoſitions in thoſe he converſes with, to inſtruct their Ignorance, reform their Errors, and, as the Apoſtle ſays, *miniſter Grace unto the Hearers.* Perhaps, indeed, the gentle Admonitions where-

wherewith good Men will rebuke the Imperfections of their Friends, may be uneaſy to the Pride of ſome Tempers; but theſe *precious Balms* (as the *Pſalmiſt* calls them) are Freedoms which wiſe and virtuous Men will eſteem rather Favours than Affronts. Holy *David*, though a Prince, was ſenſible that his Failings and Miſcarriages would make this Conſequence inſeparable from his chuſing the Society of good Men: But yet rather than he would take Refuge with the Men that wrought Wickedneſs, he makes it his Requeſt to God, that *the righteous* ſhould *ſmite him friendly, and reprove him**. And indeed there is no ſurer Argument of a good Underſtanding, and a Chriſtian Diſpoſition, than being ſenſible of the Friendſhip of a proper Reproof. But the Inſtructions and Reproofs of good Men, can hardly fail of theſe beneficial Effects on thoſe who converſe with them, when we conſider how they are inforced by a correſpondent Example. When we find a Man preſcribe nothing to us but his own conſtant Practice, we can have no Suſpicion of Diſ-

* Pſal. cxli. 6.

guiſe or Inſincerity: He is himſelf what he deſires us to be, and therefore gives us the greateſt Security that he intends our Happineſs in the Methods of Life he adviſes, ſince he purſues his own by the ſame.

EXAMPLE is confeſſed to have this Advantage over all other Methods of Inſtruction, that it not only teaches us our Duty, but convinces us of the Poſſibility of our Imitation. When we ſee a Man of like Paſſions and Weakneſs with our ſelves, and no otherwiſe aſſiſted than we either are, or may be, going before us in the Paths of Duty, it confutes all lazy Pretences of Impoſſibility; it reproaches our Imperfection; and if we have any Thing generous in our Temper, it ſhames us into Emulation. Nay, I would obſerve farther, that the Example of a good Man is, generally ſpeaking, the beſt Direction we can follow in the Performance of our Duty: The moſt exact Rules and Precepts are ſubject to be miſunderſtood; ſome Capacities at leaſt will miſtake their Meaning; and though they ſincerely endeavour to obey, will act far from the Intention of

of thoſe who delivered them. But the Example of a wiſe and good Man aſcertains the Senſe of the Precept, and ſhews plainly how 'tis to be obeyed: And the meaneſt Capacity, when he ſees a Rule practicably applied before his Eyes, can no longer be at a Loſs how 'tis to be performed. It may be obſerved alſo under this Head, that Self-Love is a very partial Interpreter. We are apt to be fond of our Opinions and Practice, and perhaps without perceiving it to bend and accommodate the Rule in Favour to them: But when we apply it to the Actions of other Men, we judge with leſs Intereſt, and conſequently with more Impartiality; whence it often happens that the Notions of Duty which we form from the Example of others, is more correct and juſt than we derive from the Rule itſelf. To theſe Advantages of converſing with good Examples, we muſt add one which I think ſtill greater, and that is the Encouragement we receive in the Performance of our Duty. The Shame of being ſingular is a Weakneſs which has debauched the beſt and moſt ingenuous Diſpoſitions; but now by

a conſtant View of good Examples, we find that we are not alone, that we have Numbers enough on our Side to countenance us in our Profeſſion; and eſpecially when we ſee wiſe Men, Perſons of Character and Eſteem, Examples of Duty, we are convinced that Piety is no unreputable Qualification, and that we need not be aſhamed of our Virtue; it will confirm our Reſolutions againſt the Railleries or Reproaches of the Prophane, and give us Courage and Confidence in our Religion.

I MIGHT farther recommend the Converſation of good Men to our Choice, from Reaſons of Prudence and Diſcretion. As that while we confine our Intercourſe to Perſons of this Character, we are in no Danger of Treachery in our Friendſhips, of Fraud or Injuſtice in our Commerce: We have a Security firmer than that of Bonds and Covenants, in their Conſcience and Integrity: We are aſſured of a ready Aſſiſtance in all our Exigencies, from a Conviction of their own Duty: We have the Satisfaction of converſing with Men, whoſe Paſſions are under Government and Diſcipline;

pline; not to be affronted with Trifles, nor provoked to any unreaſonable Reſentment; difficultly moved, and eaſily appeaſed: Men who are juſt and good-natured out of Principle, in whoſe Converſation we are ſecured from the Slanders of the Malicious, the Envy of the Spiteful, the Cenſures of the Impertinent, and the Contempt of the Proud: And in general, ſince ſo great a Part of the Uneaſineſs we complain of in this World is derived on us by the Villainies and Paſſions of unrighteous Men, we can by no Conduct more probably ſecure our Happineſs, than by confining our Intercourſe to Men of Virtue and Religion. But my Deſign being chiefly to inſiſt on the religious Advantages attending this Choice of our Acquaintance, I only mention theſe Conſiderations as a collateral Motive, and go on to engage you to it,

THIRDLY, by repreſenting the Dangers and Inconveniencies we expoſe our ſelves to, by being Companions of wicked Men.

EVIL Communications (ſays the Apoſtle) *corrupt good Manners.* The beſt re-

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ſolved Virtue cannot long defend its Integrity, againſt the continual Solicitations of a vicious Acquaintance. As to our Principles, the natural Pride of Men will make them reſtleſs and uneaſy, till they get their Sentiments and Opinions received by thoſe they converſe with, and, till this is obtained, 'tis not Society, but endleſs Wrangling and Controverſy. And as to Practice, the Deſire we have to indear our ſelves to thoſe we converſe with, will inſenſibly engage us in the ſame Pleaſures and Averſions with them: And it muſt be obſerved, as a farther Circumſtance of our Danger, that the Looſe and Diſſolute are very induſtrious in communicating their Principles, and gaining Proſelytes to Sin. The natural Shame and Diffidence that attends Vice, makes them zealous to incourage themſelves by Numbers, and form a Party againſt Religion: 'Tis with Pride they ſurvey their increaſing Strength, and begin to think themſelves a Match for Virtue. But 'tis with more than ordinary Triumph they corrupt a Man of pious and virtuous Principles. It ſooths their Fears, and gives ſome Eaſe to their Scruples, to gain

gain a Convert who ſeemed to have all the Conviction that Religion could afford: This they are ready to look upon as a Determination on their Side, and deciſive of the Controverſy between Vice and Virtue: And this is a Conqueſt they never fail to attempt with the greateſt Application. For a virtuous Man, while he preſerves that Character, is uneaſy to their Converſation. They look upon him, as the wiſe Man deſcribes their Sentiments, *as grievous to their Eyes to behold*,* as one made to reprove their Thoughts, to upbraid them with their offending the Law, and object to their Infamy the Tranſgreſſions of their Education: And therefore they never fail of their moſt artful and indefatigable Addreſs to ſilence this impertinent Adviſer, whoſe Severity awes their Exceſſes, and reſtrains their Freedom. And alas! 'tis but too often and too eaſily they prevail. For though a well directed Converſation be one of the beſt Methods to ſecure and improve our Virtue, yet 'tis the Misfortune of our fallen State that this Principle acts with the greateſt Force in the worſt Application, and the Familiarity of wicked Men more ſucceſsfully debauch-

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* Wiſd. ii. 15.

es, than that of good Men reforms. For 'tis a Work of Labour and Affiduity to form and preſerve a virtuous Diſpoſition; 'tis a Plant not to be raiſed without Culture and Management, and requires Care and Attendance to give it Vigour, and defend it from a Thouſand Accidents that may make it miſcarry: But Vice is the natural Growth of our Corruption; remit but our Care and it ſoon roots itſelf, and ſpreads over the neglected Soil. How irreſiſtibly then muſt it prevail, when the Seeds of it are artfully ſown, and induſtriouſly cultivated?

WHAT Power leſs than an uncommon Meaſure of divine Grace can preſerve even a well inclined Temper from the Infection of a looſe and prophane Converſation, where Vice appears with the Advantages of Faſhion and Reputation, and Virtue, on the contrary, is traduced and ridiculed? If he behaves with that Sobriety and Reſerve, which his Religion requires from him; if he either reproves the immoral Freedoms, or but refuſes his Applauſe to the prophane Mirth of his Company, he is either quarrelled with for Impertinence, or reproach-

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ed for Affectation and Singularity. And how few Inſtances have we of a Courage, that can ſtand the Shock of being the Jeſt of his Familiars: Even Modeſty and good Manners will help to corrupt him, and good Nature itſelf will indanger his Virtue. In Sum; what Advantages can we expect, or rather what Conſequences are too terrible to be feared, from mixing in Converſations where Irreligion and Prophaneneſs, where a Defiance of all Rules, and a Contempt of all that is holy are the Principles, and Lewdneſs, Intemperance, and Vanity the Diverſions of the Company; where the modeſt Sinner is taught to ridicule Providence, Conſcience, and Duty, and diſpute himſelf into Infidelity: His Reluctances to Diſobedience will gradually wear off under theſe Impreſſions, and Sin become every Day more familiar, and leſs formidable: He will advance from one Degree of Wickedneſs and Impenitence to another, till at laſt he becomes hardened without Remorſe or Concern, and paſt Hopes of Recovery. Give me Leave then to make ſome ſhort Application of what has been offered on this Subject,

ject, to the common Occaſions of Life and Practice.

If then our Virtue and Integrity have ſo cloſe a Dependence on the Choice of our Friends and Familiars; if the Society of good Men be ſo neceſſary to direct and confirm us in Duty, and the Converſation of wicked Men ſo deſtructive of our Principles and Morality; as we value the Favour of God and good Men here, and the ineſtimable Rewards of Duty hereafter, let us with our utmoſt Care make the important Choice, and let us remember that we are chuſing Vice or Virtue.

This Caution indeed was always neceſſary, even in the pureſt and moſt virtuous Ages; but it becomes us to recommend it with more than ordinary Warmth and Concern, when the Numbers, the Figure, and the Inſolence of wicked Men have almoſt eſtabliſhed Sin as a Faſhion; when every Enemy of Religion appears openly and undiſguiſed; when Infidelity, Schiſm and Hereſy are eſteemed Arguments of good Senſe and a ſuperior Underſtanding, and Vice and Prophaneneſs are the polite Entertainments of the World. So melan-

choly

choly a Proſpect ſhould inſpire us with a more than ordinary Zeal to oppoſe ſome Stop to the riſing Torrent, and check this overflowing of Ungodlineſs; and, as the moſt effectual Remedy that can be applied, to deter others and withdraw our ſelves from the Converſation of wicked Men. By this alone we ſhall be able to fix a Mark of Shame and Ignominy on Vice, and recover its juſt Honour and Eſteem to Virtue. And this Conduct is the more neceſſary in private Chriſtians, becauſe it has been one deplorable Effect of theſe Corruptions, and the miſerable Confuſion of our religious Diviſions, to bring the publick Diſcipline of the Church into a ſad, and, 'tis to be feared, irretrievable Decay: Good Men ſhould be therefore the more zealous to ſupply this unavoidable Defect, to diſtinguiſh ſuch Perſons as the Cenſures of the Church (if duly executed) would exclude from their Society, by Marks of Abhorrence and Deteſtation: And, as far as their private Converſation reaches, excommunicate the Enemies of Virtue and Religion.

THANKS

THANKS be to God, the World is not yet ſo bad, that we need fear a Solitude from the Practice; the Righteous are not ſo failed from the Earth, but we may ſtill find Men of Virtue and Piety enow for the Intimacies of Friendſhip, and the Entertainments of Converſation: Or whatever we may want in the Numbers of our Acquaintance will be abundantly made up to us in their Value. Nay even this Complaint will every Day leſſen upon our Hands; the Credit and Honour we ſhall retrieve to Virtue by this Conduct, will irreſiſtibly gain it Converts, and we ſhall have at the ſame Time the Satisfaction of making and enjoying good Men.

To conclude: Let neither the Power nor Quality of the Great, or the Wit of the Pleaſant; let neither Intereſt, Vanity, nor Fear prevail with us, to court the Favour, to flatter the Vices, or applaud the Prophaneneſs of wicked Men. Virtue and Religion, Heaven and eternal Happineſs, are not Trifles to be given up in a Compliment, or ſacrificed to a

Jeſt.

Jeſt. And if we are either aſhamed or afraid to aſſert the Cauſe of Religion, and give countenance to the Servants of *Chriſt* here, of us ſhall the Son of Man be aſhamed, before his Father and the holy Angels.

SERMON XI.

The great Advantages of good Discourse, and the Mischiefs of the contrary.

EPH. iv. 29.

Let no corrupt Communication proceed out of your Mouth, but that which is good to the Use of edifying, that it may minister Grace unto the Hearers.

IN Application of another Scripture, I endeavoured to represent the Obligations we are under to chuse good Men for our Friendships and Intimacies, what Limits this Duty admits

of, and what Advantages would attend our Compliance with it. The Words I have now read to you lead us into an Argument of great Affinity with that Subject, and direct us to the Matter that ſhould employ our common Converſations: A Direction indeed abſolutely neceſſary to render the Choice of our Acquaintance, I before recommended, effectual to the Advantages propoſed from it. The Matter of our Converſation comprehends that Share of our Words, or Actions, by which we ſupport our common Intercourſe one with another. As to Actions, becauſe they are not expreſly included in this Direction of the Apoſtle, I ſhall only obſerve in few Words, that they muſt be limited by Virtue and Innocence. Actions of civil Buſineſs are not only permitted under this Character of Innocence, but, when governed by Juſtice and Honeſty, oblige us as neceſſary Duties; but in Actions of pure Diverſion, nothing farther is to be conſidered, than whether they are innocent: And with this Reſtriction, they are not only conſiſtent with the Sobriety of the Goſpel, but in many Caſes uſeful, if not neceſſary,

necessary, to ease our Cares, and relax our Mind from the Fatigue of intent Applications, and recruit our Spirits for a more vigorous Return to Duty. Thus Feasts have been the unreproved Practice of the greatest Examples of Piety, in all Ages; and our Lord himself honoured them more than once by his Presence, and added to the Provisions of one of them by a Miracle: And as to the Amusements of Play, while they go no farther than a Diversion, it must be too great Severity absolutely to condemn them. But then these Indulgences are abused, when our Feasts, either by their Excess or too great Frequency, break in upon our Temperance: When Play, either by our too constant or too long Engagement in it, becomes like an Employment or Profession; or by our too great Intention on it, betrays us to Passion or Avarice, and rather tires than relieves our Mind. When Diversions are either in their Nature, or by such prevailing Abuses as cannot well be separated from them, rendered dangerous to our Virtue; when they expose us to the Influence of evil Examples, to the Temptation of Op-

portunity, and all the Provocations that can ſolicite Men to Lewdneſs, or Intemperance; 'tis not only unſafe, but ſinful to join in them: With ſuch unfruitful Works of Darkneſs, no virtuous or good Man will have Fellowſhip; but rather with Abhorrence avoid them, and with a Chriſtian Zeal reprove them. But I go on to that Branch of Converſation which the Apoſtle here expreſly directs, our Words and Diſcourſe. This is a Part of our Converſation of much greater Extent, and conſequently liable to more Irregularities, than our Actions either are or can be. For our Actions are confined to the preſent Objects, either the Entertainments of the Company, or the Perſons who compoſe it; but our Diſcourſe is no more confined than our Thoughts, extends to all Subjects, preſent or abſent, paſt or future, and may be criminally employed on all, and therefore requires much greater Care to keep it within the Bounds of Innocence and Virtue. The Apoſtle in the Words of my Text has given us a general, but very full Direction for our Behaviour in this Particular. In which we obſerve,

I. A

I. A PROHIBITION from ſuch Subjects or Expreſſions, as may ſhew a corrupt Diſpoſition in our ſelves, or tend to infuſe it into others.

II. A POSITIVE Direction to ſuch a Communication, as is agreeable to the Spirit of the Goſpel. Such as *is good to the Uſe of edifying, that it may miniſter Grace to the Hearers.* I ſhall conſider each of theſe diſtinctly, and then,

III. EXHORT you with the Apoſtle to conform to this excellent Rule, by repreſenting the Advantages of a Converſation ſo directed.

I. UNDER the forbidden Head, we are to rank all prophane, irreligious, or immodeſt Diſcourſes; all that may diſcover or encourage a Contempt, or even a ſlight Regard to Things holy: (For all theſe come under the Character of Blaſphemy.) God and his Service, and whatſoever relates to it, are Subjects of too ſerious Importance

to be treated with Mirth and Levity; ought always to command our Respect, and never be mentioned without Awe and Reverence: His holy Name must not be appealed to on Trifles, but be reserved sacred for the most weighty and solemn Occasions of Life. Our Assertions and Negations should be Yea and Nay, for whatsoever is more than these, in ordinary Conversation, we are told is Sin. Neither can filthy Communication, *i. e.* lewd or immodest Subjects or Expressions, be esteemed proper Entertainments for the Mirth of a Christian. These are Subjects which the Apostle commands should *not be so much as named among us, as becometh Saints**. And indeed, he who can treat Offences so provoking to God as Jests and Trifles, must have very little Sense of the Heinousness of them, and be under very slender Restraints from the Commission of them.

ANOTHER Sort of Discourses I would here mention as forbidden by the Apostle, are such as are injurious to our Neighbour. The former Offences indeed are so far reducible to this Head, as they tend to introduce

* Eph. v. 3.

troduce Libertinism, and corrupt the Manners of Men, and consequently injure them in their most valuable Properties, their Virtue and Religion. But the Discourses I would here more expressly dissuade, are such as affect our Neighbour with more immediate and direct, though, perhaps, not more dangerous Injuries; such as Reproaches, which provoke the Passions of the present, or Slanders which traduce the Reputation of the absent. When we sport our selves with the Imperfections or Misfortunes of our Brethren; when we entertain our Company with Scandal or Detraction; when we either asperse the Merit, or aggravate the Faults of our Neighbour, we are guilty of an Offence against this Prohibition of the Apostle: These are Effects of those unsociable Passions, that Anger and Malice, he excludes; Liberties forbidden our Conversation, and irreconcileable to the Temper of Christianity. And to these we must add, lastly, lying one to another; a Vice subversive of the very Ends and Design of Conversation, the most odious to the God of Truth, and equally the Contempt and Abhorrence of Men.

Men. 'Tis true, the greater Part of these Irregularities may seem provided against by the common Rules of Decency and good Manners, and sufficiently discouraged by the Neglect and Reproach they expose Men to; but 'tis evident, that in a general Corruption of Manners, these Restraints are in many Instances without Effect; the Notions of Decency are then changed, and every Vice becomes reputable and applauded, which is agreeable to the prevailing Taste and Corruption of the Age. The Laws of the Gospel therefore are the only standing, immutable Rule of Morality; and the Penalties affixed by God to the Breach of those Laws, the only Guards that can effectually restrain Men within the true Bounds of Decency and Virtue. But I proceed,

II. To the positive Part of the Apostle's Direction. The Subjects that should employ our Conversation, we are told are such as are *good to the Use of edifying*, and which may *minister Grace to the Hearers. Let your Speech be always with Grace, seasoned with Salt**, that is, such as may shew

* Col. iv. 6.

ſhew forth the Grace of God dwelling in us, be an Evidence of the Soundneſs of our own Hearts, and be of Efficacy to preſerve thoſe we converſe with from Corruption. Now we ſhall comply with this Precept, and may hope for theſe good Effects from our Diſcourſe, when we entertain our Company with Obſervations either on the Mercies, or Judgments of God, or the Works of his Providence; when we encourage one another in a firm Adherence to Duty, either by the Arguments and Proſpects of Religion, or by the Examples of thoſe who have gone before us in Perſeverance: When we inſtruct the ignorant, direct the doubtful, commend the virtuous, or reprove the Sinner. In ſhort, as God and our Duty ſhould be always before the Eyes, and have a Share in the Thoughts and Regards of a Chriſtian, in every Period and Hour of his Life; ſo they muſt by no Means be thrown by for ſo large a Proportion of our Time, as is employed in Converſation with one another. On the contrary, our Saviour has aſſured us that theſe Subjects muſt enter into our moſt familiar Intercourſe,

and

and has left it as a ſtanding Rule, by which our Virtue and Grace ſhould be judged of, *That a good Man out of the good Treaſure of his Heart will bring forth good Things, and the wicked Evil; for out of the Abundance of the Heart the Mouth ſpeaketh* *. Where a Zeal for the Honour of God and the Happineſs of Mankind is the governing Paſſion of a Man's Heart, the Effect of it will naturally appear in ſuch Diſcourſes as tend to promote theſe Ends; and as there is ſcarce any Incident of Life and Converſation, but what is capable of being applied to ſome Purpoſe of Morality or Religion; ſo a Mind thus diſpoſed will immediately perceive and improve the Occaſion, and be fond in engaging the Company in ſuch Reflections, as to itſelf are moſt agreeable and entertaining.

Not that I would exclude the common Accidents of Life, and much leſs the Buſineſs and Affairs of it; nay, nor even Things of a pleaſant and divertive Nature, ſo they are modeſt and innocent, from being ſometimes the Subject of Converſation. For as with Reſpect to Actions, though we are commanded to pray always,

* Luke vi. 45.

always, and the like; yet the Rule is not to be so understood as to forbid our Attendance on necessary Business, or sometimes on the Diversions of Life: So tho' this Precept of St. *Paul* for religious Discourse, be delivered without any Reserve for Business or Entertainment; yet the Necessities of human Life will oblige us to infer, that the Apostle left it to the common Sense of Mankind to make the Exception: And all we are to conclude from it is, that Virtue and Religion should be Subjects always in our View, and what we should chiefly labour to promote, in every Part of our Conversation. When we are engaged on indifferent Subjects, we converse only as Men; but when the Truths or Duties of Religion are our Argument, we then appear in a higher Character; we then converse as Christians, as Men whose Conversation is in Heaven, as Persons of great and generous Pursuits, and whose Ambition is raised above the little Prospects of this World. But let us proceed,

III. To

III. To what I principally intended in this Diſcourſe, to inforce this Exhortation of the Apoſtle, by obſerving the Advantages of a Converſation ſo directed.

I KNOW nothing can be more juſtly charged with the Slight and Contempt which is put upon Religion by ſome, and that Coldneſs and Indifference with which it is entertained by others, and in general that viſible Decay of true Zeal and Piety we obſerve and lament in the World, than the Diſuſe of ſerious and inſtructive Diſcourſe in Converſation. 'Tis a very great, and, in its Conſequences, a very fatal Point gained by the Libertine, when he could not prevail on Men of Virtue and Sobriety wholly to give up their Religion, yet to perſuade them to confine it to the Temple or the Cloſet; to limit it to ſet Times, to certain and thoſe narrow Bounds, out of which it ſhould be improper and ridiculous. For when once Men had baniſhed Religion from ſo large a Share of their Time, as is taken up in Converſation, the more ſolemn Returns of it not only grew burdenſome and diſaffecting from the Intermiſſion;

termission; but the vicious and prophane Liberties, which assumed its Place in Discourse, left such a Stain on the Minds of Men, as indisposed them for the good Effects of our publick Assemblies; and by Degrees introduced in some a total Disregard of all Religion, and in many debased the Remains of it with such a Mixture of vicious Habits and Principles, as rendered it no better than a superficial Pretence, unacceptable to God, and ineffectual to the great Ends proposed in the Gospel. The first therefore and principal Benefit we may expect from restoring Religion to our Conversations, is the reviving the declining Sense, and retrieving the Power of it; and that this Conduct may be as effectual to the Reformation, as the contrary has been to the Corruption of the World.

