

others : it is perfidious ingratitude to forsake them in every trial, that must lose their lives and all the world, rather than forsake you or betray your souls : or to grudge them food and raiment that lay by the gainful employments of the world, that they may attend continually on the service of your soula.

CHAPTER VII.

Directions for the Discovery of the Truth among Contenders, and the Escape of Heresy and Deceit.

THOUGH truth be naturally the object of man's understanding, to which it hath a certain inclination, and though it be a delightful thing to know the truth^a; yet that which is saving meeteth with so much opposition in the flesh, and in the world, that while it is applauded in the general, it is resisted and rejected in particulars : and yet while the use of holy truth is hated and obstinately cast away, the name and the barren profession of it is made the matter of the glorying of hypocrites, and the occasion of reproaching dissenters as heretics, and the world is filled with bloody persecutions, and inhuman, implacable enmities and divisions, by a wonderful zeal for the name of truth, even by those men that will rather venture on damnation, than they will obey the truth which they so contend for. Multitudes of men have tormented or murdered others as heretics, who themselves must be tormented in hell for not being Christians. It concerneth us therefore to deal very wisely and cautiously in this business.

Direct. 1. 'Take heed lest there be any carnal interest or lust which maketh you unwilling to receive the truth, or inclineth you to error, that it may serve that interest or lust.' It is no small number of men that are strangers or enemies to the truth, not because they cannot attain the knowledge of it, but because they would not have it to be truth. And men of great learning and natural parts are frequently thus deceived and led into error by a naughty, carnal, biassed heart : either because that error is the vulgar

^a Nitebatur Socrates summo ingenii acumine, non tam illorum sententiam resellere, quam ipse quid verum esset, invenire. *Dialog. Laert. in Socrat. lib. ii. sect. 22. p. 93.*

opinion, and necessary to maintain their popular reputation, and avoid reproach; or because it is the way of men in power, and necessary to their preferment and greatness in the world; or because the truth is contrary to their fleshly lusts and pleasures, or contrary to their honour and worldly interest, and would hazard their reputations or their lives. How loath is a sensual, ungodly man to believe, that "without holiness none shall see God," and that he "that is in Christ is a new creature, and that if any man have not the spirit of Christ, the same is none of his, and that if they live after the flesh they shall die." How loath is the ambitious minister to believe that the way of Christ's service lieth not in worldly pomp, or ease, or pleasures, but in taking up the cross and following Christ in self-denial, and in being as the servant of all, in the unwearied performance of careful oversight, and compassionate exhortations unto all the flock. Let a controversy be raised about any of these points, and the mind of lazy, ambitious men doth presently fall in with that part which gratifieth their fleshly lusts, and excuseth them from that toilsome way of duty which they already hate. The secret lusts and vices of a false, hypocritical heart, are the commonest and the most powerful arguments for error; and such men are glad, that great men or learned men will give so much ease to their consciences, and shelter to their reputations, as to countenance, or make a controversy at least of that which their lusts desire to be true. Above all therefore see that you come not to inquire after truth with an un sanctified heart, and unmortified lusts, which are a bias to your minds, and make you warp from the truth which you inquire after: for if the carnal mind neither is, nor can be subject to the law of God, you may easily perceive that it will be loath to believe it; when in so doing they believe their own condemnation. An honest, sanctified heart is fittest to entertain the truth.

Direct. 11. 'Seek after the truth, for the love of truth, and love it especially for its special use, as it formeth the heart and life to the image and will of God; and not for the fanciful delight of knowing; much less for carnal, worldly ends.' No means are used at all as means, where

^b Socrates de ethice, et in officinis, et in publico quotidie philosophans, ea posita inquirenda hortabatur, quæ mores instruerent, et quorum usus nobis domi esset necessaria. Diog. Laert. in Socrat.

the end is not first determined of. And to do the same thing materially to another end, is not indeed to do the same; for thereby it is made another thing. Your physician will come to you if you seek to him as a physician; but not if you send to him to mend your shoes. So if you seek knowledge for the true ends of knowledge, to fill your hearts with the love of God, and guide your lives in holiness and righteousness, God is engaged to help you in the search. But if you seek it only for to please your pride or fancy, no wonder if you miss of it; and it is no great matter whether you find it or not, for any good it is like to do you. Every truth of God is appointed to be his instrument, to do some holy work upon your heart: let the love of holiness be it that maketh you search after truth, and then you may expect that God should be your teacher.

