

## THE SINNER'S MOURNING-HABIT.

*Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*—JOB XLII. 6.

THIS is in many dear regards a mourning and penitential season,\* therefore I thought best to accommodate it with a penitential sermon: 'I abhor myself,' &c.

Affliction is a winged chariot, that mounts up the soul toward heaven; nor do we ever so rightly understand God's majesty as when we are not able to stand under our own misery. It was Naaman's leprosy that brought him to the knowledge of the prophet, and the prophet brought him to the saving knowledge of the true God. Had he not been a leper, he had still been a sinner. *Schola crucis, schola lucis*,—there is no such school instructing as the cross afflicting. If Paul had not been buffeted by Satan, he might have gone nigh to buffet God, through danger of being puffed up with his revelations.

The Lord hath many messengers by whom he solicits man. He sends one health, to make him a strong man; another wealth, to make him a rich man; another sickness, to make him a weak man; another losses, to make him a poor man; another age, to make him an old man; another death, to make him no man. But among them all, none despatcheth the business surer or sooner than affliction; if that fail of bringing a man home, nothing can do it. He is still importunate for an answer; yea, he speaks, and strikes. Do we complain of his incessant blows? Alas! he doth but his office, he waits for our repentance; let us give the messenger his errand, and he will begone. Let him take the proud man in hand, he will humble him: he can make the drunkard sober, the lascivious chaste, the angry patient, the covetous charitable; fetch the unthrift son back again to his father, whom a full purse had put into an itch of travelling, Luke xv. 17. The only breaker of those wild colts, Jer. v.; the waters of that deluge, which (though they put men in fear of their lives) bear them up in the ark of repentance higher toward heaven. It brought the brethren to the acquaintance of Joseph, and makes many a poor sinner familiar with the Lord Jesus.

Job was net ignorant of God before, while he sat in the sunshine of peace; but resting his head on the bosom of plenty, he could lie at his ease and contemplate the goodness of his Maker. But as when the sun shines forth in

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his most glorious brightness, we are then least able to look upon him,—we may solace ourselves in his diffused rays and comfortable light, but we cannot fix our eyes upon that burning carbuncle,—these outward things do so engross us, take up our consideration, and drown our contemplative faculty in our sense, that so long we only observe the effects of God's goodness, rather than the goodness of God itself. Necessity teacheth us the worth of a friend; as absynthium (wormwood) rubbed upon the eyes makes them smart a little, but they see the clearer. Therefore Job confessed that in his prosperity he had only, as it were, heard of God; but now in his trial he had seen him. Ver. 5, 'I heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee'—that is, he had obtained a more clear and perspicuous vision of him; the eye being more apprehensive of the object than the ear: *segnius irritant animos demissa per aures*. When we hear a man described, our imagination conceives an idea or form of him but darkly; if we see him, and intently look upon him, there is an impression of him in our minds: we know his stature, his gesture, his complexion, his proportion: *sic oculos, sic ille manus, sic ora ferebat*. Such a more full and perfect apprehension of God did calamity work in this holy man; and from that speculation proceeds this humiliation, 'Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.'

Where we may consider three degrees of mortification: the sickness, the death, and the burial of sin. 'I abhor myself,' there sin is sick and wounded; 'I repent,' there it is wounded and dead; 'in dust and ashes,' there it is dead and buried. To deny one's-self maims concupiscence, that it cannot thrive; to repent kills it, that it cannot live; in dust and ashes, buries it, that it cannot rise up again. I throw it into the grave, I cover it with mould, I rake it up in dust and ashes.

But I will not pull the text in pieces; only I follow the manufaction of the words: for there is not a superfluous word in the verse, as the Psalmist said of the army of Israel, 'There was not one feeble person among them.' It begins as high as the glory of heaven, and ends as low as the basest of earth. The first word, 'therefore,' respects an infinite God: the last words, 'dust and ashes,' declare a humbled man. The meditation of the former is the cause of the latter, and the condition of the latter is the way to the former. To study God, is the way to make a humble man; and a humble man is in the way to come unto God. Such a consideration will cast us down to dust and ashes: such a prostration will lift us up to glory and blessedness. Here, then, is a Jacob's ladder, but of four rounds: divinity is the highest, 'I have seen thee; therefore;' mortality is the lowest, 'dust and ashes;' between both these sit two others, 'shame' and 'sorrow;' no man can abhor himself without shame, nor repent without sorrow. Let your honourable patience admit Job descending these four stairs, even so low as he went; and may all your souls rise as he is!

