

THE TAMING OF THE TONGUE.

But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.—JAMES III. 8.

HERE is a single position, guarded with a double reason. The position is, 'No man can tame the tongue.' The reasons; 1. It is 'unruly.' 2. 'Full of deadly poison.' Here is busy dealing with a wild member; a more difficult task, and intractable nature have met. Tongue is the subject (I mean in the discourse), and can you ever think of subjecting it to modest reason, or taming it to religion? Go lead a lion in a single hair, send up an eagle to the sky to peck out a star, coop up the thunder, and quench a flaming city with one widow's tears; if thou couldst do these, yet *nescit modo lingua domari*. As the proposition is backed with two reasons; so each reason hath a terrible second. The evil hath for its second unruliness; the poisonfulness hath deadly. It is evil, yea, unruly evil; it is poison, yea, deadly poison. The fort is so barricaded, that it is hard scaling it; the refractory rebel so guarded with evil and poison, so warded with unruly and deadly, as if it were with giants in an enchanted tower, as they fabulate, that no man can tame it. Yet let us examine the matter, and find a stratagem to subdue it.

I. In the Proposition we will observe, 1. The nature of the thing to be tamed. 2. The difficulty of accomplishing it.

1. The insubjectable subject is the tongue, which is (1), a member; and (2), an excellent, necessary, little, singular member.

(1.) It is a member.—He that made all made the tongue; he that craves all, must have the tongue. *Qui creavit necessariam, postulat creatam*. It is an instrument; let it give music to him that made it. All creatures in their kind bless God, Ps. cxlviii. They that want tongues, as the heavens, sun, stars, meteors, orbs, elements, praise him with such obedient testimonies as their insensible natures can afford. They that have tongues, though they want reason, praise him with those natural organs. The birds of the air sing, the beasts of the earth make a noise; not so much as the hissing serpents, the very 'dragons in the deep,' but sound out his praise. Man, then, that hath a tongue, and a reason to guide it, and more, a religion to direct his reason, should much much more bless him. Therefore, says the Psalmographer, that for the well tuning of his tongue is called the 'Sweet Singer of Israel,' 'I will praise the Lord with the best instrument I have,' which was his tongue.

Not that praise can add to God's glory, nor blasphemies detract from it. The blessing tongue cannot make him better, nor the cursing, worse. *Nec melior si laudaveris, nec deterior si vituperaveris.** As the sun is neither bettered by birds singing, nor battered by dogs barking. He is so infinitely great, and constantly good, that his glory admits neither addition nor diminution.

Yet we that cannot make his name greater, can make it seem greater; and though we cannot enlarge his glory, we may enlarge the manifestation of his glory. This both in words praising and in works practising. We know it is impossible to make a new Christ, as the papists boast the almightiness of their priests; yet our holy lives and happy lips (if I may so speak) may make a little Christ a great Christ. They that before little regarded him, may thus be brought to esteem him greatly; giving him the honour due to his name, and glorifying him, after our example.

This is the tongue's office. Every member, without arrogating any merit, or boasting the beholdenness of the rest unto it, is to do that duty which is assigned to it. The eye is to see for all, the ear to hear for all, the hand to work for all, the feet to walk for all, the knees to bow for all, the tongue to praise God for all. This is the tongue's office, not unlike the town-clerk's, which, if it perform not well, the corporation is better without it. The tongue is man's clapper, and is given him that he may sound out the praise of his Maker. Infinite causes draw deservedly from man's lips, a devout acknowledgment of God's praise; *Quia Creator ad esse; Conservator in esse; Recreator in bene esse; Glorificator in optimo esse.*

He gave us being that had none; preserved us in that being; restored us, voluntarily fallen, unto a better being; and will glorify us with the best at the day of the Lord Jesus. Then let the tongue know, *Si non reddet Deo faciendo quæ debet, reddet ei patiundo quæ debet.†* If it will not pay God the debt it owes him in an active thankfulness, it shall pay him in a passive painfulness. Let the meditation hereof put our tongues into tune. 'A word fitly spoken, is like apples of gold in pictures of silver,' Prov. xxv. 11.

(2.) It is a member you hear; we must take it with all its properties; excellent, necessary, little, singular.

[1.] Excellent. Abstractively and simply understood, it is an exceeding excellent member, both *quoad majestatem, et quoad jucunditatem.*

First; For the majesty of it, it carries an imperious speech; wherein it hath the pre-eminence of all mortal creatures. It was man's tongue to which the Lord gave licence to call all the living creatures, and to give them names, Gen. ii. 19. And it is a strong motive to induce and to beget in other terrene natures a reverence and admiration of man. Therefore it is observed, that God did punish the ingratitude of Balaam, when he gave away some of the dignity proper to man, which is use of speech, and imparted it to the ass. Man alone speaks. I know that spirits can frame an aerial voice, as the devil when he spake in the serpent that fatal temptation, as in a trunk; but man only hath the habitual faculty of speaking.