THAT these are no unreasonable Hopes will appear, if we consider the peculiar Advantages by which this Application is fitted to instruct our Ignorance, correct our Errors, and improve our Inclinations to Duty, more than either our publick Instructions, or the private Applications of our Retirements, which, if we exclude

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Religion from our Converſations, are the only Methods left for theſe Effects. As to publick Inſtructions, 'tis obſervable that what we hear in Converſation has this general Advantage over ſet Diſcourſes, that in the latter we are apt to attend more to the Beauty and Elegance of the Compoſure, than to the Matter deliver'd; to look upon them as the Effects of Labour and Art, and to conſider our ſelves rather as Judges of the Skill and Abilities of the Preacher, than as receiving Directions for our Life and Actions. Theſe are indeed great Abuſes of ſuch excellent Means of Grace and ſpiritual Improvement, but ſuch as I am afraid will never wholly be removed, while Men have the common Paſſions and Vanities of human Nature about them: But now the Inſtructions we receive in Converſation, are infinitely leſs ſubject to theſe Abuſes; we are there in no Expectation of an accurate Performance; the Perſon who ſpeaks is not conſidered as diſtinguiſhed by any Station or Office, but as upon a Level with the reſt of the Company, and prepared as well to receive as to give Inſtruction: And as every one is permitted

permitted and expected to reply in his Turn, the Attention is unavoidably engaged to the Matter and Argument, and not diverted by fruitless Criticisms on the Skill or Address of the Orator. 'Tis to be observed farther in this Comparison, that publick Instructions are liable to be mistaken, or not understood by the Hearers. That which is plain to one Capacity, may be intricate and unintelligible to another. He has a great many Objections to propose, Doubts to be resolved, and Questions to be answered, before he can apprehend or submit to the Force of the Argument. Now in Conversation we have Opportunity of satisfying all our Scruples, of having what is obscure to us explained, what is doubtful confirmed, and being delivered from all Possibility of Error or Mistake. Neither can our private Applications to Reading or Meditation supply these Defects in our publick Instructions, but are liable to the same Inconveniencies that they are. An Author cannot answer our Objections, or be more particular in the Explication of his Meaning, than he that speaks from the Pulpit. But I go on

to obſerve farther, that in one very important Part of Inſtruction, the reforming the Looſe and Vicious, private Admonitions are without Compariſon the moſt effectual Method; for publick Reproofs of Sin delivered from the Pulpit, are, and for many neceſſary Reaſons ought to be, general, though by this they loſe a great deal of their Effect to particular Men; for even well diſpoſed Minds are contented to apply very little of them to themſelves: But in private Converſations the Application may be more perſonal; the Reproofs when ſo directed come home, and cannot be declined; the Sinner is, as it were, taken in the Fact, and cannot avoid the Charge. Nay, if it be conſidered how ſeldom Men of wicked Principles and diſſolute Lives can be prevailed on to attend our publick Aſſemblies, and by how many ſtrong Prejudices their Ears are ſtopped, and their Hearts hardened againſt any Impreſſion from what is there delivered, we can have very little Hope of reclaiming them by this Method of Inſtruction. But if Religion were once generally introduced into our Converſations, as they could not avoid

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ſometimes hearing their Duty and their Faults, ſo the Friendſhip of the Company would give the Application a favourable Acceſs to their Minds, unobſtructed by thoſe Averſions which prepoſſeſs them againſt the publick Miniſtry. To which let me here add, that if Religion were reſtored to its proper Share in our Converſations, that ſecret Confidence of the Sinner that others are as wicked as himſelf, though better concealed, and which perhaps is the greateſt Support to Infidelity, would be entirely taken off. He has been taught to ridicule our publick Aſſemblies, as Things only of Form and Faſhion, as a Trade in the Preacher, and either Cuſtom or Hypocriſy in his Hearers: And in theſe Sentiments he has been very much confirmed, by obſerving that at other Times they can forget their Piety, and appear as little confined in their Mirth as the reſt of the Company: From hence he has been tempted to believe, that they had really as little Religion as himſelf, but only leſs Courage to own their Infidelity. But when ſuch a Man ſhall obſerve us at all Times the ſame, and

that we carry our Religion always about us, he muſt acquit us of Diſguiſe and Hypocriſy, and be convinced that we are in earneſt in our Profeſſion, that our Virtue is the fixt Principle and conſtant Habit of our Minds. And when he ſees Men of as fair Titles to Senſe and Reputation as himſelf, behave themſelves as ſeriouſly convinced of their Duty, it muſt ſhock his Infidelity, and make him ſuſpect his Confidence, and think it worth his while to re-examine the Arguments of Religion, and conſider more attentively whether he be not miſtaken.

To cloſe this Argument: In Converſation the Tempers of Men are open and acceſſible, their Attention is awake, and their Minds diſpoſed to receive the ſtrongeſt Impreſſions; and what is ſpoken is generally more affecting, more appoſite to particular Occaſions; and though leſs accurate, yet expreſſed with more Life and Spirit, than is uſually found in the Compoſures of the Cloſet. And 'tis Pity, Opportunities ſo improveable to the greateſt and moſt important Purpoſes of Religion, ſhould be either thrown away on

Trifles,

Trifles, or abused to the Promotion of Vice and Immorality; and the Things which might be so much to our Advantage, be made the Occasion of our falling. Give me Leave then in Conclusion of what I have offered, to exhort and intreat you with the Apostle, to let your Communication be agreeable to this excellent Rule he has here prescribed us.

Let us then reflect that we are Christians, that we are called by the Name of the Son of God, and baptized into an irreconcileable Enmity with Sin, the World, and the Devil: That therefore neither the Suggestions of our spiritual Enemy, nor the Insinuations of the World, should prevail with us to do or comply with any Thing, how customary soever, which may prejudice the Interest we have sworn to promote, and reflect Dishonour on our holy Profession. If either the Wit, the Figure, or the Friendship of wicked Men can engage us to assist or acquiesce in immoral Freedoms of a vicious Conversation; if either the Fear of offending, or the Care of pleasing Men, can make us applaud the Lewd, or laugh with the A-

theiſt; if we can ſit tamely and hear Fools make a Mock at Sin, affront the God whom we ſerve, and vilify the Religion by which we hope to be ſaved; be we aſſured that by whatever mannerly Names we may palliate the Offence, this is not Modeſty but Cowardice, and a traiterous Deſertion of our Allegiance to *Chriſt*; that 'tis crucifying the Son of God afreſh, and putting him to an open Shame: A Crime for which we ſhall one Day be told we are unworthy of him.

LET us further reflect, that Religion is not the Buſineſs of ſome Fits only and Intervals of our Life, to be taken up at certain Days and Hours, and laid aſide for the reſt of our Time; but a Syſtem of Precepts to be regarded in all our Conduct, to direct us in publick and private, in our Buſineſs and Diverſions, in our Retirements and Converſations; and that all our Thoughts, Words, and Actions, ſhould either promote, or, at leaſt, be conſiſtent with our Obſervance of theſe Rules.

LET us remember, that God is preſent in all our Aſſemblies, that he remarks and treaſures up againſt the Day of our Account

count every Word and Expression, and every Circumstance of our Behaviour in them. *By your Words* (says our Saviour) *you shall be justified, and by your Words you shall be condemned.* And, if every idle Word shall be strictly accounted for at the Tribunal of *Christ*, where shall the Dissolute and Prophane, the Liar, the Slanderer, and the Malicious appear? And lastly, let it not be thought that Religion is too barren or too melancholy a Subject for the Entertainment of a Christian. 'Tis indeed a Stranger to those Follies, which usually pass for the Diversions of Company. It affords nothing to flatter the corrupt Passions, amuse the Impertinence, or sport with the Vanity of Men. But the Subjects it offers us, as they are great and noble in the Theory, and every Way suited to the Dignity of our Understanding; so every Step we take in the Consideration of them, discovers so wise and so affectionate Concern in God for our Happiness, and opens such animating Views to our Faith, as must fill the Mind with a manly and rational Pleasure, a Joy unspeakable and

full of Glory. And if Discourses on these Subjects are burdensome or insipid to Men, 'tis a strong Suspicion their Lives are such as render Religion and Futurity uneasy Prospects to their Fears. 'Tis no Wonder indeed if wicked Men prefer the light Flashes of a wanton Mirth, which for a while suspend Reflection and hide the Sinner from himself, to such Discourses as awaken Conscience, and prophesy no Good concerning them, but only Evil continually. Or if Men of Virtue are at any Time guilty of so much Weakness, as to appear displeased with a serious and instructive Conversation, it cannot be from an Aversion to the Argument; for 'tis impossible they should really be offended with such Subjects, as are the great Entertainment of their Retirement: But it must proceed from too great a Concern for the Uneasiness of the Company, and want of Courage to oppose a corrupt and unreasonable Custom. But if Men had Resolution enough to attempt it, these foolish Discouragements would soon be removed. If good Men with the Liberty of an honest Zeal opposed and reproved all prophane

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or immodeſt Freedoms in Converſation, Veneration and Reſpect would attend them, and Religion would ſoon improve itſelf into a Faſhion. The Libertine would retire to the Stews, and Prophaneneſs be confined to the Brothel. Joy, and Peace, and Eſteem would bleſs the Dwellings of the Righteous; and the Purity and Holineſs of his Converſation here, would prepare him for that heavenly Society, into which nothing unclean ſhall enter.

SERMON

SERMON XII.

The great Duty of redeeming Time, and the Danger of neglecting it.

EPH. V. 16.

Redeeming the Time because the Days are evil.

IN the preceeding Parts of this Epiſtle, the Apoſtle reminds the *Epheſians* of the Guilt and Miſery of their former unconverted Eſtate, when they were Aliens from the Commonwealth of *Iſrael*, dead in Treſpaſſes and Sins, having no Hope, and without

without God in the World. This Review he makes Uſe of, as an Argument of great Force to quicken them in the Improvement of thoſe Advantages, to which the Mercy of God had called them by the Goſpel. They were now the Children of Light, had a clear Proſpect of Happineſs and Immortality opened to their Faith, and were directed to the Duties by which they might attain it. It therefore highly concerned them to reflect, how great Obligations both the Memory of their paſt Miſconduct, and their preſent Advantages laid on them to act as new Creatures, to walk with Care and Circumſpection, not as Fools who trifle away Life in a thoughtleſs Security, but as wiſe Men who have the nobleſt and moſt important End in View, and with the greateſt Attention watch every Opportunity that may be improved to the Attainment of it, and retrieve, as far as they are able, every miſpent or unprofitable Hour which has ſlipped from them. And to ſtrengthen the Influence of theſe Reflections on their paſt and preſent Time, he carries their View alſo forward, and obſerves to them, that the

the Days were evil, that the Prospect before them was full of Danger and Temptation, and therefore there was no Time to be lost in the Application he recommended, but they should immediately set about the grand Work of redeeming their Time.

THAT this comprehensive Precept may have its due Influence on us, it will be of Use to us to consider,

I. THE Extent and Import of it.

II. The Motives which recommend it to our Observance. And,

1. THIS Precept in the first View of the Expression carries a Regard to Time past, and directs us to retrieve, as far as we are able, our former Miscarriages.

2. WITH great Care and Attention to improve the present Opportunities of Life, to set a due Value upon our Time, and not suffer it to pass unprofitably from us.

3. To be provident for the future, and with

with wise Resolution to guard against every Thing that may lead us into Misapplications of it.

1. THIS Precept admonishes us to regain and retrieve the Time past. Time, indeed, in a natural Sense is irrecoverable, the Moment that is but just fled by us it is impossible for us to recall: But in a moral Sense we may be said to regain or redeem our Time that is past, when we correct the Mistakes of our former Conduct, and repair the Damages we may have received from it. And this, blessed be God, through the Mercies of the Gospel, is very much in our Power: By a sincere Repentance, and a more vigorous Application to Duty, the Stains we have contracted by Sin may be washed out, the Penalties we have incurred be averted from us, and the Innocence we have lost and forfeited be regained. This inestimable Privilege *Christ* has purchased for us. He has paid down the Price of this Redemption of our Time; and if we comply with the Terms of the Contract he has made for us, if by a sincere Sorrow and Contrition

Contrition for our paſt Offences, and a ſteddy Reſolution of new Life, we qualify our ſelves for the Favour, the Veracity of God has aſſured it to us. By theſe Applications and theſe only, 'tis in our Power to retrieve the Years we have ſpent in Vanity, and revive our Title to Happineſs. But then this implies,

2. THAT we uſe our utmoſt Care and Diligence to improve the preſent Opportunities of Life, and not ſuffer a Day to paſs unprofitably by us. For the Way to regain the paſt Time is, to make a double Uſe of the preſent. If he to whom ten Talents were committed has ſquandered away five, he is concerned to make a double Improvement of the Remainder, if he would give a juſt Account to his Maſter. Every Moment muſt be precious in his Eyes, every Advantage it offers be attended to and cultivated, and every Danger it brings with it be guarded againſt with the greateſt Circumſpection. Should we apply this Precept only to thoſe who are concerned to recover Time they have loſt, it would doubtleſs extend to the whole Race of Mankind. For who is there ſo

righteous

righteous among us, as to be able to reflect even on one Day of his Life, in which he has done nothing which he ought not to have done, or left nothing undone which he ought to have done. But let him who is most without Concern for the Days that are past remember, that *sufficient unto the present is the Evil thereof* *. The Duties that every Hour brings with it, the Dangers and Temptations that attend it, will minister full Employment for our greatest Vigilance: And he who makes the best Improvement of his Time, will find he has none to spare. Not that the Duties of Religion, strictly so called, require so intire a Devotion of our Time, as to allow none to be otherwise employed. The proper Business of every ones peculiar Station must have a large Allotment made to it; and he who conducts himself in the common Affairs of Life according to the Rules prescribed by Religion, is at that Time obeying God in Duties the most acceptable to him. Indeed as a great Part of our Sins consist in some Irregularities attending the ordi-

* Matth. vi. 34.

nary

nary Purſuits of Life, ſo our Reformation muſt appear not in our laying thoſe Employments aſide, but purſuing them within the Boundaries of Duty. Nay, ſome Part of our Time may lawfully and innocently be engaged in Actions purely divertive. Some Indulgence muſt be made for the Recruit and Refreſhment both of Body and Mind, which under long Attention are apt to ſink and grow unactive, and loſe that Vigour and Chearfulneſs, which are neceſſary to fit them for Duty: And theſe Intermiſſions, if moderately uſed, and properly choſen, will be allowed us by God in the Account of our Time. But when Diverſion is made the Buſineſs and Study of Life, when it ingroſſes either the whole or the greater Part of our Time, though the Actions choſen be in themſelves never ſo innocent, yet the Exceſs will render them criminal: And the tendereſt Reflection we can make on a Life ſo ſpent, is that 'tis one great Blank, which though not blotted and deformed with Sin, is yet without any of thoſe Characters of Grace or Virtue, to which the Promiſe of Happineſs is made. But as it concerns us care-

fully to improve the present Time, so is it,

3. Our Duty to be provident for the future, and wisely to guard against whatever may lead us into Misapplications of it. He who at present stands, is cautioned by the Apostle *to take heed lest he fall*; the Difficulties and Temptations which attend our Course will more easily be born or avoided, if with prudent Foresight we arm our selves against them. And in this Conduct of spiritual Wisdom, we shall be very much assisted by reflecting often on our past Miscarriages, by observing what are the Sins that most easily beset us, by what Illusions they have prevailed, and what Circumstances of Life have most usually led us into them. By such a Review we shall be enabled to discern and strengthen our Weaknesses with good Resolutions, and so to dispose and order our future Conversation, as may render us least exposed to the Occasions of our falling. And of equal Use will it be to look also forward, to consider what Evil the next Day may probably bring forth, and with wise Presumption

ſumption of the Enemy prepare and fortify our ſelves againſt our Conflict with him. If we thus guard our future, and thus carefully improve our preſent Time, we ſhall aſſuredly redeem all that we have loſt, and lay up in Store a good Foundation againſt the Day of Neceſſity. I go on then,

II. To conſider the Motives and Inducements which recommend this Conduct to us.

As the Precept in the firſt Intention of it carries a Retroſpect to Time paſt, ſo the Firſt Argument from which the Apoſtle recommends the Obſervance of it, is taken from that Review. When we reflect on our former Tranſgreſſions, that we have provoked the Author of our Being, on whoſe Pleaſure all our Happineſs depends, to whoſe Bounty we owe thoſe very Faculties by the Abuſe of which we have offended him, what Shame and Indignation muſt it raiſe in our Breaſt, what Zeal to retrieve the Miſcarriage, and by the moſt vigorous Application to Duty to attone for our paſt Ingratitude? And when

we recollect the infinite Danger to which we have been exposed, that we have perhaps for many Years walked upon the Edge of a Precipice, while nothing but the slender Thread of a human Life has held us up from sinking into endless Misery; with what trembling Eagerness should we seize the important Present, and labour to rescue our selves from this State of Terror? These Reflections on our past Miscarriages the Apostle inforces

SECONDLY, by reminding us of the present Graces and Indulgencies vouchsafed us, for the Improvement of which we are accountable to God. 'Tis an Instance of Mercy which demands the utmost Returns of the Sinner, that the divine Compassion has hitherto spared him, and not cut him off in the midst of his Iniquity; that he has given him one Day more to provide for his Salvation, and flee from the Wrath to come. But his Gratitude must be under still farther Obligations, when he reflects on the various Means of Grace that are offered him; the clear Light and Direction to Duty which he enjoys; the noble

ble Encouragements propoſed to his Obedience, the many Calls of God by his Word, by his Miniſters, and by the ſecret Whiſpers of his Spirit, to cloſe with theſe Overtures and be ſaved. How ſore a Burden muſt it add to our Account, if we are unprofitable under ſo many Applications? How ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo great Salvation? To the Redemption of the paſt, by a due Improvement of the preſent Time, and a wiſe Proviſion for the future, we are farther perſuaded by the Apoſtle from this Conſideration, that the Days are Evil. This Reflection might, perhaps, eſpecially regard the Difficulties and Diſtreſſes, to which the early Profeſſion of Chriſtianity was expoſed: But ſurely there is no Age of the Church, to which this Argument may not be applied in a very perſuaſive Senſe. Difficulties and Temptations will never be wanting in the Proſpect of Chriſtians, which will require their greateſt Care and Attention to guard againſt them. They have an Adverſary ſtrong and ſubtil, whoſe Malice will never ceaſe to attempt their Subverſion, againſt whom our utmoſt Pre-

caution and the moſt powerful Weapons in the Armory of God are repreſented as Defence little enough to enable us to ſtand. And if at the ſame Time we conſider the Number of wicked Men in the World, with what Aſſiduity they are ever labouring to corrupt our Religion, and enſnare our Virtue; ſome to pervert the Faith by Hereſies, others to break the Communion of Saints by Schiſm, and others by libertine Principles and vicious Examples to debauch our Morals, we ſhall conclude that this Argument of the Apoſtle will at all Times deſerve our Attention, and inforce the Precept 'tis here applied to. Our whole Life indeed in this World may properly be deſcribed under this Character of evil Days; a State of Danger, Temptation, and Infirmity; a Pilgrimage through a difficult and perilous Wilderneſs, which requires us to attend diligently to our Way; if we have gone wrong, to redeem the Miſtake; if we have loitered, to quicken our Pace, and make the moſt of the preſent Opportunity; and at the ſame Time to look carefully forward, and with wiſe

Circum-

Circumſpection guard againſt the numerous Evils which on every Side beſet us.

THE ſeveral Duties implied in this Precept of redeeming our Time, and the Arguments uſed by the Apoſtle to recommend it to our Obſervance, I beg Leave farther to inforce by theſe general Conſiderations.

1. THESE Duties cannot but appear of infinite Concern to us, when we reflect how ſhort and uncertain our Time is. This may, perhaps, be thought ſo trite and obvious a Reflection, that none can want to be reminded of it: And indeed in the Affairs and Purſuits of this Life, it ſeems to be enough attended to. The Man intent on the World need not be perſuaded to make haſte to be rich, nor the ambitious to ſeize the firſt Opportunity of advancing himſelf to Honour: And the great Maxim of the Libertine is, *let us eat and drink*, and enjoy as much Pleaſure as we can to Day, *for to Morrow we die.* And yet in the Purſuit of our immortal Intereſts, where it ought to have the greateſt Influence, this obvious indiſputable Truth is little re-

garded by us. In this Respect *the Children of this World are wiser in their Generation than the Children of Light:* Admitting their Principles to be true, that the only Portion of Man is in this Life, they act wisely; they keep their End, evil as it is, steddily in View; improve every Incident to the Promotion of it, and leave nothing to be done to Morrow, which may be executed to Day in Advancement of it. But how often shall we see Men, professing themselves Christians, acknowledging the Doctrines, and valuing their Hopes in the Promises of the Gospel, and yet with strange Inconsistency putting off all Concerns for the Attainment of them from Day to Day, and from Year to Year? Every Interest or Pleasure of Life, even the most trifling Amusement is suffered to postpone the one Thing necessary. Some Time or other the Man resolves to set about it, but 'tis soon enough yet; he must first acquire such a Degree of Fortune, place himself in such a Station of Life, and then he will give over all farther Pursuits of this World, and make Provision for another. This also is the foolish Scheme of the

the Epicure. He cannot yet diſengage himſelf from the Company, the Mirth, and the Pleaſures he has been uſed to; but in a few Years his Circumſtances of Life will be altered, and his Deſires be more eaſily governed, and then he will apply himſelf in earneſt to Works of Penitence and Religion. But when this projected Time comes, ſome new Illuſions ariſe, which defer the intended Reformation a little longer. Our later Vanities ſucceed into the ſame Power and Dominion over us that the former had, and the Anſwer to Religion continues ſtill the ſame; *Go thy Way for this Time, at a more convenient Seaſon I will ſend for thee* *. But what Seaſon can be ſo convenient as the preſent? How know we that a Day, that an Hour longer will be granted us? That our Souls ſhall not this Night be required from us, laden with thoſe unpardoned Sins for which we propoſed to repent even to Morrow? Methinks this is a Reflection which, if attended to, ſhould ſtrike Terror and Amazement into the ſecureſt Sinner; engage him with Fear and

* Acts xxiv. 25.

Trembling

Trembling to lay hold on the preſent Moment, and not ſuffer it to paſs without Improvement by him. Even he who has the faireſt Proſpect of Life before him, who rejoices in the Strength and Beauty of Youth, yet if he conſiders by how precarious a Tenure he holds theſe Advantages; that a Thouſand Accidents may before the next Dawn lay all theſe Glories in the Duſt; and if this, very poſſible, Event ſhould happen, he muſt immediately enter upon an eternal unalterable State of Happineſs or Miſery; that if he has made no Proviſion for this great Change, the Omiſſion can never be repaired, the Time miſpent never be redeemed; that he is loſt and undone for ever, condemned to everlaſting Anguiſh and Deſpair; can he ſtand againſt the Terror of ſo awaking a Reflection? Can he go calmly on, and leave ſo important, ſo irretrievable an Intereſt at ſo much Hazard and Uncertainty? When a near and certain Approach of Death ſets this Proſpect before us, it ſeldom fails of its Influence on us. With what Regret will the wounded Soul then look back on the Years it has waſted in Purſuits

Purſuits of Vanity? How will he wiſh to recall the precious Hours he has ſpent in Trifles, loitered away in idle unprofitable Diverſions? And if by due Reflection we at any Time bring this Proſpect to be equally preſent to us, it will have the ſame Effect and Impreſſion on us. And what Charm is it that can thus draw a Veil before the Eyes of Men, and hide this important Concluſion from them? What tho' the Lamp of Life be full of Oil, and burn ſtrong, yet when we conſider that a Blaſt of Air may blow it out, that a Shower, a Drop of Rain may extinguiſh it, and that it is every Moment expoſed to theſe Accidents, ſhall we defer a Work on which our eternal Happineſs or Miſery depends, a Work which cannot be done but by this Light, in a vain Confidence of its burning down to the laſt Poſſibility of Life? *Rejoice, O young Man* (ſays *Solomon* in a ſevere Sarcaſm) *and let thy Heart chear thee in the Days of thy Youth, and walk in the Ways of thy Heart, and in the Sight of thine Eyes: But know thou, that for theſe Things God will bring thee into Judgment* *. To thoſe ſurely who have gone

* Eccleſ. xi. 9.

gone far and long in the Ways of Sin, we need only obſerve that the Day is far ſpent, and the Night is at Hand: That they have much Time to redeem; have already ſpent the faireſt Part of their Portion, and therefore are concerned with the utmoſt Solicitude to huſband the poor Remainder. 'Tis ſomething peculiarly ſhocking to ſee gray Hairs, and the Infirmities of Age, ſquandering away the laſt Stake of Life in Sin and Folly, without Remorſe for the paſt, and thoughtleſs of the future. With whatever Deluſions we may flatter our own Security, ſuch Examples are not looked on without Terror and Concern. And I queſtion not but each Beholder reſolves to be wiſer for himſelf, long before that Age to abſtract from the World and reform, and not leave the whole Taſk of the Day to be wrought out at the laſt Hour; at leaſt to devote that Period wholly to Religion, and the Care of Eternity. But alas! how few are prevailed on to make the proper Inference from theſe Obſervations, to reflect that 'tis not only uncertain whether they ſhall arrive at that Period, but uncertain alſo whether they ſhall employ that

laſt

laſt Reſerve better than others have done before them? That though the Day of their natural Life may continue to that Time, yet their Day of Salvation may expire before; and from theſe juſt Apprehenſions, to conclude the Wiſdom of attending to the preſent Calls of Grace, leſt they be hardened through the Deceitfulneſs of Sin, and the ſlighted Mercy be withdrawn from them?