*Wherefore.*—This refers us to the motive that humbled him; and that appears by the context to be a double meditation,—one of God's majesty, another of his mercy.

1. Of his majesty, which being so infinite, and beyond the comprehension of man, he considered by way of comparison, or relation to the creatures; the great behemoth of the land, the greater leviathan of the sea, upon which he hath spent the precedent chapters. Mathematicians wonder at the sun, that, being so much bigger than the earth, it doth not set it on fire and burn it to ashes: but here is the wonder, that God being so infinitely great, and we so infinitely evil, we are not consumed. 'Whatsoever the Lord would do, that did he in heaven, in earth, in the sea, and in all deep places,' Ps.

cxxy. 6. If man's power could do according to his will, or God's will would do according to his power, who could stand? 'I will destroy man from the face of the earth,' saith the Lord, Gen. vi. 7. The original word is, 'I will steep him,' as a man steeps a piece of earth in water, till it turn to dirt; for man is but clay, and forgets his Maker and his matter. None but God can reduce man to his first principles, and the original grains whereof he was made; and there is no dust so high, but this great God is able to give him a steeping.

2. Or this was a meditation of his mercy, than which nothing more humbles a heart of flesh. 'With thee, O Lord, is forgiveness, that thou mightest be feared,' Pa. cxxx. 4. One would think that punishment should procure fear, and forgiveness love; but *nemo magis diligit, quam qui maxime veretur offendere*,—no man more truly loves God than he that is most fearful to offend him. 'Thy mercy reacheth to the heavens, and thy faithfulness to the clouds,'—that is, above all sublimities. God is glorious in all his works, but most glorious in his works of mercy; and this may be one reason why St Paul calls the gospel of Christ a 'glorious gospel,' 1 Tim. i. 11. Solomon tells us, 'It is the glory of a man to pass by an offence.' Herein is God most glorious, in that he passeth by all the offences of his children. Lord, who can know thee and not love thee, know thee and not fear thee; fear thee for thy justice and love thee for thy mercy; yea, fear thee for thy mercy and love thee for thy justice, for thou art infinitely good in both!

Put both these together, and here is matter of humiliation, even to 'dust and ashes.' So Abraham interceding for Sodom, 'Behold, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes,' Gen. xviii. 17. *Quanto magis sancti Divinitatis interna conspiciunt, tanto magis se nihil esse cognoscunt*. It is a certain conclusion, no proud man knows God. *Non sum dignus*, I am not worthy, is the voice of the saints: they know God, and God knows them. Moses was the meekest man upon earth, and therefore God is said to know him by name, Exod. xxxiii. 17. 'I am less than the least of thy mercies,' saith Jacob, Gen. xxxii. 10; lo, he was honoured to be father of the twelve tribes, and heir of the blessing. *Quis ego sum, Domine*, says David,—'Who am I, O Lord?' He was advanced from that lowly conceit to be king of Israel. 'I am not worthy to loose the latchet of Christ's shoe,' saith John Baptist, Matt. iii. 11; lo, he was esteemed worthy to lay his hand on Christ's head. 'I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof,' says the centurion; therefore Christ commended him, 'I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel,' Matt. viii. 8. 'I am the least of the apostles,' saith Paul, 'not worthy to be called an apostle,' 1 Cor. xv. 9; therefore he is honoured with the title of *the Apostle*. 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord,' saith the holy virgin; therefore she was honoured to be the mother of the Lord, and to have all generations call her blessed. This *non sum dignus*, the humble annihilation of themselves, hath gotten them the honour of saints. In spiritual graces let us study to be great, and not to know it, as the fixed stars are every one bigger than the earth, yet appear to us less than torches. *In alto non altum sapere*, not to be high-minded in high deserts, is the way to blessed preferment. Humility is not only a virtue itself, but a vessel to contain other virtues: like embers, which keep the fire alive that is hidden under it. It emptieth itself by a modest estimation of its own worth, that Christ may fill it. It wrestleth with God, like Jacob, and wins by yielding; and the lower it stoops to the ground, the more advantage it gets to obtain the blessing. All our pride, O Lord, is from the want of knowing thee. O thou infinite Maker, reveal thyself yet