Secondly; For the pleasantness of the tongue, the general consent of all gives it the truest *melos*, and restrains all musical organs from the worth and praise of it. 'The pipe and the psaltery make sweet melody; but a pleasant tongue is above them both,' Ecclus. xl. 21. No instruments are so ravishing, or prevail over man's heart with so powerful complacency, as the tongue and voice of man.

If the tongue be so excellent, how then doth this text censure it for so

* Aug. in Ps. cxxxiv.

† August.

evil? I take the philosopher's old and trite answer, *Lingua nihil est vel bona melius, vel mala pejus*: Than a good tongue, there is nothing better; than an evil, nothing worse. *Nihil habet medium, aut grande bonum est, aut grande malum*.* It hath no mean; it is either exceedingly good or excessively evil. It knows nothing but extremes; and is or good, best of all; or bad, worst of all. If it be good, it is a walking garden, that scatters in every place a sweet flower, an herb of grace to the hearers. If it be evil, it is a wild bedlam, full of goading and madding mischiefs. So the tongue is every man's best or worst moveable.

Hereupon that philosophical servant, when he was commanded to provide the best meat for his master's table, the worst for the family, bought and brought to either, neat's tongues. His moral was, that this was both the best and worst service, according to the goodness or badness of the tongue. A good tongue is a special dish for God's public service. *Pars optima hominis, digna quæ sit hostia*† The best part of a man, and most worthy the honour of sacrifice. This only when it is well seasoned. Seasoned, I say, 'with salt,' as the apostle admonisheth; not with fire, Col. iv. 6. Let it not be so salt as fire (as that proverb speaks), which no man living hath tasted. There is 'a city of salt,' mentioned Josh. xv. 62. Let no man be an inhabitant of this salt city. Yet better a salt tongue than an oily. Rather 'let the righteous reprove me,' than the precious balms of flatterers break my head, whilst they most sensibly soothe and supple it. We allow the tongue salt, not pepper; let it be well seasoned, but not too hot. Thus a good tongue is God's dish, and he will accept it at his own table.

But an evil tongue is meat for the devil, according to the Italian proverb: The devil makes his Christmas pie of lewd tongues. It is his daintiest dish, and he makes much of it; whether on earth, to serve his turn as an instrument of mischief, or in hell, to answer his fury in torments. Thus saith Solomon of the good tongue: 'The tongue of the just is as choice silver, and the lips of the righteous feed many,' Prov. x. 20, 21. But Saint James of the bad one: 'It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.'

[2.] It is necessary; so necessary, that without a tongue I could not declare the necessity of it. It converseth with man, conveying to others by this organ that experimental knowledge which must else live and die in himself. It imparts secrets, communicates joys, which would be less happy suppressed than they are expressed; mirth without a partner is *hilaris cum pondere felicitas*. But to disburden griefs, and pour forth sorrows in the bosom of a friend, O necessary tongue! How many hearts would have burst if thou hadst not given them vent! How many souls fallen grovelling under their load, if thou hadst not called for some supportance! How many a panting spirit hath said, I will speak yet ere I die; and by speaking received comfort! Lastly, it speaks our devotions to heaven, and hath the honour to confer with God. It is that instrument which the Holy Ghost useth in us to cry, 'Abba, Father.' It is our spokesman; and he that can hear the heart without a tongue, regardeth the devotions of the heart better, when they are sent up by a diligent messenger, a faithful tongue.

[8.] It is little. As man is a little world in the great, so is his tongue a great world in the little. It is a 'little member,' saith the apostle, ver. 5, yet it is a world; yea, *pravitatis universitas*, 'a world of iniquity,' ver. 6. It is *parvum*, but *pravum*; little in quantity, but great in iniquity. What it hath lost in the thickness, it hath gotten in the quickness; and the defect of magnitude is recompensed in the agility. An arm may be longer, but the

* Hieron.

† Prudentius.

tongue is stronger; and a leg hath more flesh than it hath, besides bones, which it hath not; yet the tongue still runs quicker and faster: and if the wagger lie for holding out, without doubt the tongue shall win it.

If it be a talking tongue, it is *mundus garrulitatis*, a world of prating. If it be a wrangling tongue, it is *mundus litigationis*, a world of babbling. If it be a learned tongue, it is, as Erasmus said of Bishop Tonstal, *mundus eruditionis*, a world of learning. If it be a petulant tongue, it is *mundus scurrilitatis*, a world of wantonness. If it be a poisonous tongue, it is *mundus infectionis*; saith our apostle, 'it defileth the whole body,' ver. 6. It is 'little.'

So little, that it will scarce give a kite her breakfast, yet it can discourse of the sun and stars, of orbs and elements, of angels and devils, of nature and arts; and hath no straiter limits than the whole world to walk through. *Homuncio est, gigantea jactat*: It is a 'little member,' yet 'boasteth great things,' ver. 5.