Direct. III. 'Seek after truth without too great or too small regard to the judgment of others: neither contemn them, nor be captivated to them.' Use the help of the wise; but give not up your reason absolutely to any. Engage not yourselves in a party, so as to espouse their errors, or implicitly to believe whatever they say; for this breedeth in you a secret desire to please your party, and interesteth you in their dividing interest, and maketh you betray the truth to be accounted orthodox by those you value^c.

Direct. IV. 'Take heed of pride, which will make you dote upon your own conceits, and cause you to slight the weightiest reasons that are brought by others, for your conviction.' And if once you have espoused an error it will engage all your wit, and zeal, and diligence to maintain it: it will make you uncharitable and furious against all that cross you in your way; and so make you either persecutors (if you stand on the higher ground), or sect-leaders, or church-dividers, and turbulent and censorious, if you are on the lower ground. There is very great reason in Paul's advice for the choice of a bishop, "Not a novice; lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil^d."

^c Non tam auctoritatis in disputando, quam rationis momenta quærenda sunt. Cic. Nat. D. I. 9. Obest plerumque iis, qui discere volunt, auctoritas eorum, qui se docere profitentur. Desinunt enim suum iudicium adhibere: id habent ratum, quod ab eo, quem probant, iudicatum vident. Ibid.

^d 1 Tim. iii. 6.

It is no more wonder to see a proud man erroneous, and in the confidence of his own understanding, to rage against all that tell him he is mistaken, than to hear a drunken man boasting of his wit, to the increase of his shame.

Direct. v. 'Take heed of slothfulness and impatience in searching after truth, and think not to find it in difficult cases, without both hard and patient studies, and ripeness of understanding to enable you therein: and suspect all opinions which are the offspring of idleness and ease, whatever Divine illumination they may pretend;' (except as you take them from others upon trust (in a slothful way) who attained them by diligent studies). For God that hath called men to labour, doth use to give his blessing to the laborious. And he that hath said by his Spirit, "Meditate upon these things: give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all," doth accordingly cause those men to profit, who seek it in this laborious way of his appointment: and he that hath said, "The desire of the slothful killeth him," doth not use to bless the slothful with his teachings. He that will say to him in judgment, "Thou wicked and slothful servant," will not encourage the slothfulness which he condemneth. "My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God: for the Lord giveth wisdom." Mark here to whom God giveth wisdom: all the godly are taught of God: but mark here how it is that he teacheth them. Not while they scorn at studies and universities, and look that their knowledge should cost them nothing, or that the Spirit should be instead of serious studies, or that their understandings should discern what is true or false at the first appearance; but while they think no pains or patience too great to learn the truth in the school of Christ.

Direct. vi. 'Keep out passion from your disputes, and in the management of all your controversies in religion.' For though passion be useful both antecedently to the re-

* 1 Tim. iv. 15.

† Prov. ii. 1—6.

solution of the will, and consequently to the effectual execution of its resolutions, yet it is commonly a very great seducer of the understanding, and strangely blindeth and perverteth the judgment^s: so that a passionate man is seldom so far from the truth, as when he is most confident he is defending it. When passion hath done boiling, and the heart is cooled, and leaveth the judgment to do its work without any clamour or disturbance, it is strange to see how things will appear to you, to be quite of another tendency and reason, than in your passion you esteemed them.

Direct. VII. 'Keep up a sense of the evil and danger of both extremes; and be not so wholly intent upon the avoiding of one extreme, as to be fearless of the other.' The narrow minds of unexperienced men are hardly brought to look on both sides them, and to be duly sensible of the danger of both extremes; but while they are taken up only with the hating and opposing one sort of errors, they forget those on the other side. And usually the sin or error which we observe not, is more dangerous to us than that which we do observe, (if the wind of temptation set that way.)