To this Conſideration of the Shortneſs and Uncertainty of our Time, let us farther add the Greatneſs and Difficulty of the Work we have to perform in it. To ſubdue the Luſts and Paſſions of our Corruption, to correct the evil Propenſities of our Nature, to poſſeſs the Soul with the Reverence and Love of God, to ſow and cultivate in it the Seeds of Grace, and improve them into ſettled Habits of Piety and Virtue; in ſhort, to prepare it to be a fit Inhabitant of that holy Place to which we aſpire, is a Work not to be accompliſhed in a Moment, but to be brought to Perfection by ſlow and gradual Advances, through ſeveral hard and laborious Stages of Diſcipline. Various Mortifications muſt be

be undergone, many Difficulties and Obſtructions conquered, many ſtrong Attacks of the Enemy withſtood, before we can arrive at a juſt Maturity in Religion, at the Firmneſs of an able and faithful Soldier of *Chriſt*. A Work thus difficult can never be begun too ſoon; 'tis the Buſineſs of our whole Life, and he who ſets earlieſt about it, will find his Time little enough for the finiſhing of it: But the longer it is deferred, the more difficult it becomes: He who begins late is not only obliged to learn to do well, to form anew the whole Diſpoſition of his Soul, to acquire new Habits of Life, to practiſe Duties to which he is utterly a Stranger; but, which is a much harder Taſk than this, he muſt unlearn all his former Life; renounce Gratifications he has long been uſed to; diveſt himſelf of Habits which by Cuſtom have grown up to be a Part of his Conſtitution, and are become a kind of ſecond Nature to him; contend with an Enemy that has long ſubdued him; reſiſt the ſtrongeſt Temptations from the Violence of his own Deſires, the Importunity and Reproaches of his old Companions in Sin;

Sin; and, which perhaps is not the leaſt mortifying Part of his Diſcipline, he muſt humble himſelf to an Acknowledgment of his own Folly. And when we conſider that all this is to be performed under the Pangs and Remorſe of a wounded Conſcience, and a continual Dread leſt the evil Day overtake him before he has finiſhed his Work, and made his Peace with God, how great muſt the Labour, how ſevere the Conflict be? Since then the Burden of the Work increaſes with the Delay, with what Perſuaſion ſhould this Argument recommend to us the immediate Diſpatch of it? The Queſtion of *Nicodemus*; *Can a Man be born again when he is old?* may not improperly be aſked even in that ſpiritual Senſe meant by our Saviour. Thro' the Grace of God this is not impoſſible, but when we reflect how unfit we are for any weighty Performance in that unactive Part of our Life, how often the Faculties of the Mind are as much decayed as thoſe of the Body, how many Imperfections will attend even the beſt we are able to do, the Diffidence we muſt be under whether God will accept our poor defective Services, whether

whether he will regard our Sacrifice when we have nothing to offer him but the Dregs and Refuſe of Life, the Days of Loathing and Satiety, and the Years in which we have no Pleaſure; what amazing Folly is it to defer the great Buſineſs of Life to a Time the leaſt qualified for a due Performance of it? Each of theſe Arguments, one would think, were ſufficient to recommend to us the wiſe Advice in my Text; but when they are collected together, and ſet before us in one View; when we conſider how ſhort and precarious our Time is, the Difficulty of the Work to be accompliſhed; that every Day both adds to the Difficulty of the Service, and takes away from our Strength to perform it; how uncertain it is whether the Years we propoſe to our ſelves ſhall be indulged us; uncertain whether we ſhall have Power or even Inclination to improve them better than thoſe we now ſquander away; and uncertain whether God will accept ſo maimed and defective an Offering; and laſtly, that the Stake we leave to the Hazard of ſo many Uncertainties, is nothing leſs than our eternal Salvation; when

when, I ſay, theſe important Conſiderations are brought together, and ſet before a rational Being intent on Happineſs and acknowledging the Truth of every Article, could it be imagined that a bare ſingle Poſſibility ſhould be of Weight enough to overballance them all? And yet thus it is; this is the whole Strength of the Sinner's Confidence; 'tis poſſible he may live to be old; 'tis poſſible the Grace of God may then enable him to redeem the Years he has loſt, and receive him to Mercy: But how much more poſſible is it that all theſe Schemes may miſcarry, and how dreadful is the Event if they do ſo?

WHOSO is wiſe will ponder theſe Things, will underſtand the loving Kindneſs of the Lord, and learn to value and improve the Opportunities before him. He who has lived with the greateſt Care, will find upon a Review of his Time that he has ſomething to redeem; but he who has miſpent much, has ſtill a greater Concern upon him: Hard is the Taſk he has to perform, and ſhort the Time in which it muſt be performed; yea the greater the Work, the ſhorter the Time; and there-

fore with the greater Diligence ſhould he apply himſelf to the Improvement of it. In ſum, he who has waſted much of his Stock, is concerned attentively to improve the little that is left; and he who has been moſt frugal, need not be at a Loſs for the Employment of it all. May God give us Grace ſeriouſly to regard theſe important Truths; *ſo to number our Days, that we may apply our Hearts unto Wiſdom*; by a prudent Management of the preſent Day, to retrieve the Errors of thoſe that are paſt; and lay up ſomething in Store which may ſupport us in the evil Day, and abide with us for ever.

I Beg Leave only farther to obſerve how peculiarly the preſent holy Seaſon ſuggeſts theſe Reflections to us. We are now more diſengaged from the Pleaſures and Diverſions of Life, that the Mind may cool, and be at Leiſure to attend to its domeſtick Concerns, to conſider what Habit wants to be corrected, what Inclination to be ſubdued, what Weakneſs to be ſtrengthened, and what Virtue to be confirmed and improved. Spiritual Recollection

lection is, indeed, at all Times a Duty, and there passes not a Day but gives us Occasion for it; but since what is left to be done at any Time, is very apt to be wholly omitted, the ancient Usage of the Church has with great Piety and Wisdom appointed certain Seasons for this Exercise, and recommended such Restraints as may dispose us for it. The mere bodily Exercise of Abstinence, or Retirement from Pleasure, the Apostle determines to profit little, is of no other real Value in Religion than as a ministerial Causer of moral Effects; as it recals us from the World, gives a serious Turn to our Thoughts, and disposes us to an attentive Revisal of our Conduct.

PRAY God give us Grace to improve every Call and Opportunity to these excellent Purposes, by a wise Employment of the present Time to retrieve the Errors of our past Life, and lay up in Store such good Resolutions as may strengthen us against the evil Day of Temptation, and enable us so to pass the Waves of this troublesome World,

that we may finally come to the Land of everlasting Life, where our Labours and our Fears shall cease, and Sin and Sorrow shall be no more.

SERMON

SERMON XIII.

The Difficulties of Salvation to the Righteous, an Argument of Fear and Terror to Sinners.

1 Pet. iv. 18.

If the Righteous ſcarcely be ſaved, where ſhall the Ungodly and the Sinner appear?

MAN is naturally conſcious to himſelf of his Immortality; and as the firſt Paſſion of his Soul is a Deſire of Happineſs, ſo he cannot be without Concern for his Condition in that State

that is to commence after this Life. Theſe Sentiments, whether they are impreſſed on the Soul by God, or ariſe to us as obvious Reflections of our Reaſon, I preſume to call Natural, becauſe they have been found in all Ages, Nations, and Diſtinctions of Mankind. And though ſome few may be alledged in Exception, who have denied and argued againſt theſe Concluſions, yet they generally obtained, and have been acknowledged even by theſe Diſputers themſelves, 'till with Labour and Study they had ſtifled their firſt Convictions; and either from a Fondneſs to ſome Vices, which the Doctrine of Futurity rendered uneaſy, brought themſelves to doubt of it; or, out of a vain Affectation of ſeeing farther than other Men, pretended to diſbelieve it. In the mean Time, infinitely the greater Part of Mankind have profeſſed to act under a full Perſuaſion of this great Article. Before the Revelation of the Goſpel, indeed, this Proſpect lay much in the dark; and though Men in General believed a future State, yet they had but confuſed Preſumptions of the Nature and Condition of it, or by what Obſervances

ſervances they might ſecure the Favour of God in it.

BUT our bleſſed Lord has diſtinctly opened the Scene of Futurity to us, and directed us to ſuch a Conduct as will infallibly render us happy in it. And one would expect the Zeal, Aſſiduity and Application of Men in the Duties preſcribed, ſhould be proportioned to the Greatneſs of the Reward ſet before them, and the Certainty with which it is aſſured to their Faith. But far otherwiſe, we ſee a ſtrange Inattention to this moſt important Proſpect; and the Duties to which it ſhould engage us, are ſo far from being purſued as the chief and principal Concern of Life, that by ſome they ſcarce appear to be regarded at all, and by others to be conſidered only as an incidental Buſineſs, ſomething to be done when they have nothing elſe to do. Very few, I am perſuaded, among thoſe who profeſs themſelves Chriſtians, diſclaim all Concern for their Souls, diſown the Authority, or renounce the Expectations of the Goſpel: They will tell you, if you aſk them, they intend and hope to be ſaved by it; but by various Illuſions of the

Devil they are prevailed on to ſhift off the Duties, and neglect the Conditions on which Salvation is promiſed. Some repreſent to themſelves the Whole of Religion as conſiſting in a few eaſy Obſervances, and never intended to lay the leaſt Reſtraint on the Buſineſs or Diverſions of this Life; if they now and then appear in the Offices of Religion, and avoid ſome ſcandalous Enormities, they are as good Chriſtians as they need be, and may employ the reſt of their Time how they pleaſe. Others will go farther than theſe, and in their Scheme of Religion include an Indulgence for any Sin they are fond of, and fancy a regular Obedience to one Law will be a full Equivalent for their Breach of another. Or if they acknowledge Repentance and a more ſtrict Obedience to be one Time or other neceſſary, they imagine 'tis Time enough yet to ſet about theſe Duties, which they can diſpatch when they will, in a Manner ſufficient to ſecure their Salvation. By theſe Deluſions Men are led on from one Stage of Life to another in a Condition of the utmoſt Hazard, and yet without

without the leaſt Apprehenſion of their Danger.

THE Words of the Apoſtle before us cannot, one would think, be heard or read without Trembling by any Man thus careleſs and indolent in the Buſineſs of Religion. That they may have their due Effect in exciting your Vigilance and Attention to the great Concern of your Souls, I ſhall ſet before you the Import of them by obſerving,

I. WHAT they directly affirm, that even the Righteous are ſcarcely ſaved.

II. THE Inference ariſing hence; how ſad muſt be the Condition, how miſerable the Proſpect of the ungodly and Sinner?

I. IT is here affirmed, that even the Righteous are ſcarcely ſaved. By which Expreſſion we are not to apprehend any Doubt, but that he *who feareth God, and worketh Righteouſneſs*, and perſeveres in the Faith and Duties of our Religion, ſhall certainly be ſaved. This the Precepts, the Promiſes,

Promiſes, the whole Covenant of the Goſpel aſſure to us, and 'tis a prime Article of our Faith to believe. 'Tis a natural Principle that *he who cometh to God, muſt believe that he is a Rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him* * ; and he who cometh to God in the Covenant of the Goſpel, muſt believe, that, through the Merits and Interceſſion of his Son *Jeſus Chriſt*, all who live according to that Covenant, ſhall obtain eternal Life. But the Meaning of the Apoſtle is, that the Religion which by this Covenant we engage our ſelves to obſerve, is a Work of Labour and Difficulty, a Service that requires our greateſt Care and Attention to the Diſcharge of it. The Righteous ſhall certainly be ſaved; but then the Chriſtian Character of a righteous Man implies a conſtant unwearied Perſeverance in many hard and painful Inſtances of Duty. To evince this, let us only recollect the Engagement we take upon our ſelves, when we enter into Covenant with God at our Baptiſm. We there ſolemnly renounce the World, the Fleſh, and the Devil, and pro-

* Heb. xi. 6.

miſe

miſe not to follow nor be led by them: We promiſe obediently to keep all God's Commandments, and to walk in the ſame all the Days of our Life. Our Righteouſneſs and all the Hopes given by the Goſpel to that Character, depend on our Performance of this Stipulation. And can he who has undertaken all this, want Conviction of the Burden of his Chriſtian Duty, and the Neceſſity of his utmoſt Vigour and Aſſiduity to acquit himſelf of it? He has renounced a World full of Snares and Temptations, offering preſent Eaſe and Satisfaction to all his Appetites. Its Honours and Intereſts, its Pomps and Vanities, are continually paſſing before him, and inviting his Purſuit. He is ſolicited by popular Faſhion and Cuſtom, by numerous Examples of wicked Men, by their Perſuaſions and Importunity, by their Reproach and Laughter, by their Friendſhip, Relation, or Company to indulge himſelf in forbidden Liberties, and take his Share in ſinful Pleaſures: And with what Difficulty muſt he prevail with himſelf to turn his Eye from ſo many alluring Objects, and harden himſelf againſt ſo many ſtrong

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Solicitations; especially when we consider with what Eagerness and Impatience that Flesh and Blood he carries about him, the Lusts and Appetites of his Corruption persuade his Compliance? To mortify the boiling of Revenge upon the Provocation of an Injury; to subdue and cool the Ferment of Desire, inflamed by a near and tempting Satisfaction; in general, to restrain all our Pursuits and Aversion within the Bounds of Duty and Religion, whoever has felt the Conflict, will confess to be no slight and easy Instances of Virtue. All this our Religion requires from us, and in some Cases even more than this; not only to forego Pleasure, but to submit to Pain, Affliction, Disgrace, and even Death itself; the Desertion of Friends, and the Scorn and Insolence of Enemies. To take even joyfully the spoiling of our Goods, and the torturing of our Bodies. And when we observe that every Station and Period of human Life is exposed to some or other of these Trials, either to Temptations that provoke our Appetites or disquiet our Fears, and that we have an Adversary, in Cunning and Strength our Superior,

perior, who watches all our Paſſions, and applies all theſe Temptations with the greateſt Skill and Aſſiduity, to the various Tempers and Diſpoſitions of Men, and the ſeveral Incidents of Life, we muſt ſurely acknowledge that great is the Difficulty of what we undertake, when we renounce the World, the Fleſh, and the Devil: A Service that demands our conſtant Attention, and the moſt vigorous Application of all our Faculties, to the Diſcharge of it.

But we muſt go on, and take farther into our Account the active Part of our Religion: We muſt not only mortify all theſe Paſſions, reſiſt all theſe Temptations, and abſtain from thoſe Indulgences to which they ſolicit us; but we muſt learn to do well, and act up to the poſitive Precepts of our Duty. We muſt be conſtant and devout in the Worſhip of our God, and ready in all Acts of Benevolence to our Neighbour. We muſt attend our Creator in his Courts and in our Cloſets, and in all thoſe Ordinances which he has preſcribed to the Obſervance of his Church. And in all theſe Duties to God the Heart

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muſt be ſanctified and prepared, the Affections kept ſteddy and attentive, leſt we offer the Sacrifice of Fools, and our Prayers themſelves be turned into Sin.

WITH Regard to our Neighbour, how great is the Extent and Compaſs of our Duty? All the various Relations of Life, in which we ſtand engaged to one another, as Parents or Children, Maſters or Servants, Superiors, Equals, or Inferiors, exact from us particular Obſervances, and the Neglect of any of theſe will render us criminal in the Sight of God.

IF then we ſtand ſtill and look back on all theſe manifold Obligations of the Chriſtian Life, even as drawn up in this ſhort Abſtract; if we conſider to how many and how dangerous Enemies our Weakneſs is continually expoſed, and in how vaſt a Multiplicity the Duties we owe to the Honour and Service of God, the Welfare of our Neighbour, and the Inſtruction and Diſcipline of our own Souls beſet us round, and require our Attendance, we cannot but conclude that the Righteouſneſs ariſing from the Obſervance of theſe Duties, cannot be attained without great Labour, and the

the moſt diligent Application. That Religion is not the ſlight and eaſy Thing ſome would make it, but a Warfare in which we muſt always be on our Guard with our Armour about us, that *having done all we may be able to ſtand*, to repel the Enemy, and execute the Commands of our great Captain, and intitle our ſelves to his Favour and Approbation. Far from diſputing the Aſſertion of the Apoſtle, that the Righteous are not without Difficulty ſaved, we ſhall rather be tempted, from ſuch a View of Religion, to doubt the Poſſibility of any one's Salvation. Did God indeed inſiſt on a ſinleſs and unerring Obſervance of all this Multiplicity of Duties, had the Chriſtian Diſpenſation provided no Remedy for our Lapſes, made no Indulgence to our Infirmities, we might cry out with *Balaam*, *Alas! who ſhould live, if God did this* *? It were eaſier for a Camel to go through the Eye of a Needle, than for a Man on theſe Terms to enter into the Kingdom of God. But, bleſſed be the Mercies of our Lord *Jeſus Chriſt*, who has purchaſed for us Terms

* Num. xxiv. 23.

of

of Reconciliation, who will accept of Sincerity inſtead of Perfection, and has made our Repentance effectual to Salvation. But then it muſt be remembered that this Sincerity implies our honeſt and diligent Endeavours to do the utmoſt in our Power. Single Acts of Tranſgreſſion will through Weakneſs, Surprize, and the ſudden Ferment of our Paſſions be unavoidable to the beſt guarded among us: But theſe, though they wound the Soul, and require our Humiliation before God, yet do not forfeit our regenerate State, or exclude us from the Number of the Righteous. But no Indulgence to any Habit of Sin, can conſiſt with that Character; for he who thus ſins, does in Effect deny the Obligation of that Law he tranſgreſſes, and conſequently diſowns the Authority of God who enjoins it: And he who thus *offends in one Point*, is juſtly reputed *guilty of all.* He is not barely an Offender, but a Rebel, who will not have *Chriſt* to rule over him. In Sum, the Goſpel, conſidered as a Law, preſcribes every Virtue to our Conduct under the Condition, *This do and thou ſhalt live*; and forbids every Sin under the Penalty

nalty of Exclusion from the Kingdom of God: But as a Covenant, through the Merits and Mediation of *Christ*, it accepts of our sincere Applications to obey instead of exact Obedience: His Blood will attone for our Imperfection, and his Righteousness will be imputed in Supplement to what is lacking in ours. But still our Obligation remains to obey every Law to the utmost of our Power; this is insisted on as essential to Gospel Righteousness, and our Weakness is so far from rendering the Burden of our Duty lighter to us, that it manifestly adds to the Weight of it; and is itself an Argument, the Righteous are not without great Difficulty saved.

And if this be the Case of the Righteous, we must hence be led to reflect,

II. How sad must be the Condition, how terrible the Prospect of the Ungodly and Sinner.

Of what Character the Sinner here meant is, it concerns us to enquire: For all Men are Sinners; the most righteous among us must confess our selves to come under that Denomination: But, as I ob-

ſerved, Sins of mere Ignorance or Infirmity, do not exclude us from Goſpel Righteouſneſs. The Sinner here intended then is, as the Word joined with it explains it, the ungodly Sinner: He who either forgets or defies God, who lives without any or a very ſlight Regard to Religion; he who neglects the Worſhip of God, prophanes his Sabbaths, and walks not in his Ordinances, but gives himſelf up to a lawleſs Purſuit of the Intereſts or Pleaſures of the World; and perhaps ridicules all who are toiling in the narrow Paths of Duty, and with Fear and Trembling apply themſelves to work out their Salvation: Or, if he does not go quite ſo far as this, but is regular in ſome Reſpects, yet indulges himſelf in the habitual avowed Practice of ſome known Sin, whether it be Commiſſion of ſomething which God has forbidden, or the Omiſſion of ſomething which he has commanded. Theſe are voluntary preſumptuous Sins, and the Perſons guilty of them are properly the ungodly Sinners here deſcribed. Now though God in the Goſpel of his Son has called all Sinners to Repentance, and, on the Performance of that

that Condition, has excluded none from his Pardon; nay, and has promiſed his Grace to aſſiſt them in that Duty, yet how difficultly is a Man, thus *hardened through the Deceitfulneſs of Sin* *, reclaimed from it? How hardly is his Will brought to change all its Deſires and Averſions, to renounce thoſe Gratifications in which he has been long uſed to place his Happineſs? And if by the Grace of God he can be induced to attempt this great Change, with what Labour and Conflict muſt he accompliſh it? How many hard and ſevere Stages of Diſcipline muſt he paſs through, before he can ſubdue the Reluctances of his Corruption? What Pangs and Convulſions muſt he undergo in cutting off a right Hand, and plucking out a right Eye, in parting with thoſe Sins which by long Habit and Familiarity are become a ſecond and acquired Sort of Nature to him? How muſt the Wounds of Conſcience ſmart for what is paſt; and how muſt he tremble for fear the Day of Vengeance ſhould overtake him, before he has finiſhed his Work, and made his Peace with God? And how ſlowly muſt Hope

* Heb. xi. 13.

revive, and enable him to look up to his Father which is in Heaven with the Confidence of a Son? Thus hardly is even the penitent Sinner ſaved; thus difficult is that Duty by which alone he can be reconciled to his Creator, and intitled to the Mercies of the Goſpel. And yet unleſs this hard and difficult Service be performed, he is loſt and undone for ever. Let him not flatter himſelf that on any other Terms the Merits of *Chriſt*, and the Compaſſion of God, will be extended to him. God has declared that he will judge every Man according to his Works; to them who, by patient Continuance in well-doing, endure through the Heat and Burden of the Day, he will give the Reward of their Labour. Neither from them whom he has called later in the Day, after a long Courſe of Sin and Forgetfulneſs of God, will he withold his Mercy. Great, indeed, is the Work they have to do, and ſhort the Time in which it muſt be performed; but if with double Diligence they labour to retrieve the Hours they have loſt, they ſhall be ſaved, though through a Service of great Difficulty, and like a Brand plucked out of

of the Fire. But to them who presumptuously go on in Sin, despising the Calls, and neglecting the Means of Grace, there remains nothing but Tribulation and Anguish, and a terrible looking for of Judgment and fiery Indignation, from the Justice of God.

CONSIDER *this, ye that forget God, lest he pluck you away and there be none to deliver* *.

YEA, let us all consider, and in a serious Application of what this Scripture offers to us, remember and be convinced that Religion is no trifling Concern, to be performed in any careless and superficial Manner; an Employment designed only to fill up some idle Vacancies of Life, but the great Business for which we came into the World: A Rule that extends it self to every Part of our Conduct publick or private, and in many Instances commands us to oppose the whole Torrent of our Passions, and restrain the most importunate Appetites of our Nature. As the Extent of the Service therefore obliges our constant Attention, so the Difficulties of it require all

* Psal. l. 22.

our Strength and all our Might, the utmoſt Application of all our Powers. Even the moſt perfect among us, who have their Paſſions in the beſt Diſcipline, who have overcome the firſt and hardeſt Struggles with their Corruption, and are arrived to a State of Pleaſure and Delight in the Paths of Obedience, are yet obliged to be conſtantly on their Guard; have many Temptations to ſubdue, many Conflicts with thoſe Enemies which war againſt the Soul, and many Failings and Lapſes to lament and recover; and find upon the whole that they have enough to do to preſerve a Conſcience void of Offence, and keep themſelves in a due Preparation to meet their Judge, *and give Account of their Stewardſhip.* But how much more has the habitual Sinner to do, if he intends to eſcape the Damnation to come? What Labours muſt he paſs through? What Agonies and Diſtractions of Soul muſt he endure? What Difficulties overcome, before he can cleanſe himſelf from the Pollutions of Sin, and be a fit Inhabitant of that holy Place, where no unclean Thing ſhall enter?

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LET us then all live in a conſtant and ſerious Expectation of that Day, when we muſt appear before the Judge of Heaven and Earth. Let the Righteous perſevere with Patience, and go on abounding in the Work of the Lord, ſupported with this Conſolation, that their Labour ſhall not be in vain. And let the Sinner tremble to think through what Difficulties he muſt eſcape, and ſet himſelf immediately with all his Heart, and with all his Soul, to correct the Evil of his Ways, and bring forth Fruits meet for Repentance, leſt the Night overtake him when none can work, and he be ſhut out for ever to a fruitleſs Sorrow and Repentance in Hell.