Though it be little, yet if good, it is of great use. A little bit guideth a great horse, *ad equitis libitum*, to the rider's pleasure. A little helm ruleth a great vessel; though the winds blow, and the floods oppose, yet the helm steers the ship. Though little, yet if evil, it is of great mischief. 'A little leaven sours the whole lump,' 1 Cor. v. 6. A little *remora* dangers a great vessel. A little sickness distempereth the whole body. A little fire setteth a whole city on combustion. 'Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth,' ver. 5.

It is little in substance, yet great *ad affectum*, to provoke passion; *ad effectum*, to produce action. A Seminary's tongue is able to set instruments on work to blow up a parliament. So God hath disposed it among the members, that it governs or misgoverns all; and is either a good king, or a cruel tyrant. It either prevails to good, or perverts to evil; purifieth or putrefieth the whole carcass, the whole conscience. It betrayeth the heart, when the heart would betray God; and the Lord lets it double treason on itself, when it prevaricates with him.

It is a little leak that drowneth a ship, a little breach that loseth an army, a little spring that pours forth an ocean. Little; yet the lion is more troubled with the little wasp, than with the great elephant. And it is observable, that the Egyptian sorcerers failed *in minimis*, that appeared skilful and powerful *in majoribus*. Doth Moses turn the waters into blood? 'The magicians did so with their enchantments,' Exod. vii. 22. Doth Aaron stretch out his hand over the waters, and cover the land with frogs? 'The magicians did so with their enchantments,' Exod. viii. 7. But when Aaron smote the dust of the land, and turned it into lice (ver. 17), the magicians could not effect the like; nor in the ashes of the furnace turned into boils and blains, chap. ix. 10. In frogs and waters they held a semblance, not in the dust and ashes turned into lice and sores. Many have dealt better with the greater members of the body than with this little one. *Defecerunt in minimis*:

Virtus non minima est, minimam compescere linguam.

[4.] It is a singular member. God hath given man two ears; one to hear instructions of human knowledge, the other to hearken to his divine precepts; the former to conserve his body, the latter to save his soul. Two eyes, that with the one he might see to his own way, with the other pity and commiserate his distressed brethren. Two hands, that with the one he might work for his own living, with the other give and relieve his brother's wants. Two feet, one to walk on common days to his ordinary labour.

'Man goes forth in the morning to his labour, and continues till the evening,' Ps. civ. 23: the other, on sacred days to visit and frequent the temple and the congregation of saints. But among all, he hath given him but one tongue; which may instruct him to hear twice so much as he speaks; to work and walk twice so much as he speaks. 'I will praise thee, O Lord, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well,' Ps. cxxxix. 14. Stay, and wonder at the wonderful wisdom of God!

First, To create so little a piece of flesh, and to put such vigour into it: to give it neither bones nor nerves, yet to make it stronger than arms and legs, and those most able and serviceable parts of the body. So that as Paul saith, 'On those members of the body, which we think less honourable, we bestow more abundant honour: and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness,' 1 Cor. xii. 23. So on this little weak member hath the Lord conferred the greatest strength; and as feeble as it is, we find it both more necessary and more honourable.

Secondly, Because it is so forcible, therefore hath the most wise God ordained that it shall be but little, that it shall be but one. That so the parvity and singularity may abate the vigour of it. If it were paired, as the arms, legs, hands, feet, it would be much more unruly. For he that cannot tame one tongue, how would he be troubled with twain! But so hath the Ordinator provided, that things of the fiercest and fieriest nature should be little, that the malice of them might be somewhat restrained.

Thirdly, Because it is so unruly, the Lord hath hedged it in, as a man will not trust a wild horse in an open pasture, but prison him in a close pound. A double fence hath the Creator given to confine it, the lips and the teeth; that through these mounds it might not break. And hence a threefold instruction for the use of the tongue is insinuated to us.

First; Let us not dare to pull up God's mounds; nor, like wild beasts, break through the circular limits wherein he hath cooped us. 'Look that thou hedge thy possession about with thorns, and bind up thy silver and gold,' Eccles. xxviii. 24. What, doth the wise man intend to give us some thrifty counsel, and spend his ink in the rule of good husbandry, which every worldling can teach himself? No. Yes; he exhorteth us to the best husbandry, how to guide and guard our tongues, and to thrive in the good use of speech. Therefore declares himself: 'Weigh thy words in a balance, and make a door and bar for thy mouth.' Let this be the possession thou so hedgest in, and thy precious gold thou so bindest up. 'Beware thou slide not by it, lest thou fall before him that lieth in wait.' Commit not burglary, by breaking the doors, and pulling down the bars of thy mouth.

