

THE
RIGHT METHOD

FOR
A SETTLED PEACE OF CONSCIENCE

AND
SPIRITUAL COMFORT:

IN THIRTY-TWO DIRECTIONS.

"God is love."

1 JOHN IV. 16.

"Come, for all things are now ready."

LUKE XIV. 17. MATT. XXII. 4.

"Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart : and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

MATT. XI. 28.

"For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh : and these are contrary the one to the other ; so that ye cannot do the thing that ye would."

GAL. V. 17.

"Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey ; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?"

ROM. VI. 16.

"Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."

ROM. XIII. 14.

"For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live."

ROM. VIII. 13.

"While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption : for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage."

2 PET. II. 19.

"Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways ; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

EZEK. XXXIII. 10, 11.

"Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us : we pray you in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God."

2 COR. V. 20.

"Trust in the Lord, and do good, &c. Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart."

PSAL. XXXVII. 3, 4.

Sound doctrine makes a sound judgment, a sound heart, a sound conversion, and a sound conscience.

EPISTLE DEDICATORY.

To my much valued, beloved, and honoured Friends, Colonel JOHN BRIDGES, with Mrs. MARGARET BRIDGES, his wife, and Mr. THOMAS FOLEY, with Mrs. ANNE FOLEY, his wife.

THOUGH in publishing our writings, we intend them for the good of all : yet custom, not without reason, doth teach us, sometimes to direct them more especially to some. Though one only had the original interest in these papers, yet do I now direct them to you all, as not knowing how in this to separate you. You dwell together in my estimation and affection : one of you a member of the church, which I must teach, and legally the patron of its maintenance and minister : the other, a special branch of that family, which I was first indebted to in this county. You lately joined in presenting to the parliament, the petition of this county for the Gospel and a faithful ministry. When I only told you of my intention, of sending some poor scholars to the university, you freely and jointly offered your considerable annual allowance thereto, and that for the continuance of my life, or their necessities there. I will tell the world of this, whether you will or no ; not for your applause, but for their imitation ; and the shame of many of far greater estates, that will not be drawn to do the like. The season somewhat aggravates the goodness of your works. When satan hath a design to burn up those nurseries, you are watering God's plants ; when the greedy mouth of sacrilege is gaping for their maintenance, you are voluntarily adding for the supply of its defect. Who knows how many souls they may win to Christ (if God shall send them forth into his

harvest) whom you have thus assisted ? And what an addition to your comfort this may be ? When the Gospel is so undermined, and the ministry so maligned, and their maintenance so envied, you have, as the mouth of this county, appeared for them all. What God will yet do with us, we cannot tell ; but if he will continue his Gospel to us, you may have the greater comfort in it. If he will remove it, and forsake a proud, unworthy, false-hearted people, yet may you have the comfort of your sincere endeavours ; you (with the rest that sincerely furthered it) may escape the gnawings of conscience, and the public curse and reproach which the history of this age may fasten upon them, who after all their engagements in blood and covenants, would either in ignorant fury, or malicious subtlety, or base temporizing cowardice, oppugn or undermine the Gospel, or in perfidious silence look on whilst it is destroyed. But because it is not the work of a flatterer that I am doing, but of a friend, I must second these commendations with some caution and counsel, and tell yourselves of your danger and duty, as I tell others of your exemplary deeds. Truly, the sad experiences of these times, have much abased my confidence in man, and caused me to have lower thoughts of the best than sometime I have had. I confess I look on man, as such a distempered, slippery and inconstant thing, and of such a natural mutability of apprehensions and affections, that as I shall never more call any man on earth my friend, but with a supposition that he may possibly become mine enemy ; so I shall never be so confident of any man's fidelity to Christ, as not withal to suspect that he may possibly forsake him. Nor shall I boast of any man's service for the Gospel, but with a jealousy that he may be drawn to do as much against it (though God, who knows the heart, and knows his own decrees, may know his sincerity, and foreknow his perseverance). Let me therefore remember you, that had you expended your whole estates, and the blood of your hearts for Christ and his Gospel, he will not take himself beholden to you. He oweth you no thanks for your deepest engagements, highest adventures, greatest cost, or utmost endeavours. You are sure beforehand that you shall be no losers by him : your seeming hazards increase your security : your losses are your gain : your giving is your receiving : your expenses are your revenues : Christ returns

the largest usury. The more you do and suffer for him, the more you are beholden to him. I must also remember you, that you may possibly live to see the day, when it will cost you dearer to shew yourselves faithful to the Gospel, ordinances and ministers of Christ, than now it doth; and that many have shrunk in greater trials, that past through lesser with resolution and honour. Your defection at the last, would be the loss of all your works and hopes. "If any man draw back (Christ saith) his soul shall have no pleasure in him." Even those that have endured the great fight of affliction, being reproached and made a gazing stock, and that having taken joyfully the spoiling of their goods, in assurance of a better and enduring substance, have yet need to be warned that they cast not away their confidence, and draw not back to perdition, and lose not the reward for want of patience and perseverance; Heb. x. 22. to the end. That you may escape this danger and be happy for ever, take this advice. 1. Look carefully to the sincerity of your hearts, in the covenant-closure with Christ. See that you take him with the happiness he hath promised for your all. Take heed of looking after another felicity; or cherishing other hopes; or esteeming too highly any thing below. Be jealous, and very jealous, lest your hearts should close deceitfully with Christ, maintaining any secret reserve for your bodily safety; either resolving not to follow him, or not resolving to follow him through the most desolate distressed condition that he shall lead you in. Count what it may cost you to get the crown; study well his precepts of mortification and self-denial. There is no true hopes of the glory to come, if you cannot cast over-board all worldly hopes, when the storm is such that you must hazard the one. O how many have thought that Christ was most dear to them, and that the hopes of heaven were their chiefest hopes, who have left Christ, though with sorrow, when he bid them let go all? 2. Every day renew your apprehensions of the truth and worth of the promised felicity, and of the delusory vanity of all things here below: let not heaven lose with you its attractive force, through your forgetfulness or unbelief. He is the best Christian that knows best why he is a Christian, and he will most faithfully seek and suffer, that best knows for what he doth it. Value not wealth and honour above that rate, which the wisest and best experienced have put

upon them, and allow them no more of your affections than they deserve. A mean wit may easily discover their emptiness. Look on all present actions and conditions with a remembrance of their end. Desire not a share in their prosperity, who must pay as dear for it as the loss of their souls. Be not ambitious of that honour which must end in confusion nor of the favour of those that God will call enemies. How speedily will they come down, and be levelled with the dust, and be laid in the chains of darkness, that now seem so happy to the purblind world, that cannot see the things to come? Fear not that man must shortly tremble before that God whom all must fear. 3. Be more solicitous for the securing of your consciences and salvation, than of your honours or estates: in every thing that you are put upon, consult first with God and conscience, and not with flesh and blood. It is your daily and most serious care and watchfulness that is requisite to maintain your integrity, and not a few careless thoughts or purposes, conjunct with a minding of earthly things. 4. Deal faithfully with every truth which you receive. Take heed of subjecting it to carnal interests: if once you have affections that can master your understandings, you are lost, and know it not. For when you have a resolution to cast off any duty, you will first believe it is no duty: and when you must change your judgment for carnal advantages, you will make the change seem reasonable and right: and evil shall be proved good when you have a mind to follow it. 5. Make Gospel-truths your own, by daily humble studies, arising to such a soundness of judgment, that you may not need to take too much upon trust, lest if your guides should miscarry, you miscarry with them. Deliver not up your understanding in captivity to any. 6. Yet do not over-value your own understandings. This pride hath done that in church and state, which all discerning men are lamenting. They that know but little, see not what they want, as well as what they have; nor that imperfection in their knowledge, which should humble them, nor that difficulty in things which should make them diligent and modest. 7. Apprehend the necessity and usefulness of Christ's officers, order, and ordinances, for the prosperity of his church: pastors must guide you, though not seduce you, or lead you blindfold. But choose (if you may) such as are judicious and not ignorant, not rash but sober, not

formal, but serious and spiritual ; not of carnal, but heavenly conversations : especially avoid them that divide and follow parties, and seek to draw disciples to themselves, and can sacrifice the church's unity and peace to their proud humours or carnal interests. Watch carefully that no weaknesses of the minister, do draw you to a disesteem of the ordinances of God ; nor any of the sad miscarriages of professors, should cause you to set less by truth or godliness. Wrong not Christ more, because other men have so wronged him. Quarrel more with your own unfitness and unworthiness in ordinances, than with other men's. It is the frame of your own heart that doth more to help or hinder your comforts, than the quality of those you join with. To these few directions, added to the rest in this book, I shall subjoin my hearty prayers, that you may receive from that Gospel, and ministry which you have owned, such stability in the faith, such victory over the flesh and the world, such apprehensions of the love of God in Christ, such direction in every strait and duty, that you may live uprightly, and die peaceably, and reign gloriously. Amen.

Your servant in the faith

and Gospel of Christ,

RICHARD BAXTER.

May 9, 1653.

TO THE

POOR IN SPIRIT.

MY dearly beloved fellow Christians, whose souls are taken up with the careful thoughts of attaining and maintaining peace with God, who are vile in your own eyes, and value the blood and Spirit, and word of your Redeemer, and the hope of the saints in their approaching blessedness, before all the pomp and vanities of this world, and resolve to give up yourselves to his conduct, who is become "the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him:" for you do I publish the following directions, and to you it is that I direct this preface. The only glorious and infinite God, who made the worlds, and upholdeth them by his word, who is attended with millions of his glorious angels, and praised continually by his heavenly hosts; who pulleth down the mighty from their seats, and scattereth the proud in the imaginations of their hearts, and maketh his enemies lick the dust; to whom the kings and conquerors of the earth are as the most silly worms, and the whole world is nothing, and lighter than vanity, which he will shortly turn into flames before your eyes. This God hath sent me to you, with that joyful message, which needs no more but your believing entertainment, to make it sufficient to raise you from the dust, and banish those terrors and troubles from your hearts, and help you to live like the sons of God. He commandeth me to tell you, that he takes notice of your sorrows. He stands by when you see him not, and say, he hath forsaken you. He minds you with greatest tender-

ness, when you say, he hath forgotten you. He numbereth your sighs. He bottles up your tears. The groans of your heart do reach his own. He takes it unkindly, that you are so suspicious of him, and that all that he hath done for you in the work of redemption, and all the gracious workings of his Spirit on your souls, and all your own peculiar experiences of his goodness, can raise you to no higher apprehensions of his love! Shall not love be acknowledged to be love, when it is grown to a miracle? When it surpasseth comprehension! Must the Lord set up love and mercy in the work of redemption, to be equally admired with his omnipotency manifested in the creation? And call forth the world to this sweet employment, that in secret and in public it might be the business of our lives? And yet shall it be so overlooked or questioned, as if you lived without love and mercy in the world? Providence doth its part, by heaping up mountains of daily mercies, and these it sets before your eyes. The Gospel hath eminently done its part by clear describing them, and fully assuring them, and this is proclaimed frequently in your ears. And yet is there so little in your hearts and mouths? Do you see, and hear, and feel, and taste mercy and love? Do you live wholly on it? And yet do you still doubt of it? and think so meanly of it, and so hardly acknowledge it? God takes not this well; but yet he considereth your frailty, and takes you not at the worst. He knows that flesh will play its part, and the remnants of corruption will not be idle. And the serpent will be suggesting false thoughts of God, and will be still striving most to obscure that part of his glory which is dearest to him, and especially which is most conjoined with the happiness of man. He knows also, that sin will breed sorrows and fears; and that man's understanding is shallow, and all his conceivings of God are exceeding low. And that we are so far from God as creatures, and so much further as sinners, and especially as conscious of the abuse of his grace, that there must needs follow such a strangeness as will damp and dull our apprehensions of his love. And such an abatement of our confidence, as will make us draw back, and look at God afar off. Seeing therefore that at this distance no full apprehensions of love can be expected, it is the pleasure of our Redeemer shortly to return,

with ten thousands of his saints, with the noble army of his martyrs, and the attendance of his angels, and to give you such a convincing demonstration of his love, as shall leave no room for one more doubt. Your comforts are now but a taste, they shall be then a feast. They are now but intermittent, they shall be then continual. How soon now do your conquered fears return; and what an inconstancy and unevenness is there in our peace. But then our peace must needs be perfect and permanent, when we shall please God, and enjoy him in perfection to perpetuity. Certainly, Christians, your comforts should be now more abundant, but that they are not ripe. It is that, and not this, that is your harvest. I have told you in another book, the mistake and danger of expecting too much here, and the necessity of looking and longing for that rest, if we will have peace indeed! But, alas, how hard is this lesson learned! Unbelievers would have happiness, but how fain would they have it in the creature rather than in God! Believers would rather have their happiness in God than in the creature, but how fain would they have it without dying! And no wonder, for when sin brought in death, even grace itself cannot love it, though it may submit to it. But though churlish death do stand in our way, why look we not at the soul's admittance into rest, and the body's resurrection that must shortly follow? Doubtless that faith by which we are justified and saved, as it sits down on the word of truth as the present ground of its confident repose, so doth it thence look with one eye backward on the cross, and with the other forward on the crown. And if we well observe the Scripture descriptions of that faith, we shall find them as frequently magnifying it, and describing it from the latter, as from the former. As it is the duty and glory of faith to look back with thankful acknowledgment to a crucified Christ, and his payment of our ransom, so is it the duty and glory of that same justifying faith to look forward with desire and hope to the return of king Jesus, and the glorious celebration of the marriage of the Lamb, and the sentential justification, and the glorification of his saints. To believe these things unfeignedly which we never saw, nor ever spoke with man that did see, and to hope for them so really as to let go all present forbidden pleasures, and all worldly hopes

and seeming happiness, rather than to hazard the loss of them. This is an eminent part of that faith by which the just do live, and which the Scripture doth own as justifying and saving. For it never distinguishes between justifying faith, as to their nature. It is therefore a great mistake of some to look only at that one eye of justifying faith which looks back upon the cross, and a great mistake of them on the other hand that look only at that eye of it which beholds the crown. Both Christ crucified, and Christ interceding, and Christ returning to justify and glorify, are the objects even of justifying, saving faith, most strictly so called. The Scripture oft expresseth the one only, but then it still implieth the other. The Socinians erroneously therefore from Heb. xi. where the examples and eulogies of faith are set forth, do exclude Christ crucified, or the respect to his satisfaction, from justifying faith, and place it in a mere expectation of glory. And others do as ungroundedly affirm, that is not the justifying act of faith which Heb xi. describeth, because they find not the cross of Christ there mentioned. For as believing in Christ's blood comprehendeth the end, even the expectation of remission and glory merited by that blood, so the believing of that glory doth always imply that we believe and expect it as the fruit of Christ's ransom. It is for health and life that we accept and trust upon our physician. And it is for justification and salvation that we accept and trust on Christ. The salvation of our souls is the end of our faith. They that question whether we may believe and obey for our own salvation, do question whether we may go to the physician and follow his advice for health and life. Why then do you that are believers so much forget the end of your faith? And that for which it is that you believe? Believing in Christ for present mercies only, be they temporal or spiritual, is not the true believing. They are dangerously mistaken that think the thoughts of heaven to be so accidental to the nature and work of faith, is that they tend only to our comfort, and are not necessary to salvation itself. It is upon your apprehensions and expectations of that unseen felicity that both your peace and safety do depend. How contrary therefore is it to the nature of a believer, to forget the place of his rest and consolation! And to look for so much of these from the creatures, in this our present pilgrimage and prison, as, alas, too

commonly we do! Thus do we kill our comforts, and then complain for want of them. How should you have any life or constancy of consolations, that are so seldom, so slight, so unbelieving, and so heartless in your thoughts of heaven! You know what a folly it is to expect any peace, which shall not come from Christ as the fountain. And you must learn as well to understand what a folly it is to expect any solid joys, or stable peace, which is not fetched from heaven, as from the end. O that Christians were careful to live with one eye still on Christ crucified, and with the other on Christ coming in glory! If the everlasting joys were more in your believing thoughts, spiritual joys would more abound at present in your hearts. It is no more wonder that you are comfortless when heaven is forgotten, or doubtingly remembered, than that you are faint when you eat not, or cold when you stir not, or when you have not fire or clothes.

But when Christians do not only let fall their expectations of the things unseen, but also heighten their expectations from the creature, then do they most infallibly prepare for their fears and troubles, and estrangedness from God, and with both hands draw calamities on their souls. Whoever meets with a distressed, complaining soul, where one or both of these is not apparent? Their low expectations from God hereafter, or their high expectations from the creature now? What doth keep us under such trouble and disquietness, but that we will not expect what God hath promised, or we will needs expect what he promised not? And then we complain when we miss of those expectations which we foolishly and ungroundedly raised to ourselves. We are grieved for crosses, for losses, for wrongs from our enemies, for unkind or unfaithful dealings of our friends, for sickness, for contempt and disesteem in the world! But who bid you look for any better? Was it prosperity and riches, and credit, and friends, that God called you to believe for? or that you became Christians for? or that you had an absolute promise of in the word? If you will make promises to yourself, and then your own promises deceive you, whom should you blame for that? Nay, do we not, as it were necessitate God hereby to embitter all our comforts below, and to make every creature as a scorpion to us, because we will needs make them our petty deities? We have less comfort

in them than else we might have, because we must needs have more than we should have. You might have more faithfulness from your friends, more reputation in the world, more sweetness in all your present enjoyments, if you looked for less. Why is it that you can scarce name a creature near you, that is not a scourge to you, but because you can scarce name one that is not your idol, or at least which you do not expect more from than you ought? Nay, (which is one of the saddest considerations of this kind that can be imagined) God is fain to scourge us most even by the highest professors of religion, because we have most idolized them, and had such excessive expectations from them. One would have thought it next to an impossibility, that such men, and so many of them, could ever have been drawn to do that against the church, against that Gospel-ministry and ordinances of God (which once seemed dearer to them than their lives) which hath since been done, and which yet we fear! But a believing eye can discern the reason of this sad providence in part. Never men were more idolized, and therefore no wonder if were never so afflicted by any. Alas, when will we learn by Scripture and providence so to know God and the creature, as to look for far more from him, and less from them! We have looked for wonders from Scotland, and what is come of it? We looked that war should have even satisfied our desires, and when it had removed all visible impediments, we thought we should have had such a glorious reformation as the world never knew! And now behold a babel, and a mangled deformation! What high expectations had we from an assembly! What expectations from a parliament, and where are they now! O hear the word of the Lord, ye low-spirited people! "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of;" Isa. ii. 22. "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord: for he shall be like the hearth in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters," &c.; Jer. xvii. 5—8. "Surely men of low degree are vanity; and men of high degree are a lie. To be laid in the balance they are altogether lighter than vanity;" Psal. lxxii. 9. Let me

warn you all, Christians, for the time to come, take the creature as a creature; remember its frailty; look for no more from it than its part. If you have the nearest, dearest, godly friends, expect to feel the sting of their corruptions, as well as to taste the sweetness of their grace. And they must expect the like from you.

If you ask me why I speak so much of these things here? It is, 1. Because I find that much of the trouble of ordinary Christians comes from their crosses in the creature, and the frustration of these their sinful expectations. 2. And because I have said so little of it in the following directions, they being intended for the cure of another kind of trouble, therefore I have said thus much here of this.

Having premised this advice, I take myself bound to add one thing more; that is, an apology for the publication of this imperfect piece, whether just or insufficient other men must judge. I confess I am so apprehensive of the luxuriant fertility, or licentiousness of the press of late, as being a design of the enemy to bury and overwhelm in a crowd those judicious, pious, excellent writings, that before were so commonly read by the people, that I think few men should now print without an apology, much less such as I. Who hath more lamented this inundation of impertinencies? or more accused the ignorance and pride of others, that must needs disgorge themselves of all their crudities, as if they were such precious conceptions proceeding from the Holy Ghost, that the world might not, without very great injury, be deprived of; and it were pity that all men should not be made partakers of them? And how come I to go on in the same fault myself? Truly I have no excuse or argument, but those of the times, necessity, and providence; which how far they may justify me, I must leave to the judge. Being in company with a troubled, complaining friend, I perceived that it must be some standing counsel which might be frequently perused, that must satisfactorily answer the complaints that I heard, and not a transient speech, which would quickly slip away. Being therefore obliged as a pastor, and as a friend, and as a Christian, to tender my best assistance for relief, I was suddenly, in the moment of speaking, moved to promise one sheet of paper, which might be useful to that end. Which promise, when I attempted

to perform, the one sheet lengthened to thirty, and my one day's (intended) work was drawn out to a just month. I went on far before I had the least thought to let any eye behold it, except the party for whom I wrote it. But at last I perceived an impossibility of contracting, and I was presently possessed with confident apprehensions, that a copy of those directions might be useful to many other of my poor neighbours and friends that needed them as much. Upon which apprehension I permitted my pen to run more at large, and to deviate from the case of the party that I wrote for, and to take in the common case of most troubled, doubting souls. By that time that I had finished it, I received letters from several parts, from learned and judicious divines, importuning me to print more, having understood my intentions to desist, as having done too much already, even at first. I confess I was not much moved by their importunity, till they seconded it with their arguments; whereof one was, the experience of the success of former writings, which might assure me it was not displeasing to God. I had many that urged me, I had no one but myself to draw me back. I apprehended that a writing of this nature might be useful to the many weak, perplexed Christians through the land. Two reasons did at first come in against it. The first was, that if there were no more written on this subject than Dr. Sibbs' "Bruised Reed, and Soul's Conflict," and Mr. Jos. Symonds' "Deserted Soul's Case and Cure," there need no more. Especially there being also Dr. Preston's Works, and many of Perkins', to this use; and Mr. Ball, and Mr. Culverwell of Faith, and divers the like. To this my own judgment answered, that yet these brief directions might add somewhat that might be useful to the weak, as to the method of their proceedings; if not to the matter. And my brethren stopped my mouth by telling me, that others had written before me of heaven and baptism, and yet my labours were not lost. Next this, I thought the crudity and weakness of the writing was such, as should prohibit the publication, it being unfit to thrust upon the world the hasty, undigested lines; that were written for the use of one person. To this my thoughts replied, that, 1. For all that it might be useful to poor women, and country people, who most commonly prove the troubled spirits, for whose sakes I wrote it. Had

I writ for the use of learned men, I would have tried to make it fitter for their use ; and if I could not, I would have suppressed it. 2. It was my pride that nourished this scruple, which moved me not to appear so homely to the world, and therefore I cast it by. One thing more I confess did much prevail with me to make these papers public, and that is, the Antinomians common confident obtrusion of their anti-evangelical doctrines and methods for comforting troubled souls. They are the most notorious mountebanks in this art, the highest pretenders, and most unhappy performers, that most of the reformed churches ever knew. And none usually are more ready to receive their doctrines, than such weak women, or unskilful people, that being in trouble, are like a sick man in great pain, who is glad to hear what all can say, and to make trial of every thing by which he hath any hope of ease. And then there is so much opium in these mountebanks *Nepenthes*, or *Antidote* of rest : so many principles of carnal security and presumption, which tend to the present ease of the patient, whatever follow, that it is no wonder if some well-meaning Christians do quickly swallow the bait, and proclaim the rare effects of this medicament, and the admirable skill of this unskilful sect, to the ensnaring of others, especially that are in the like distress. Especially when they meet with some divines of our own, who do deliver to them some master-points of this system of mistakes, which are so necessarily concatenated to the rest, that they may easily see, if they have one, they must have all, unless they will hold contradictions. As to instance in the doctrine of justification before faith, or the dissolving the obligation to punishment, which is nothing but the remission of sin before faith. So that nothing remains since Christ's death (as some) or since God's decree (as others) but only to have your pardon manifested, or to be justified in conscience, or (as some phrase it) to have that justification which is terminated in conscience. There is a very judicious man, Mr. Benjamin Woodbridge, of Newbury, hath written so excellent well against this error, and in so small room, being but one sermon, that I would advise all private Christians to get one of them, and peruse it, as one of the best, easiest, cheapest preservatives against the contagion of this part of Antinomianism.

I had not troubled the reader with this apology, had I thought so well of this writing, as to be a sufficient apology for itself; or had I not taken it for a heinous crime to speak idly in print.

For the doctrine here contained, it is of a middle strain, between (I think) the extremes of some others. I have laboured so to build up peace, as not thereby to fortify presumption. And perhaps in some points you may see my meaning more plainly, which through the obscurity of former writings, I was misunderstood in. As for the manner of this writing, I must desire them that expect learning or exactness, to turn away their eyes, and know, that I wrote it not for such as they. I use not to speak any thing but plain English to that sex, or to that use and end for which I wrote these lines. I wrote to the utmost verge of my paper, before I thought to make it public, and so had no room for marginal quotations, (nor time to transcribe that copy, that I might have room,) nor indeed much mind of them, if I had both room and time.

As in all the removes of my life I have been still led to that place or state which was farthest from my own thoughts, and never designed or contrived by myself; so all the writings that yet I have published, are such as have been by some sudden, unexpected occasion extorted from me, while those that I most affected have been stifled in the conception; and those I have most laboured in, must lie buried in the dust, that I may know it is God that is the disposer of all. Experience persuadeth me to think, that God, who hath compelled me hitherto, intendeth to make this hasty writing a means for the calming of some troubled souls; which if he do, I have my end. If I can do nothing to the church's public peace, either through my own unskilfulness and unworthiness, or through the prevalency of the malady; yet will it be my comfort, to further the peace of the poorest Christian. (Though to the former also I shall contribute my best endeavours, and am with this sending to the press some few sheets to that end, with our "Worcestershire Agreement.") The full accomplishment of both; the subduing of the prince of darkness, confusion, and contention; the destroying of that pride, self-esteem, self-seeking, and carnal-mindedness, which remaining even in the best,

are the disturbers of all peace; the fuller discovery of the sinfulness of unpeaceable principles, dispositions, and practices; the nearer closure of all true believers, and the hastening of the church's everlasting peace;—these are his daily prayers, who is

A zealous desirer of the peace of the
church, and of every faithful soul,

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THE
RIGHT METHOD

FOR
A SETTLED PEACE OF CONSCIENCE

AND
SPIRITUAL COMFORT.

IT must be understood, that the case here to be resolved is not, How an unhumbed, profane sinner, that never was convinced of sin and misery, should be brought to a settled peace of conscience. Their carnal peace must first be broken, and they must be so far humbled, as to find the want and worth of mercy, that Christ and his consolations may not seem contemptible in their eyes. It is none of my business now, to give any advice for the furthering of this conviction or humiliation. But the case in hand is, 'How a sinner may attain to a settled peace of conscience, and some competent measure of the joy of the Holy Ghost, who hath been convinced of sin and misery, and long made a profession of holiness, but liveth in continual doubtings of their sincerity, and fears of God's wrath, because of an exceeding deadness of spirit, and a want of that love to God, and delight in him, and sweetness in duty, and witness of the Spirit, and communion with God, and the other like evidences which are found in the saints.' How far the party is right or wrong in the discovery of these wants, I now meddle not. Whether they judge rightly or wrongly, the Directions may be useful to them. And though I purposely meddle not with the unhumbed, that feel not the want of Christ and

mercy, yet most that falls may be useful to all that profess the Christian faith. For I shall study so to avoid the extremes in my doctrinal directions, as may conduce to your escaping the desperate extremes of ungrounded comforts, and causeless terrors in your own spirit.

Of my directions, the first shall be only general, and the rest more particular. And in all of them I must entreat you, 1. To observe the order and method, as well as the matter ; and that you would practise them in the same order as I place them. 2. And to remember that it is not only comfortable words, but it is direction for your own practice, which here I prescribe you ; and therefore that it is not the bare reading of them that will cure you ; but if you mean to have the benefit of them, you must bestow more time in practising them, than I have done in penning them ; yea, you must make it the work of your life. And let not that startle you, or seem tedious to you, for it will be no more grievous a work to a well-tempered soul, than eating or drinking, or sleep, or recreation is to an healthful body ; and than it is to an honest woman to love and delight in her husband and her children, which is no grievous task.

Direction I. ‘ Get as clear a discovery as you can of the true cause of your doubts and troubles ; for if you should mistake in the cause, it would much frustrate the most excellent means for the cure.’

The very same doubts and complaints, may come from several causes in several persons, and therefore admit not of the same way of cure. Sometimes the cause begins in the body ; and thence proceedeth to the mind ; sometimes it begins in the mind, and thence distempereth the body. Sometimes in the mind, it is most, or first from worldly crosses ; and thence proceedeth to spiritual things. And of spiritual matters, sometimes it begins upon scruples or differences in religion, or points of doctrine ; sometimes and most commonly, from the sense of our own infirmities ; sometimes it is only from ordinary infirmities ; sometimes from some extraordinary decays of inward grace ; sometime from the neglect of some weighty duty ; and sometimes from the deep wounds of some heinous, secret, or scandalous sin ; and sometimes it is merely from the fresh discovery of that which before we never did discern ; and sometimes from the violent assault of extraordinary temptations. Which of

these is your own case, you must be careful to find out, and to apply the means for cure accordingly. Even of true Christians, the same means will not fit all. The difference of natures, as well as of actual cases, must be considered. One hath need of that tender handling, which would undo another; and he again hath need of that rousing which another cannot bear. And therefore understand, that when I have given you all the directions that I can, I must, in the end hereof, advise you to take the counsel of a skilful minister, in applying and making use of them: for it is in this, as in the case of physic, when we have written the best books of receipts, or for methodical cures; yet we must advise people to take heed how they use them, without the advice of a learned and faithful physician; for medicines must not be only fitted to diseases, but to bodies: that medicine will kill one man, which will cure another of the same distemper; such difference there may be in their age, strength, complexion, and other things. So is it much in our present case. And therefore as when all the physic books in the world are written, and all receipts known, yet will there be still a necessity of physicians: so when all discoveries and directions are made in divinity, there will still be a necessity of a constant standing ministry. And as ignorant women and empirics do kill oftentimes more than they cure, though they have the best receipts, for want of judgment and experience to use them aright; so do ignorant teachers and guides by men's souls, though they can say the same words as a judicious pastor, and repeat the same texts of Scripture. Not that I mean, that such can do no good: yes, much no doubt, if they will humbly, compassionately, and faithfully improve their talents within the verge of their own calling; which if they go beyond, ordinarily a remarkable judgment followeth their best labours; both to the churches, and particular souls that make use of them. And therefore because (if my conjectural prognostics fail not, as I daily pray they may) we are like to be more tried and plagued in this way, than ever were any of our forefathers, since Adam's days, till now: and seeing this is the hour of our temptation, wherein God is purposely separating the chaff, and discovering to the world the dangers of injudicious, misguided zeal; I shall therefore both first and last advise you, as ever you would have a settled

peace of conscience, keep out of the hand of vagrant and seducing mountebanks, under what names, or titles, or pretences soever they may assault you. Especially suspect all that bestow as much pains to win you to their party, as to win you to Christ.

Direct. II. ‘Make as full a discovery as you can, how much of the trouble of your mind doth arise from your melancholy and bodily distempers, and how much from discontenting afflictions in your worldly estate, or friends, or name, and according to your discovery make use of the remedy.’

I put these two causes of trouble here together in the beginning, because I will presently dismiss them; and apply the rest of these directions only to those troubles that are raised from sins and wants in grace.

1. For melancholy, I have by long experience found it to have so great and common a hand in the fears and troubles of mind, that I meet not with one of many, that live in great troubles and fears for any long time together; but melancholy is the main seat of them; though they feel nothing in their body, but all in their mind. I would have such persons make use of some able godly physician, and he will help them to discern how much of their trouble comes from melancholy. Where this is the cause, usually the party is fearful of almost every thing; a word, or a sudden thought will disquiet them. Sometimes they are sad, and scarce know why: all comforts are of no continuance with them; but as soon as you have done comforting them, and they be never so well satisfied, yet the trouble returns in a few days or hours, as soon as the dark and troubled spirits return to their former force: they are still addicted to musing and solitariness, and thoughts will run in their minds, that they cannot lay them by: if it go any thing far, they are almost always assaulted with temptations to blasphemy, to doubt whether there be a God, or a Christ, or the Scriptures be true; or whether there be a heaven or a hell; and oft tempted to speak some blasphemous words against God; and this with such importunity, that they can hardly forbear; and oftentimes they are tempted to make away themselves. When it goes so far, they are next the loss of the use of reason, if it be not prevented.

Now to those that find that melancholy is the cause of

their troubles, I would give this advice. 1. Expect not that rational, spiritual remedies, should suffice for this cure : for you may as well expect that a good sermon, or comfortable words, should cure the falling sickness, or palsy, or a broken head, as to be a sufficient cure to your melancholy fears ; for this is as real a bodily disease as the other ; only because it works on the spirits and fantasy, on which words of advice do also work, therefore such words, and Scripture and reason, may somewhat resist it, and may palliate or allay some of the effects at the present ; but as soon as time hath worn off the force and effects of these reasons, the distemper presently returns.

For the humour hath the advantage ; 1. Of continual presence. 2. Of a more necessary, natural, and sensible way of working. As if a man be in an easy lethargy, you may awake him so long as you are calling on him aloud ; but as soon as you cease, he is asleep again. Such is the case of the melancholy in their sorrows ; for it is as natural for melancholy to cause fears and disquietness of mind, as for phlegm in a lethargy to cause sleep.

Do not therefore lay the blame on your books, friends, counsels, instructions (no nor all on your soul) if these troubles be not cured by words : but labour to discern truly how much of your trouble comes this way, and then fix in your mind in all your inquiries, reading, and hearing, that it is the other part of your trouble which is truly rational, and not this part of it which is from melancholy, that these means were ordained to remove (though God may also bless them extraordinarily to do both). Only constant importunate prayer is a fit and special means for the curing of all.

2. When you have truly found out how much of your disquietness proceeds from melancholy, acquit your soul from that part of it ; still remember in all your self-examinations, self-judgings, and reflections on your heart, that it is not directly to be charged with those sorrows that come from your spleen ; save only remotely, as all other diseases are the fruits of sin ; as a lethargic dulness is the deserved fruit of sin ; but he that should charge it immediately on his soul, should wrong himself, and he that would attempt the cure, must do it on the body.

3. If you would have these fears and troubles removed, apply yourself to the proper cure of melancholy. 1. Avoid

all passion of sorrow, fear, and anger, as much as you can ; and all occasions, and discontents and grief. 2. Avoid much solitariness, and be most commonly in some cheerful company. Not that I would have you do as the foolish sinners of the world do, to drink away melancholy, and keep company with sensual, vain, and unprofitable persons, that will draw you deeper into sin, and so make your wound greater instead of healing it, and multiply your troubles when you are forced to look back on your sinful loss of time. But keep company with the more cheerful sort of the godly. There is no mirth like the mirth of believers, which faith doth fetch from the blood of Christ, and from the promises of the word, and from experiences of mercy, and from the serious fore-apprehensions of our everlasting blessedness. converse with men of strongest faith, that have this heavenly mirth, and can speak experimentally of the joy of the Holy Ghost ; and these will be a great help to the reviving of your spirit, and changing your melancholy habit, so far as without a physician it may be expected. Yet sometimes it may not be amiss to confer with some that are in your own case, that you may see that your condition is not singular. For melancholy people, in such distresses, are ready to think, that never any was in the case as they are in ; or at least, never any that were truly godly. When you hear people of the most upright lives, and that truly fear God, to have the same complaints as you have yourself, it may give you some hopes that it is not so bad as you before did imagine. However be sure that you avoid solitariness as much as you well can. 3. Also take heed of too deep, fixed, musing thoughts ; studying and serious meditating be not duties for the deeply melancholy (as I shall shew more in the following directions) ; you must let those alone till you are better able to perform them, lest by attempting those duties which you cannot perform, you shall utterly disable yourself from all : therefore I would advise you, by all means, to shake and rouse yourself out of such musings, and suddenly to turn your thoughts away to something else. 4. To this end, be sure that you avoid idleness and want of employment ; which as it is a life not pleasing to God, so is it the opportunity for melancholy thoughts to be working, and the chiefest season for satan to tempt you. Never let the devil find you unemployed, but see that you

go cheerfully about the works of your calling, and follow it with diligence; and that time which you redeem for spiritual exercises, let it be most spent in thanksgiving, and praises, and heavenly conference.

These things may do much for prevention, and abating your disease, if it be not gone too far; but if it be, you were best have recourse to the physician, and expect God's blessing in the use of means; and you will find, when your body is once cured, the disquietness of your mind will vanish of itself.

2. The second part of this direction, was, that you take notice how much of your disquietness may proceed from outward crosses; for it is ordinary for these to lie at the root, and bring the heart into a disquiet and discontent, and then trouble for sin doth follow after. Alas, how oft have I seen that verified of the apostle; 2 Cor. vii. 10. "The sorrow of the world worketh death." How many, even godly people have I known, that through crosses in children, or friends, or losses in their estates, or wrongs from men, or perplexities, that through some unadvisedness they were cast into, or the like, have fallen into mortal diseases, or into such a fixed melancholy, that some of them have gone besides themselves; and others have lived in fears and doubting ever after, by the removal of the disquietness to their consciences? How sad a thing is it, that we should thus add to our own afflictions? And the heavier we judge the burden, the more we lay on! As if God had not done enough, or would not sufficiently afflict us. We may more comfortably bear that which God layeth on us, than that which we immediately lay upon ourselves! Crosses are not great or small, according to the bulk of the matter, but according chiefly to the mind of the sufferer. Or else, how could holy men "rejoice in tribulation, and be exceeding glad that they are accounted worthy to suffer for Christ?" Reproaches, wrongs, losses, are all without you; unless you open them the door wilfully yourself, they cannot come into the heart. God hath not put the joy or grief, of your heart in any other man's power, but in your own. It is you therefore that do yourselves the greatest mischief. God afflicts your body, or men wrong you in your state or name (a small hurt if it go no further) and therefore you will afflict your soul! But a sadder thing yet is it to consider of, that men fearing God

should so highly value the things of the world. They who in their covenants with Christ, are engaged to renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil : they that have taken God in Christ for their portion, for their all ; and have resigned themselves and all that they have to Christ's dispose ! Whose very business in this world, and their Christian life, consisteth so much in resisting the devil, mortifying the flesh, and overcoming the world ; and it is God's business in his inward works of grace, and his outward teachings, and sharp afflictions, and examples of others, to convince them of the vanity and vexation of the world, and thoroughly to wean them from it ; and yet that it should be so high in their estimation, and sit so close to their hearts, that they cannot bear the loss of it without such discontent, disquiet, and distraction of mind ; yea, though when all is gone, they have their God left them, they have their Christ still, whom they took for their treasure ; they have opportunities for their souls, they have the sure promise of glory, yea, and a promise, that " all things shall work together for their good ;" yea, and for that one thing that is taken from them, they have yet an hundred outward mercies remaining, that yet even believers should have so much unbelief ! and have their faith to seek, when they should use it, and live by it ! And that God should seem so small in their eye, as not to satisfy or quiet them, unless they have the world with him ; and that the world should still seem so amiable, when God hath done so much to bring it into contempt ! Truly this (and more) shews that the work of mortification is very imperfect in professors, and that we bend not the force of our daily strivings and endeavours that way. If Christians did bestow but as much time and pains in mortifying the flesh, and getting down the interest of it in the soul, that Christ's interest may be advanced, as they do about controversies, external duties, formalities, tasks of devotion, and self-tormenting fears, O what excellent Christians should we then be ! And how happily would most of our disquiet be removed ! Alas, if we are so unfit to part with one outward comfort now, upon the disposal of our Father's providence, how should we forsake all for Christ ? O what shall we do at death, when all must be parted with ! As ever therefore you would live in true Christian peace, set more by Christ, and less by the world, and all things in it ; and hold all that

you possess so loosely, that it may not be grievous to you when you must leave them.

So much for the troubles that arise from your body and outward state. All the rest shall be directed for the curing of those troubles that arise immediately from more spiritual causes.

Direct. III. ‘ Be sure that you first lay sound apprehensions of God’s nature in your understanding, and lay them deeply.’

This is the first article of your creed, and the first part of “ life eternal, to know God !” His substance is quite past human understanding ; therefore never make any attempt to reach the knowledge of it, or to have any positive conceivings of it, for they will be all but idols, or false conceptions ; but his attributes are manifested to our understandings. Well, consider, that even under the terrible law, when God proclaims to Moses his own name, and therein his nature, *Exod.* xxxiv. 6, 7. the first and greatest part is, “ The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. And he hath sworn, “ That he hath no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he return and live.” Think not therefore of God’s mercifulness, with diminishing, extenuating thoughts, nor limit it by the bounds of our frail understandings ; For the heavens are not so far above the earth, as his thoughts and ways are above ours. Still remember that you must have no low thoughts of God’s goodness, but apprehend it as bearing proportion with his power. As it is blasphemy to limit his power, so it is to limit his goodness. The advantages that your soul will get by this right knowledge, and estimation of God’s goodness, will be these.

1. This will make God appear more amiable in your eyes, and then you will love him more readily and abundantly. And love, 1. Is effectually consolatory in the very working ; so much love, usually so much comfort, (I mean this love of complacency ; for a love of desire there may be without comfort). 2. It will breed persuasions of God’s love to you again, and so comfort. 3. It will be an unquestionable evidence of true grace, and so comfort.

The affections follow the understanding’s conceptions. If you think of God as one that is glad of all advantages

against you, and delighteth in his creatures misery, it is impossible you should love him. The love of yourselves is so deeply rooted in nature, that we cannot lay it by, nor love any thing that is absolutely and directly against us. We conceive of the devil as an absolute enemy to God and man, and one that seeks our destruction, and therefore we cannot love him. And the great cause why troubled souls do love God no more, is because they represent him to themselves in an ugly, odious shape. To think of God as one that seeks and delighteth in man's ruin, is to make him as the devil. And then what wonder if instead of loving him, and delighting in him, you tremble at the thoughts of him, and fly from him. As I have observed children, when they have seen the devil painted on the wall, in an ugly shape, they have partly feared, and partly hated it. If you do so by God in your fancy, it is not putting the name of God on him when you have done, that will reconcile your affections to him as long as you strip him of his divine nature. Remember the Holy Ghost's description of God, 1 John iv. 16. "God is love." Write these words deep in your understanding.

2. Hereby you will have this advantage also, that your thoughts of God will be more sweet and delightful to you. For as glorious and beautiful sights to your eyes, and melodious sounds to your ears, and sweet smells, tastes, &c. are all delightful: when things deformed, stinking, &c. are all loathsome, and we turn away from one with abhorrency, but for the other, we would often see, taste, &c. and enjoy them. So is it with the objects of our mind; God hath given no command for duty, but what most perfectly agreeth with the nature of the object. He hath therefore bid us love God and delight in him above all, because he is above all in goodness; even infinitely and inconceivably good; else we could not love him above all, nor would he ever command us so to do. The object is ever as exactly fitted to its part, as to draw out the love and delight of our hearts, as the precept is on its part, to oblige us to it. And indeed the nature of things is a precept to duty, and it which we call the law of nature.

3. Hereupon will follow this further advantage, that your thoughts will be both more easily drawn toward God, and more frequent and constant on him; for delightful objects draw the heart to them, as the loadstone doth the iron.

How gladly, and freely, and frequently do you think of your dearest friends. And if you did firmly conceive of God, as one that is ten thousand times more gracious, loving, and amiable than any friend that you have in the world, it would make you not only to love him above all friends, but also more freely, delightfully, and unweariedly to think of him.

4. And then you would hence have this further advantage, that you would have less backwardness to any duty, and less weariness in duty; you would find more delight in prayer, meditation, and speech of God, when once God himself were more lovely and delightful in your eyes.

5. All these advantages would produce a further, that is, the growth of all your graces. For it is impossible, but this growth of love, and frequent delightful thoughts of God, and addresses to him, should cause an increase of all the rest.

6. Hereupon your evidences would be more clear and discernible. For grace in strength and action would be easily found; and would not this resolve all your doubts at once?

7. Yea, the very exercise of these several graces would be comfortable.

8. And hereupon you would have more humble familiarity and communion with God; for love, delight, and frequent addresses, would overcome strangeness and disacquaintance, which make us fly from God, as a fish, or bird, or wild beast, will from the face of a man, and would give us access with boldness and confidence. And this would banish sadness and terror, as the sun dispelleth darkness and cold.

9. At least you would hence have this advantage, that the fixed apprehension of God's goodness and merciful nature, would cause a fixed apprehension of the probability of your happiness, as long as you are willing to be happy in God's way. For reason will tell you, that he who is love itself, and whose goodness is equal to his almightiness, and who hath sworn, that he hath no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he repent and live, will not destroy a poor soul that lieth in submission at his feet, and is so far from resolved rebellion against him, that he grieveth that it is no better, and can please him no more.

10. However, these right apprehensions of God would overcome those terrors which are raised only by false apprehensions of him. And doubtless a very great part of men's causeless troubles, are raised from such misapprehensions of God. For satan knows, that if he can bring you to think of God as a cruel tyrant and blood-thirsty man-hater, then he can drive you from him in terror, and turn all your love and cheerful obedience into hatred and slavish fear. I say therefore again, do not only get, but also fix deep in your understanding, the highest thoughts of God's natural goodness and graciousness that possibly you can raise. For when they are at the highest, they come short ten thousand-fold.

Object. ' But God's goodness lieth not in mercy to men, as I have read in great divines; he may be perfectly good, though he should for ever torment the most innocent creatures.'

Ans. These are ignorant, presumptuous intrusions into that which is unsearchable. Where doth Scripture say as you say? Judge of God as he revealeth himself, or you will but delude yourself, and abuse him. All his works represent him merciful; for "his mercy is over all his works," and legible in them all. His word saith, "He is good, and doth good;" Psal. cxix. 68. cxlv. 9. How himself doth proclaim his own name (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.) I told you before. The most merciful men are his liveliest image; and therefore he plants mercy in them in their conversion, as a principal part of their new nature. And commands of mercifulness are a great part of his law; and he bids us "Be merciful, as our heavenly Father is merciful;" Luke vi. 36. Now if this were none of his nature, how could he be the pattern of our new nature herein? And if he were not infinitely merciful himself, how could we be required to be merciful, as he is? Who dare say, 'I am more merciful than God?'

Object. ' But God is just as well as merciful; and for all his merciful nature, he will damn most of the world for ever in hell.'

Ans. 1. But James saith, "Mercy rejoiceth against judgment;" James ii. 13. 2. God is necessarily the Governor of the world (while there is a world), and therefore must govern it in justice, and so must not suffer his mercy

to be perpetually abused by wicked, wilful, contemptuous sinners. But then consider two things : 1. That he destroyeth not humble souls that lie at his feet, and are willing to have mercy on his easy terms, but only the stubborn despisers of his mercy. He damnth none but those that will not be saved in his way ; that is, that will not accept of Christ and salvation freely given them. (I speak of those that hear the Gospel ; for others, their case is more unknown to us.) And is it any diminution to his infinite mercy, that he will not save those that will not be entreated to accept of salvation ? 2. And consider how long he useth to wait on sinners, and even beseech them to be reconciled to him, before he destroyeth them ; and that he heapeth multitudes of mercies on them, even in their rebellion, to draw them to repentance, and so to life. And is it unmercifulness yet if such men perish ?

Object. ' But if God were so infinite in mercy, as you say, why doth he not make all these men willing, that so they may be saved ?'