Direct. VIII. 'When you detect any ancient error or corruption, inquire into its original; and see whether reformation consist not rather in a restitution of the primitive state, than in an extirpation of the whole.' Even in Popery itself there are many errors and ill customs, which are but the corruption of some weighty truth, and the degenerating of some duty of God's appointment; and to reduce all, in such cases, to the primitive verity, is the way of wise and true reformation; and not to throw away that which is God's, because it is fallen into the dirt of human depravation. But in cases where all is bad, there all must be rejected.

Direct. IX. 'Pretend not to truth and orthodoxy against Christian love and peace: and so follow truth, as that you lose not love and peace by it; (as much as in you lieth live peaceably with all men).' Charity is the end of truth: and it is a mad use of means, to use them against the end. Make sure of the sincerity of your charity, and

^s Quæ dæm virtutes in disputatore primæ sunt, eas ambas in Hubero deprehendi, patientiam adversarium prolixè sua explicantem audiendi, et lenitatem etiã asperè dicta perferendi, inq. Scultetus post. disp. Curric. p. 33.

hold it fast; and then no error that you hold will be destructive to you: but if you know more than others, and use your knowledge to the weakening of your love, you are but (as our first parents,) deceived and destroyed by a desire of fleshly, ineffectual knowledge. Such "knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth^b." To contend for truth, to the loss of love, in yourselves, and the destruction of it among others, is but to choke yourselves with excellent food, and to imitate that orthodox, catholic physician, that gloried that he killed his patients 'secundem artem,' by the most accurate method, and excellent rules of art that men could die by.

Direct. x. 'Pretend no truth against the power and practice of godliness.' For this also is its proper end; if it be not truth that is according to godliness, it is no truth worthy our seeking or contending for. And if it be contrary to godliness in itself, it is no truth at all; therefore if it be used against godliness, it is used contrary to the ends of truth. Those men that suppress or hinder the means of knowledge, and holiness, and concord, and edification, under pretence of securing, defending, or propagating the orthodox belief, will find one day, that God will give them as little thanks for their blind, preposterous zeal for truth, as a tender father would do to a physician, that killed his children, because they distasted or spit out his medicines. It is usually a pitiful defence of truth that is made by the enemies of godliness.

More near and particular Directions against Error.

Direct. i. 'Begin at the greatest, most evident, certain and necessary truths, and so proceed orderly to the knowledge of the less, by the help of these.' As you climb by the body of the tree unto the branches. If you begin at those truths, which spring out of greater common truths, and know not the premises, while you plead for the conclusion, you abuse your reason, and lose the truth and your labour both: for there is no way to the branches but by ascending from the stock. The principles well laid, must be your help to all your following knowledge.

Direct. ii. 'The two first things which you are to learn

^b 1 Cor. viii. 1.

are, what man is, and what God is: the nature and relation of the two parties, is the first thing to be known in order to the knowledge of the covenant itself, and all following transactions between God and man^b. One error here will introduce abundance. A thousand other points of natural philosophy you may safely be ignorant of; but if you know not what man is, what reason is, what natural freewill is, and what inferior sensitive faculties are, as to their uses, it will lay you open to innumerable errors. In the nature of man, you must see the foundation of his relations unto God: and if you know not those great relations, the duties of which must take up all our lives, you may easily foresee the consequents of such ignorance or error. So if you know not what God is, and what his relations to us are, so far as is necessary to our living in the duties of those relations, the consequents of your ignorance will be sad. If learned men be but perverted in their apprehensions of some one attribute of God, (as those that think his goodness is nothing but his benignity, or proneness to do good, or that he is a necessary agent, doing good, 'ad ultimum posse,' &c.) what abundance of horrid and impious consequents will follow?

Direct. 111. 'Having soundly understood both these and other principles of religion, try all the subsequent truths hereby, and receive nothing as truth that is certainly inconsistent with any of these principles¹.' Even principles that are not of sense, may be disputed till they are well received; and with those that have not received them: but afterwards they are not to be called in question; for then you would never proceed nor build higher, if you still stand questioning all your grounds. Indeed no truth is inconsistent with any other truth: but yet when two dark or doubtful points are compared together, it is hard to know which of them to reject. But here it is easy; nothing that contradicteth the true nature of God or man, or any principle must be held.