Much more, when the Lord hath hung a lock on it, do not pick it with a false key. Rather pray with David, 'O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise,' Ps. li. 15. It is absurd in building, to make the porch bigger than the house; it is as monstrous in nature, when a man's words are too many, too mighty. Every man mocks such a gaping boaster with *Quid feret hic dignum tanto promissor hiatus?* Saint Bernard gives us excellent counsel. *Sint tua verba rara, contra multiloquium; vera, contra falsiloquium; ponderosa, contra vaniloquium.* Let thy words be few, true, weighty, that thou mayest not speak much, not falsely, not vainly. Remember the bounds, and keep the *non ultra*.

Secondly; Since God hath made the tongue one, have not thou 'a tongue and a tongue.' Some are double-tongued, as they are double-hearted.

But God hath given one tongue, one heart, that they might be one indeed, as they are in number. It is made simple; let it not be double. God hath made us men; we make ourselves monsters. He hath given us two eyes, two ears, two hands, two feet. Of all these we will have, or at least use, but one. We have one eye to pry into others' faults, not another to see our own. We have one ear to hear the plaintiff, not the other for the defendant. We have a foot swift to enter forbidden paths, not another to lead us to God's holy place. We have one hand to extort, and scrape, and wound, and not another to relieve, give alms, heal the wounded. But now whereas God hath given us but one tongue and one heart, and bidden us be content with their singularity, we will have two tongues, two hearts. Thus cross are we to God, to nature, to grace; monstrous men; *monoculi*, *monopodes*: *bicordes*, *bilingues*: one-eyed, one-footed; double-tongued, double-hearted. The slanderer, the flatterer, the swearer, the tale-bearer, are monstrous (I dare scarce add) men: as misshapen stigmatics as if they had two tongues and but one eye; two heads and but one foot.

Thirdly; This convinceth them of preposterous folly, that put all their malice into their tongue, as the serpent all her poison in her tail; and, as it were by a chemical power, attract all vigour thither, to the weakening and enervation of the other parts. Their hands have *chiragram*; they cannot stretch them forth to the poor, nor give relief to the needy. Their feet *podagram*; they cannot go to the church. Their eyes *ophthalmiam*; they cannot behold the miserable and pity-needing. Their ears *surditatem*; they cannot hear the gospel preached. Oh how defective and sick all these members are! But their tongues are in health; there is blitheness and volubility in them. If they see a distressed man, they can give him talkative comfort enough; 'Be warmed, be filled, be satisfied,' Jam. ii. 16. They can fill him with Scripture sentences, but they send him away with a hungry stomach; whereas the good man's hand is as ready to give, as his tongue to speak. But the fool's lips babbleth foolishness; *volat irrevocabile verbum*. Words run like Asahel; but good works, like the cripple, come lagging after.

2. We see the nature of the thing to be tamed, the tongue; let us consider the difficulty of this enterprise. No man can do it. Which we shall best find, if we compare it (1.) with other members of the body; (2.) with other creatures of the world.

(1.) With other members of the body, which are various in their faculties and offices; none of them idle.

[1.] The eye sees far, and beholdeth the creatures *in cælo, solo, salo*: in the heavens, sun, and stars; on the earth, birds, beasts, plants, and minerals; in the sea, fishes and serpents. That it is an unruly member, let our grandmother speak, whose roving eye lost us all. Let Dinah speak; her wandering eye lost her virginity, caused the effusion of much blood. Let the Jews speak concerning the daughters of Midian; what a fearful apostasy the eye procured! Yea, let David acknowledge, whose petulant eye robbed Uriah of his wife and life, the land of a good soldier, his own heart of much peace. Yet this eye, as unruly as it is, hath been tamed. Did not Job 'make a covenant with his eyes, that he would not look upon a maid?' Job xxxi. 1. The eye hath been tamed; but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil.

[2.] The ear yet hears more than ever the eye saw; and by reason of its patulous admission, derives that to the understanding whereof the sight

never had a glance. It can listen to the whisperings of a Doeg, to the surrations of a devil, to the noise of a Siren, to the voice of a Delilah. The parasite through this window creeps into the great man's favour; he tunes his warbling notes to an enlarged ear. It is a wild member, an instrument that Satan delights to play upon. As unruly as it is, yet it hath been tamed. Mary sat at the feet of Christ, and heard him preach with glad attention. The ear hath been tamed; 'but the tongue can no man tame,' &c.

[3.] The foot is an unhappy member, and carries a man to much wickedness. It is often swift to the shedding of blood; and runneth away from God, Jonah's pace; flying to Tarshish, when it is bound for Nineveh. There is 'a foot of pride,' Ps. xxxvi. 11, a saucy foot, that dares presumptuously enter upon God's freehold. There is a foot of rebellion, that with an apostate malice kicks at God. There is a dancing foot, that paceth the measures of circular wickedness. Yet, as unruly as this foot is, it hath been tamed. David got the victory over it. 'I considered my ways, and turned my foot unto thy testimonies,' Ps. cxix. 59. The foot hath been tamed; 'but the tongue can no man tame,' &c.