Ans. God having created the world, and all things it, at first, did make them in a certain nature and order, and so establish them as by a fixed law ; and he thereupon is their Governor, to govern every thing according to his nature. Now man's nature was to be principled with an inclination to his own happiness, and to be led to it by objects in a moral way, and in the choice of means to be a free agent, and the guider of himself under God. As Governor of the rational creature, God doth continue that same course of ruling them by laws, and drawing them by ends and objects as their natures do require. And in this way he is not wanting to them ; his laws are now laws of grace, and universal in the tenor of the free gift and promise, for he hath there given life in Christ to all that will have it ; and the objects propounded are sufficient in their kind, to work even the most wonderful effects of men's souls, for they are God himself, and Christ, and glory. Besides, God giveth men natural faculties, that they may have the use of reason ; and there is nothing more unreasonable than to refuse this offered mercy. He giveth inducing arguments in the written word, and sermons, and addeth such mercies and afflictions, that one should think should bow the hardest heart. Besides, the strivings and motions of his Spirit within, are more than

we can give an account of. Now is not this as much as belongs to God as Governor of the creature according to its nature? And for the giving of a new nature, and creating new hearts in men, after all their rebellious rejecting of grace, this is a certain miracle of mercy, and belongs to God in another relation (even as the free chooser of his elect) and not directly as the Governor of the universe. This is from his special providence, and the former from his general. Now special providences are not to be as common as the general, nor to subvert God's ordinary, established course of government. If God please to stop Jordan, and dry up the Red Sea for the passage of the Israelites, and to cause the sun to stand still for Joshua, must he do so still for every man in the world, or else be accounted unmerciful? The sense of this objection is plainly this. God is not so rich in mercy, except he will new make all the world, or govern it above its nature. Suppose a king know his subjects to be so wicked, that they have every one a full design to famish or kill themselves, or poison themselves with something which is enticing by its sweetness, the king not only makes a law, strictly charging them all to forbear to touch that poison, but he sendeth special messengers to entreat them to it, and tell them the danger. If these men will not hear him, but wilfully poison themselves, is he therefore unmerciful? But suppose that he hath three or four of his sons that are infected with the same wickedness, and he will not only command and entreat them, but he will lock them up, or keep the poison from them, or will feed them by violence with better food, is he unmerciful unless he will do so by all the rest of his kingdom?

Lastly. If all this will not satisfy you; consider, 1. That it is most certain God is love, and infinite in mercy, and hath no pleasure in the death of sinners. 2. But it is utterly uncertain to us how God worketh on man's will inwardly by his Spirit. 3. Or yet what intolerable inconvenience there may be if God should work in other ways; therefore we must not upon such uncertainties deny certainties, nor from some unreasonable scruples about the manner of God's working grace, deny the blessed nature of God, which himself hath most evidently proclaimed to the world.

I have said the more of this, because I find satan harp so much on this string with many troubled souls, especially

on the advantage of some common doctrines. For false doctrine still tends to the overthrow of solid peace and comfort. Remember therefore before all other thoughts for the obtaining of peace, to get high thoughts of the gracious and lovely nature of God.

Direct. IV. Next this, 'Be sure that you deeply apprehend the gracious nature, disposition, and office of the Mediator, Jesus Christ.'

Though there can no more be said of the gracious nature of the Son than of the Father's, even that his goodness is infinite; yet these two advantages this consideration will add unto the former. 1. You will see here goodness and mercy in its condescension, and nearer to you than in the divine nature alone it was. Our thoughts of God are necessarily more strange, because of our infinite distance from the Godhead; and therefore our apprehensions of God's goodness will be the less working, because less familiar. But in Christ God is come down into our nature, and so Infinite goodness and mercy is incarnate. The man Christ Jesus is able now to save to the utmost all that come to God by him. We have a merciful High-Priest that is acquainted with our infirmities. 2. Herein we see the will of God putting forth itself for our help in the most astonishing way that could be imagined. Here is more than merely a gracious inclination. It is an office of saving and shewing mercy also that Christ hath undertaken; even "to seek and to save that which was lost." To bring home straying souls to God. To be the great Peace-maker between God and man, to reconcile God to man, and man to God; and so to be the Head and Husband of his people. Certainly the devil strangely wrongeth poor, troubled souls in this point, that he can bring them to have such hard, suspicious thoughts of Christ, and so much to overlook the glory of mercy which so shineth in the face of the Son of Mercy itself. How can we more contradict the nature of Christ, and the Gospel description of him, than to think him a destroying hater of his creatures, and one that watcheth for our halting, and hath more mind to hurt us than to help us? How could he have manifested more willingness to save, and more tender compassion to the souls of men, than he hath fully manifested? That the Godhead should condescend to assume our nature is a thing so wonderful, even to astonishment, that it puts

faith to it to apprehend it ; for it is ten thousand times more condescension than for the greatest king to become a fly or a toad to save such creatures. And shall we ever have low and suspicious thoughts of the gracious and merciful nature of Christ, after so strange and full a discovery of it ? If twenty were ready to drown in the sea, and if one that were able to swim and fetch all out, should cast himself into the water, and offer them his help, were it not foolish ingratitude for any to say, ‘ I know not yet whether he be willing to help me or not ;’ and so to have jealous thoughts of his good will, and so perish in refusing his help ? How tenderly did Christ deal with all sorts of sinners. He professed that he “ came not into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.” Did he weep over a rejected, unbelieving people, and was he desirous of their desolation ? “ How oft would he have gathered them as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings (mark, that he would have done this for them that he cast off) and they would not ?” When his disciples would have had “ fire come down from heaven to consume those that refused him,” he reproofs them, and tells them, “ They knew not what spirit they were of” (the common case of them that miscarry, by suffering their zeal to overrun their Christian wisdom and meekness). Yea, he prayeth for his crucifiers, and that on the cross, not forgetting them in the heat of his sufferings. Thus he doth by the wicked ; but to those that follow him, his tenderness is unspeakable, as you would have said yourself, if you had but stood by and seen him washing his disciples’ feet, and wiping them ; or bidding Thomas put his finger into his side, “ and be not faithless, but believing.” Alas ! that the Lord Jesus should come from heaven to earth, from glory into human flesh, and pass through a life of misery to a cross, and from the cross to the grave, to manifest openly to the world the abundance of his love, and the tenderness of his heart to sinners ; and that after all this, we should suspect him of cruelty, or hard-heartedness and unwillingness to shew mercy ; and that the devil can so far delude us, as to make us think of the Lamb of God as if he were a tiger or devourer !

But I will say no more of this, because Dr. Sibbs, in his “ Bruised Reed,” hath said so much already. Only remember, that if you would methodically proceed to the attaining

of solid comfort, this is the next stone that must be laid. You must be deeply possessed with apprehensions of the most gracious nature and office of the Redeemer, and the exceeding tenderness of his heart to lost sinners.

Direct. V. The next step in right order to comfort is this : ‘ You must believe and consider the full sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice and ransom for all.’

The controversies about this you need not be troubled at. For as almost all confess this sufficiency, so the Scripture itself, by the plainness and fulness of its expression, makes it as clear as the light, that Christ died for ALL. The fuller proof of this I have given you in public, and shall do yet more publicly, if God will. If satan would persuade you either that no ransom or sacrifice was ever given for you, or that therefore you have no Redeemer to trust in, and no Saviour to believe in, and no sanctuary to fly to from the wrath of God, he must first prove you either to be no lost sinner, or to be a final, impenitent unbeliever ; that is, that you are dead already ; or else he must delude your understanding, to make you think that Christ died not for all ; and then I confess he hath a sore advantage against your faith and comfort.

Direct. VI. The next thing in order to be done is this : ‘ Get clear apprehensions of the freeness, fulness, and universality of the new covenant or law of grace.’

I mean the promise of remission, justification, adoption, and salvation to all, so they will believe. No man on earth is excluded in the tenor of this covenant. And therefore certainly you are not excluded ; and if not excluded, then you must needs be included. Shew where you are excluded if you can ! You will say, ‘ But for all this, all men are not justified and saved.’ *Answ.* True, because they will not be persuaded to accept the mercy that is freely given them.

The use that I would have you make of this, I will shew in the next.

Direct. VII. ‘ You must get the right understanding of the difference between general grace and special. And between the possibility, probability, conditional certainty, and absolute certainty of your salvation. And so between the comfort on the former ground and on the latter.’

36 DIRECTIONS FOR GETTING AND KEEPING

And here I shall open to you a rich mine of consolation.

Understand, therefore, that as every particular part of the house is built on the foundation, so is every part of special grace built on general grace. Understand also, that all the four last mentioned particulars do belong to this general grace. As also, that though no man can have absolute certainty of salvation, from the consideration of this general grace alone, yet may it afford abundance of relief to distressed souls, yea, much true consolation. Lastly, Understand that all that hear the Gospel may take part in this consolation, though they have no assurance of their salvation at all, no nor any special, saving grace.

Now when you understand these things well, this is the use that I would have you make of them.

1. Do not begin the way to your spiritual peace by inquiring after the sincerity of your graces, and trying yourselves by signs. Do not seek out for assurance of salvation in the first place, nor do not look and study after the special comforts which come from certainty of special grace, before you have learned, 1. To perform the duty. 2. And to receive the comforts which general grace affordeth. Such immethodical, disorderly proceedings keepeth thousands of poor, ignorant Christians in darkness and trouble almost all their days. Let the first thing you do, be to obey the voice of the Gospel, which calleth you to accept of Christ and special mercy. "This is the record, that God hath given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life." Fix this deep in your mind, that the nature of the Gospel is first to declare to our understandings the most gracious nature, undertakings, and performances of Christ for us, which must be believed to be true. And 2. To offer this Christ with all his special mercy to every man to whom this Gospel comes, and to entreat them to accept Christ and life, which is freely given and offered to them. Remember then you are a lost sinner. For certain Christ and life in him is given and offered to you. Now your first work is, presently to accept it, not to make an unseasonable inquiry, whether Christ be yours. But to take him that he may be yours. If you were condemned, and a pardon were freely given you, on condition you would thankfully take it, and it were offered to you, and you en-

treated to take it, what would you do in this case? Would you spend your time and thoughts in searching whether this pardon be already yours? Or would you not presently take it that it may be yours? Or if you were ready to furnish, and food were offered you, would you stand asking first, 'How shall I know that it is mine?' Or rather take and eat it, when you are sure it may be yours if you will. Let me entreat you therefore, when the devil clamours in your ears, 'Christ and salvation is none of thine,' suppose that this voice of God in the Gospel were still in your ears, yea, let it be still in your memory, 'O take Christ, and life in him, that thou mayst be saved:' still think that you hear Paul following you with these words: "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us. We pray you in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God." Will you but remember this, when you are on your knees in sorrow; and when you would fain have Christ and life, and you are afraid that God will not give them to you? I say, remember then, God stands by beseeching you to accept the same thing which you are beseeching him to give. God is the first suitor and solicitor. God prays you to take Christ, and you pray him to give you Christ. What have you now to do but to take him? And here understand, that this taking is no impossible business; it is no more but your hearty consenting, as I shall tell you more anon. If you did but well understand and consider, that believing is the great duty that God calls you to perform, and promiseth to save you if you do truly perform it; and that this believing is to take, or consent to have the same mercy which you pray for, and are troubled for fear lest you shall miss of it, even Christ and life in him; this would presently draw forth your consent, and that in so open and express a way, as you could not but discover it, and have the comfort of it. Remember this then, That your first work is to believe, or accept an offered Saviour.

2. You must learn (as I told you) to receive the comforts of universal or general grace, before you search after the comforts of special grace. I here suppose you so far sound in the doctrine of the Gospel, as neither with some on one hand, to look so much at special grace, as to deny that general grace, which is the ground of it, or presupposed to it. Nor with others, so far to look at universal mercy, as to de-

ny special. Satan will tell you, that all your duties have been done in hypocrisy, and you are unsound at the heart, and have not a drop of saving grace. You are apt to entertain this, and conclude that all this is true: 'If I had any grace, I should have more life, and love, and delight in God; more tenderness of heart, more growth in grace. I should not carry about such a rock in my breast; such a stupid, dull, insensible soul,' &c.

At the present, let us suppose that all this be true: yet see what a world of comfort you may gather from universal or general mercy. I have before opened to you four parts of it, in the cause of your happiness, and three in the effect, which may each of them afford much relief to your troubled soul.

1. Suppose you are yet graceless, is it nothing to you that it is a God of infinite mercy that you have to do with, whose compassions are ten thousand times greater than your dearest friends, or your own husbands?

Object. 'O but yet he will not save the graceless.'

Ans. True, but he is the more ready to give grace, that you may be saved. "If any of you (mark, any of you) do lack wisdom, let him ask it of God, who giveth to all men liberally (without desert) and upbraideth not (with our unworthiness or former faults), and it shall be given him;" James i. 4. "If you that are evil can give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit to them that ask it?" Luke xi. 13. Suppose your life were in the hands of your own husband, or your children's life in your hands, would it not exceedingly comfort you or them, to consider whose hands they are in, though yet you had no further assurance how you should be used? It may be you will say, 'But God is no Father to the graceless.' I answer, He is not their Father in so near and strict a sense as he is the Father of believers; but yet a Father he is, even to the wicked; and to convince men of his fatherly mercy to them, he often so stileth himself. He saith by Moses, Deut. xxxii. 6. to a wicked generation, whose spot was not the spot of his children, "Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise? Is not he thy Father that bought thee? Hath he not made thee, and established thee?" And the prodigal could call him Father for his encouragement before he returned to him; Luke xv.

16—18. For my own part I must needs profess, that my soul hath more frequent support from the consideration of God's gracious and merciful nature, than from the promise itself.

2. Furthermore, Suppose you were graceless at the present; yet is it not an exceeding comfort, that there is one of such infinite compassions as the Lord Christ, who hath assumed our nature, and is come down to seek and save that which was lost; and is more tender-hearted to poor sinners than we can possibly conceive? Yea, who hath made it his office to heal, and relieve, and restore, and reconcile. Yea, that hath himself endured such temptations as many of ours; "For we have not a High-priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, without sin. Let us therefore (saith the Holy Ghost) come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need;" Heb. iv. 15, 16. "Forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part with them, that he might destroy, through death, him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them, who through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High-Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted;" Heb. ii. 14—18. Have you discountenance from men? Christ had much more. Doth God seem to forsake you? So he did by Christ. Are you fain to lie on your knees crying for mercy? Why Christ in the days of his flesh was fain to offer up "strong cries and tears, to him that was able to save him. And was heard in that he feared." It seems that Christ had distressing fears as well as you, though not sinful fears. Have you horrid temptations? Why Christ was tempted to cast himself headlong, and to worship the devil, for worldly preferment; yea, the devil had power to carry his body up and down to the pinnacle of the temple, and the top of a mountain. If he had such power of you, would you not think yourself certainly

his slave? I conclude therefore, as it is an exceeding ground of comfort to all the sick people in a city, to know that there is a most merciful and skilful physician, that is easily able to cure them, and hath undertaken to do it freely for all that will take him for their physician; so is it a ground of exceeding comfort to the worst of sinners, to all sinners that are yet alive, and have not blasphemed the Holy Ghost, to know what a merciful and efficient Saviour hath undertaken the work of man's redemption.

3. Also, Suppose yet that you are graceless, is it nothing that a sufficient sacrifice and ransom is given for you? This is the very foundation of all solid peace. I think this is a great comfort, to know that God looks now for no satisfaction at your hand; and that the number or greatness of your sins, as such, cannot now be your ruin. For certainly no man shall perish for want of the payment of his ransom, or of an expiatory sacrifice for sin, but only for want of a willing heart to accept him that hath freely ransomed them.

4. Also, Suppose you are graceless, is it nothing that God hath under his hand and seal made a full and free deed of gift, to you and all sinners, of Christ, and with him of pardon and salvation! And all this on condition of your acceptance or consent? I know the despisers of Christ shall be miserable for all this. But for you that would fain have Christ, is it no comfort to know that you shall have him if you will? And to find this to be the sum of the Gospel? I know you have often read those free offers, Rev. xxii. 17. "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely. Ho, every one that thirsteth, come and drink," &c. Almost all that I have hitherto said to you is comprised in that one text, John iii. 16. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

And as I have shewed it you in the causes, what comfort even general mercy may afford, so let me a little shew it you in the effects. I mean, not only in that God is now satisfied; but as to yourself and every sinner, these three things are produced hereby.

1. There is now a possibility of salvation to you. And certainly even that should be a very great comfort. I know you will meet with some divines, who will tell you that this is no effect of Christ's death; and that else Christ should

die for God, if he procured him a power to save which he had not before. But this is no better than a reproaching of our Redeemer. Suppose that a traitor had so abused a king, that it will neither stand with his own honour, nor justice, nor laws to pardon him; if his compassion were so great, that his own son shall suffer for him, that so the king might be capable of pardoning him, without any diminution of his honour or justice; were it not a vile reproach, if this traitor should tell the prince that suffered for him, 'It was for your father that you suffered to procure him a power of pardoning, it was not for me?' It is true, the king could not pardon him, without satisfaction to his honour and justice. But this was not through any impotency, but because the thing was not fit to be done, and so was morally impossible. For in law we say, dishonest things are impossible. And it had been no less to the king if the traitor had not been pardoned. So it is in our case. And therefore Christ's sufferings could not be more eminently for us; than by enabling the offended Majesty to forgive us; and so taking the greatest impediment out of the way. For when impediments are once removed, God's nature is so gracious and prone to mercy, that he would soon pardon us when once it is fit to be done, and so morally possible in the fullest sense; only men's own unwillingness now stands in the way, and makes it to be not fully fit to be yet done. It is true, in a remote sense, the pardon of sin was always possible; but in the nearest sense it was impossible, till Christ made it possible by his satisfaction.

2. Nay, though you were yet graceless, you have now this comfort, that your salvation is probable as well as possible. You are very fair for it. The terms be not hard in themselves, on which it is tendered. For Christ's yoke is easy, and his burden is light, and his commands are not grievous. "The word is nigh you," even the offer of grace. You need not say, "Who shall ascend to heaven; or go down to hell?" Rom. x. But this will appear in the next.

3. Yea, this exceeding comfort there is, even for them that are graceless, that their salvation is conditionally certain, and the condition is but their own willingness. They may all have Christ and life if they will. Now I desire you in all your doubts, that you will well consider and improve this one truth and ground of comfort. Would you, in the

midst of your groans, and complaints and fears, take it for a small mercy, to be certain that you shall have Christ if you will? When you are praying for Christ in fear and anguish of spirit, if an angel or voice from heaven should say to you 'It shall be unto thee according to thy will, if thou wilt have Christ and live in him, thou shalt : ' Would this be no comfort to you? Would it not revive you and overcome your fears?

By this time I hope you see what abundance of comfort general mercy or grace may afford the soul, before it perceive (yea, or receive) any special grace; though few of those that receive not special grace can make use of general, yet it is propounded to them as well as others.

1. All the terrifying temptations which are grounded on misrepresentations of God, as if he were a cruel destroyer to be fled from, are dispelled by the due consideration of his goodness, and the deep settled apprehensions of his gracious, merciful, lovely nature (which indeed is the first work of true religion, and the very master radical act of true grace, and the chief maintainer of spiritual life and motion).

2. All these temptations are yet more effectually dispelled, by considering this merciful divine nature dwelling in flesh, becoming man, by condescending to the assumption of our human nature; and so come near us, and assuming the office of being the Mediator, the Redeemer, the Saviour of the world.

3. All your doubts and fears that proceed from your former sins, whether of youth or of age, of ignorance or of knowledge, and those which proceed from your legal unworthiness, have all a present remedy in the fulness and sufficiency of Christ's satisfaction, even for all the world; so that no sin (except the excepted sin) is so great, but it is fully satisfied for; and though you are unworthy, yet Christ is worthy; and he came into the world to save only the unworthy (in the strict and legal sense).

4. All your doubts and fears that arise from an apprehension of God's unwillingness to shew you mercy, and to give you Christ and life in him, arise from the misapprehensions of Christ's unwillingness to be yours; or at least from the uncertainty of his willingness; these have all a sufficient remedy in the general extent, and tenor of the new covenant. Can you doubt whether God be willing to

give you Christ and life, when he had given them already, even by a deed of gift under his hand, and by a law of grace? 1 John v. 10—12.

Object. 'But yet all are not pardoned, and possessed of Christ, and so saved.'

Ans. I told you, that is because they will not; so that (I pray you mark it well) God hath in these four means before mentioned, given even to the graceless so much ground of comfort, that nothing, but their unwillingness to have Christ, is left to be their terror. For though sin be not actually remitted to them, yet is it conditionally remitted, viz. If they will but accept of Christ offered them. Will you remember this, when your doubts are greatest, and you conclude, that certainly Christ is not yours, because you have no true grace? Suppose it to be true, yet still know, that Christ may be yours if you will, and when you will. This comfort you may have when you can find no evidences of true grace in yourself. So much for that direction.

Direct. VIII. The next thing that you have to do, for building up a stable comfort, and settling your conscience in a solid peace, is this, 'Be sure to get and keep a right understanding of the nature of saving faith.'

As you must have right thoughts of the covenant of grace (of which before), the want thereof doth puzzle and confound very many Christians; so you must be sure to have right thoughts of the condition of the covenant. For indeed that grace which causeth you to perform this condition, is your first special saving grace, which you may take as a certain evidence of your justification. And this condition is the very link which conjoineth all the general foregoing grace to all the rest of the following special grace. The Scripture is so full and plain in assuring pardon and salvation to all true believers; that if you can be sure you are a believer, you need not make any doubt of your interest in Christ, and your salvation. Seeing therefore that all the question will be, Whether you have true faith? Whether you do perform the condition of the new covenant? (for all other doubts God hath given you sufficient ground to resolve, as is said) how much then doth it concern you to have a right understanding of the nature of this faith? Which that you may have, let me tell you briefly what it is. Man's soul hath two faculties, understanding and will: ac-

cordingly the objects of man's soul (all beings which it is to receive) have two modifications; truth and goodness (as those to be avoided are evil). Accordingly God's word or Gospel hath two parts; the revelation of truth, and the offer and promise of some good. This offered good is principally and immediately Christ himself to be joined to us by covenant, as our head and husband. The secondary consequential good, is pardon, justification, reconciliation, adoption, further sanctification and glorification, which are all offered with Christ. By this you may see what saving faith is; it is first, a believing that the Gospel is true; and then an accepting of Christ therein offered to us, with his benefits; or a consenting that he be ours, and we be his; which is nothing but a true willingness to have an offered Christ. Remember this well, that you may make use of it, when you are in doubt of the truth of your faith. Thousands of poor souls have been in the dark, and unable to see themselves to be believers, merely for want of knowing what saving faith is. The Papists place almost all in the mere assent of the understanding. Some of our Reformers made it to be either an assurance of the pardon of our own sins, or a strong persuasion of their pardon, excluding doubting; or (the most moderate) a persuasion of our particular pardon, though mixed with some doubting. The Antinomians strike in with them, and say the same. Hence some divines conclude, that justification and remission go before faith, because the act doth always suppose its object. For they thought that remission already past was the object of justifying faith, supposing faith to be nothing else but a belief that we are pardoned. Yea, ordinarily, it hath been taught in the writings of our greatest refuters of the Papists, 'That this belief is properly a divine faith, or the belief of a divine testimony, as is the believing of any proposition written in the Scripture (a foul error, which I have confuted in my Book of Rest, part iii. chap. vii). Most of late have come nearer the truth, and affirmed justifying faith to consist in affiance, or recumbency, or resting on Christ for salvation. No doubt this is one act of justifying faith, but not that which a poor troubled soul should first search after and try itself by (except by affiance, any should mean as Amesius doth, election of Christ, and then it is the same act which I am asserting, but very unfitly expressed). For, 1. Affiance is not the

principal act nor that wherein the very life of justifying faith doth consist, but only an imperate allowing act, and an effect of the vital act, (which is consent, or willing, or accepting Christ offered ;) for it lieth mainly in that which we call the sensitive part, or the passions of the soul. 2. It is therefore less constant, and so unfitter to try by. For many a poor soul that knows itself unfeignedly willing to have Christ, yet feeleth not a resting on him, or trusting in him, and therefore cries out, 'O I cannot believe;' and think they have no faith. For recumbency, affiance, or resting on Christ, implieth that easing of themselves, or casting off their fears, or doubts, or cares, which true believers do not always find. Many a poor soul complains, 'O I cannot rest on Christ; I cannot trust him!' who yet would have him to be their Lord and Saviour, and can easily be convinced of their willingness. 3. Besides affiance is not the adequate act of faith, suited to the object in that fulness, as it must be received, but willingness or acceptance is. Christ is rested on not only for ourselves as our deliverer, but he is accepted also for himself as our Lord and Master. The full proof of these I have performed in other writings, and oft in your hearing in public, and therefore omit them now. Be sure then to fix this truth deep in your mind, 'That justifying faith is not an assurance of our justification; no, nor a persuasion or belief that we are justified or pardoned, or that Christ died more for us than for others. Nor yet is affiance or resting on Christ the vital principle, certain, constant, full act; but it is the understanding's belief of the truth of the Gospel, and the will's acceptance of Christ and life offered to us therein; which acceptance is but the hearty consent or willingness that he be yours, and you his' This is the faith which must justify and save you.

Object. But, 1. 'May not wicked men be willing to have Christ? 2. And do not you oft tell us that justifying faith comprehends love to Christ and thankfulness, and that it receiveth him as a Lord to be obeyed, as well as a deliverer? And that repentance and sincere obedience are parts of the condition of the new covenant?'

Ans. I will give as brief a touch now on these as may be, because I have handled them in fitter places.

1. Wicked men are willing to have remission, justification, and freedom from hell (for no man can be willing to be

unpardoned, or to be damned;) but they are not willing to have Christ himself in that nature and office which he must be accepted; that is, as an holy head and husband to save both from the guilt and power, and all defilement and abode of sin, and to rule them by his law, and guide them by his Spirit, and to make them happy by bringing them to God, that being without sin, they may be perfectly pleasing and amiable in his sight, and enjoy him for ever. Thus is Christ offered, and thus to be accepted of all that will be saved; and thus no wicked man will accept him (but when he ceaseth to be wicked). 2. To cut all the rest short in a word, I say, That in this fore-described willingness or acceptance, repentance, love, thankfulness, resolution to obey, are all contained, or nearly implied, as I have elsewhere manifested; so that the heart of saving faith is this acceptance of Christ, or willingness to have him to justify, sanctify, guide, and govern you. Find but this willingness, and you find all the rest, whether you expressly see them or not. So much for that direction.

Direct. IX. Having thus far proceeded, in discovering and improving the general grounds of comfort, and then in discovering the nature of faith, which gives you right to the special mercies of the covenant following it; your next work must be, 'To perform this condition by actual believing.'

Your soul stands in extreme need of a Saviour. God offereth you a Saviour in the Gospel. What then have you next to do but to accept him? Believe that this offer is general, and therefore to you. And that Christ is not set to sale, nor doth God require you to bring a price in your hand, but only heartily and thankfully to accept of what he freely giveth you. This must be done before you fall on trying your graces to get assurance, for you must have grace before you can discover it; and this is the first proper special saving grace (as it compriseth that knowledge and assent which necessarily go before it). This is not only the method for those that yet never believed, but also for them that have lost the sense of their faith, and so the sight of their evidence. Believe again, that you may know you do believe; or at least may possess an accepted Saviour. When God in the Gospel bids you take Jesus Christ, and beseecheth you to be reconciled to him, what will you say to him? If your heart answer, 'Lord I am willing, I will ac-

cept of Christ and be thankful ;' why then the match is made between Christ and you, and the marriage-covenant is truly entered, which none can dissolve. If Christ were not first willing, he would not be the suitor, and make the motion ; and if he be willing, and you be willing, what can break the match ? If you will say, ' I cannot believe ;' if you understand what you say, either you mean that you cannot believe the Gospel is true, or else that you cannot be willing that Christ should be yours. If it be the former, and speak truly, then you are a flat infidel (yet many temptations to doubt of the truth of Scripture, a true believer may have, yea, and actual doubtings ; but his faith prevaieth, and is victorious over them) ; but if you really doubt whether the Gospel be true, use God's means for the discovery of its truth. Read what I have written in the second part of my Book of Rest. I will undertake now more confidently than ever I did, to prove the truth of Scripture by plain, full, undeniable force of reason. But I suppose this is none of your case. If therefore when you say, that you cannot believe, you mean, that you cannot accept an offered Christ, or be willing to have him ; then I demand, 1. What is your reason ? The will is led by the reason of the understanding. If you be not willing, there is something that persuades you to be unwilling. This reason must be from something real, or else upon a mistake, upon supposal of something that is not in being. If it be upon mistake, either it is that you be not convinced of Christ's willingness to be yours ; and if you thought he did consent, you would consent willingly ; if this be it, you do truly believe while you think you do not ; for you do consent (and that is all on your part to make the match) and Christ doth certainly consent, though you do not understand it. In this case it concerneth you, to understand better the extent of the new covenant, and then you will be past doubt of the willingness of Christ, and see that wherever the match breaks, it is only for want of consent in men ; for Christ is the first suitor, and hath long ago in the covenant proclaimed his consent, to be the head and husband of every sinner, on condition they will but consent to be his.

If your mistake be from any false apprehension of the nature of Christ, as if he were not a sufficient Saviour, or were an enemy to your comfort, that he would do you more harm

than good ; if these mistakes are prevalent, then you do not know Christ, and therefore must presently better study him in the Gospel, till you have prevailed over such ignorant and blasphemous conceits (but none of this I suppose is your case).

If then the reason why you say you cannot believe, be from any thing that is really in Christ (and not upon mistake), then it must be either from some dislike of his saving work, by which he would pardon you, and save you from damnation (but that is impossible, for you cannot be willing to be damned or unpardoned, till you lose your reason) : or else it is from a dislike of his work of sanctification, by which he would cleanse your heart and life, by saving you from your sinful nature and actions ; some grudging against Christ's holy and undefiled laws and ways will be in the best, while there is that flesh in them which lusteth against the Spirit, so that they cannot do the things they would. But if truly you have such a dislike of a sinless condition, through the love of any sin or creature, that you cannot be willing to have Christ to cure you, and cleanse you from that sin, and make you holy : I say, if this be true, in a prevailing degree, so that if Christ and holiness were offered you, you would not accept them, then it is certain you have not true faith. And in this case it is easily to discern, that your first work lieth not in getting comfort or ease to your troubled mind ; but in getting better conceits of Christ and a holy state and life, that so you may be willing of Christ, as Christ is of you, and so become a true believer. And here I would not leave you at that loss as some do, as if there were nothing for you to do for the getting of faith ; for certainly God hath prescribed you means for that end. " Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God preached ;" Rom. x. 17. 1. Therefore see that you wait diligently on this ordinance of God. Read the Scriptures daily, and search them to see whether you may not there find that holiness is better than sin. 2. And however some seducers may tell you, that wicked men ought not to pray, yet be sure that you lie on your knees before God, and importunately beg that he would open your eyes, and change your heart, and shew you so far the evil of sin, and the want and worth of Christ and holiness, that you may be unfeignedly glad to accept his offer.

Object. 'But the prayers of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord.'

Ans. 1. You must distinguish between wicked men, as actually wicked, and going on in the prosecution of their wickedness; and wicked men, as they have some good in them, or are doing some good, or are attempting a return to God. 2. You must distinguish between real prayer and seeming prayer. 3. You must distinguish between full acceptance of prayer, when God delighteth in them, and an acceptance only to some particular end, not imitating the acceptance of the person with his prayer: and between acceptance fully promised (as certain) and acceptance but half promised (as probable). And upon these distinctions I shall answer your objections in the conclusion.

1. When wicked men pray to God to prosper them in their wickedness, yea, or to pardon them while they intend to go on in it, and so to give them an indulgence in sin; or when they think with a few prayers for some good, which they can endure, to put by that holiness which they cannot endure, and so to make a cloak for their rebellion, these prayers are all an abomination to the Lord.

2. When men use the words of a prayer, without the desire of the thing asked, this is no prayer, but equivocally so called; as a carcase is a man; and therefore no wonder if God abhor that prayer, which is truly no prayer.

3. God hath not made a full promise, ascertaining any wicked man, while wicked, that he will hear his prayer; for all such promises are made to believers.

4. God doth never so hear an unbeliever's prayer, as to accept his person with his prayer, or to take a complacency in them. So much for the negative.

Now for the affirmative, I add; 1. Prayer is a duty which God enjoined even wicked men (I could prove it by an hundred Scripture texts.)

2. There may be some good desires in unbelievers, which they may express in prayer, and these God may so far hear as to grant them, as he did in part to Ahab.

3. An unbeliever may lie under preparing grace, and be on his way in returning towards God, though yet he be not come to saving faith; and in this state he may have many good desires, and such prayers as God will hear.

4. Though God have not flatly engaged himself to unbelievers, so as to give them a certainty of hearing their prayers, and giving them true grace on the improvement of their naturals, yet he hath not only appointed them this and other means to get grace, but also given them half promises, or strong probabilities of speeding, so much as may be a sufficient encouragement to any such sinner to call on God, and use his means. For as he appointeth not any vain means to man, so no man can name that man who did improve his naturals to the utmost, and in particular, sought God in prayer, so far as a natural man may do, who yet missed of grace, and was rejected (this is the true mean between Pelagianism and Antinomianism in this point).

5. When God calls unbelievers to prayer, he withal calls them to believe. And when he works their heart to prayer by that call, he usually withal works them to believe, or at least towards believing. If he that was unwilling to have Christ, do pray God to make him willing, it is a beginning of willingness already, and the way to get more willingness. In prayer God useth to give in the thing prayed for, of this kind.

6. Prayer is the soul's motion God-ward : and to say an unbeliever should not pray, is to say he should not turn to God ; who yet saith to the wicked, " Seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way ;" &c. Isaiah lv. 6, 7.

7. Prayer hath two parts ; desire is the soul of it, and expression is the body. The soul can live separated from the body, but so cannot the body separated from the soul. So can desire without expression, but not expression without desire. When our blind Antinomians (the great subverters of the Gospel, more than the law) do rail against ministers for persuading wicked men to pray, they are against us for persuading men to desire that they pray for ; prayer having desire for its soul. And do not those men deserve to be exterminated the churches and societies of the saints, who dare say to a wicked unbeliever, ' Desire not faith ? Desire not to leave thy wickedness ? Desire not grace ? or Christ ? or God ? And that will proclaim abroad the world (as I have oft heard of them with zealous reproaches) that our ministers are legalists, seducers, ignorant of the mysteries of the Gospel, because they persuade poor sinners to pray for

faith, grace, and Christ ; that is to desire these, and to express their desires ; which in effect is to persuade them to repent, believe, and turn to God. Indeed, if these blind seducers had ever heard our ministers persuading wicked men to dissemble and lie to God, and ask faith, grace and Christ with their tongues, but not desire them in their hearts, then had they sufficient grounds for their reviling language (but I have been too long on this). I may therefore boldly conclude, that they that find themselves unbelievers, that is, unwilling to have Christ to deliver them from sin, must use this second means to get faith, even earnest frequent prayer for it to God.

3. Let such also see that they avoid wicked seducing company and occasions of sin ; and be sure that they keep company with men fearing God, especially joining with them in their holy duties.

4. Lastly, let such be sure that they use that reason which God hath given them, to consider frequently, retiredly, seriously, of the vanity of all those things that steal away their hearts from Christ ; and of the excellency of holiness, and how blessed a state it is to have nothing in us of heart or life that is displeasing to God, but to be such as he taketh full delight in ; also of the certainty of the damnation of unbelievers, and the intolerableness of their torments ; and of the certainty and inconceivable greatness of believers' everlasting happiness. If wicked unbelievers would but do what they can in daily, serious, deep considering of these things, and the like, they would have no cause to despair of obtaining faith and sanctification. Believing is a rational act. God bids you not to believe any thing without reason, nor to accept or consent to any thing without full reason to cause you to consent. Think then often and soberly of those reasons that should move you to consent, and of the vanity of these that hinder you from consenting, and this is God's way for you to obtain faith or consent.

Remember then, that when you have understood and improved general grounds of comfort (nay before you can come to any full improvement of them) your next business is to believe ; to consent to the match with Christ, and to take him for your Lord and Saviour. And this duty must be looked to and performed, before you look after special com-

fort. But I said somewhat of this before under the sixth head, and therefore will say no more now.

Direct. X. When you have gone thus far, your soul is safe, and you are past your greatest dangers, though yet you are not past your fears; your next work therefore for peace and comfort is this; 'To review and take notice of your own faith, and thence to gather assurance of the certainty of your justification, and adoption, and right to glory.'

The sum of this direction lieth in these things:

1. See that you do not content yourself with the fore-mentioned general comforts, without looking after assurance and special comforts. The folly of this I have manifested in the third part of my Book of Rest, about Self-examination.

2. See that you dream not of finding assurance and special comfort from mere general grounds. This is the delusion of many Antinomians, and of most of our profane people (who I find are commonly of the Antinomian faith naturally, without teaching). For men to conclude that they shall certainly be saved, merely because God is merciful, or Christ is tender-hearted to sinners, and would not that any should perish, but all should come to repentance; or because God delights not in the death of him that dieth, but rather that he repent and live; or because Christ died for them; or because God hath given Christ and life in the Gospel to all, on condition of believing; these are all but mere delusions. Much comfort, as I have shewed you, may be gathered from these generals; but no certainty of salvation, or special comfort can be gathered from them alone.

3. See that you reject the Antinomian doctrine or doctrine, which would teach you to reject the trial and judging of your state by signs of grace in yourself, and tell you that it is only the Spirit that must assure, by witnessing your adoption; I will further explain this caution when I have added the rest.

4. And on the other extreme, do not run to marks unseasonably, but in the order here laid down.

5. Nor trust to unsafe marks.

6. And therefore do not look at too many; for the true ones are but few. I do but name these things to you, because I have more fully handled them in my Book of Rest,

whither I must refer you. And so I return to the third caution.

I have in the forementioned book told you, what the office of the Spirit is in assuring us, and what the use of marks are. The Spirit witnesseth first objectively, and so the Spirit and marks are all one. For it is the Spirit dwelling in us that is the witness or proof that we are God's sons; for he that hath not his Spirit is none of his. And the Spirit is not discerned by us in its essence, but in its workings; and therefore to discern these workings, is to discern the Spirit, and these workings are the marks that we speak of: so that the Spirit witnesseth our sonship, as a reasonable soul witnesseth that you are a man and not a beast. You find by the acts of reason, that you have a reasonable soul, and then you know, that having a reasonable soul, you certainly are a man. So you find by the works or fruits of the Spirit, that you have the Spirit (that is, by marks; and Paul enumerates the fruits of the Spirit to that end), and then by finding that you have the Spirit you may certainly know that you are the child of God. 2. Also, as the reasonable soul is its own discerner by the help of the body (while it is in it) and so witnesseth our humanity effectively as well as objectively (but first in order objectively, and next effectively); so doth the Spirit effectively discover itself to the soul, by illuminating us to discern it, and exciting us to search, and giving us that spiritual taste and feeling of its workings, and so of its presence, by which it is best known. But still it witnesseth objectively, first, and its effective witnessing is but the causing us to discern its objective witness. Or (to speak more plainly), the Spirit witnesses first and principally, by giving us those graces and workings which are our marks; and then, secondly, by helping us to find and feel those workings or marks in ourselves; and then, lastly, by raising comforts in the soul upon that discovery. Take heed therefore of expecting any such inward witness of the Spirit, as some expect, viz. a discovery of your adoption directly; without first discovering the signs of it within you; as if by an inward voice he should say to you, 'Thou art a child of God and thy sins are pardoned.'

This that I described to you, is the true witness of the Spirit. This mistake is so dangerous, that I had thought to have made it a peculiar direction by itself, to warn you of

it; and now I have gone so far, I will dispatch it here. Two dangerous consequents I find do follow this unwarrantable expectation of the first immediate efficient revelation that we are adopted.

1. Some poor souls have languished in doubtings and trouble of mind almost all their days, in expectation of such a kind of witness as the Spirit useth not to give; when in the mean time they have other sufficient means of comfort, and knew not how to improve them; yea, they had the true witness of the Spirit in his inhabitation and holy workings, and did not know it; but run as Samuel did to Eli, not knowing the voice of God; and look for the Spirit's testimony when they had it, as the Jews for Elias and the Messias.

2. Others do more dangerously err, by taking the strong conceit of their own fantasy for the witness of the Spirit; as soon as they do but entertain the opinion that it must be such a witness of the Spirit, without the use of marks, that must assure men of their adoption, presently they are confident that they have that witness themselves. It is scarce likely to be God's Spirit that is so ready upon the mere change of an opinion. The devil useth to do as much to cherish presumption, as to destroy true faith and assurance. It is a shrewd sign that our persuasions of our truth of grace is a delusion, when we find the devil a friend to it, and helping it on. And it is a probable sign it is a good persuasion, when we find the devil an enemy to it, and still troubling us and endeavouring our disquiet.

And here I remember the scruple that troubleth some about the spirit of bondage, and the spirit of adoption. But you must understand, that by the spirit of bondage is meant that spirit, and those operations on the soul which the law of works did naturally beget in those that were under it; which was to be partly in bondage, to a task of ceremonious duties, and partly to the curse and obligation to punishment for disobedience, without any power to justify. They were said therefore to be in bondage to the law; and the law was said to be a yoke, which neither they nor their fathers were able to bear: Acts xv.

And by the spirit of adoption is meant, 1. That spirit, or those qualifications or workings in their souls, which by the Gospel God giveth only to his sons. 2. And which raise

in us some childlike affections to God, inclining us in all our wants to run to him in prayer, as to a Father, and to make our moan to him, and open our griefs, and cry for redress, and look to him, and depend on him as a child on the father. This spirit of adoption you may have, and yet not be certain of God's special love to you. The knowledge only of his general goodness and mercy, may be a means to raise in you true childlike affections. You may know God to have fatherly inclinations to you, and yet doubt whether he will use you as a child, for want of assurance of your own sincerity. And you may hope God is your Father, when yet you may apprehend him to be a displeased, angry father, and so he may be more your terror than your comfort. Are not you ready in most of your fears, and doubts, and troubles, to go to God before all other for relief? And doth not your heart sigh and groan to him, when you can scarcely speak? Doth not your troubled spirit there find its first vent? And say, 'Lord kill me not: forsake me not; my life is in thy hands; O soften this hard heart; make this carnal mind more spiritual! O be not such a stranger to my soul! Wo to me that I am so ignorant of thee! so disaffected to thee! so backward and disinclined to holy communion with thee; Wo to me, that can take no more pleasure in thee! and am so mindless and disregardful of thee! O that thou wouldst stir up in me more lively desires, and workings of my soul towards thee! and suffer me not to lie at such a distance from thee!' Are not such as these the breathings of your spirit? Why these are childlike breathings after God! This is crying 'Abba, Father.' This is the work of the spirit of adoption, even when you fear God will cast you off. You much mistake (and those that tell you so) if you think that the spirit of adoption lieth only in a persuasion that you are God's child, or that you may not have the spirit of adoption, without such a persuasion of God's adopting you. For God may adopt you, and give you that spirit which he gives only to his children, and possess you with true filial affections towards him, before ever you know yourself to be adopted; much more, though you may have frequent returning doubts of your adoption.

Having thus shewed you how far you may expect the witness of the Spirit, and how far you may and must make use of marks and qualifications, or actions of your own, for

the obtaining of assurance and settled peace, I shall add an answer to the principal objections of the Antinomians against this.

Object. They say, This is to draw men from Christ to themselves, and from the Gospel to the law; to lay their comforts, and build their peace upon any thing in themselves, is to forsake Christ, and make themselves their own saviours: and those teachers that persuade them to this, are teachers of the law, and false prophets, who draw men from Christ to themselves. All our own righteousness is as a menstruous cloth, and our best works are sin; and therefore we may not take up our assurance or comforts from them. We shall be always at uncertainties, and at a loss, or inconstant, up and down in our comforts, as long as we take them from any signs in ourselves: also our own graces are imperfect, and therefore unfit to be the evidences for our assurance.

Ans. Because I am not now purposely confuting the Antinomians, but only forearming you against their assaults; I shall not therefore give you half that I should otherwise say, for the explication of this point, and the confutation of their errors, but only so much as is necessary to your preservation: which I do, because they pretend to be the only preachers of free grace, and the only right comforters of troubled consciences; and because they have written so many books to that end, which if they fall into your hands may seem so specious, as that you may need some preservative. I suppose you remember what I have taught you so oft, concerning the difference of the law of works, and the law of grace, with their different conditions. Upon which supposition I explicate the point thus. 1. No man may look at his own graces or duties as his legal righteousness; that is, such as for which the law of works will pronounce him righteous. Nor yet may he take them for part of his legal righteousness, in conjunction with Christ's righteousness, as the other part; but here must go wholly out of ourselves, and deny and disclaim all such righteousness of our own. We have no works which make the reward to be not of grace but of debt. We must not once think that our graces, duties, or sufferings, can make satisfaction to God's justice for our sin and unrighteousness; nor yet that they are any part of that satisfaction. Here we ascribe all to

Christ, who is the only sacrifice and ransom. 4. Nor must we think that our duties or graces are properly meritorious ; this also is to be left as the sole honour of Christ. 5. Yet that we may and must raise our assurance and comforts from our own graces and duties, shall appear in these clear reasons following, which shew also the grounds on which we may do it.

1. Pardon, justification, and adoption, and salvation, are all given to us in the Gospel only conditionally (if we believe), and the condition is an act, or rather several acts of our own. Now till the condition be performed, no man can have any certainty that the benefit shall be his, nor can he by any other means (ordinarily) be certain of the benefit, but by that which ascertains him that he hath performed the condition. God saith, "He that believeth shall be saved." No man can know then that he shall be saved, till he first know that he believeth. Else he should know either contrary to that which is written, or more than that which is written; and justification and adoption should be given some other way than by the Gospel promise, (for that promise giveth them only conditionally, and so suspendeth the actual right, upon the performance of the condition). But if any can shew any other way, by which God maketh over pardon and adoption, besides the Gospel promise, let them do it; but I will not promise suddenly to believe them, for it was never yet shewed as I know of. Also, if men must not look at their own performance of the condition, to prove their right to the benefit, then either all or none must believe that they have that right; for the promise saith, "He that believeth shall be saved." And this is a promise of life conditionally to all. If all must believe that they shall be saved, then most of the world must believe a lie. If the true believer may not therefore conclude that he shall be saved, because he performeth the condition of the promise, then no man may believe it. And for that absolute promise of the new heart, no man can, or may believe that it is his, till he have that new heart which it promiseth; that is, till it be fulfilled. For there is no mark by which a man can know whether that promise belong to him or no beforehand, and if all should believe that it belongs to them, most would find it false.

2. God hath not redeemed us by his Son to be lawless.

To be without law is to be without government. We are without the law; that is, of works or of Moses, but not without law; Jesus Christ is our ruler, and he hath made us a law of grace; an easy yoke, and commands that are not grievous. This law hath precepts, promises, and threats; it must needs be either obeyed or disobeyed; and so the penalty must be due or not due; and the reward due or not due. He that performs the condition, and so to whom the reward is due, and not the penalty, is righteous in the sense of this law. As when we are accused to be sinners against the law of works, and so to deserve the penalty of that law, we must confess all, and plead the righteousness of Christ's satisfaction for our justification. So when we are accused to be final unbelievers or impenitent, and so not to have performed the conditions of the new covenant, we must be justified by our own faith and repentance, the performance of that condition; and must plead, not guilty. And so far our own acts are our evangelical righteousness, and that of such necessity, that without it no man can have part in Christ's righteousness, nor be saved. I would desire any man else to tell me, what else he will plead at judgment, when the accuser chargeth him (or if he do so charge him) with final unbelief? Will he confess it, and say, 'Christ hath believed and repented for me?' That is as much as to say, 'Christ was a believer for infidels, that he might save infidels.' All false. If he will not say thus (and lying will do no good) then must he plead his own believing and repenting, as his righteousness, in opposition to that accusation. And if it be of such use then, and be called a hundred times in Scripture, "our righteousness," and we righteous for it, then doubtless we may accordingly try by it now, whether we shall then be able to come off and be justified, or no; and so may build our comfort on it.