more unto us; so shall we 'abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes.'

*I abhor myself.*—It is a deep degree of mortification for a man to abhor himself. To abhor others is easy, to deny others more easy, to despise others most easy. But it is hard to despise a man's self, to deny himself harder, hardest of all to abhor himself. Every one is apt to think well, speak well, do well to himself. Not only charity, a spiritual virtue, but also lust, a carnal vice, begins at home. There is no direct commandment in the Bible for a man to love himself, because we are all so naturally prone to it. Indeed, we are bound to love ourselves: so much is implied in the precept, 'Love thy neighbour as thyself;' therefore love thyself, but *modus precipiendus, ut tibi prosis*,\* so love thyself, as to do thyself good. But for a man, upon good terms, to abhor himself, this is the wonder. He is more than a mere son of Eve that does not overvalue himself. *Qui se non admirat, mirabilis est*,—He that doth not admire himself, is a man to be admired.

Nor is this disease of proud flesh peculiar only to those persons whose imperious commands, surly salutations, insolent controlments, witness to the world how little they abhor themselves; but it haunts even the baser condition, and foams out at the common jaws. A proud beggar was the wise man's monster; but pride is the daughter of riches. It is against reason, indeed, that metals should make difference of men; against religion that it should make such a difference of Christian men. Yet commonly reputation is measured by the acre, and the altitude of countenance is taken by the pole of advancement. And as the servant values himself higher or lower according as his master is, so the master esteems himself greater or less according as his master is,—that is, as his money or estate is. His heart is proportionably enlarged with his house: his good and his blood riseth together. 'Is not this the great Babylon, which I have built for the honour of my majesty?' Dan. iv. 30. But, you know, he was turned into a beast that said so. Gold and silver are heavy metals, and sink down in the balance; yet, by a preposterous inversion, they lift the heart of man upwards, as the plummet of a clock, which, while itself poiseth downwards, lifts up the striking hammer. As Saul upon his anointing, so many a one upon his advancing, is turned quite into another man. 'God, I thank thee,' says the Pharisee, 'that I am not as other men are, nor as this publican,' Luke xviii. 11. 'Not as other men,' and for this he thanks God: as if because he thought better of himself, God must needs think better of him too. Now he must no more take it as he hath done; a new port for a new report. He abhors all men, but admires himself. Yet after these blustering insolences and windy ostentations, all this thing is but a man, and that, God knows, a very foolish one.

But the children of grace have learned another lesson,—to think well of other men, and to abhor themselves. And indeed, if we consider what master we have served, and what wages deserved, we have just cause to abhor ourselves. What part of us hath not sinned, that it should not merit to be despised? Run all over this little Isle of Man, and find me one member of the body, or faculty of the soul, that can say with Job's messenger, chap. i. 15, *Ego solus aufugi*,—'I alone have escaped.' What one action can we justify? Produce *ex tot millibus, unum*. Where is that innocency which desires not to stand only in the sight of mercy? There is in our worst works wickedness, in our best weakness, error in all. What time, what place, are not

\* Augustine.

witnesses against us? The very Sabbath, the day of rest, hath not rested from our evils. The very temple, that holy place, hath been defiled with our obliquities. Our chambers, our beds, our boards, the ground we tread, the air we breathe, can tell our follies. There is no occasion which, if it do not testify what evil we have done, yet can say what good we should and have not done.