Direct. 1v. 'Believe nothing which certainly contradicteth the end of all religion.' If it be of a natural or necessary tendency to ungodliness, against the love of God, or

^b Ut Deum noris, etsi ignores et locum et faciem, sic animum tibi tuum notum esse oportet, etiam si ignores et locum et formam. Cic. Tuscul. I. 70.

¹ Nec est ulla erga Deos pietas, nisi honesta de numine decorum ac mente opinio sit. Cic. pro Dom. 107. Op. vol. iii. p. 88z.

against a holy and heavenly mind and conversation, it cannot be truth whatever it pretend.

Direct. v. ‘Be sure to distinguish well betwixt revealed and unrevealed things:’ and before you dispute any question, search first whether the resolution be revealed or not: and if it be not, lay it by; and take it as a part of your necessary submission, to be ignorant of what God would have you ignorant, as it is part of your obedience to labour to know what God would have you know. And when some things unrevealed are mixed in the controversy, take out those and lay them by, before you go any further, and see that the resolution of the rest be not laid upon them, nor twisted with them, to entangle the whole in uncertainty or confusion^k. Thus God instructed Job, by convincing him how many things were past his knowledge^l. Thus Christ instructed Nicodemus about the work of regeneration, so as to let him know that though the necessity of it must be known, yet the manner of the Spirit’s accesses to the soul cannot be known^m. And Paul in his discourse of election takes notice of the unsearchable depths, and the creature’s unfitness to dispute with Godⁿ. When you find any disputes about predetermination or predestination resolved into such points as these: Whether God do by physical, premoving influx, or by concurrence, or by moral operation ‘*ut finis*,’ determine or specify moral acts of man? Whether a positive decree ‘*quoad actum*’ be necessary to the negation of effects, (as that such a one shall not have grace given him, or be converted or saved; that all the millions of possible persons, names, and things shall not be future)? What understanding, will, or power are formally in God? How he knoweth future contingents? with a hundred such like; then remember that you make use of this rule, and say with Moses, “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things that are revealed unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of his law^o.” There are many rare, profound discoveries much gloried of by the masters of several sects, of which you may know the sentence of the

^k Non ii, sumus quibus hoc nihil verum esse videatur; sed ii, qui omnibus veris falsæ quædam adjuncta esse dicamus, tanta similitudine, ut, &c. Cic. Nat. D. I. 12.

^l Job xxxviii—xli.

^m John iii. 7, 8.

ⁿ Rom. ix.

^o Deut. xix. 29.

Holy Ghost, by that instance, "Let no man beguile you of your reward, in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind^p." Reverently withdraw from things that are unrevealed, and dispute them not.

Direct. vi. 'Be a careful and accurate (though not a vain) distinguisher: and suffer not ambiguity and confusion to deceive you.' Suspect every word in your question, and anatomise it, and agree upon the sense of all your common terms, before you dispute with any adversary. It is not only in many words, but in one word or syllable, that so much ambiguity and confusion may be contained, as may make a long dispute to be but a vain and ridiculous wrangling^q. Is it not a ridiculous business to hear men dispute many hours about the 'cur credis,' and into what faith is to be resolved? and in the end come to understand, that by 'cur,' one of them speaks of the 'principium or causa veritatis' and the other of the 'principium patefactionis,' or the 'evidentia veritatis,' or some other cause? And when one speaks of the resolution of his faith as into the formal object, and another into the subservient testimony or means, or into the proofs of Divine attestation, or many other causes? Or to hear men dispute whether Christ died for all: when by 'for,' one man meaneth 'for the benefit of all,' and another means 'in the place or stead of all, or for the sins of all as the procuring cause, &c.' Yet here is but a syllable to contain this confusion! What a tedious thing is it to read long disputes between many Papists and Protestants, about justification, while by justification one meaneth one thing, and another meaneth quite another thing? He that cannot force every word to make a plain confession of its proper signification, that the thing intended may be truly discerned in the word, he will but deceive himself and others, with a wordy, insignificant dispute.

Direct. vii. 'Therefore be specially suspicious of metaphors; as being all but ambiguities till an explication hath fixed or determined the sense.' It is a noisome thing to

^p Col. ii. 18.