[4.] The hand rageth and rangeth with violence, to take the bread it never sweat for, to enclose fields, to depopulate towns, to lay waste whole countries. 'They covet fields, and houses, and vineyards, and take them, because their hand hath power,' Mic. ii. 2. There is a hand of extortion, as Ahab's was to Naboth; the greedy landlord's to the poor tenant. There is a hand of fraud and of legerdemain, as the usurer's to the distressed borrower. There is a hand of bribery, as Judas, with his *quantum dabit*, what will you give me to betray the Lord of life? There is a hand of lust, as Amnon's to an incestuous rape. There is a hand of murder, as Joab's to Abner, or Absalom's to Amnon. Oh, how unruly hath this member been! Yet it hath been tamed; not by washing it in Pilate's basin, but in David's holy water, innocence. 'I will wash my hands in innocency, and then, O Lord, will I compass thine altar.' Hereupon he is bold to say, 'Lord, look if there be any iniquity in my hands,' Ps. vii. 8. God did repudiate all the Jews' sacrifices, because their hands were full of blood, Isa. i. 15. David's hands had been besmeared with the aspersions of lust and blood, but he had penitently bathed them in his own tears; and because that could not get out the stains, he faithfully rinseth and cleanseth them in his Son's and Saviour's fountain, the all-meritorious blood of Christ. This made them look white, whiter than lilies in God's sight. 'Therefore hath the Lord recompensed me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands in his eyesight,' Ps. xviii. 24.

Thus the eye, the ear, the foot, the hand, though wild and unruly enough, have been tamed; 'but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil,' &c.

(2.) With other creatures of the world, whether we find them in the earth, air, or water.

[1.] On the earth there is the man-hating tiger, yet man hath subdued him; and (they write) a little boy hath led him in a string. There is the flock-devouring wolf, that stands at grinning defiance with the shepherd; mad to have his prey, or lose himself; yet he hath been tamed. The roaring lion, whose voice is a terror to man, by man hath been subdued. Yea serpents, that have to their strength two shrewd additions, subtlety and malice; that carry venom in their mouths, or a sting in their tails, or

are all over poisonous; the very basilisk, that kills with his eyes (as they write) three furlongs off. Yea, all these savage, furious, malicious natures have been tamed; 'but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil,' &c.

[2.] In the sea there be great wonders. 'They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep,' Ps. cvii. 23, 24. Yet those natural wonders have been tamed by our artificial wonders, ships. Even the leviathan himself, 'out of whose mouth go burning lamps and sparks of fire. Out of his nostrils goeth smoke, as out of a boiling caldron,' Job xli. 19, 20. *Squama squamæ conjungitur*: 'the flakes of his flesh are joined together; they are firm in themselves, and cannot be moved.' Yet we know that this huge creature hath been tamed; 'but the tongue can no man tame,' &c.

[3.] In the air, the birds fly high above our reach, yet we have gins to fetch them down. A lure stops the highest-soaring hawk; nay, art makes one fowl catch another, for man's delight and benefit; incredible things, if they were not ordinary. Snares, lime-twigs, nets, tame them all; even the pelican in the desert, and the eagle amongst the cedars. Thus saith our apostle, verses 7, 8: 'Every kind' (not every one of every kind, but every kind of nature of all), 'of beasts, of birds, of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of the nature of man; 'but the tongue can no man tame,' &c.

Thus far, then, St James's proposition passeth without opposition. 'The tongue can no man tame;' the tongue is too wild for any man's taming. It would be a foolish exception (and yet there are such profane tongues to speak it), that woman stands without this compass and latitude; and to infer, that though no man can tame the tongue, yet a woman may. It is most unworthy of answer. Woman, for the most part, hath the glibbest tongue; and if ever this impossibility preclude men, it shall much more annihilate the power of the weaker sex. 'She is loud,' saith Solomon, Prov. vii. 11; 'a foolish woman is ever clamorous,' ix. 13. She calls her tongue her defensive weapon; she means offensive: a firebrand in a frantic hand doth less mischief. The proverb came not from nothing, when we say of a brawling man, He hath a woman's tongue in his head.

'The tongue can no man tame.' Let us listen to some weightier exceptions. The prophets spake the oracles of life, and the apostles the words of salvation; and many men's speech ministers grace to the hearers. Yield it; yet this general rule will have no exceptions: 'no man can tame it: man hath no stern* for this ship, no bridle for this colt. How then? God tamed it. We by nature stammer as Moses, till God open a door of utterance. 'I am of unclean lips,' saith the prophet, 'and dwell with a people of unclean lips,' Isa. vi. 5. God must lay a coal of his own altar upon our tongues, or they cannot be tamed.