If all this do not humble us, look we up, with Job here, to the majesty which we have offended. To spoil the arms of a common subject, or to counterfeit his seal, is no such heinous or capital crime; but to deface the arms of the king, to counterfeit his broad seal or privy signet, is no less than treason, because the disgrace redounds upon the person of the king. Every sin dishonours God, and offers to stick ignominy upon that infinite majesty; therefore deserves an infinite penalty. 'Against thee, O Lord, against thee have I sinned,' Ps. li. 4. I, thy creature, against thee, my Maker: here is a transcendency, which when a man considers, he is worthy to be abhorred of all men that does not abhor himself.

Yet when God and our own selves stand in competition, which do we most respect? Temptation is on our left hand, in a beautiful resemblance, to seduce us; the will, the glory, the judgment of God is on our right hand to direct us: do we now abhor ourselves? Commodity sets off iniquity, and woos us to be rich, though sinners; Christ bids us first seek the kingdom of heaven, and tells us that other things shall come without seeking, they shall be added unto us: do we now abhor ourselves? Such a sin is pleasing to my lust and concupiscence, but it is displeasing to God and my conscience: do I now abhor myself? That we love God far better than ourselves, is soon said; but to prove it is not so easily done. He must deny himself that will be Christ's servant, Mark viii. 34. Many have denied their friends, many have denied their kindred, not a few have denied their brothers, some have denied their own parents; but to deny themselves, *durus hic sermo*, this is a hard task. *Negare suos, sua, se*; to deny their profits, to deny their lusts, to deny their reasons, to deny themselves? No, to do all this they utterly deny.

Yet he that repents truly abhors himself. *Non se ut conditum, sed se ut perditum*,—Not the creature that God made, but the creature that himself made. Repentance loves *animam, non malitiam; carnem, non carnalitatem*,—the soul, not the venom of the soul; the flesh, not the fleshliness of it. So far as he hath corrupted himself, so far he abhors himself; and could rather wish *non esse*, not to be at all, than *malum esse*, to be displeasing to his Maker.

Thus, if we despise ourselves, God will honour us; if we abhor ourselves, God will accept us; if we deny ourselves, God will acknowledge us; if we hate ourselves, God will love us; if we condemn ourselves, God will acquit us; if we punish ourselves, God will spare us; yea, thus if we seem lost to ourselves, we shall be found in the day of Jesus Christ.

*I repent*.—Repentance hath much acquaintance in the world, and few friends; it is better known than practised, and yet not more known than trusted. My scope now shall not be the definition of it, but a persuasion to it. It is every man's medicine, a universal antidote, that makes many a Mithridates venture on poison. They make bold to sin, as if they were sure to repent. But the medicine was made for the wound, not the wound for the medicine. We have read, if not seen, the battle betwixt those two venomous creatures, the toad and the spider, where the greater being over-matched by the poison of the less, hath recourse to a certain herb, some think

the plantain, with which she expels the infection, and renews the fight ; but at last, the herb being wasted, the toad bursts and dies. We suck in sin, the poison of that old serpent, and presume to drive it out again with repentance ; but how if this herb of grace be not found in our gardens ? As Trajan was marching forth with his army, a poor woman solicited him to do her justice upon the murderers of her only son. ' I will do thee justice, woman,' says the emperor, ' when I return.' The woman presently replied, ' But what if my lord never return ?' How far soever we have run out, we hope to make all reckonings even when repentance comes ; but what if repentance never comes ?