3. Conscience is a witness and judge within us, and doth, as under God, accuse and condemn, or excuse and acquit. Now if conscience must absolve us only so far as we are innocent, or do well, or are qualified with grace, then it is impossible but these our qualifications and actions should be some ground of our comfort. See Acts xxiv. 16. xxiii. 1. Rom. ii. 15, 16.

4. Those which are our graces and works, as we are the subjects and agents, are the graces and works of God, of

Christ, of the Holy Ghost dwelling in us. If therefore we may not rejoice in our own works, or graces, then we may not rejoice in the works or gifts of God, Christ, or the Holy Ghost. And,

5. Our graces are the spiritual life or health of the soul, and our holy actions are the vital operations. Now life and health are necessary; rejoicing, delighting things of themselves; and vital actions are necessarily pleasant and delectable.

6. Our graces and holy actions must needs rejoice us in respect of their objects; for the object of our love, trust, hope, meditation, prayer, conference, &c. is God himself, and the Lord Jesus, and the joys of heaven. And how can such actions choose but rejoice us!

7. Yea, rejoicing itself, and delighting ourselves in God is not only one part of our duty, but that great duty wherein lieth the height of our Christianity. And how vain a speech is it to say, that we may not take up our comforts from our own works, nor rejoice in any thing of our own; when even rejoicing itself, and delighting, and comforting ourselves, is one part of our duty?

8. As God in Christ is the chief object and ground of our comfort (so that we must rejoice in nothing but God, and the cross of Christ, in that kind, or in co-ordination with them); so it is the office of every grace and holy work, and ordinance, and means, to be subservient to Christ, either for the attaining of Christ, or applying his merits, or they are the effects of his merits. Now if we must love and rejoice in Christ principally, then must we needs love and rejoice in all those things that stand in a necessary subordination to him, in their places. And therefore to say, 'We must rejoice in Christ only, and therefore not in any graces or duties of our own,' is as wise, as if a wife should cast her husband's clothes and meat out of doors and say, 'You charged me to admit none into my chamber but yourself.' Or as if a physician, having told his patients, 'I will cure you, if you will trust me only for the cure;' thereupon the patients should cast away his medicines, and shut the doors against his servants and apothecaries, and say, 'We must trust none but the physician.'

9. All the failings of our duties are pardoned, and they accepted in Christ; and therefore we may rejoice in them.

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10. Our duties have a double tendency to our salvation. 1. As the condition to which God hath promised it as the crown and reward (in a hundred texts of Scripture), and may we not comfort ourselves in that which God promiseth heaven to? 2. As a natural means to our obedience and further protection (as watchfulness, meditation, &c. tend to destroy sin), as Paul saith to Timothy, "Take heed to thyself, and to thy doctrine, and in so doing, thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee;" 1 Tim. iv. 16. and may we not take comfort in that which tends to save our own and our brethren's souls?

11. We shall be judged according to our works; therefore we must judge ourselves according to our works; and so must judge our state good or bad, according to our works. For can man judge by a righter way than God will? At least is it not lawful for man to judge as God doth?

12. We must judge of others in probability, according to their external works, even the tree by the fruits; therefore we must judge of ourselves in certainty, according to our internal and external works together, which we may certainly know.

13. If we may not rejoice in any of our graces, then we may not be thankful for them, for thankfulness is accompanied with joy; but we must be thankful.

14. If we may not rejoice in our duties, we may not repent or sorrow for the neglect of them; and if we may not rejoice in our graces, we may not lament the want of them. (for these are as the two ends of the balance, that one goes down when the other goes up; or as day and night, light and darkness). But the consequent is intolerable.

15. This would overthrow all religion. For what a man cannot rejoice in, he cannot love, he cannot esteem, regard, be careful to obtain, be fearful of losing, &c.

16. God delighteth in our graces and holy duties, and is well pleased with them; and therefore it is lawful and needful that we do as God doth; Jer. ix. 24. Heb. xi. 5. Abel's sacrifice by faith obtained testimony that he pleased God. "To do good, and to communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased;" Heb. xiii. 16.

17. The saints of God have not only tried themselves by their graces and duties, and commanded others to try by

them, but have gloried and rejoiced in their duties and sufferings. "This is our rejoicing, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, we have had our conversation among you;" 2 Cor. i. 12. "They gloried that they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ;" Acts v. 41. "I have therefore whereof I may glory in Jesus Christ, in those things which pertain to God;" Rom. xv. 17. "We glory in tribulation," &c.; chap. v. 3. "Though I should desire to glory, I should not be a fool. I glory in mine infirmities;" 2 Cor. xii. 6. 9. "Let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me;" Jer. ix. 24. "I had rather die than any should make my glorying void;" 1 Cor. ix. 15. "Let every man prove his own work, so shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another;" Gal. vi. 4.

18. Scripture nameth many of our own graces and duties, as the certain marks of our justification and right to glory. Even Christ with his own mouth, gives us many; "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also;" Matt. vi. 21. "He that doth evil hateth the light, &c. but he that doth good cometh to the light, that," &c." John iii. 10. Matt. v. is full of such; "Blessed are the poor in spirit, the pure in heart," &c.

19. We may rejoice in other men's good works and graces (and do, if we be true Christians), therefore in our own.

20. We may rejoice in God's outward mercies; therefore much more in inward, and such as accompany salvation. All these arguments prove, that we may take up our comfort from our own gracious qualifications and actions (not in opposition to Christ, but in subordination to him), and most of them prove that we may fetch our assurance of salvation from them, as undoubted evidences thereof.

I have said the more in answer to these objections, 1. Because never any came with fairer pretences of exalting Christ, and maintaining the honour of his righteousness and free grace, and of denying ourselves and our own righteousness. 2. And yet few doctrines more dishonour Christ, and destroy the very substance of religion. Even as if a man should cry down him that would praise and commend obedience to the king, and say, 'You must praise nothing but the king. So do these cry down our looking at, and re-

joicing in our love to Christ, and our thankfulness to him, and our obedience, and all under pretence of honouring him. Nay, they will not have us rejoice in one part of Christ's salvation (his saving us from the power of sin, and his sanctifying us) under pretence that we dishonour the other part of his salvation (his justifying us). If ever satan transformed himself into an angel of light, and his ministers into ministers of light, it is in the mistakes of the Antinomians; and no people in the world (except carnal libertines, whom this doctrine fits to a hair) are in more danger of them, than poor, doubting Christians, under trouble of conscience; especially if they be not judicious, and skilled in the doctrine of Christ. For the very pretence of extolling Christ and free grace, will take much with such; and any new way will sometimes seem to give them comfort, upon the very novelty and sudden change.

Having thus proved that you may, and must fetch your special comfort and assurance from evidences, and that your first evidence is your faith, I shall open this more fully under the next Direction.

Direct. XI. In the trial of your state, 'Be sure that you make use of infallible signs of sincerity, and take not those for certain which are not.'

And to that end remember what I said before, that you must well understand wherein the nature of saving faith, and so of all saving grace doth consist. And when you understand this, write it down in two or three lines; and both at your first trial, and afterward, whenever any doubts do drive you to a review of your evidence, still have recourse only to those signs, and try by them. What these signs are, I have shewed you so fully in the forecited place in my Book of Rest, that I shall say but little now. Remember that infallible signs are very few; and that whatsoever is made the condition of salvation, that is the most infallible evidence of our salvation, and therefore the fittest mark to try by; and therefore faith in God the Father and the Redeemer, is the main evidence. But because I have elsewhere shewed you, that this faith is comprehensive of love, gratitude, resolution to obey, and repentance, let me more particularly open it to help you in the trial. To prove any grace to be saving, it is necessary that you prove that salvation is fully promised to him that hath it. Now if you will

know what it is that hath this promise, I will tell you, 1. As to the object. 2. The act. 3. The degree or modification of the act. For all these three must be inquired after if you will get assurance. 1. The object is principally God, and the Redeemer Christ. And secondarily the benefits given by Christ; and under that, the means to attain the principal benefits, &c. 2. The act hath many names drawn from respective and moral differences in the object, as faith, desire, love, choosing, accepting, receiving, consenting, &c. But properly all are comprised in one word, 'willing.' The understanding's high estimation of God, and Christ, and grace, is a principal part of true saving grace; but yet it is difficult, and scarce possible to judge of yourself by it rightly, but only as it discovers itself by prevailing with the will. 3. The degree of this act must be such, as ordinarily prevaileth against its contrary; I mean, both the contrary object, and the contrary act to the same object. But because I doubt school-terms do obscure my meaning to you (though they are necessary for exactness), I will express the nature of saving grace in two or three marks as plain as I can.

1. Are you heartily willing to take God for your portion? And had you rather live with him in glory in his favour and fullest love, with a soul perfectly cleansed from all sin, and never more to offend him, rejoicing with his saints in his everlasting praises, than to enjoy the delights of the flesh on earth, in a way of sin and without the favour of God?

2. Are you heartily willing to take Jesus Christ as he is offered in the Gospel? that is, to be your only Saviour, and Lord, to give you pardon by his bloodshed, and to sanctify you by his word and Spirit, and to govern you by his laws?

(Because this general containeth and implieth several particulars, I will express them distinctly.)

Here it is supposed that you know this much following of the nature of his laws. For to be willing to be ruled by his laws in general, and utterly unwilling when it comes to particulars, is no true willingness or subjection. 1. You must know that his laws reach both to heart and outward actions. 2. That they command a holy, spiritual, heavenly life: 3. That they command things so cross and displeasing to the flesh, that the flesh will be still murmuring and striving against obedience. Particularly, 1. They command

things quite cross to the inclinations of the flesh; as to forgive wrongs, to love enemies, to forbear malice and revenge, to restrain and mortify lust and passion, to abhor and mortify pride, and be low in our own eyes, and humble and meek in spirit. 2. They command things that cross the interest of the flesh and its inclination both together; I mean which will deprive it of its enjoyments, and bring it to some suffering? As to perform duties even when they lay us open to disgrace and shame, and reproach in the world; and to deny our credit, rather than forsake Christ or our duty. To obey Christ in doing what he commandeth us, though it would hazard or certainly lose our wealth, friends, liberty and life itself; forsaking all rather than to forsake him; to give to the poor, and other good uses, and that liberally, according to our abilities. To deny the flesh all forbidden pleasures, and make not provisions to satisfy its lusts, but to crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts thereof; and in this combat to hold on to the end, and to overcome. These are the laws of Christ, which you must know, before you can determine whether you are indeed unfeignedly willing to obey them. Put therefore these further questions to yourself, for the trial of your willingness to be ruled by Christ according to his laws.

3. Are you heartily willing to live in the performance of those holy and spiritual duties of heart and life, which God hath absolutely commanded you? And are you heartily sorry that you perform them no better? With no more cheerfulness, delight, success, and constancy?

4. Are you so thoroughly convinced of the worth of everlasting happiness, and the intolerableness of everlasting misery, and the truth of both; and of the sovereignty of God the Father, and Christ the Redeemer, and your many engagements to him; and of the necessity and good of obeying; and the evil of sinning, that you are truly willing; that is, have a settled resolution to cleave to Christ, and obey him in the dearest, most disgraceful, painful, hazardous, flesh-displeasing duties; even though it should cost you the loss of all your worldly enjoyments, and your life?

5. Doth this willingness or resolution already so far prevail in your heart and life, against all the interest and temptations of the world, the devil, and your flesh, that you do

ordinarily practise the most strict and holy, the most self-denying, costly, and hazardous duties that you know God requireth of you, and do heartily strive against all known sin, and overcome all gross sins; and when you fall under any prevailing temptation, do rise again by repentance, and begging pardon of God, through the blood of Christ, do resolve to watch and resist more carefully for the time to come?

In these five marks is expressed the Gospel-description of a true Christian.

Having laid down these marks, I must needs add a few words for the explaining of some things in them, lest you mistake the meaning, and so lose the benefit of them.

1. Observe that it is your willingness, which is the very point to be tried. And therefore, 1. Judge not by your bare knowledge. 2. Judge not by the stirring or passionate workings of your affections. I pray you forget not this rule in any of your self-examinings. It is the heart that God requireth. "My son, give me thy heart;" Prov. xxiii. 26. If he hath the will, he hath the heart. He may have much of our knowledge, and not our heart. But when we know him so thoroughly as to will him unfeignedly, then he hath our heart. Affectionate workings of the soul to God in Christ, are sweet things, and high and noble duties and such as all Christians should strive for. But they are not the safest marks to try our states by. 1. Because there may be a solid, sincere intention and choice in and of the will, where there is little stirring perceived in the affections. 2. Because the will is the master-commanding faculty of the rational soul; and so if it be right, that man is upright and safe. 3. Because the passions and affections are so mutable and uncertain. The will can command them but imperfectly; it cannot perfectly restrain them from vanities; much less can it perfectly raise them to that height, as is suitable to the excellency of our heavenly objects. But the object itself, with its sensible manner of apprehension, moves them more than all the command of the will. And so we find by experience, that a godly man, when with his utmost private endeavour, he cannot command one stirring pang of divine love or joy in his soul, yet upon the hearing of some moving sermon, or the sudden receiving of some extraordinary mer-

cy, or the reading of some quickening book, he shall feel perhaps some stirring of that affection. So when we cannot weep in private one tear for sin, yet at a stirring sermon, or when we give vent to our sorrows, and ease our troubled hearts into the bosom of some faithful friend, then we can find tears. 4. Because passions and affections depend so much on the temperature of the body. To one they are easy, familiar, and at command; to another (as honest) they are difficult and scarce stirred at all. With most women, and persons of weaker tempers, they are easier than with men. Some cannot weep at the death of a friend, though never so dear, no, nor perhaps feel very sensible, inward grief; and yet perhaps would have redeemed his life at a far dearer rate (had it been possible) than those that can grieve and weep more abundantly. 5. Because worldly things have so great an advantage on our passions and affections. 1. They are sensible and near us, and our knowledge of them is clear. But God is not to be seen, heard, or felt by our senses, he is far from us, though locally present with us; we are capable of knowing but little, very little of him. 2. Earthly things are always before our eyes, their advantage is continual. 3. Earthly things being still the objects of our senses, do force our passions, whether we will or not, though they cannot force our wills. 6. Because affections and passions rise and fall, and neither are nor can be in any even and constant frame, and therefore are unfit to be the constant or certain evidence of our state; but the will's resolution, and choice may be more constant. So that I advise you rather to try yourself by your will, than by your passionate stirrings of love or longing, of joy or sorrow.

Object. 'But doth not the Scripture lay as much on love, as on any grace? And doth not Christ say, That except we love him above all, we cannot be his disciples?'

Ans. It is all very true. But consider, love hath two parts; the one in the will, which is commonly called a faculty of the soul, as rational; and this is the same thing that I call willing, accepting, choosing, or consenting. This complacency is true love to Christ; and this is the sure, standing mark. The other is the passionate part, commonly said to be in the soul, as sensitive; and this, though most commonly called love, yet is less certain and

constant, and so unfitter to try your state by though a great duty, so far as we can reach it.

2. You must understand and well remember, that it is not every willingness that will prove your sincerity: for wicked men may have slight apprehensions of spiritual things, which may produce some slight desires and wishes which yet are so feeble and heartless, that every lust and carnal desire overcomes them; and it will not so much as enable them to deny the grossest sin. But it must be the prevalent part of your will that God must have. I mean a great share, a deeper and larger room than any thing in the world; that is, you must have a higher estimation of God, and everlasting happiness, and Christ, and a holy life, than of any thing in the world; and also your will must be so disposed hereby, and inclined to God, that if God and glory, to be obtained through Christ by a holy, self-denying life, were set before you on the one hand, and the pleasure, profits, and honours of the world to be enjoyed in a way of sin, on the other hand, you would resolutely take the former, and refuse the latter. Indeed they are thus set before you, and upon your choice dependeth your salvation or damnation, though that choice must come from the grace of God.

3. Yet must you well remember, that this willingness and choice is still imperfect, and therefore when I mention a hearty willingness, I mean not a perfect willingness. There may be, and is in the most gracious souls on earth, much indisposedness, backwardness, and withdrawing of heart, which is too great a measure of unwillingness to duty; especially to those duties which the flesh is most averse from, and which require most of God and his Spirit to the right performance of them.

Among all duties, I think the soul is naturally most backward to these following. 1. To secret prayer, because it is spiritual, and requires great reverence, and hath nothing of external pomp or form to take us up with, and consisteth not much in the exercise of common gifts, but in the exercise of special grace, and the breathings of the Spirit, and searchings, pantings, and strivings, of a gracious soul towards God. (I do not speak of the heartless repeating of bare words, learned by rote, and either not understood, or not uttered from the feeling of the soul.) 2. To serious

meditation also is the soul very backward ; that is, either to meditate on God, and the promised glory, or any spiritual subject, to this end that the heart may be thereby quickened and raised, and graces exercised (though to meditate on the same subject, only to know or dispute on it, the heart is nothing near so backward). Or else to meditate on the state of our own hearts, by way of self-examination, or self-judging, or self-reprehension, or self-exciting. 3. Also to the duty of faithful dealing with each other's souls, in secret reproof and exhortation, plainly (though lovingly) to tell each other of our sins and danger, to this the heart is usually very backward ; partly through a sinful bashfulness, partly for want of more believing, lively apprehensions of our duty, and our brother's danger, and partly because we are loath to displease men and lose their favour, it being grown so common for men to fall out with those (if not hate them) that deal plainly and faithfully with them. 4. Also to take a reproof, as well as to give it, the heart is very backward. Even godly men, through the sad remainders of their sinfulness, do too commonly frown, and snarl, and retort our reproofs, and study presently how to excuse themselves, and put it by, or how to charge us with something that may stop our mouths, and make the reprover seem as bad as themselves. Though they dare not tread our reproofs under feet, and turn again, and all to rent us, yet they oft shew the remnants of a dogged nature, though when they review their ways it costs them sorrow. We must sugar and butter our words, and make them liker to stroking than striking, liker an approving than a reproving them, liker a flattery than faithful dealing, and yet when we have all done, they go down very hardly, and that but half way, even with many godly people when they are under a temptation. 5. The like may be said of all those duties which do pinch upon our credit or profit, or tend to disgrace us, or impoverish us in the world ; as the confessing of a disgraceful fault ; the free giving to the poor or sacred uses, according to our estates ; the parting with our own right or gain for peace ; the patient suffering of wrong, and forgiving it heartily, and loving bitter, abusive enemies, especially the running upon the stream of men's displeasure, and incurring the danger of being utterly undone in our worldly state (especially if men be rich, who do therefore as hardly get to heaven as a

camel through a needle's eye). And above all, the laying down of our lives for Christ. It cannot be expected, that godly men should perform all these with perfect willingness; the flesh will play its part, in pleading its own cause, and will strive hard to maintain its own interests. O the shifts, the subtle arguments, or at least the clamorous and importunate contradictions that all these duties will meet with in the best, so far as they are renewed, and their graces weak! So that you may well hence conclude that you are a sinner, but you may not conclude that you are graceless, because of a backwardness, and some unwillingness to duty.

Yet your willingness must be greater than your unwillingness, and so Christ must have the prevailing part of your will; and from that the denomination is usually taken. So that Scripture useth to affirm God's people to be willing even when they fail in the execution. So Paul (Rom. vii. 18.) saith, "To will is present with me, when how to do or perform he found not;" that is, not to obey so perfectly as he would do; not to love God so intensely and fervently; not to subdue passions and lusts so thoroughly; not to watch our thoughts, and words, and ways so narrowly, and order them so exactly, as the bent of his will did consent to. And lest any Arminian should pretend (as they do) that Paul speaks here in the person of an unregenerate man, as under the convictions of the law, and not as a man regenerate; it is plain in the text that he speaks of himself in the state which he was then in, and that state was a regenerate state. He expressly saith, it is thus, and thus with me; "So then I myself with my mind do serve the law of God, but with my flesh the law of sin;" ver. 25. And to put it out of doubt, the apostle speaks the like of all Christians, Gal. v. 17. "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." This is the plain exposition of Rom. vii. Here Scripture maketh the godly willing to do more than they do or can do, but yet it is not a perfect willingness, but it is the prevailing inclination and choice of the will, and that gives the name.

4. Observe further, that I add your actual performance of duty; because true hearty willingness will shew itself in actions and endeavours. It is but dissembling, if I should say I am willing to perform the strictest, holiest duties, and

yet do not perform them. To say I am willing to pray, and pray not; or to give to the poor, and yet give not; or to perform the most self-denying costly duties, and yet when it should come to the practice, I will not be persuaded or drawn to them. I will not confess a disgraceful sin, nor further a good cause to my danger, cost or trouble; nor reprove, nor submit to reproof, nor turn from the way of temptations or the like. Action must discover true willingness. The son that said to his father, "I go, Sir," but went not to labour in the vineyard, was not accepted or justified. If therefore you are in doubt whether your willingness be sincere, inquire into your practice, and performance. God commandeth you to pray, to instruct your family, to be merciful to the poor, to forgive those that wrong you, &c. The flesh and the devil persuade you from these. Do you perform them, or do you not? Though you may do it with backwardness and dulness, and weakness, yet do you do it? And desire you could do it better, and lament your misdoing it? And endeavour to do it better than you have formerly done? This shews then that the Spirit prevaieth, though the flesh do contradict it.

5. Yet here you must carefully distinguish of duties; for God hath made some to be secondary parts of the condition of the covenant, and so of flat necessity for the continuance or our justification, and for the attaining of glorification. Such are confessing Christ before men when we are called to it; confessing sin, praying, shewing mercy to the poor, forgiving wrongs, hearing and yielding to God's word, &c. still supposing that there be opportunity and necessities for the performance of these. But some duties there are that God hath not laid so great a stress or necessity on, though yet the wilful resolved omission in ordinary, of any known duty, is contrary to the nature of true obedience.

Also, the case may much differ with several persons, places and seasons, concerning duty; that may be a duty to one man, that is not to another; and at one place which is not at another, and at one season, which is not at another. And that may be a greater duty, and of indispensable necessity to one, which to another is not so great. It may stand with true grace, to omit that duty which men know not to be a duty, or not to be so to them (except where the duty is such, as is itself of absolute necessity to salvation);

but it cannot so stand with grace in those that know it, ordinarily to reject it.

6. Also you must understand, that when I say, that true willingness to be ruled by Christ, will shew itself in actual obedience; I do not mean it of every particular individual act which is our duty, as if you should judge yourself graceless for every particular omission of a duty; no, though you knew it to be a duty; and though you considered it to be a duty. For, 1. There may be a true habituated inclination and willingness to obey Christ rooted in the heart, when yet by the force of a temptation, the actual prevalency of it at that time, in that act, may be hindered and suppressed. 2. And at the same time, you do hold on in a course of obedience in other duties. 3. And when the temptation is overcome, and grace hath been roused up against the flesh, and you soberly recollect your thoughts, you will return to obedience in that duty also. Yea, how many days, or weeks, or months, a true Christian may possibly neglect a known duty, I will not dare to determine, (of which more anon). Yet such omissions as will not stand with a sincere resolution and willingness to obey Christ universally (I mean an habitual willingness) will not consist with the truth of grace.

7. I know the fourth mark, about forsaking all for Christ, may seem somewhat unseasonable and harsh to propound for the quieting of a troubled conscience. But yet, I durst not omit it, seeing Christ hath not omitted it; nay, seeing he hath so urged it, and laid such a stress on it in the Scripture as he hath done, I dare not daub, nor be unfaithful, for fear of troubling. Such skinning over the wound will but prepare for more trouble and a further cure. Christ thought it meet even to tell young beginners of the worst, (though it might possibly discourage them, and did turn some back) that they might not come to him upon mistaken expectations, and he requireth all that will be Christians, and be saved, to count their cost beforehand, and reckon what it will stand them in to be Christ's disciples; and if they cannot undergo his terms (that is, to deny themselves, take up their cross, forsake all and follow him) they cannot be his disciples. And Christ had rather they knew it beforehand, than to deceive themselves, or to turn back when they meet with what they never thought of, and then to

imagine that Christ had deceived them, and drawn them in, and done the wrong.

8. When I say in the fourth mark, that you must have a settled resolution, I mean the same thing as before I did by hearty willingness. But it is meeter here to call it resolution, because this is the proper name for that act of the will, which is a determination of itself upon deliberation, after any wavering, to the doing or submitting to any thing as commanded. I told you it must be the prevailing act of the will that must prove you sincere : every cold ineffectual wish will not serve turn. Christ seeks for your heart on one side, and the world with its pleasures, profits, and honours on the other side. The soul, which upon consideration of both, doth prefer Christ in his choice, and reject the world (as it is competitor with him) and this not doubtingly and with reservation for further deliberation or trial, but presently passeth his consent for better and worse, this is said to be a resolving. And I know no one word that more fitly expresth the nature of that grace which differenceth a true Christian from all hypocrites, and by which a man may safely judge of his estate.

9. Yet I here add, that it must be a settled resolution ; and that to intimate, that it must be an habitual willingness or resolution. The prevalency of Christ's interest in the soul must be an habitual prevalency. If a man that is terrified by a rousing sermon, or that lieth in expectation of present death, should actually resolve to forsake sin, or perform duty, without any further change of mind, or habit, or fixedness of this resolution, it would be of no great value, and soon extinguished. Though yet I believe that no un-sanctified man doth ever attain to that full resolution for Christ, which hath a complacency in Christ accompanying it, and which may be termed the prevailing part of the will. Those that seem resolved to day to be for Christ, and to deny the world and the flesh, and the next day are unresolved again, have cause to suspect that they were never truly resolved. Though the will of a godly man may lie under declinings in the degrees of resolution, yet Christ hath always his habitual resolutions, and usually his actual in a prevalent degree.

10. I add also the grounds (in the fourth mark) on which this resolution must be raised. For false grounds in the

understanding will not bear up a true resolution in the will. And therefore we put the articles of our creed before our profession of consent and obedience. Sound doctrine and sound belief of it breeds a sound resolution, and makes a sound heart and life. If a man resolve to obey Christ, upon a conceit that Christ will never put him upon any suffering (else he would not resolve it) and that he will give him such brutish pleasures when he is dead, as Mahomet hath promised to his disciples, this resolution were not sound, yet in many lesser points of doctrine a true Christian may be unsound, and yet soundly cleave to the foundation. He may build hay and stubble possibly ; but the foundation must be held.

11. Observe well (lest you mistake me) that I speak only of the necessity of your present resolving to forsake all for Christ, if he call you to it ; but I speak not of your absolute promise or prediction, that eventually you shall not deny or forsake him. You may be uncertain how you shall be upheld in a day of trial, and yet you may now be resolved or fully purposed in your own mind what to do. To say, 'I will not consent, purpose or resolve, unless I were certain to perform my resolutions, and not to flag or change again ;' this is but to say, I will be no Christian, unless I were sure to persevere. I will not be married to Christ, lest I should be drawn to break my covenant with him.

12. Also observe, that when I speak of your resolving to forsake all for Christ, it is not to cast away your state or life, but to submit it to his dispose, and to relinquish it only in case that he command you so.

13. And I do not intend that you should be able thus to resolve of yourself without the special grace of God ; nor yet without it to continue those resolutions, much less to perform them by actual suffering.

Object. 'But I cannot be sure that God will give me grace to persevere, or at least not to deny him, as Peter did ; and therefore I should neither promise nor resolve what I cannot be certain to perform.'

Ans. 1. I suppose you have read the many Scriptures and arguments which our divines ordinarily use to prove that the true believers shall not fall quite away. And I know not how the opposers can answer that text which themselves use to allege for the contrary ; Matt. xiii. 6. 21,

Those that believe for a time, and in the time of persecution fall away, it is because the seed had not depth of earth, the word never took rooting in their hearts. Whence it seems that it may be well inferred, that those shall not fall away in time of temptation, in whom the word of God hath taken deep rooting. And that is, in them in whose hearts or wills Christ hath a stronger interest than the creature, or those that have a well-grounded, unreserved, habituated or settled resolution to be for Christ. 2. However, your present resolution, and your covenanting with Christ, is no more but this; to say, 'I do consent;' or 'This I am resolved to do, by the help of God's grace.' 3. Else no man should be baptized or become a Christian, because he is uncertain to keep his covenants: for all that are baptized, do covenant and vow, "to forsake the world, flesh, devil," and fight under Christ's banner to their lives' end. Understand me therefore, that you are not to promise to do this by your own strength, but by the strength of Christ, as knowing that he hath promised his Spirit and grace for the aid of every true believer.

14. If your resolution at present be hearty, you ought not to vex and disquiet your mind, with doubtful tormenting fears what you should do, if you be put to it to forsake all; and suffer death for Christ, for he hath promised to lay no more on us than we can bear, but with the temptation will make us a way to come forth; 1 Cor. x. 13. either he will not bring us into trials beyond our strength; or else he will increase our strength according to our trials. He hath bid us pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:" and he hath promised, that "whatsoever we ask in the name of Christ according to his will, he will give us." So that if once you can but truly say, that it is your full resolution to forsake all for Christ if he call you to it, and that on the forementioned grounds, you ought not then to vex your soul with fears of the issue; for that is but to distrust God your Father and your strength. Only you must be careful to do your duty to the keeping up of your present resolutions, and to wait obediently on God for the help of his Spirit, and to beg it earnestly at his hands.

15. Much less is it lawful for men to feign and suppose such calamities to themselves, as God doth never try men by, and then to ask themselves, 'Can I bear these for Christ?'

And so to try themselves on false and dangerous grounds. Some use to be troubled, lest if they were put to long and exquisite torments for Christ, they should renounce him. One saith, 'I cannot endure the torments of hell for Christ;' another saith, 'Could I endure to be roasted, or torn in pieces so many weeks or days together?' Or 'Could I endure to die so many times over?' These are foolish, sinful questions, which Christ never desired you to put to yourselves. He never tries men's faith on this manner. Tormentors cannot go beyond his will. Nay, it is but very few he tries by death, and fewer by an extreme tormenting death. All this therefore proceeds from error.

16. Observe from the fifth mark, that the present prevalency of your resolutions now against those temptations which you encounter with, may well encourage you to expect that they should prevail hereafter, if God bring you into greater trials. Can you now follow Christ in a holy life, though your flesh repine, and would have its liberties and pleasures; and though the world deride or threaten you, or great ones turn against you and threaten your undoing? Can you part with your money to the poor, or to the promoting of any work of Christ, according to the measure of estate that God hath allotted you, notwithstanding all temptations to the contrary? Some trials you have now; if you can go well through these, you have no cause to disquiet your mind with fears of falling in greater trials. But he that cannot now deny his greedy appetite in meats and drink, so far as to forbear excess: nor can deny his credit with men; nor bear the scorns or frowns of the world, but be on the stronger side, and decline his duty to avoid danger, whatever become of conscience or God's favour, this man is not like to forsake and lay down his life for Christ and his cause.

Object 'But though I break through lesser trials, I am not sure to overcome in greater, for the same measure of grace will not enable a man to forsake all, which will enable him to forsake a little. Many have gone through smaller trials, and after forsake Christ in greater. And Christ makes it the property of temporaries that are not rooted in the faith, that they fall when tribulation and persecution for the Gospel ariseth, and therefore it seems they may stand till

then ; and if trial never come, they may never fall, and yet be unsound in the mean time.'

Ans. 1. If your trial now be considerable, the truth of grace may be manifested in it, though it be none of the greatest, and though in striving against sin you have not yet resisted unto blood. 2. If you carefully observe your own heart, you may discern whether the Spirit and your resolutions be prevalent, by their daily subduing and mortifying the flesh and its lusts. Nay, let me tell you, the victory of God's Spirit over the flattering, enticing world in prosperity, is as great and glorious, if not more, than that over the frowning, persecuting world in adversity. And therefore find the one, and you need not fear the other. Though I confess that hypocrites do not fall so visibly and shamefully always in prosperity as in adversity ; for they have more pretences, advantages, and carnal shifts, to hide the shame of their falls. And for that in the parable in Matt. xiii. I pray you mark one thing. Christ seems to speak of every several sort of hearers by a gradation, speaking last of those that go farthest. The first sort are the common, ignorant, negligent hearers, in whom the word takes no root at all. The second sort are those that give it a slight and shallow rooting, but no deep rooting at all ; these are they that fall away in tribulation. By falling away, is meant the plain deserting Christ or the substance of his cause. These men till this falling away, though they professed Christ, and heard the word with joy, yet no doubt did not crucify the flesh and the world, whereby they might have discovered their unsoundness if they would, before tribulation came. First, by discerning that the word was not deep rooted : 1. In their judgment and estimation. 2. Or in their wills and settled resolution. Secondly ; And by discerning the unmortified lusts of their hearts in the mean time. But it seems the third sort of hearers, likened to the thorny ground, went further than these ; for here it is only said by Luke, viii. 14. " That they bring no fruit to perfection." However, whether these went farther than the other, or not, it is certain that these also had their trial, and fell in the trial. The deceitfulness of riches overturned these, as the heat of persecution overturned the other. So that it is evident that prosperity puts faith to the trial, as well as ad-

versity. But mark the different manner of their falls and overthrows. They that are overthrown by adversity, are said to fall away, that is, to forsake Christ openly; but they that fall by prosperity, are not said to fall away; but only that the "deceitfulness of riches, and cares of the world, choke the word, so that it becomes unfruitful;" that is, brings no fruit to perfection. For usually these do not openly forsake Christ, but continue oft an unfruitful and hypocritical profession; insomuch that at that very time, when the word is choked and fruitless, yet the blade of profession may be as green as ever, and they may be so much in some duties, and have such golden words, and witty shifts to plead for every covetous practice, and put so fair a gloss on all their actions, that they may keep up the credit of being very eminent Christians. So that if your grace can carry you well through prosperity, you may be confident of the truth of it. 3. And then if it be thus proved true and saving, you have cause to be confident that it will hold out in adversity also, and cause you to overcome the shake of tribulation. I think most men are better in adversity than in prosperity, though I confess no adversity is so shaking, as that which leaves it in a man's choice to come out of it by sinning. As for a man in health to be persecuted, and the persecutor to say, 'If thou wilt turn to my side and way, I will give thee thy life and preferment with it;' but sickness or other sufferings imposed only by God, and which only God can take off, are nothing so shaking. For as the former draws us to please men, that they may deliver us, so this draws even the wicked to think of pleasing God, that he may deliver them.

17. Observe that when I ask 'whether this resolution do already prevail,' I do not mean any perfect prevailing; nay, sin may prevail to draw you to a particular act (and how many, I will not undertake to tell you) and yet still grace and the Spirit do conquer in the main. For you will say, that general and army get the victory who vanquish the other, and win the field, though yet perhaps a troop or regiment may be routed, and many slain.

18. When I speak of your 'overcoming all gross sins,' as I mean in ordinary, not doubting but it is too possible for a believer to commit a gross sin; so I confess that it is hard to tell just which sins are to be called gross, and which

infirmities only; or (as some speak) which are mortal, and which not. And therefore this mark hath some difficulties, as to the right trying of it (of which more anon).

19. Yet I desire that you join them all together in trial, seeing it is in the whole that the true and full description of a Christian is contained. The same description of a true Christian (presupposing his right belief) I have drawn up in our public church profession, which in this county, the ministers have agreed on; in the profession of consent in these words; ‘I do heartily take this one God for my only God and chief good; and this Jesus Christ for my only Lord, Redeemer and Saviour; and this Holy Ghost for my Sanctifier; and the doctrine by him revealed and sealed by his miracles, and now contained in the Holy Scriptures, do I take for the law of God, and the rule of my faith and life: and repenting unfeignedly of my sins, I do resolve through the grace of God sincerely to obey him, both in holiness to God, and righteousness to man, and in special love to the saints, and communion with them, against all the temptations of the devil, the world, and my own flesh, and this to the death.’ He that sincerely can speak these words, is a sincere Christian.

20. Lastly, that you may see that those five which I laid you down are all true marks, do but peruse these texts of Scripture following. For the first, Psalm xvi. 5. 2. lxxiii. 24—28. iv. 6, 7. i. 1—3. Josh. xxiv. 16—18. 21—24. Matt. vi. 19—21. Rom. vii. 24. viii. 17, 18. 23. Heb. xi. 10. 15, 16. 25—27. Psalm xvi. 5—8. For the second, see John i. 10—12. iii. 16. Mark xvi. 16. Acts xvi. 31. John xiv. 21. xvi. 27. Rom. xiv. 9. Luke xvi. 27. James i. 12. Matt. xxii. 37. 1 Cor. xvi. 22. Matt. x. 37. Rev. xxii. 14. Heb. v. 9. For the third, most of the same will serve, and Heb. xii. 14. Matt. vii. 24. Psalm i. 2, 3. Matt. v. 20. Acts x. 35. Rom. vii. 22. For the two last besides the former, see Heb. xi. 6. Rom. viii. 1—14. Gal. v. 17. 24. vi. 8. 1 Tim. vi. 9. Luke viii. 13. 1 John ii. 15. v. 4, 5. James i. 27. iv. 4. Gal. vi. 14. i. 4. Rom. xii. 2. Titus ii. 14. Matt. x. 37. Rom. ii. 5—7. Rev. xiv. 13. Phil. ii. 14. Col. iii. 23, 24. 1 Cor. iii. 8. 14. John xii. 16. 1 John iii. 22, 23. Gen. xxii. 16. Matt. x. 22. xxiv. 13. Heb. iii. 6. 14. vi. 11. Rev. ii. 26. 10. xii. 11.

Matt. xvi. 25. x. 39. Mark xvii. 33. Rom. viii. 9. 13. Luke xiii. 3. 5. Rom. vi. 4—6. 12. 14. 16, 17. 22.

And thus I have given you such marks as you may safely try yourself by, and cleared the meaning of them to you. Now let me advise you to this use of them. 1. In your serious self-examination, try only by these, and not by any uncertain marks. I know there be promises of life made to some particular duties and single qualifications in Scripture, as to humility, meekness, alms-deeds, love to the godly, &c.; but it is still both on supposition that they be not single in the person, but are accompanied with, and flow from that faith and love to God before-mentioned; and also that they are in a prevailing degree.

2. Whenever any fresh doubtings arise in you upon the stirrings of corruption, or debility of graces, still have recourse to these former marks; and while you find these, let not any thing cause you to pass wrong judgments on yourself. Lay these now to your own heart, and tell me, 'Are you not unfeignedly willing to have Christ on the terms that he is offered? Are you not willing to be more holy? And beg of him to make you so? Would you not be glad if your soul were more perfectly sanctified, and rid of that body of sin, though it were to the smart and displeasing of your flesh? Are you not willing to wait on God, in the use of his ordinances, in that poor weak measure as you are able to perform them? Durst you, or would you quit your part in God, heaven, Christ, and forsake the way of holiness, and do as the profane world doth, though it were to please your flesh, or save your state or life? Do you not daily strive against the flesh and keep it under, and deny its desires? Do you not deny the world when it would hinder you from works of mercy or public good, according to your ability? Is it not the grief of your soul when you fall, and your greatest trouble that you cannot walk more obediently, innocently and fruitfully? And do you not after sinning resolve to be more watchful for the time to come? Are you not resolved to stick to Christ and his holy laws and ways, whatever changes or dangers come, and rather to forsake friends and all that you have, than to forsake him? Yet in a godly jealousy and distrust of your own heart, do renounce your own strength, and resolve to do this only in the strength of Christ, and therefore daily beg it of him? Is it not your daily care

and business to please God and do his will, and avoid sinning in you weak measure ?' I hope that all this is so, and your own case ; which, if it be, you have infallible evidences, and want but the sight and comfort of them, you have the true grounds for assurance, though you want assurance itself ; your chief danger is over, though your trouble remain. Your soul is at the present in a safe condition, though not in the sense of it. You are in the state of salvation, though not of consolation. It must be your next work therefore to study God's mercies, and take notice what he hath done for your soul. Let not so blessed a guest as the Holy Ghost dwell in you unobserved. Shall he do such wonders in you, and for you, and you not know it, or acknowledge it ? Shall he new-beget you, and new-make you, and produce a spiritual and heavenly nature in you, who of yourself were so carnal and earthly, and will you not observe it ? Had you any of these holy desires, endeavours, or resolutions of yourself by nature ? Or have the ungodly about you any of them ? O that you knew what a work of wonderful mercy, wisdom and power, the Spirit performeth in the renewing of a soul ; then sure you would more observe and admire his love to you herein !

Direct. XII. The next rule for your direction for the right settling of your peace is this. ' You must know, that assurance of justification, adoption, and right of salvation, cannot be gathered from the smallest degree of saving grace.'

1. Here I must say something for explaining my meaning to you. 2. And then give you my reasons of this assertion.

1. Understand that I speak of God's ordinary working by means, not denying but God may, by a voice from heaven, or an angel, or other supernatural revelation, bestow assurance on whom he pleaseth. But I hope all wise Christians will take heed of expecting this, or of trusting too much to seeming revelations, unless they could prove that God useth to confer assurance in this way ; which I think they cannot.

2. By the smallest degree of grace, I mean, of faith, love, obedience, and those saving graces. whose acts are the condition of our salvation, and which in the fore-expressed marks I laid down to you. Do not therefore so mistake me,

as to think that I speak of a small measure of those common gifts which are separable from true sanctification; such as are extensive knowledge, memory, ability of utterance in preaching, repeating, exhorting or praying; an ornate, plausible winning deportment before men, such as is commonly called good breeding or manners; an affected, humble, complimentary familiarity and condescension, to creep into men's estimation and affections, and steal their hearts, &c. Many a one that is strong in saving grace, is weak in all these, and other the like.

Now for my reasons.

1. I conceive that it is not possible for any minister punctually to set down a discernible difference between the least measure of true saving grace, and the highest degree of common grace; and to say, just here it is that they part, or by this you may discern them. I do but say, I think so, because other men may know far more than I do; but I will say it as certain, that I am not able to do it, for my own part. This much I can tell, that the least degree of grace that is saving, doth determine the soul for God and Christ, against the world and flesh, that stand as competitors; and so where Christ's interest prevaleth in the least measure, there is the least measure of saving grace. As when you are weighing two things in the balance, and at last make it so near even weight, that one end is turned and no more: so when you are considering whether to be for Christ, or for the flesh and the world, and your will is but even a very little determined to Christ, and preferreth him; this is the least measure of saving grace. But then how a poor soul should discern this prevalent choice and determination of itself is all the question. For there is nothing more easy and common than for men to think verily, that they prefer Christ above the creature, as long as no temptation doth assault them, nor sensual objects stand up in any considerable strength to entice them. Nay, wicked men do truly, oftentimes, purpose to obey Christ before the flesh, and to take him for their Lord, merely in the general, when they do not know or consider the quality of his laws; that they are so strict and spiritual, and contrary to the flesh, and hazardous to their worldly hopes and seeming happiness. But when it comes to particulars, and God saith, 'Now deny thyself, and thy friend, and thy goods, and thy life for my sake;'

alas, it was never his resolution to do it; nor will he be persuaded to it. But he that said to God, who sends him to labour in his vineyard, "I go, Sir," when he comes to find the unpleasingness of the work, he goes not, nor ever sets a hand to it. So that it is evident, that it is no true, saving resolution or willingness, which prevaieth not for actual obedience. Now here comes in the unresolvable doubt, What is the least measure of obedience, that will prove a man truly willing and resolved, or to have truly accepted of Christ for his Lord? This obedience lieth in performing what is commanded, and avoiding what is forbidden. Now it is too certain, that every true believer is guilty of a frequent neglect of duty, yea, of known duty. We know we should love God more abundantly, and delight in him, and meditate more on him, and pray more oft and earnestly than we do, and instruct our families more diligently, and speak against sin more boldly, and admonish our neighbours more faithfully, with many the like. "The good that we would do, we do not;" Rom. vii. 19. Nay, the flesh so striveth against the Spirit, that "we cannot do the good we would;" Gal. v. 17. Nay, many a true Christian in time of temptation, hath been drawn to omit secret prayer, or family duties, almost wholly for a certain space of time; yea, and perhaps to be so corrupted in his judgment for a time, as to think he doth well in it, as also in forbearing praising God by psalms, receiving the sacraments, and communicating with the church, hearing the word publicly, &c. (for what duty almost is not denied of late?) and perhaps may not only omit relieving the poor for a time, but excuse it. Now what man can punctually determine just how often a true Christian may be guilty of any such omission? and just how long he may continue it? and what the duties be which he may possibly so omit, and what not?

So also in sins of commission. Alas, what sins did Noah, Lot, David, Solomon, Asa, Peter, &c. commit!

If we should say as the Papists and Arminians, that these being mortal sins, do for the time, till repentance restore him, cast a true Christian out of God's favour into a state of damnation; then what man breathing is able to enumerate those mortal sins, and tell us which be so damning, and which not? Nay, if he could say, drunkenness is one, and gluttony another, who can set the punctual stint,

and say, 'Just so many bits a man must eat before he be a glutton; or just so much he must drink before he be a drunkard? or by such a sign the turning point may be certainly known?' We may have signs by which we may be tried at the bar of man; but these are none of them taken from that smallest degree, which specifieth and denominates the sin before God. If we avoid the foresaid opinion that one such sin doth bring us into the state of damnation, yet is the difficulty never the less; for it is certain, that "he that commits sin is of the devil;" 1 John iii. 8. and there are spots, which are not the spots of God's children; and all true faith will mortify the world to us, and us to it, (Gal. vi. 14.), and "he that is in Christ hath crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts thereof," (chap. v. 24.); and that "if we live after the flesh we shall die;" Rom. viii. 13. And "his servants we are to whom we obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness;" chap. vi. 16. And "if we delight in iniquity, or regard it, God will not hear our prayers;" Psal. lxvi. 18. And that "he that nameth the name of Christ must depart from iniquity;" 1 Tim. ii. 19. And that "God will judge all men according to their works," and bid the workers of iniquity depart from him; Matt. vii. 23. Now can any man on earth tell us just how great, or how often sinning will stand with true grace, and how much will not? Who can find those punctual bounds in the word of God? I conclude, therefore, that no minister, or at least, none who is no wiser than I am, can give a true, discernible difference between the worst of saints, and the best of the unsanctified, or the weakest degree of true grace, and the highest of common grace; and so to help such weak Christians to true assurance of their salvation.

2. But as this is impossible to be declared by the teachers, so much more is it impossible to be discerned by the persons themselves, yea, though it could possibly be declared to him; and that for these reasons.