How, alas! will he appear in that awful Day, when even the Failings and Miſcarriages of the Righteous ſhall not be concealed, though the Mercy of God be magnified in their Pardon? With what Confuſion will he hear all his unrepented Sins produced before Men and Angels, and even the mild and merciful *Jeſus* pronounce that dreadful irreverſible Sentence, *Go ye curſed into everlaſting*

Fire, prepared for the Devil and his Angels.*

God of his infinite Mercy give us Grace to rescue our selves from that Scene of Astonishment and Despair, and grant, &c.

* Matt. xxv. 41.

SERMON

SERMON XIV.

The Scripture Doctrine of Regeneration, or a New Creature, explain'd.

2 Cor. v. 17. former Part.

If any Man be in Christ, he is a new Creature.

ALL the Privileges of the Gospel relating to our present State, are comprehended in the Promise of the Holy Spirit, who regenerates and sanctifies all the elect People of God. The Effects of this Promise, every good Man feels

feels and experiences in the Comforts, Assistances and Direction he receives from him: Neither will any true Christian deny that 'tis he works in us both to will and to do, that without him we cannot so much as think a good Thought, that 'tis he who enlightens our Understandings, corrects our Wills, and enables us to subdue our Affections to the Law of God. By these Effects and Operations of the Holy Spirit, the Man is so much alter'd from what he was in his corrupt State, that he is said in my Text to be *a new Creature*. And in other Places to be regenerated, born a-new, to have kill'd or crucify'd the old Man, and to have a new Man rais'd up in him. From which Expressions some have conceiv'd and taught, that in this Work of the Holy Spirit, on every sincere Convert of the Gospel, there is something literally kill'd and destroy'd in him, and an Act of real new Creation exerted by God; a new Being produc'd by his Almighty Power, and rais'd up in him. Now this Notion might be let alone and despised as a Piece of harmless unintelligible Enthusiasm, if no evil Consequence to the Faith or Practice

ctice of Chriſtians had followed from it. But when it is farther inferred, that Man in the Work of his Converſion, in receiving or obeying the Goſpel, is merely paſſive, contributes no more, and can contribute no more than he did to his natural Birth, or preceding Creation, or than he ſhall do to his Reſurrection from the Dead at the laſt Day: The obvious and natural Conſequence hence is, That it is to no Purpoſe for any Man to labour and apply himſelf to the Works of Converſion, to convince his Faith by attending to the Evidences of the Goſpel, or to regulate his Affections and Actions by the Laws of it. He has nothing to do but to ſit ſtill, and wait till this Almighty creating Spirit comes, and irreſiſtibly infuſes this new Principle into him. A Doctrine which ſo manifeſtly tends to diſcourage the Endeavours of Men, to introduce a lazy Inactivity and Neglect of the ordinary Means of Grace, and even to quench the Spirit; and ſuggeſts ſuch an Excuſe for all Sin and Infidelity, if it be falſe, as it certainly is, cannot but require our utmoſt Zeal in oppoſing

poſing and refuting it. I ſhall therefore endeavour

I. To ſhew that this Doctrine cannot be the proper Expoſition of my Text, nor of any other Scripture whoſe Authority may be pretended for it.

II. I SHALL offer and aſſert what I think the true Meaning of this and the like Expreſſions.

III. I SHALL obſerve what Sentiments and Duties this Scripture, in its true Import, ought to ſuggeſt to us.

AND I. I am to ſhew that this Doctrine cannot be the proper Expoſition of my Text, nor of any other Scripture whoſe Authority may be pretended for it.

THE Scriptures being acknowledged to be the Word of God, and therefore infallibly true in every Part of them, we are aſſured,

1. THAT no Propoſition contradicting any evident Truth, natural or moral, can be the intended Senſe of them. For we rationally

rationally may and ought rather to reject any Pretenſions to a divine Revelation, however ſupported, than believe that God can affirm to us an evident Falſhood.

2. THAT where two Propoſitions contradict one another, one of them muſt be falſe, and conſequently cannot be affirmed by God: When, therefore, a Senſe of Scripture is given which contradicts another Scripture, one of the Places muſt be miſunderſtood. And, as a Corollary, hence I add,

3. THAT where the Expreſſion in one ſuch Place is plain, and the Senſe affixed to it agreeable to the proper Force of the Words, and no negative Objection requires us to depart from it; and the Expreſſion in the other is figurative or alluſive, and the Doctrine deduced from it liable to great Objections, 'tis reaſonable in this latter Place to reſtrain the Extent of the Figure and Alluſion, to a Conſiſtency with the plain Affirmations of the former.

LET us then apply theſe Rules to the Scripture in queſtion before us: I ſay then,

Firſt, THAT the Expoſition which I reject offers us a Doctrine irreconcileable to thoſe Attributes

Attributes which the natural Idea of God implies, *viz.* that Man is purely paſſive in the Work of his Converſion to God, contributes nothing to it by any Endeavours of his own, but only ſubmits to an irreſiſtible Act of God. Some of the firſt Attributes which occur to us in the divine Idea, are perfect Juſtice, and perfect Goodneſs: Whatſoever Doctrine repreſents God as unjuſt or unmerciful, cannot be from God, becauſe it contradicts a manifeſt Truth, and indeed ſubverts the very Foundation of Religion. And for the ſame Reaſon we cannot admit ſuch a Doctrine to be the intended Senſe of any Book, or Words, which we acknowledge to be a divine Revelation. Now if Man is purely paſſive in his Converſion and Regeneration; if, as this Doctrine ſuppoſes, no Man can be converted but by ſuch a new Creation, ſuch an over-powering Work of the Spirit as no Man can reſiſt, then all Men are equally capable of being converted; for there can be no Difference in the Subjects, where the Application is almighty and irreſiſtible, as in Creation; and conſequently, according to this Doctrine, it

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muſt be reſolved wholly into the abſolute irreſpective Will of God, that ſome to whom the Means of Converſion are offered, are converted and ſaved, and others periſh in Unconverſion. But how can this be reconciled to divine Juſtice? Can it be juſt in God to condemn a Man for not being converted, when it was impoſſible for him to be ſo? For not being new created, when he alone could new create him, and would not? Much leſs can this Doctrine conſiſt with the perfect Mercy and Goodneſs of the divine Nature. Can Goodneſs, perfect Goodneſs, condemn his Creatures to eternal Miſery, for not complying with Conditions which he knows it impoſſible for them to comply with? Surely we can hardly draw a more conſummate Image of Cruelty than this Doctrine aſcribes to God, which repreſents him as calling to theſe poor devoted helpleſs Creatures, pretending the greateſt Concern and Compaſſion for them, offering them Terms, and preſcribing Means of attaining eternal Happineſs, though he knows at the ſame Time that 'tis impoſſible for them to comply with thoſe Terms, or uſe thoſe Means, without

without ſuch an irreſiſtible Operation of his Spirit as he reſolves to withold from them. This is repreſenting God not only as unjuſt and cruel, but as ſolemnly ſporting himſelf with the Miſery of his Creatures. If this Doctrine gives us the true and proper Senſe of theſe Scriptures, this is the Image in which God muſt appear to us, an Image repugnant to the natural Idea of the Deity; and therefore we may with Aſſurance conclude that this cannot be the Meaning of them. But,

Secondly, THIS Doctrine is alſo manifeſtly inconſiſtent with the plain Declarations of God in other Scriptures, and therefore cannot be admitted to be the Senſe of theſe. He frequently profeſſes that he has no Pleaſure in the Death of him that dies, and that he would have all Men to be ſaved. He calls upon the Sinners to turn themſelves and live. He tells us that he has ſet before us Life and Death, and referred it to our own Election, which we will chuſe. He preſcribes Laws and Ordinances, and pronounces, *This do, and thou ſhalt live.* And wherever we find our own Abilities too weak for the Performance, he

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aſſures us of the Aſſiſtance of his Holy Spirit. *Aſk and you ſhall receive, ſeek and you ſhall find, knock and it ſhall be opened unto you.* Is God ſincere in all theſe Declarations? Or is he only mocking the Weakneſs of his Creatures? This muſt be his Character, if we believe that at the ſame Time he knows it is, and reſolves it ſhould be, impoſſible for thoſe he thus addreſſes, to comply with the Overtures he makes to them. Shall we thus conceive of a wiſe, a juſt, and a good God? Shall we aſcribe to him the Levity of forgeting himſelf, and at other Times teaching us a Doctrine contradictory to all theſe gracious Profeſſions? God forbid! yea, let God be true, and every Man a Liar. When we hear him in expreſs Terms affirming, that every Man ſhall be judged according to his own Works*, and receive according to his Deeds, can we doubt but there is a Senſe in which the Works of every Man, good as well as bad, are properly his own? When our bleſſed Lord aſks†, *Why do ye not of your ſelves judge that which is right?* does not the Queſtion neceſſarily imply,

* John v. 29. Rev. xx. 13. † Luke xii 57.

that we have in our ſelves a Power of judging what is right? Nay, does not every Precept, Exhortation, or Command of Scripture, ſuppoſe theſe Faculties in us. To what Purpoſe, for inſtance, did our Lord preach, and offer the Motives of Converſion to thoſe who heard him, if they had no Power to diſcern their Force, or comply with them. God is able, indeed, out of Stones to raiſe up Children unto *Abraham.* But would infinite Wiſdom uſe Arguments and rational Perſuaſions to theſe Stones? Would he encourage their Faith by Promiſes of Reward, and threaten their Infidelity with his ſevereſt Reſentments? Would he thus addreſs Beings which were perfectly paſſive, and could be nothing elſe but what he by an almighty irreſiſtible Act muſt make them? And what is yet more unaccountable, would he complain of their reſiſting his Omnipotence, and lament over their Infidelity, in thoſe Expreſſions of Regret and Diſappointment: *How often would I have gathered thee under my Wings, and thou wouldſt not* *? Nothing is more evident than the Force and Import

* Matt. xxiii. 37.

of

of theſe Scriptures, and nothing more contrary to the Concluſions I am oppoſing. Either therefore theſe Scriptures, and thoſe whoſe Authority is pretended for theſe Concluſions, contradict one another, which cannot be ſuppoſed of a divine Revelation; or elſe we muſt find a Senſe in which they are reconcileable, which can only be done by aſſigning ſome other Expoſition to one of them. And when the Doctrine affirmed by one, is the plain and neceſſary Import of the Words, a Doctrine without any Objection from Reaſon, agreeable to the natural Sentiments and Perceptions of every one's own Mind; and the Expreſſion in the other manifeſtly figurative, the Doctrine raiſed from them ſhocking to Reaſon, repugnant to the Idea of God, and in its Conſequences ſubverſive of all Religion; in which is it moſt reaſonable to ſuſpect the Miſtake? Surely in the Expoſition of the latter. And if the Expreſſions in theſe figurative Places are capable of any Senſe free from theſe Abſurdities, it ought without any Heſitation to be admitted: Such a Senſe I am to endeavour

II. To propose and assert.

That the Expressions of *being born again**, *having a new Man raised up in us*†, and, in my Text, of *being a new Creature*, are figurative, I have affirmed, and think it cannot be disputed; for that is a figurative Expression, where the Words are used in a different Sense from what they signify in their first and ordinary Intention. Now 'tis plain that he who is converted from a State of Sin and Death by the preaching or Application of the Gospel, is not born again, raised from the Dead, or created anew, in the first and ordinary Sense of those Words; they must therefore be understood only in a Sense of Resemblance and Analogy.

If it be said, that the new Creation here asserted, is of a Principle, a new Spirit which is infused into and actuates the Man, I observe,

1. That the Expressions will not bear this Construction: For 'tis said that the Man, the same Man is born again, is a new Creature, *&c.* The Man therefore is the

* John iii. 3. 1 Pet. i. 23. † Eph. iv. 24. Col. iii. 10.

Subject

Subject of whom this new Creation, whatever it means, is affirmed. Now 'tis evident that the converted Man is perſonally the ſame he was before, and is neither born nor created a-new in a proper literal Senſe. I would aſk

2. WHAT is this Spirit, this Principle which is ſuppoſed to be created? All the Effects which this Principle is ſaid to produce, are in Scripture aſcribed to the Holy Ghoſt: 'Tis he who guides, ſanctifies, and comforts the Elect, and works in them *both to will and to do, according to the good Pleaſure of God**. And the human Nature is certainly a Subject very ſuſceptible of theſe Operations.

SINCE this new Creation and all the Effects of it are in Scripture aſcribed to the Holy Ghoſt, and 'tis plainly affirmed that 'tis the Man who is the new Creature; and 'tis evident to common Senſe that the Man is not in a literal Propriety new created, the Expreſſion is manifeſtly figurative; and the natural and obvious Senſe that ariſes to us from it is, that by the Influence of the Holy Ghoſt, a great moral

* Phil. ii. 13.

Alteration is produced in him. And what we are to underſtand by them, is plainly this, That the Fall of *Adam* having derived on human Nature an univerſal Corruption of all our Faculties, on the Underſtanding a Darkneſs and Indiſpoſition to acknowledge ſpiritual Truths, on the Will and Affections a violent Bent and Propenſity to Evil; our bleſſed Lord, who was manifeſted in the Fleſh to deſtroy or undo this Work of the Devil on our Nature, has promiſed to all who with a ſincere Faith embrace his Goſpel, and are Partakers of the Seals of that holy Covenant, that he will by the powerful Aſſiſtances of his Holy Spirit raiſe them up to a Capacity of diſcerning his ſaving Truth, enable them to mortify every corrupt Affection, and to attain ſuch Meaſures of Holineſs and Virtue, as he will accept and reward. Now the Change is ſo great, in this Reſtoration of the Man from a State of ſpiritual Darkneſs to a Capacity of perceiving divine Truth, from a Life of Senſe and Paſſion to the Love of Holineſs and Purity, and a Submiſſion of all his Appetites to the Will of God, that the moſt exalted

alted Figures of Speech have been chosen by the Holy Ghost to represent it to our Conceptions and Gratitude: 'Tis like a new Creation, a second Birth, a Being raised again from the Dead. And agreeably it has hence ordinarily obtained in common Language, when a Man is reformed from a Course of Vice and Irreligion, to a Life of Virtue and Piety, to say he is become a *new Man*, or a *new Creature*. From these sublime Images we truly collect the Greatness of the Work wrought in us, and the Necessity of the divine Concurrence to the Production of it: We could no more effect this Change by our own unassisted Activity, than we could create our selves, or rise again to Life after we were dead. But the Analogy in these, as in other figurative Expressions, will not hold in all Circumstances, and may be carried too far in Application. Thus in the present Case, when from these Similitudes it is inferred that Man, in the Work of his Regeneration or Conversion, is as purely passive as he is in the Instances alluded to, the Resemblance is manifestly overstrained, and carries too a Doctrine

(which as I have obſerved) can neither be reconciled to Reaſon, Senſe, or the plain Declarations of other Scriptures. We acknowledge it then to be implied in theſe Expreſſions, that in the Regeneration or Converſion of a Man, the greateſt moral Change is wrought in him; that the Influences of the Holy Spirit are a Cauſe, without which this Change could not be effected, and therefore it ought principally to be aſcribed to him. 'Tis he points out to him the Way of Life, enlivens his Affections towards it, ſtrengthens his Weakneſſes, reſtores his Lapſes, and enables him to walk and perſevere in it. Take away this Aſſiſtance, and he relapſes into a State of Darkneſs and Corruption. But then we ſay that he cooperates with Grace, and by the Strength he receives from this Aſſiſtance, is enabled to will and to do according to God's good Pleaſure.

THE Manner, indeed, the ſpecial Acts and Impreſſions by which the divine Spirit introduces this Change, and how far human Liberty cooperates with it, are Subjects beyond our Reach and Comprehenſion, and not diſcovered to us by Revelation.

tion. Our Lord compares this Work of the Spirit to the Wind: We hear the Sound thereof, and perceive its Effects, and are equally assured they proceed from it, whether we can explain the physical Process of the Operation or not. In like Manner the Change wrought in a Man by Conversion is manifest and certain, and Revelation assures us 'tis wrought by the Spirit of God; but how we cannot tell: We acknowledge the Effect, though we cannot explain the Operation of the Cause. At the same Time we are assured (as I have said) by Sense, by Reason, by the Attributes of God, and by the whole Tenor of Scripture, that 'tis not by an irresistible Operation; that we are not merely passive in this Work of Grace; that God addresses us as rational Creatures, and requires a voluntary Application of our Faculties to his Service.

The original Powers of our Nature still remain with us, though grievously weakened and impaired by the Fall. A Thirst after Truth, and a Desire of Good, are Principles which still act with a great and universal Force. The Understanding, indeed,

deed, is dim, and cannot by its natural Light discover spiritual Truths; and the Corruption of our Will and Affections renders them tasteless and insipid to us. The Defect of Light God supplies by a distinct Proposal of these Truths in the Gospel: His Grace strengthens our Faculties to a Capacity of discerning them, and removes the Defect of Inclination by taking off our natural Deadness and Disaffection towards them. The Proposal of these Truths is wholly from God; and we conclude from his Goodness, and Justice, and his Veracity in the Professions of his Word, that all to whom they are proposed are by his Grace sufficiently moved to attend and assent to them: Sufficiently, I say, but not irresistibly; for if all were irresistibly moved, all would embrace them; and if none were sufficiently moved, none would embrace them; and if they only could embrace them who are irresistibly moved, then they who are not so moved, could be guilty of no Crime in rejecting them. But when God has by a sufficient Measure of Grace supplied the natural Corruption of our Faculties, he then leaves us to act freely

freely in embracing or rejecting the Truths he propoſes to us.

So likewiſe God in the Goſpel points out to us our proper Good, and directs to the Means by which we may attain it. He ſets before us Life and Death, and repreſents to us the Motives which ought to engage us to make a wiſe Choice, and aſſiſts us with a Meaſure of Grace ſufficient to over-ballance the corrupt Propenſity of the Will and Affections to Evil: But then he leaves us to chuſe with the Liberty of reaſonable Beings: They who comply with his Grace, comply with it freely; and they who reject it, do alſo freely reject it.

THUS, then, I underſtand the new Creation aſſerted in my Text. God by his Grace ſupplies thoſe Inabilities and Averſions from ſpiritual Truth and ſpiritual Good, which our Faculties had contracted by the Fall: This is a great Change, a great Reſtoration of our Nature: Neither can any Expreſſions give us too high Conceptions of the Power, Mercy, and Goodneſs of our Creator and Redeemer in effecting this for us. But then this implies no new Creation, no Production of any

Faculties

Faculties in us, but only a Restoration of the Decays, a Removal of Obstructions from those with which we were created. Thus restored by the Grace of God thro' *Christ*, he leaves us to act freely, without any irresistible Force upon our Wills: He proposes to us our Duty, with the strongest Inducements to comply with it, that can be offered to reasonable Nature; and if we miscarry under these Advantages, the Fault is wholly in our selves.

As the Exposition I have given of this Scripture, makes a full Acknowledgment of the Power of God, and the Necessity of his Concurrence to our Regeneration and Conversion; so 'tis agreeable to the Attributes of the divine Nature, to the necessary Import of other Scriptures, and to the clear and evident Perceptions of every Man who observes what passes in his own Mind, and therefore it may safely be admitted by us. And since the Sense I oppose, is attended with such gross irreconcileable Absurdities, I presume I need not offer any Thing farther in Support of one, or in Disproof of the other. I proceed then,

III. To

III. To obſerve what Sentiments and Duties this Scripture in its true Import ought to ſuggeſt to us.

THE firſt Sentiment that ariſes hence, is, a Conviction of the deplorable State of Nature to which Sin had reduced us; a weak, ignorant Creature, Alien from God and Goodneſs, and a Prey to the great Deſtroyer. In Man naturally dwelleth no good Thing, but the Imaginations of his Heart are only evil continually. But then we are here taught, and with humble Gratitude are bound to acknowledge, whence our Strength and our Redemption come: That 'tis God, who by his Grace purchaſed for us by *Chriſt*, and communicated to us by his Spirit, lightens our Darkneſs, out of Weakneſs makes us ſtrong, able to contend with thoſe Enemies who war againſt the Soul, and ſubdue the Reluctances of our own Corruption. Let him therefore who glories, glory in the Lord. To him let us aſcribe the Merit and Praiſe of all our Services; and with humble Supplication intreat this neceſſary Aſſiſtance, that by his renewing, preventing, and ſup-

porting

porting Grace, he would lead us from Strength to Strength, till we come unto the perfect Man, unto the Measure of the Stature of Fulness in *Christ*. But then it is to be remembered,

Secondly, THAT thus renewed, thus assisted, God demands a voluntary Service from us: Without this inspired Strength indeed, we could do nothing, but by it we are raised to a Capacity of turning to God, and performing such an Obedience as he requires. We are restored to the Liberty of reasonable Beings, and may either quench the Spirit, resist his Grace, and harden our Hearts against his Impressions; or we may attend to his holy Motions, follow the Trace of Light he opens to us, and pursue the Paths of Duty and Happiness to which he invites us. Our Ability is from God, but the Neglect of improving that Ability to its proper Ends, is from our selves, and the fatal Consequences that will attend that Neglect, the Result of our own Choice. God has done all for us that the tenderest Father could do for his Children, the most indulgent Creator for the Work of his Hands. Through the Mediation of *Christ* he

he pardons our original Apoſtaſy, ſupplies by Grace the Defects of our Corruption, and puts it in our Power to chuſe and obtain eternal Salvation: More than this neither will infinite Goodneſs require, nor infinite Juſtice permit to be done for us. It is our Part and Duty to cooperate with this Grace, vigorouſly to exert thoſe Powers, and act up to thoſe Advantages to which it reſtores us. He has given Eyes to the Blind, and Feet to the Lame: He ſhews us the Way of Life, and perſuades and encourages us to walk in it, and promiſes to accompany us through all the Stages of our Paſſage, with Supports equal to the Difficulties that may attend us. If we are not wanting to our ſelves, if we diligently uſe and improve the Abilities he has given us, and is ready at all Times to afford us, 'tis in our Power to run the Race that is ſet before us, and ſo to run as to obtain. But if we will ſit down ſullen and unactive, in Expectation that God ſhould do all, and irreſiſtibly carry us to our Journey's End, we ſhall find our ſelves miſerably deceived in the Event. Grace is not intended to excuſe our Labour, but to qualify us for it, and conſequently to oblige us

to

to it. And agreeably the Apostle observes to the *Philippians*, that God's working in them *both to will and to do**, was so far from excusing their own Applications, or encouraging them to presume on their Security, that he assigns it as the very Reason for which they ought to work out their own Salvation with Fear and Trembling. His Grace is a Talent committed to us, and if we neglect to employ it in Use and Action, it will not only be taken from us, but the abused Favour will be imputed, and increase our Damnation.

Upon the whole, God has through the Mediation of *Christ*, and by the Operation of his Spirit, made us in a moral Sense new Creatures; strengthened the Infirmities, and repaired the Ruins of our Nature; opened to us the Gate of Life, and enabled us, if we strive, to enter in: A Mercy to be acknowledged by us in the most devout Returns of Praise and Adoration. But unless we strive, this Grace will profit us nothing, this Strength will be given us in vain, we shall not enter in. 'Tis a Presumption of equal Danger to our Happiness, to imagine we can do all, and

* Phil. ii. 13.

to imagine we need do nothing for the Attainment of it: The Medium between these Extremes, is the true Christian Doctrine. Of our selves, as of our selves, we could do nothing; but we can do all Things through *Christ* strengthening us.

LET us then give continual Thanks unto him for the Love wherewith he hath loved us, praying always with all Supplication, that being strengthened with all Might according to his glorious Power, we may work together with him, and make our Calling and Election sure.

SERMON XV.

Universal Obedience to the Laws of God the indispensable Obligation of Christians.

JAM. ii. 10.

Whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one Point, is guilty of all.

THAT Sin will expose us to the Resentment of a supreme Almighty Judge, is a Conclusion so irresistibly suggested to us by the natural Terrors of Conscience, and confirmed by such clear and ob-

vious Deductions of our Reaſon, that we may juſtly look upon it as the firſt Dictate of that natural Law written on the Heart of Man.