It is not many years, more incitations, and abundance of means, that can work it ; but repentance is the fair gift of God. One would think it a short lesson, yet Israel was forty years a-learning it ; and they no sooner got it but presently forgot it. Rev. xvi. 11, we read of men plagued with heat, and pains, and sores, yet they repented not. Judas could have a broken neck, not a broken heart. There is no such inducement to sin as the presumption of ready repentance, as if God had no special riches of his own, but every sinner might command them at his pleasure. The king hath earth of his own, he lets his subjects walk upon it ; he hath a sea, lets them sail on it ; his land yields fruit, lets them eat it ; his fountains water, lets them drink it. But the moneys in his exchequer, the garments in his wardrobe, the jewels in his jewel-house, none may meddle with but they to whom he disposeth them. God's common blessings are not denied ; his sun shines, his rain falls, Matt. v. 45, on the righteous and unrighteous. But the treasures of heaven, the robes of glory, the jewels of grace and repentance, these he keeps in his own hands, and gives not where he may, but where he will. Man's heart is like a door with a spring-lock ; pull the door after you, it locks of itself, but you cannot open it again without a key. Man's heart doth naturally lock out grace ; none but he that ' hath the key of the house of David,' Rev. iii. 7, can open the door and put it in. God hath made a promise to repentance, not of repentance ; we may trust to that promise, but there is no trusting to ourselves. Nature flatters itself with that singular instance of mercy, one malefactor on the cross repenting at his last hour. But such hath been Satan's policy, to draw evil out of good, that the calling and saving of that one soul hath been the occasion of the loss of many thousands.

Wheresoever repentance is, she doth not deliberate, tarries not to ask questions and examine circumstances, but bestirs her joints, calls her wits and senses together ; summons her tongue to praying, her feet to walking, her hands to working, her eyes to weeping, her heart to groaning. There is no need to bid her go, for she runs ; she runs to the word for direction, to her own heart for remorse and compunction, to God for grace and pardon ; and wheresoever she findeth Christ, she layeth faster hold on him than the Shunammite did on the feet of Elisha, 2 Kings iv. 30 : ' As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not let thee go ;' no Gehazi can beat her off. She resolves that her knees shall grow to the pavement, till mercy hath answered her from heaven. As if she had felt an earthquake in her soul, not unlike that jailor when he felt the foundations of his prison shaken, she ' calls for a light,' Acts xvi. 29, the gospel of truth, and springs in trembling ; and the first voice of her lips is, ' O what shall I do to be saved ?' She lows with mourning, like the kine that carried the ark, and never rests till she comes to Bethshemesh, the fields of mercy. The good star that guides her is the promise of God ; this gives her light through all the dark clouds of her sor-

row. Confidence is her life and soul; she draws no other breath than the persuasion of mercy, that the 'king of Israel is a merciful king,' 1 Kings xx. 31. Faith is the heart-blood of repentance. The matter, composition, constitution, substance of it, is amendment of life; there be many counterfeits that walk in her habit, as King Ahab had his shadows, but that is her substance. Her countenance is spare and thin; she hath not eyes standing out with fatness. Her diet is abstinence; her garment and livery, sackcloth and ashes; the paper in her hand is a petition; her dialect is *Miserere*; and lest her own lusts should be bane within her, she sweats them out with confession and tears.

We know there is no other fortification against the judgments of God but repentance. His forces be invisible, invincible; not repelled with sword and target; neither portcullis nor fortress can keep them out; there is nothing in the world that can encounter them but repentance. They had long since laid our honour in the dust, rotted our carcases in the pit, sunk our souls into hell, but for repentance. Which of those saints, that are now saved in heaven, have not sinned upon earth? What could save them but repentance? Their infirmities are recorded not only for the instruction of those that stand, but also for the consolation of them that are fallen. *Instruunt patriarchæ, non solum docentes, sed et errantes*.—They do not only teach us by their doctrines, but even by their very errors. Noah was overcome with a little wine, that escaped drowning with the world in that deluge of water. Lot was scorched with the flame of unnatural lust, that escaped burning in the fire of Sodom. Samson, the strongest, Solomon, the wisest, fell by a woman. One balm recovered them all, blessed repentance. Let our souls, from these premises, and upon the assurance of God's promises, conclude, that if we repent, our sins are not greater, God's mercies cannot be less. Thus was Nineveh overthrown, that she might not be overthrown. *Quæ peccatis perit, fletibus stetit*. Every man must either be a Ninevite or a Sodomite; a Ninevite sorrowing for sin, or a Sodomite suffering for sin. *Doleat peccata reus, ut delect peccata Deus*. If we grieve, God will forgive.