1. From the nature of the thing. Small things are hardly discerned. A little is next to none. 2. From the great darkness of man's understanding, and his unacquaintedness with himself (both the nature, faculties, and motions of his soul, naturally considered, and the moral state, dispositions, and motions of it), and is it likely that so blind an

eye can discern the smallest thing, and that in so strange and dark a place? Every purblind man cannot see an atom, or a pin, especially in the dark. 3. The heart is deceitful above all things, as well as dark; full of seemings, counterfeits, and false pretences. And a child in grace is not able to discover its jugglings, and understand a book, where almost every word is equivocal or mysterious. 4. The heart is most confused, as well as dark and deceitful; it is like a house, or shop of tools, where all things are thrown together on a heap, and nothing keeps its own place. There are such multiplicity of cogitations, fancies, and passions, and such irregular thronging in of them, and such a confused reception, and operation of objects and conceptions, that it is a wonderful difficult thing for the best Christian to discern clearly the bent and actions, and so the state of his own soul. For in such a crowd of cogitations and passions, we are like men in a fair or crowd of people, where a confused noise may be heard, but you cannot well perceive what any of them say, except either some one near you that speaks much louder than all the rest, or else except you single out some one from the rest, and go close to him to confer with him of purpose. Our intellect and passions are like the lakes of water in the common roads, where the frequent passage of horses doth so muddy it, that you can see nothing in it, especially that it is near the bottom; when in pure untroubled waters you may see a small thing. In such a confusion and tumult as is usually in men's souls, for a poor weak Christian to seek for the discovery of his sincerity, is according to the proverb, to seek for a needle in a bottle of hay. 5. Besides all this, the corrupt heart of man is so exceeding backward to the work of self-examination, and the use of other means, by which the soul should be familiarly acquainted with itself, that in a case of such difficulty it will hardly ever overcome them, if it were a thing that might be done. In the best, a great deal of resolvedness, diligence, and unwearied constancy in searching into the state of the soul, is necessary to the attainment of a settled assurance and peace. How much more in them that have so small, and almost undiscernible a measure of grace to discover. 6. Yet further, the conceptions, apprehensions, and consequently the sensible motions of the will, and especially the passions, are all naturally

exceeding mutable ; and while the mobile, agile spirits are any way the instruments, it will be so ; especially where the impression which is made in the understanding is so small and weak. Naturally man's mind and will is exceeding mutable, and turned into a hundred shapes in a few days, according as objects are presented to us, and the temperature of the body disposeth, helps, or hinders the mind. Let us hear one man reason the case, and we think he makes all as clear as the light ; let us hear another solve all his arguments, and dispute for the contrary, and then we see that our apprehensions were abused. Let us hear him reply and confute all again, and confirm his cause, and then we think him in the right again. Nothing more changeable than the conceivings and mind of man, till he be thoroughly resolved and habituated. Now in this case, how shall those that have but little grace, be able to discern it ? It will not keep the mind from fluctuating. If they seem resolved for obedience to Christ to-day, to-morrow they are so shaken by some enticing object, and force of the same temptation, that their resolution is undiscernible ; nay, actually they prefer sin at that time before obedience. It is impossible then but the soul should stagger and be at a loss ; for it will judge of itself as it finds itself, and it cannot discern the habitual prevalency of Christ's interest, when they feel the actual prevalency of the flesh's interest. For the act is the only discoverer of the habit. And if Peter himself should have fallen to the examination of his heart, whether he preferred Christ before his life, at the same time when he was denying and forswearing Christ to save his life, do you think he could have discerned it ? And yet even then Christ's interest was greatest in him habitually. If David should have gone to search, whether he preferred obedience to God, before his fleshly pleasure, when he was committing adultery ; or before his credit, when he was plotting the death of Uriah, what discovery do you think he would have made ? 7. Add to all these, that as these several distempers, were they but in the same measure in a weak Christian, as they are in the best or in most, would yet make the smallest measure of grace undiscernible (if we might suppose the smallest grace to be consistent with such a frame) ; so it is certain, that whoever he be that hath the least measure of grace to discover

in himself, he hath proportionably the least measure of abilities and helps to discover it, and the greatest measure of all the forementioned hindrances. He that hath but a very little repentance, faith, love, and obedience sincere, when he goeth to find it out, he hath in the same measure, a darker understanding to discern it than others have; and a greater strangeness and disacquaintance with himself, and more deceitfulness in his heart, and a greater confusion and hurly-burly in his thoughts and affections, and all more out of order and to seek. Also he hath a greater backwardness to the work of self-examination, and can hardly get his heart to it, and more hardly to do it thoroughly, and search to the quick, and most hardly to hold on against all withdrawing temptations, till he have made a clearer discovery. And lastly, his soul is more mutable than stronger Christians are; and therefore when cross actings are so frequent, he cannot discern the smallest prevailing habit. If (when you are weighing gold) the scales be turned but with one grain, every little jog, or wind, or unsteadfast holding, will actually lift up the heavier end; and its preponderation is with great wavering and mobility. 8. Yet further, consider, that those that have least grace, have most sin, habitual and actual; and they are so frequent in transgressing, that their failings are still in their eye, and thereby the prevalency of Christ's interest is made more doubtful and obscure. For when he asketh his own conscience, 'Do I will or love most the world and my fleshly delights, or Christ and his ways?' Presently conscience remembereth him at such a time, and such a time thou didst choose thy fleshly pleasures, profits, or credit, and refuse obedience. And it is so oft, and so foully, that the soul is utterly at a loss, and cannot discern the habitual prevalent bent and resolution of the will. 9. Besides, conscience is a judge in man's soul, and will be accusing and condemning men so far as they are guilty. Now, they that make work for the most frequent and terrible accusations of conscience that will stand with true grace, are unlikely to have assurance. For assurance quiets the soul, and easeth it; and a galled conscience works the contrary way. They that keep open the wound, and daily fret off the skin more, and are still grating on the galled part, are unlikely to have assurance. 10. Again, these weakest Christians being least in

duty, and most in sinning (of any in whom sin reigneth not), they are consequently most in provoking and displeasing God. And they that do so shall find that God will shew them his displeasure, and will displease them again. They must not look to enjoy assurance, or see the pleased face of God, till they are more careful to please him, and are more sparing, and seldom in offending him. As God's universal justice in governing the world, will make as great a difference between the sincerely obedient, and disobedient, as there is between heaven and hell, so God's paternal justice in governing his family, will make as wide a difference between the more obedient children, and the less obedient, as is between his dreadful frowns, and his joyous, reviving smiles; or between his smarting rod, or his encouraging rewards. 11. If God should give assurance and peace to the sinning and least obedient believers, he should not fit his providential disposals to their good. It is not that which their state requires, nor would it tend to their cure any more than a healing plaister to a sore that is rotten in the bottom, or a cordial to the removal of a cacochymy, or the purging out of corrupt, redundant humours. They are so inclined to the lethargy of security, that they have need of continual pinching, striking, or loud calling on, to keep them waking; (still remember that by this weak Christian, I mean not every doubting, distressed soul that is weak in their own apprehension, and little in their own eyes, and poor in spirit; but I mean those that have the least measure of sincere love to Christ, and desire after him, and tenderness of conscience, and care to please God, and the greatest measure of security, worldliness, pride, flesh-pleasing, and boldness in sinning, which is consistent with sincerity in the faith. I believe there is no father or mother, that hath children to govern, but they know by experience, that there is a necessity of frowns and rods for the more disobedient; and that rewards and smiles are no cure for stubbornness or contempt. 12. Lastly, Do but well consider, what a solecism in government it would be, and what desperate inconveniences it would have brought into the world, if God should have set such a punctual land-mark between his kingdom and the kingdom of satan, as we are ready to dream of. If God should have said in his word, just so oft a man may be drunk, or may murder, or commit adul-

tery, or steal, or forswear himself, and yet be a true Christian and be saved ! Or just so far a man may go, in neglecting duty to God and man, and in cherishing his flesh, hiding, his sin, &c., and yet be a true believer and be saved. This would, 1. Embolden men in sinning, and make them think, I may yet venture, for I stand on safe ground. 2. And it would hinder repentance. Indeed it would be the way to rob God of his honour, and multiply provocations against him, and keep his children in disobedience, and hinder their growth in holiness, and cause a deformity in Christ's body, and a shame to his religion and sacred name. As for those that say, assurance never encourageth men in sin, but tends to destroy it ; I answer, it is true of God's assurance, seasonably given to those that are fit for it, and used by them accordingly. But if God should have told all the world, just how far they may sin, and yet be certain of salvation, this would have bred assurance in those that were unfit for it ; and it would have been but the putting of new wine into old cracked bottles ; or a new piece into an old garment, that would break them, or make worse the rent. I must therefore freely tell these objectors (I am sorry that so many of my old acquaintance now harp so much on this Antinomian string), that ignorance or error hath so blinded them, that they have forgotten, or know not, 1. What an imperfect piece the best is in this life, much more the worst true Christian. 2. Nor what a subtle devil we have to tempt us. 3. Nor what an active thing corruption is, and what advantage it will take on unseasonable assurance. 4. Nor what the nature of grace and sanctification is ; and how much of it lies in a godly jealousy of ourselves, and apprehension of our danger, and that "the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom : " see Heb. iv. 1. Nay, 5. They have forgotten what a man is, and how inseparable from his nature is the principle of self-preservation, and how necessary the apprehension of danger, and the fear of evil to himself, is to the avoiding of that evil, and so to his preservation. 6. Yea, if they knew but what a commonwealth or a family is, they would know that fear of evil, and desire of self-preservation, is the very motive to associations, and the groundwork of all laws and government, and a great part of the life of all obedience.

And thus I have fully proved to you, that the smallest

measure of grace cannot help men to assurance in God's ordinary way.

Perhaps you will say, 'What comfort is there in this to a poor weak Christian?' This is rather the way to put him quite out of heart and hope. I answer, No such matter. I shall shew the uses of this observation in the following Directions. In the mean time I will say but this, The expectations of unseasonable assurance, and out of God's way, is a very great cause of keeping many in languishing and distress, and of causing others to turn Antinomians, and snatch at comforts which God never gave them, and to feign and frame an assurance of their own making, or build upon the delusions of the great deceiver, transforming himself into an angel of light.

Direct. XIII. From the last mentioned observation, there is one plain consecretary arising, which I think you may do well to note by the way, viz. 'That according to God's ordinary way of giving grace, it cannot be expected that Christians should be able to know the very time of their first receiving or acting true saving grace, or just when they were pardoned, justified, adopted, and put into a state of salvation.'

This must needs be undeniable, (if you grant the former point, That the least measure of grace yieldeth not assurance of its sincerity, which is proved); and withal, if you grant this plain truth, That it is God's ordinary way, to give a small measure of grace at the first. This I prove thus: 1. Christ likeneth God's kingdom of grace to a grain of mustard-seed, which is at the first, the least of all seeds, but after cometh to a tree; and to a little leaven, which leaveneth the whole lump. I will not deny, but this may be applied to the visible progress of the Gospel, and increase of the church. But it is plainly applicable also to the kingdom of Christ within us. 2. The Scripture oft calleth such young beginners, babes, children, novices, &c. 3. We are all commanded still to grow in grace; which implieth, that we have our smallest measure at the first. 4. Heb. v. 12. sheweth, that strength of grace should be according to time and means. 5. Common experience is an invincible argument for this. Men are at a distance from Christ, when he first calleth them to come to him; and many steps they have toward him before they reach to him. We are

first so far enlightened as to see our sin and misery, and the meaning and truth of the Gospel, and so roused out of our security, and made to look about us, and see that we have souls to save or lose, and that it is no jesting matter to be a Christian. And so we come to understand the tenor of the covenant, and Christ's terms of saving men. But, alas, how long is it usually after this, before we come sincerely to yield to his terms, and take him as he is offered, and renounce the world, flesh, and the devil, and give up ourselves to him in a faithful covenant! We are long deliberating, before we can get our backward hearts to resolve. How then should a man know just when he was past the highest step of common or preparative grace, and arrived at the first step of special grace?

Yet mark, that I here speak only of God's ordinary way of giving grace; for I doubt not, but in some God may give a higher degree of grace at the first day of their conversion, than some others do attain in many years. And those may know the time of their true conversion, both because the effect was so discernible, and because the suddenness makes the change more sensible and observable.

But this is not the ordinary course. Ordinarily convictions lie long on the soul before they come to a true conversion. Conscience is wounded, and smarting long, and long grudging against our sinful and negligent courses, and telling us of the necessity of Christ and a holy life; before we sincerely obey conscience, and give up ourselves to Christ. We seldom yield to the first conviction or persuasion. The flesh hath usually too long time given it to plead its own cause, and to say to the soul, 'Wilt thou forsake all thy pleasure and merry company and courses? Wilt thou beggar thyself? or make thyself a scorn or mocking-stock to the world? Art thou ever able to hold out in so strict a course? and to be undone? and to forsake all, and lay down thy life for Christ? Is it not better to venture thyself in the same way as thou hast gone in, as well as others do, and as so many of thy forefathers have done before thee?' Under such sinful deliberations as these we usually continue long before we fully resolve; and many demurs and delays we make before we conclude to take Christ on the terms that he is offered to us. Now I make no doubt but most or many Christians can remember how and when

God stirred their consciences, and wakened them from their security, and made them look about them, and roused them out of their natural lethargy. Some can tell what sermon first did it; others can remember by what degrees and steps God was doing it long. The ordinary way appointed by God for the doing of it first, is the instruction of parents. And (as I have more fully manifested in my Book of Infant Baptism) if parents would do their duties, they would find that the word publicly preached was not appointed to be the first ordinary means of conversion and sanctification; but commonly, grace would be received in childhood; I speak not of baptismal relative grace, consisting in the pardon of original sin, nor yet any infusion of habits before they have the use of reason (because I suppose it is hid from us, what God doth in that), but I speak of actual conversion; and I prove that this should be the first ordinary way and time of conversion to the children of true Christians, because it is the first means that God hath appointed to be used with them; Deut. vi. 6—8. Eph. vi. 4. Parents are commanded to teach their children the law of God urgently at home, and as they walk abroad, lying down, and rising up; and to bring them up in the admonition and nurture of the Lord, and to “train up a child in the way he should go and when they are old they will not depart from it;” Prov. xxii. 6. And children are commanded to “remember their Creator in the days of their youth;” Eccles. xii. 1. And if this be God’s first great means, then doubtless he will ordinarily bless his own means here, as well as in the preaching of the word.

From all this I would have you learn this lesson, That you ought not to trouble yourself with fears and doubts, lest you are not truly regenerate, because you know not the sermon or the very time and manner of your conversion; but find that you have grace, and then, though you know not just the time or manner of your receiving of it, yet you may nevertheless be assured of salvation by it. Search therefore what you are, and how your will is disposed and resolved, and how your life is ordered, rather than to know how you became such. I know the workings of the Spirit on the soul may be discerned, because they stir up discernible actings in our own spirits. The soul’s convictions, considerations, resolutions and affections, are no insensible things.

But yet the work of grace usually begins in common grace, and so proceeds by degrees till it come to special saving grace, even as the work of nature doth, first producing the matter, and then introducing the form ; first producing the embryo, before it introduce a rational soul. And as no child knows the time or manner of its own formation, vivification or reception of that soul, so I think few true believers can say, just such a day, or at such a sermon I became a true justified, sanctified man. That was the hour of your true conversion and justification, when you first preferred God and Christ, and grace before all things in this world, and deliberately and seriously resolved to take Christ for your Saviour and Governor, and give up yourself to him to be saved, taught and governed, and to obey him faithfully to the death against all temptations, whatsoever you shall lose or suffer by it. Now I would but ask those very Christians that think they do know the very sermon that converted them ; Did that sermon bring you to this resolution ? Or was it not only some troubling rousing preparation hereto ? I think some desperate sickness or the like affliction is a very usual means to bring resolutions to be downright and fixed, with many souls that long delayed and fluctuated in unresolvedness, and lay under mere ineffectual convictions.

Object. ' But this runs on your own grounds, that saving grace and common grace do differ but in degrees.'

Answ. I think most will confess, that as to the acts of grace, and that is it that we are now inquiring after ; and that is all the means that we have of discerning the habits. Yet remember that I still tell you, ' That there is a special moral difference, though grounded but in a gradual natural difference.' Yea, and that one grain of the Spirit's working, which turns the will in a prevalent measure for Christ, (together with the illumination necessary thereto) deserves all those eulogies and high titles that are given it in the word ; so great a change doth it make in the soul ! Well may it be called ' The new creature : ' ' Born of the Spirit : ' ' The workmanship of God : ' ' The new life : ' Yea, ' The image of God,' and ' The Divine Nature.' (If that text be not meant of the Divine Nature in Christ which we are relatively made partakers of in our union with him). When you are weighing things in the balance, you may add grain after grain, and it makes no turning or motion at all, till you

come to the very last grain, and then suddenly that end which was downward is turned upward. When you stand at a loss between two highways, not knowing which way to go, as long as you are deliberate, you stand still: all the reasons that come into your mind do not stir you; but the last reason which resolves you, setteth you in motion. So is it in the change of a sinner's heart and life; he is not changed (but preparing towards it) while he is but deliberating, whether he should choose Christ or the world? But the last reason that comes in and determineth his will to Christ, and makes him resolve and enter a firm covenant with Christ, and say, 'I will have Christ for better or worse;' this maketh the greatest change that ever is made by any work in this world. For how can there be greater than the turning of a soul from the creature to the Creator? So distant are the terms of this change. After this one turning act Christ hath that heart, and the main bent and endeavours of the life, which the world had before. The man hath a new end, a new rule and guide, and a new master. Before the flesh and the devil were his masters, and now Christ is his master. So that you must not think so meanly of the turning, determining, resolving act of grace, because it lieth but in a gradual difference naturally from common grace. If a prince should offer a condemned beggar to marry her, and to pardon her, and make her his queen, her deliberation may be the way to her consent, and one reason after another may bring her near to consenting. But it is that which turns her will to consent, resolve, covenant and deliver herself to him, which makes the great change in her state. Yet all the foregoing work of common grace hath a hand in the change, though only the turning resolution do effect it: it is the rest with this that doth it: as when the last grain turns the scales, the former do concur. I will conclude with Dr. Preston's words, in his "Golden Sceptre," page 210: *Object.* 'It seems then that the knowledge of a carnal man, and of a regenerate man, do differ but in degrees and not in kind.' *Answ.* The want of degrees here alters the kind, as in numbers, the addition of a degree alters the species and kind.' Read for this also, Dr. Jackson "Of Saving Faith," sect. iii. chap. iii. pp. 297, 298. and frequently in other places. So much for that observation.

Direct. XIV. Yet further I would have you to under-

stand this : 'That as the least measure of saving grace is ordinarily undiscernible from the greatest measure of common grace, (notwithstanding the greatness of the change that it makes) so a measure somewhat greater is so hardly discernible, that it seldom brings assurance : and therefore it is only the stronger Christians that attain assurance ordinarily ; even those who have a great degree of faith and love, and keep them much in exercise, and are very watchful and careful in obedience : and consequently (most Christians being of the weaker sort) it is but few that do attain to assurance of their justification and salvation.'

Here are two or three points which I would have you distinctly to observe, though I lay them all together for brevity. 1. That it is only a greater measure of grace that will ordinarily afford assurance. 2. That therefore it is only the stronger, and holier, and more obedient sort of Christians that usually reach to a certainty of salvation. 3. That few Christians do reach to a strong or high degree of grace. 4. And therefore it is but few Christians that reach to assurance.

For the two first of these it will evidently appear that they are true, by reviewing the reasons which I gave of the last point save one. He that will attain to a certainty of salvation, must, 1. Have a large measure of grace to be discerned. 2. He must have that grace much in action, and lively action ; for it is not mere habits that are discernible. 3. He must have a clear understanding to be acquainted with the nature of spiritual things ; to know what is a sound evidence, and how to follow the search, and how to repel particular temptations. 4. He must have a good acquaintance and familiarity with his own heart, and to that end must be much at home, and be used sometimes to a diligent observation of his heart and ways. 5. He must be in a good measure acquainted with, and a conqueror of contradicting temptations. 6. He must have some competent cure of the deceitfulness of the heart, and it must be brought to an open, plain, ingenuous frame, willing to know the worst of itself. 7. He must have some cure of that ordinary confusion and tumultuous disorder that is in the thought and affections of men, and get things into an order in his mind. 8. He must be a man of diligence, resolution, and unwearied patience, that will resolutely set on the work of self-examination, and painfully watch in it, and constantly follow it

from time to time till he attain a certainty. 9. He must be one that is very fearful of sinning, and careful in close obedient walking with God, and much in sincere and spiritual duty, that he keep not conscience still in accusing and condemning him, and God still offended with him, and his wounds fresh bleeding, and his soul still smarting. 10. He must be a man of much fixedness and constancy of mind, and not of the ordinary mutability of mankind; that so he may not by remitting his zeal and diligence, lose the sight of his evidences, nor by leaving open his soul to an alteration by every new intruding thought and temptation, let go his assurance as soon as he attaineth it. All these things in a good degree are necessary to the attaining of assurance of salvation.

And then do I need to say any more to the confirmation of the third point, That few Christians reach this measure of grace? O that it were not as clear as the light, and as discernible as the earth under our feet, that most true Christians are weaklings, and of the lower forms in the school of Christ? Alas, how ignorant are most of the best, how little love, or faith, or zeal, or heavenly mindedness, or delight in God have they? How unacquainted with a frequent exercise of these graces? How unacquainted with the way of self-examination? And how backward to it? And how dull and careless in it? Doing it by the halves as Laban searched Rachel's tent? How easily put off with an excuse? How little acquainted with their own hearts? Or with satan's temptations and ways of deceiving? How much deceitfulness remaineth in their hearts? How confused are their minds? And what distractions and tumults are there in their thoughts? How bold are they in sinning? And how little tenderness of conscience, and care of obeying have they? How frequently do they wound conscience, provoke God, and obscure their evidences? And how mutable their apprehensions? And how soon do they lose that assurance which they once attained? And upon every occasion quite lose the sight of their evidences? Yea, and remit their actual resolutions, and so lose much of the evidence itself? Is not this the common case of godly people? O that we could truly deny it: let their lives be witness, let the visible neglects, worldliness, pride, impatience of plain reproof, remissness of zeal, dulness and cus-

tomariness in duty, strangeness to God, unwillingness to secret prayer and meditation, unacquaintedness with the Spirit's operations and joys, their unpeaceableness one with another, and their too frequent blemishing the glory of their holy profession by the unevenness of their walking, let all these witness, whether the school of Christ have not most children in it; and how few of them ever go to the university of riper knowledge: and how few of those are fit to begin here the works of their priestly office, which they must live in for ever, in the high and joyful praises of God, and of the Lamb, who hath redeemed them by his blood, and made them kings and priests to God, that they may reign with him for ever. I am content to stand to the judgment of all humble, self-knowing Christians, whether this be not true of most of themselves; and for those that deny it, I will stand to the judgment of their godly neighbours, who perhaps know them better than they know themselves.

And then this being all so, the fourth point is undeniable, That it is but very few Christians that reach to assurance of salvation. If any think (as intemperate hot-spirited men are like enough to charge me) that in all this I countenance the popish doctrine of doubting and uncertainty, and contradict the common doctrine of the reformed divines that write against them; I answer, 1. That I do contradict both the Papists that deny assurance, and many foreign writers, who make it far more easy, common, and necessary than it is (much more than them and the Antinomists, who place justifying faith in it). But I stand in the midst between both extremes; and I think I have the company of most English divines. 2. I come not to be of this mind merely by reading books, but mainly by reading my own heart, and consulting my own experience, and the experience of a very great number of godly people of all sorts, who have opened their hearts to me, for almost twenty years time. 3. I would entreat the gainsayers to study their own hearts better for some considerable time, and to be more in hearing the case and complaints of godly people; and by that time they may happily come to be of my mind. 4. See whether all those divines that have been very practical and successful in the work of God, and much acquainted with the way of recovery of lost souls, be not all of the same judgment as myself in this point, (such as T. Hooker, Jo. Rogers, Preston,

Sibbs, Bolton, Dod, Culverwell, &c.) And whether the most confident men for the contrary be not those that study books more than hearts, and spend their days in disputing, and not in winning souls to God from the world.

Lastly, Let me add to what is said, these two proofs of this fourth point here asserted.

1. The constant experience of the greatest part of believers tells us, that certainty of salvation is very rare. Even of those that live comfortably and in peace of conscience, yet very few of them do attain to a certainty. For my part, it is known that God in undeserved mercy hath given me long the society of a great number of godly people, and great interest in them, and privacy with them, and opportunity to know their minds, and this in many places (my station by providence having been oft removed), and I must needs profess, that of all these I have met with few, yea, very few indeed, that if I seriously and privately asked them, 'Are you certain that you are a true believer, and so are justified, and shall be saved,' durst say to me, 'I am certain of it.' But some in great doubts and fears : most too secure and neglective of their states without assurance, and some in so good hopes (to speak in their own language) as calmeth their spirits, that they can comfortably cast themselves on God in Christ. And those few that have gone so far beyond all the rest, as to say, 'They were certain of their sincerity and salvation,' were the professors, whose state I suspected more than any of the rest, as being the most proud, self-conceited, censorious, passionate, unpeaceable sort of professors ; and some of them living scandalously, and some fallen since to more scandalous ways than ever ; and the most of their humble, godly acquaintance or neighbours suspected them as well as I. Or else some very few of them that said they were certain were honest, godly people (most women) of small judgment and strong affections, who depended most on that which is commonly called, 'The sense or feeling of God's love ;' and were the lowest at some times as they were the highest at other times ; and they that were one month certain to be saved, perhaps the next month were almost ready to say, they should certainly be damned. So that taking out all these sorts of persons, the sober, solid, judicious believers that could groundedly and ordinarily say, 'I am certain that I

shall be saved,' have been so few, that it is sad to me to consider it. If any other men's experience be contrary, I am glad of it, so be it they be sober, judicious men, able to gather experiences; and so they live not among mere Antinomians, and take not the discovery of their mere opinion, for a discovery of experience. For I have seen in divers professors of my long acquaintance, the strange power of opinion and fancy in this thing. I have known those that have lived many years in doubting of their salvation, and all that while walked uprightly: and in the late wars, falling into the company of some Anabaptists, they were by them persuaded that there was no right way to their comfort, but by being re-baptized, and associating themselves with the re-baptized church, and abstaining from the hearing of the unbaptized parish-priests (as they called them.) No sooner was this done, but all their former doubtings and troubles were over, and they were as comfortable as any others (as themselves affirmed) which no doubt proceeded from partly the strength of fancy, conceiting it should be so, and partly from the novelty of their way which delighted them, and partly from the strong opinion they had that this was the way of salvation, and that the want of this did keep them in the dark so long; and partly from satan's policy, who troubleth people least, when they are in a way that pleaseth him; but when these people had lived a year or two in this comfortable condition, they fell at last into the society of some Libertines or Familists, who believe that the Scriptures are all but a dream, fiction, or allegory; these presently persuaded them, that they were fools to regard baptism or such ordinances, and that they might come to hear again in our congregations, seeing all things were lawful, and there was no heaven or hell but within men, and therefore they should look to their safety and credit in the world, and take their pleasure. This lesson was quickly learned, and then they cried down the Anabaptists, and confessed they were deluded, and so being grown loose while they were Anabaptists, to mend the matter, they grew Epicures when they had been instructed by the Libertines; and this was the end of their new-gotten comfort. Others I have known that have wanted assurance, and falling among the Antinomians, were told by them that they undid themselves by looking after signs and marks of grace, and so

laying their comforts upon something in themselves ; whereas they should look only to Christ for comfort, and not at any thing in themselves at all ; and for assurance, it is only the witness of the Spirit without any marks that must give it them ; and to fetch comfort from their own graces and obedience, was to make it themselves instead of Christ and the Holy Ghost, and was a legal way. No sooner was this doctrine received, but the receivers had comfort at will, and all was sealed up to them presently by the witness of the Spirit in their own conceits. Whence this came, judge you. I told you my judgment before. Sure I am that the sudden looseness of their lives, answering their ignorant, loose, ungospel-like doctrine, did certify me that the Spirit of comfort was not their comforter ; for he is also a Spirit of holiness, and comforteth men by the means of a Holy Gospel, which hath precepts and threatenings as well as promises.

2. And as the experience of the state of believers assur-eth us that few of them attain to certainty ; so experience of the imperfection of their understanding shews us, that few of them are immediately capable of it. For how few believers be there that understand well what is sound evidence and what not ? Nay, how many learned men have taught them, that the least unfeigned desire of grace, is the grace itself, (as some say,) or at least a certain evidence of it, (as others say). Whereas, alas ! how many have unfeignedly desired many graces, and yet have desired the glory and profits of the world so much more, that they have miscarried and perished. How many have taught them, that the least unfeigned love to God or to the brethren, is a certain mark of saving grace ; whereas many a one hath unfeignedly loved God and the brethren, who yet have loved house, land, credit, pleasure, and life so much more, that God hath been thrust as it were into a corner, and hath had but the world's leavings. And the poor saints have had but little compassion or relief from them, nor would be looked on in times of danger and disgrace. As Austin and the schoolmen used to say, “ Wicked men do, ‘ uti Deo, et frui creaturis,’ Use God and enjoy the creatures ; godly men do ‘ frui Deo, et uti creaturis,’ enjoy God and use the creatures.” The meaning is, both regenerate and unregenerate have some will or love, both to God and to the creature :

but the wicked do will or love the creature as their chief good, with their chiefest love, and they only love God as a means to help them to the creature, with a love subordinate to their love to the creature : whereas the godly do will or love God as their chief good, with their chiefest love or complacency ; and love the creature but as a means to God, with an inferior love.

If then the nature of sincerity be so little known, then the assurance of sincerity cannot be very common. More might be said to prove that certainty of salvation is not common among true Christians ; but that it is labour in vain, as to them, seeing experience and their own ready confession doth witness it.

Now what is the use that I would have you make of this ? Why it is this. If assurance of sincerity and justification (much more of salvation) be so rare among true Christians, then you have no cause to think that the want of it proveth you to be no true Christian. You see then that a man may be in a state of salvation without it ; and that it is not justifying faith, as some have imagined, nor yet a necessary concomitant of that faith. You see that you were mistaken in thinking that you had not the Spirit of adoption, because you had no assuring witness within you effectively testifying to you that you are the child of God. All God's children have the Spirit of adoption. (For because they are sons, therefore hath God sent the Spirit of his Son into their hearts, whereby they cry, ' Abba, Father ;' Gal. iv. 6.) But all God's children have not assurance of their adoption, therefore the Spirit of adoption doth not always assure those of their adoption in whom it abideth. It is always a witness-bearer of their adoption ; but that is only objectively by his graces and operations in them, as a land-mark is a witness whose land it is where it standeth ; or as your sheep-mark witnesseth which be your sheep ; or rather as a sensible soul witnesseth a living creature, or a rational soul witnesseth that we are men. But efficiently it doth not always witness ; as a land-mark or sheep-mark is not always discerned ; and a brute knows not itself to be a brute ; and a man is not always actually knowing his own humanity, nor can know it at all in the womb, in infancy, in distraction, in an epilepsy, apoplexy, or the like disease, which depriveth him of the use of reason. Besides, it is no doubt but

the apostle had some respect to the eminent gift of the Spirit, for tongues, prophecies, miracles, and the like, which was proper to that age ; though still as including the Spirit of holiness.

You see then that you need not be always in disquiet when you want assurance. For else how disquiet a life should most Christians live ! I shall shew you more anon, that all a man's comforts depend not so on his assurance, but that he may live a comfortable life without it. Trouble of mind may be overcome ; conscience may be quieted ; true peace obtained ; yea, a man may have that joy in the Holy Ghost, wherein the kingdom of God is said to consist, without certainty of salvation. (If there be any passages in my Book of Rest, part iii. pressing to get assurance, which seem contrary to this, I desire that they may be reduced to this sense, and no otherwise understood.) This shall be further opened anon, and other grounds of comfort manifested, besides assurance.

Direct. XV. Yea thus much more I would here inform you of, ' That many holy, watchful and obedient Christians, are yet uncertain of their salvation, even then when they are certain of their justification and sanctification ; and that because they are uncertain of their perseverance and overcoming ; for a man's certainty of his salvation can be no stronger than is his certainty of enduring to the end and overcoming.'

That you may not misunderstand me in this, observe, 1. That I do not say perseverance is a thing uncertain in itself. 2. Nor that it is uncertain to all Christians. 3. But that it is uncertain to many, even strong and self-knowing Christians. Divines use to distinguish of the certainty of the object and of the subject ; and the former is either of the object of God's knowledge, or of man's. I doubt not but God knows certainly who shall be saved, which, with his decree, doth cause that which we call certainty of the object as to man's understanding ; but men themselves do not always know it.

If a man have the fullest certainty in the world that he is God's child, yet if he be uncertain whether he shall so continue to the end, it is impossible that he should have a certainty of his salvation ; for it is he only that endureth to the end that shall be saved.

Now that many eminent Christians of great knowledge, and much zeal and obedience, are uncertain of their perseverance, is proved by two infallible arguments. 1. By experience : if any should be so censorious as to think that none of all those nations and churches abroad, that deny the doctrine of certain perseverance of all believers, have any strong Christians among them, yet we have had the knowledge of such at home. 2. Besides, the difficulty of the subject is a clear argument that a strong Christian may be uncertain of it. God hath made all those points plain in Scripture, which must be believed as of necessity to salvation ; but the certainty of all believers' perseverance, is not a point of flat necessity to salvation to be believed. Otherwise it would be a hard matter to prove, that any considerable number were ever saved till of late ; or are yet saved, but in a very few countries. It is a point that the churches never did put into their creed, where they summed up those points that they held necessary to salvation. There are a great number of texts of Scripture, which seeming to intimate the contrary, do make the point of great difficulty to many of the wisest ; and those texts that are for it, are not so express as fully to satisfy them. Besides, that the examples of these ten years last past have done more to stagger many sober wise Christians in this point, than all the arguments that ever were used by Papists, Arminians, or any other, to see what kind of men in some places have fallen, and how far, as I am unwilling further to mention.

But I think by this time I have persuaded you, that a proper certainty of our salvation is not so common a thing as some controversial doctors, or some self-conceited professors do take it to be ; and therefore that you must not lay all your comfort on your assurance of salvation. As for them who are most highly confident both of the doctrine of the certain perseverance of every believer, merely upon tradition and prejudice, or else upon weak grounds, which will not bear them out in their confidence ; and are as confident of their own salvation on as slender grounds, having never well understood the nature of saving grace, sincerity, examination, nor assurance ; nor understood the causes of doubting, which else might have shaken them ; I will not call their greatest confidence by the name of assurance or certainty of salvation, though it be accompanied with never

so great boastings, or pretences, or expressions of the highest joys. And for yourself, I advise you first use those comforts which those may have who come short of assurance.

Direct. XVI. The next thing which I would have you learn is this, 'That there are several grounds of the great probability of our salvation, besides the general grounds mentioned in the beginning: and by the knowledge of these, without any further assurance, a Christian may live in much peace and comfort, and in delightful, desirous thoughts of the glory to come. And therefore the next work which you have to do, is to discover those probabilities of your sincerity and your salvation, and then to receive the peace and comfort which they may afford you, before you can expect assurance in itself.'

I shall here open to you the several parts of this proposition and direction distinctly. 1. I told you in the beginning of the four grounds of probability which all may have in general; from 1. The nature of God. 2. And of the Mediator and his office. 3. And the universal sufficiency of Christ's satisfaction. 4. And the general tenor of the promise, and offer of pardon and salvation. Now I add, that besides all these, there are many grounds of strong probability, which you may have of your own sincerity, and so of your particular interest in Christ and salvation, when you cannot reach to a certainty.

1. Some kind of probability you may gather by comparing yourself with others. Though this way be but delusory to unregenerate men, whose confidence is plainly contradicted by the Scriptures, yet may it be lawful and useful to an humble soul that is willing to obey and wait on God: I mean to consider, that if such as you should perish how few people would God have in the world? Consider first in how narrow a compass the church was confined before Christ's coming in the flesh; how carnal and corrupt even that visible church then was; and even at this day, the most learned do compute, that if you divide the world into thirty parts, nineteen of them are heathenish idolators, six of them are Mahometans, and only five of them are Christians. And of these five that are Christians, how great a part are of the Ethiopian, Greek, and Popish churches? So ignorant, rude, and superstitious, and erroneous, that salvation cannot be imagined to be near so easy or ordinary with them as with

us : and of the reformed churches, commonly called Protestants, how small is the number ? And even among these, what a number are grossly ignorant and profane ? And of those that profess more knowledge and zeal, how many are grossly erroneous, schismatical and scandalous ? How exceeding small a number is left then that are such as you ? I know this is no assuring argument, but I know withal that Christ died not in vain, but he will see the fruit of his sufferings to the satisfaction of his soul ; and the God of Mercy, who is a lover of mankind, will have a multitude innumerable of his saved ones in the earth.

2. But your strongest probabilities are from the consideration of the work of God upon your souls, and the present frame and inclination of your soul to God. You may know that you have workings above nature in you ; and that they have been kept alive and carried on these many years against all opposition of the flesh and the world ; it hath not been a mere flash of conviction which hath been extinguished by sensuality, and left you in the darkness of security and profaneness as others are. You dare not give up your hopes of heaven for all the world. You would not part with Christ, and say, ‘ Let him go,’ for all the pleasures of sin, or treasures of the earth. If you had (as you have) an offer of God, Christ, grace, and glory on one side, and worldly prosperity in sin on the other side, you would choose God, and let go the other. You dare not, you would not give over praying, hearing, reading and Christian company, and give up yourself to worldly, fleshly pleasures ; yet you are not assured of salvation, because you find not that delight and life in duty, and that witness of the Spirit, and that communion with God, nor that tenderness of heart as you desire. It is well that you desire them ; but though you be not certain of salvation, do not you see a great likelihood, a probability in all this ? Is not your heart raised to a hope, that yet God is merciful to you, and means you good ? Doubtless, this you might easily discern.

The second thing that I am to shew you, is, that there may much spiritual comfort and peace of conscience be enjoyed, without any certainty of salvation, even upon these forementioned probabilities. Which I prove thus, 1. No doubt but Adam in innocency, had peace of conscience, and comfort, and communion with God, and yet he had no as-

surance of salvation ; I mean, either of continuing in paradise, or being translated to glory. For if he had, either he was sure to persevere in innocency, and so to be glorified, (but that was not true,) or else he must foreknow both that he should fall and be raised again, and saved by Christ. But this he knew not at all. 2. Experience tells^{us}, that the greatest part of Christians on earth do enjoy that peace and comfort which they have, without any certainty of their salvation. 3. The nature of the thing telleth us, that a likelihood of so great a mercy as everlasting glory, must needs be a ground of great comfort. If a poor condemned prisoner do but hear that there is hopes of a pardon, especially if very probable, it will glad his heart. Indeed, if an angel from heaven were brought into this state, it would be sad to him ; but if a devil or condemned sinner have such hope, it must needs be glad news to them. The devils have it not, but we have.

3. Let me next, therefore, entreat you to take the comfort of your probabilities of grace and salvation. Your horse or dog know not how you will use them certainly ; yet will they lovingly follow you, and put their heads to your hand, and trust you with their lives without fear, and love to be in your company, because they have found you kind to them, and have tried that you do them no hurt, but good : yea, though you do strike them sometimes, yet they find that they have their food from you, and your favour doth sustain them. Yea, your little children have no certainty how you will use them, and yet finding that you have always used them kindly, and expressed love to them, though you whip them sometimes, yet are glad of your company, and desire to be in your lap, and can trust themselves in your hands, without tormenting themselves with such doubts as these, ‘I am uncertain how my mother will use me, whether she will wound me, or kill me, or turn me out of doors, and let me perish.’ Nature persuades us not to be too distrustful of those that have always befriended us, and especially whose nature is merciful and compassionate ; nor to be too suspicious of evil from them that have always done us good. Every man knows that the good will do good, and the evil will do you evil ; and accordingly we expect that they should do to us. Naturally we all fear a toad, a serpent, an adder, a mad dog, a wicked man, a madman, a cruel, blood-

thirsty tyrant, and the devil. But no one fears a dove, a lamb, a good man, a merciful, compassionate governor, except only the rebels or notorious offenders that know he is bound in justice to destroy or punish them. And none should fear distrustfully the wrath of a gracious God, but they who will not submit to his mercy, and will not have Christ to reign over them, and therefore may know that he is bound in justice, if they come not in, to destroy them. But for you that would be obedient and reformed, and are troubled that you are no better, and beg of God to make you better, and have no sin, but what you would be glad to be rid of, may not you, at least, see a strong probability that it shall go well with you? O make use therefore of this probability; and if you have but hopes that God will do you good, rejoice in those hopes till you can come to rejoice in assurance.

And here let me tell you, that probabilities are of divers degrees, according to their divers grounds. Where men have but a little probability of their sincerity, and a greater probability that they are not sincere in the faith, these men may be somewhat borne up, but it behoves them presently to search in fear, and to amend that which is the cause of their fear. Those that have more probability of the sincerity of their hearts than of the contrary, may well have more peace than trouble of mind. Those that have yet a higher degree of probability, may live in more joy, and so according to the degree of probability may their comforts still arise.

And observe also, that it is but the highest degree of this probability here which we call a certainty: for it is a moral certainty, and not that which is called a certainty of divine faith, nor that which is called a certainty of evidence in the strictest sense, though yet evidence there is for it. But it is the same evidences materially, which are the ground of probability and of certainty; only sometimes they differ gradually (one having more grace, and another less), and sometimes not so neither; for he that hath more grace, may discern but a probability in it (through some other defect), no more than he that hath less. But when one man discerns his graces and sincerity but darkly, he hath but a probability of salvation manifested by them; and when another discerneth them more clearly, he hath a stronger probability; and

he that discerneth them most clearly (if other necessities concur) hath that which we call a certainty.

Now I am persuaded that you frequently see a strong probability of your sincerity; and may not that be a very great stay and comfort to your soul? Nay, may it not draw out your heart in love, delight and thankfulness? Suppose that your name were written in a piece of paper, and put among a hundred, or fifty, or but twenty other like paper into a lottery, and you were certain that you should be the owner of this whole land, except your name were drawn the first time, and if it were drawn you should die, would your joy or your sorrow for this be the greater? Nay, if it were but ten to one, or but two to one odds on your side, it would keep you from drooping and discouragement; and why should it not do so in the present case?

Direct. XVII. My next advice to you is this, 'For the strengthening your apprehensions of the probability of your salvation, gather up, and improve all your choicest experiences of God's goodwill and mercy to you; and observe also the experiments of others in the same kind.'

1. We do God and ourselves a great deal of wrong by forgetting, neglecting, and not improving our experiences. How doth God charge it on the Israelites, especially in the wilderness, that they forgot the works of God, by which he had so often manifested his power and goodness! Psalm lxxviii. cvii. See cv. cvi. When God had by one miracle silenced their unbelief, they had forgotten it in the next distress. It was a sign the disciples' hearts were hardened, when they forgot the miracles of the loaves, and presently after were distrustful and afraid; Mark vi. 52. God doth not give us his mercies only for the present use, but for the future; nor only for the body, but for the soul. I would this truth were well learned by believers. You are in sickness, in troubles, and dangers, and pinching straits, in fears and anguish of mind: in this case you cry to God for help, and he doth in such a manner deliver you as silenceth your distrust, and convinceth you of his love; at least, of his readiness to do you good. What a wrong is it now to God and yourself, to forget this presently, and in the next temptation, to receive no strengthening by the consideration of it? Doth God so much regard this dirty flesh, that he should do all this merely for its ease and relief? No, he doth it to

kill your unbelief; and convince you of his special providence, his care of you, and love to you, and power to help you, and to breed in you more loving, honourable and thankful thoughts of him. Lose this benefit, and you lose all. You may thus use one and the same mercy an hundred times: though it be gone as to the body, it is still fresh in a believing, thankful, careful soul. You may make as good use of it at your very death, as the first hour. But O, the sad forgetfulness, mutability and unbelief of these hearts of ours! What a number of these choice experiences do we all receive! When we forget one, God giveth another, and we forget that too. When unbelief doth blasphemously suggest to us, Such a thing may come once or twice by chance. God addeth one experience to another, till it even shame us out of our unbelief, as Christ shamed Thomas, and we cry out, "My Lord and my God." Hath it not been thus oft with you? Have not mercies come so seasonably, so unexpectedly, either by small means, or the means themselves unexpectedly raised up; without your designing or effecting; and plainly in answer to prayers, that they have brought conviction along with them; and you have seen the name of God engraven on them? Sure it is so with us, when through our sinful negligence we are hardly drawn to open our eyes, and see what God is doing. Much more might we have seen, if we had but observed the workings of Providence for us; especially they that are in an afflicted state, and have more sensibly daily use for God, and are awakened to seek him, and regard his dealings. I know a mercy to the body is no certain evidence of God's love to the soul. But yet from such experiences a Christian may have very strong probabilities. When we find God hearing prayers, it is a hopeful sign that we have some interest in him. We may say as Manoah's wife said to him, "If the Lord had meant to destroy us, he would not have received a sacrifice at our hands, nor have done all this for us;" Judges xiii. 23. To have God so near to us in all that we call upon him for, and so ready to relieve us, as if he could not deny an earnest prayer, and could not endure to stop his ears against our cries and groans, these are hopeful signs that he meaneth us good. I know special grace is the only certain evidence of special love: but yet these kind of experiences are many times more effectual to refresh a drooping, doubting

soul, than the first evidences: for evidences may be unseen, and require a great deal of holy skill and diligence to try them, which few have; but these experiences are near us, even in our bodies, and shew themselves; they make all our bones say, "Lord, who is like unto thee?" And it is a great advantage to have the help of sense itself for our consolation. I hope you yet remember the choice particular providences, by which God hath manifested to you his goodness, even from your youth till now: especially his frequent answering of your prayers! Methinks these should do something to the dispelling of those black, distrustful thoughts of God. I could wish you would write them down, and oft review them: and when temptations next come, remember with David, who helped you against the lion and the bear, and, therefore, fear not the uncircumcised Philistine.

2. And you may make great use also of the experiences of others. Is it not a great satisfaction to hear twenty, or forty, or an hundred Christians, of the most godly lives, to make the very same complaints as you do yourself? The very same complaints have I heard from as many. By this you may see your case is not singular, but the ordinary case of the tenderest consciences, and of many that walk uprightly with God. And also is it not a great help to you, to hear other Christians tell how they have come into those troubles, and how they have got out of them? What hurt them? And what helped them? And how God dealt with them, while they lay under them? How desirous are diseased persons to talk with others that have had the same disease? And to hear them tell how it took them, and how it held them, and especially what cured them? Besides, it will give you much stronger hopes of cure and recovery to peace of conscience, when you hear of so many that have been cured of the same disease. Moreover, is it not a reviving thing, to hear Christians open the goodness of the Lord? And that in particular, as upon experience they have found him to their own souls? To hear them tell you of such notable discoveries of God's special providence and care of his people, as may repel all temptations to atheism and unbelief? To hear them give you their frequent and full experiences of God's hearing and answering their prayers, and helping them in their distresses? Though the carnal part of the

mercy were only theirs, yet by improvement, the spiritual part may be yours: you may have your faith, and love, and joy, confirmed by the experiences of David, Job, Paul, which are past so long ago; and by the experiences of all your godly acquaintance, as if they were your own. This is the benefit of the unity of the church; the blessings of one member of the body are blessings to the rest; and if one rejoice, the rest may rejoice with them, not only for their sakes, but also for their own. Such as God is to the rest of his children, such is he and will be to you. He is as ready to pity you as them, and to hear your complaints and moans as theirs. And lest we should think that none of them were so bad as we, he hath left us the examples of his mercies to worse than ever we were. You never were guilty of witchcraft, and open idolatry, as Manasses was, and that for a long time, and drawing the whole nation, and chief part of the visible church on earth, into idolatry with him. You never had your hand in the blood of a saint, and even of the first martyr (Stephen) as Paul had. You never hunted after the blood of the saints, and persecuted them from city to city as he did; and yet God did not only forgive him, but was found of him when he never sought him, yea, when he was persecuting him in his members, and kicking against the pricks; yea, and made him a chosen vessel to bear about his name, and as noble an instrument of the propagation of his Gospel, as if he had never been guilty of any such crimes, that he might be an encouraging example to the unworthiest sinners, and in him might appear to the riches of his mercy; 1 Tim. iii. 13. 16. See also Titus iii. 3—7. Is there no ground of comfort in these examples of the saints? The same we may say of the experiences of God's people still; and doubtless it were well if experimental Christians did more fully and frequently open to one another their experiences; it were the way to make private particular mercies to be more public and common mercies; and to give others a part in our blessings, without any diminution of them to ourselves. Not that I would have this so openly and rashly done (by those, who through their disability to express their minds, do make the works and language of the Spirit seem ridiculous to carnal ears), as I perceive some in a very formality would have it (as if it must be one of their church customs, to satisfy the society of the fitness of each member

before they will receive them): but I would have Christians that are fit to express their minds, to do it in season and with wisdom; especially those to whom God hath given any more eminent and notable experiments, which may be of public use. Doubtless, God hath lost very much of the honour due to his name, and poor Christians much of the benefit which they might have received, (and may challenge by the mutual interest of fellow members) for want of the public communication of the extraordinary and more notable experiences of some men. Those that write the lives of the holiest men when they are dead, can give you but the outside and carcase of their memorials; the most observable passages are usually secret, known only to God and their own souls, which none but themselves are able to communicate. For my own part, I do soberly and seriously profess to you, that the experiences I have had of God's special providences, and fatherly care, and specially of his hearing prayers, have been so strange, and great, and exceeding numerous, that they have done very much to the quieting of my spirit, and the persuading of my soul of God's love to me, and the silencing and shaming of my unbelieving heart, and especially for the conquering of all temptations that lead to atheism or infidelity, to the denying of special providence, or of the verity of the Gospel, or of the necessity of holy prayer and worshipping of God. Yea, those passages that in the bulk of the thing seem to have no great matter in them, yet have come at such seasons, in such a manner, in evident answer to prayers, that they have done much to my confirmation. O happy afflictions and distresses! Sufferings and danger force us to pray, and force the cold and customary petitioner to seriousness and importunity. Importunate prayers bring evident returns; such returns give us sensible experiences; such experiences raise faith, love and thankfulness, kill unbelief and atheism, and encourage the soul in all distresses, to go the same way as when it sped so well. I often pity the poor seduced infidels of this age, that deny Scripture and Christ himself, and doubt of the usefulness of prayer and holy worship; and I wish that they had but the experiences that I have had. O how much more might it do than all their studies and disputes! Truly I have once or twice had motions in my mind, to have publicly and freely communicated by experiences in a relation

of the more observable passages of my life ; but I found that I was not able to do it to God's praise, as was meet, without a shew of ostentation or vanity, and therefore I forbore.