^q See my Preface before the second Part of the Saints' Rest, Edit. 5. &c. A man of judgment shall hear ignorant men differ, and know that they mean one thing: and yet they themselves will never agree. Lord Bacon, Essay 3.

hear some dispute upon an unexplained metaphorical word, when neither of them have enucleated the sense, and when there are proper words enow.

Direct. VII. 'Take special notice of what kind of being your inquiry or disputation is, and let all your terms be adapted and interpreted according to the kind of beings you dispute of.' As if you be inquiring into the nature of any grace, as faith, repentance, obedience, &c. remember that it is 'in genere moris,' a moral act: and therefore the terms are not to be understood as if you disputed about mere physical acts, which are considered but 'in genere entis.' For that object which must essentiate one moral act, containeth many physical particles, which will make up many physical acts'. If you take such a man for your king, your commander, your master, your physician, &c., if you should at the bar, when you are questioned for unfaithfulness, dispute upon the word 'take,' whether it be an act of the fantasy, or sense, or intellect, or will, &c. would you not be justly laughed at? So when you ask, What act faith or repentance is? which contain many particular physical acts. When you dispute of divinity, policy, law, war, &c. you must not use the same terms in the same sense, as when you dispute of physics, or metaphysics.

Direct. IX. 'Be sure in all your disputes that you still keep distinguished before your eyes, the order of being, and the order of knowing: that the questions 'de esse' lying undetermined in your way, do not frustrate all your dispute about the question 'de cognoscere.' As in the question, Whether a man should do such or such a thing, when he thinketh that it is God's command? How far conscience must be obeyed? It must first be determined 'de esse,' whether indeed the thing be commanded or lawful, or not? before the case can be determined about the obligation that followeth my apprehension. For, whatever my conscience or opinion say of it, the thing either is lawful or it is not: if it be lawful, or a duty, the case is soon decided; but if it be not lawful, the error of my conscience altereth not God's law, nor will it make it lawful unto me. I am bound first to know and then to do what God revealeth and command-

' As I have shewed in my Dispute of Saving Faith with Dr. Barlow, and of Justification.

eth : and this I shall be bound to, whatever I imagine to the contrary ; and to lay by the error which is against it.

Direct. x. ' Be sure when you first enter upon an enquiry or dispute, that you well discover how much of the controversy is verbal ' de nomine,' and how much is material ' de re.' And that you suffer not your adversary to go on upon a false supposition, that the controversy is ' de re,' when it is but ' de nomine.' The difference between names and things is so wide, that you would think no reasonable man should confound them : and yet so heedless in this point are ordinary disputers, that it is a usual thing to make a great deal of stir about a controversy before they discern whether it be ' de nomine' or ' de re.' Many a hot and long dispute I have heard, which was managed as about the very heart of some material cause (as about man's power to do good, or about the sufficiency of grace, or about justification, &c.) when the whole contest between the disputers was only or principally ' de nomine,' and neither of them seemed to take notice of it. Be sure as soon as you peruse the terms of your question, to sift this thoroughly, and dispute verbal controversies, but as verbal, and not as real and material. We have real differences enow : we need not make them seem more by such a blind or heedless manner of disputing^t.

Direct. xi. ' Suffer not a rambling mind in study, nor a rambling talker in disputes, to interrupt your orderly procedure, and divert you from your argument before you bring it to the natural issue.' But deceiving sophisters, and giddy headed praters, will be violent to start another game, and spoil the chase of the point before you : but hold them to it, or take them to be unworthy to be disputed with, and let them go (except it be where the weakness of the auditors requireth you to follow them in their wild-goose chase). You do but lose time in such rambling studies and disputes.

Direct. xii. ' Be cautelous of admitting false suppositions : or at least of admitting any inference that dependeth

^s Non ex verbis res, sed ex rebus verba esse inquirenda. Myson, in Laert. p. 70. Basil. Edit. (Amstel. lib. i. sect. 108. p. 69. T. C.)

^t It is a noble work that Mr. Leblanck of Sedan is about to this purpose, stating more exactly than hath yet been done all the controversies between us and the Papists : which how excellently he is like to perform I easily conjecture by the Disputes of his upon Justification, &c. which I have seen.

upon them.' In some cases a supposition of that which is false may be made, while it no way tends to infer the truth of it: but nothing must be built upon that falsehood, as intimating it to be a truth. False suppositions cunningly and secretly worked into arguments, are very ordinary instruments of deceit.