And when they are tamed, yet they often have an unruly trick. Abraham lies; Moses murmurs; Elias, for fear of a queen and a quean, wisheth to die. Jonah frets for the gourd; David cries in his heart,† 'All men are liars;' which speech rebounded even on God himself, as if the Lord by Samuel had deceived him. Peter forswears his Master, his Saviour. If the tongues of the just have thus tripped, how should the profane go upright? 'The tongue can no man tame.'

The instruction hence riseth in full strength; that God only can tame

* Qu. 'helm?'—Ed.

† Qu. 'haste?' or 'heat?'—Ed.

man's tongue. Now the principal actions hereof are, *first*, to open the mouth, when it should not be shut; *secondly*, to shut it, when it should not be open.

First, To open our lips when they should speak is the sole work of God. 'O Lord, open thou my lips, and then my mouth shall be able to shew forth thy praise,' Ps. li. 15. God must open with his golden key of grace, or else our tongues will arrogate a licentious passage. We had better hold our peace, and let our tongues lie still, than set them a-running till God bids them go. God commands every sinner to confess his iniquities; this charge, David knew, concerned himself; yet was David silent, and then his 'bones waxed old' with anguish, Ps. xxxii. 8. His adultery cried, his murder cried, his ingratitude cried for revenge; but still David was mute; and so long, 'day and night, the hand of the Lord was heavy upon him.' But at last God stopped the mouth of his clamorous adversaries, and gave him leave to speak. 'I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.' It is Christ that must cast out this devil. The Lord is the best opener. He did open Lydia's heart, to conceive, Acts xvi. 14. He did open Elisha's servant's eyes to see, 2 Kings vi. 17. He did open the prophet's ears to hear, Isa. i. 5. He did open Paul's mouth to speak, Col. iv. 8.

Secondly, To shut our lips when they should not speak, is only the Lord's work also. It is Christ that casts out the talking devil; he shuts the wicket of our mouth against unsavoury speeches. We may think it a high office (and worthy even David's ambition) to be a 'door-keeper in God's house' Ps. lxxxiv. 10, when God vouchsafes to be a door-keeper in our house.

Thus all is from God. Man is but a lock; God's Spirit the key 'that openeth, and no man shutteth; that shutteth, and no man openeth,' Rev. iii. 7. He opens, and no man shuts. I must speak though I die, saith Jeremiah; 'his word is like fire in my bones,' Jer. xx. 9; and will make me weary of forbearing. He shuts, and no man opens; so Zacharias goes dumb from the altar, and could not speak, Luke i. 22.

Away, then, with arrogation of works, if not of words. When a man hath a good thought, it is *gratia infusa*; when a good work, it is *gratia diffusa*. If then man cannot produce words to praise God, much less can he procure his works to please God. If he cannot tune his tongue, he can never turn his heart. Two useful benefits may be made hereof.

First, It is taught us, whither we have recourse to tame our tongues. He that gave man a tongue, can tame the tongue. He that gave man a tongue to speak, can give him a tongue to speak well. He that placed that unruly member in his mouth, can give him a mouth to rule it. He can give psalms for carols; the songs of Zion for the ballads of hell. Man hath no bridle, no cage of brass, nor bars of iron to tame it; God can. Let us move our tongues to entreat help for our tongues; and, according to their office, let us set them on work to speak for themselves.

Secondly, We must not be idle ourselves; the difficulty must spur us to more earnest contention. As thou wouldst keep thy house from thieves, thy garments from moths, thy gold from rust, so carefully preserve thy tongue from unruliness. As 'the Lord doth set a watch before thy mouth, and keep the door of thy lips,' Ps. cxli. 8; so thou must also be vigilant thyself, and not turn over thy own heart to security. 'How can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart

the mouth speaketh,' Matt. xii. 34. Look how far the heart is good, so far the tongue. If the heart believe, the tongue will confess; if the heart be meek, the tongue will be gentle; if the heart be angry, the tongue will be bitter. The tongue is but the hand without, to shew how the clock goes within. A vain tongue discovers a vain heart. But some have words soft as butter, when their hearts are keen swords; be they never so well traded in the art of dissembling, some time or other the tongue, Judas-like, will betray its master; it will mistake the heart's errand, and, with stumbling forgetfulness, trip at the door of truth. 'The heart of fools is in their mouth: but the mouth of the wise is in their heart,' Eccles. xxi. 26. To avoid ill communication, hate ill cogitation: a polluted heart makes a foul mouth; therefore one day, *ex ore tuo*, 'out of thine own mouth, will God condemn thee.'

II. 1. It is 'an unruly evil.'—The difficulty of taming the tongue, one would think, were sufficiently expressed in the evil of it; but the apostle seconds it with another obstacle, signifying the wild nature of it, unruly. It is not only an evil, but an unruly evil. I will set the champion and his second together in this fight, and then shew the hardness of the combat.