Direct. XVIII. Next, that you may yet further understand the true nature of assurance, faith, doubting and desperation, I would have you observe this, ' That God doth not command every man, nor properly any man, ordinarily by his word, to believe that his sins are forgiven, and himself is justified, adopted, and shall be saved. But he hath prescribed a way by which they may attain to assurance of these, in which way it is men's duty to seek it : so that our assurance is not properly that which is called a certainty of belief.'

I have said enough for the proof of this proposition in the third part of my Book of Rest, Chap. ii. whither I must refer you. But there is more to be said yet for the application of it. But first I must briefly tell you the meaning of the words. 1. God commandeth us all to believe (wicked and godly), that our sins are made pardonable by the sufficient satisfaction of Christ for them ; and that God is very merciful and ready to forgive ; and that he hath conditionally forgiven us all in the new covenant, making a deed of gift of Christ, and pardon, and life in him to all, on condition they believe in him, and accept what is given. 2. But no man is commanded to believe that he is actually forgiven. 3. Therefore I say our assurance is not strictly to be called belief, or a certainty of belief ; for it is only our certain belief of those things which we take on the mere credit of the witnesser or revealer, which we call certainty of faith. Indeed, we commonly in English use the word ' belief,' to express any confident, but uncertain, opinion or persuasion ; and if any will so take it, then I deny not but our assurance is a belief. But it is commonly taken by divines for an assent to any thing on the credit of the word of the revealer, and so is distinguished both from the sensible apprehension of things, and from principles that are known by the mere light and help of nature ; and from the knowledge of conclusions, which by reasoning we gather from those principles. Though yet one and the same thing may be known, as revealed in nature, and believed as revealed immediately or supernaturally ; and so we both know and believe that there is one only God, who made and preserveth all things :

4. But our assurance is an act of knowledge, participating of faith and internal sense or knowledge reflect. For divine faith saith, "He that believeth is justified, and shall be saved." Internal sense and knowledge of ourselves saith, 'But I believe.' Reason, or discursive knowledge saith, 'Therefore I am justified and shall be saved.'

Only I must advise you, that you be not troubled when you meet with that which is contrary to this in any great divines : for it is only our former divines, whose judgments were partly hurt by hot disputations with the Papists herein, and partly not come to that maturity as others since then have had opportunity to do. And therefore in their expositions of the creed, and such like passages in the text, they eagerly insist on it, that when we say, 'We believe the forgiveness of sin, and life everlasting,' every man is to profess that he believeth that his own sins are forgiven, and he shall have life everlasting himself. But our later divines, and especially the English, and most especially those that deal most in practicals, do see the mistake, and lay down the same doctrine which I teach you here ; God bids us not believe as from him, more than he hath revealed. But only one of the propositions is revealed by God's testimony, "He that believeth shall be saved." But it is no where written that you do believe, nor that you shall be saved ; nor any thing equivalent. And therefore you are not commanded to believe either of these. How the Spirit revealeth these, I have fully told you already. In our creed therefore we do profess to believe remission of sins to be purchased by Christ's death, and in his power to give, and given in the Gospel to all, on condition of believing in Christ himself for remission : but not to believe that our own sins are actually and fully pardoned.

My end in telling you this again (which I have told you elsewhere) is this, That you may not think (as I find abundance of poor troubled souls do) that faith (much less justifying faith) is a believing that you have true grace, and shall be saved ; and so fall a condemning yourself unjustly every time that you doubt of your own sincerity, and think that so much as you doubt of this, so much unbelief you have : and so many poor souls complain that they have no faith, or but little, and that they cannot believe, because they believe not their own faith to be sincere : and when they wholly judge

themselves unsanctified, then they call that desperation, which they think to be a sin inconsistent with true grace. These are dangerous errors, all arising from that one error which the heat of contention did carry some good men to, that faith is a belief that our sins are forgiven by Christ. Indeed all men are bound to apply Christ and the promise to themselves. But that application consisteth in a belief that this promise is true, as belonging to all, and so to me, and then in acceptance of Christ and his benefits as an offered gift; and after this, in trusting on him for the full performance of this promise. Hence therefore you may best see what unbelief and desperation are, and how far men may charge themselves with them. When you doubt whether the promise be true, or when you refuse to accept Christ and his benefits offered in it, and consequently to trust him as one that is able and willing to save you, if you do assent to his truth, and accept him, this is unbelief. But if you do believe the truth of the Gospel, and are heartily willing to accept Christ as offered in it, and only doubt whether your belief and acceptance of him be sincere, and so whether you shall be saved; this is not unbelief, but ignorance of your own sincerity, and its consequents. Nay, and though that affiance be wanting, which is a part of faith, yet it is but an hindering of the exercise of it, for want of a necessary concomitant condition; for the grace of affiance is in the habit, and virtually is there, so that it is not formally distrust or unbelief any more, than your not trusting God in your sleep is distrust. If a friend do promise to give you an hundred pounds, on condition that you thankfully accept it: if you now do believe him, and do thankfully accept it; but yet through some vain scruple shall think, my thankfulness is so small, that it is not sincere, and therefore I doubt I do not perform his condition, and so shall never have the gift; in this case now you do believe your friend, and you do not distrust him properly; but you distrust yourself, that you perform not the condition; and this hindereth the exercise of that confidence or affiance in your friend which is habitually and virtually in you. Just so is it in our present case.

The same may be said of desperation, which is a privation of hope; when we have believed the truth of the Gospel, and accepted Christ offered, we are then bound to hope

that God will give us the benefits promised : so hope is nothing but a desirous expectation of the good so promised and believed. Now if you begin to distrust whether God will make good his promise or no, either thinking that it is not true, or he is not able, or hath changed his mind since the making of it, and on these grounds you let go your hopes, this is despair. If because that Christ seems to delay his coming, we should say I have waited in hope till now, but now I am out of hope that ever Christ will come to judge the world, and glorify believers, I will expect it no longer. This is despair. And it hath its several degrees more or less as unbelief hath. Indeed the schoolmen say that affiance is nothing but strengthened hope. Affiance in the properest sense is the same in substance as hope ; only it more expresseth a respect to the promise and promiser, and indeed is faith and hope expressed in one word. So that what I said before of distrust is true of despair. If you do continue to believe the truth of the Gospel, and particularly of Christ's coming and glorifying his saints, and yet you think he will not glorify you, because you think that you are not a true believer or saint ; this is not desperation in the proper sense. For desperation is the privation of hope, where the formal cause, the heart and life of it, is wanting. But you have here hope in the habit, and virtually do hope in Christ ; but the act of it, as to your own particular salvation is hindered, upon an accidental mistake. In the forementioned example, if your friend promise to give you an hundred pounds on condition of your thankful acceptance, and promiseth to come at such an hour and bring it you : if now you stay till the hour be almost come, and then say, ' I am out of hope of his coming now ; he hath broke his word ; ' this is properly a despair in your friend. But if you only think that you have overstaid the time, and that it is past, and therefore you shall not have the gift, this may be called a despair of the event, and a despair in yourself, but not properly a despair of your friend ; only the act of hoping in God is hindered, as is said. So it is in our present case. Men may be said to despair of their salvation, and to despair in themselves, but not to despair in God, except the formal cause of such despair were there present ; and except they are drawn to it, by not believing his truth and faithfulness. The true nature of despair is ex-

pressed in that of the apostles, Luke xxiv. 21. "We trusted that that was he that should redeem Israel;" only it was but imperfect despair, else it had been damnable. Their hopes were shaken. And for my part, I am persuaded that it is only this proper despair in God, which is the damnable desperation, which is threatened in the Scripture, and not the former. And that if a poor soul should go out of this world without any actual hope of his own salvation, merely because he thinks that he is no true believer, that this soul may be saved, and prove a true believer for all this. Alas! the great sin that God threateneth is our distrust of his faithfulness, and not the doubting of our own sincerity and distrust of ourselves. We have great reason to be very jealous of our own hearts, as knowing them to be deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know them? But we have no reason to be jealous of God. Where find you in Scripture that any is condemned for hard thoughts of themselves, or for not knowing themselves to have true grace, and for thinking they had none? It is true, unbelief in God's promise is that men are condemned for, even that sin which is an aversion of the soul from God. But perhaps you will ask, is doubting of our own sincerity and salvation no sin? I answer, doubting is either taken in opposition to believing, or in opposition to knowing, or to conjecturing.

1. Doubting as it signifieth only a not believing that our sins are pardoned, and we shall be saved, is no sin, (still remember that I take believing in the strict, proper sense of the crediting of a divine testimony or assertion). For God hath no where commanded us ordinarily to believe either of these. I say ordinarily (as I did in the proposition before) because when Christ was on earth he told a man personally, "Thy sins are forgiven thee;" (whether he meant only as to the present disease inflicted for them, or also all punishment temporal and eternal, I will not now discuss) so Nathan from God told David, his sin was forgiven. But these were privileges only to these persons, and not common to all. God hath no where said, either that all men's sins are actually forgiven; or that yours or mine by name are forgiven: but only that all that believe are forgiven, which supposeth them to believe before they are forgiven, and that they may be forgiven, and therefore

it is not true that they are forgiven before they believe. And therefore this faith is not a believing that they are forgiven, but a believing on Christ for forgiveness. Else men must believe an untruth, to make it become true by their believing it.

2. But now doubting, as it is opposed to the knowledge of our remission and justification, in those that are justified is a sin. For it can be no sin for an unjustified person to know that he is unjustified. But then I pray you mark how far it is a sin in the godly, and what manner of sin it is.

1. It is a sin, as it is part of our natural ignorance, and original depravedness of our understandings, or a fruit hereof, and of our strangeness to our own hearts, and of their deep deceitfulness, confusion, mutability, or negligence. 2.

And further, as all these are increased by long custom in sinning, and so the discerning of our states is become more difficult, it is yet a greater sin. 3. It is a sin as it is the fruit of any particular sin by which we have obscured our own graces, and provoked God to hide his face from us. And so all ignorance of any truth which we ought to know, is a sin; so the ignorance of our own regeneration and sincerity is a sin, because we ought to know it. But this is so far from being the great condemning sin of unbelief which Christ threateneth in his new law, that it is none of the greatest or most heinous sort of sins, but the infirmity in some measure of every Christian.

And let me further acquaint you with this difference between these doubtings, and your fears and sorrows that follow thereupon. Though the doubtings itself be your sin, yet I suppose that the fears, and sorrows, and cares that follow it may be your duty. Yet respectively, and by remote participation, even these also must be acknowledged sinful; even as our prayers for that pardon which we have received and knew it not, may by remote participation be called sinful; because if we had not sinned we should not have been ignorant of our own hearts. And if we had not been ignorant, we should not have doubted of the least true grace we have. And if we had not so doubted, we should not have feared, or sorrowed, or prayed for that remission in that sense. But yet, though these may be called sinful, as they come from sin, yet more nearly and in themselves considered, on supposition of our present estate, they are all

duties, and great duties necessary to our salvation. You may say to a thief that begs for pardon, 'If thou hadst not stolen, thou hadst not need to have begged pardon.' Yet supposing that he hath stolen, it may be his duty to beg pardon. And so you may say to a poor, fearing soul, that fears damnation and God's wrath, 'Thou needst not fear if thou hadst not sinned.' But when he hath once by sin obscured his evidences, and necessitated doubting, then is fear, and sorrow, and praying for justification and pardon, his duty, and indeed not fitly to be called sin, but rather a fruit of sin in one respect (and so hath some participation in it) but a fruit of the Spirit, and of Christ's command in another respect, and so a necessary duty. For else we should say, that it is a sin to repent and believe in Christ, and to love him as our Redeemer; for you may say to any sinner, 'Thou needst not to have repented, believed in a Redeemer, &c. but for thy sin;' yet I hope none will say, that so doing is properly a sin, though doing them defectively is. God doth not will and approve of it, that any soul that can see no signs of grace and sincerity in itself should yet be as confident, and merry, and careless, as if they were certain that all were well. God would not have men doubt of his love, and yet make light of it. This is a contempt of him. Else what should poor, carnal sinners do that find themselves unsanctified. No, nor doth God expect that any man should judge of himself better than he hath evidence to warrant such a judgment. But that every man should "prove his own work, that so he may have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For he that thinketh he is something when he is nothing, deceiveth himself;" Gal. vi. 3—6. And no man should be a self-deceiver, especially in a case of such inexpressible consequence. It is therefore a most desperate doctrine of the Antinomians (as most of theirs are) that all men ought to believe God's special love to them, and their own justification. And that they are justified by believing that they were justified before, and that no man ought to question his faith (saith Saltmarsh, any more than to question Christ). And that all fears of our damnation, or not being justified after this believing, are sin; and those that persuade to them, are preachers of the law, (how punctually do the most profane, ungodly people, hold most points of the Antinomian belief, though they ne-

ver knew that sect by name?). God commandeth no man to believe more than is true, not immediately to cast away their doubts and fears, but to overcome them in an orderly methodical way; that is, using God's means till their graces become more discernible, and their understandings more clear and fit to discern them, that so we may have assurance of their sincerity, and thereby of our justification, adoption, and right to glorification. "Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left of entering into his rest, any of us should seem to come short of it;" Heb. iv. 1. "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice before him in trembling; kiss the Son lest he be angry, and ye perish;" Psal. ii. 11. "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling;" Phil. ii. 12. Not only, 1. A reverent fear of God's majesty. 2. And a filial fear of offending him. 3. And an awful fear of his judgments, when we see them executed on others, and hear them threatened. 4. And a filial fear of temporal chastisements are lawful and our duty; but also, 5. A fear of damnation exciting to most careful importunity to escape it; whenever we have so far obscured our evidences, as to see no strong probability of our sincerity in the faith, and so of our salvation. The sum of my speech therefore is this: Do not think that all your fears of God's wrath are your sins; much of them is your great duty. Do you not feel that God made these fears at your first conversion, the first and a principal means of your recovery? To drive you to a serious consideration of your state and ways, and to look after Christ with more longing and estimation? And to use the means with more resolution and diligence? Have not these fears been chief preservers of your diligence and integrity ever since? I know love should do more than it doth with us all. But if we had not daily use for both (love and fear) God would not, 1. Have planted them both in our natures. 2. And have renewed them both by regenerating grace. 3. And have put into his word the objects to move both, (*viz.* threatenings as well as promises). That fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom, includeth the fear of his threatened wrath. I could say abundance more to prove this, but that I know as to you it is needless for conviction of it; but remember the use of it. Do not put the name of unbelief upon all your fears of God's displeasure. Much less should you presently conclude that you have no

faith, and that you cannot believe, because of these fears. You may have much faith in the midst of these fears; and God may make them preservers of your faith, by quickening you up to those means that must maintain it, and by keeping you from those evils that would be as a worm at the root of it, and eat out its precious strength and life. Security is no friend to faith, but a more deadly enemy than fear itself.

Object. ‘Then Cain and Judas sinned not by despairing, or at least not damnably.’

Ans. 1. They despaired not only of themselves, and of the event of their salvation, but also of God; of his power or goodness, and promise, and the sufficiency of any satisfaction of Christ. Their infidelity was the root of their despair. 2. Far it is for me to say or think that you should despair of the event, or that it is no sin; yea, or that you should cherish causeless and excessive jealousies and fears. Take heed of all fears that drive you from God, or that distract or weaken your spirit, or disable you from duty, or drown your love to God, and delight in him, and destroy your apprehensions of God’s loveliness and compassion, and raise black, and hard, and unworthy thoughts of God in your mind. Again, I entreat you, avoid and abhor all such fears. But if you find in you the fears of godly jealousy of your own heart, and such moderated fears of the wrath of God, which banish security, presumption, and boldness in sinning, and are (as Dr. Sibbs calls them) the awe-band of your soul; and make you fly to the merits and bosom of the Lord Jesus, as the affrighted child to the lap of the mother, and as the man-slayer under the law to the city of refuge, and as a man pursued by a lion, to his sanctuary or hold; do not think you have no faith, because you have these fears, but moderate them by faith and love, and then thank God for them. Indeed perfect love (which will be in heaven when all is perfected) will cast out this fear; and so it will do sorrow and care, and prayer and means. But see you lay not these by till perfect love cast them out. See Jer. v. 22, 23. Heb. xii. two last verses. “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.”

I am sensible that I am too large on these foregoing

heads; I will purposely shorten the rest, lest I weary you.

Direct. XIX. Further understand, 'That those few who do attain to assurance, have it not either perfectly or constantly (for the most part) but mixed with imperfection, and oft clouded and interrupted.'

That the highest assurance on earth is imperfect, I have shewed you elsewhere. If we be imperfect, and our faith imperfect, and the knowledge of our own hearts imperfect, and all our evidences and graces imperfect; then our assurance must needs be imperfect also. To dream of perfection on earth, is to dream of heaven on earth. And if assurance may be here perfect, why not all our graces? Even when all doubtings are overcome, yet is assurance far short of the highest degree.

Besides, that measure of assurance which godly men do partake of, hath here its many sad interruptions, in the most. Upon the prevalency of temptations, and the hidings of God's face, their souls are oft left in a state of sadness, that were but lately in the arms of Christ. How fully might this be proved from the examples of Job, David, Jeremy, and others in Scripture? And much more abundantly by the daily complaints and examples of the best of God's people now living among us. As there is no perfect evenness to be expected in our obedience while we are on earth, so neither will there be any constant or perfect evenness in our comforts. He that hath life in one duty, is cold in the next. And therefore he that hath much joy in one duty, hath little in the next. Yea, perhaps duty may but occasion the renewal of his sorrows; that the soul who before felt not its own burden at a sermon, or in prayer, or holy meditation, which were wont to revive him, now seems to feel his miseries to be multiplied. The time was once with David, when thoughts of God were sweet to him, and he could say, "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul." And yet he saw the time also when he remembered God and was troubled; he complained, and his spirit was overwhelmed. God so held his eyes waking, that he was troubled and could not speak. He considered the days of old, and the years of ancient time; he called to remembrance his song in the night, he communed with his own heart, and his spirit made diligent search. "Will the

Lord (saith he) cast off for ever? And will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercy?" Was not this a low ebb, and a sad case that David was in? Till at last he saw, this was his infirmity; Psal. lxxii. 1—10. Had David no former experiences to remind? No arguments of comfort to consider of? Yes, but there is at such a season an incapacity to improve them. There is not only a want of comfort, but a kind of averseness from it. The soul bendeth itself to break its own peace, and to put away comfort far from it. So saith he in ver. 2. "My soul refused to be comforted." In such cases men are witty to argue themselves into distress; that it is hard for one that would comfort them to answer them; and they are witty in repelling all the arguments of comfort that you can offer them; so that it is hard to fasten any thing on them. They have a weak wilfulness against their own consolations.

Seeing then that the best have such storms and sad interruptions, do not you wonder or think your case strange if it be so with you? Would you speed better than the best? Long for heaven then, where only is joy without sorrow, and everlasting rest without interruption.

Direct. XX. Let me also give you this warning, 'That you must never expect so much assurance on earth, as shall set you above the possibility of the loss of heaven; or above all apprehensions of real danger of your miscarrying.'

I conceive this advertisement to be of great necessity. But I must first tell you the meaning, and then the reasons of it. Only I am sorry that I know not how to express it fully, but in school-terms, which are not so familiar to you. 1. That which shall certainly come to pass, we call a thing future. That which may and can be done we call possible. All things are not future which are possible. God can do more than he hath done or will do. He could have made more worlds, and so more were possible than were future. Moreover a thing is said to be possible, in reference to some power which can accomplish it; whether it be God's power, or angel's, or man's. God hath decreed that none of his elect shall finally or totally fall away and perish; and therefore their so falling and perishing is not future; that is, it is a thing that shall never come to pass. But God

never decreed that it should be utterly impossible, and therefore it still remaineth possible, though it shall never come to pass.

Object. 'But it is said, 'They shall deceive, if it were possible, the very elect.'

Ans. A most comfortable place, which many opposers of election and free grace do in vain seek to obscure. But let me tell you for the right understanding of it, 1. That as I said, possible and impossible are relative terms, and have relation to the power of some agent, as proportioned to the thing to be done. Now this text speaks only of the power of false Christs, and false prophets and the devil by them their power of deceiving is exceeding great, but not great enough to deceive the elect; which is true in two respects, 1. Because the elect are guided and fortified by God's Spirit. 2. Because seducers work not efficiently, but finally, by propounding objects; or by a moral, improper efficiency only. All their seducement cannot force or necessitate us to be deceived by them. But though it be impossible to them to do it, yet it is possible to God to permit (which yet he never will), and so possible for ourselves to be our own deceivers, or to give deceivers strength against us, by a wilful receiving of their poisoned baits. 3. Besides Christ spoke not in Aristotle's school, but among the vulgar, where words must be used in the common sense, or else they will not be understood. And the vulgar use to call that impossible which shall never come to pass.

There is a consequential impossibility of the event, because it is directly impossible that God should be mutable or deceived; even as contingents may be consequentially and accidentally necessary. But in its own nature, alas our apostacy is more than possible.

And indeed when we say that it is possible or impossible for a man to sin or fall away, there is some degree of impropriety in the terms, because possible and impossible are terms properly relating to some power apportioned to a work; but sinning and falling away thereby, are the consequents of impotency, and not the effects of power; except we speak of the natural act, wherein the sin abideth. But this must be borne with, for want of a fitter word to express our meaning by. But I will leave these things

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which are not fit for you, and desire you to leave them and overpass them, if you understand them not.

2. I here told you also, that you must not look to be above all apprehension of danger of your miscarrying. The grounds of this are these : 1. Because as is said, our miscarrying remaineth still possible. 2. Because the perfect, certain knowledge of our election, and that we shall not fall away, is proper to God only ; we have ourselves but a defective, interrupted assurance of it. 3. The covenant gives us salvation but on condition of our perseverance, and perseverance on condition that we quench not the Spirit, which we shall do if we lose the apprehension of our danger. 4. Accordingly there is a connexion in our assurance, between all the several causes of our salvation, and necessities there-to ; whereof the apprehension of danger is one. We are sure we shall be saved, if we be sure to persevere ; else not. We are sure to persevere, if we be sure faithfully to resist temptations. We can be no surer of faithful resisting of temptations, than we are sure to be kept in an apprehension of our danger.

I still say therefore, that the doctrine of Antinomians is the most ready way to apostacy and perdition ; and no wonder if it lead to licentiousness and scandals, which our eyes have seen to be its genuine fruits ! They cry down the weakness, unbelief, and folly of poor Christians, that will apprehend themselves in danger of falling away, and so live in fear, after they are once justified ; and that if they fall into sin (as whoredom, drunkenness, murder, perjury, destroying the ministry, and expelling the Gospel, &c.), will presently question or fear their estates and their justification. Such like passages I lately read in some printed sermons of one of my ancient acquaintance, who would never have come to that pass that he is at now, if his judgment and humility had been as great as his zeal. I entreat you therefore never to expect such an assurance as shall extinguish all your apprehensions of danger. He that sees not the danger, is nearest it, and likely to fall into it. Only he that seeth and apprehendeth it, is likely to avoid it. He that seeth no danger of falling away, is in greatest danger of it. I doubt not but that is the cause of the seditions, scandals, heresies, blood-guiltiness, destroyers of the

churches of Christ, and most horrid apostacies, hypocrisy, and wickedness, which these late times have been guilty of; that they apprehended not the danger of ever coming into such a state, or ever doing such things, but would have said, 'Am I a dog?' to him that should have foretold them what is come to pass. Wonderful! that men should be so blinded by false doctrine, as not to know that the apprehension of danger is made in the very fabrication of the nature of man, to be the very engine to move his soul in all ways of self-preservation and salvation! Yea, it is that very supposed principle upon which all the government of the world, and the laws and order of every nation, are grounded. We could not keep the very brutes from tearing us in pieces, but for their own safety, because they apprehend themselves to be in danger by it. The fear of man is it that restraineth them. But for this, no man's life would be in any safety, for every malicious man would be a murderer. He that feareth not the loss of his own life, is master of another man's. Do these men think that the apprehension of bodily dangers may carry them on through all undertakings, and be the potent string of most of their actions, and warrant all those courses that else would be unwarrantable, so that they dare plead necessity to warrant those fearful things which by extenuating language (like Saul's) are called irregularities! And yet that it is unlawful or unmeet for a Christian, yea the weakest Christian, to live in any apprehensions of danger to their souls. Either danger of sinning, or falling away, or perishing for ever? No wonder if such do sin, and fall away and perish. Would these men have fought well by sea or land, if they had apprehended no danger? Would the earth have been so covered with carcasses, and with blood (yea, even of saints) and the world filled with the doleful calamities that accompanied and have followed, if there had been no apprehensions of danger? Would they take physic when they are sick? Would they avoid fire or water, or thieves, but through an apprehension of danger? Let them talk what they please, if ever they escape hell, without a deep apprehension of the danger of it, it must be in a way not known by Scripture, or by nature. Sure I am Paul did tame his body, and bring it into subjection, through an apprehension of this danger, lest when he had preached to others, himself should be a cast-

away or reprobate? 2 Cor. ix. 27. And Christ himself, when he biddeth us “fear not them that can kill the body,” (whom yet these men think it lawful to fear and fight against) yet chargeth us with a double charge, to “fear him that is able to destroy both body and soul in hell: yea, I say unto you, (saith Christ), fear him;” Luke xii. 5. What can be plainer? and to his disciples? My detestation of these destructive Antinomian principles, maketh me to run out further against them than I intended; though it were easy more abundantly to manifest their hatefulness. But my reasons are these: 1. Because the mountebanks are still thrusting in themselves, and impudently proclaiming their own skill, and the excellency of their remedies for the cure of wounded consciences, and the settling of peace; when indeed their receipts are rank poison, gilded with the precious name of Christ, and free grace. 2. Because I would not have your doubtings cured by the devil; for he will but cure one disease with another, and a lesser with a far greater. If he can so cure your fears and doubtings, as to bring you into carnal security and presumption, he will lose nothing by the cure, and you will get nothing. If he can turn a poor, doubting, troubled Christian to be a secure Antinomian, he hath cured the smart of a cut finger by casting them into a lethargy, or stupefaction by his opium. To go to Antinomian receipts to cure a troubled soul, is as going to a witch to cure the body. 3. I would have you sensible of God’s goodness to you, in these very troubles that you have so long laid under. Your blessed physician knew your disease, and the temperature of your soul. Perhaps he saw that you were in some danger of being carried away with the honours, profits, or treasures of this world; and would have been entangled in either covetousness, pride, voluptuousness, or some such desperate sin. And now by these constant and extraordinary apprehensions of your danger, these sins have been much kept under, temptations weakened, and your danger prevented. If you have found no such inclinations in yourself, yet God might find them. Had it not been far worse for you to have lain so many years in pride, sensuality, and forgetfulness of God, and utter neglect of the state of your soul, than to have lain so long as you have done in the apprehensions of your danger? O love and admire your wise Physician! Little do you know now

what he hath been doing for you ; nor shall you ever fully know it in this life ; but hereafter you shall know it, when your sanctification, and consolation, and his praises shall be perfected together. 4. If you should for the time to come, expect or desire that God should set you out of all apprehension of danger, you know not what it is that you desire. It were to desire your own undoing. Only see that you apprehend not your danger to be greater than it is ; nor so apprehend it as to increase it, by driving you from Christ, but as to prevent it by driving you to him. Entertain not fancies and dreams of danger, instead of right apprehensions. Apprehend your happiness and grounds of hope and comfort, and safety in Christ, and let these quite exceed your apprehensions of the danger. Look not on it as a remediless danger, or as greater than the remedy. Do not conclude that you shall perish in it, and it will swallow you up. But only let it make you hold fast on Christ, and keep close to him in obedience. Shall I lay open all the matter expressed in this section, by a familiar comparison ?

A king having many subjects and sons, which are all beyond sea, or beyond some river, they must needs be brought over to him before they can live or reign with him. The river is frozen over at the sides, till it come almost to the middle. The foolish children are all playing on the ice, where a deceiving enemy enticeth them to play on till they come to the deep, where they drop in one by one and perish. The eldest son, who is with the father on the other side, undertaketh to cast himself into the water, and swim to the further side, and break the ice, and swim back with them all that will come with him and hold him. The father bids him, ‘ Bring all my subjects with you, if they will come and hold by you ; but be sure you fail not to bring my sons.’ This is resolved on ; the prince casteth himself into the water, and swimmeth to the further side. He maketh a way through the ice, and offereth all of them his safe carriage, if they will accept him to be their bearer and helper, and will trust themselves on him, and hold fast by him till they come to the further side. Some refuse his help, and think he would deceive them, and lead them into the deep, and there leave them to perish. Some had rather play on the ice, and will not hearken to him. Some dare not venture through the streams, or will not endure the coldness of the water.

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Some waveringly agree to him, and hold faintly by his skirt; and when they feel the cold water, or are near the deep, or are weary of holding, they lose him; either turning back, or perishing suddenly in the gulf. The children are of the same mind with the rest; but he is resolved to lose none of them, and therefore he chargeth them to come with him, and tells them fully what a welcome they shall have with their father; and ceaseth not his importunity till he persuade them to consent. Some of them say, 'How shall we ever get over the river? we shall be drowned by the way.' He tells them, 'I will carry you safe over, so you will but hold fast by me. Never fear, I warrant you.' They all lay hold on him, and venture in with him. When they are in the midst some are afraid, and cry out, 'We shall be drowned.' These he encourageth, and bids them trust him; hold fast, and fear not. Others, when they hear these words, that they need not fear, they grow so bold and utterly secure, as to lose their hold. To these he speaketh in other language, and chargeth them to hold fast by him; for if they lose their hold, they will fall into the bottom, and if they stick not to him they will be drowned. Some of them upon this warning hold fast; others are so boldly confident of his skill, and good will, and promise, that they forget or value not his warning and threatening, but lose their hold. Some through laziness and weariness do the like. Whereupon he lets them sink till they are almost drowned, and cry out for help, "Save us or we perish," and think they are all lost; and then he layeth hold of them and fetcheth them up again, and chideth them for their bold folly, and biddeth them look better to themselves, and hold faster by him hereafter, if they love themselves. Some at last, through mere weariness and weakness, before they can reach the bank, cry out, 'O I am tired, I faint, I shall never hold fast till I reach the shore, I shall be drowned.' These he comforteth, and gives them cordials, and holdeth them by the hand, and bids them Despair not. Do your best. Hold fast, and I will help you. And so he brings them all safe to the haven.

This king is God; heaven is his habitation; the subjects are all men; the sons, who are part of the subjects, are the elect; the rest are the non-elect; the river or sea is the passage of this life. The further side is all men's natural, sinful distance and separation from God and happiness;

the ice that bears them, is this frail life of pleasures, profits, and honours, which delight the flesh; the depth unfrozen is hell; he that enticeth them thither is the devil. The eldest son that is sent to bring them over, is Jesus Christ; his commission and undertaking is, to help all over that refuse not his help; and to see that the elect be infallibly recovered and saved. Do I need to go over the other particulars? I know you see my meaning in them all: especially that which I aim at is this; that as Paul had a promise of the life of all that were with him in the ship, and yet when some would have gone out, he told them, "Except these abide in the ship ye cannot be saved," Acts xxvii. 31. (so that he makes their apprehension of danger in a possibility of being drowned, to be the means of detaining them in the ship till they came all safe to land) so Jesus Christ who will infallibly save all his elect (they being given him by his Father to be infallibly saved) will do it by causing them to hold fast by him, through all the troubles, and labours, and temptations of this tumultuous, tempestuous world, and that till they come to land; and the apprehension of their dangers shall be his means to make them hold fast; yet is not their safety principally in themselves, but in him: nor is it their holding fast by him that is the chief cause of their difference from those that perish, but that is his love and resolution to save them. And therefore when they do let go their hold, he will not so lose them, but will fetch them up again; only he will not bring them through this sea of danger as you would draw a block through the water; but as men that must hold fast, and be commanded and threatened to that end; and therefore when they lose their hold, it is the fear of drowning which they felt themselves near, which shall cause them to hold faster the next time; and this must needs be the fear of a possible danger. And for those that perish, they have none to blame but themselves. They perish not for want of a Saviour, but because they would not lay hold on him, and follow him through the tempests and waves of trial. Nor can they quarrel at him because he did more for others, and did not as much for them as long as he offered them so sufficient help, that only their own wilful refusal was their ruin, and their perdition was of themselves.

I conclude therefore, that seeing our salvation is laid by

God, upon our faithful holding fast to Christ through all trials and difficulties, and our holy fear is the means of our holding fast (Christ being still the principal cause of our safety), therefore never look for such a certainty of salvation, as shall put you above such fears and moderated apprehensions of danger; for then it is ten to one you will lose your hold. You read in Scripture very many warnings to take heed lest we fall, and threatenings to those that do fall away and draw back. What are all these for, but to excite in us those moderate fears, and cares, and holy diligence, which may prevent our falling away? And remember this, that there can be no such holy fears, and cares, and diligence, where there is no danger or possibility of falling away; for there can be no act without its proper object; and the object of fear is a possible hurt, at least in the apprehension of him that feareth it. No man can fear the evil which he knoweth to be impossible.

Direct. XXI. The next advice which I must give you, is this, 'Be thankful if you can but reach to a settled peace, and composure of your mind, and lay not too much on the high raptures and feelings of comfort which some do possess: and if ever you enjoy such feeling joys, expect not that they should be either long or often.'

It is the cause of miserable languishing to many a poor soul, to have such importunate expectations of such passionate joys, that they think without these they have no true comfort at all; no witness of the Spirit, no spirit of adoption, no joy in the Holy Ghost. Some think that others have much of this, though they have not, and therefore they torment themselves because it is not with them as with others; when, alas, they little know how it goes with others. Some taste of such raptures sometimes themselves have had, and therefore when they are gone, they think they are forsaken, and that all grace, or peace at least is gone with them. Take heed of these expectations. And to satisfy you, let me tell you these two or three things: 1. A settled calm and peace of soul is a great mercy, and not to be undervalued as nothing. 2. The highest raptures and passionate feeling joys, are usually of most doubtful sincerity. Not that I would have any suspect the sincerity of them without cause; but such passions are not so certain signs of grace, as the settled frame of the understanding and will; nor can we so

easily know that they are of the Spirit, and they are liable to more questioning, and have in them a greater possibility of deceit. Doubtless it is very much that fancy and melancholy, and especially a natural weakness and moveable temper will do in such cases. Mark whether it be not mostly these three sorts of people that have or pretend to have such extraordinary raptures and feelings of joy. 1. Women and others that are most passionate. 2. Melancholy people. 3. Men that by erroneous opinions have lost almost all their understandings in their fancies, and live like men in a continual dream. Yet I doubt not but solid men have oft high joys; and more we might all have, if we did our duty. And I would have no Christian content himself with a dull quietness of spirit, but by all means possible to be much in labouring to rejoice in God and raising their souls to heavenly delights. O what lives do we lose, which we might enjoy! But my meaning is this: look at these joys and delights as duties and as mercies, but look not at them as marks of trial; so as to place more necessity in them than God hath done; or to think them to be ordinary things. If you do but feel such a high estimation of Christ and heaven, that you would not leave him for all the world, take this for your surest sign. And if you have but so much probability or hope of your interest in him, that you can think of God as one that loveth you, and can be thankful to Christ for redeeming you, and are more glad in these hopes of your interest in Christ and glory, than if you were owner of all the world; take this for a happy mercy, and a high consolation. Yet I mean not that your joy in Christ will be always so sensible, as for worldly things; but it will be more rational, solid and deeper at the heart. And that you may know by this, you would not for all the pleasures, honours or profits in the world, be in the same case as once you were (supposing that you were converted since you had the use of reason and memory), or at least as you see the ungodly world still lie in.

3. And let me add this: commonly those that have the highest passionate joys, have the saddest lives; for they have withal, the most passionate fears and sorrows. Mark it, whether you find not this prove true. And it is partly from God's will in his dispensations; partly from their own necessities; who after their exaltations do usually need a prick in the flesh, and a minister of satan to buffet them, lest

they be exalted above measure; and partly, and most commonly it is from the temperature of their bodies. Weak, passionate women, of moveable spirits and strong affections, when they love, they love violently, and when they rejoice, especially in such cases, they have most sensible joys, and when any fears arise, they have most terrible sorrows. I know it is not so with all of that sex; but mark the same people that usually have the highest joys, and see whether at other times they have not the greatest troubles. This week they are as at the gates of heaven, and the next as at the doors of hell: I am sure, with many it is so. Yet it need not be so, if Christians would but look at these high joys as duties to be endeavoured, and mercies to be valued; but when they will needs judge of their state by them, and think that God is gone from them or forsaken them, when they have not such joys, then it leaves them in terror and amazement. Like men after a flash of lightning, that are left more sensible of the darkness. For no wise man can expect that such joys should be a Christian's ordinary state; or God should so diet us with a continual feast. It would neither suit with our health, nor the condition of this pilgrimage. Live therefore on your peace of conscience as your ordinary diet; when this is wanting, know that God appointeth you a fast for your health; and when you have a feast of high joys, feed on it and be thankful; but when they are taken from you, gape not after them as the disciples did after Christ at his ascension; but return thankfully to your ordinary diet of peace. And remember that these joys, which are now taken from you, may so return again. However, there is a place preparing for you, where your joys shall be full.

Direct. XXII. My next Direction is this, 'Spend more of your time and care about your duty than about your comforts; and for the exercise and increase of your graces, than for the discovery of them: and when you have done all that you can for assurance and comfort, you shall find that it will very much depend on your actual obedience.'

This Direction is of as great importance as any that I have yet given you; but I shall say but little of it, because I have spoke of it so fully already in my Book of Rest, Part iii. Chap. 8—11. My reasons for what I here assert are these: 1. Duty goeth in order of nature and time, before

comfort, as the precept is before the promise : comfort is part of the reward, and therefore necessarily supposeth the duty. 2. Grace makes men both so ingenious and divine, as to consider God's due as well as their own ; and what they should do, as well as what they shall have, still remembering that our works cannot merit at God's hands. 3. As we must have grace before we can know we have it, so ordinarily we must have a good measure of grace, before we can so clearly discern it as to be certain of it. Small things, I have told you, are next to none, and hardly discernible by weak eyes. When all ways in the world are tried, it will be found that there is no way so sure for a doubting soul to be made certain of the truth of his graces, as to keep them in action, and get them increased. And it will be found that there is no one cause of Christians doubting of the truth of their faith, love, hope, repentance, humility, &c. so great or so common as the small degree of these graces. Doth not the very language of complaining Christians shew this ? One saith, 'I have no faith ; I cannot believe ; I have no love to God ; I have no delight in duty.' Another saith, 'I cannot mourn for sin, my heart was never broken ; I cannot patiently bear an injury ; I have no courage in opposing sin, &c.' If all these were not in a low and weak degree, men could not so ordinarily think they had none. A lively, strong, working faith, love, zeal, courage, &c. would shew themselves, as do the highest towers, the greatest mountains ; the strongest winds, the greatest flames, which will force an observance by their greatness and effects. 4. Consider also that it is more pleasing to God to see his people study him and his will directly, than to spend the first and chiefest of their studies about the attaining of comforts to themselves. 5. And it is the nature of grace to tend first and chiefly toward God ; and but secondarily to be the evidence of our own happiness. We have faith given us principally that we might believe, and live by it in daily applications of Christ : we have repentance, that it might break us off from sin, and bring us back to God ; we have love, that we might love God and our Redeemer, his saints, and laws, and ways ; we have zeal, that we might be quickened in all our holy duties ; and we have obedience, to keep us in the way of duty. The first thing we have to do with these graces, is to use them for those

holy ends which their nature doth express: and then the discerning of them that we may have assurance, followeth after this both in time and dignity. 6. And it is a matter of far greater concernment to ourselves to seek after the obtaining of Christ and grace, than after the certain knowledge that we have them. You may be saved though you never get assurance here, but you cannot be saved without Christ and grace. God hath not made assurance the condition of your salvation. It tends indeed exceedingly to your comfort, and a precious mercy it is; but your safety lieth not on it. It is better to go sorrowful and doubting to heaven, than comfortably to hell. First therefore ask what is the condition of salvation and the way to it, and then look that you do your best to perform it, and to go that way, and then try your performance in its season. 7. Besides, as it is a work of far greater moment, so also of quicker dispatch, to believe and love Christ truly, than to get assurance that you do truly believe and love him. You may believe immediately, (by the help of God's grace,) but getting assurance of it may be the work of a great part of your life. Let me therefore entreat this one thing of you, that when you feel the want of any grace, you would not presently bend all your thoughts upon the inquiry, whether it be true or no; but rather say to yourself, 'I see trying is a great and difficult, a long and tedious work: I may be this many years about it, and possibly be unresolved still. If I should conclude that I have no grace, I may be mistaken; and so I may if I think that I have it. I may inquire of friends and ministers long, and yet be left in doubt; it is therefore my surest way to seek presently to obtain it, if I have it not, and to increase it if I have it. And I am certain none of that labour will be lost; to get more is the way to know I have it.'

But perhaps you will say, 'How should I get more grace? That is a business of greater difficulty than so.' I answer, Understand what I told you before, that as the beginning of grace is in your understanding, so the heart and life of it is in your will; and the affections and passionate part are but the fruits and branches. If therefore your grace be weak, it is chiefly in an unwillingness to yield to Christ, and his word and Spirit. Now, how should an unwilling soul be made willing? Why thus, 1. Pray constantly as you are able, for a willing mind, and yielding, inclinable heart to

Christ. 2. Hear constantly those preachers that bend their doctrine to inform your understanding of the great necessity and excellency of Christ, and grace, and glory ; and to persuade the will with the most forcible arguments. A persuading, quickening ministry, that helps to excite your graces, and draw up your heart to Christ, is more useful than they that spend most of their time to persuade you of your sincerity, and give you comfort. 3. But especially lay out your thoughts more in the most serious considerations of those things which tend to breed and feed those particular graces which you would have increased. Objects and moving reasons kept much upon the mind by serious thoughts, are the great engine appointed both by nature and by grace, to turn about the soul of man. Thoughts are to your soul, as taking in the air, and meat and drink to your body. Objects considered, do turn the soul into their own nature. Such as are the things that you most think and consider of (I mean in pursuance of them), such will you be yourself. Consideration, frequent serious consideration, is God's great instrument to convert the soul, and to confirm it ; to get grace, and to keep it, and increase it. If any soul perish for want of grace, it is ten to one it is mainly for want of frequent and serious consideration. That the most of us do languish under such weaknesses, and attain to small degrees of grace, is for want of sober, frequent consideration. We know not how great things this would do, if it were but faithfully managed. This then is my advice, when you feel so great a want of faith and love (for those be the main graces for trial and use,) that you doubt whether you have any or none, lay by those doubting thoughts awhile, and presently go and set yourself to consider of God's truth, goodness, amiableness, and kindheartedness to miserable, unworthy sinners : think what he is in himself, and what he is to you, and what he hath done for you, and what he will do for you if you do but consent. And then think of the vanity of all the childish pleasures of this world ; how soon, and in how sad a case they will leave us ; and what silly, contemptible things they are, in comparison of the everlasting glory of the saints ! By that time you have warmed your soul a little with such serious thoughts, you will find your faith and love revive, and begin to stir and work within you ; and then you will feel that you have faith and love.

Only remember what I told you before, that the heart and soul of saving faith and love (supposing a belief that the Gospel is true,) is all in this one act of willingness and consent to have Christ as he is offered. Therefore if you doubt of your faith and love, it is your own willingness that you doubt of, or else you know not what you do. Now methinks, if you took but a sober view of the goodness of God, and the glory of heaven on one side, and of the silly, empty, worthless world on the other side; and then ask your heart which it will choose; and say to yourself, 'O my soul, the God of glory offers thee thy choice of dung and vanity for a little time, or of the unconceivable joys of heaven, for ever: which wilt thou choose?' I say, methinks the answer of your own soul should presently resolve you, that you do believe, and that you love God above this present world! For if you can choose him before the world, then you are more willing of him than the world: and if he have more of your will, for certain he hath more of your faith and love. Use, therefore, instead of doubting of your faith, to believe till you put it out of doubt. And if yet you doubt, study God, and Christ, and glory yet better, and keep those objects by consideration close to your heart, whose nature is to work the heart to faith and love. For certainly objects have a mighty power on the soul; and certainly God, and Christ, and grace, and glory, are mighty objects; as able to make a full and deep impression on man's soul, as any in the world; and if they work not, it is not through any imperfection in them, but because they be not well applied, and by consideration held upon the heart, that they may work. Perhaps you will say, that meditation is too hard a work for you, and that your memory is so weak that you want matter to meditate upon; or if you do meditate on these, yet you feel no great motion or alteration on your heart. To this I answer; if you want matter, take the help of some book that will afford you matter; and if you want life in meditation, peruse the most quickening writings you can get. If you have not better at hand, read over (and seriously consider as you read it,) those passages in the end of my Book of Rest, which direct you in the exercises of these graces, and give you some matter for your meditation to work upon: and remember, that if you can increase the re-

solved choice of your will, you increase your love, though you feel not those affectionate workings that you desire.

Let me ask you now whether you have indeed taken this course in your doubtings? If not, how unwisely have you done. Doubting is no cure, but actual believing and loving is a cure. If faith and love were things that you would fain get, but cannot, then you had cause enough to fear, and to lie down and rise in trouble of mind from one year to another. But it is no such matter; it is so far from being beyond your reach or power to have these graces, though you would, that they themselves are nothing else but your very willingness; at least your willingness to have Christ, is both your faith and love. It may be said therefore to be in the power of your will, which is nothing else but that actual willingness which you have already. If therefore you are unwilling to have him, what makes you complain for want of the sense of his presence, and the assurance of his love, and the graces of his Spirit, as you frequently do? It is strange to me, that people should make so many complaints to God and men, and spend so many sad hours in fears and trouble, and all for want of that which they would not have. If you be not willing, be willing now. If you say you cannot, do as I have before directed you. One hour's sober, serious thoughts of God and the world, of Christ and satan, of sin and holiness, of heaven and hell, and the differences of them, will do very much to make you willing. Yet mistake me not; though I say you may have Christ if you will, and faith and love if you will, and no man can truly say, 'I would be glad to have Christ (as he is offered) but cannot;' yet this gladness, consent, or willingness which I mention, is the effect of the special work of the Spirit, and was not in your power before you had it; nor is it yet so in your power as to believe, without God's further help. But he that hath made you willing, will not be wanting to maintain your willingness. Though I will say to any man, You may have Christ if you will; yet I will say to no man, You can be willing of yourself, or without the special grace of God.