Direct. XIII. 'Plead not uncertainties against certainties:' but make certain points the measure to try the uncertain by. Reduce not things proved and sure to those that are doubtful and justly controverted: but reduce points disputable to those that are past doubt.

Direct. XIV. 'Plead not the darker texts of Scripture against those that are more plain and clear, nor a few texts against many that are as plain:' for that which is interpreted against the most plain and frequent expressions of the same Scripture is certainly misinterpreted.

Direct. XV. 'Take not obscure prophecies for precepts.' The obscurity is enough to make you cautious how you venture yourself in the practice of that which you understand not; but if there were no obscurity, yet prophecies are no warrant to you to fulfil them; no, though they be for the church's good. Predictions tell you but 'de eventu' what will come to pass, but warrant not you to bring it to pass: God's prophecies are oftentimes fulfilled by the wickedest men and the wickedest means. As by the Jews in killing Christ, and Pharaoh in refusing to let Israel go, and Jehu in punishing the house of Ahab. Yet many self-conceited persons think that they can fetch that out of the Revelations or the prophecies of Daniel, that will justify very horrid crimes, while they use wicked means to fulfil God's prophecies.

Direct. XVI. 'Be very cautious in what cases you take men's practice or example to be instead of precept, in the sacred Scriptures.' In one case a practice or example is obligatory to us as a precept; and that is, when God doth give men a commission to establish the form or orders of his church and worship, (as he did to Moses and to the apostles,) and promiseth them his Spirit to lead them into all truth, in the matters which he employeth them in; here God is engaged to keep them from miscarrying; for if they should, his work would be ill done, his church would be ill

constituted and framed, and his servants unavoidably deceived. The apostles were authorized to constitute church officers, and orders for continuance; and the Scripture which is written for a great part historically, acquaints us what they did (as well as what they said and wrote) in the building of the church, in obedience to their commission; (at least in declaring to the world what Christ had first appointed). And thus if their practice were not obligatory to us, their words also might be avoided by the same pretences. And on this ground (at least) the Lord's day is easily proved to be of Divine appointment and obligation. Only we must see that we carefully distinguish between both the words and practice of the apostles which were upon a particular and temporary occasion (and obligation) from those that were upon an universal or permanent ground.

Direct. XVII. 'Be very cautelous what conclusions you raise from any mere works of Providence.' For the bold and blind exposition of these, hath led abundance into most heinous sins: no providence is instead of a law to us: but sometimes and oftentimes Providence changeth the matter of our duty, and so occasioneth the change of our obligations: (as when the husband dieth, the wife is disobliged, &c.) But men of worldly dispositions do so over-value worldly things, that from them they venture to take the measure of God's love and hatred, and of the causes which he approveth or disapproveth in the world. And the wisdom of God doth seem on purpose, to cause such wonderful, unexpected mutations in the affairs of men, as shall shame the principles or spirits of these men, and manifest their giddiness and mutability to their confusion. One year they say, 'This is sure the cause of God, or else he would never own it as he doth:' another year they say, 'If this had been God's cause he would never have so disowned it:' just as the barbarians judged of Paul when the viper seized on his hand. And thus God is judged by them to own or disown by his prospering or afflicting, more than by his word.

Direct. XVIII. 'In controversies which much depend on the sincerity and experience of godly men, take heed that you affect not singularity, and depart not from the common sense of the godly.' For the workings of God's Spirit are

better judged of, by the ordinary tenor of them, than by some (real or supposed) case that is extraordinary.

Direct. xix. 'In controversies which most depend on the testimony of antiquity, depart not from the judgment of the ancients.' They that stood within view of the days of the apostles could better tell what they did, and what a condition they left the churches in than we can do. To appeal to the ancients in every cause, even in those where the later Christians do excel them is but to be fools in reverence of our forefathers' wisdom. But in points of history, or any thing in which they had the advantage of their posterity, their testimony is to be preferred.