Bernard saith, *Lingua facile volat, et ideo facile violat*: The tongue runs quickly, therefore wrongs quickly. Speedy is the pace it goes, and therefore speedy is the mischief it does. When all other members are dull with age, the tongue alone is quick and nimble. It is an unruly evil to ourselves, to our neighbours, to the whole world.*

(1.) To ourselves; verse 6, 'it is so placed among the members, that it defileth all.' Though it were evil as the plague, and unruly as the possessed Gergesene (Matth. viii.), yet if set off with distance, the evil rests within itself. A leper shut up in a pesthouse rankleth to himself, infects not others. A wild cannibal in a prison may only exercise his savage cruelty upon the stone walls or iron grates. But the tongue is so placed, that being evil and unruly, it hurts all the members.

(2.) To our neighbours. There are some sins that hurt not the doer only, but many sufferers. These are districtly the sins of the tongue and the hand. There are other sins, private and domestic, the sting and smart whereof dies in the own soul; and without farther extent, plagues only the own soul; and without farther extent, plagues only the person of the committer. So the lavish is called no man's foe but his own; the proud is guilty of his own vanity; the slothful bears his own reproach; and the malicious wasteth the marrow of his own bones, whiles his envied object shines in happiness. Though perhaps these sins insensibly wrong the commonwealth, yet the principal and immediate blow lights on themselves. But some iniquities are swords to the country, as oppression, rapine, circumvention; some incendiaries to the whole land, as evil and unruly tongues.

(3.) To the whole world. If the vastatè ruins of ancient monuments, if the depopulation of countries, if the consuming fires of contention, if the land manured with blood, had a tongue to speak, they would all accuse the tongue for the original cause of their woe. Slaughter is a lamp, and blood the oil; and this is set on fire by the tongue.

You see the latitude and extension of this unruly evil, more unruly than the hand. Slaughters, massacres, oppressions, are done by the hand; the tongue doth more. *Parcit manus absenti, lingua nemini*: The hand spares to hurt the absent, the tongue hurts all. One may avoid the sword by

• Erasmus.

running from it; not the tongue, though he run to the Indies. The hand reacheth but a small compass; the tongue goes through the world. If a man wore coat of armour, or mail of brass, yet *penetrabunt spicula lingue*: the darts of the tongue will pierce it.

It is evil, and doth much harm; it is unruly, and doth sudden harm. You will say, Many wicked men have often very silent tongues. True; they know their times and places, when and where to seem mute. But Jeremiah compounds the wisdom and folly of the Jews: that 'they were wise to do evil, but to do good they had no understanding,' Jer. iv. 22. So I may say of these, they have tongue enough to speak evil, but are dumb when they should speak well.

Our Saviour, in the days of his flesh on earth, was often troubled with dumb devils (Luke xi. 14); but now he is as much troubled with roaring devils. With the fawning sycophant, a prattling devil; with the malicious slanderer, a brawling devil; with the unquiet peace-hater, a scolding devil; with the avarous and ill-conscious lawyer, a wrangling devil; with the factious schismatic, a gaping devil; with the swaggering ruffian, a roaring devil. All whom Christ by his ministers doth conjure, as he once did that crying devil, 'Hold thy peace and come out.' These are silent enough to praise God, but loud as the cataracts of Nilus to applaud vanity. David said of himself, that 'when he held his peace, yet he roared all the day long,' Psa. xxxii. 8. Strange! be silent, and yet roar too, at once! Gregory answers: He that daily commits new sins, and doth not penitently confess his old, roars much, yet holds his tongue. The father pricked the pleurisy-vein of our times. For we have many roarers, but dumb roarers. Though they can make a hellish noise in a tavern, and swear down the devil himself; yet to praise God, they are as mute as fishes.

Saint James here calls it fire. Now you know fire is an ill master; but this is unruly fire. Nay, he calls it 'the fire of hell,' blown with the bellows of malice, kindled with the breath of the devil. Nay, Stella hath a conceit, that it is worse than the fire of hell; for that torments only the wicked; this all, both good and bad. For it is *flabellum invidi*, and *flagellum justi*. Swearers, railers, scolds, have hell-fire in their tongues.

This would seem incredible; but that God saith it is true. Such are hellish people, that spit abroad the flames of the devil. It is a cursed mouth that spits fire; how should we avoid those, as men of hell! Many are afraid of hell-fire, yet nourish it in their own tongues. By this kind of language, a man may know who is of hell. There are three sorts of languages observed: celestial, terrestrial, and infernal. The heavenly language is spoken by the saints. 'Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee,' Psa. lxxxiv. 4. Their discourse is habituated, like their course or conversation, which Paul saith is heavenly, Phil. iii. 20. The earthly tongue is spoken of worldlings: 'He that is of the earth is earthly; and speaketh of the earth,' John iii. 81. Worldly talk is for worldly men. The infernal language is spoken by men of hell; such as have been taught by the devil: they speak like men of Belial. Now, as the countryman is known by his language, and as the damsel told Peter, 'Sure thou art of Galilee, for thy speech bewrayeth thee;' so by this rule you may know heavenly men by their gracious conference; earthly men by their worldly talk; and hellish, by the language of the low countries—swearing, cursing, blasphemy.