Nay, let me further ask; Have not you darkened, buried, or weakened your graces, instead of exercising and increasing them, even then when you complained for want of

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assurance of them? When you found a want of faith and love, have not you weakened them more, and so made them less discernible? Have you not fed your unbelief, and disputed for your doubtings, and taken satan's part against yourself; and (which is far worse) have you never, through these doubtings, entertained hard thoughts of God, and presented him to your soul, as unwilling to shew you mercy, and in an unlovely, dreadful, hideous shape, fitter to affright you from him, than to draw you to him and likelier to provoke your hatred than your love? If you have not done thus, I know too many troubled souls that have. And if you have, you have taken a very unlikely way to get assurance. If you would have been certain that you loved God in sincerity, you should have laboured to love him more, till you had been certain; and that you might do so, you should have kept better thoughts of God in your mind. You will hardly love him while you think of him as evil, or at least as hurtful to you. Never forget this rule which I laid you down in the beginning, that, He that will ever love God, must apprehend him to be good. And the more large and deep are our apprehensions of his goodness, the more will be our love. For such as God appears to be to men's fixed conceivings, such will their affections be to him. For the fixed, deep conceptions, or apprehensions of the mind, do lead about the soul, and guide the life.

I conclude therefore with this important and importunate request to you, that, Though it be a duty necessary in its time and place, to examine ourselves concerning our sincerity, in our several graces and duties to God; yet be sure that the first and far greater part of your time, and pains; and care, and inquiries, be for the getting and increasing of your grace, than for the discerning it; and to perform your duty rightly, than to discern your right performance. And when you confer with ministers, or others, that may teach you, see that you ask ten times at least, 'How should I get or increase my faith, my love to Christ, and to his people?' For once that you ask, 'How shall I know that I believe or love?' Yet so contrary hath been, and still is, the practice of most Christians among us in this point, that I have heard it twenty times asked, 'How shall I know that I truly love the brethren?' For once that I have heard it demanded, 'How should I bring my heart to

love them better ?' And the like I may say of love to Christ himself.

I should next have spoke of the second part of the Direction, How much our assurance and comfort will still depend on our actual obedience. But this will fall in in handling the two or three next following Directions.

Direct. XXIII. My next advice is this, 'Think not those doubts and troubles of mind, which are caused and continued by wilful disobedience, will ever be well healed but by the healing of that disobedience; or that the same means must be used, and will suffice to the cure of such troubles; which must be used, and will suffice to cure the troubles of a tender conscience, and of an obedient Christian, whose trouble is merely through mistakes of their condition.'

I will begin with the latter part of this Direction. He that is troubled upon mere mistakes, may be quieted upon the removal of them. If he understood not the universal extent of Christ's satisfaction, or of the covenant or conditional grant of Christ and life in him; and if upon this he be troubled, as thinking that he is not included, the convincing him of his error may suffice to the removal of his trouble. If he be troubled through his mistaking the nature of true faith, or true love, or other graces, and so think that he hath them not, when he hath them, the discovery of his error may be the quieting of his soul. The soul that is troubled upon such mistakes, must be tenderly dealt with. Much more they that are disquieted by groundless fears, or too deep apprehensions of the wrath or justice of God, of the evil of sin, and of their unworthiness, and for want of fuller apprehensions of the lovingkindness of God, and the tender, compassionate nature of Christ. We can scarce handle such souls too gently. God would have all to be tenderly dealt with, that are tender of displeasing and dishonouring him by sin. God's own language may teach all ministers what language we should use to such, Isa. lvii. 15—21. "Thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wrath. For the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made, &c. But the

wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." Much more tender language may such expect from Christ in the Gospel, where is contained a fuller revelation of his grace. If Mary, a poor, sinful woman, lie weeping at his feet, and washing them with her tears, he hath not the heart to spurn her away ; but openly proclaims the forgiveness of her many sins. As soon as ever the heart of a sinner is turned from his sins, the heart of Christ is turned to him. The very sum of all the Gospel is contained in those precious words, which fully express this : " Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me ; for I am meek and lowly in heart ; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light ;" Matt. xi. 28—30. When the prodigal (Luke xi. 20.), doth once come home to his father, with sorrow and shame, confessing his unworthiness, yea, but resolved to confess it ; his father preventeth him, and sees him afar off, and stays not his coming, but runs and meets him. And when he comes to him, he doth not upbraid him with his sins, nor say, Thou rebel, why hast thou forsaken me, and preferred harlots and luxury before me ? Nay, he doth not so much as frown upon him, but compassionately falls on his neck and kisseth him. Alas, God knows that a poor sinner in this humbled, troubled case, hath burden enough on his back already, and indeed more than he is able of himself to bear. The sense of his own sinful folly and misery is burden enough. If God should add to this his frowns and terrors, and should spurn at a poor sinner that lies prostrate at his feet, in tears or terrors, who then should be able to stand before him, or to look him in the face ? But he will not break the bruised reed ; he will not make heavier the burden of a sinner. He calls them to come to him for ease and rest, and not to oppress them, or kill them with terrors. We have not a king like Rehoboam, that will multiply our pressures ; but one whose office it is to break our yokes, and loose our bonds, and set us free. When he was a preacher himself on earth ; you may gather what doctrine he preached by his text, which he chose at one of his first public sermons ; which, as you may find in Luke iv. 18, 19. was this, " The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor ;

he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted ; to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised ; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." O if a poor, bruised, wounded soul, had but heard this sermon from his Saviour's own mouth, what heart-meltings would it have caused ? What pangs of love would it have raised in him ? You would sure have believed then that the Lord is gracious, when "all (that heard him) bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth ;" Luke iv. 22. I would desire no more for the comfort of such a soul, than to see such a sight, and feel such a feeling as the poor penitent prodigal did, when he found himself in the arms of his father, and felt the kisses of his mouth, and was surprised so unexpectedly with such a torrent of love. The soul that hath once seen and felt this, would never sure have such hard and doubtful thoughts of God, except through ignorance they knew not whose arms they were that thus embraced them, or whose voice it was that thus bespoke them ; or unless the remembrance of it were gone out of their minds. You see then what is God's own language to humbled penitents, and what is the method of his dealings with them ; and such must be the language and dealing of his ministers : they must not wound when Christ would heal ; nor make sad the heart that Christ would comfort, and would not have made sad ; Ezek. xiii. 22.

But will this means serve turn, or must the same course be taken to remove the sorrows of the wilfully disobedient ? No. : God takes another course himself, and prescribes another course to his ministers ; and requires another course from the sinner himself. But still remember who it is that I speak of : it is not the ordinary, unavoidable infirmities of the saints that I speak of ; such as they cannot be rid of, though they fain would ; such as Paul speaks of, Rom. vii. 19. "The good that I would do, I do not : " and "when I would do good, evil is present with me." And Gal. v. 17. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, &c. so that we cannot do the things that we would." A true Christian would love God more perfectly, and delight in him more abundantly, and bring every thought in subjection to his will, and subdue the very remnants of carnal concupiscence, that there should be no stirrings of lust or unjust anger, or world-

ly desires, or pride within him; and that no vain word might pass his lips: all this he would do, but he cannot. Striving against these unavoidable infirmities, is conquering.

But though we cannot keep under every motion of concupiscence, we can forbear the execution. Anger will stir upon provocations; but we may restrain it in degree, that it set us not in a flame, and do not much distemper or discompose our minds. And we can forbid our tongues all raging, furious, or abusive words in our anger; all cursing, swearing, or reproachful speaking. If an envious thought against one brother do arise in our hearts, because he is preferred before us, we may hate it and repress it, and chide our hearts for it, and command our tongues to speak well of him, and no evil. Some pride and self-esteem will remain and be stirring in us, do what we can, it is a sin so deeply rooted in our corrupt natures. But yet we can detest it, and resist it, and meet with abhorrence of our self-conceited thoughts, and rejoicings in our own reputations and fame, and inward heart-risings against those that undervalue us, and stand in the way of our repute; and we may forbear our boasting language, and our contestings for our credit, and our excuses of our sins, and our backbitings and secret defaming of those that cross us in the way of credit. We may forbear our quarrels, and estrangements, and dividings from our brethren, and stiff insisting on our own conceits, and expecting that others should make our judgments their rule, and say and do as we would have them, and all dance after our pipe; all which are the effects of inward pride. We cannot, while we are on earth, be free from all inordinate love of the world, and the riches and honours of it; but we may so watch against it and repress it, as that it shall neither be preferred before God, nor draw us to unlawful ways of gain, by lying, deceit, and overreaching our brethren; by stealing, unjust or unmerciful dealings, oppressing the poor, and insulting over those that are in the way of our thriving, and crushing them that would hinder our aspiring designs, and treading them down that will not bow to us, and taking revenge of them that have crossed or disparaged us, or cruelly exacting all our rights and debts of the poor, and squeezing the purses of subjects or tenants, or those that we bargain with, like a sponge, as long as any thing will come out. Yea, we may so far subdue our love of the world, as

that it shall not hinder us from being merciful to the poor, compassionate to our servants and labourers, and bountiful to our power in doing good works ; nor yet shut out God's service from our families and closets ; nor rob him of our frequent, affectionate thoughts, especially on the Lord's day. So for sensuality, or the pleasing of our flesh more immediately ; we shall never on earth be wholly freed from inordinate motions, and temptations, and fleshly desires, and urgent inclinations and solicitations to forbidden things. But yet we may restrain our appetite by reason, so far that it brings us not to gluttony and drunkenness, and a studying for our bellies, and pampering of our flesh, or a taking care for it, and making provision to satisfy its lusts ; Rom. xiii. 14. We may forbear the obeying it, in excess of apparel, in indecent, scandalous, or time-wasting recreations, in uncleanness, or unchaste speeches or behaviour, or the reading of amorous books and sonnets, or feeding our eyes or thoughts on filthy or enticing objects, or otherwise wilfully blowing the fire of lust. So also for the performance of duty. We shall never in this life be able to hear or read so diligently, and understandingly, or affectionately, as we would do ; nor to remember or profit by what we hear, as we desire. But yet we can bring ourselves to the congregation, and not prefer our ease, or business, or any vain thing before God's word and worship, or loathe or despise it, because of some weakness in the speaker. And we may in a great measure restrain our thoughts from wandering, and force ourselves to attend ; and labour when we come home to recal it to mind. We cannot call on God so fervently, believingly, or delightfully, as we would ; but yet we may do it as sincerely as we can, and do it constantly. We cannot instruct our children and servants, and reprove or exhort our neighbours, with that boldness, or love, and compassion, and discretion, and meet expressions, as we would ; but yet we may do it faithfully and frequently as we are able.

So that you may see in all this, what sin it is that Paul speaks of, Rom. vii. when he saith, When he would do good, evil is present with him ; and that he is led captive to the law of sin, and serves the law of sin with his flesh. And Gal. iv. 17. when he saith, "We cannot do the things that we would," he speaks not of wilful sinning or gross sin, but

of unavoidable infirmities ; whereby also we are too often drawn into a committing of many sins which we might avoid (for so the best do).

And because you may often read and hear of sins of infirmity, as distinguished from other sins, let me here give you notice, that this word may be taken in several senses, and that there are three several sorts of infirmity in the godly.

1. There are those sins which a man cannot avoid though he would ; which are in the gentlest sense called sins of infirmity. Here note, 1. That Adam had none such. 2. And that the reason of them is, because, 1. Our reason which should direct, and our wills themselves which should command, are both imperfect. 2. And our faculties that should be commanded and directed, are by sin grown impotent and obstinate, and have contracted a rebelling, disobedient disposition. 3. And that degree of grace, which the best attain to in this life, is not such as wholly to overcome either the imperfection of the guiding and commanding faculty, or the rebellion of the obeying faculties : otherwise if our own wills were perfect, and the rebellion of the inferior faculties cured, no man could then say, ‘The good that I would, I do not, and the evil that I would not, that I do.’ For the will would so fully command, that all would obey, and itself being perfect, all would be perfect. And therefore in heaven it is and will be so.

I know philosophers conclude, that all acts of the inferior faculties are but acts commanded by the will ; it should be so I confess. It is the office of the will to command, and the understanding to direct, and the rest to obey. But in our state of sinful imperfection, the soul is so distempered and corrupted, that the will cannot fully rule those faculties that it should rule ; so that it may be said, ‘I would forbear sin, but cannot.’ For, 1. The understanding is become a dark, imperfect director. 2. The will is become an imperfect receiver of the understanding’s directions ; yea, an opposer, as being tainted with the neighbourhood of a distempered sense. 3. When the will is rectified by grace, it is but in part ; and therefore when Paul, or any holy man saith, ‘I would do good,’ and ‘I would not do evil,’ they mean it not of a perfect willingness, but of a sincere ; to wit, that this is the main bent of their will, and the resolved prevalent act of it is for good. 4. When the will doth com-

mand, yet the commanded faculties do refuse to obey, through an unfitness of impotency and corruption. 1. The will hath but an imperfect command of the understanding. (I mean as to the exercise of the act, in which respect it commandeth it, and not as to the specification of the act.) A man may truly and strongly desire to know more, and apprehend things more clearly, and yet cannot. 2. The will hath but an imperfect command of the fancy or thoughts; so that a man may truly say, 'I would think more frequently, more intensely, and more orderly of good, and less of vanity, and yet I cannot.' For objects and passions may force the fancy and cogitations in some degree. 3. The will hath but an imperfect command of the passions; so that a man may truly say, 'I would not be troubled, or afraid, or grieved, or disquieted, or angry, but I cannot choose, and I would mourn more for sin, and be more afraid of sinning, and of God's displeasure, and more zealous for God, and more delighted in him, and joy more in holy things, but I cannot.' For these passions lie so open to the assault of objects, (having the senses for their inlet, and the moveable spirits for their seat or instruments) that even when the will commands them one way, an object may force them in part against the will's command, as we find sensibly in cases of fear, and sorrow or anger, which we can force a man to whether he will or no. And if there be no contradicting object, yet cannot the will excite these passions to what height it shall command; for their motion depends as much (and more) on the lively manner of representing the object, and the working nature and weight of the object represented, and upon the heat and mobility of the spirits, and temperature of the body, as upon the command of the will. 4. Much less can the will command out all vicious habits, and sensual or corrupt inclinations; and therefore a true Christian may well say in respect of these, that he would be more holy, heavenly, and disposed to good, and less to evil, but he cannot. 5. As for complacency and displacency, liking or disliking, love and hatred, so far as they are passions, I have spoke of them before: but so far as they are the immediate acts of the will (willing and nilling) they are not properly said to be commanded by it, but elicited; or acted by it; (wherein, how far it hath power is a most noble ques-

tion, but unfit for this place or your capacity.) And thus you see that there are many acts of the soul, beside habits, which the will cannot now perfectly command, and so a Christian cannot be what he would be, nor do the things that he would. And these are the first sort of sins of infirmity.

If you say, 'Sure these can be no sins, because we are not willing of them, and there is no more sin than there is will in it;' I answer, 1. We were in Adam willing of that sin which caused them. 2. We are in some degree inclining in our wills to sin, though God have that prevalent part and determination, which in comparative cases doth denominate them. 3. The understanding and will may be most heinously guilty where they do not consent, in that they do not more strongly dissent, and more potently and rulingly command all the subject faculties; and so a negation of the will's act, or of such a degree of it as is necessary to the regiment of the sensual part, is a deep guilt and great offence; and it may be said, that there is will in this sin. It is morally or reputatively voluntary, though not naturally; because the will doth not its office when it should: as a man is guilty of voluntary murder of his own child, that stands by and seeth his servant kill him, and doth not do his best to hinder him. I would this were better understood by some divines; for I think that the commonest guilt of the reason and will in our actual sins, is by omission of the exercise of their authority to hinder it; and that most sins are more brutish, as to the true efficient cause, than many imagine; and yet they are human or moral acts too, and the soul nevertheless guilty; because the commanding faculties performed not their office, and so are the moral or imputative causes, and so the great culpable causes of the fact. But I am drawn nearer to philosophy and points beyond your reach than I intended; a fault that I must be still resisting in all my writings, being upon every occurring difficulty carried to forget my subject, and the capacity of the meanest to whom I write: but what you understand not, pass over, and go to the next.

The second kind of sins of infirmity, are, The smaller sort of sins, which we may forbear if we will; that is, If we be actually, though not perfectly, yet prevalently willing; or if our will be determined to forbear them; or if the chief

part of the will actually be for such forbearance. The first sort are called sins of infirmity in an absolute sense. These last, I call sins of infirmity in both an absolute and comparative sense : that is, both as they proceed from our inward corruption, which through the weakness of the soul having but little grace, is not fully restrained, and also as it is compared with gross sins : and so we may call idle words, and rash expressions in our haste, and such like, sins of infirmity, in comparison of murder, perjury, or the like gross sins, which we commonly call crimes or wickedness, when the former we use to call but faults. These infirmities are they which the Papists (and some learned divines of our own, as Rob. Baronius in his excellent tractate "*De peccat. Mortali et Veniali*,") do call venial sins ; some of them in a fair and honest sense, viz. Because they are such sins as a true Christian may live and die in, though not unrepented or unresisted, yet not subdued so far as to forsake or cease from the practice of them, and yet they are pardoned. But other Papists call them venial sins in a wicked sense, as if they needed no pardon, and deserved not eternal punishment. (And why should they call them venial if they need not pardon ?) A justified man liveth in the daily practice of some vain thoughts, or the frequent commission of some other sins, which by his utmost diligence he might restrain ; but he liveth not in the frequent practice of adultery, drunkenness, falsewitnessing, slandering, hating his brother, &c.

Yet observe, that though the forementioned lesser sins are called infirmities, in regard of the matter of them, yet they may be so committed in regard of the end and manner of them, as may make them crimes or gross sins. As for example, if one should use idle words wilfully, resolvedly, without restraint, reluctance or tenderness of conscience, this were gross sinning ; or the nearer it comes to this, and the more wilfulness, or neglect, or evil ends there is in the smallest forbidden action, the worse it is, and the grosser. And observe (of which more anon) that the true bounds or difference between gross sins, and those lesser faults, which we call infirmities, cannot be given ; (I think by any man, I am sure not by me,) either as to the act itself, to say, just what acts are gross sins, and what not ; or else as to the manner of committing them ; as to say, just how much of the will must go to make a gross sin ; or just how far a man may

proceed in the degree of evil intents ; or how far in the frequency of sinning, before it must be called a gross sin.

3. The third sort of sins, which may be called sins of infirmity, are these last mentioned gross sins themselves, so far as they are found in the regenerate : these are gross sins put in opposition to the former sort of infirmities ; but our divines use to call them all sins of infirmity, in opposition to the sins of unbelievers, who are utterly unholy. And they call them sins of infirmity, 1. Because the person that committeth them is not dead in sins, as the unregenerate are, but only diseased, wounded and infirm. 2. Because that they are not committed with so full consent of will, as those of the unregenerate are ; but only after much striving, or at least contrary to habitual resolutions, though not against actual.

Here we are in very great difficulties, and full of controversies : some say, that these gross sins do extinguish true grace, and are inconsistent with it : and that David and Peter were out of the state of grace till they did again repent. Others say, that they were in the state of grace, and not at all so liable to condemnation, but that if they had died in the act, they had been saved, because "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus ;" and that therefore all the sins of believers are alike sins of infirmity, pardoned on the same terms : and therefore as a rash word may be pardoned without a particular repentance, so possibly may these gross sins. To others this seems dangerous and contrary to Scripture, and therefore they would fain find out a way between both ; but how to do it clearly and satisfactorily is not easy (at least to me, who have been long upon it, but am yet much in the dark in it). I think it is plain that such persons are not totally unsanctified by their sin ; I believe that Christ's interest is habitually more in their wills than is the interest of the flesh or world, at that very time when they are sinning, and so Christ's interest is least as to their actual willing ; and so sin prevaleth for that time against the act of their faith and love, but not wholly against the prevalent part of the habit. And therefore when the shaking wind of that stormy temptation is over, the soul will return to Christ by repentance, love and renewed obedience. But then to know what state he is relatively in this while, as to his justification, and reconciliation, and

right to glory, is the point of exceeding difficulty. Whether as we distinguish of habitual faith, and love, and obedience, which he hath not lost; and actual, which he hath lost; so we must make some answerable distinction of justification (habitual and actual it cannot be) into virtual justification which he hath not lost, and actual justification which he hath lost: or into plenary justification (which he hath not) and imperfect justification, wanting a further act to make it plenary (which may remain). But still it will be more difficult to shew punctually what this imperfect or virtual justification is: and most difficult to shew, whether with the loss of actual plenary justification, and the loss of a plenary right to heaven, a man's salvation may consist; that is, whether if he should die in that condition, he should be saved or condemned? Or if it be said, that he shall certainly repent, 1. Yet such a supposition may be put, while he yet repenteth not; for the inquiry into his state, how far there is any intercession of his justification, pardon, adoption or right to salvation? 2. And whether it can fully be proved that it is impossible (or that which never was or shall be) for a regenerate man to die in the very act of a gross sin (as self-murder or the like)? For my part I think God hath purposely left us here in the dark, that we may not be too bold in sinning, but may know that whether the gross sins of believers be such as destroy their justification and the right to glory, prevalently or not, yet certainly they leave them in the dark, as to any certainty of their justification or salvation.

And then more dark is it and impossible to discover, how far a man may go in these grosser sins, and yet have the prevalent habits of grace. As to the former question about the intercession of justification, I am somewhat inclinable to think, that the habit of faith hath more to do in our justification than I have formerly thought, and may as properly be said to be the condition as the act: and that as long as a man is (in a prevalent degree) habitually a believer, he is not only imperfectly and virtually justified, but so far actually justified, that he should be saved, though he were cut off before he actually repent: and that he being already habitually penitent, having a hatred of all sin as sin, should be saved if mere want of opportunity do prevent the act: and that only those sins do bring a man into a

state of condemnation, prove him in such, which consist not with the habitual preeminence of Christ's interest in our souls, above the interest of the flesh and world; and that David's and Peter's were such as did consist with the preeminence of Christ's interest in the habit. But withal, that such gross sins must needs be observable, and so the soul that is guilty doth ordinarily know its guilt, yea, and think of it: and that it is inconsistent with this habitual repentance, not to repent actually as soon as time is afforded, and the violence of passion so far allayed, as that the soul may recollect itself, and reason have its free use: and that he that hath this leisure and opportunity for the free use of reason, and yet doth not repent, it is a sign that the interest of the flesh is habitually as well as actually stronger than Christ's interest in him. I say, in this doubtful case, I am most inclining to judge thus: but as I would have no man take this as my resolved judgment, much less a certain truth, and least of all, to venture on sin and impenitency ever the more for such a doubtful opinion, which doth not conclude him to be certainly unjustified; so I am utterly ignorant both how long sensual passions may possibly rage, and keep the soul from sober consideration; or how far they may interpose in the very time of consideration, and frustrate it, and prevail against it, and so keep the sinner from actual repenting, or at least, from a full ingenuous acknowledgment and bewailing of the sin, which is necessary to full repentance; and how long repentance may be so far stifled, as to remain only in some inward grudgings of conscience, and trouble of mind, hindered from breaking out into free confession (which seemeth to have been David's case long). Nay, it is impossible to know just how long a man may live in the very practice of such gross sin, before Christ's habitual interest above the flesh be either overthrown, or proved not to be there; and how oft a man that hath true grace may commit such sins: these things are undiscernible, besides that none can punctually define a gross sin, so as to exclude every degree of infirmities, and include every degree of such gross sin.

Perhaps you will marvel why I run so far in this point: it is both to give you as much light as I can, what sins they be which be to be called infirmities, and so what sins they be that do forbid that gentle, comforting way of cure, when

the soul is troubled for them, which must be used with those that are troubled more than needs, or upon mistakes ; and also to convince you of this weighty truth, That our comfort, yea, and assurance, hath a great dependance on our actual obedience : yea, so great, that the least obedient sort of sincere Christians cannot by ordinary means have any assurance : and the most obedient (if other necessities concur) will have the most assurance : and for the middle sort, their assurance will rise or fall, ordinarily with their obedience, so that there is no way to comfort such offending Christians, but by reducing them to fuller obedience by faith and repentance, that so the evidences of their justification may be clear, and the great impediments of their assurance and comfort be removed.

This I will yet make clearer to you by its reasons, and then tell you how to apply it to yourself.

1. No man can be sure of his salvation or justification, but he that is sure of his true faith and love. And no man can be sure of his true faith and love, but he that is sure of the sincerity of his obedience. For true faith doth ever take God for our great Sovereign, and Christ for our Lord Redeemer, and containeth a covenant-delivery of a man's self to God and the Redeemer, to be ruled by him, as a subject, child, servant and spouse. This is not done sincerely and savingly, unless there be an actual and habitual resolution to obey God and the Redeemer, before all creatures, and against all temptations that would draw us from him. To obey Christ a little and the flesh more, is no true obedience : if the flesh can do more with us to draw us to sin, than faith and obedience do to keep us from sin, ordinarily, this is no true faith or obedience. If Christ have not the sovereignty in the soul, and his interest be not the most predominant and potent, we are no true believers. Now it is plain, that the interest of the world and flesh doth actually prevail, when a man is actually committing a known sin, and omitting a known duty ; and then it is certain that habits are known but by the acts. And therefore it must needs be that the soul that most sinneth, must needs be most in doubt whether the interest of Christ or the flesh be predominant, and so whether his obedience be true or no ; and so whether he did sincerely take Christ for his Sovereign : and that is, whether he be a true believer ; for when

a man is inquiring into the state of his soul, Whether he do subject himself to Christ as his only Sovereign ; and whether the authority and love of Christ will do more with him, than the temptations of the world, flesh and devil : he hath no way to be resolved but by feeling the pulse of his own will. And if he say, ' I am willing to obey Christ before the flesh,' and yet do actually live in an obedience to the flesh before Christ, he is deceived in his own will ; for this is no saving willingness. A wicked man may have some will to obey Christ principally ; but having more will, to the contrary, viz. to please the flesh before Christ, therefore he is wicked still ; so that you see in our self-examination, the business is for the most part finally resolved into our sincere actual obedience. For thus we proceed : we first find, He that believeth and loveth Christ sincerely, shall be saved. Then we proceed, He that believeth sincerely taketh Christ for his Sovereign. Then, He that truly taketh Christ for his Sovereign, doth truly resolve to obey him and his laws, before the world, flesh or devil. Then, He that truly resolveth thus to obey Christ before all, doth sincerely perform his resolution, and doth so obey him. For that is no true resolution ordinarily, that never comes to performance. And here we are cast unavoidably to try whether we do perform our resolutions by actual obedience, before we can sit down with settled peace ; much more before we get assurance. Now those that are diligent and careful in obeying, and have greatest conquest over their corruptions, and do most seldom yield to temptations, but do most notably and frequently conquer them, these have the clearest discovery of the performance of their resolutions by obedience, and consequently the fullest assurance : but they that are oftenest overcome by temptations, and yield most to sin, and live most disobediently, must needs be furthest from assurance of the sincerity of their obedience, and consequently of their salvation.

2. God himself hath plainly made our actual obedience, not only a sign of a true faith, but a secondary part of the condition of our salvation, as promised in the new covenant. And therefore it is as impossible to be saved without it, as without faith, supposing that the person have opportunity to obey, in which case only it is made necessary, as a condition. This I will but cite several Scriptures to prove, and

leave you to peruse them if you be unsatisfied ; Rom. viii. 1—14. They that are in Christ Jesus, are they that walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. “ If ye live after the flesh ye shall die, but if ye by the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body ye shall live.” “ Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gate into the city ;” Rev. xxii. 14. “ He is become the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him ;” Heb. v. 9. “ Take my yoke upon you, for it is easy, and my burden, for it is light. Learn of me to be meek and lowly, &c. and ye shall find rest,” &c. ; Matt. xi. 28—30. John xvi. 27. Luke xiii. 24. Phil. ii. 12. Rom. ii. 7. 10. John xv. 12. 17. xii. 21. Matt. v. 44. Luke vi. 27. 35. Prov. viii. 17. 21. Matt. x. 37. 1 Tim. vi. 18, 19. 2 Tim. ii. 5. 12. Matt. xxv. 41, 42. James ii. 21—24. 26. i. 22. ii. 5. Prov. i. 23. xxviii. 13. Luke xiii. 3. 5. Matt. xii. 37. xi. 25, 26. vi. 12. 14, 15. 1 John i. 9. Acts viii. 22. iii. 19. xxii. 16. Luke vi. 37. 1 Pet. iv. 18. i. 2. 22. Rom. vi. 16. ; with abundance more the like. Now when a poor sinner that hath oft fallen into drunkenness, railing, strife, envying, &c. shall read that these are the works of the flesh, and that for these things’ sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience ; and that every man shall be judged according to his works, and according to what he hath done in the flesh ; and that they that do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God ; it cannot be but that his assurance of salvation must needs have so great a dependance on his obedience, as that these sins will diminish it. When he reads Rom. vi. 16., “ His servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness,” he must needs think, how such a time, and such a time, he obeyed sin ; and the oftener and the more wilfully he did it, the more doubtful will his case be ; especially if he be yet in a sinful course, which he might avoid, whether of gross sin, or any wilful sin, it cannot be but this will obscure the evidence of his obedience. Men cannot judge beyond evidence ; and he that hath not the evidence of his true obedience, hath not the evidence of the sincerity of his faith.

3. Moreover, assurance and comfort are God’s gifts, and without his gracious aid we cannot attain them. But God will not give such gifts to his children, while they stand out

in disobedience, but when they carefully please him. Paternal justice requires this.

4. And it would do them abundance of hurt, and God much dishonour, if he should either tell them just how oft, or how far they may sin, and yet be saved; or yet should keep up their peace and comforts, as well in their greatest disobedience, as in their tenderest careful walking with him. But these things I spoke of before, and formerly elsewhere.

You see then, that though some obedient, tender Christians may yet on several occasions be deprived of assurance; yet ordinarily no other but they have assurance; and that assurance and comfort will rise and fall with obedience.

And for all the Antinomian objections against this, as if it were a leading men to their own righteousness from Christ, I refer you to the twenty arguments which I before laid you down, to prove that we may and must fetch our assurance and comfort from our own works and graces; and so from our own evangelical righteousness, which is subordinate to Christ's righteousness, (which he speaks of, Matt. xxv. last, and in forty places more) though we must have no thoughts of a legal righteousness (according to the law of works or ceremonies) in ourselves. They may as well say, that a woman doth forsake her husband, because she comforteth herself in this, that she hath not forsaken him, or been false and unchaste, thence gathering that he will not give her a bill of divorce. Or that a servant forsakes his master, or a subject his prince, or a parent is forsaken by his child; because they comfort themselves in their obedience and loyalty, gathering thence that they are not flat rebels, and shall not be used as rebels. Or that any that enter covenant with superiors do forsake them, because they comfort themselves in their keeping covenant, as a sign that the covenant shall be kept with them: all these are as wise collections, as to gather, that a man forsakes Christ and his righteousness, and setteth up his own instead of it, because he looks at his not forsaking, refusing and vilifying of Christ, his love and faithful obedience to Christ, as comfortable signs that Christ will not forsake and reject him. Do these men think that a rebel may have the love of his prince, and as much comfort from him as a loyal subject? Or a whorish woman have as much love and comfort from her husband, as a faithful wife? Or a stubborn, rebellious son or servant have as

much love and comfort from their father or mother as the dutiful? If there be so near a relation as hitherto we have supposed, between a sovereign and subjection to him, and a husband and marriage-faithfulness to him, and a master and service to him, and a father and loving obedience to him, it is strange that men should suppose such a strange opposition, as these men do. Certainly God doth not so, when he saith, "If I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master where is my fear?" Mal. i. 6. And Isaiah i. 3, 4. "Hear O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters, they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger, they are gone away backward." And Jer. iii. 19. "Thou shalt call me, My father, and shalt not depart away from me." And 2 Tim. ii. 19. "The Lord knoweth who are his. And, let him that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." And Psalm lxvi. 18. "If I delight in iniquity, or regard it, God will not hear my prayers," saith David himself. Doubtless Paul did not forsake Christ's righteousness by confidence in his own, when he saith, "This is our rejoicing, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation among you;" 2 Cor. i. 12. with many the like which I before mentioned. Nor doth the Lord Jesus at the day of judgment turn men off from his righteousness, when he saith, "Well done, good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful in a very little, I will make thee ruler over much;" Luke xix. 17. Matt. xxv. 23. and calls them thereupon righteous, saying, "And the righteous shall go into life everlasting;" Matt. xxv. last.

It remains now that I further acquaint you what use you should make of this observation, concerning the dependance of assurance upon actual obedience. And 1. I advise you, if your soul remain in doubts and troubles, and you cannot enjoy God in any way of peace and comfort, nor see any clear evidence of the sincerity of your faith, take a serious view of your obedience, and faithfully survey your heart and life, and your daily carriage to God in both. See whether

there be nothing that provokes God to an unusual jealousy; if there be, it is only the increase of some carnal interest in your heart, or else the wilful or negligent falling into some actual sin, of commission or of omission. In the making of this search, you have need to be exceeding cautious; for if I have any acquaintance with the mystery of this business, your peace or trouble, comfort or discomfort, will mainly depend on this. And your care must lie in this point, that you diligently avoid these two extremes: first, That you do not deal negligently and unfaithfully with your own soul, at that labour which you must needs be at before you can know it. Secondly, That you do not either condemn yourself when your conscience doth acquit you; or vex your soul with needless scruples, or make unavoidable or ordinary infirmities to seem such wilful heinous sins, as should quite break your settled peace. O how narrow is the path between these two mistaken roads, and how hard a thing, and how rare is it to find it and to keep in it! For yourself, and all tender-conscienced Christians, that are heartily willing to be ruled by Christ, I would persuade you equally to beware of both these; because some souls are as inclinable to the latter extreme as to the former (during their troubles). But for the most Christians in the world, I would have them first and principally avoid the former, and that with far greater diligence than the latter. For, 1. Naturally all men's hearts are far more prone to deal too remissly, yea, unfaithfully with themselves, in searching after their sins, than too scrupulously and tenderly. The best men have so much pride and carnal self-love, that it will strongly incline them to excuse, or mince, or hide their sins, and to think far lighter and more favourably of it than they should do, because it is theirs. How was the case altered with Judah towards Tamar, when he once saw it was his own act! How was David's zeal for justice allayed, as soon as he heard, "Thou art the man!" This is the most common cause why God is fain to hold our eyes on our transgressions by force, because we are so loath to do it more voluntarily; and why he openeth our sin in such crimson and scarlet colours to us; because we are so apt either to look on them as nothing, or to shut our eyes and overlook them: and why God doth hold us so long on the rack, because we would still ease ourselves by ingenious excuses and extenuations:

and why God doth break the skin so oft, and keep open our wounds; because we are still healing them by such carnal shifts. This proud, sin-excusing distemper needs no other proof or discovery, than our great tenderness and backwardness in submitting to reproofs: how long do we excuse sin, and defend our pretended innocency, as long as we can find a word to say for it. Doth not daily experience of this sad distemper, even in most of the godly, discover fully to us, that most men (yea naturally all) are far more prone to overlook their sins, and deal faithlessly and negligently in the trial; than to be too tender, and to charge themselves too deep.

Besides, if a Christian be heartily willing to deal impartially, and search to the quick, yet the heart is lamentably deceitful, that he shall overlook much evil in it, when he hath done his best. And the devil will be far more industrious to provoke and help you to hide, excuse, and extenuate sin, than to open it, and see it as it is. His endeavour to drive poor souls into terrors, is usually but when he can no longer keep them in presumption. When he can hide their sin no longer, nor make it seem small, to keep them in impenitency, then he will make it seem unpardonable and remediless if he can; but usually not before. So that you see the frame of most men's spirits doth require them, to be rather over-jealous in searching after their sins, than over-careless and confident of themselves.

2. Besides this, I had rather of the two that Christians would suspect and search too much than too little, because there is a hundred times more danger in seeing sin less than it is, or overlooking it, than in seeing it greater than it is, and being over-fearful. The latter mistake may bring us into sorrow, and make our lives uncomfortable to us (and therefore should be avoided); but usually it doth not endanger our happiness; but is often made a great occasion of our good. But the former mistake may hazard our everlasting salvation, and so bring us to remediless trouble.

3. Yea, lest you should say, 'This is sad language to comfort a distressed, wounded soul,' let me add this one reason more. So far as I can learn by reading the Scriptures, and by long experience of very many souls under troubles of conscience, It is most commonly some notable cherished corruption, that breedeth and feedeth the sad, un-

comfortable estate of most professors, except those who by melancholy or very great ignorance, are so weak in their intellectuals, as that they are incapable of making any true discovery of their condition, and of passing a right judgment upon themselves thereupon.

Lest I should make sad any soul that God would not have sad, let me desire you to observe, 1. That I say but of most professors, not all; for I doubt not but God may hide his face for some time from some of the holiest and wisest of believers, for several and great reasons. 2. Do but well observe most of the humble, obedient Christians, that you know to lie under any long and sad distress of mind, and you will find that they are generally of one of the two fore-mentioned sorts: either so ignorant as not to know well what faith is, or what the conditions of the covenant are, or what is the extent of the promise, or the full sufficiency of Christ's satisfaction for all sinners, or what are the evidences by which they may try themselves: or else they are melancholy persons, whose fancy is still molested with these perturbing vapours, and their understandings so clouded and distempered, that reason is not free. And so common is this latter, that in my observation of all the Christians that have lived in any long and deep distress of mind, six, if not ten for one, have been deeply melancholy; except those that feed their troubles by disobedience. So that besides these ignorant and melancholy persons, and disorderly, declining Christians, the number of wounded spirits I think is very small, in comparison of the rest. Indeed it is usual for many at, or shortly after, their first change, to be under trouble and deep fears; but that is but while the sense of former sin is fresh upon their hearts. The sudden discovery of so deep a guilt, and so great a danger, which a man did never know before, must needs amaze and affright the soul: and if that fear remain long, where right means are either not known, or not used for the cure, it is no wonder; and sometimes it will be long, if the rightest means be used. But for those that have been long in the profession of holiness, and yet lie, or fall again under troubles of soul (except those before excepted), I would have them make a diligent search, whether God do not observe either some fleshly interest encroach upon his right, or some actual sin to be cherished in their hearts or conversations.

And here let me tell you, when you are making this search, what particulars they be which I would have you to be most jealous of. 1. The former sort, which I call contrary carnal interest, encroaching on Christ's right, are they that you must look after with far more diligence than your actual sins. (1.) Because they are the far greatest and most dangerous of all sins, and the root of all the rest: for as God is the end and chief good of every saint, so these sins do stand up against him, as our end and chief good, and carry away the soul by that act which we call simply willing, or complacency, and so these interests are men's idols, and resist God's very sovereignty and perfect goodness; that is, they are against God himself as our God. Whereas those which I now call actual sins, as distinct from these, are but the violation of particular precepts, and against God's means and laws directly, and but remotely, or indirectly against his Godhead: and they have but that act of our will, which we call election, consent or use, which is proper to means, and not to the end. (2.) Because, as these sins are the most damnable, so they lie deepest at the heart, and are not so easily discovered. It is ordinary with many, to have a covetous, worldly, ambitious heart, even damnably such, that yet have wit to carry it fairly without; yea, and seem truly religious to themselves and others. (3.) Because these sins are the most common: for though they reign only in hypocrites and other unsanctified ones, yet they dwell too much in all men on earth.

If you now ask me what these sins are, I answer, They are as denominated from the point or term from which men turn, all comprised in this one, unwillingness of God, or the turning of the heart from God, or not loving God. But as we denominate them from the term or object to which they run, they are all comprised in this one, carnal self-love, or turning to, and preferring our carnal self before God: and as it inclineth to action, all, or most of it, is comprehended in this one word, 'Fleshpleasing.' But because there are a trinity of sins in this unity, we must consider them distinctly. Three great objects there are, about which this sin of fleshpleasing is exercised: 1. Credit or honour. 2. Profit or riches. 3. Sensual pleasure, more strictly so called, consisting in the more immediate pleasing of the senses; whereas the two first do more remotely please them,

by laying in provision to that end ; otherwise all three are in the general but fleshpleasing. The three great sins therefore that do most directly fight against God himself in his sovereignty, are, 1. Pride or ambition. 2. Worldliness, or love of riches. 3. Sensuality, voluptuousness, or inordinate love of pleasures. There are in the understanding indeed other sins, as directly against God as these, and more radical ; as, 1. Atheism, denying a God. 2. Polytheism, denying our God to be the alone God, and joining others with him. 3. Idolatry, owning false Gods. 4. Infidelity, denying Jesus Christ our Lord Redeemer. 5. Owning false Saviours and prophets, in his stead, or before him, as do the Mahometans. 6. Joining other Redeemers and Saviours with him, as if he were not the alone Christ. 7. Denying the Holy Ghost, and denying credit to his holy and miraculous testimony to the Christian faith, and blasphemously ascribing all to the devil ; which is the sin against the Holy Ghost. 8. Owning and believing in devils, or lying spirits instead of the Holy Ghost ; as the Montanists, Mahometans, Ranters, Familists do. 9. Owning and adjoining devils, or lying spirits, in co-ordination or equality with the Holy Ghost, and believing equally his doctrine and theirs ; as if he were not sole and sufficient in his work. All these are sins directly against God himself, and if prevalent, most certainly damning ; three against the Father, three against the Son, and three against the Holy Ghost. But these be not they that I need now to warn you of. These are prevalent only in pagans, infidels, and blasphemers. Your troubles and complaints shew that these are not predominant in you. It is therefore the three forementioned sins of the heart or will, that I would have you carefully to look after in your troubles, to see whether none of them get ground and strength in you.

1. Inquire carefully into your humility. It is not for nothing that Christ hath said so much of the excellency and necessity of this grace ; when he bids us learn of him to be meek and lowly ; when he blesseth the meek and poor in spirit : when he setteth a little child in the midst of them, and telleth them, except they become as that child, they could not enter into the kingdom of heaven : when he stoopeth to wash and wipe his disciples' feet, requiring them to do so by one another. How oft doth the Holy Ghost

press this upon us? Commanding us, to submit ourselves to one another, and not to mind high things; but to condescend to men of low estate; Rom. xii. 16. and not to be wise in our own esteem, but in honour prefer others before ourselves; Rom. xii. 10. How oft hath God professed to resist and take down the proud, and to give grace to the humble, and dwell with them? Search carefully, therefore, lest this sin get ground upon you. For though it may not be so predominant and raging as to damn you, yet may it cause God to afflict you, and hide his face from you, and humble you by the sense of his displeasure, and the concealment of his love. And though one would think that doubting, troubled souls should be always the most humble and freest from pride, yet sad experience hath certified me, that much pride may dwell with great doubtings and distress of mind. Even some of the same souls that cry out of their own unworthiness, and fear lest they shall be firebrands of hell, yet cannot endure a close reproof, especially for any disgraceful sin, nor bear a disparaging word, nor love those, nor speak well of them, who do not value them, nor endure to be crossed or contradicted in word or deed, but must have all go their way, and follow their judgment, and say as they say, and dance after their pipe, and their hearts rise against those that will not do it; much more against those that speak or do any thing to the diminishing of their reputation: they cannot endure to be low, and passed by, and overlooked, when others are preferred before them, or to be slighted and disrespected, or their words, or parts, or works, or judgments to be contemned or disparaged. Nay, some are scarce able to live in the same house, or church, or town, in love and peace, with any but those that will humour and please them, and speak them fair, and give them smooth and stroking language, and forbear crossing, reproving, and disparaging them. Every one of these singly is an evident mark and fruit of pride; how much more all jointly. I seriously profess it amazeth me to consider, how heinously most professors are guilty of this sin! even when they know it to be the devil's own sin, and the great abomination hated of God, and read and hear so much against it as they do, and confess it so oft in their prayers to God, and yet not only inwardly cherish it, but in words, actions, gestures, apparel, express it and passionately

defend these discoveries of it. The confusions and distractions in church and state are nothing else but the proper fruits of it; so are the contentions among Christians, and the unpeaceableness in families; "for only from pride cometh contention," saith Solomon; Prov. xiii. 10. For my part, when I consider the great measure of pride, self-conceitedness, self-esteem, that is in the greatest part of Christians that ever I was acquainted with, (we of the ministry not excepted,) I wonder that God doth not afflict us more, and bring us down by foul means, that will not be brought down by fair. For my own part, I have had as great means to help me against this sin, as most men living ever had; first, in many years' trouble of mind, and then in near twenty years' languishing, and bodily pains, having been almost twenty times at the grave's mouth, and living near it continually; and lastly, and above all, I have had as full a sight of it in others, even in the generality of professors, and in the doleful state of the church and state, and heinous, detestable abominations of this age, which one would think should have fully cured it. And yet if I hear but either an applauding word from any of fame on one side, or a disparaging word on the other side, I am fain to watch my heart as narrowly as I would do the thatch of my house when fire is put to it, and presently to throw on it the water of detestation, resolution, and recourse to God. And though the acts through God's great mercy be thus restrained, yet the constancy of these inclinations assures me, that there is still a strong and deep root. I beseech you therefore, if you would ever have settled peace and comfort, be watchful against this sin of pride, and be sure to keep it down, and get it mortified at the very heart.

2. The next sin that I would have you be specially jealous of, is covetousness, or love of the profits or riches of the world. This is not the sin of the rich only, but also of the poor: and more heinous is it in them, to love the world inordinately, that have so little of it, than in rich men, that have more to tempt them, though dangerous in both. Nor doth it lie only in coveting that which is another's, or in seeking to get by unlawful means; but also in overvaluing and overloving the wealth of the world, though lawfully gotten. He that loveth the world, (that is, above Christ and holiness,) the love of the Father is not in him, (that is,

savingly and sincerely); 1 John ii. 15. He that loveth house or lands better than Christ, cannot be his disciple. I beseech you therefore when God hides his face, search diligently, and search again and again, lest the world should encroach on Christ's interest in your heart. If it should be so, can you wonder if Christ seem to withdraw, when you begin to set so light by him, as to value dung and earth in any comparison with himself? May he not well say to you, 'If you set so much by the world, take it, and see what it will do for you? If you can spare me better than your wealth, you shall be without me.' Must not the Lord Jesus needs take it exceedingly unkind, that after all his love and bloodshed, and pains with your heart, and seals of his kindness, and discoveries of his amiableness, and the treasures of his kingdom, you should now so much forget and slight him, to set up the world in any comparison with him? And to give such loving entertainment to his enemy? And look so kindly on a competitor? Is his glory worth no more than so? And hath he deserved no better at your hands? Again, therefore, do I beseech you to be afraid, lest you should be guilty of this sin. Examine whether the thoughts of the world grow not sweeter to you, and the thoughts of God and glory more unwelcome and displeasing; whether you have not an eagerness after a fuller estate, and too keen an edge upon your desires after riches, or at least after a fuller portion and provision for your children: or after better accommodations and contentments in house, goods, or other worldly things? Do not worldly hopes delight you too much? And much more your worldly possessions? Are you not too busily contriving how to be richer, forgetting God's words, 1 Tim. vi. 8, 9. 17. Doth not the world eat out the life of your duties, that when you should be serious with God, you have left your heart behind you, and drowned your affections in things below? Doth not your soul stick so fast in this mud and clay, that you can scarce stir it Godward in prayer or heavenly meditation? Do not you cut short duties in your family and in secret, if not frequently omit them, that so you may be again at your worldly business? Or do you not customarily hurry them over, because the world will not allow you leisure to be serious, and so you have no time to deal in good earnest with Christ or your soul? Do not your very speeches of Christ

and heaven grow few and strange, because the world must first be served? When you see your brother have need, do you not shut up the bowels of your compassions from him? Doth not the love of the world make you hard to your servants, hard to those you buy and sell with? And doth it not encroach much on the Lord's own day? Look after this earthly vice in all these discoveries, search for your enemy in each of these corners. And if you find that this is indeed your case, you need not much wonder if Christ and you be stranger than heretofore. If this earth get between your heart and the sun of life, no wonder if all your comforts are in an eclipse, seeing your light is but as the moon's, a borrowed light. And you must be the more careful in searching after this sin, both because it is certain that all men have too much of it, and because it is of so dangerous a nature, that should it prevail it would destroy; for covetousness is idolatry, and among all the heinous sins that the godly have fallen into, look into the Scripture, and tell me how many of them you find charged with covetousness. And also, because it is a blinding, befooling sin, not only drawing old men, and those that have no children, and rich men, that have no need to pursue these things as madly as others, but also hiding itself from their eyes, that most that are guilty of it will not know it: though, alas! if they were but willing, it were very easy to know it. But the power of the sin doth so set to work their wits to find excuses and fair names and titles for to cloke it, that many delude others by it, and more delude themselves, but none can delude God. The case of some professors of godliness that I have known, is very lamentable on this point, who being generally noted for a dangerous measure of worldliness, by most that know them, could yet never be brought to acknowledge it in themselves. Nay, by the excellency of their outward duties and discourse, and the strength of their wits, (alas! ill employed,) and by their great ability of speech, to put a fair gloss on the foulest of their actions, they have gone on so smoothly and plausibly in their worldliness, that though most accused them of it behind their backs, yet no man knew how to fasten any thing on them. By which means they were hindered from repentance and recovery.