Direct. xx. 'In controversies which depend on the experience of particular Christians or of the church, regard most the judgment of the most experienced, and prefer the judgment of the later ages of the church before the judgment of less experienced ages : ' (except the apostolical age that had the greater help of the Spirit). An ancient, experienced Christian or divine is more to be regarded in many points, which require experience, than many of the younger sort, that are yet more zealous and of quicker understanding and expression than the elder. So those that we call the fathers or ancients were indeed in the younger ages of the church, and we that are fallen into the later and more experienced age, have all the helps of the wisdom and experience of the ages that were before us : and therefore God will require at our hands an account of these greater talents which we have received ! As it were inexcusable now in a physician, that hath the help of such voluminous institutions, observations and experiments of former ages, to know no more than those former times that had no such helps ; so would it be as inexcusable for this present age of the church to be no wiser than those former ages. When Aquinas, Scotus, Ariminensis, and other schoolmen, delivered the doctrine of Christianity to the church in a dress so far different from Ignatius, Irenæus, Tertullian, Cyprian, or any of those former ages, they certainly thought that they had attained to a far greater excellency and accurateness in the knowledge of divinity than those their ancestors had attained : and whatever they swear in the Trent oath, of not expounding any Scripture otherwise than the fathers do, I

doubt not but Suarez, and Vasquez, and others of their modern schoolmen thought so too, and would have been loath to be accounted wise in the measure only of those ancients. The later and elder ages of the church have had abundant experience, e. g. of the tendency of ambition and papal aspirings and usurpations; of the mischiefs of composing and imposing the popish missals and numerous ceremonies, and of their implicit faith, and their concealment of the Scriptures from the vulgar, and many such points; and if we are never the wiser for all this experience, we are the more inexcusable; and may be judged as the neglecters of our greater helps.

Direct. XXI. 'In controversies which depend most upon skill in the languages, philosophy, or other parts of common learning, prefer the judgment of a few that are the most learned in those matters, before the judgment of the most ancient, or the most godly, or of the greatest numbers, even whole churches, that are unlearned.' In this case neither numbers, nor antiquity, nor godliness will serve turn: but as one clear eye will see further than ten thousand that are purblind, so one Jerome or Origen may judge better of a translation, or the grammatical sense of a text than a hundred of the other fathers could. One man that understandeth a language is fitter to judge of it, than a whole nation that understand it not. One philosopher is fitter to judge of a philosophical question, than a thousand illiterate persons. Every man is most to be regarded in the matters which he is best acquainted with.

Direct. XXII. 'In controversies of great difficulty where divines themselves are disagreed, and a clear and piercing wit is necessary, regard more the judgment of a few acute, judicious, well-studied divines that are well versed in those controversies, than of a multitude of dull and common wits that think to carry it by the reputation of their number.' It is too certainly attested by experience, that judicious men are very few, and that the multitude of the injudicious that have not wit enough to understand them, nor humility enough to confess it, and to learn of them, have yet pride and arrogance enough to contradict them, and often malice

▪ Satis triumphat veritas si apud paucos bonosque accepta: nec in dolos ejus est placere multis. Lipsius.

enough to vilify them. In such differences it is not only a sign of a wise man to be content with the approbation of a few, but also to have but few approvers; (except where the injudicious do implicitly believe those few that are judicious). Commonly a very few that are wiser than the multitude, are fain to stand by, and compassionate not only the world but the church, and see the disease, and the easy remedy, and all in vain; while they are but neglected or despised by the rest, that will not be made wiser by them.

Direct. xxiii. 'In all contentions hold close to that which all sides are agreed in:' there is so much agreed on, even between the Papists and Protestants, as would save them all, if all of them did sincerely believe, love and practise it; for they all confess that the whole canonical Scripture is true. Therefore be more studious sincerely to hold and improve those common truths which they all profess, than to oppose the particular opinions of any, further than that common truth requireth it. See that the articles of the common creed which all profess, be unfeignedly believed by you; and that the petitions in the Lord's prayer be sincerely and earnestly put up to God; and that the ten commandments be heartily and entirely obeyed; and then no error or difference will be damning to you.