But then this is a Proſpect very uneaſy to the Luſts and Paſſions of our Corruption, and oppoſite to the ſtrongeſt Deſires of Fleſh and Blood; a Reflection ſo painful and diſquieting, that it corrupts our ſprightlieſt Enjoyments, and embitters every Pleaſure; and withal ſo importunate, that neither Company can divert it, nor Solitude exclude it. It purſues the Hypocrite to his Cloſet, and the Libertine to the Brothel. 'Tis therefore no Wonder to find all the Arts of Irreligion employed to weaken the Impreſſions of this Truth, and reconcile Mens Vices to their Fears. This is the Aim of all the various Schemes and Projects of Sin, and is equally intended by Atheiſm and Immorality. 'Tis this Enemy to their Satisfactions they both labour to ſuppreſs, the one by denying the Being or Providence of God, and ſo removing the Object of this Fear; the other by repreſenting him either as not offended, or as eaſily appeaſed, and ſo not to be feared

feared. But the Notion of a God is either so implanted in the Soul, or, which is all one, so obvious a Result of our first Reasonings, that Men cannot without great Violence to their natural Sentiments, bring them to admit so hardy a Conclusion as the former. And though some few may seem to acquiesce in Infidelity, and enjoy that fearless Security they propose from it, yet even these Men have their Hours of Diffidence and Uncertainty, and then all their Apprehensions of divine Vengeance return upon them with so much greater Force, as he appears now more irreconcileably offended. Religion therefore seems not so much in Danger from downright Atheism, as is sometimes imagined, since all rational Men must reject it for want of Proof; and even the Fool must be convinced by his Experience, when he finds the Evils it proposes to redress rather increased than abated by the Application.

And if we pursue our Enquiry into the Causes of that Corruption of Manners, we lament in the World, we shall find it rather owing to some mediating Schemes, that offer to comprehend the different In-

tereſts of Sin and Religion, and unite the Kingdoms of Light and Darkneſs.

And among all the various Projecters who have appeared in this Attempt, none ſeem to have met with ſo general a Succeſs, as they who apply themſelves to ſoften the Rigour of the Precept, and explain away the Obligation or Extent of the Law: Who perſuade us that all this Talk of Strictneſs and Severity is owing to the moroſe Singularity of ſome few, who would have their own Pride or Melancholy paſs for Religion: That God Almighty requires our Obedience in Proportion to the Abilities he has given us, and ſince the Infirmities of our Nature make our Obedience to the whole Law impoſſible, he cannot without the Imputation of Cruelty require more than a partial Obedience from us.

Now as this Plea appears under a Colour of Friendſhip to Religion, and to invite Men to it by the Eaſineſs of the Terms it offers, the Enemy is not readily ſuſpected: And a Propoſal ſo agreeable to all our Paſſions, will inſenſibly prevail upon our Weakneſs, make our Conſcience reſt ſatisfied and ſecure in the known Tranſgreſſion of ſome

Duties,

Duties, while we are persuaded we can give God an Equivalent in the more accurate Observance of some others.

It can therefore be no unserviceable Design to Religion to undeceive Men in so important a Point, and, from the Words of the Apostle, endeavour to convince them that the Piety our heavenly Father will accept, must consist in an entire unreserved Obedience to his Commands, since whosoever offends in the Breach of one Precept, is in his Sight guilty of the whole Law. In Prosecution of which, I shall

I. Confirm this Decision of the Apostle, by shewing that the Breach of one Precept necessarily implies, and therefore is fairly to be adjudged a Breach of the whole Law.

II. As a Corollary of this Proof, I shall shew that our Obedience to other Precepts cannot attone for our Guilt in offending against one.

III. I SHALL endeavour to obviate those Pleas which encourage Men to rely on a partial Obedience. And

I. I AM to confirm this Decision of the Apostle, by shewing that the Breach of one Precept necessarily implies, and therefore is fairly to be adjudged a Breach of the whole Law.

AND here, *First*, It is to be premised, that by Offence we are to understand a knowing and voluntary Transgression of the Law. For to Sins of unaffected Ignorance, when the Law is not, and could not be known, our heavenly Father, for the Merits, and through the Intercession of *Jesus Christ*, has promised his Pardon. For the Malignity of all Sin consists in the Contradiction of the Will of Man to the Will of God. Now whoever is entirely ignorant of the Law, which is the Will of God, is also ignorant whether his Actions are conformable to his Will or not, and may therefore commit a forbidden Action, and yet still preserve the highest Respect for the Law, and the most conscien-

tious

tious Submission to the Authority of the Legislator: And if the Ignorance be innocent, the Action will be so too.

Secondly, By offending in one Point is meant an habitual Neglect of one Duty, founded on a Disbelief of the Necessity of our performing it: And not any single Act of Transgression. For the irresistible Infirmities of our Nature make a perfect and unerring Obedience, as to single Acts of Sin, impossible; and therefore to preach up the Necessity of that which our Experience tells us is utterly impracticable, were to affright Mankind with the terrible Prospect of universal Damnation.

The Proposition then implied in my Text, is this, That whoever knows the Law, and yet denies his Obedience to any one Precept of it, is guilty of Disobedience to the whole Law. And the manifest Reason of this Decision is, because he subverts the Authority of the whole: For that which gives Force and Efficacy to the Law, is the Authority of him that enacts it, and consequently whoever destroys this Authority, does in Effect annul the Law.

Now

Now ſince all the Precepts of the Law are equally commanded by God, whatever Reaſonings can diſpute away, or induce a Man to diſpenſe with the Authority of one Precept, are equally concluſive againſt the reſt: And whatever Plea can excuſe our Obligation to one Duty, muſt have the ſame Force when applied to another. And this is the Argument the Apoſtle makes uſe of for the Proof of my Text, in the Words following: *He that ſaid do not kill, ſaid alſo, do not commit Adultery: Now if thou commit no Adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art a Tranſgreſſor of the Law**: i. e. It is the ſame Authority that commands our Obedience to one Precept of the Law, as to another; and if this Authority does not oblige our Obſervance in one Precept, it is impoſſible to aſſign any Reaſon why it ſhould oblige more in another. The Law muſt oblige either in all Precepts, or in none: If it oblige in all, all are to be obeyed; if it oblige in none, it has no longer the Authority of a Law, and can at moſt be eſteemed but as the Advice of a Friend, which we are at Liberty whether we will

* Jam. ii. 11.

comply

comply with or not. If therefore denying the Authority of the Law be transgressing the whole Law, and the avowed Violation of one Precept implies a Denial of the Authority of the Law, it remains, that offending in one Point, as I have before explained it, is effectually transgressing the whole Law.

To illustrate this farther, let us consider that the only Principles that preserve Mens Reverence of God, and engage their Obedience to his Laws, are either Fear and Apprehension of his Justice in their Punishment, or Love and the Expectation of those Rewards he proposes to Obedience. Now all the Restraint Men are under from these Motives, is by the Violation of one Law broken through; and the Principle which influenced their Obedience, has lost its Efficacy on them; the Partition between Good and Evil is broken down; and where one Sin has entered, Legions will force their Way through the same Breach. For he that can in the Transgression of one Precept, despise the Terrors of the divine Majesty, and the Endearments of his Mercy, is no longer under

any

any Impreſſion from theſe Motives that can engage his Obedience to the reſt.

It muſt be conſidered farther, that the Right our Creator has to our Obedience, is of ſo high and tranſcendent a Nature, that it can ſuffer no Competition; his Commands muſt have the firſt and governing Influence on all our Actions. Whoever therefore in any one avowed Inſtance of Sin, gives any temporal Motive or Principle a Direction over his Actions ſuperior to the Law of God, dethrones the Deity, while he denies the divine Law that ſovereign Authority it ought to have over him. Neither

II. Can our Obſervance of other Parts of our Duty be any Attonement for our Guilt in offending in one Point, or entitle us to the Rewards of Obedience. For it is not our performing any particular Action, but our performing it in Obedience to the divine Law, that renders it acceptable to God. Now whoever performs ſome Duties required by the Law, while he neglects others, cannot act from any Conviction that he ought to obey, or from any

any Regard to the Authority of the Legislator, which being the same in all, would equally influence his Obedience to all; but the virtuous Actions he performs, are either

1. PURELY a Compliance with natural Appetite; and consequently are not to be looked on as Instances of Obedience to a divine Law. Did the same natural Motives of Action appear with the same Force, against those Precepts of the Law which he seems to obey, as they do against those which he visibly transgresses, he would violate these with as little Reluctancy and Sense of Disobedience, as he does them. The Psalmist has given us the true Character of this Man. *He careth not for God, neither is God in all his Thoughts**. He never considers whether an Action be commanded or forbidden by God, but, without Distinction, resigns up himself to those natural Motives of Action which his Appetite or Inclination suggest. But

2. SUPPOSING him not to be insensible of an Obedience due to God Almighty, and to act with some Regard to it, yet

* Psal. x. 4.

since

ſince this Regard is ſo ſmall, that in ſome Inſtances it is manifeſtly inferior to a Temptation, were the ſame Temptation applied to other Parts of his Duty, it would by the ſame regular Influence engage him to tranſgreſs them too. His Religion is no more than the Want of Temptation will permit him to have; he commits every Sin that his Appetite calls for, or perhaps his Conſtitution or Fortunes can bear; and it is for want of Temptation or Ability that he commits no more: And conſequently, whatever his Pretenſions may be, it is not from any juſt Senſe of his Allegiance to God, that he obſerves any Precept of the Law, but becauſe his Intereſt or natural Temper give him no Averſion to the Performance. Nay

3. It may appear not only conſiſtent with the Purſuits he is engaged in, but the Profit, the Reputation, or the Convenience of the Virtue, may recommend it, from the ſame Inducements of Pleaſure and Advantage, by which he has been determined in the Choice of his favourite Vices; and ſo he may obey the Law in one Inſtance, from the Motives that prevail on him

him to break it in another. But this is not serving God, but our own Lusts. We accidentally indeed perform what is commanded by the Law of God, but the Obedience of the Action is paid to his Enemy: And if we performed the whole Law upon no better Principle than this, it would be far from an acceptable Service to God.

THE Covetous may be chaste and temperate, and the Libertine charitable, but not in Obedience to a divine Command; Avarice engages the one, and the Reputation of the Virtue the other. And though God does not generally distinguish the virtuous Actions of bad Men, from the Obedience of his Servants in the present and immediate Consequences of them; though he does not destroy that Connexion he has ordained between a virtuous Practice and temporal Happiness, but the Frugality of the Malicious is rewarded with Plenty, the Temperance of the Covetous with Health and Length of Days, and the Charity of the Libertine with Esteem and Reputation; yet their Consequence in the more important Event of human Actions, will be widely different:

For

For the temporal Reward is indeed annexed to the bare Performance of the Action, but the eternal to the Obedience.

But allowing that theſe virtuous Actions are performed from a due Senſe of the Authority of God, and out of a ſincere Intention of Obedience to his Laws: For theſe are manifeſtly the Pretenſions of ſome Men: They are with great Zeal concerned for the Obſervance of ſome Parts of the Law, while they can calmly tranſgreſs others, and think that their Exactneſs in one Duty, will attone for their Neglect of another. And it is to be feared a great Part of Mankind will be found to rely on no better a Title to Chriſtianity than this. Something they are forced to do to ſtop the Demands of an importunate Conſcience, which will not be ſatisfied without ſomething it can call its Religion. Even the Pride of human Nature will not ſuffer Men to act without ſome Pretence of Principles to juſtify their Conduct. The moſt Diſſolute affect ſtill the Character of rational Agents, and are therefore buſy in forming Schemes of Morality, conſiſtent with their ſeveral Vices. Each has ſome darling

darling Luſt, which pleads for a Reſerve, and which they would fain reconcile to the Expectations of Religion. And when an eager Appetite, and the Uneaſineſs of an unſatisfied Deſire are engaged in the Controverſy, the Underſtanding is bribed, and overlooks even its own Convictions; and weak Arguments will determine the Man in Favour of his beloved Enjoyments. But how ſo partial a Judgment can conſiſt with any Pretence to Conſcience, or why he ſhould ſcruple at the Commiſſion of one Sin, who can without Regret abandon himſelf to another, is hard to be imagined. Conſcience refers us to the revealed Will of God, as the Meaſure and Standard of our Obedience; and ſince we can thence produce no Warrant for Exception or Reſerve, Conſcience can never encourage us to hope for his Favour, while we act contrary to the Direction of any one of his Laws.

BUT the Abſurdity of theſe partial Schemes of Religion may appear even from hence, that ſcarce any two M n can be found agreeing in the ſame: Each is for laying the Reſtraint wide enough to take

in his favourite Irregularity; and wherever the ſtanding Rule does not interfere with that, allows it to be juſt and reaſonable, and will readily condemn thoſe who tranſgreſs it. 'Tis plain therefore that his Deciſions are corrupt and partial; the Judgment of his Paſſions, and not of his Reaſon; the Philoſophy of the Sinner, and not of the Man.

But let us remember that 'tis the renouncing this very Luſt we are fond of, is the Obedience God requires from us. This is the only Teſt of our Affection to his Service, and Submiſſion to his Authority. To decline an Action we have no Intereſt, nor Inclination to perform, is ſacrificing to God that which coſt us nought. But when we ſubdue the Reluctancies of our Corruption, and offer up the beloved of our Souls upon his Altar, this will be received as a deciſive Proof of our Affection: We then evidently prefer God to his Rival, and determine for *Chriſt* againſt *Belial.* This is the Rule, the Meaſure, the Teſt of our Allegiance: And however inoffenſive we may be in other Parts of our Conduct, if we are found wanting in this

Trial of our Love, we shall be disowned by God as Traitors and Enemies. But since so great a Part of the World are engaged in Pursuits manifestly inconsistent with this Doctrine, let us farther endeavour their Conviction, by considering

III. WHAT are the Pleas which delude so great a Part of Mankind, and induce them to believe that God will be satisfied with a partial Obedience.

Now this is a Conclusion they pretend to infer,

1. FROM a comparative View of the Mercy and Goodness of God, and the Infirmity of Men.

2. FROM those easy Representations he has given of Religion, and that Compassion he has expressed to Sinners in Scripture. And

1. *First*, 'TIS urged that God Almighty is a wise and merciful Father, who knows the Powers and Weaknesses of our Nature, and the Number and Difficulty of those Temptations we are exposed to. When therefore he gave us a Law, upon the Observance of which our Happiness was to

depend, both his Mercy and Juſtice were obliged to proportion the Service to the Capacity of that Being from whom he required it: And ſince an entire Obſervance of the whole Law is manifeſtly beyond our Abilities, God cannot without the Imputation of Cruelty be ſuppoſed to require more than a partial Obedience from us.

BUT in anſwer to this we may obſerve, firſt, that ſince God has by plain and poſitive Precept required our Obedience to every Command of the Law, it is a much fairer Inference from his Knowledge of our Abilities, and his inſeparable Attributes of Goodneſs and Juſtice, to conclude that ſo good, ſo juſt, and ſo compaſſionate a Being would not require Impoſſibilities, and inſult the Weakneſs of his Creatures with a deluſive Propoſal of Happineſs, which he knew they could never attain, and conſequently that the Obedience he has ſo expreſly commanded, is certainly within our Capacities to perform. But to give a more direct Anſwer to this Plea, it muſt be obſerved that this Objection proceeds upon a miſtaken Senſe of the Doctrine we aſſert; which is not that God requires a

perfect

perfect unsinning Obedience, free from particular Acts of Transgression: Thus we acknowledge it impossible for us to obey any one Law: But that every Law of God is equally to be obeyed, and we can certainly obey one Law of God as well as another, though our Obedience to every one will be attended with some Imperfections. It is not denied that from the Disposition of natural Temper, the Prepossessions of Habit, or the Circumstances they are placed in, Men may find a greater Difficulty in obeying one Law than another: But if in these Instances we do as much as we are able, we fulfil the Law; and if we sincerely endeavour not to transgress, we obey; and these Conditions are surely not impossible to the weakest Capacity. But if we presume to reject any one divine Law, and disown our Obedience, (which is the Case of those who contend for the Sufficiency of a partial Obedience) this is not an Act of Infirmity, but a deliberate Rebellion against the Authority of the Legislator, and is consequently (as I before proved) to be looked on and punished as a Breach of the whole Law. So that it cannot be inferred

from the Infirmities of Man, or the Goodness of God, that our Obedience to any one of the divine Laws is excused, because, notwithstanding these Infirmities, we can endeavour to obey every one of the divine Laws, and therefore God may with the greatest Justice strictly require these Endeavours from us, and without any Inconsistency with his Goodness inflict the Penalties of the Law on those who are wanting in these Endeavours to obey it. Let us then,

2. *Secondly*, EXAMINE whether any Plea can be drawn from Scripture to excuse or to justify a partial Obedience. Now it is not pretended that the Scriptures in express Terms dispense with any one divine Law, but a general Argument is formed upon those Representations we there find of Religion, as an easy agreeable Institution, a Refreshment to the Weary, and a Relief to the Laden; *Its Ways, Ways of Pleasantness, and all its Paths Peace**; and other Characters of the like Importance: Whence Men are willing to infer, that Christianity cannot be that difficult severe

* Prov. iii. 17.

Thing

Thing we would make it, restraining all our Inclinations, and denying our most eager Appetites the Satisfactions they press for, but a good-natured complying Institution, and which requires no stricter Obedience than may consist with an Indulgence to present Pleasure.

But to this it may be answered in few Words, That the Pleasures which these Scriptures ascribe to Religion, are of a Kind very different from those in favour of which they are here alledged, and generally consist not so much in the religious Action it self, which may be, and frequently is full of Difficulty and Uneasiness, as in the Consequences of it, and more especially in the Peace of a Conscience satisfied with the Performance of its Duty. Or however, that an Indulgence to the Lusts and Vices of Men, can never be imagined to be here tacitly implied, since they are plainly and particularly forbidden in innumerable other Places of Scripture. But here they have Refuge, and that is under the Example of those Servants of God, whose Failings and Miscarriages are recorded in Scripture. But first, These

Inſtances do not come up to the Point in Queſtion, which is not whether a Man may not in general be acceptable to God, notwithſtanding ſome Sins of Surprize or Infirmity; but whether a Man may be acceptable to God, though he diſowns Obedience to any one of his Laws. Offences of the former Kind we before allowed might conſiſt with our Title to Salvation, and no other can be produced in the Example of any Perſon, who is mentioned in a Character approved by God. And

Secondly, THE Failings of theſe good Men are recorded in Scripture as Monuments of the Weakneſs of human Nature, and at the ſame Time to convince us that theſe great Examples were nothing more than Men ſubject to the ſame Infirmities with our ſelves, and conſequently that the ſame Obedience which was acceptable in them, is poſſible to us: That if we are as ready to imitate their Repentance, as we are to tranſcribe their Faults, we ſhall be received with the ſame Mercy that they were. But we cannot with the leaſt Shew of Reaſon hence conclude, that God was pleaſed with their Tranſgreſſions, or allows

lows our Imitation: On the contrary, the Failings even of these holy Persons passed not in any Instance unresented by God; and the same Scripture which informs us of the Sin, records the Punishment. And our Christianity commands us to act after a nobler Pattern than the Virtues even of the most perfect Men, even him in whom there was no Sin, neither was Guile found in his Mouth.

In Sum; Strict and unreserved Obedience is the universal Language of Scripture. The great Sanction of the *Mosaical* Law is, *Cursed be every one who confirms not every Word of this Law to do it**. And the Gospel every where commands us *to cleanse our selves from all Filthiness of Flesh and Spirit, to be holy in all manner of Conversation, and abstain even from all Appearance of Evil; to add to Faith Virtue, to Virtue Knowledge, Temperance, Patience, and Charity*†; and, without Exception, to be perfect in the whole System of Christian Morality.

Upon the whole then, Let us in Application of what has been offered, stand

* Deut. xxvii. 26. † 2 Cor. vii. 1. 1 Pet. i. 15.

still

ſtill and examine how the faſhionable Practice of the World can be reconciled to this important Doctrine of our Religion. 'Twas the Glory of riſing Chriſtianity that a clear and uniform Virtue ſhone bright in the Lives of its Diſciples, and diſtinguiſhed them from the reſt of Mankind. 'Twas a ſtrict Obſervance of every Precept of their Religion, 'twas an exemplary Conqueſt over Paſſion and Appetite, a reſolute Zeal for the Honour, and an unwearied Devotion in the Service of God, that recommended the Goſpel to the World: Men ſaw their Works, and glorified their Father which was in Heaven. But alas! with what Shame and Regret muſt we obſerve the reverſe of this Character, in the preſent Lives and Morality of Chriſtians; when we ſee Piety and Holineſs ridiculed as moroſe Singularities, and thoſe Vices not only owned but gloried in, at the bare mention of which a Chriſtian ought to tremble; when even the beſt of us appear contented with a mingled imperfect Virtue, and the far greater and more publick Part of our Examples are ſo profeſſedly abandoned to Vice, that inſtead of offending

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but in one Point, they have scarce the Appearance of obeying in one?

Let us then reflect how glorious an Act of Resolution it would be in us, to appear in Countenance of discredited Duty, and by a bright and uniform Example of Piety, revive the declining Spirit of Religion, and retrieve the ancient Honour of Christianity. Let us not amuse our selves with vain Projects of reconciling Sin and Duty, but be contented to tread the old, though strait and narrow Paths of Faith and Obedience, the Paths in which Prophets, Apostles, and Martyrs are gone before us; and let us not fondly imagine that the Way to Happiness is made plainer to us than it was to them.

Let us remember that our Religion has taught us that there is no Communion of Light with Darkness, that we cannot serve two Interests, so perfectly irreconcileable as God and Mammon. That God Almighty will not be obeyed by Halves, or suffer the Allegiance we owe him to be shared between him and his Enemy. Let us then give a general Discharge to all our Lusts and irregular Desires, and let none be so

secret

ſecret as to be concealed, or ſo beloved as to be ſpared. Let no Sin appear ſmall or inconſiderable, by which an Almighty God is offended, and our eternal Salvation endangered. And if our Obedience be like the young Man's in the Goſpel, ſo near to Perfection that but one Thing is lacking, let us not ſuffer a ſingle Vice to rob us of our Share of eternal Happineſs, and make it in vain for us that a *Jeſus*, a Saviour, is come into the World. Let us not delude our ſelves with vain Hopes that God will reverſe one of his Laws, or depart from the eſtabliſhed Rules of his Juſtice, in our Favour. He hath ſaid, *This do, and thou ſhalt live**. And ſhall Man diſpute the Conditions? Shall Duſt and Aſhes preſcribe the Terms on which it will be ſaved? And

Laſtly, LET no Pretence of Difficulty weaken our Reſolutions in the Purſuit of our Duty, ſince God has not only proportioned the Burden to our Abilities, with all the Compaſſion of a merciful Father, but has alſo aſſured us of the Support of his Holy Spirit, who will ſupply Vigour to

* Luke x. 28.

the

the Weary, and Strength to the Weak, and make us more than Conquerors.

LET us not therefore faint, or be weary in our Journey; much less turn back, or sit down in Despair; but press chearfully forward to the high Mark of our Calling; and as far as our own Ability, and the divine Assistance will carry us, endeavour to be pure as our Creator is pure, and perfect as our Father which is in Heaven is perfect.

SERMON

SERMON XVI.

The Goodneſs of God a Motive to Repentance.

ROM. ii. 4. *latter part.*

Not knowing that the Goodneſs of God leadeth thee to Repentance.

OD Almighty has in no Inſtance left us a more affecting Conviction of his Love to Mankind, than in the various Methods he makes Uſe of to engage us in the Promotion of his Glory, and our own Happineſs. He has addreſſed every Faculty and Paſſion of

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our Nature with Arguments and Motives infinitely more deſerving our Regard, than thoſe which uſually govern us in the common Actions of our Lives. If our Fears can be awakened with the Dread of Evil, he has armed his Laws with the Terror of eternal Miſery. If our Hopes can be influenced by the Promiſe of Reward, he has encouraged our Obedience by the Aſſurance of a glorious Immortality. If our Love and Affection can be engaged, he daily endeavours it by the moſt endearing Inſtances of Favour and Goodneſs towards us. This laſt is the Motive, which the Apoſtle in my Text reminds his Converts of their Duty to comply with. He ſeems with a juſt Regret to have obſerved, that Men are apt to grow more remiſs in their Duty for the Indulgence of God towards them, and by a very dangerous Miſtake to infer from the Mercy and long-ſuffering of God, that they were themſelves ſufficiently ſecure of his Favour: And to cenſure others whom God was pleaſed to viſit with Affliction, as the only Perſons who needed Repentance. But the Apoſtle with great Zeal diſcourages ſo unreaſonable a

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Presumption, and assures them that the divine Wisdom designed the same Effect from both Dispensations: And as he intended to reform the one by Discipline and Correction, so he expected that his Goodness should lead the other to Repentance.

In treating this Subject I shall shew,

I. That 'tis the Intention of Providence, in all the various Expressions of his Goodness, to reclaim Mankind and to engage their Obedience.