In this sad case, though it be God's course very often to

let hypocrites and other enemies go on and prosper, because they have their portion in this life, and the reckoning is to come; yet I have oft observed, that for God's own people, or those that he means to make his people by their recovery, God useth to cross them in their worldly desires and designs. Perhaps he may let them thrive awhile, and congratulate the prosperity of their flesh, but at last he breaks in suddenly on their wealth, and scatters it abroad, or addeth some cross to it, that embitters all to them, and then asketh them, 'Where is now your idol?' And then they begin to see their folly. If you do dote on any thing below, to the neglecting of God, he will make a rod for you of that very thing you dote upon, and by it will he scourge you home to himself.

3. The third great heart-sin which I would have you jealous of, is sensuality or voluptuousness, or pleasing the senses inordinately. The two former are in this the more mortal sins, in that they carry more of the understanding and will with them, and make reason itself to be serviceable to them in their workings; whereas sensuality is more in the flesh and passion, and hath oftentimes less assistance of reason or consent of the will. Yet is the will tainted with sensual inclinations, and both reason and will are at the best guilty of connivance, and not exercising their authority over the sensual part. But in this sensuality is the more dangerous vice, in that it hath so strong and inseparable a seat as our sensual appetite; and in that it acteth so violently and ragingly as it doth; so that it beareth down a weak opposition of reason and will, and carrieth us on blindfold, and transformeth us into brutes. I will not here put the question concerning the gross acting of this sin (of that anon), but I would have you very jealous of a sensual disposition. When a man cannot deny his appetite what it would have; or at least, covetousness can do more in restraining it than conscience; when a man cannot make a covenant with his eyes, but must gaze on every alluring object; when the flesh draws to forbidden pleasures, in meats, drinks, apparel, recreations, lasciviousness, and all the considerations of reason cannot restrain it; this is a sad case, and God may well give over such to sadness of heart. If we walk so pleasingly to the flesh, God will walk more displeasingly to us.

And as you should be jealous of these great heart transgressions, so should you be of particular, actual sins. Examine whether the jealous eye of God see not something that much offendeth him, and causeth your heaviness. I will not enlarge so far as to mind you of the particular sins that you should look after, seeing it must be all, and your obedience must be universal. Only one I will give you a hint of. I have observed God sometimes shew himself most displeased and angry to those Christians, who have the least tenderness and compassion towards the infirmities of others. He that hath made the forgiving others a necessary condition of God's forgiving us, will surely withdraw the sense of our forgiveness, when we withdraw our forgiveness and compassion to men. He that casts the unmerciful servant into hell, who takes his fellow servant by the throat, will threaten us, and frown upon us, if we come but near it. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. He shall have judgment without mercy that sheweth no mercy;" James ii. 13. Study well, Rom. xiv. xv. Gal. vi.; which the proud, censorious, self-esteeming professors of this age have studied so little, and will not understand. When we deal sourly and churlishly with our weak brethren, and instead of winning an offender by love, we will vilify him, and disdain him, and say, 'How can such a man have any grace?' And will think and speak hardly of those that do but cherish any hopes that he may be gracious, or speak of him with tenderness and compassion; no wonder if God force the consciences of such persons to deal as churlishly and sourly with them, and to clamour against them, and say, 'How canst thou have any true grace, who hast such sins as these?' When our Lord himself dealt away so tenderly with sinners, that it gave occasion to the slanderous Pharisees to say, he was "a friend of Publicans and sinners;" (and so he was, even their greatest friend). And his command to us is, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves: let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification: for even Christ pleased not himself;" Rom. xv. 1—3. And Gal. vi. 1, 2. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken with a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

When people can bear with almost no infirmity in a neighbour, in a servant, or in their nearest friends, but will make the worst of every fault, no wonder if God make such feel their dealings with others, by his dealings with them. Had such that love to their poorest brethren, which thinketh no evil, and speaketh not evil, which "suffereth long and is kind, envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, be-haveth not itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things;" 1 Cor. xiii. 4, 5. 7. Had we more of this love, which covereth a multitude of infirmities, God would cover our infirmities the more, and tell us of them, and trouble us for them the less.

To this sin I may add another, which is scarcely another, but partly the same with this, and partly its immediate effect; and that is, unpeaceableness and unquietness with those about us; this commonly occasioneth God to make us as unpeaceable and unquiet in ourselves. When people are so froward, and peevish, and troublesome, that few can live in peace with them, either in family or neighbourhood, except those that have little to do with them, or those that can humour them in all things, and have an extraordinary skill in smooth speaking, flattering or man-pleasing, so that neighbours, servants, children, and sometimes their own yoke-fellows, must be gone from them, and may not abide near them, as a man gets out of the way from a wild beast or a mad dog, or avoideth the flames of a raging fire; is it any wonder if God give these people as little peace in their own spirits, as they give to others? When people are so hard to be pleased, that nobody about them or near them can tell how to fit their humours; neighbours cannot please them, servants cannot please them, husband or wife cannot please each other; every word is spoke amiss, and every thing done amiss to them; what wonder if God seem hard to be pleased, and as frequently offended with them? Especially if their unpeaceableness trouble the church, and in their turbulency and self-conceitedness, they break the peace thereof.

Thus I have told you what sins you must look after when you find your peace broken, and your conscience disquieted; search carefully lest some iniquity lie at the root. Some I know will think that it is an unseasonable discourse to a troubled conscience, to mind them so much of their sins,

which they are apt to look at too much already. But to such I answer, either those sins are mortified and forsaken, or not. If they be, then these are not the persons that I speak of, whose trouble is fed by continued sin. But I shall speak more to them anon. If not, then it seems for all their trouble of conscience, sin is not sufficiently laid to heart yet.

*The chiefest thing therefore that I intend in all this discourse, is this following advice to those that upon search do find themselves guilty in any of these cases. As ever you would have peace of conscience, set yourselves presently against your sins. And do not either mistakingly cry out of one sore, when it is another that is your malady; nor yet spend your days in fears and disquietness of mind, and fruitless complainings, and in the mean time continue in wilful sinning. But resist sin more, and torment your minds less; and break off your sin and your terrors together.

In these words I tell you what must be done for your cure; and I warn you of two sore mistakes of many sad Christians hereabout. The cure lieth in breaking off sin, to the utmost of your power. This is the Achan that disquieteth all. It is God's great mercy that he disquieteth you in sinning, and gives you not over to so deep a slumber and peace in sin, as might hinder your repentance and reformation. The dangerous mistakes here are these two.

1. Some do as the lapwing, cry loudest when they are furthest from the nest, and complain of an aching tooth, when the disease is in the head or heart. They cry out 'O I have such wandering thoughts in prayer, and such a bad memory, and so hard a heart, that I cannot weep for sin, or such doubts and fears, and so little sense of the love of God; that I doubt I have no true grace.' When they should rather say, 'I have so proud a heart, that God is fain by these sad means to humble me. I am so high in mine own eyes, so wise in my own conceit, and so tender of my own esteem and credit, that God is fain to make me base in my own eyes, and to abhor myself. I am so worldly and in love with earth, that it draws away my thoughts from God, dulls my love, and spoils all my duties. I am so sensual, that I venture sooner to displease my God than my flesh; I have so little compassion on the infirmities of my neighbours and

servants, and other brethren, and deal so censoriously, churlishly, and unmercifully with them, that God is fain to hide his mercy from me, and speak to me as in anger, and vex me as in sore displeasure. I am so froward, peevish, quarrelsome, unpeaceable, and hard to be pleased, that it is no wonder if I have no peace with God, or in my own conscience; and if I have so little quietness who love and seek it no more.' Many have more reason, I say, to turn their complaints into this tune.

2. Another most common, unhappy miscarriage of sad Christians lieth here, That they will rather continue complaining and self-tormenting, than give over sinning, so far as they might give it over if they would. I beseech you in the name of God, to know and consider what it is that God requireth of you. He doth not desire your vexation but reformation. No further doth he desire the trouble of your mind, than as it tendeth to the avoiding of that sin which is the cause of it. God would have you less in your fears and troubles, and more in your obedience. Obey more, and disquiet your mind less. Will you take this counsel presently, and see whether it will not do you more good than all the complaints and doubtings of your whole life have done. Set yourself with all your might against your pride, worldliness, and sensuality, your unpeaceableness and want of love and tenderness to your brethren; and whatever other sin your conscience is acquainted with. I pray you tell me, if you had gravel in your shoe, in your travel, would it not be more wisdom, to sit down and take off your shoe, and cast it out, than to stand still, or go complaining, and tell every one you meet of your soreness? If you have a thorn in your foot, will you go on halting and lamenting? or will you pull it out? Truly sin is the thorn in your conscience; and those that would not have such troubled consciences told of their sins for fear of increasing their distress, are unskilful comforters, and will continue the trouble while the thorn is in. As ever you would have peace then, resolve against sin to the utmost of your power. Never excuse it, or cherish it, or favour it more. Confess it freely. Thank those that reprove you for it. Desire those about you to watch over you, and to tell you of it, yea, to tell you of all suspicious signs that they see of it, though it be not evident. And if you do not see so much pride, worldliness, unpeace-

ableness, or other sins in yourself, as your friends think they see in you, yet let their judgment make you jealous of your heart, seeing self-love doth oft so blind us that we cannot see that evil in ourselves which others see in us; nay, which all the town may take notice of. And be sure to engage your friends that they shall not smooth over your faults, or mince them, and tell you of them in extenuating language, which may hinder conviction and repentance, much less silence them, for fear of displeasing you; but that they will deal freely and faithfully with you. And see that you distaste them not, and discountenance not their plain dealing, lest you discourage them, and deprive your soul of so great a benefit. Think best of those as your greatest friends, who are least friends to your sin, and do most for your recovery from it. If you say, 'Alas, I am not able to mortify my sins. It is nor in my power,' I answer,

1. I speak not of a perfect conquest; nor of a freedom from every passion or infirmity.
2. Take heed of pretending disability when it is unwillingness. If you were heartily willing, you would be able to do much, and God would strengthen you. Cannot you resist pride, worldliness, and sensuality, if you be willing? Cannot you forbear most of the actual sins you commit, and perform the duties that you omit, if you be willing? (though not so well as you would perform them.) Yea, let me say thus much, lest I endanger you by sparing you. Many a miserable hypocrite doth live in trouble of mind and complaining, and after all perish for their wilful disobedience. Did not the rich young man go far before he would break off with Christ? And when he did leave him, he went away sorrowful. And what was the cause of his sorrow? Why, the matter was, that he could not be saved without selling all, and giving it to the poor, when he had great possessions. It was not that he could not be rid of his sin, but that he could not have Christ and heaven without forsaking the world. This is the case of unsanctified persons that are enlightened to see the need of Christ, but are not weaned from worldly profits, honours and pleasures; they are perhaps troubled in mind (and I cannot blame them), but it is not that they cannot leave sinning, but that they cannot have heaven without leaving their delights and contentments on earth. Sin as sin they would willingly leave; for no man can love evil as evil. But their

fleshly profits, honours, and pleasures they will not leave, and there is the stop; and this is the cause of their sorrows and fears. For their own judgment cries out against them, "He that loveth the world, the love of the Father is not in him. If ye live after the flesh ye shall die. God resisteth the proud." This is the voice of their informed understandings. And conscience seconds it, and saith, "Thou art the man." But the flesh cries louder than both these, 'Wilt thou leave thy pleasures? Wilt thou undo thyself? Wilt thou be made a scorn or laughing-stock to all?' Or rather it strongly draws and provoketh, when it hath nothing to say. No wonder if this poor sinner be here in a strait, and live in distress of mind. But as long as the flesh holds so fast, that all this conviction and trouble will not cause it to lose its hold, the poor soul is still in the bonds of iniquity. The case of such an hypocrite, or half Christian, is like the case of the poor Papist, that having glutted himself with flesh in the Lent, was in this strait, that either he must vomit it up, and so disclose his fault, and undergo penance; or else he must be sick of his surfeit, and hazard his life. But he resolveth rather to venture on the danger, than to bear the penance. Or their case is like that of a proud woman, that hath got on a strait garment, or pinching shoe, and because she will not be out of the fashion, she will rather choose to bear the pain, though she halt or suffer at every step. Or like the more impudent sort of them, who will endure the cold, and perhaps hazard their lives, by the nakedness of their necks, and breasts, and arms, rather than they will control their shameless pride. What cure now should a wise man wish to such people as these? Surely, that the shoe might pinch a little harder, till the pain might force them to cast it off. And that they might catch some cold that would pay them for their folly (so it would but spare their lives), till it should force them to be ashamed of their pride, and cover their nakedness. Even so when disobedient hypocrites do complain that they are afraid they have no grace, and afraid God doth not pardon them, and will not save them, I should tell them, if I knew them, that I am afraid so too; and that it is not without cause, and desire, that their fears were such as might affright them from their disobedience, and force them to cast away their wilful sinning. I have said the more on this point, because I know

if this advice do but help you to mortify your sin, the best and greatest work is done, whether you get assurance and comfort or no; and withal, that it is the most probable means to this assurance and comfort.

I should next have warned you of the other extreme, *viz.* needless scruples; but I mean to make that a peculiar Direction by itself, when I have first added a little more of this great means of peace—a sound obedience.

Direct. XXIV. My next advice for the obtaining of a settled peace of comfort, is this, ‘Take heed that you content not yourself with a cheap course of religion, and such a serving of God, as costeth you little or nothing. But in your abstaining from sin, in your rising out of sin, and in your discharge of duty, incline most to that way which is most self-denying, and displeasing to the flesh, (so you be sure it be a lawful way). And when you are called out to any work which will stand you in extraordinary labour and cost, you must be so far from shrinking and drawing your neck out of the yoke, that you must look upon it as a special price that is put into your hand, and singular advantage and opportunity for the increase of your comforts.’

This rule is like the rest of the Christian doctrine, which is not thoroughly understood by any way but experience. Libertines and sensual professors that never tried it, did never well understand it. I could find in my heart to be large in explaining and applying it, but that I have been so large beyond my first intentions in the former Directions, that I will cut off the rest as short as I well can.

Let none be so wickedly injurious to me, as to say, I speak or think of any merit, properly so called, in any the most costly work of man. Fasten not that on me, which I both disclaim, and desire the reader to take heed of. But I must tell you these two things.

1. That a cheap religion is a far more uncertain evidence of sincerity, than a dear. It will not discover so well to a man’s soul, whether he prefer Christ before the world, and whether he take him and his benefits for his portion and treasure.

2. That a cheap religion is not usually accompanied with any notable degree of comforts, although the person be a sincere-hearted Christian.

Every hypocrite can submit to a religion that will cost

him little ; much more, which will get reputation with men of greatest wisdom and piety ; yea, he may stick to it, so it will not undo him in the world. If a man have knowledge, and gifts of utterance, and strength of body, it is no costly matter to speak many good words, or to be earnest in opposing the sins of others, and to preach zealously and frequently, (much more if he have double honour by it, reverent obedience, and maintenance, as ministers of the Gospel have, or ought to have). It is hard to discern sincerity in such a course of piety and duty. Woe to those persecutors that shall put us to the trial how far we can go in suffering for Christ ; but it should be a matter of rejoicing to us, when we are put upon it. To be patient in tribulation is not enough ; but to rejoice in it is also the duty of a saint. Let those that think this draweth men to rejoice too much in themselves, but hear what the Lord Jesus himself saith, and his Spirit in his apostles : “ Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake ; for their’s is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my name’s sake : rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven ;” Matt. v. 10—12. “ My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations (not inward temptations of the devil and our lust, but trials by persecution) ; knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience. Blessed is the man that endureth temptation ; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him ;” James i. 2, 3. 12. See Luke vi. 23. 1 Pet. iv. 13. Acts v. 41. 2 Cor. vi. 10. vii. 4. Col. i. 11. Heb. x. 34. 2 Cor. xiii. 9. xii. 15. O how gloriously doth a tried faith shine, to the comfort of the believer, and the admiration of the beholders ! How easily may a Christian try himself at such a time, when God is trying him ! One hour’s experience, when we have found that our faith can endure the furnace, and that we can hazard or let go all for Christ, will more effectually resolve all our doubtings of our sincerity, than many a month’s trial by mere questioning of our own deceitful hearts.

Object. ‘ But, you may say, what if God call me not to suffering or hazards ? Must I cast myself upon it without a call ? Or must I be therefore without comfort ?’

Ans. No ; you shall not need to cast yourself upon suf-

fering, nor yet to be without comfort for want of it. I know no man but may serve God at dearer rates to the flesh than most of us do, without stepping out of the way of his duty. Nay, he must do it, except he will avoid his duty. Never had the church yet such times of prosperity, but that faithful duty would hazard men, and cause their trouble in the flesh. Can you not, nay, ought you not, to put yourself to greater labour for men's souls? If you should but go day after day among the poor, ignorant people where you live, and instruct them in the knowledge of God, and bear with all their weakness and rudeness, and continue thus with patience, this might cost you some labour, and perhaps contempt from many of the unthankful. And yet you should not do more than your duty, if you have opportunity for it, as most have, or may have, if they will. If you should further hire them to learn catechisms; if you should extend your liberality to the utmost, for relief of the poor, this would cost you somewhat. If you carry on every just cause with resolution, though never so many great friends would draw you to betray it; this may cost you the loss of those friends. If you would but deal plainly with the ungodly, and against all sin, as far as you have opportunity, especially if it be the sins of rulers and gentlemen of name and power in the world, it may cost you somewhat. Nay, though you were ambassadors of Christ, whose office is to deal plainly, and not to please men in evil, upon pain of Christ's displeasure; you may perhaps turn your great friends to be your great enemies. Go to such a lord, or such a knight, or such a gentleman, and tell him freely, that God looketh for another manner of spending his time, than in hunting and hawking, and sporting, and feasting, and that this precious time must be dearly reckoned for. Tell him that God looks he should be the most eminent in holiness, and in a heavenly life, and give an example thereof to all that are below him, as God hath made him more eminent in worldly dignity and possessions. Tell him, that where much is given, much is required; and that a low profession, and dull approbation of that which is good, will serve no man, much less such a man. Tell him, that his riches must be expended to feed and clothe the poor, and promote good uses, and not merely for himself and family, or else he will make but a sad account. And that he must freely engage his reputation, estate, and life,

and all for Christ and his Gospel, when he calls you to it; yea, and forsake all for him, if Christ put him to it, or else he can be no disciple of Christ. And then what good will his honours and riches do him, when his soul shall be called for? Try this course with great men, yea with great men that seem religious, and that no further than faithfulness and compassion to men's souls doth bind you, and do it with all the wisdom you can, that is not carnal; and then tell me what it doth cost you. Let those ministers that are near them, plainly and roundly tell both the parliament-men and commanders of the army, of their unquestionable transgressions, and that according to their nature (and woe to them if they do not), and then let them tell me what it doth cost them. Alas, sirs, how great a number of professors are base, daubing, self-seeking hypocrites, that cull out the safe, the cheap, the easy part of duty, and leave all the rest! And so ordinarily is this done, that we have made us a new Christianity by it; and the religion of Christ's own making, the self-denying course prescribed by our Master, is almost unknown; and he that should practise it would be taken for a madman, or some self-conceited cynic, or some saucy, if not seditious fellow. It is not, therefore, because Christ hath not prescribed us a more self-denying, hazardous, laborious way, that men so commonly take up in the cheapest religion; but it is through our false-heartedness to Christ, and the strength of sensual, carnal interests in us, which make us put false interpretations on the plainest precepts of Christ, which charge any unpleasant duty on us, and familistically turn them into allegories, or at least we will not yield to obey him. And truly, I think that our shifting off Christ in this unworthy manner, and even altering that very frame and nature of Christian religion (by turning that into a flesh-pleasing religion, which is more against the flesh than all the religions else in the world) and dealing so reservedly, superficially and unfaithfully in all his work, is a great cause why Christ doth now appear no more openly for men, and pour out no larger a measure of his Spirit in gifts and consolations. When men appeared ordinarily in the most open manner for Christ, in greatest dangers and sufferings, then Christ appeared more openly and eminently for them, (yet is none more for meek-

ness, humility and love, and against unmerciful or dividing zeal, than Christ).

2. And as you see that a cheap religiousness doth not so discover sincerity ; so secondly, it is not accompanied with that special blessing of God. As God hath engaged himself in his word, that they shall not lose their reward that give but a cup of water in his name, so he hath more fully engaged himself to those that are most deeply engaged for him ; even that they that forsake all for him, shall have manifold recompence in this life, and in the world to come eternal life. Let the experience of all the world of Christians be produced, and all will attest the same truth, That it is God's usual course to give men larger comforts in dearer duties, than in cheap : nay, seldom doth he give large comforts in cheap duties, and seldom doth he deny them in dearer ; so be it they are not made dear by our own sin and foolish indiscretion, but by his command, and our faithfulness in obeying him. Who knows not that the consolation of martyrs is usually above other men's, who hath read of their sufferings and strange sustentations ? Christian, do but try this by thy own experiences, and tell me, when thou hast most resolutely followed Christ in a good cause ; when thou hast stood against the faces of the greatest for God ; when thou hast cast thy life, thy family and estate upon Christ, and run thyself into the most apparent hazards for his sake ; hast thou not come off with more inward peace and comfort, than the cheaper part of thy religion hath afforded thee ? When thou hast stood to the truth and Gospel, and hast done good through the greatest opposition, and lost thy greatest and dearest friends, because thou wouldst not forsake Christ and his service, or deal falsely in some cause that he hath trusted thee in ; hast thou not come off with the blessing of peace of conscience ? Nay, when thou hast denied thy most importunate appetite, and most crossed thy lusts, and most humbled and abased thyself for God, and denied thy credit, and taken shame to thyself in a free confessing of thy faults, or patiently put up with the greatest abuses, or humbled and tamed thy flesh by necessary abstinence, or any way most displeased it, by crossing its interest, by bountiful giving, laborious duty, dangers or sufferings, for the sake of the Lord Jesus, his

truth and people ; hath it not been far better with thee in thy peace and comforts than before ? I know some will be ready to say, that may be from carnal pride in our own doing or suffering. I answer, it may be so ; and therefore let all watch against that. But I am certain that this is God's ordinary dealing with his people, and therefore we may ordinarily expect it. It is for their encouragement in faithful duty ; and I may truly say, for their reward, when himself calls that a reward which he gives for a cup of water. Lay well to heart that example of Abraham, for which he is so often extolled in the Scripture, viz. His readiness to sacrifice his only son. This was a dear obedience : " And, saith God, because (mark, because) thou hast done this thing, in blessing I will bless thee," &c. David would not offer to God that which cost him nothing ; 2 Sam. xxiv. 24. 1 Chron. xxi. 24. God will have the best of your hearts, the best of your labours, the best of your estates, the best of all, or he will not accept it. Abel's sacrifice was of the best, and it was accepted : and God saith to Cain, " If thou doest well, shalt not thou be accepted ?"

Seeing this is so, let me advise you, Take it not for a calamity, but for a precious advantage, when God calls thee to a hazardous costly service, which is like to cost thee much of thy estate, to cost thee the loss of thy chiefest friends, the loss of thy credit, the indignation of great ones, or the most painful diligence and trouble of body : shift it not off, but take this opportunity thankfully, lest thou never have such another for the clearing of thy sincerity, and the obtaining of more than ordinary consolations from God : thou hast now a prize in thy hand for spiritual riches, if thou hast but a heart to improve it. I know all this is a paradox to the unbelieving world ; but here is the very excellency of the Christian religion, and the glory of faith. It looks for its greatest spoils, and richest prizes from its conquests of fleshly interests : it is not only able to do it, but it expecteth its advancement and consolations by this way. It is engaged in a war with the world and flesh ; and in this war it plays not the vapouring fencer, that seems to do much, but never strikes home, as hypocrites and carnal, worldly professors do : but he says it home, and spares not, as one that knows, that the flesh's ruin must be his rising, and the

flesh's thriving would be his ruin. In these things the true Christian alone is in good sadness, and all the rest of the world but in jest. The Lord pity poor deluded souls! You may see by this one thing, how rare a thing true Christianity is among the multitude that take themselves for Christians; and how certain, therefore, it is that few shall be saved. Even this one point of true mortification and self-denial, is a stranger amongst the most of professors. O how sad a testimony of it are the actions of these late times, wherein so much hath been done for self, and safety, and carnal interests, and so little for Christ! yea, and that after the deepest engagements of mercies and vows that ever lay on a people in the world. Insomuch, that through the just judgment of God, they are now given up to doubt, whether it be the duty of rulers to do any thing as rulers for Christ, or no; or whether they should not let Christ alone to do it himself. Well, this which is such a mystery to the unregenerate world, is a thing that every genuine Christian is acquainted with; for "they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts thereof;" and the world is dead to them, and they to the world; Gal. v. 21.

Take this counsel therefore in all the several cases mentioned in the Direction.

1. In your preventing sin, and maintaining your innocency, if you cannot do it without denying your credit, and exposing yourself to disgrace; or without the loss of friends, or a breach in your estate, do it nevertheless: yea, if it would cost you your utter ruin in the world, thank God that put such an opportunity into your hand for extraordinary consolations. For ordinarily the martyrs' comforts exceed other men's, as much as their burden of duty and suffering doth. Cyprian is fain to write for the comfort of some Christians in his times, that at death were troubled that they missed of their hopes of martyrdom. So also if you cannot mortify any lust without much pinching the flesh, do it cheerfully; for the dearer the victory costeth you, the sweeter will be the issue and review.

2. The same counsel I give you also in your rising from sin. It is the sad condition of those that yield to a temptation, and once put their foot within the doors of satan, that they ensnare themselves so, that they must undergo thrice as great difficulties to draw back, as they needed to have

done beforehand for prevention and forbearance. Sin unhappily engageth the sinner to go on; and one sin doth make another seem necessary. O how hard a thing is it for him that hath wronged another by stealing, deceit, overreaching in bargaining or the like, to confess his fault, and ask him forgiveness, and to the utmost of his ability to make restitution! What abundance of difficulties will be in the way! It will likely cost him the loss of his credit, besides the breach in his estate, and perhaps lay him open to the rage of him that he hath wronged. Rather he will be drawn to cover his sin with a lie, or at least by excuses. And so it is in many other sins. Now in any of these cases, when men indulge the flesh, and cannot find in their hearts to take that loss or shame to themselves, which a thorough repentance doth require, they do but feed the troubles of their soul, and hide their wounds and sores, and not ease them. Usually such persons go on in a galled, unpeaceable condition, and reach not to solid comfort. (I speak only of those to whom such confession or restitution is a duty.) And I cannot wonder at it: for they have great cause to question the truth of that repentance, and consequently the soundness of that heart, which will not bring them to a self-denying duty, nor to God's way of rising from their sin. It seems at present the interest of the flesh is actually predominant, when no reason or conviction will persuade them to contradict it. As ever you would have sound comfort then in such a case as this, spare not the flesh. When you have sinned, you must rise again or perish. If you cannot rise without fasting, without free confessing, without the utter shaming of ourselves, without restitution, never stick at it. This is your hour of trial: O yield not in the conflict. The dearer the victory costeth you, the greater will be your peace. Try it; and if you find it not so, I am mistaken. Yet if you have sinned so that the opening of it may more discredit the Gospel, than your confession will honour it, and yet your conscience is unquiet, and urgeth you to confess, in such a case be first well informed, and proceed warily and upon deliberation; and first open the case to some faithful minister or able Christian in secret, that you may have good advice.

3. The same counsel also would I give you in the performance of your duty. A magistrate is convinced he must

punish sinners, and put down alehouses, and be true to every just cause; but then he must steel his face against all men's reproaches, and the solicitations of all friends. A minister is convinced that he must teach from house to house, as well as publicly, if he be able; and that he must deal plainly with sinners according to their conditions; yea, and require the church to avoid communion with them, if they be obstinate in evil after other sufficient means; but then he shall lose the love of his people, and be accounted proud, precise, rigid, lordly, and perhaps lose his maintenance. Obey God now; and the dearer it costeth you, the more peace and protection, and the larger blessing may you expect from God: for you do, as it were, oblige God the more to stick to you; as you will take yourself obliged to own, and bear out, and reward those that hazard estate, and credit, and life for you. And if you cannot obey God in such a trial, it is a sad sign of a falsehearted hypocrite, except your fall be only in a temptation, from which you rise with renewed repentance and resolutions, which will conquer for the time to come. As Peter, who being left to himself for an example of human frailty, and that Christ might have no friend to stick by him when he suffered for our sin, yet presently wept bitterly, and afterwards spent his strength and time in preaching Christ, and laid down his life in martyrdom for him.

So perhaps many a poor servant, or hard labourer, hath scarce any time, except the Lord's day, to pray or read. Let such pinch the flesh a little the more (so they do not overthrow their health) and either work the harder, or fare the harder, or be clothed the more meanly, or especially break a little of their sleep, that they may find some time for these duties; and try whether the peace and comfort will not recompense it. Never any man was a loser for God. So private Christians cannot conscionably discharge the great plain duty of reproof and exhortation, joyingly, yet plainly telling their friends and neighbours of their sins, and danger, and duty, but they will turn friends into foes, and possibly set all the town on their heads. But is it a duty, or is it not? If it be, then trust God with the issue, and do your work, and see whether he will suffer you to be losers.

For my part I think, that if Christians took God's word before them, and spared the flesh less, and trusted them-

selves and all to Christ alone, and did not baulk all the troublesome and costly part of religion, and that which most crosseth the interest of the flesh, it would be more ordinary with them to be filled with the joys of the Holy Ghost, and walk in that peace of conscience which is a continual feast; and to have such full and frequent views both of the sincerity of their evidencing graces, and of God's reconciled face, as would banish their doubts and fears, and be a greater help to their certainty of salvation, than much other labour doth prove. If you flinch not the fiery furnace, you shall have the company of the Son of God in it. If you flinch not the prison and stocks, you may be able to sing as Paul and Silas did. If you refuse not to be stoned with Stephen, you may perhaps see heaven opened as he did. If you think these comforts so dear bought, that you will rather venture without them; let me tell you, you may take your course, but the end will convince you to the very heart, of the folly of your choice. Never then complain for want of comfort; remember you might have had it, and would not. And let me give you this with you; You will shortly find, though worldly pleasures, riches and honours, were some slight salves to your molested conscience here, yet there will no cure nor ease for it be found hereafter. Your merry hours will then all be gone, and your worldly delights forsake you in distress; but these solid comforts which you judged too dear, would have ended in the everlasting joys of glory. When men do flinch God and his truth in straits, and juggle with their consciences, and will take out all the honourable, easy, cheap part of the work of Christ, and make a religion of that by itself, leaving out all the disgraceful, difficult, chargeable, self-denying part; and hereupon call themselves Christians, and make a great show in the world with this kind of religiousness, and take themselves injured if men question their honesty and uprightness in the faith; these men are notorious self-deceivers, mere hypocrites; and in plain truth, this is the very true description by which damnable hypocrites are known from sound Christians. The Lord open men's eyes to see it in time while it may be cured! Yea, and the nearer any true Christian doth come to this sin, the more doth he disoblige God; and quench the spirit of comfort, and darken his own evidences, and destroy his peace of conscience, and create unavoidable troubles to his

spirit, and estrangedness betwixt the Lord Jesus and his own soul. Avoid this, therefore, if ever you will have peace.

Direct. XXV. My next advice shall be somewhat near of kin to the former. If you would learn the most expeditious way to peace and settled comfort, 'Study well the art of doing good; and let it be your every day's contrivance, care and business, how you may lay out all that God hath trusted you with, to the greatest pleasing of God, and to your most comfortable account.'

Still remember (lest any Antinomian should tell you that this savours of Popery, and trusting for peace to our own works;)

1. That you must not think of giving any of Christ's honour or office to your best works. You must not dream that they can do any thing to the satisfaction of God's justice for your sins; nor that they have any proper merit in them, so as for their worth to oblige God to reward you; nor that you must bring them as a price to purchase Christ and heaven; nor that you have any righteousness or worthiness in yourself and works, which the law of works will so denominate or own. But only you must give obedience its due under Christ; and so you honour Christ himself, when those that detract from obedience to him, do dishonour him; and you must have an evangelical worthiness and righteousness (so called, many and many times over in the Gospel) which partly consisteth in the sincerity of your obedience and good works; as the condition of continuing your state of justification, and right to eternal life.

2. Remember I have given you many arguments before, to prove that you may take comfort from your good works and gracious actions.

3. If any further objections should be made against this, read considerately and believingly, Matt. xxv. v. vii. throughout, or the former only; and I doubt not but you will be fully resolved. But to the work.

Those men that study no other obedience than only to do no (positive) harm, are so far from true comfort, that they have yet no true Christianity; I mean such as will be saving to them. Doing good is a high part of a Christian's obedience, and must be the chief part of his life. The heathen could tell him that asked him, how men might be like to God; the one way was, To do good to all. That is be-

yond our power, being proper to God the universal good, whose mercy is over all his works. But our goodness must be communicative, if we will be like God, and it must be extended and diffused as far as we can. The apostles charge is plain, and we must obey it if we will have any peace; "While you have time, do good to all men, but especially to them of the household of faith;" Gal. vi. 10. "Cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool;" Isa. i. 16, 17. "To do good, and to communicate, forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased;" Heb. xiii. 16. "Charge them that be rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy: that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life;" 1 Tim. vi. 17—19. See Luke vi. 33—35. Mark xiv. 7. Matt. v. 44. 1 Pet. iii. 11. James iv. 17. Psalm xxxiv. 14. xxxvii. 27. xxxvi. 3. xxxvii. 3. "Trust in the Lord, and do good." "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? But if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door;" Gen. iv. 7. "Cornelius, thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. In every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him;" Acts x. 3, 4. 34, 35. "Know you not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? Yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God;" Rom. vi. 13. 16. Matt. v. 16. Acts ix. 36. Eph. ii. 10. "We are created in Christ Jesus to good works, which God hath ordained that we should walk in them." 1 Tim. ii. 10. v. 10. 25. 2 Tim. iii. 17. Tit. ii. 7. iii. 8. 14. ii. 14. "He redeemed us from all iniquity, that he might purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." 1 Pet. ii. 12. Heb. x. 24. "Let us consider one another, to provoke unto

love, and to good works." What a multitude of such passages may you find in Scripture.

You see then how great a part of your calling and religion consisteth in doing good. Now it is not enough to make this your care now and then, or do good when it falls in your way; but you must study it, or it will not be done well. You must study which are good works, and which are they that you are called to; and which are the best works, and to be preferred, that you choose not a less instead of a greater. God looks to be served with the best. You must study for opportunities of doing good, and of the means of succeeding and accomplishing it; and for the removing of impediments; and for the overcoming of dissuasives, and withdrawing temptations. You must know what talents God hath entrusted you with, and those you must study to do good with: whether it be time, or interest in men, or opportunity, or riches, or credit, or authority, or gifts of mind, or of body: if you have not one, you have another, and some have all.

This therefore is the thing that I would persuade you to: take yourself for God's steward; remember the time when it will be said to you, "Give account of thy stewardship; thou shalt be no longer steward." Let it be your every day's contrivance, how to lay out your gifts, time, strength, riches or interest, to your Master's use. Think which way you may do most, first to promote the Gospel and the public good of the church; and then, which way you may help towards the saving of particular men's souls; and then, which way you may better the commonwealth, and how you may do good to men's bodies, beginning with your own and those of your family, but extending your help as much further as you are able. Ask yourself every morning, 'Which way may I this day most further my Master's business, and the good of men?' Ask yourself every night, 'What good have I done to-day?' And labour as much as may be, to be instruments of some great and standing good, and of some public and universal good, that you may look behind you at the year's end, and at your lives' end, and see the good that you have done. A piece of bread is soon eaten, and a penny or a shilling is soon spent; but if you could win a

soul to God from sin, that would be a visible, everlasting good. If you could be instruments of setting up a godly minister in a congregation that want, the everlasting good of many souls might, in part, be ascribed to you. If you could help to heal and unite a divided church, you might more rejoice to look back on the fruits of your labour, than any physician might rejoice to see his poor patient recovered to health. I have told rich men in another book, what opportunities they have to do good, if they had hearts. How easy were it with them to refresh men's bodies, and to do very much for the saving souls; to relieve the poor; to set their children to trades; to ease the oppressed. How easy to maintain two or three poor scholars at the Universities, for the service of the church. But I hear but a few that do ever the more in it, except three or four of my friends in these parts. Let me further tell you, God doth not leave it to them as an indifferent thing; Matt. xxv. They must feed Christ in the poor, or else starve in hell themselves: they must clothe naked Christ in the poor, or be laid naked in his fiery indignation for ever. How much more diligently then must they help men's souls, and the church of Christ, as the need is greater, and the work better! Oh the blinding power of riches! Oh the easiness of man's heart to be deluded! Do rich men never think to lie rotting in the dust? Do they never think that they must be accountable for all their riches, and for all their time, and power, and interests? Do they not know that it will comfort them at death and judgment, to hear in their reckoning, Item, so much given to such and such poor; so much to promote the Gospel; so much to maintain poor scholars, while they study to prepare themselves for the ministry? &c. Than to hear, So much in such a feast; to entertain such gallants; to please such noble friends; so much at dice, at cards, at horse-races, at cock-fights; so much in excess of apparel; and the rest to leave my posterity in the like pomp? Do they not know that it will comfort them more to hear then of their time spent in reading Scripture, secret and open prayer, instructing and examining their children and servants; going to their poor neighbours' houses to see what they want, and to persuade them to godliness; and in being examples of eminent holiness to all; and in suppressing vice, and doing justice, than to hear of so much time

spent in vain recreations, visits, luxuries, and idleness? O deep unbelief and hardness of heart, that makes gentlemen that they tremble not to think of this reckoning! Well, let me tell both them and all men, that if they knew but either their indispensable duty of doing good, that lieth on them, or how necessary and sure a way (in subordination to Christ) this act of doing good is for the soul's peace and consolation. they would study it better, and practise it more faithfully than now they do: they would then be glad of an opportunity to do good, for their own gain, as well as for God's honour, and for the love of good itself. They would know, that lending to the Lord is the only thriving usury; and that no part of all their time, riches, interest in men, power, or honours, will be then comfortable to them, but that which was laid out for God; and they will one day find, that God will not take up with the scraps of their time and riches, which their flesh can spare; but he will be first served, even before all comers, and that with the best, or he will take them for no servants of his. This is true, and you will find it so, whether you will now believe it or no.

And because it is possible these lines may fall into the hands of some of the rulers of this commonwealth, let me here mind them of two weighty things:

1. What opportunities of doing very great good hath been long in their hands, and how great an account of it they have to make. It hath been long in their power to have done much to the reconciling of our differences, and healing our divisions, by setting divines a work of different judgments, to find out a temperament for accommodation. It hath long been in their power to have done much towards the supply of all the dark congregations in England and Wales, with competently able, sound and faithful teachers. We have many congregations that do contain three thousand, five thousand, or ten thousand souls, that have but one or two ministers that cannot possibly do the tenth part of the ministerial work of private oversight, and so poor souls must be neglected, let ministers be never so able or painful. We have divers godly, private Christians, of so much understanding, as to be capable of helping us, as officers in our churches; but they are all so poor, that they are not able to spare one hour in a day or two from their labour, much less to give up themselves to the work. How

many a congregation is in the same case? Nothing almost is wanting to us, to have set our congregations in the order of Christ, and done this great work of reformation which there is so much talking of, so much as want of maintenance for a competent number of ministers or elders to attend the work. I am sure, in great congregations this is the case, and a sore that no other means will remedy. Was it never in the power of our rulers to have helped us here? Was nothing sold for other uses, that was once devoted and dedicated to God, and might have helped us in this our miserable distress? Were our churches able to maintain their own officers, our case were more tolerable; but when a congregation that wants six, or seven, or ten, is not able to maintain one it is hard.

2. The second thing that I would mind our rulers of, is, what mortal enemies those men are to their souls, that would persuade them that they must not, as rulers, do good to the souls of men, and to the church as such; nor further the reformation, nor propagate the Gospel, nor establish Christ's order in the churches of their country, any otherwise than by a common maintaining the peace and liberties of all. What doctrine could more desperately undo you, if entertained? If you be once persuaded that it belongs not to you to do good, and the greatest good, to which all your successes have made way, then all the comfort, the blessing and reward is lost; and consequently all the glorious preparative successes, as to you, are lost. If once you take yourselves to have nothing to do as rulers for Christ, you cannot promise yourselves that Christ will have any thing to do for you, as rulers, in a way of mercy. This, Mr. Owen hath lately told you in his sermon, October 13, "The God of heaven forbid, that ever all the devils in hell, the Jesuits at Rome, or the seduced souls in England, should be able to persuade the rulers of this land, who are so deeply bound to God by vows, mercies, professions, and high expenses of treasure and blood, to reform his church, and propagate his Gospel; that now after all this, it belongeth not to them, but they must, as rulers, be no more for Christ than for Mahomet. But if ever it should prove the sad case of England to have such rulers, (which I strongly hope will never be,) if my prognostics fail not, this will be their fate: the Lord Jesus will forsake them, as they have forsaken him, and the

prayers of his saints will be fully turned against them ; and his elect shall cry to him night and day, till he avenge them speedily, by making these his enemies to lick the dust, and dashing them in pieces like a potter's vessel, because they would not that he should reign over them : and then they shall know whether Christ be not King of kings, and Lord of lords.

Perhaps you may think I digress from the matter in hand ; but as long as I speak but for my Lord Christ, and for doing good, I cannot think that I am quite out of my way. But to return nearer to those for whose sakes I chiefly write, this is that sum of my advice ; Study with all the understanding you have, how to do as much good, while you have time, as possibly you can, and you shall find that (without any Popish or Pharisaical self-confidence) to be the most excellent art for obtaining spiritual peace, and a large measure of comfort from Christ.

To that end use seriously and daily to bethink yourself, what way of expending your time and wealth, and all your talents, will be most comfortable for you to hear of, and review at judgment. And take that as the way most comfortable now. Only consult not with flesh and blood ; make not your flesh of your counsel in this work, but take it for your enemy ; expect its violent, unwearied opposition ; but regard not any of its clamours or repinings. But know, as I said before, that your most true, spiritual comforts are a prize that must be won, upon the conquest of the flesh. I will only add to this, the words of the blessed Dr. Sibbs (a man that was no enemy to free-grace, nor unjust patron of man's works), in his preface to his "Soul's Conflict:" "Christ is first a King of righteousness, and then of peace. The righteousness that works by his Spirit brings a peace of sanctification ; whereby though we are not freed from sin, yet we are enabled to combat with it, and to get the victory over it. Some degree of comfort follows every good action, as heat accompanies fire, and as beams and influences issue from the sun. Which is so true, that very heathens upon the discharge of a good conscience, have found comfort and peace answerable ; this is a reward before our reward." Again, "In watchfulness and diligence we sooner meet with comfort, than in idle complaining." Again, pp. 44, 45. "An unemployed life is a burden to itself. God is a pure Act ;

always working; always doing. And the nearer our soul comes to God, the more it is in action, and the freer from disquiet. Men experimentally feel that comfort in doing that which belongs unto them, which before they longed for and went without." And in his preface to the "Bruised Reed:" "There is no more comfort to be expected from Christ than there is care to please him. Otherwise, to make him an abettor of a lawless and a loose life, is to transform him into a fancy; nay, into the likeness of him, whose works he came to destroy; which is the most detestable idolatry of all. One way whereby the Spirit of Christ prevaieth in his, is to preserve them from such thoughts: yet we see people will frame a divinity to themselves, pleasing to the flesh, suitable to their own ends; which being vain in the substance, will prove likewise vain in the fruit, and a building upon the sands." So far Dr. Sibbs. It seems there were libertines and Antinomians then, and will be as long as there are any carnal, unsanctified professors.

Direct. XXVI. Having led you thus far towards a settled peace, my next Direction shall contain a necessary caution, lest you run as far into the contrary extreme, viz. 'Take heed that you neither trouble your own soul with needless scruples, about matters of doctrine, of duty, or of sin, or about your own condition. Nor yet that you do not make yourself more work than God hath made you, by feigning things unlawful, which God hath not forbidden; or by placing your religion in will-worship, or in an over curious insisting on circumstantial, or an over rigorous dealing with your body.'

This is but the exposition of Solomon, "Be not over wise, and be not righteous overmuch;" Eccles. vii. 16. A man cannot serve God too much, formally and strictly considering his service; much less love him too much. But we may do too much materially intending thereby to serve God, which though it be not true righteousness, yet being intended for righteousness, and done as a service of God, or obedience to him, is here called overmuch righteousness. I know it is stark madness in the profane, secure world, to think that the doing of no more than God hath commanded us, is doing too much, or more than needs; as if God had bid us do more than needs, or had made such laws as few of the foolish rulers on earth would make. This is plainly to

blaspheme the Most High, by denying his wisdom and his goodness, and his just government of the world; and to blaspheme his holy laws, as if they were too strict, precise, and made us more to do than needs; and to reproach his sweet and holy ways, as if they were grievous, intolerable, and unnecessary. Much more is their madness, in charging the godly with being too pure, and too precise, and making too great a stir for heaven, and that merely for their godliness and obedience; when, alas, the best do fall so far short of what God's word, and the necessity of their own souls do require, that their consciences do more grievously accuse them of negligence, than the barking world doth of being too precise and diligent. And yet more mad are the world, to lay out so much time, and care, and labour, for earthly vanities, and to provide for their contemptible bodies for a little while; and in the mean time to think, that heaven and their everlasting happiness there, and the escaping of everlasting damnation in hell, are matters not worth so much ado, but may be had with a few cold wishes, and that it is but folly to do so much for it as the godly do. That no labour should be thought too much for the world, the flesh, and the devil, and every little is enough for God. And that these wretched souls are so blinded by their own lusts, and so bewitched by the devil into an utter ignorance of their own hearts, that they verily think, and will stand in it, that for all this they love God above all, and love heavenly things better than earthly, and therefore shall be saved.