Well therefore did the apostle call this tongue a fire; and such a fire as sets the whole world in combustion. Let these unruly tongues take heed

lest by their roarings they shake the battlements of heaven, and so waken an incensed God to judgment. There is a 'curse that goeth forth, and it shall enter into the house of the swearer,' and not only cut him off, but 'consume his house, with the timber and the stones of it,' Zech. v. 4. It was the prophet Jeremiah's complaint, that 'for oaths the land mourned,' Jer. xxiii. 10. No marvel if God curse us for our cursings; and if the plague light upon our bodies, that have so hotly trolled it in our tongues; no wonder if we have blistered carcasses, that have so blistered consciences; and the stench of contagion punish us for our stinking breaths. Our tongues must walk, till the hand of God walk against us.

2. 'Full of deadly poison.'—Poison is *hominum inimicum*; loathsomely contrary to man's nature; but there is a poison not mortal, the venom whereof may be expelled; that is 'deadly poison.' Yet if there was but a little of this resident in the wicked tongue, the danger were less; nay, it is full of it, 'full of deadly poison.'

Tell a blasphemer this, that he vomits hell fire, and carries deadly poison in his mouth; and he will laugh at thee. Beloved, we preach not this of our own heads; we have our infallible warrant. God speaks it. 'The poison of asps is under their lips,' saith the psalmist, Psa. cxl. 8. It is a loathsome thing to carry poison in one's mouth; we would fly that serpent, yet yield to converse with that man. A strangely hated thing in a beast, yet customable in many men's tongues. Whom poison they? First, Themselves; they have speckled souls. Secondly, They sputter their venom abroad, and bespurtle others; no beast can cast his poison so far. Thirdly, Yea they would (and no thanks to them that they cannot) poison God's most sacred and feared name. Let us judge of these things, not as flesh and blood imagineth, but as God pronounceeth.

It is observable that which way soever a wicked man useth his tongue, he cannot use it well. *Mordet detrahendo, lingit adulando*: He bites by detraction, licks by flattery; and either of these touches rankle; he doth no less hurt by licking than by biting. All the parts of his mouth are instruments of wickedness. Logicians, in the difference betwixt *vocem* and *sonum*, say that a voice is made by the lips, teeth, throat, tongue.

The psalmographer on every one of these hath set a brand of wickedness. 1. The lips are *labia dolosa*; 'lying lips,' Psa. cxx. 2. The teeth are *frementes, frendentes*; 'gnashing teeth.' 3. The tongue *lingua mendax, lingua mordax*: 'What shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue?' ver. 8. 4. The throat *patens sepulchrum*: 'Their throat is an open sepulchre,' Rom. iii. 13. This is a monstrous and fearful mouth; where the porter, the porch, the entertainer, the receiver, are all vicious. The lips are the porter, and that is fraud; the porch, the teeth, and there is malice; the entertainer, the tongue, and there is lying; the receiver, the throat, and there is devouring.

I cannot omit the moral of that old fable. Three children call one man father, who brought them up. Dying, he bequeaths all his estate only to one of them, as his true natural son; but which that one was, left uncertain. Hereupon every one claims it. The wise magistrate, for speedy decision of so great an ambiguity, causeth the dead father to be set up as a mark, promising the challengers, that which of them could shoot next his heart, should enjoy the patrimony. The elder shoots, so doth the second; both hit. But when it came to the younger's turn, he utterly refused to shoot; good nature would not let him wound that man dead, that bred and fed him living. Therefore the judge gave all to this son, reputed the for-

mer bastards. The scope of it is plain, but significant. God will never give them the legacy of glory, given by his Son's will to children, that like bastards shoot through, and wound his blessed name. Think of this, ye swearing and cursing tongues !

To conclude, God shall punish such tongues in their own kind ; they were full of poison, and the poison of another stench shall swell them. They have been inflamed, and shall be tormented, with the fire of hell. Burning shall be added to burning ; save that the first was active, this passive. The rich glutton, that when his belly was full could loose his tongue to blasphemy, wanted water to cool his tongue. His tongue sinned, his tongue smarted. Though his torment was universal, yet he complains of his tongue. That panted, that smoked, that reeked with sulphur and brimstone : that burns with the flame of hell dead, that burned with it living. For a former tune of sin, it hath a present tone of woe. It scalded, and is scalded ; as it cast abroad the flames of hell in this world, so all the flames of hell shall be cast on it in the world to come. It hath fired, and shall be fired with such fire as is not to be quenched. But blessed is the sanctified tongue. God doth now choose it as an instrument of music to sing his praise ; he doth water it with the saving dews of his mercy, and will at last advance it to glory.