II. I shall consider the Propriety and Efficacy of this Motive, to induce our Obedience and Repentance.

III. I shall endeavour to apply this Motive, and persuade you in the Force of it to bring forth Fruits meet for Repentance.

I. 'Tis the Intention of Providence, in all the various Expressions of his Goodness, to reclaim Mankind and engage their Obedience.

THIS is the Argument by which he delights to prevail, and 'tis with Reluctancy he is provoked by our Impenitence to apply the Discipline of Severity and Correction. He had rather Mankind should adore him as their Patron and Benefactor, as the Author of their Felicity, and the Protector of their Being. And though we are frequently reminded in Scripture of the Power, Justice, and Severity of God, yet the Obedience which is especially acceptable to him, is what flows from our Love and Gratitude. And therefore in that comprehensive Summary which is given us of our Duty to God, there is no express Mention of our Fear; but we are told the first and great Commandment is, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Soul, with all thy Heart, and with all thy Strength, and with all thy Mind.* And agreeably we may observe the Almighty introduces the Proposal of his Laws, rather with the Mention of some particular Acts of Kindness and Mercy, than by reminding Mankind of his Severity and Rigour; to convince them that they were the Commands of a Friend who consulted their

Happi-

Happineſs, and to reconcile them with Pleaſure to the Duties he enjoined.

THUS in the Delivery of the *Moſaical* Law, he addreſſes the Affections of that People in that engaging Preface, *I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the Land of* Egypt, *out of the Houſe of Bondage**. Before the Law, he was worſhipped by *Abraham* as his Shield, and great Reward. By the Houſe of *Iſrael*, till their coming forth out of *Egypt*, as the God of their Fathers, the God of *Abraham*, *Iſaac*, and *Jacob*. And under the Goſpel he continues to recommend himſelf to our Adoration, as the Father of our Lord *Jeſus Chriſt*, by whom we obtain Redemption out of the ſpiritual *Egypt*, the Bondage of Sin and Satan. And in every Act of our Chriſtian Worſhip, we are taught to call upon him under the endearing Character of our Father, to remind us of our Adoption, that we are made Heirs of God, and joint Heirs of *Chriſt*. Thus ſtudiouſly does God endeavour to render his Service acceptable to Mankind, and had rather per-

* Exod. xx. 2.

ſuade than force their Obedience: Neither are his Methods or Intentions different in his Diſpenſations to each private Man: The preſent Inſtances of Favour he vouchſafes every one of us, are deſigned not only to encourage, but to engage our Obedience. While there is any Probability of recommending his Commands to our Love and Inclination, he applies to our Gratitude by Obligations of Kindneſs and Beneficence, of Long-ſuffering and Forbearance. He reprieves the Sinner from Time to Time, and continues and even heaps on him the Favours of his Providence, in Hopes that, by an Act of Clemency ſo undeſerved, he may prevail on his Gratitude and Repentance.

II. And the Propriety and Efficacy of this Motive, (which is the *Second* Thing I propoſed to conſider) might be ſufficiently concluded from what I have already obſerved; that the infallible Wiſdom of God, who knows every Faculty and Paſſion of our Nature, and in what Manner they can moſt ſucceſsfully be applied to, had choſen this Motive, before all other, to lead Mankind

into Duty and Obedience: But this will more particularly appear from the following Considerations.

1. If we reflect on the Force of Goodness in General, and with how prevailing an Influence Acts of Kindness and Favour engage the Love and Compliance of Mankind, we cannot but conclude it to be the most effectual of all Arguments. Goodness is a Character which carries irresistible Charms and Persuasion along with it, and which alone can give us an Interest in the Hearts and Affections of Men. To love them who love us is so natural a Passion, that even the most intractable Tempers obey its Force. The Perfections of any Person may create our Veneration, his Power our Fear, and his Authority arising thence a servile and necessitated Obedience: But Love and Inclination can be produced only by an Experience or Opinion of Kindness to us. Now (as I observed) the Service that God delights in is free and voluntary, the Obedience of Sons and not of Slaves. He requires our Hearts and Affections, the Service of our

Choice and our Love, which no Method could effectually engage but the convincing Mankind by previous Acts of Kindness and Beneficence that their Happiness was dear to him, that he intended nothing in the Duties he enjoined but the Advancement of their Felicity. But,

2. THE Force of this Motive will especially appear, if we consider the transcendent Value of those Benefits, for which Mankind stand indebted to their Creator: Benefits, on the Continuance of which to us all our Capacities of Happiness and even our very Being depends, our Support in the present Life, and our only Hopes in the future: To which we may add.

3. THAT this is an Argument particularly adapted to prevail on all Capacities of Men. The far greater Part of Men are no otherwise moved than by Sense, and have neither Leisure nor Ability so far to improve their Power of Reflection, as to be capable of conceiving the divine Perfections without the Assistance of sensible Objects: And these can be no other than

ſome viſible Effects of either the Power, or Goodneſs of God. The general Effects of his Power might indeed ſufficiently manifeſt his Nature, if duly reflected on; but Men ſeldom conſider God any otherwiſe than in Relation to themſelves, and therefore want ſome extraordinary Benefits to excite their Attention, and engage their Love. Theſe beyond all other Arguments leave the ſtrongeſt Impreſſion on our Mind, and awaken our Gratitude to ſome Thoughts of Return. And indeed if the Senſe of the divine Beneficence cannot perſuade us, if an Argument recommended with ſo many tender Expreſſions of Love cannot move us, if we can be deaf to the Words of ſo ſweet a Charmer, and inexorable to all his Invitations, in vain will it be hoped that other Arguments ſhould have a greater Influence on us.

I HAVE hitherto conſidered the Efficacy of this Motive as it influenced our Obedience in every Part of our Duty to God, as a Principle that ſhould animate the Zeal, enliven the Devotions, and confirm the Reſolutions of the beſt of Men: But we may

farther reflect with how peculiar a Force it persuades the Repentance of the Sinner. For if even the Righteous, when he considers the many gracious Expressions of divine Compassion towards him, and that the poor imperfect Sacrifice of human Obedience is all the Acknowledgment, that either he can make or his merciful Creator requires, is filled with a religious Astonishment at the Riches of his Goodness, and his Affections charmed into the strongest Resolutions of Submission and Duty, what piercing Impressions must the Sinner receive from these Reflections? When he considers that the Person he offends, and has perhaps provoked through a long Course of Impiety, is not only of infinite Worth and Majesty, one who has the most transcendent Title to his Service and Obedience, and who is able to strike the Offender dead in a Moment, and vindicate the Honour of his Laws by a single Act of his Power? But what is more than all this, is his Friend and his Father, one who has obliged him by the most endearing Acts of Kindness and Favour, who has not only supplied him with Life, and Breath,

Breath, and all Things, but has with amazing Compaſſion born with all his weak and obſtinate Refuſals of Grace, has given him Time, Day after Day, and Year after Year, to conſider better of his Condition, and preſſed him by all the moſt engaging Motives to accept his Favour, and be ſaved? What wounding Reproaches of Soul muſt he then feel, from the Reflection on his own Ingratitude; and what Impatience to reconcile himſelf to ſo indulgent a Creator? And as the Arguments drawn from the Goodneſs of God have ſo prevailing an Efficacy to induce Men to repent, ſo the peculiar Propriety of them will farther appear, if we reflect that they are both the moſt generous, and the moſt laſting Foundation of our Converſion to God. For how much more noble is it, how much more becoming the Dignity of our Nature, and the Excellence of our Religion, to perform our Duty to God rather out of a grateful Senſe of our Obligations to his Goodneſs, than from the Dread of his Power and Reſentment? In the firſt Caſe, the governing Principle of our Converſion and Obedi-
ence

ence will be the Love of God; but in the latter, merely the Love of our selves. When we are thus frightened and terrified into Duty, we enter upon the Service of God with Coldness and Indifference, and our Obedience is hardly voluntary; we submit to the Yoke of *Christ* as a Hardship thrown upon us, by a Power we were afraid to resist. Our Correction may produce the Obedience of Clients or Slaves, but 'tis Love and Gratitude alone can give us the Title of Friends and Sons of God. And as that Repentance which is the Effect of Fear and Punishment is less generous, so 'tis usually less sincere and lasting, than that which flows from our Reflections on the divine Goodness towards us. We see, in too frequent Instances, the Relapses of those who either under the present Smart, or the near Apprehension of the divine Displeasure, have with the most solemn Vows resolved on a religious Reformation. While the Man is under the Scourge of Affliction, 'tis no Wonder if he be willing to shake off so troublesome a Companion, and abjure those Sins which he now experimentally finds attended with such

ſuch bitter Conſequences. But the Danger is, when the Rod is removed, and the Smart over, leſt he then forget the Hand whence the Stroke came, and return to his former Courſe of Sin and Pleaſure. Affliction indeed generally diſables a Man, while he is under the Preſſure of it, from purſuing the greater Part of thoſe Vices, in which the Guilt of Men conſiſts. If the Affliction be on his Body, his Appetites are weakened, and his Capacity of Fruition deſtroyed: If on his Fortunes and Eſtate, he is rendered incapable of the Expence of his Pleaſures: And 'tis but a poor imperfect Virtue to reſtrain from that which is out of his Power. Let but his Capacities of Enjoyment return, we ſhall find his Luſts plead hard for their accuſtomed Gratifications, and him ready to propoſe as much Happineſs in them as he did before. But now the Repentance, which is formed by a grateful Senſe of the divine Goodneſs and Beneficence towards him, is reſolved on while all the Appetites are in their Strength and Vigor: The Penitent conquers the Temptations of Sin in their full Force, is

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in the first Onset Master of all that is difficult in Duty, and consequently is in no Danger from any future Conflict. Nay, the Difficulty will every Day grow less and wear off, and Obedience become easy and familiar. The great Struggle with his Passions is in the first Check, and if his Gratitude to God can give him Resolution enough for that Conquest, when his Lusts had all the Confirmation of Habit and Custom, when his Appetites were pressing and strong, and in their full Relish of Pleasure, and the Duties of Religion on the other Side irksom and uneasy, Performances he was unacquainted with, and had no Inclination to set about; if under the Disadvantage of all these Prepossessions, this Motive has Force enough to recommend his Duty to his Choice, it must be infinitely superior to any Temptation that shall afterwards assault his Integrity. Let me then,

III. PERSUADE you seriously to consider and effectually to apply this gracious Motive, which the Compassion of our heavenly Father makes Use of to lead us to Repen-

Repentance and Obedience. Let us then frequently repreſent to our Souls the many Inſtances of Love and Beneficence, for which we daily ſtand indebted to the Goodneſs of God. Let us reflect that 'tis from him we receive the Diſtinctions of our Station, the Support and Protection of our Lives; that 'tis he who gives Health to our Bodies, and Grace to our Souls; that to his Bounty we owe all we enjoy here, and to his Compaſſion in *Chriſt* all that we can hope for hereafter.

And let it not appear the leaſt Inſtance of his Mercy that when he might have demanded our Obedience by Right of Creation, and as a Tribute to his ſupream Power, he has condeſcended rather to do it by repeated Acts of Kindneſs and Favour. That he has adapted the Arguments of Obedience to the Weakneſs of our Wills and the Imperfection of our Underſtanding, requiring us to conſider him only under the amiable Attributes of Goodneſs and Loving-kindneſs, and to adore him as our Friend and our Patron. Let us then reflect what Returns ſo good and ſo gracious a Being has a Title to from

from us. Shall any Thing appear too valuable to be ſacrificed to him, to whom we are ſo infinitely obliged? Is any Luſt or Intereſt too dear to us to be parted with for his Sake, who witheld not the only begotten of his Boſom, but gave up the anointed Son of his Love to the Croſs, for our Redemption? Should ſo indulgent a Benefactor have required ſome great Thing of us, ſhould not we have done it? How much more when he only intreats us to repent, and be ſaved? And let us then impartially conſider what we have done towards the Diſcharge of thoſe numberleſs Obligations which the Riches of his Goodneſs have heaped on us. Do we find any Effect of them on our Lives? Do we feel our Love more inflamed towards him, our Devotions raiſed, or our Reſolutions of Repentance more ſincere, from the Influence of ſo engaging a Motive? Be we aſſured, if his Goodneſs be without any Effect on our Gratitude, he will change the Methods of his Providence, and viſit our Afflictions with Scourges. If a Man will not turn, he will whet his Sword, and convince him by the Terrors of his

Majeſty

Majesty that he is the Sovereign of the World, and has a Right to the Obedience of Men. This indeed is the most favourable Treatment that a Sinner can hope for, who continues unreclaimed by the Goodness of God; and so compassionate a Punishment will itself demand his Gratitude: But he has Reason to apprehend an infinitely more terrible Infliction from his Justice: That he will give him up to his own Heart's Lusts, and let him follow his own Imaginations, and leave him to ruin himself by his own Blindness and Indiscretion. For let us remember that the Spirit of God will not always strive with the Obstinacy of Men: His Forbearance and Long-suffering will not endure for ever; but if neglected and despised, will certainly be withdrawn from us. That he has fixed and determined the Time for our Repentance, beyond which he will no longer await the Perverseness of Men, no longer suffer his Compassion to be abused. For we must not ascribe unto God such an unlimited Exercise of Mercy, as may destroy his Justice; for this is an Attribute as essential to the Deity as his Goodness;

and

and his Glory is as much manifested in the Execution of the one, as in displaying the other; and if the Obstinacy of Sinners disappoint his gracious Intention of setting forth his Mercy in their Pardon and Salvation, he will do Honour to his Justice in their Punishment. Alas! in vain do we hope that God will overlook such high Contradiction of Sinners, and pardon Offences committed against the plain Convictions of Conscience, and in open Contempt of all the Means he has appointed to bring Men to Duty and Repentance. When he has proposed all the Motives of Conversion to us, and given us Time and Capacity to apply them to our Souls; he has done all that the most merciful Creator could do for our Recovery. And if all these gracious Indulgences are without any Effect on us, we must perish in our own Folly, and our Blood will be upon our own Heads. God has appointed his Mercy to be a Refuge to Mankind for Sins of Ignorance, Surprize, and Inadvertency; not as a Sanctuary for prophane and incorrigible Sinners: To pass by such a wilful and presumptuous

tuous Contempt of Grace as this, would be an Argument rather of Weakneſs than Compaſſion; 'twould debaſe the Majeſty, and reflect Diſhonour upon the Juſtice and Sovereignty of God.

No, be we aſſured the Day will come when we ſhall be called to a ſevere Account for all his ſlighted and abuſed Mercies, for all the Favours of his Grace and Providence, for the Years we have ſpent in Pleaſure and Security, regardleſs of all our Obligations to his Bounty, and the frequent Calls and Invitations of his Holy Spirit to Repentance.

ALAS! whither can we hope to retreat in that Day, when Mercy itſelf ſhall be turned into Judgment, and that Goodneſs, which alone we could fly to for Shelter, ſhall already have been wearied by our Impenitence, and will then be produced as an Argument for the Juſtice of our Condemnation? Let us therefore, while the Door of divine Compaſſion is yet open, while our Prayers can be heard, and our Repentance be received, addreſs our ſelves to make our Peace with our God, and by a juſt Ac-

knowledgment of his Goodness to us here, entitle our selves to those more glorious Expressions of it, which he has reserved for our Reward in a blessed Immortality hereafter.

SERMON

SERMON XVII.

The Righteous Man the beſt Friend to the Community.

PROV. xii. 26. former Part.

The Righteous is more excellent than his Neighbour.

BY the Righteous in the Language of Scripture, eſpecially of *David* and *Solomon*, is intended the religious Man; one who fears God, and eſchews Evil; who applies himſelf to the Diſcharge of all perſonal and relative Duties, from Convictions of Conſcience, and

a Senſe of the divine Authority which enjoins them: And conſequently, by his Neighbour, here placed in Oppoſition to him, muſt be meant a Man of the contrary Character, one who careth not for God, but purſues the Intereſts or Pleaſures of the World, without any Regard to his Authority, or the Rules he has preſcribed to the Actions of Men. The Excellency here aſcribed to the former of theſe Characters, may refer either to the perſonal Happineſs attending it, or its beneficial Influence on Society. In this laſt View I ſhall at preſent conſider the Aphoriſm before us, and as equivalent to this Propoſition, That a Man of Religion and Virtue is a more uſeful, and conſequently a more valuable Member of a Community, than his wicked Neighbour. A Truth which ſeems to have found the Contradiction of the Scorner, even in *Solomon*'s Reign; and therefore we cannot wonder to find it oppoſed by Perſons of the ſame Character in any other Age, or under any other Adminiſtration, though as wiſe and juſt as his. For Religion will never be without Enemies, nor thoſe Enemies be wanting in

Endeavours

Endeavours to expoſe it to the Contempt or Averſion of Mankind. *Solomon*, we may preſume, at leaſt in the wiſer and better Part of his Reign, acted in his Royal Character as he often in this Book adviſes his Son; and made the Diſpenſations of his Juſtice and Favour an Encouragement to the Good and Virtuous, and a Diſcountenance and Reſtraint to the Libertine. But his Example, as a Preacher, is more properly before us in this Place: And when the Overflowings of Ungodlineſs make us afraid, the Miniſters of Religion cannot better diſcharge their Duty of oppoſing it, than by aſſerting and inforcing the Concluſions of this great Prince, deduced with the Aſſiſtance of inſpired Wiſdom from long Experience, and an attentive Obſervation on the Tendency and Events of human Actions. And the Truth and Juſtice of his Reflection in my Text, in the View I propoſed to conſider it, will appear to us if we obſerve,

I. In General, the Neceſſity of Virtue and Religion to the Ends of civil Society.

It will yet more diſtinctly appear if we obſerve,

II. In a more particular Application, how theſe Qualities fit and diſpoſe Men for the moſt uſeful Diſcharge of the ſeveral Offices and Relations of ſocial Life. I will add

III. A Religious Motive to value and eſteem Perſons of this excellent Character, becauſe by their Piety and Prayers the Bleſſing of God is derived on the Community.

I. In Contradiction to my firſt general Obſervation, it has been offered us, among the refined Productions of the preſent Age, that Vice is a Thing highly beneficial to Society, derives on it ſo many Advantages, that publick Happineſs would be imperfect without it. Now we may admit in Support of this Paradox, that if there were no vitious Men in the World, we ſhould not want to be protected by civil Government from them. We will alſo admit, that ſome Advantages may ariſe to Soci-

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ety from the Vices of Men, either as they occaſion good Laws, or awaken a due Execution of them; or as the Example or Nature of his Puniſhment may render a Criminal of ſome Service to the Publick. But then it muſt be remembered, that theſe are purely accidental Conſequences from Vice: Its natural and proper Effects are all Evil, the very Evils which Government was deſigned to redreſs; and the Advantages that any Time happen to ariſe from it, are owing wholly to the Wiſdom and Virtue of thoſe in Authority. Should the Magiſtrate be ſo weak or corrupt as to approve and encourage Vice, and leave it without Reſtraint or Correction, the Effects of it would ſoon be felt in the Confuſion of the Society. But to make ſhort with this Argument, let us aſk the Libertine himſelf whether he would chuſe to live in a Community, where all profeſs and are without Reſtraint allowed to gratifie every Paſſion, without any Regard to the Peace or Intereſts of their Neighbours. If Vice, as he pretends, *i.e.* if Luſt and Violence, if Fraud and Rapine be really in themſelves beneficial to the

Society, the more they abound the happier muſt he and every Member of it be: But with whatever Colours he may perſuade Authority to connive at his own Vices, I preſume he will deſire its Protection from the Effects of other Mens. So that even the vitious themſelves, where their Judgment is not corrupted by a Partiality to their own Actions, are in Sentiment with us, and agree to that Concluſion which the Wiſdom of all Ages, and the Experience of all Hiſtories affirms to us, That the Peace, Strength, and Happineſs of a Society depend on the Juſtice and Fidelity, the Temperance and Charity of its Members: That theſe Virtues always render a People flouriſhing and ſecure, and the contrary Vices are as conſtantly productive of Miſery and Ruin.

If then theſe Virtues are acknowledged neceſſary to ſocial Felicity, Religion muſt be ſo too, becauſe no other Principle can offer an equal Inducement to the Practice of them, or equally reſtrain Men from the oppoſite Vices. 'Tis vain to imagine that the Fear of the Magiſtrate, or political Laws can effectually govern the Acti-

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ons of Men, without the Aid of Religion: For the Duty of obeying these Laws must be deduced from a superior Principle: And he who looks no higher for the Motives of his Conduct than the Resentments of human Justice, whenever he can presume himself cunning enough to elude, rich enough to bribe, or strong enough to resist it, will be under no Restraint from any Action of Treachery, Lust, or Violence, which his Passions suggest.

Yet less can we rely on that fantastick Principle called Honour, which has sometimes been pretended to supply the Place of Religion. For if by Honour is meant any Thing distinct from Conscience, 'tis no more than a Regard to the Censure and Esteem of the World. Now if Men constantly affixed Applause and Disgrace where they ought to do, this Principle would certainly have a very good and extensive Influence on the publick Conduct of Men; though on concealed and secret Villanies it lays no Restraint. But what will be its Effect, if ever any Vice shall become reputable; if Lewdness, Intemperance,

rance, and Oppreſſion ſhall at any Time be gloried in as Marks of Greatneſs, and the Diſtinctions of a ſuperior Character; what can we then expect from the Man of Honour, but to ſignalize himſelf as far as he can by theſe dignified Accompliſhments? In ſhort, if Honour had forbid Men their Vices, they would have contented themſelves with the good old Principles of Conſcience and Religion. But when the libertine Part of the World obſerved that theſe condemned the Purſuits and Pleaſures they were fond of, and withal were ſo ſtubborn and inflexible that no Artifice could reconcile them to Vice, they applied themſelves to leſſen their Authority, decried them as hard and unneceſſary Reſtraints, and propoſed Honour or a Concern for Reputation as an equivalent Security for Mens good Behaviour. This they foreſaw was a Principle more flexible to their Purpoſe. The Opinion of the World might be eaſily altered by Cuſtom and Numbers, by Impudence and Raillery; and if they could once perſuade Mankind to receive this as the only Rule and Meaſure of their Actions, Vice might

might ſoon prevail for that Credit and Eſteem which upon Principles of Religion could only belong to Virtue. I am unwilling to obſerve in what Effects this Scheme has ſucceeded; but this we may with Confidence affirm, that neither Honour, nor any other Principle that can be imagined, will be found of equal Power to ſecure the Ends and Intereſts of Society, with Religion. And this is in Effect acknowledged by its greateſt Enemies, who, while they pretend to diſcredit as a mere political Contrivance to awe Men into Reſtraint and Obedience, confeſs, at the ſame Time, that the Wiſdom of all Ages has concurred in eſteeming Religion the only Principle, that could effectually preſerve the Peace and Order of Civil Government. From which Conceſſion I will take the Liberty alſo of this farther Inference, That whoever ſhall attempt to leſſen the Reverence, and weaken the Authority of this Principle, ought to be puniſhed and deteſted as a publick Enemy. What has been obſerved in theſe general Reflections, cannot but lead us to aſſert the Concluſion, That the Man of Virtue and Religion is

more

more excellent, a more valuable Member of Society, and contributes more to its Honour and Happineſs, than thoſe of a contrary Character. It will yet appear to us in a fuller Light, if we obſerve

II. In a more particular Application, how Virtue and Religion fit and diſpoſe Men for the moſt uſeful Diſcharge of the ſeveral Offices and Relations of ſocial Life.