Nor yet must we think with this one short word, 'I repent,' to answer for the multitude of our offences; as if we, that had sinned in parcels, should be forgiven in gross. It were a rare favour, if we paying but one particular of a whole book of debts, should be granted a general acquittance for them all. No, let us reckon up our sins to God in confession, that our hearts may find a plenary absolution. Nor is it enough to recount them, but we must recant them. Do we think, because we do not remember them, that God hath forgotten them? Are not debts of many years' standing to be called for? Man's justice doth not forbear old offenders; no tract of time can eat out the characters of blood. 'Thou writest bitter things against me, when thou makest me to possess the sins of my youth,' Job xiii. 26. 'These things hast thou done,' saith God, 'and I held my peace: therefore thou thoughtest me altogether such a one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes,' Ps. l. 21. Therefore let us number all the sins we can, and then God will forgive us all the sins we have.

If we could truly weigh our iniquities, we must needs find a necessity either of repenting or of perishing. Shall we make God to frown upon us in heaven, arm all his creatures against us on earth? shall we force his curses upon us and ours; take his rod, and teach it to scourge us with all temporal plagues; and not repent? Shall we wound our own consciences with sins, that they may wound us with eternal torments; make a hell in our bosoms here, and open the gates of that lower hell to devour us here-

after ; and not repent ? Do we by sin give Satan a right in us, a power over us, an advantage against us ; and not labour to cross his mischiefs by repentance ? Do we cast brimstone into that infernal fire, as if it could not be hot enough, or we should fail of tortures except we make ourselves our own tormentors ; and not rather seek to quench those flames with our penitent tears ?

If we could see the farewell of sin, we would abhor it, and ourselves for it. Could David have conceived the grief of his broken bones beforehand, he had escaped those aspersions of lust and blood. Had Achan foreseen the stones about his ears, before he filched those accursed things, he would never have fingered them. But it may be said of us, as it was of our first parents, when they had once sinned and fallen : *Tunc aperti sunt oculi eorum*,—‘Then their eyes were opened,’ Gen. iii. 7 ; then, not before. In this place comes in repentance, as a rectifier of disorders, a recaller of aberrations, a repairer of all decays and breaches. So it pleaseth God’s mercy that the daughter should be the death of the mother. *Peccatum tristitiam peperit, tristitia peccatum conteret*,—Sin bred sorrow, sorrow shall kill sin ; as the oil of scorpions healeth the sting of scorpions.

If I should give you the picture of repentance, I would tell you that she is a virgin fair and lovely ; and those tears, which seem to do violence to her beauty, rather indeed grace it. Her breast is sore with the strokes of her own penitent hands, which are always either in Moses’s posture in the mount, lift up towards heaven, or the publican’s in the temple, smiting her bosom. Her knees are hardened with constant praying ; her voice is hoarse with calling to heaven ; and when she cannot speak, she delivers her mind in groans. There is not a tear falls from her, but an angel holds a bottle to catch it. She thinks every man’s sins less than her own, every man’s good deeds more. Her compunctions are unspeakable, known only to God and herself. She could wish, not only men, but even beasts, and trees, and stones, to mourn with her. She thinks no sun should shine, because she takes no pleasure in it ; that the lilies should be clothed in black, because she is so appalled. Mercy comes down like a glorious cherub, and lights on her bosom, with this message from God, ‘I have heard thy prayers, and seen thy tears ;’ so with a handkerchief of comfort dries her cheeks, and tells her that she is accepted in Jesus Christ.

*In dust and ashes*.—I have but one stair more, down from both text and pulpit ; and it is a very low one—‘dust and ashes.’