Direct. xxiv. 'Take nothing as necessary to salvation in point of faith, nor as universally necessary in point of practice, which the universal church in every age since Christ did not receive.' For if any thing be necessary to salvation which the church received not in every age, then the church itself of that age could not be saved; and then the church was indeed no church; for Christ is the Saviour of his body. But certainly Christ had in every age a church of saved ones, who openly professed all that was of common necessity to salvation. An opinion may be true which accuseth the generality in the church of some error or imperfection; for it is most certain that the church on earth is composed of none (that have the use of reason) but erring and imperfect members; but no opinion can be true that condemneth all the church to hell, in any one age; for the head and husband of the church must be her judge.

Direct. xxv. 'Be not borne down by the censoriousness of any, to overrun your own understanding and the truth,

and to comply with them in their errors and extremes^x: but hold to the truth and keep your station: "let them return unto thee, but return not thou unto them^y." It is too usual for the younger and more injudicious sort of Christians to be most zealous about some little opinions, ceremonies and words, and to censure all those that differ from them, with such bitter censures, (as ungodly, false-hearted, &c.) that hereupon some of the more judicious forsake the truth and simplicity of the Gospel, to comply with these censurers merely to escape them, (or as some say, that they may keep an interest in them to do them good :) but such carnal compliances, though with the most zealous men, will bring nothing home at last but repentance and shame: truth which is the means of the good of souls, must not be betrayed as for the good of souls.

Direct. xxvi. 'Doubt not of well-proved truths, for every difficulty that appeareth against them.' There is scarce any truth in the world so plain, but in your own thoughts, or in the cavils of a wrangling wit, there may such difficulties be raised as you can hardly answer: and there is scarce any thing so evident, that some will not dispute against. You see that even the most learned Jesuits, and all the clergy of the Roman kingdom, will not stick to dispute all the world (if they could) out of the belief of all their senses, while they maintain that bread is not bread, and wine is not wine. And yet how many princes, lords and rulers follow them, and how many millions of the people; because they be not able to confute them. If they had said that a man is no man but a worm^z, they might in reason have expected as much belief.

Direct. xxvii. 'Abuse not your own knowledge by subjecting it to your carnal interest or sensuality.' He that will sin against his conscience, and will not obey the knowledge which he hath, doth deserve to be given over to blindness and deceit, and to lose even that which he hath, and to be forsaken till he believe and defend a lie: "that all they might be damned who obeyed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness^a." God will not hold him guiltless who debaseth his sacred truth so far, as to make it stoop to

^x Thus Peter and Barnabas erred, Gal. ii.

^y Jer. xv. 19.

^z Psal. xxii. 6.

^a 2 Thess. ii. 10—12.

his commodity and lust; where he is a teacher he will be a king, and sendeth his truth as the instrument of his government, and not as a slave or pander to the flesh: he that will "do God's will shall know it^b." But the carnal mind that cannot be subject to God's law, is unfit to receive it, because it is spiritually discerned^c.

CHAPTER VIII.

Directions for the Union and Communion of Saints, and the avoiding Unpeaceableness and Schism.

THE peace and concord of believers is a thing that almost all those plead for, who call themselves believers; and yet a thing that almost all men hinder and resist while they commend it^a. The discord and divisions of believers, are as commonly spoken against, and by the same men, as commonly fomented. The few that are sincere (both rulers and private men) desire concord and hate divisions in love to holiness which is promoted by it, and in love to the church, and good of souls, and the honour of religion, and the glory of God; and the few of those few that are experienced, wise, judicious persons, do choose the means that are fittest to attain these ends, and do prudently and constantly prosecute them accordingly; but these being in the world as a spoonful of fresh water cast into the sea, or a spoonful of water cast into the flames of a house on fire, no wonder if the briny sea be not sweetened by them, nor the consuming, raging fire quenched by them. The other rulers of the world and of the churches, are for concord and against division, because this tendeth to the quieting of the people under them, and the making of men submissive and obedient to their wills, and so to confirm their dignities, dominions and interests^b. And all men that are not holy, being predominantly selfish, they would all be themselves the centre of that union, and bond of that concord which they desire: and they

^b John vii. 17.

^c Rom. viii. 7. 1 Cor. ii/14.

^a Of this subject I have written already, 1. My "Universal Concord." 2. My "Catholic Unity." 3. Of the "True Catholic Church." 4. My "Christian Concord."

^b Read over Sir Francis Bacon's third Essay; and Hales of Schism.