Power, without Goodneſs, is the moſt terrible Idea our Imagination can form; and the more the Authority of any Station in Society is extended, the more it concerns publick Happineſs that it be committed to Men fearing God, and acting under the Awe of a ſuperior Juſtice. When we carry our Reflections on this Argument to the ſupreme Civil Power, we may obſerve that no Prince can ever rely on the Fidelity of that Man who is a Rebel to his Creator: Neither will any human Commands engage him to Juſtice and Integrity in an Office, whom the Authority of God cannot diſpoſe to theſe Duties. Parts, Knowledge, and Experience, are indeed excellent Ingredients in a publick Character; of equal

equal Uſe and Ornament to the Seat of Judgment and Counſel: But without Virtue and Religion, theſe are only Abilities to do Miſchief, and give us the Idea of a dangerous Villain. All that Skill which deſerves the Name of Wiſdom, Religion approves, recommends, and teaches. The Rules and Means it preſcribes, have generally been found more ſucceſsful in publick as well as private Affairs, than all the Refinements of irregular Cunning: And I will venture to affirm, that more true political Wiſdom may be learned from the holy Scriptures, and even from this ſingle Book of *Proverbs*, than from a thouſand ſuch Writers as *Machiavel*. To compaſs a wicked End, or to render wicked Means ſucceſsful, that Author has perhaps directed as well as human Subtilty can deviſe. But a righteous and juſt End is beſt promoted by righteous Means, the Way to it lies more obvious and direct, and needs not thoſe Windings of the Serpent to lead us to it. In ſum, from a Libertine the Prince is no farther aſſured of Service, nor the People of Juſtice, than either his ſecular Fears or Intereſts can engage him. But the

Man

Man of Conſcience and Religion, is under the Influence of Principles which give both the greateſt Security. The Prince is in no Danger of being betrayed by the Falſeneſs, or cheated by the Avarice of ſuch a Servant; nor the People of being oppreſſed by the Tyranny, or undone by the Corruption of ſuch a Ruler. *When the Righteous are exalted*, (ſays *Solomon*) *the City rejoiceth.* Power in ſuch Hands is as the Power of God, by whoſe Laws it is guided; a Terror only to evil Doers, but the Delight and Confidence of all who do well, and wiſh the Proſperity of their Countrey.

BUT I go on to obſerve, that though Religion and Virtue be more eminently neceſſary to thoſe in Stations of Authority, yet theſe Qualities are proportionably conducive to publick Happineſs, in every inferior Relation of Life: They equally diſpoſe Men to be good Rulers and good Subjects, to be good Parents and good Children, good Maſters and good Servants, good Neighbours and good Friends.

I NEED not remind a Chriſtian Audience how eminently theſe Characters diſtinguiſh the holy Religion we profeſs: A Re-

A Religion which not only forbids, but by its natural Influence ſweetens all Bitterneſs and Aſperity of Temper, and corrects that ſelfiſh Narrowneſs of Spirit which inclines Men to a fierce unbenevolent Behaviour; and to which we may juſtly aſcribe thoſe Envies, Jealouſies, and Encroachments, which render Mankind uneaſy to one another. But by our Religion we are taught and habituated to be meek and humble, to conſider the meaneſt Chriſtian under the endearing Character of a Brother, as equally related to our God and our Redeemer, and born to the ſame Expectations with our ſelves: To be tender of his Peace, and concerned for his Credit and Intereſt as our own: To be gentle and eaſy to be intreated, ready to forgive his Offences, and relieve his Diſtreſſes: To weep with them that weep, and rejoice with them that rejoice: To ſhew Reverence to Superiors, Kindneſs and Humanity to Equals and Inferiors, and Juſtice to all. Theſe are the Precepts, and this the natural Genius of our Religion; and whenever it is truly received into the Heart, the Fruits of it will

appear

appear in ſo lovely an Exerciſe of Juſtice, Friendſhip, and Charity, as will diffuſe Peace and Harmony through the World, and mutually reconcile Mankind to each other.

It may perhaps be thought an Objection of Weight againſt this Doctrine, that our own and other Hiſtories furniſh us with Examples of War and Confuſion introduced, and the Blood of Princes and Nobles ſacrificed to Perſuaſions of Religion; and that the Cauſe of ſo many Evils cannot be ſo harmleſs and beneficial a Principle, as we would repreſent it.

But the Anſwer to this is eaſy and obvious.

'Tis indeed confeſſed that wicked and ambitious Men frequently cover over their Pride, Rapine, and Revenge, the real Motives of their Actions, with the venerable Names of Conſcience and Religion; and by a Superiority of Craft and Skill, may perhaps prevail on the Weakneſs and Miſtakes of ſome well-meaning Men to engage in their Deſigns, under Perſuaſions of Conſcience and Duty. Every Inſtance that can be referred to in ſupport of this

this Objection, will upon Examination be resolved into this Account; and all that can be inferred from it is, that a very good Name may be abused to very bad Purposes. And if this be any just Reproach to Religion, 'tis what will equally condemn all Laws, and civil Administrations of Justice in the World: For that these have been often abused by Malice, Ignorance, or Knavery, to the Oppression of Innocence, and the Subversion of that Right and Order they were intended to preserve, cannot be denied. But will it hence be inferred, that Laws and Tribunals are destructive to the Peace and Interests of Society? No better Consequence can be drawn to the Prejudice of Religion from such Examples, where the Authors, who conduct the Mischief, are allowed to have no Religion, and they who assist in it to act in Ignorance, or Mistake of its Directions: On the contrary, from these very Instances we conclude to the Advantage of Religion; since the very Choice of this holy Name, as the most effectual Concealment of a wicked Design, supposes that Mankind are generally satisfied that

nothing but what is innocent and juſt is directed by the Rules, or can be acted upon the Principles of it.

And wherever it is true and ſincere, Juſtice, Meekneſs, and Fidelity, all the Virtues that can render a Government ſecure, and a People happy, will be Fruits of it. All the Duties that the beſt political Laws enjoin, as conducive to the Quiet and Order of ſocial Life, are expreſly commanded by our Religion: And all the Crimes they forbid as deſtructive of publick Happineſs, are the repeated Prohibitions of the Goſpel; and conſequently our Religion has this Teſtimony from the wiſeſt Legiſlators, that it gives the beſt Directions that can be deviſed for the general Intereſt and Felicity of Mankind, only with this great Advantage, that whereas human Laws can reach no farther than to reſtrain the overt Action, Religion extends to the ſecret Motions of the Soul, and applies Remedies to the Source and Fountain whence every Vice ariſes. Attend our Bars, and our Priſons, and let them ſhew us how much more excellent the Righteous is than his Neighbour. We there

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ſee who they are that violate the Peace, and diſturb the Rights and Comforts of Society: Men unreſtrained by the Authority or Proſpects of Religion, and, as our Law very juſtly accounts for their Crimes, who have not the Fear of God before their Eyes. But from the Good and Juſt, from thoſe whoſe Conduct is governed by the Rules of the Goſpel, no Injury can ariſe to Society, and therefore, as the Apoſtle obſerves, againſt ſuch there is no Law.

To theſe relative Characters, which diſtinguiſh the Righteous as more excellent than their Neighbours, I will

III. Add one more private and perſonal, but of equal Merit and Value, Their Piety and Devotion, by which the Bleſſing of God is engaged to the Community.

For let it not be imagined that they contribute nothing to the Happineſs of the Countrey, who only ſerve God in the Duties of a holy Life; who attend his Sanctuary, and daily addreſs his Goodneſs to pardon the Sins of the Land, and turn away his Anger from it; to direct and proſper the Counſels, and protect the Perſons

of those who act in the publick Administration. If we own a God and a Providence, we cannot but acknowledge the Dependance of Success in all human Affairs on his Concurrence. And since God in these Dispensations acts as a Judge and Governor of the World, these Marks of his Favour or Displeasure must have the Nature of Rewards and Punishments, and be proportioned to the Neglect or Observance of his Laws. And for the same Reasons that a righteous and godly People will be entitled to Honour and Happiness, and a wicked exposed to Contempt and Misery, righteous and good Men ought to be esteemed a Strength and Defence to their Country, and wicked Men a Reproach and Weakness to it. For as *Solomon* says, *By the Blessing of the Upright the City is exalted; but 'tis overthrown by the Mouth of the Wicked**.

And this national Merit of the Righteous will still farther appear in the Comparison, if we observe from the Declarations of God, and the Histories of his Providence, that the Piety of good Men more effectually prevails for his Blessing upon a

* Prov. xi. 11.

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Nation, than the Sins of wicked Men provoke his Resentment. So great is the Compassion of God, that in the Execution of his Judgments he never visits a People with publick and general Calamities, but where their Sins are publick and national too: But his Mercy is pleased to regard the Virtue and Prayers of a much smaller Proportion, to suffer their Piety to attone for the Guilt, and suspend the Punishment due to a far greater Number of wicked Men. Thus in that Conference with which God honoured the Patriarch *Abraham*, when he had determined the Overthrow of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*, he assures him, that *if but ten righteous Men could* have been found in those Cities, though the Cry of their Iniquity reached unto Heaven, yet the Hand of his destroying Angel had been stayed, and the whole Multitude of the Ungodly spared for the Sake of so small a Number. His Hand was stayed till *Lot* was in a Place of Safety. *Make haste*, (says the Angel) *and escape thither, for I can do nothing till thou art come thither* †.

† Gen. xix. 22.

And we ſee the ſingle Interceſſion of that righteous Man prevailed for the Deliverance of one even of thoſe devoted Cities.

And though, when God denounces the irrevocable Sentence of his Wrath againſt the Idolatry of *Judah*, he tells them, that though *Noah*, *Daniel*, and *Job*, were among them, they ſhould not reverſe the Judgment he had paſſed upon their Sins; yet the very mention of this by the Prophet, as the greateſt Argument of the Immutability of his Purpoſe, ſuppoſes that generally the Piety and Interceſſion of three ſuch Men would appeaſe the Anger of God, that this was the moſt effectual Addreſs that could be made to the divine Compaſſion, and if they had ſinned beyond the Power of ſuch an Application, their Caſe was deſperate and paſt Remedy.

Upon the whole then, let us recollect from what a Variety of Reaſons we are forced to approve the Concluſion in my Text, and confeſs the Righteous more excellent than his Neighbour. We have ſeen that the Graces of his Religion prepare him for the moſt uſeful Diſcharge of every Relation of Life, equally to adorn the

the Seat of Authority himſelf, and to render it eaſy to others; diſpoſe him to thoſe Virtues, which by their natural Influence ſpread Chearfulneſs and Pleaſure, Amity and Confidence, through human Society; and laſtly, that his Piety and Prayers are a continual Guard to his Countrey, derive the Bleſſings of God upon it, and avert his Judgments from it.

SINCE therefore we all pretend a Concern for the Proſperity of our Countrey, let our Zeal for it appear in our Endeavours to promote Virtue and Religion. Let us conſtantly diſtinguiſh the Righteous, by that Honour and Reſpect which is due to ſo excellent a Character. By this we ſhall give Beauty and Luſtre to his Example, and enable him by increaſing the Number of the Good, to add daily to our Happineſs and Security. Above all, let our Care begin at Home: Let us each in our Stations govern our Lives by the Rules of our holy Religion, and practiſe thoſe Virtues our ſelves, whoſe Excellence we acknowledge in others. And let us unite in our Prayers to God, that by the holy Influences of his Spirit he would guide and

ſanctify every Rank and Order of Men among us, that the Wiſdom which is from above, that Righteouſneſs, Holineſs, and Mercy, may be the Ornament of our Superiors, and be acknowledged in univerſal Honour and Imitation.

THEN ſhall Peace be within our Walls, and Plenteouſneſs within our Palaces, and no Complaining be heard in our Streets. God ſhall be merciful to us, and bleſs us, and under his Protection we ſhall be ſafe and happy.

SERMON

SERMON XVIII.

A prudent Conduct and Behaviour in Christians recommended and inforced.

ROM. xii. 17. latter Part.

Provide Things honest in the Sight of all Men.

IF it was necessary to exhort Christians to an holy unblamable Life in the Age in which the Apostles wrote, when all who professed the Gospel were Converts of Conscience, when the Terrors of Persecution and the daily Expecta-

Expectation of Death gave the Motives to Obedience the ſtrongeſt and moſt lively Impreſſion on their Minds, much more muſt it be neceſſary, when that primitive Zeal is decayed, when the Religion of many is no more than a Compliance with a faſhionable Profeſſion, and the outward Security of the Church has produced a careleſs Indolence, a Deadneſs and Inactivity of Spirit among the Generality of Chriſtians. It may, perhaps be thought, that the Intention of this Precept was principally to guard againſt the Malice and Detraction of the profeſſed Enemies of the Goſpel, who were then numerous, prejudiced againſt it by ſtrong Averſions, ready to triumph over every Miſcarriage in the Conduct of its Diſciples, and improve every Failing into an Argument of Reproach and Diſcredit to the Faith they profeſſed: But that under a general Reception of Chriſtianity, we may expect a candid and favourable Interpretation of all our Actions; and where all are equally concerned for the publick Honour of our Profeſſion, none will be inclined to reflect to its Diſadvantage the Defects of Particulars,

culars, which the Principles of our Religion are well known to diſallow; and therefore the great Reaſon for that Strictneſs and Caution ceaſing, it need not now be inculcated to Men. But alas! this Reaſon for the Precept holds ſtill with too much Force: The Goſpel has ſtill its Enemies among us open and barefaced, diſputing and ridiculing every Article of its Faith, and vigilant over every Advantage by which they may expoſe it to the Scorn or Averſion of Mankind. The weekly, and even daily Invectives we hear or read againſt all who miniſter in the Offices of our Religion, or who with any Zeal and Reverence attend them, are too plain a Conviction that our Religion wants not Enemies, nor thoſe Enemies Spight and Malice againſt it; and conſequently this Reaſon perſuades the Conduct here recommended, with as much Force as it could do in any Age of the Goſpel. We are ſtill concerned to be upon our Guard, and by a prudent and exemplary Behaviour cut off all Occaſion from thoſe who ſeek Occaſion, that they may have whereof to accuſe us. But ſhould we ſet this Conſideration,

deration aſide, the Duty here injoined will ever oblige, as the moſt effectual Means to reſtrain the Growth of Vice and Wickedneſs, and promote the Practice of Virtue and Piety among Men. Wicked Men there ever were, and ever will be in the World; but ſo long as they can be kept under the Reſtraint of Shame and Singularity, the publick Reverence and Practice of Religion will not be much affected by them: But if once they can dare to appear openly and undiſguiſed, when they can take up the Seat of the Scorner, defy Cenſure, and turn the Ridicule upon Seriouſneſs and Piety, the Contagion ſpreads like a Peſtilence, and prevails as a Faſhion, and the weak and modeſt grow aſhamed to appear in the Habit of Virtue. To prevent or redreſs this Evil, the Command in my Text is a moſt effectual Preſcription, *Provide Things honeſt in the Sight of all Men.* That it may have its due Weight and Influence on our Practice, I ſhall,

I. *Firſt*, CONSIDER the Extent and Import of it, and

II. *Secondly*, SET before you the Motives which recommend it to your conſcientious Obſervance.

I. THE plain Meaning of this Precept is, that we ſhould have a ſtrict Regard to our outward Behaviour and Converſation, to every Part of our Conduct which is publick, and ſubject to the Notice and Obſervation of Men. We ſhould weigh and conſider with our ſelves in what Light our Actions will appear, how far they may probably miſlead the Judgment, or influence the Practice of others: And therefore we are to provide Things honeſt, to conſider not only the internal Rectitude of our Actions in the Sight of God, but whether they will be free from all Mark or Suſpicion of Evil. Nay, 'tis not enough that they are barely inoffenſive to Men, but they muſt be honeſt, of good Report, ſuch as will engage Eſteem and Obſervance, and adorn that holy Principle from which they proceed.

As Things of this Character muſt be provided, ſo they muſt be provided in the Sight

Sight of all Men, Inferior as well as Superior, Enemies as well as Friends, the Infidel as well as the Chriſtian. Our Conduct muſt be ſuch as may not only be attended with the Approbation and Applauſe of good Men, but it muſt be ordered with ſuch Prudence, as may ſilence the Reproaches, engage the Reverence, and tend to the Conviction of the Libertine himſelf.

BUT to avoid Miſtakes in the Practice of this Duty, it is neceſſary that we diſtinguiſh between thoſe Acts of Piety and Virtue which we ought to keep cloſe to our ſelves, and thoſe in whoſe Performance we are required to be open and viſible. For in this Injunction the Apoſtle did not intend to contradict his Maſter, or recommend a Practice which he with ſo much Severity reproved in the *Phariſees*, the doing their Alms before Men, loving to pray ſtanding in the Synagogues and Corners of the Streets, affecting the Praiſe and Admiration of Men, and, in Order to acquire it, performing thoſe Acts of Piety and Devotion openly, which ought to have been done ſecretly and in the Cloſet.

Much

Much leſs did he deſign to encourage our Vanity and Oſtentation, in counterfeiting any Part of Religion; it is not his Meaning that we ſhould ſound a Trumpet before us as the Hypocrites do, that we ſhould ſtudy to appear better, or even ſo good as we are, merely to procure the good Opinion and Praiſe of Men: Still leſs that we put on the outward Face and Semblance of Virtue, only to conceal and diſguiſe our Vice, that we may with more Security and leſs Suſpicion, indulge our ſecret Luſts, and execute our wicked Purpoſes, and be, in our Lord's Compariſon, like whited Sepulchres which appear beautiful outwardly, but within are full of dead Mens Bones and all Uncleanneſs. But that under a fair and beautiful Appearance, there ſhould ever be the real Subſtance of Good; that an honeſt Intention of Heart, and an upright Conſcience, ſhould always be at the Bottom of a good Converſation; and the outward and apparent Sanctity of our Actions, ſhould flow from the Purity of our Heart and Affections.

BUT leaſt of all does this Precept imply, that we ſhould do any Evil to gain the Favour and Approbation of Men, or comply with any Thing that the Prevalence of corrupt Faſhion has made reputable. When ſuch an Overflowing of Ungodlineſs ſhall prevail, that Men ſhall glory in what ought to be their Shame, when the Diſtinctions of Good and Evil are confounded, when Virtue is expoſed to the Reproach of Vice, and Vice honoured with the Applauſe of Virtue; to pleaſe Men upon theſe Terms, and provide what in ſo corrupt a Judgment may be called honeſt, would be a direct Contradiction to this Command of the Apoſtle.

THIS Precept then, under its proper Limitations, will oblige us with a pure and unaffected Sincerity to perform our Duty, according to the Nature and Exigence of the various Branches of it.

THERE are ſome Works of Piety, whoſe Nature, as was inſinuated, requires that we ſhould be reſerved in the Practice of them. Such with which the World is not immediately concerned, or which may with more ſpiritual Advantage be tranſ-

acted

acted between God and our own Souls. Such are private Devotion, Meditation on God's Holy Word, the Examination of our own Consciences, and voluntary Acts of Penitence: To which we may add particular Deeds of Charity in dispensing Alms, and more especially in the friendly Reproof of our Neighbour. These Duties our Lord has taught us to perform in secret, industriously to conceal our Observance of them from the Eyes of Men, that we may avoid Vanity and Hypocrisy in our selves, or giving Offence to our Neighbour by a just Suspicion of it. *Take Heed* (says he) *that you do not your Alms before Men; when thou prayest enter into thy Closet; when thou fastest, anoint thy Head, and wash thy Face, that thou appear not unto Men to fast* *. *And if thy Brother sin against thee, tell him of his Faults between thee and him alone* †.

But when the Profession of our holy Faith, and the Acknowledgement of the Truths or Hopes revealed to us in the Gospel is the Instance of our Duty; when we are called upon to join in publick Ad-

* Matt. vi. 1, 6, 17. † Matt. xvii. 15.

oration, whereby the Reverence of God is upheld in the World, or to bear our Part in Acts of publick Humiliation; or when a juſt Zeal in Vindication of God's Honour from the Blaſphemies of the Prophane, or the Scandal of Actions openly wicked and irreligious is required at our Hands, theſe Duties in the very Nature of them require a publick and obſervable Performance: If we do them at all, they muſt be ſeen of Men. But in other Parts alſo of our moral or religious Conduct, and even in thoſe in which we are ſometimes, and perhaps generally, obliged to ſtudy Concealment, it may in ſome Circumſtances be our bounden Duty to diſtinguiſh our ſelves by the moſt open and remarkable Practice. As when any Duty is fallen under a general Diſuſe and Neglect, in ſuch a Caſe the moſt viſible and exemplary Performance is required; and to hide our Light under a Buſhel, and content our ſelves with our private Virtue, is being aſhamed of *Chriſt*.

In every Action of our Lives indeed our firſt and principal Care ſhould be to approve our Conſciences to God, who ſees

in ſecret; the Intereſt, the Credit or Reputation that may attend them are no farther to be received among the Motives of our Conduct, than as they may promote the Glory of God. *We muſt be* (as the Apoſtle directs) *the Servants of* Chriſt, doing the Will of God *heartily as unto the Lord, and not unto Men, knowing that of the Lord we ſhall receive the Reward of the Inheritance* *: But at the ſame Time we are to remember, that being exemplary before Men, is a Duty alſo commanded by God, under the ſame Penalties and Obligations with his other Laws: Theſe Duties are certainly conſiſtent with each other, and we may do the one without leaving the other undone; and therefore the Performance of the one, will not excuſe the Omiſſion of the other.

II. The Motives which recommend the Precept in my Text to our conſcientious Obſervance, are what I propoſed Secondly to conſider.

And here the firſt Motive that occurs to us, is the manifeſt Tendency of ſuch a

* Col. iii. 23, 24.

Conduct to promote the Glory of God, the great End of every Creature, high and low, animate or inanimate, and which every intelligent Being is bound to consult by a direct and intentional Service; the constant Employment of *Cherubim* and *Seraphim*, and all the Company of Heaven; and which Man is particularly commanded to propose in all his Actions. Whatsoever we do, we are to do all Things to the Glory of God. Now the Glory of God is in the most eminent Manner promoted by a visible and exemplary Obedience to his Laws, both as such a Conduct is in it self the most expressive Acknowledgment of the Majesty and Sovereignty of God, and as it disposes others to glorify him by the same Observances. Our retired Acts of Piety and Devotion are indeed expressive of our personal Honour and Subjection to the Deity, and as such are accepted and approved by him to whose Eyes all Things are open; but he requires also, that we should honour him before Men, and give Occasion to those who are Witnesses of our Actions, to glorify his holy Name, which can only be done by a publick and visible Practice of Duty.

Duty. By this we manifeſt to the World our firm Perſuaſion of the Being and Providence of God, our Reverence to his Majeſty, Authority, and Power, and our Truſt in his Goodneſs and Promiſes: And while by theſe Acts we each in his own Perſon give Honour unto God, we excite all who behold our good Works, to glorify his holy Name by the ſame Services. For a virtuous Example equally directs and perſuades to Duty: It affords the cleareſt and moſt intelligible Inſtruction, and the Perſuaſion with which it acts upon our natural Paſſions can hardly be reſiſted. None can behold an uniform Practice of Virtue and Piety without Reſpect and Eſteem; and what we admire in anothers Character, we cannot but wiſh a Part of our own. The very Regret of being ſurpaſſed in any valuable Quality, by a Perſon of the ſame Abilities with our ſelves, and no otherwiſe aſſiſted than we either are, or by our Prayers to God may be, will reproach our own Lazineſs and Imperfection, and even ſhame us into Imitation. So that Examples of Sobriety, and Holineſs, and Religion, promote the Glory of God, not on-

ly as they induce Men to think reverently of his Laws and Authority, and to bless that Goodness which has given such Graces to Men, but also as they influence publick Practice, and dispose others to glorify his Name by their Conversion to Righteousness. And agreeably this Motive to exemplary Obedience, is frequently urged by the Holy Ghost in Scripture. Thus St. *Paul* exhorts the * *Philippians*, *to be filled with the Fruits of Righteousness, unto the Praise and Glory of God.* Thus does he put up his Supplications for the *Thessalonians* †, *that God would fulfill all the good Pleasure of his Goodness, and the Work of Faith with Power, that the Name of our Lord* Jesus Christ *might be glorified in them.* Thus also does St. *Peter* ‡ exhort all Christians *to have their Conversation honest among the Gentiles, that they might by their good Works, which they should behold, glorifie God in the Day of Visitation.* This he declares to be one great Design of the Christian Institution. To this End were we made *a chosen Generation, a royal*

* Phil. i. 11. † Thess. i. 11, 12. ‡ 1 Pet. ii. 12.

Priesthood,

*Prieſthood, an holy Nation, a peculiar People, that we ſhould ſhew forth the Praiſes of him who called us out of Darkneſs into his marvellous Light**. On the contrary, a prophane and irreligious Example, does an open Diſhonour to God. In the Perſon himſelf, it ſpeaks a Defiance of his Power and Juſtice, and a Contempt of his Goodneſs and Promiſes; it encourages others in the ſame Impieties, and gives Occaſion to the Enemies of the Lord to blaſpheme.