An adorned body is not the vehicle of a humbled soul. Job, before his affliction, was not poor. Doubtless he had his wardrobe, his change and choice of garments. Yet now, how doth his humbled soul contemn them, as if he threw away his vesture, saying, I have worn thee for pomp, given countenance to a silken case ; I quite mistook thy nature ; get thee from me, I am weary of thy service ; thou hast made me honourable with men, thou canst get me no estimation before the Lord. Repentance gives a farewell not only to wonted delights, but even to natural refreshings. Job lies not on a bed of roses and violets, as did the Sybarites ; nor on a couch beautified with the tapestry of Egypt ; but on a bed of ashes. Sackcloth is his apparel ; dust and ashes the lace and embroidery of it. Thus Nineveh’s king, upon that fearful sentence, ‘rose from his throne, laid his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes,’ Jonah iii. 6. Oh, what an alteration can repentance make ! From a king of the earth to a worm of the earth ; from a footcloth to sackcloth ; from a throne to a dunghill ; from sitting in state to lying in ashes ! Whom all the reverence of the world



attended on, to whom the head was uncovered, the knee bowed, the body prostrated; who had as many salutations as the firmament stars,—God save the king!—he throws away crown, sceptre, majesty, and all, and sits in ashes. How many doth the golden cup of honour make drunk, and drive from all sense of mortality! Riches and heart's ease are such usual intoxications to the souls of men, that it is rare to find any of them so low as dust and ashes.

Dust, as the remembrance of his original; ashes, as the representation of his end. Dust, that was the mother; ashes, that shall be the daughter of our bodies.

*Dust*, the matter of our substance, the house of our souls, the original grains whereof we were made, the top of all our kindred. The glory of the strongest man, the beauty of the fairest woman, all is but dust. Dust, the only compounder of differences, the absolver of all distinctions. Who can say which was the client, which the lawyer; which the borrower, which the lender; which the captive, which the conqueror, when they all lie together in blended dust?

Dust; not marble nor porphyry, gold nor precious stone, was the matter of our bodies, but earth, and the fractions of the earth, dust. Dust, the sport of the wind, the very slave of the besom. This is the pit from whence we are digged, and this is the pit to which we shall be resolved. 'Dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return again,' Gen. iii. 18. They that sit in the dust, and feel their own materials about them, may well renounce the ornaments of pride, the gulf of avarice, the foolish lusts of concupiscence. Let the covetous think, What do I scrape for? a little golden dust; the ambitious, What do I aspire for? a little honourable dust; the libidinous, What do I languish for? a little animated dust, blown away with the breath of God's displeasure.

Oh, how goodly this building of man appears when it is clothed with beauty and honour! A face full of majesty, the throne of comeliness, wherein the whiteness of the lily contends with the sanguine of the rose; an active hand, an erected countenance, an eye sparkling out lustre, a smooth complexion, arising from an excellent temperature and composition; whereas other creatures, by reason of their cold and gross humours, are grown over, beasts with hair, fowls with feathers, fishes with scales. Oh, what a workman was this, that could raise such a fabric out of the earth, and lay such orient colours upon dust! Yet all is but dust, walking, talking, breathing dust; all this beauty but the effect of a well-concocted food, and life itself but a walk from dust to dust. Yea, and this man, or that woman, is never so beautiful as when they sit weeping for their sins in the dust: as Mary Magdalene was then fairest when she kneeled in the dust, bathing the feet of Christ with her tears, and wiping them with her hairs; like heaven, fair sight-ward to us that are without, but more fair to them that are within.

The dust is come of the same house that we are, and when she sees us proud and forgetful of ourselves, she thinks with herself, Why should not she that is descended as well as we bear up her plumes as high as ours? Therefore she so often borrows wings of the wind, to mount aloft into the air, and in the streets and highways dasheth herself into our eyes, as if she would say, Are you my kindred, and will not know me? Will you take no notice of your own mother? To tax the folly of our ambition, the dust in the street takes pleasure to be ambitious.

The Jews in their mourning used to rend their garments, as if they would be revenged on them for increasing their pride and keeping them from the

sight of their nakedness. Then they put on sackcloth, and that sackcloth they sprinkled over with dust, and overstrawed with ashes, to put God in mind that if he should arm his displeasure against them, he should but contend with dust and ashes. And what glory could that be for him? 'Shall the dust praise thee, O God? or art thou glorified in the pit?' Ps. xxx. 9. Nay, rather, how often doth the Lord spare us, 'because he remembers we are but dust?' Ps. ciii. 14. To shew that they had lifted up themselves above their creation, and forgot of what they are made, now by repentance returning to their first image, in all prostrate humility they lie in the dust, confessing that the wind doth not more easily disperse the dust than the breath of God was able to bring them to nothing.