ANOTHER Inducement to the Conduct here preſcribed, we may take from the Credit and Eſteem it will derive on our Profeſſion. This Motive indeed is coincident with the former, ſo far as the Honour done to our Religion ultimately redounds to God the Author of it; but as this applies to a particular Paſſion in our Nature, it may deſerve a diſtinct Conſideration. Every Man feels in himſelf a ſtrong Deſire that the Religion he has choſen, and under whoſe Influence he profeſſes to act, may not only be free from Re-

* 1 Pet. ii. 9.

proach, but appear venerable in the Eyes of Men. Now nothing will ſo effectually recommend it under this Character, as a remarkable Sanctity, Meekneſs, Juſtice, and Charity in the Lives of its Diſciples; the Practice of theſe Virtues natural Reaſon cannot but approve, and the Excellency of the Fruit will reflect Honour on the holy Root from whence it ſprings. When Men ſee us renounce our Luſts and Intereſts in Obedience to our Religion, 'tis a Conviction to them that we are in earneſt in our Profeſſion, that the Expectations of our Faith are ſomething great and valuable, and firmly aſſured to our Hopes; when our Religion appears under theſe Characters, it cannot but engage Eſteem and Reverence, as moſt agreeable to the Dignity, and moſt conducive to the general Intereſts of Mankind.

On the other Hand, vitious and immoral Examples among Chriſtians, reflect Diſgrace and Scandal on their Religion. For though the Argument will not hold in juſt Reaſoning, There are wicked Men among Chriſtians, therefore the Religion they profeſs is a wicked Religion: Yet the

Gene-

Generality of Mankind, who are not uſed to much Abſtraction, are exceedingly apt to judge by this Rule; and in the Caſe of Scandal, we are concerned to reflect not only how Men ought reaſonably to judge, but how in Probability they will judge, and avoid ſuch a Conduct as may lay a ſtumbling Block before weak Men, and give Occaſion to the Adverſary to ſpeak reproachfully.

To the Love of our Religion we may join alſo the Love of our Country, as recommending the Conduct here adviſed. For ſince the Happineſs of every Community manifeſtly depends on the Virtues and good Behaviour of its Members, and publick Examples of Duty by a moſt effectual Influence diſpoſe others to the ſame Obſervances; it follows that we can by no Service more eminently promote the Honour and Proſperity of our Country. And this Argument will appear yet ſtronger, when we conſider ſuch Examples as engaging the Protection, and deriving the Bleſſings of Almighty God on our Land. We have Inſtances in the Hiſtory of Providence, when the Integrity of a few, nay of one Perſon

Perſon has appeaſed the divine Anger, and witheld imminent Ruin from a People. Thus did the Piety of *Moſes* ſtand in the Gap, and turn away the Diſpleaſure of God from *Iſrael.* Thus would the Righteouſneſs of ten Perſons, have ſaved even *Sodom* from Deſtruction. And thus does God declare by his Prophet *Jeremy*, that one good Man might have prevented the Vengeance he denounced againſt *Iſrael: Run ye to and fro* (ſays he) *through the Streets of* Jeruſalem, *and ſee now and know, and ſeek in the broad Places thereof, if there be any that executeth Judgment, and ſeeketh Truth, and I will pardon it* *. And thus by his Prophet *Ezekiel: I ſought for a Man* (ſays God) *among them that ſhould make up the Hedge, and ſtand in the Gap before me for the Land that I ſhould not deſtroy it, but I found none, therefore I poured mine Indignation upon them* †.

One Conſideration more I will here ſuggeſt, which affords great Encouragement to good Men to diſtinguiſh themſelves by ſuch a Converſation as the Apoſtle

* Jer. v. 1. † Ezek. xxii. 30, 31.

preſcribes,

prescribes, which is, that it will be the most probable Means of restraining the Contempt and Insolence of wicked Men, and rendering a Course of Duty more easy and comfortable to them. From this kind of Affliction indeed, we can never hope to be perfectly freed in this World: He who is born after the Flesh, will always vex and persecute him who is born after the Spirit; but by such a Conduct good Men will be distinguished, and enabled mutually to support and countenance each other. The Beauties of Holiness, when thus laid open to Light and Observation, will irresistibly gain it Converts, and Numbers will establish it as a Fashion. The Libertine will no longer glory in his Impieties, but content himself with private Wickedness, and even be forced to pay Reverence to Examples of Virtue.

Upon the Whole, the Motives that have been offered in Recommendation of this Duty, are such as I assure my self have Weight with every good Man; and what ought to give them the most quick and lively Influence on us, is the prevailing Corruption of the Age in which we live.

If

If the Duty here commanded be at all Times neceſſary, more eſpecially is it ſo when Blaſphemy, Infidelity, and every Vice reigns in open Triumph. If our Regard to the Honour of God requires this Conduct from us, more eſpecially ſhould it do ſo, when his Name, his Word, his Miniſters, and his Service are treated with open Scorn and Ridicule. If the Recovery of Sinners, and giving Countenance to good Men, are Ends which perſuade our Obedience to this Precept; more eſpecially ſhould they prevail when Iniquity abounds, and the Love of many is grown cold, born down by the Torrent of overflowing Ungodlineſs. If the Regard to our Country, and a Deſire to avert the Judgments of God from it, recommend to us this Duty; they can never do it more forcibly than when the Treſpaſſes of a People are grown up to Heaven, and their Sins are got beyond all Reſtraints of Laws and Authority.

THESE are Conſiderations which ſhould awaken our Zeal, and engage us immediately to ſet about the good Work recommended to us. If our Endeavours ſucceed,

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the greateſt and moſt generous Satisfaction muſt attend it: But whether we ſucceed or not in any preſent Effect, be we aſſured God will remember our honeſt Zeal, and in the ſame Proportion that our Example has ſhone forth as a Light in this crooked and perverſe Generation, we ſhall ſhine in Heaven with a more diſtinguiſhed Meaſure of Glory.

SERMON

SERMON XIX.

The Duty and Advantages of Truſt in God.

JEREM. xvii. 7.

Bleſſed is he that truſteth in the Lord, and whoſe Hope the Lord is.

WHENEVER we reflect on the Powers of our Nature, and the Circumſtances of our Being, ſome of the firſt Concluſions that ariſe to us are; that we are a weak dependent Creature, inſufficient to our own Happineſs, full of Wants

Wants which of our ſelves we cannot relieve, expoſed to a numerous Train of Evils which we know not how to divert, inſecure in the Poſſeſſion of the preſent, and anxious for the future, and therefore that ſome foreign Support is neceſſary to us on which we may ſtay and reſt our ſelves with Confidence of being ſupplied with what we want, and protected from what we fear; a Reflection ſo obvious that natural Inſtinct ſeems to have ſuggeſted it even to thoſe who never much attended to Deductions of Reaſon. In every Man's Scheme of Happineſs we ſhall find upon Enquiry ſome ſpecial Point of Confidence. Something without himſelf he relies on to be his Guard and Aſſiſtance, to furniſh to him the Materials of his Happineſs, and defend him in the Fruition of it. Thus we may obſerve ſome placing this Confidence in the Power, Influence, and Authority of their Station; others with the rich Fool in the Goſpel, truſt in their Riches, and pronounce Reſt to their Soul in the Multitude of their Treaſures; others on their Parts and Abilities, their Skill in deſigning, and their Management in Exe-

cution. Theſe Inſtances may perhaps ſeem at firſt View rather to refute than inforce my Obſervation, that Man naturally ſeeks a Strength and Refuge in ſomething without himſelf; for the Object of Truſt here, is either our own natural or acquired Powers, or at leaſt ſomething domeſtick and in our Poſſeſſion. But if we go on in the Reflection but one Step farther, all theſe Schemes muſt appear to us ultimately to reſolve into a Confidence in Man: For of what Advantage are Power, or Skill, or Riches to us, but as they enable us to command, engage, or purchaſe the Services of other Men? The Great and the Rich depend on the Aſſiſtances of thoſe whom their Power or their Wealth attaches to them; and their Inferiors ſtrengthen themſelves in the Favour and Friendſhip of the Great, which they preſume their Services or Addreſs will aſſure to them; and the whole Skill of each is employed in cultivating and improving theſe Advantages.

But if we ſuffer our ſelves to reaſon upon ſuch a Conduct, and examine the Grounds of this Confidence, it muſt appear weak and treacherous in the Founda-

tion; for what is Man, even the greateſt of Men, whoſe Breath is in his Noſtril, a Creature frail and indigent as our ſelves, whoſe Powers, whoſe very Life is limited within narrow Bounds, and whoſe Affections change as the Wind? The greater and more formidable Part of the Evils we are expoſed to are ſuch, as 'tis above the Abilities of Man to prevent or redreſs; and even where 'tis in his Power to ſerve us, we can have no firm Aſſurance of his Inclinations to do it. Here then we cannot ſit down, but muſt ſtill proceed in our Search, and look higher for a Support equal to our Wants: And though, as we paſs through the ſeveral Orders of Beings above us, we diſcern many Excellencies, and cannot but deſire the Favour and Aſſiſtance of Natures ſo much ſuperior to our own, yet ſtill there appears a Mixture of Weakneſs and Imperfection; we are not yet arrived at what we want, neither can we reſt with a full Truſt and Satisfaction till we come where Religion directs us; to a Being infinite in Power, Wiſdom, and Goodneſs, to God the Author and Gover-

nor of every Creature, who can reſtrain the Malice, and command the Service, overrule the Powers, and direct the Actions of all inferior Beings. If we can aſſure to our ſelves the Favour of this mighty Being, our Concern is at an End; we may here repoſe our ſelves with a full Affiance, as on a Refuge ſure and ſtedfaſt, in whoſe Hand are all Events, whoſe Wiſdom can foreſee, and whoſe Power can divert every Evil that may approach us, and whoſe Veracity has declared that he will never fail thoſe who put their Truſt in him. This Truſt and Confidence in God, as it is our greateſt Felicity, ſo 'tis alſo our bounden Duty enjoined us by Religion, as a Condition of that Favour and Protection we expect from him; and therefore this Subject will oblige me to conſider,

I. WHAT the Duty here required from us implies, or when we may be ſaid to hope and truſt in God, as we ought to do.

II. WHEN this Truſt is grounded as it ought to be, or what Conditions are

required on our Part to aſſure our Confidence in God.

III. THE Bleſſedneſs of him who can thus truſt and hope in the Lord.

I. THEN this Truſt in God is an Honour we owe to the Supremacy of the divine Nature, and 'tis a Degree of Idolatry to place it on any other Being. This Duty implies poſitively an entire Reſignation to the Wiſdom, a Dependence on the Power, and a firm Aſſurance of the Goodneſs and Veracity of God: On him we muſt ultimately rely to ſupply us with all Things needful and proper for us, to give Food to our Bodies, and Pardon and Grace to our Souls. Whatever our Condition or the Events of our Life may be, though our temporal Proſpects ſhould be full of Danger, or though the Days of Sorrow ſhould actually overtake us, yet ſtill we muſt repoſe our ſelves on God, as a Being who loves us as his Children, who even corrects us with the Mercy of a Father, and will in the End make all Things work together for our Good. *Though he ſlay me* (ſays

(ſays *Job* *) *yet will I truſt in him*; nay, though we are conſcious to our ſelves that we have offended him by our Sins, though we have provoked him to withdraw the Comforts of his Holy Spirit, and hide his Face from us, yet ſtill we muſt not let go our Truſt in him, but look up from the Deep into which we are fallen, and depend on the Promiſes he has made us through *Chriſt*, that he will forgive the Penitent, and receive him again to Mercy and Favour.

NEGATIVELY this Duty implies, that we ſhould withdraw our Confidence from all inferior Beings; and in Order to this we muſt begin at home, put off all Truſt in our ſelves, our Parts, Abilities or Acquiſitions, how great or how many ſoever they may be. This Truſt indeed, in our own natural or acquired Powers, as I before obſerved, ultimately terminates in the Friendſhip and Services of other Men, which theſe Advantages are preſumed to aſſure to us. But no Man, or Number of Men, how mighty, how good, or how virtuous ſoever, or whatever Preſumption

* Job. xiii. 15.

we may have of their Engagements or Inclination to us, muſt be ſuffered to rival God in the Honour of our Confidence; for him has the Holy Spirit pronounced accurſed, *who truſteth in Man and maketh Fleſh his Arm, and whoſe Heart departeth from the Lord* *. And though the bleſſed Angels far excel Man in Power and Wiſdom, and we have far greater Aſſurances of their Goodneſs and Benevolence towards us, yet our Truſt muſt not reſt in them: Even theſe glorious Beings muſt be conſidered by us as our Fellow Servants, as Inſtruments only in the Hand of God, who applies their Services, governs all their Actions, and diſpoſes even their Wills and Affections according to his good Pleaſure But the greateſt Offence againſt this Duty, is placing our Confidence in the Enemies of God, in evil Men or evil Spirits. When we pay this Regard to the Angels of God, we are guilty indeed of a criminal Miſtake, we honour the Servant inſtead of the Maſter; but they are Servants of great Dignity, and to whom ſome Reſpect is due from us, and therefore the

* Jer. xvii. 5.

Error

Error may admit ſome Alleviation: But when we have Recourſe to the Powers of Darkneſs, we declare our ſelves Aſſociates with the profeſſed Rebels againſt God and his *Chriſt*, we deliberately renounce the Allegiance we have ſworn to him. In Sum, the whole Syſtem of Creatures muſt be excluded from this Honour: Though we are permitted to rejoice in the Poſſeſſion of any valuable Advantages, to cultivate the Friendſhip and engage the Benevolence of Men and Angels; yet our Confidence muſt not terminate here, but be carried on to God, from whoſe Bounty we receive, and at whoſe Pleaſure we hold every Bleſſing we enjoy; whoſe Appointment every Creature, good or evil, is bound to obey; who only is mighty, who only is the Lord, who alone has Power to ſave, and Power to deſtroy. Let us then,

II. Consider when this Truſt is grounded as it ought to be, or what Conditions are required on our Part to aſſure our Confidence in the Favour and Protection of God.

For as, with Respect to the Duty of Prayer, the proper Means of obtaining from God the Blessings we trust in him for, though it be a bounden Service we all owe to the Lord of Heaven and Earth, yet certain Qualifications are on our Parts necessary to give our Prayers any just Expectation of Success; so likewise in this Trust itself, though it be an Homage due from us to God, as his Subjects and Creatures, yet unless we are duly qualified for his Favour, our Trust will be a vain and sinful Presumption. Now the great and most important Qualification for a successful Performance of these Duties, is a sincere Obedience to the Laws of God, an unfeigned Devotion of the Heart to his Service, a steddy Adherence to the Faith, and a Purity and Holiness of Life agreeable to the Precepts of our Religion: Wicked Men have no Interest in the Promises of God, but are the Objects of his Wrath and Displeasure. When *Rabshekah* was sent to terrify the People of *Jerusalem*, he argues from this Principle against their Confidence in God. *If ye say we trust in the Lord our God, is not that he whose Altars*

tars Hezekiah *has caſt down* *? Had his Suggeſtion been true, that *Hezekiah* had aboliſhed the Worſhip of God and the Religion he had eſtabliſhed among them the *Aſſyrian* had reaſoned juſtly; a Prince and People in ſuch manifeſt Rebellion againſt their God, could not expect that he ſhould appear in their Defence, or reſcue them from the Calamity that hung over them; but that excellent Prince was conſcious to himſelf of his own Integrity, of his honeſt Zeal and Uprightneſs of Life in the Service of God, and relied on this as a ſure Foundation for that Truſt he repoſed in him, to deliver him out of all his Diſtreſſes. *Remember* (ſays he) *O Lord, how I have walked before thee in Truth, and with a perfect Heart, and have done that which was good in thy Sight* †. We muſt examine our Lives, and be aſſured that our Ways pleaſe the Lord before we can hope for his favourable Interpoſition; *for his Eyes are over the Righteous, and his Ears are open to their Prayers, but the Ungodly and him that delight-*

* 2 Kings xviii. 22. † 2 Kings xx. 3.

eth

eth in Wickedneſs doth his Soul abhor. If our Heart condemn us not (ſays the Apoſtle) *then have we Confidence towards God**. But if our Conſcience reproach us with unmortified Sin, if we have neglected his Service, been deaf to his Calls, and deſpiſed his Authority, our Hope is the Hope of the Hypocrite, we may call and none will anſwer, yea he will laugh when our Sorrow comes. One Refuge nevertheleſs remains to the Sinner, the laſt and only Anchor of his Hope. Let him put away the Evil of his Doings, and humble himſelf by a ſpeedy and ſincere Repentance: Let him return to God whom he has forſaken, and then let him be aſſured that God will return to him, will take him again into his Protection, will be reconciled to him through *Chriſt*, and reſtore him to the Confidence of a Son.

III. The Bleſſedneſs of him who can thus truſt and hope in the Lord, is the third Thing I propoſed to conſider.

If we would draw a ſhort Abſtract of human Happineſs, bring together all the vari-

* 1 John iii. 21.

ous

ous Ingredients of it, and digeſt them into one Preſcription, we muſt at laſt fix on this wiſe and religious Aphoriſm in my Text, as the Sum and Comprehenſion of all. Every other Scheme we can form appears upon Examination weak and defective, perplexed and intricate in the Project, full of Difficulties in the Execution, and precarious in the Iſſue, depending for Succeſs on the Concurrence of Beings either frail and periſhing in their Nature, confined in their Power, or uncertain in their Wills and Inclinations; and if any of theſe Circumſtances fail us, and none of them can be relied on, the whole Scheme is broken; all our Plots and Contrivances, the Pains we have taken, and the Skill and Addreſs we have ſhewn in the Conduct of them, come all to nothing, and leave us to Diſappointment and Deſpair. But he who with a juſt Confidence can truſt in God, is ſecure from theſe Contingences. He relies on a Wiſdom who ſees the utmoſt Conſequence of Things, on a Power which nothing can obſtruct, on a Goodneſs of infinite Affection to his Happineſs, and who has bound himſelf by Promiſe never to

fail

fail thoſe who truſt in him. If this God be with us, who or what can be againſt us? But if he be angry, all our other Dependencies will profit us nothing, our Strength will be but Weakneſs, and our Wiſdom Folly; every other Support will fail under us when we come to lean upon it, and deceive us in the Day when we want it moſt.

SHOULD we carry our Enquiry no farther than after preſent Felicity, how much better is it ſecured to the Man who truſts in God, than to him whoſe Dependence is on the Creature. The Hope of the former is founded on a Rock, his Soul dwells at Eaſe, ſecure in the Skill, the Power, and the Affection of his Governor, calm and unconcerned in all his Purſuits: He commits the Event of them to God, who perfectly knows what is beſt for him, and is both able and willing to do more than he can aſk or think; the preſent Bounties of Providence he enjoys with a chearful Content, without any anxious Solicitude for the future. If Things happen contrary to his Wiſh or Expectation, he ſupports himſelf with reflecting, that

that 'tis the Appointment of infinite Wiſdom and infinite Goodneſs, of one who ſees that the Succeſs he deſired would, in ſome Reſpect or other, prove a greater Diſappointment to him. In the Days of Danger he is without Fear, his Heart ſtandeth faſt and will not ſhrink. Neither the Rage of Men, nor the Malice of Devils are terrible to him. Though the Kings of the Earth ſtand up, and the Rulers take Counſel together againſt him; or though the Madneſs of the People be gathered about him, yet he knows that all theſe Things are under the Direction of his Friend, whoſe Power ruleth over all, and ſets them their Bounds which they cannot paſs; who can in a Moment either ſtill the Tempeſt, or divert it from him, and with his favourable Kindneſs defend him as with a Shield. Nay, even in the ſevereſt Afflictions he is attended with Reflections full of Comfort: He knows that all the Powers of Earth or Hell cannot diſtreſs him beyond the Ability of God to deliver him; cannot exclude him from his Preſence, or hinder his Recourſe to him; that whatever he ſuffers

comes

comes upon him by his Permiſſion, who does not willingly grieve his Creatures, but has wiſe and gracious Ends in all his Diſpenſations, though they may not preſently appear to us; that it may be well for him that he is troubled either for the Exerciſe and Improvement of his Virtues, his Patience and Fortitude; or perhaps it may be the neceſſary Means of deriving to him even ſome preſent Advantage of greater Value than it takes from him. In Sum, he relies on his God, either to remove the Burden, or to enable him to bear it, or to make him Amends for what he endures under it.

But how different from this is his Condition whoſe Truſt is in the Creature? Vexation and Uneaſineſs attend him in every Stage and Event of Life; his Purſuits are diſquieted with perpetual Fear leſt the fickle Powers he relies on ſhould deceive him, or ſome Accident ſhould diſable them from ſerving him. Succeſs, indeed, may give him a preſent Fluſh of Joy; but when the ſhort Tranſport is over, and he begins to conſider the precarious Tenure by which he holds his Attainment,

tainment, the Apprehenſion of loſing ſucceeds to the Care of acquiring, and the ſame Anxiety and Solicitude that embittered the Purſuit, diſreliſhes the Fruition itſelf. But when Danger becomes imminent, when the Clouds are gathered around him, and are ready to burſt upon his Head, he then finds the Vanity of his Confidence; Fearfulneſs and Trembling come upon him, and his Heart within him is like melting Wax; diſtracted and irreſolute in his Counſels, and diffident of every Recourſe. But if the Day of Adverſity actually overtakes him, he is then compleatly miſerable; he flies from Strength to Strength, from one Dependence to another, but he finds them all either weak or treacherous; the Wealth, the Honours in which he gloried avail him nothing, and even the Friend of his Boſom, on whoſe Fidelity and Aſſiſtance he moſt relied, either proves falſe and forſakes him, or looks on with an uſeleſs Pity, and cannot help him. In the beautiful Image given us by the Prophet, *He is like a Man diſtreſſed with Thirſt in the parched Places of the Wilderneſs, in a Salt Land and not inhabited.*

inhabited. He ſearches every Pit, but finds no Water, or ſuch only as increaſes his Torment; and if he cries for Help, there is none can hear him; deſerted and aſtonied he ſinks into utter Dejection, and even Hope itſelf is ſwallowed up in Deſpair. Lo this is the Man that takes not God for his Hope, but truſteth in the Multitude of his Riches, and ſtrengthens himſelf in his Ungodlineſs. Thus weakly provided is he even with Regard to temporal Happineſs, thus fooliſh and miſerable in Compariſon with him who truſts in God. But if we carry the Reflection farther, and conſider their different Conditions with Reſpect to another Life, and the Expectations of Futurity, the Wordling here gives up the Argument, and pretends not to diſpute the Advantage of Religion. All his Schemes are terminated by the preſent Scene of Things; and if there be any Thing beyond it, if an eternal State is to commence after this, he knows and confeſſes that he has made no Proviſion for it, that he is loſt and undone for ever: A Proſpect, which though conſidered but as poſſible, is enough to caſt a Damp

Damp over his sprightliest Hours, and embitter every Pleasure. But if he ever attends to the Arguments that persuade his Belief of this great Truth (and sometimes in spight of all his Amusements he will be forced to attend to them) with what Horror and Agonies must he reflect on the dreadful Scene it opens to him!

Upon the whole then it appears from the Comparison, that he who trusts in God has much the Advantage, even with respect to present Felicity; and when we take Futurity into the Account, he stands alone in his Hope and Pretensions, and is acknowledged to have no Competitor; and it must be observ'd that this glorious Hope is it self the best Ingredient, and the surest Foundation even of his present Happiness; from hence he derives Content in his Enjoyment, Easiness in his Expectations, and Support and Courage in Calamity. He considers that his proper Home and Heritage is in another World, and therefore regards the Events of this, with the Indifference of a Guest that tarries but a Day; in the mean Time that Peace of Conscience, that Confidence towards God which

he enjoys are a perpetual Spring of Pleasure to his Soul. He triumphs over Death it self, disarm'd of its Sting, and even longs to appear in the Presence of that God in whom he has trusted, and thro' whose Mercies in *Christ* he hopes to receive a blessed Immortality.

I shall conclude with reminding you of one Corollary arising to us from these Reflexions.

That since a Confidence in God is the only sure Foundation of our Happiness present or future, and the Uprightness of our Heart and the Obedience of our Lives, is the only sure Foundation of that Confidence; the first Care and Concern of Man must be to approve himself to God by Righteousness, Holiness, and Purity; a firm Perseverance in the Duties which he has prescribed must be the Groundwork in our Scheme of Happiness, and if this be truly laid, the Super-structure will be strong and abide the Trial. We shall be able to look up to God, with a firm Trust in his Promises; a Trust, which will support us in all Events of Life; in our greatest Troubles his Comforts will refresh

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our Soul; and when we paſs thro' the Vale of the Shadow of Death, the Light of his Countenance will be our Conſolation, and open a Proſpect to our Faith into thoſe Regions of Bliſs and Glory, where our Labours and our Fears ſhall ceaſe, and Sorrow ſhall be no more.

The E N D.

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