Thus dust is not only *materia nostra*, or *mater*, our mother, or matter whereof we are made, for our 'foundation is in the dust,' Job iv. 19, but *patria nostra*, our country where we shall dwell. 'Awake, ye that dwell in the dust,' Isa. xxvi. 19. We are no better than the dust we shake off from our feet, or brush off from our clothes. Oh, therefore, let us turn to God in dust, before he turn us into dust! Yea, St Augustine goes further, and says, that not only the bodies of all men, but even the souls of some men, are no better than dust. They are so set upon earth and earthly things, that they are transformed into earth and dust, and so become the food of that old serpent, whose punishment was to eat the dust.

For *ashes*, they are the emblem or representation of greater misery. Dust only shews us that we have deserved the dissolution of our bodies. Ashes put us in mind that we have merited also the destruction of our souls. Ashes are the leavings of the fire, the offals of consumed substances. When God shall give up the largest buildings of nature to the rage of that element, it shall reduce them to a narrow room, the remnants shall be but ashes. This was all the monument of those famous cities, Sodom and Gomorrah, and the rest; heaps of ashes, 2 Pet. ii. 6. *Ecce vix totam Hercules implevit urnam*, says the poet,—That great giant scarce makes a pitcher of ashes.

For this cause the ancients used to repent in ashes, remonstrating to themselves that they deserved burning in endless fire more than those ashes wherein they wallowed. Yea, if Abraham compared himself to dust and ashes, I may compare my soul to a spark hid in the ashes, which when sickness and death shall stir up, like fire she takes her flight upwards, and leaves the heavy fruitless ashes of my body behind her.

In both, we have a lesson of our own mortality. The finger of God hath written the epitaph of man, the condition of his body, like characters printed in the dust. Man's body, so well as the ice, expounds that riddle, that *gignit filia matrem*,—the daughter begets the mother. Dust begot a body, and a body begets dust. Our bodies were at first strong cities, but then we made them the forts of rebels; our offended liege sent his servant Death to arrest us of high treason. And though, for his mercies' sake in Christ, he pardoned our sins, yet he suffers us no more to have such strong houses, but lets us dwell in paper cottages, mud walls, mortal bodies. Methusalem lived nine hundred sixty-nine years, yet he was the son of Enoch, who was the son of Jared, who was the son of Mahalaleel, who was the son of Cainan, who was the son of Enos, who was the son of Seth, who was the son of Adam, who was the son of dust. Ask the woman that hath conceived a child in her womb, Will it be a son? Peradventure so. Will it be well-formed and featured? Peradventure so. Will it be wise? Peradventure so. Will it be rich? Peradventure so. Will it be long-lived? Peradventure so. Will it be mortal? Yes, this is without peradventure; it will die. Even a

heathen, when he heard that his son was dead, could say without changing countenance, *Scio me genuisse mortalem*,—I know I begot a mortal man.

An old man is said to give Alexander a little jewel, and told him that it had this virtue, so long as he kept it bright, it would outvalue the most fine gold or precious stone in the world; but if it once took dust it would not be worth a feather. What meant the sage, but to give the monarch an emblem of his own body, which, being animated with a soul, commanded the world; but once fallen to dust, it would be worth nothing, 'for a living dog is better than a dead lion,' Eccles. ix. 4.

I conclude; I call you not to casting dust on your heads or sitting in ashes, but to that sorrow and compunction of soul whereof the other was but an external symbol or testimony. Let us rend our hearts and spare our garments, humble our souls without afflicting our bodies, Isa. lviii. 5. It is not a corpse wrapped in dust and ashes, but a contrite heart, which the Lord will not despise, Ps. li. 17. Let us repent our sins and amend our lives; so God will pardon us by the merits, save us by the mercies, and crown us with the glories of Jesus Christ.