But yet extremes there are in the service of God, which all wise Christians must labour to avoid. It is a very great question among divines, Whether the common rule in ethics, that virtue is ever in the middle between two extremes, be sound, as to Christian virtues; Amesius saith no. The case is not very hard, I think, to be resolved, if you will but use these three distinctions: 1. Between the acts of the mere rational faculties, understanding and will, called elicit acts, and the acts of the inferior faculties of soul and body, called imperate acts. 2. Between the acts that are about the end immediately, and those that are about the means. 3. Between the intention of an act, and the objective extension, and comparison of object with object. And so I say, 1. The end (that is, God and salvation) cannot be too fully known, or too much loved, with a pure, rational

love of complacency; nor too much sought by the acts of the soul, as purely rational: for the end being loved and sought for itself, and being of infinite goodness, must be loved and sought without measure or limitation, it being impossible here to exceed. *Prop. 2.* The means, while they are not misapprehended, but taken as means, and materially well understood, cannot be too clearly discerned, nor too rightly chosen, nor too resolutely prosecuted. *Prop. 3.* It is too possible to misapprehend the means, and to place them instead of the end, and so to overlove them. *Prop. 4.* The nature of all the means consisteth in a middle or mean between two extremes, materially; both which extremes are sin: so that it is possible to overdo about all the means, as to the matter of them, and the extent of our acts. Though we cannot love God too much, yet it is possible to preach, hear, pray, read, meditate, confer of good too much: for one duty may shut out another, and a greater may be neglected by our overdoing in a lesser; which was the Pharisees' sin in sabbath resting. *Prop. 5.* If we be never so right in the extension of our acts, yet we may go too far in the intention of the imperate acts or passions of the soul, and that both on the means and end; though the pure acts of knowing or willing cannot be too great towards God and salvation, yet the passions and acts commonly called sensitive may. A man may think on God not only too much, (as to exclude other necessary thoughts,) but too intensely, and love and desire too passionately: for there is a degree of thinking or meditating, and of passionate love and desire, which the brain cannot bear, but it will cause madness, and quite overthrow the use of reason, by overstretching the organs, or by the extreme turbulency of the agitated spirits. Yet I never knew the man, nor ever shall do, I think, that was ever guilty of one of these excesses; that is, of loving or desiring God so passionately, as to distract him. But I have often known weak-headed people, (that be not able to order their thoughts,) and many melancholy people, guilty of the other; that is, of thinking too much, and too seriously and intensely on good and holy things, whereby they have overthrown their reason, and been distracted. And here I would give all such weak-headed, melancholy persons this warning, that whereas in my Book of Rest, I so much press a constant course of heavenly meditation, I do intend it only

for sound heads, and not for the melancholy, that have weak heads, and are unable to bear it. That may be their sin, which to others is a very great duty ; while they think to do that which they cannot do, they will but disable themselves for that which they can do. I would therefore advise those melancholy persons whose minds are so troubled, and heads weakened, that they are in danger of overthrowing their understandings, (which usually begins in multitudes of scruples, and restlessness of mind, and continual fears, and blasphemous temptations, where it begins with these, distraction is at hand, if not prevented,) that they forbear meditation, as being no duty to them, though it be to others ; and instead of it be the more in those duties which they are fit for, especially conference with judicious Christians, and cheerful and thankful acknowledgment of God's mercies. And thus have I shewed you how far we may possibly exceed in God's service. Let me now a little apply it.

It hath ever been the devil's policy to begin in persuading men to worldliness, fleshpleasing, security, and presumption, and utter neglect of God and their souls, or at least preferring their bodies and worldly things, and by this means he destroyeth the world. But where this will not take, but God awaketh men effectually, and casteth out the sleepy devil, usually he fills men's heads with needless scruples, and next setteth them on a religion not commanded, and would make poor souls believe they do nothing, if they do not more than God hath commanded them. When the devil hath no other way left to destroy religion and godliness, he will pretend to be religious and godly himself, and then he is always over-religious and over-godly in his materials. All overdoing in God's work is undoing ; and whoever you meet with that would overdo, suspect him to be either a subtle, destroying enemy, or one deluded by the destroyer. O what a tragedy could I here shew you of the devil's acting ! And what a mystery in the hellish art of deceiving could I open to you ! And shall I keep the devil's counsel ? No : O that God would open the eyes of his poor desolate churches at last to see it !

The Lord Jesus in wisdom and tender mercy, establisheth a law of grace, and rule of life, pure and perfect, but simple and plain ; laying the condition of man's salvation more in the honesty of the believing heart, than in the strength of

wit, and subtlety of a knowing head. He comprised the truths which were of necessity to salvation in a narrow room : so that the Christian faith was a matter of great plainness and simplicity. As long as Christians were such and held to this, the Gospel rode in triumph through the world, and an omnipotency of the Spirit accompanied it, bearing down all before it. Princes and sceptres stooped; subtle philosophy was nonplust; and all useful sciences came down, and acknowledged themselves servants, and took their places, and were well contented to attend the pleasure of Christ. As Mr. Herbert saith in his "Church Militant;"—

Religion thence fled into Greece, where arts
Gave her the highest place in all men's hearts:
Learning was proposed; philosophy was set;
Sophisters taken in a fisher's net.
Plato and Aristotle were at a loss,
And wheeled about again to spell Christ's cross.
Prayers chas'd syllogisms into their den,
And 'ergo' was transformed into Amen.

The serpent envying this happiness of the church, hath no way to undo us, but by drawing us from our Christian simplicity. By the occasion of heretics' quarrel and errors, the serpent steps in, and will needs be a spirit of zeal in the church; and he will so overdo against heretics, that he persuades them they must enlarge their creed, and add this clause against one, and that against another, and all was but for the perfecting and preserving of the Christian faith. And so he brings it to be a matter of so much wit to be a Christian, (as Erasmus complains,) that ordinary heads were not able to reach it. He had got them with a religious, zealous cruelty to their own and others' souls, to lay all their salvation, and the peace of the church, upon some unsearchable mysteries about the Trinity, which God either never revealed, or never clearly revealed, or never laid so great a stress upon: yet he persuades them that there was Scripture-proof enough for these; only the Scripture spoke it but in the premises, or in darker terms, and they must but gather into their creed the consequences, and put it into plainer expressions, which heretics might not so easily corrupt, pervert, or evade. Was not this reverent zeal? And was not the devil

seemingly now a Christian of the most judicious and forward sort? But what got he at this one game? 1. He necessitated implicit faith even in fundamentals, when he had got points beyond a vulgar reach among fundamentals. 2. He necessitated some living judge for the determining of fundamentals 'quoad nos,' though not 'in se' (the soul of Popish wickedness), that is, what it is in sense that the people must take for fundamentals. 3. He got a standing verdict against the perfection and sufficiency of Scripture, (and consequently against Christ, his Spirit, his apostles, and the Christian faith;) that it will not afford us so much as a creed or system of fundamentals, or points absolutely necessary to salvation and brotherly communion, in fit or tolerable phrases; but we must mend the language at least. 4. He opened a gap for human additions, at which he might afterwards bring in more at his pleasure. 5. He framed an engine for an infallible division, and to tear in pieces the church, casting out all as heretics that could not subscribe to his additions, and necessitating separation by all dissenters, to the world's end, till the devil's engine be overthrown. 6. And hereby he lays a ground upon the divisions of Christians, to bring men into doubt of all religion, as not knowing which is the right. 7. And he lays the ground of certain heart-burnings, and mutual hatred, contentions, revilings, and enmity. Is not here enough got at one cast? Doth there need any more to the establishing of the Romish and hellish darkness? Did not this one act found the seat of Rome? Did not the devil get more in his gown in a day than he could get by his sword in three hundred years? And yet the Holy Ghost gave them full warning of this beforehand; "For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy; for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve, through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ;" 2 Cor. xi. 2, 3. "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations;" Rom. xiv. 1. "The law of the Lord is perfect;" Psal. xix. "All Scripture is given by inspiration from God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works;" 2 Tim.

iii. 16, 17. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to these, it is because there is no truth in them;" Isa. viii. 20. With many the like.

This plot the serpent hath found so successful, that he hath followed it on to this day. He hath made it the great engine to get Rome on his side, and to make them the great dividers of Christ's church. He made the pope and the council of Trent believe, that when they had owned the ancient creed of the church, they must put in as many and more additional articles of their own, and anathematize all gainsayers; and these additions must be the peculiar mark of their church as Romish; and then all that are not of that church, that is, that own not those superadded points, are not of the true church of Christ, if they must be judges. Yea, among ourselves hath the devil used successfully this plot! What confession of the purest church hath not some more than is in Scripture? The most modest must mend the phrase and speak plainer, and somewhat of their own in it, not excepting our own most reformed confession.

Yea, and where modesty restrains men from putting all such inventions and explications in their creed, the devil persuades men, that they being the judgments of godly, reverend divines (no doubt to be revered, valued, and heard), it is almost as much as if it were in the creed, and therefore whoever dissenteth must be noted with a black coal, and you must disgrace him, and avoid communion with him as an heretic. Hence lately is your union, communion, and the church's peace, laid upon certain unsearchable mysteries about predestination, the order and objects of God's decrees, the manner of the Spirit's most secret operations on the soul, the nature of the will's essential liberty, and its power of self-determining the Divine concurrence, determination or predestination of man's, and all other creature's actions, &c. That he is scarcely to be accounted a fit member for our fraternal communion that differs from us herein. Had it not been for this one plot, the Christian faith had been kept pure; religion had been one; the church had been one; and the hearts of Christians had been more one than they are. Had not the devil turned orthodox, he had not made so many true Christians heretics, as Epiphanius and Austin have enrolled in the black list. Had not the enemy of truth and peace got into the chair, and made

so pathetic an oration as to inflame the minds of the lovers of truth to be over zealous for it, and to do too much, we might have had truth and peace to this day. Yea, still, if he see any man of experience and moderation stand up to reduce men to the ancient simplicity, he presently seems the most zealous for Christ, and tells the inexperienced leaders of the flocks, that it is in favour of some heresy that such a man speaks; he is plotting a carnal syncretism, and attempting the reconciliation of Christ and Belial; he is tainted with Popery, or Socinianism, or Arminianism, or Calvinism, or whatsoever may make him odious with those he speaks to. O what the devil hath got by over-doing!

And as this is true in doctrines, so is it in worship and discipline, and pastoral authority, and government. When the serpent could not get the world to despise the poor fishermen that published the Gospel (the devil being judged, and the world convinced by the power of the Holy Ghost, the Agent, Advocate, and Vicar of Christ on earth), he will then be the most forward to honour and promote them. And if he cannot make Constantine a persecutor of them, he will persuade him to raise them in worldly glory to the stars, and make them lords of Rome, and possess them with princely dignities and revenues. And he hath got as much by over-honouring them, as ever he did by persecuting and despising them. And now in England, when this plot is descried, and we had taken down that superfluous honour, as antichristian, what doth the devil but set in again on the other side? And none is so zealous a reformer as he. He cries down all as antichristian, which he desireth should fall. Their tithes and maintenance are antichristian and oppressive (O pious, merciful devil), down with them! These church-lands were given by Papists to Popish uses, to maintain bishops, and deans, and chapters, down with them. These college-lands, these cathedrals, nay, these church-houses, or temples (for so I will call them, whether the devil will or no), all come from idolaters, and are abused to idolatry, down with them. Nay, think you but he hath taken the boldness to cry out, these priests, these ministers, are all antichristian, seducers, needless, enviers of the spirit of prophesy, and of the gifts of their brethren, monopolizers of preaching, down with them too! So that though he yet have not what he would have, the old serpent hath done

more as a reformer by overdoing, than he did in many a year as a deformer or hinderer of reformation. Yet if he do but see that there is a Sovereign Power that can do him a mischief, he is ready to tell them, they must be merciful, and not deal cruelly with sinners! Nay, it belongs not to them to reform, or to judge who are heretics and who not, or to restrain false doctrine, or church-disturbers. Christ is sufficient for this himself. How oft hath the devil preached thus, to tie the hands of those that might wound him.

Would you see any further how he hath played this successful game of overdoing? Why, he hath done as much by it in worship and discipline, as almost in any thing. When he cannot have discipline neglected, he is an over-zealous spirit in the breasts of the clergy; and he persuades them to appoint men penance, and pilgrimages, and to put the necks of princes under their feet. But if this tyranny must be abated, he cries down all discipline, and tells them it is all but tyranny and human inventions; and this confessing sin to ministers for relief of conscience, and this open confessing in the congregation for a due manifestation of repentance, and satisfaction to the church, that they may hold communion with them, it is all but Popery and priestly domineering.

And in matter of worship, worst of all. When he could not persuade the world to persecute Christ, and to refuse him and his worship, the serpent will be the most zealous worshipper, and saith, as Herod, and with the same mind, "Come and tell me, that I may worship him." He persuades men to do and overdo. He sets them on laying out their revenues in sumptuous fabrics, in fighting to be masters of the holy land and sepulchre of Christ; on going pilgrimages; worshipping saints, angels, shrines, relics, adoring the very bread of the sacrament as God, excessive fastings, choice of meats, numbered prayers on beads, repetitions of words, so may Ave Maries, Pater Nosters, the name Jesus so oft repeated in a breath, so many holidays to saints, canonical hours, even at midnight to pray, and that in Latin for greater reverence, crossings, holy garments, variety of prescribed gestures, kneeling and worshipping before images, sacrificing Christ again to his Father in the mass; forswearing marriage; living retiredly, as separate from the world; multitudes of new, prescribed rules and orders of life; vow-

ing poverty; begging without need; creeping to the cross, holy water, and holy bread, carrying palms, kneeling at altars, bearing candles, ashes; in baptism, crossing, conjuring out the devil, salting, spittle, oil; taking pardons, indulgencies, and dispensations of the pope; praying for the dead, perambulations, serving God to merit heaven, or to ease souls in purgatory; doing works of supererogation, with multitudes the like. All these hath the devil added to God's worship, so zealous a worshipper of Christ is he, when he takes that way. Read Mr. Herbert's "Church Militant of Rome," pp. 188—190. I could trace this deceiver yet further, and tell you wherein, when he could not hinder reformation in Luther's days, he would needs overdo in reforming! But O how sad an example of it have we before our eyes in England! Never people on earth more hot upon reforming! Never any deeper engaged for it! The devil could not hinder it by fire and sword; when he sees that, he will needs turn reformer, as I said before, and he gets the word, and cries down antichrist, and cries up reformation, till he hath done what we see! He hath made a Babel of our work, by confounding our languages; for, though he will be for reformation too, yet his name is Legion, he is an enemy to the one God, one Mediator and Head, one faith, and one baptism, one heart, and one lip, and one way, unity is the chief butt that he shoots at. Is baptism to be reformed? Christ is so moderate a Reformer, that he only bids, Down with the symbolical, mystical rite of man's vain addition. But the serpent is a more zealous reformer. He saith, Out with express covenanting; out with children; they are a corruption of the ordinance. And to others he says, Out with baptism itself. We might follow him thus through other ordinances. Indeed he so overdoes in his reforming, that he would not leave us a Gospel, a ministry, a magistracy to be for Christ, no, nor a Christ; (though yet he would seem to own a God, and the light of nature). All these with him are antichristian.

By this time I hope you see that this way of overdoing hath another author than many zealous people do imagine; and that it is the devil's common, successful trade; so that his agents in state-assemblies are taught his policy, 'When you have no other way of undoing, let it be by overdoing.' And the same way he takes with the souls of particular per-

sons. If he see them troubled for sin, and he cannot keep them from the knowledge of Christ and free grace, he puts the name of free grace and Gospel-preaching upon Antinomian and libertine errors which subvert the very Gospel and free grace itself. If he see men convinced of this, and that it is neither common nor religious libertinism and sensuality that will bring men to heaven, then he will labour to make Papists of them, and to set them on a task of external formalities, or macerating their bodies with hurtful fastings, watchings, and cold, as if self-murder were the highest pitch of religion, and God had pleasure to see his people torment themselves! I confess it is very few that ever I knew to have erred far in austere usage of their bodies. But some I have, and especially poor, melancholy Christians, that are more easily drawn to deal rigorously with their flesh than others be. And such writings as lately have been published by some English Popish formalists, I have known draw men into this snare. I would have all such remember, 1. That God is a Spirit, and will be worshipped in spirit and in truth; and such worshippers doth he seek. 2. That God will have mercy and not sacrifice; and that the vitals of religion are in a consumption, when the heat of zeal is drawn too much to the outside; and that placing most in externals, is the great character of hypocrisy, and is that pharisaical religion to which the doctrine and practice of the Lord Jesus was most opposite, as any that will read the Gospel may soon see. 3. That God hath made our bodies to be his servants, and instruments of righteousness (Rom. vi. 13.), and helpful and serviceable to our souls in well-doing. And therefore it is disobedience, it is injustice, it is cruelty to disable them, and causelessly to vex and torment them, much more to destroy them. You may see by sick men, by melancholy men, by madmen and children, how unfit that soul is to know, or love, or serve God, that hath not a fit body to work in and by. The serpent knows this well enough. If he can but get you by excessive fastings, watchings, labours, studies, or other austerities, especially sadness and perplexities of mind, to have a sick body, a crazed brain, or a short life, you will be able to do him but little hurt, and God but little service, besides the pleasure that he takes in your own vexation. Nay, he will hope to make a further advantage of your weakness, and to keep many a

soul in the snares of sensuality, by telling them of your miseries, and saying to them, 'Dost thou not see in such a man or woman, what it is to be so holy and precise? They will all run mad at last. If once thou grow so strict, and deny thyself thy pleasures, and take this precise course, thou wilt but make thy life a misery, and never have a merry day again.' Such examples as yours the devil will make use of that he may terrify poor souls from godliness, and represent the word and ways of Christ to them in an odious, and displeasing, and discouraging shape. Doubtless that God who himself is so merciful to your body, as well as to your soul, would have you to be so too. He that provided so plentifully for its refreshment, would not have you refuse his provision. He that saith the righteous man is merciful to his beast, no doubt would not have him to be unmerciful to his own body. You are commanded to love your neighbours but as yourself; and therefore by cruelty and unmerciful dealing with your own body, you will go about to justify the like dealing with others. You durst not deny to feed, to clothe, to comfort and refresh the poor, lest Christ should say, "You did it not to me." And how should you dare to deny the same to yourself? How will you answer God for the neglect of all that service which you should have done him, and might, if you had not disabled your bodies and mind? He requireth that you delight yourself in him. And how can you do that when you habituate both mind and body to a sad, dejected, mournful garb? The service that God requires, is "To serve him with cheerfulness in the abundance that we possess;" Deut. xxviii. 47. If you think that I here contradict what I said in the former Directions, for pinching the flesh, and denying its desires, you are mistaken. I only shew you the danger of the contrary extreme. God's way lieth between both. The truth is (if you would be resolved how far you may please or displease the flesh) the flesh being ordained to be our servant and God's servant, must be used as a servant. You will give your servant food, and raiment, and wholesome lodging, and good usage, or else you are unjust, and he will be unfit to do your work. But so far as he would master you, or disobey you, you will correct him, or keep him under. You will feed your horse, or else he will not carry you; but if he grow unruly, you must tame him. It is a delusory formality of

Papists, to tie all the countries to one time and measure of fasting, as Lent, Fridays, &c. When men's states are so various that many (though not quite sick) have more need of a restoring diet; and those that need fasting, need it not all at once, not in one measure, but at the time, and in the measure, as the taming of their flesh requireth it. As if a physician should proclaim that all his patients should take physick such forty days every year, whether their disease be plethoric or consuming, from fulness or from abstinence, and whether the disease take him at that time of the year, or another. And remember that you must not under pretences of saving the body, disable it to serve God. You will not lay any such correction on your child or servant as shall disable them from their work, but such as shall excite them to it. And understand that all your afflicting your body must be either preventive, as keeping the fire from the thatch, or medicinal and corrective, and not strictly vindictive; for that belongs to your Judge. Though in a subordination to the other ends, the smart or suffering for its fault, is one end, and so it is truly penal or vindictive, as all chastisement is. And so Paul saith, "Behold what revenge," &c. 2 Cor. vii. 11. but not as mere judicial revenge is. Remember therefore, though you must so far tame your body as to bring it into subjection, that you perish not by pampering; yet not so far as to bring it to weakness, and sickness, and unfitness for its duty. Nor yet must you dare to conceit that you please God, or satisfy him for your sin, by such a wronging and hurting your own body. Such Popish religiousness shews, that men have very low and carnal conceits of God. Was it not a base wickedness in them that offered their children in sacrifice, to think that God would be pleased with such cruelty? Yea, were it not to have directed us to Christ, he would not have accepted of the blood of bulls and goats; it is not sacrifice that he desires. He never was bloodthirsty, nor took any pleasure in the creature's suffering. How can you think then that he will take pleasure in your consuming and destroying your own bodies? It is as unreasonable as to imagine, that he delights to have men cut their own throats, or hang themselves; for pining and consuming oneself is self-murder as well as that. Yet I know no man should draw back from a painful or hazardous work, when God calls him to it, for

fear of destroying the flesh; but do not make work or suffering for yourselves. God will lay as much affliction on you as you need, and be thankful if he will enable you to bear that; but you have no need to add more. If yourselves make the suffering, how can you with any encouragement, beg strength of God to bear it? And if you have not strength, what will you do? Nay, how can you pray for deliverance from God's afflictings, when you make more of your own? And thus I have shewed you the danger of overdoing, and what hindrance it is to a settled peace, both of church (state) and soul; though perhaps it may not condemn a particular soul so certainly (in most parts of it) as doing too little will.

5. The next part of my Direction (first expressed) is, That you avoid causeless scruples, about doctrines, duties, sins, or your own state.

These are also engines of the enemy, to batter the peace, and comfort of your soul; he knows that it is cheerful obedience, with a confidence of Christ's merits and mercies that God accepteth; and therefore if he cannot hinder a poor soul from setting upon duty, he will hinder him if he can, by these scruples, from a cheerful and prosperous progress. First, If he can, he will take in scruples about the truth of his religion, and shewing him the many opinions that are in the world, he will labour to bring the poor Christian to a loss. Or else he will assault him by the men of some particular sect; to draw him to that party, and so by corrupting his judgment, to break his peace; or at least to trouble his head, and divert his thoughts from God, by tedious disputes. The Papists will tell him, that they are the only true Catholic church (as if they had got a monopoly or patent for religion, and had confined Christ to themselves) who are such notorious abusers of him. And as if all the churches of Greece, Ethiopia, and the rest of the world, were unchurched by Christ, to humour Master Pope, though they be far more in number, and many of them sounder in doctrine than the Romanists are. Those of other parties will do the like, each one to draw him to their own way. And the devil would make him believe that there are as many religions as there be odd opinions, when alas, the Christian religion is one, and but one, consisting, for the doctrinals, in those fundamentals contained in our creed.

And men's lesser erroneous opinions are but the scabs that adhere to their religion. Only the church of Rome is a very leper, whose infectious disease doth compel us to avoid her company. (As for any sort of men that deny the fundamentals, I will not call them by the name of Christians.) So also in duties of worship, satan will be casting in scruples. If they should hear the word, he will cause them to be scrupling the calling of the minister, or something in his doctrine to discourage them. If they should dedicate their children to Christ in the baptismal covenant, he will be raising scruples about the lawfulness of baptizing infants. When they should solace their souls at the Lord's supper, or other communion of the church, he will be raising scruples about the fitness of every one that they are to join with, and whether it be lawful to join with such an ignorant man, or such a wicked man; or whether it be a true church, or rightly gathered, or governed, or the minister a true minister, and twenty the like. When they should join with the church in singing of God's praises, he will move one to scruple singing David's psalms; another to scruple singing among the ungodly; another singing psalms that agree not to every man's condition; another, because our translation is bad, or our metre defective, and we might have better. When men should spend the Lord's day in God's spiritual worship, he causeth one to scruple, whether the Lord's day be of divine institution. Another he drives into the other extreme, to scruple almost every thing that is not worship. Whether they may provide their meat on that day (when yet it is a solemn day of thanksgiving, and they scruple not much more on other thanksgiving-days) or whether they may so much as move a stick out of the way. Others he moves to trouble themselves with scruples, as what hour the day begins and ends, and the like. Whereas, if they, 1. Understood that worldly rest is commanded but as a help to spiritual worship. 2. And that they must employ as much of that day in God's work as they do of other days in their callings, and rest in the night as at other times, and that God looks to time for the work's sake, and not at the work for the time's sake; this would cast out most of their scruples. The like course satan takes with Christians in reading, praying in secret, or in their families, teaching their families, reproofing sinners, teaching the ignorant, meditation, and all other duties, too long to mention the

particular scruples which he thrusts into men's heads, much more to resolve them, which would require a large volume alone.

Now I would entreat all such Christians to consider, how little they please God, and how much they please satan, and how much they break their own peace, and the peace of the churches. If you send a man on a journey, would you like him better that would stand questioning and scrupling every step he goes, whether he set the right foot before? Or whether he should go in the foot-path or in the road? Or him that would cheerfully go on, not thinking which foot goeth forward; and rather step a little beside the path, and in again, than to stand scrupling when he should be going? If you send reapers into your harvest, which would you like better, him that would stand scrupling how many straws he should cut down at once, and at what height; and with fears of cutting them too high or too low, too many at once, or too few, should do you but little work? Or him that would do his work cheerfully, as well as he can? Would you not be angry at such childish, unprofitable diligence or curiosity, as is a hindrance to your work? And is it not so with our Master? There was but one of those parties in the right that Paul spoke to; Rom. xiv. xv. And yet he not only persuades them to bear with one another, and not to judge one another, but to receive the weak in faith, and not to doubtful disputations; but he bids them, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." How? Can he that erreth be fully persuaded in his error? Yes, he may go on boldly and confidently, not troubling himself with demurs in his duty, as long as he took the safer side in his doubt. Not that this should encourage any to venture on sin, or to neglect a due inquiry after God's mind. But I speak against tormenting scruples, which do no work, but hinder from it, and stay us from our duty.

The same I say against scruples about your sins; satan will make you believe that every thing is a sin, that he may disquiet you, if he cannot get you to believe that nothing almost is sin, that he may destroy you. You shall not put a bit in your mouth, but he will move a scruple, whether it were not too good, or too much. You shall not clothe yourself, but he will move you to scruple the lawfulness of it. You shall not come into any company, but he will afterward vex you about every word you spoke, lest you sinned.

The like I may say also about your condition, but more of that anon.

Direct. XXVII. 'When God hath once shewed you a certainty, or but a strong probability of your sincerity and his especial love, labour to fix this so deep in your apprehension and memory, that it may serve for the time to come, and not only for the present. And leave not your soul too open to changes, upon every new apprehension, nor to question all that is past upon every jealousy; except when some notable declining to the world, and the flesh, or a committing of gross sins, or a wilfulness or carelessness in other sins that you may avoid, do give you just cause of questioning your sincerity, and bringing your soul again to the bar, and your estate to a more exact review.'

Some Antinomian writers and preachers you shall meet with, who will persuade you, whatsoever sins you fall into, never more to question your justification or salvation. I have said enough before to prove their doctrine detestable. Their reason is, because God changeth not as we change, and justification is never lost. To which I answer, 1. God hated us while we were workers of iniquity; Psal. xi. 5. v. 5. And was angry with us when we were children of wrath; Ephes. iii. 1—3. And afterward he laid by that hatred and wrath; and all this without change. If we cannot reach to apprehend how God's unchangeableness can stand with the fullest and most frequent expressions of him in Scripture, must we therefore deny what those expressions do contain? As Austin saith, 'Shall we deny that which is plain, because we cannot reach that which is obscure and difficult?' 2. But if these men had well studied the Scriptures, they might have known that the same man that was yesterday hated as an enemy, may to-day be reconciled and loved as a son, and that without any change in God; even as it falls out within the reach of our knowledge: for God ruleth the world by his laws; they are his moral instruments; by them he condemneth; by them he justifieth, so far as he is said in this life, before the judgment day, to do it, (unless there be any other secret act of justification with him, which man is not able now to understand). The change is therefore in our relations, and in the moral actions of the laws. When we are unbelievers, and impenitent, we are related to God as enemies, rebels, unjustified and unpar-

done; being such as God's law condemneth and pronounceth enemies, and the law of grace doth not yet justify or pardon; and so God is, as it were, in some sense obliged, according to that law which we are under, to deal with us as enemies, by destroying us; and this is God's hating, wrath, &c. When we repent, return, and believe, our relation is changed; the same law that did condemn us, is relaxed and disabled, and the law of grace doth now acquit us; it pardoneth us, it justifieth us, and God by it: and so God is reconciled to us, when we are such as according to his own law of grace he is, as it were, obliged to forgive and to do good to, and to use us as sons: is not all this apparently without any change in God? Cannot he make a law that shall change its moral action according to the change of the actions or inclinations of sinners? And this without any change in God? And so, if it should so be that a justified man should fall from God, from Christ, from sincere faith or obedience, the law would condemn him again, and the law of grace would justify him no more (in that state), and all this without any change in God. 3. If this Antinomian argument would prove any thing, it would prove justification before, and so without, Christ's satisfaction, because there is no change in God. 4. The very point, That no justified man shall ever fall from Christ, is not so clear and fully revealed in Scripture, and past all doubt from the assault of objections, as that a poor soul in such a relapsed estate should venture his everlasting salvation wholly on this, supposing that he were certain that he was once sincere. For my own part, I am persuaded that no rooted believer, that is habitually and groundedly resolved for Christ, and hath crucified the flesh and the world, (as all have that are thoroughly Christ's,) do ever fall quite away from him afterwards. But I dare not lay my salvation on this. And if I were no surer of my salvation, than I am of the truth of this my judgment, to speak freely, my soul would be in a very sad condition. 5. But suppose it as certain and plain as any word in the Gospel, (that a justified man is never quite unjustified;) yet as every new sin brings a new obligation to punishment, (or else they could not be pardoned, as needing no pardon, so must every sin have its particular pardon, and consequently the sinner a particular justification from the guilt of that sin,) besides his first general par-

don (and justification): for to pardon sin before it is committed, is to pardon sin that is no sin, which is a contradiction, and impossibility. Now, though for daily, unavoidable infirmities, there be a pardon of course, upon the title of our habitual faith and repentance; yet whether in case of gross sin, or more notable defection, this will prove a sufficient title to particular pardon, without the addition of actual repentance; and what case the sinner is in till that actual repentance and faith, as I told you before, are so difficult questions (it being ordered by God's great wisdom that they should be so,) that it beseems no wise man to venture his salvation on his own opinion in these. Nay, it is certain, that if gross sinners having opportunity and knowledge of their sins, repent not, they shall perish. And therefore I think, a justified man hath great reason upon such falls, to examine his particular repentance; (as well as his former state,) and not to promise himself, or presume upon a pardon without it. 6. And besides all this, though both the continuance of faith, and non-intercision of justification be never so certain, yet when a man's obedience is so far overthrown, his former evidences and persuasions of his justification will be uncertain to him. Though he have no reason to think that God is changeable, or justification will be lost, yet he hath reason enough to question whether ever he were a true believer, and so were ever justified. For faith worketh by love; and they that love Christ will keep his commandments. Libertines and carnal men may talk their pleasure; but when satan maintains not their peace, sin will break it: and Dr. Sibbs's words will be found true, "Soul's Conflict," pp. 41, 42. "Though the main pillar of our comfort be the free forgiveness of our sins, yet if there be a neglect of growing in holiness, the soul will never be soundly quiet, because it will be prone to question the truth of justification; and it is as proper for sin to raise doubts and fears in the conscience, as for rotten flesh and wood to breed worms: where there is not a pure conscience, there is not a pacified conscience," &c. Read the rest.

Thus much I have been fain to premise, lest my words for consolation should occasion security and desolation. But now let me desire you to peruse the Direction, and practise it. If when God hath given you assurance, or strong probabilities of your sincerity, you will make use of

it but only for that present time, you will never then have a settled peace in your soul : besides, the great wrong you do to God, by necessitating him to be so often renewing such discoveries, and repeating the same words to you so often over. If your child offend you, would you have him when he is pardoned, no longer to believe it, than you are telling it him ? Should he be still asking you over and over every day, ' Father, am I forgiven, or no ? ' Should not one answer serve his turn ? Will you not believe that your money is in your purse or chest any longer than you are looking on it ? Or that your corn is growing on your land, or your cattle in your grounds, any longer than you are looking on them ? By this course a rich man should have no more content than a beggar, longer than he is looking on his money, or goods, or lands ; and when he is looking on one, he should again lose the comfort of all the rest. What hath God given you a memory for, but to lay up former apprehensions, and discoveries, and experiences, and make use of them on all meet occasions afterwards ? Let me therefore persuade you to this great and necessary work. When God hath once resolved your doubts, and shewed you the truth of your faith, love or obedience, write it down, if you can, in your book, (as I have advised you in my Treatise of Rest,) ' Such a day, upon serious perusal of my heart, I found it thus and thus with myself.' Or at least, write it deep in your memory ; and do not suffer any fancies, or fears, or light surmises to cause you to question this again, as long as you fall not from the obedience or faith which you then discovered. Alas ! man's apprehension is a most mutable thing ! If you leave your soul open to every new apprehension, you will never be settled : you may think two contrary things of yourself in an hour. You have not always the same opportunity for right discerning, nor the same clearness of apprehension, nor the same outward means to help you, nor the same inward assistance of the Holy Ghost. When you have these, therefore, make use of them, and fix your wavering soul, and take your question and doubt as resolved, and do not tempt God, by calling him to new answers again and again, as if he had given you no answer before. You will never want some occasion of jealousy and fears as long as you have corruption in your heart, and sin in your life, and a tempter to be troubling

you ; but if you will suffer any such wind to shake your peace and comforts, you will be always shaking and fluctuating, as a wave of the sea. And you must labour to apprehend not only the uncomfortableness, but the sinfulness also of this course. For though the questioning your own sincerity on every small occasion, be not near so great a sin as the questioning of God's merciful nature, or the truth of his promise, or his readiness to shew mercy to the penitent soul, or the freeness and fulness of the covenant of grace ; yet even this is no contemptible sin. For, 1. You are doing satan's work, in denying God's graces, and accusing yourself falsely, and so pleasing the devil in disquieting yourself. 2. You slander God's Spirit as well as your own soul, in saying, he hath not renewed and sanctified you, when he hath. 3. This will necessitate you to further unthankfulness, for who can be thankful for a mercy, that thinks he never received it ? 4. This will shut your mouth against all those praises of God, and that heavenly, joyful commemoration of his great, unspeakable love to your soul, which should be the blessed work of your life. 5. This will much abate your love to God, and your sense of the love of Christ in dying for you, and all the rest of your graces, while you are still questioning your interest in God's love. 6. It will lay such a discouragement on your soul, as will both destroy the sweetness of all duties to you (which is a great evil), and thereby make you backward to them, and heartless in them : you will have no mind of praying, meditation, or other duties, because all will seem dark to you, and you will think that every thing makes against you. 7. You rob all about you of that cheerful, encouraging example and persuasion which they should have from you, and by which you might win many souls to God. And contrarily you are a discouragement and hindrance to them. I could mention many more sinful aggravations of your denying God's graces in you on every small occasion, which methinks should make you be very tender of it, if not to avoid unnecessary trouble to yourself, yet at least to avoid sin against God.

And what I have said of evidences and assurance, I would have you understand also of your experiences. You must not make use only at the present of your experiences, but lay them up for the time to come. Nor must you tempt God so far as to expect new experiences upon every new

scruple or doubt of yours, as the Israelites expected new miracles in the wilderness, still forgetting the old. If a scholar should in his studies forget all that he hath read and learned, and all the resolutions of his doubts which in study he hath attained, and leave his understanding still as an unwritten paper, as a receptive of every mutation and new apprehension, and contrary conceit, as if he had never studied the point before, he will make but a poor proficiency, and have but a fluctuated, unsettled brain. A scholar should make all the studies of his life to compose one entire image of truth in his soul, as a painter makes every line he draws to compose one entire picture of a man; and as a weaver makes every thread to compose one web; so should you make all former examinations, discoveries, evidences, and experiences, compose one full discovery of your condition, that so you may have a settled peace of soul: and see that you tie both ends together, and neither look on your present troubled state without your former, lest you be unthankful, and unjustly discouraged; nor on your former state without observance of your present frame of heart and life, lest you deceive yourself, or grow secure. O that you could well observe this Direction! How much would it help you to escape extremes, and conduce to the settling of a well-grounded peace, and at once to the well ordering of your whole conversation!

Direct. XXVIII. 'Be very careful that you create not perplexities and terrors to your own soul, by rash misinterpretations of any passages either of Scripture, of God's providence, or of the sermons or private speeches of ministers: but resolve with patience, yea, with gladness, to suffer preachers to deal with their congregations in the most searching, serious and awakening manner, lest your weakness should be a wrong to the whole assembly, and possibly the undoing of many a sensual, drowsy or obstinate soul, who will not be convinced and awakened by a comforting way of preaching, or by any smoother or gentler means.'

Here are three dangerous enemies to your peace, which (for brevity) I warn you of together.

1. Rash misinterpretations and misapplications of Scripture. Some weak-headed, troubled Christians can scarce read a chapter, or hear one read, but they will find something which they think doth condemn them. If they read

of God's wrath and judgment, they think it is meant against them. If they read, "Our God is a consuming fire," they think presently it is themselves that must be the fuel; whereas justice and mercy have each their proper objects; the burning fire will not waste the gold, nor is water the fuel of it; but combustible matter it will presently consume. A humble soul that lies prostrate at Christ's feet, confessing its unworthiness, and bewailing its sinfulness, this is not the object of revenging justice; such a soul bringing Christ's mercies, and pleading them with God, is so far from being the fuel of this consuming fire, that he bringeth that water which will undoubtedly quench it. Yet this Scripture expression of our God, may subdue carnal security even in the best, but not dismay them or discourage them in their hopes. Another reads in Psalm l. "I will set thy sins in order before thee;" and he thinks, certainly God will deal thus by him, not considering that God chargeth only their sins upon them that charge them not by true repentance on themselves, and accept not of Christ who hath discharged them by his blood. It is the excusers, and mincers, and defenders of sin, that love not those that reprove them, and that will not avoid them, or the occasions of them, that would not be reformed, and will not be persuaded, in whose souls iniquity hath dominion, and that delight in it, it is these on whom God chargeth their sin: "For this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light; and come not to the light, lest their deeds should be reprov'd;" John iii. 20, 21. But for the soul that trembleth at God's word, and comes home to God with shame and sorrow, resolving to return no more to wickedness, God is so far from charging his sins upon him, that he never mentioneth them, as I told you, is evident in the case of the prodigal. He makes not a poor sinner's burden more heavy by hitting him in the teeth with his sins, but makes it the office of his Son to ease him by disburdening him.

Many more texts might be named (and perhaps it would not be lost labour) which troubled souls do misunderstand and misapply; but it would make this writing tedious, which is already swelled so far beyond my first intention.

2. The second enemy of your peace here mentioned, is, Misunderstanding and misapplying passages of providence.

Nothing more common with troubled souls, than upon every new cross and affliction that befalls them, presently to think, God takes them for hypocrites; and to question their sincerity! As if David and Job had not left them a full warning against this temptation. Do you lose your goods? So did Job. Do you lose your children? So did Job; and that in no very comfortable way. Do you lose your health? So did Job. What if your godly friends should come about you in this case, and bend all their wits and speeches to persuade you that you are but a hypocrite, as Job's friends did by him, would not this put you harder to it? Yet could Job resolve, "I will not let go mine integrity till I die." I know God's chastisements are all paternal punishments; and that Christians should search and try their hearts and ways at such times; but not conclude that they are graceless ever the more for being afflicted, seeing God chasteneth every son whom he receiveth; Heb. xii. 6, 7. And in searching after sin itself in your afflictions, be sure that you make the word, and not your sufferings, the rule to discover how far you have sinned; and let afflictions only quicken you to try by the word. How many a soul have I known that by misinterpreting providences, have in a blind jealousy, been turned quite from truth and duty, supposing it had been error and sin; and all because of their afflictions. As a foolish man in his sickness accuseth the last meat that he eat before he fell sick, though it might be the wholesomest that ever he eat, and the disease may have many causes which he is ignorant of. One man being sick, a busy seducing Papist comes to him (for it is their use to take such opportunities) and tells him, 'It is God's hand upon you for forsaking or straying from the Roman Catholic Church, and God hath sent this affliction to bring you home. All your ancestors lived and died in this church, and so must you if ever you will be saved.' The poor, jealous, affrighted sinner hearing this, and through his ignorance being unable to answer him, thinks it is even true, and presently turns Papist. In the same manner do most other sects. How many have the Antinomians and Anabaptists thus seduced! Finding a poor silly woman (for it is most common with them) to be under sad doubts and distress of soul, one tells her, 'It is God's hand on you to convince you of error, and to bring you to submit to the ordi-

nance of baptism :’ and upon this many have been rebaptized, and put their foot into the snare which I have yet seen few escape and draw back from. Another comes and tells the troubled soul, ‘It is legal preaching, and looking at something in yourself for peace and comfort, which hath brought you to this distress : as long as you follow these legal preachers, and read their books, and look at any thing in yourself, and seek assurance from marks within you, it will never be better with you. These preachers understand not the nature of free grace, nor ever tasted it themselves, and therefore they cannot preach it, but despise it. You must know that grace is so free that the covenant hath no condition : you must believe, and not look after the marks. And believing is but to be persuaded that God is reconciled to you, and hath forgiven you ; for you are justified before you were born, if you are one of the elect, and can but believe it. It is not any thing of your own, by which you can be justified ; nor is it any sin of yours that can unjustify. It is the witness of the Spirit only persuading you of your justification and adoption, that can give you assurance ; and fetching it from any thing in yourself, is but a resting on your own righteousness, and forsaking Christ.’ When the Antinomian hath but sung this ignorant charm to a poor soul as ignorant as himself, and prepared by terrors to entertain the impression, presently it (oft) takes, and the sinner without a wonder of mercy is undone. This doctrine, which subverteth the very scope of the Gospel, being entertained, subverteth his faith and obedience ; and usually the libertinism of his opinion is seen in his liberty of conscience, and licentious practices ; and his trouble of mind is cured, as a burning fever by opium, which gives him such a sleep, that he never awaketh till he be in another world. Yet these errors are so gross, and so fully against the express texts of Scripture, that if ministers would condescendingly, lovingly and familiarly deal with them and do their duty, I should hope many well-meaning souls might be recovered. Thus you see the danger of rash interpreting, and so misinterpreting providences. As such interpretations of prosperity and success delude not only the Mahometan world, and the profane world, but many that seemed godly, so many such interpretations of adversity and crosses do ; especially if the seducer be but kind and liberal to re-

lieve them in their adversity, he may do with many poor souls almost what he please.

3. The third enemy to your peace here mentioned, is, Misinterpreting or misapplying the passages of preachers in their sermons, writings or private speeches. A minister cannot deal thoroughly or seriously with any sort of sinners, but some fearful, troubled souls apply all to themselves. I must entreat you to avoid this fault, or else you will turn God's ordinances and the daily food of your souls, into bitterness and wormwood, and all through your mistakes. I think there are few ministers so preach, but you might perceive whom they mean, and they so difference as to tell you who they speak to. I confess it is a better sign of an honest heart and self-judging conscience, to say, 'He speaks now to me, this is my case;' than to say, 'He speaks now to such or such a one, this is their case.' For it is the property of hypocrites to have their eye most abroad, and in every duty to be minding most the faults of others: and you may much discern such in their prayers, in that they will fill their confessions most with other men's sins, and you may feel them all the while in the bosom of their neighbours, when you may even feel a sincere man speaking his own heart, and most opening his own bosom to God. But though self-applying and self-searching be far the better sign, yet must not any wise Christian do it mistakingly: for that may breed abundance of very sad effects. For besides the aforesaid embittering of God's ordinances to you, and so discouraging you from them, do but consider what a grief and a snare you may prove to your minister. A grief it must needs be to him who knows he should not make sad the soul of the innocent, to think that he cannot avoid it, without avoiding his duty. When God hath put two several messages in our mouths; "Say to the righteous, it shall be well with him;" and "Say to the wicked, it shall be ill with him;" Isaiah iii. 10, 11. "He that believeth shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned;" and we speak both; will you take that as spoken to you, which is spoken to the unbeliever and the wicked? Alas, how is it possible then for us to forbear troubling you? If you will put your head under every stroke that we give against sin and sinners, how can we help it if you smart? What a sad case are we in, by such misapplications! We have but two messages

to deliver, and both are usually lost by misapplications. The wicked saith, 'I am the righteous, and therefore it shall go well with me.' The righteous saith, 'I am the wicked, and therefore it shall go ill with me.' The unbeliever saith, 'I am a believer, and therefore am justified.' The believer saith, 'I am an unbeliever, and therefore am condemned.' Nay, it is not only the loss of our preaching, but we oft do them much harm; for they are hardened that should be humbled; and they are wounded more that should be healed. A minister now must needs tell them who he means by the believer, and who by the unbeliever; who by the righteous, and who by the wicked: and yet when he hath done it as accurately, and as cautelously as he can, misapplying souls will wrong themselves by it. So that because people cannot see the distinguishing line, it therefore comes to pass that few are comforted but when ministers preach nothing else but comfort; and few humbled, but where ministers bend almost all their endeavours that way, that people can feel almost nothing else from him. But for him that equally would divide to each their portion, each one snatcheth up the part of another, and he oft misseth of profiting either; and yet this is the course that we must take.

And what a snare is this to us, as well as a grief! What if we should be so moved with compassion of your troubles, as to fit almost all our doctrine and application to you, what a fearful guilt should we draw upon our own souls!

Nay, what a snare may you thus prove to the greater part of the congregation! Alas, we have seldom past one, or two, or three troubled consciences in an auditory, (and perhaps some of their troubles be the fruit of such wilful sinning, that they have more need of greater, yet) should we now neglect all the rest of these poor souls, to preach only to you? O how many an ignorant hardhearted sinner comes before God every day! Shall we let such go away as they came, without ever a blow to awaken them and stir their hearts, when, alas, all that ever we can do is too little! When we preach you into tears and trembling, we preach them asleep! Could we speak swords, it would scarce make them feel, when you through misapplication have gone home with anguish and fears. How few of all these have been pricked at the heart, and said, "What shall we do to be saved?" Have you no pity now on such stupid souls as

these? I fear this one distemper of yours, that you cannot bear this rousing preaching, doth betray another and greater sin; look to it, I beseech you, for I think I have spied out the cause of your trouble; are you not yourself too great a stranger to poor stupid sinners? and come not among them? or pity them not as you should? And do not your duty for the saving of their souls; but think it belongs not to you but to others? Do you use to deal with servants and neighbours about you, and tell them of sin and misery, and the remedy, and seek to draw their hearts to Christ, and bring them to duty? I doubt you do little in this; (and that is sad unmercifulness;) for if you did, truly you could not choose but find such miserable ignorance, such senselessness and blockishness, such hating reproof and unwillingness to be reformed, such love of this world, and slavery to the flesh, and so little favour of Christ, grace, heaven, and the things of the Spirit, and especially such an unteachableness, untractableness (as thorns and briars) and so great a difficulty moving them an inch from what they are, that you would have been willing ever after to have ministers preach more rousingly than they do, and you would be glad for their sakes, when you heard that which might awake them and prick them to the heart. Yea, if you had tried how hard a work it is to bring worldly, formal hypocrites to see their hypocrisy, or to come over to Christ from the creature, and to be in good earnest in the business of their salvation, you would be glad to have preachers search them to the quick, and ransack their hearts, and help them against their affected and obstinate self-delusions.

Besides, you should consider that their case is far different from yours; your disease is pain and trouble, they are stark dead: you have God's favour and doubt of it, they are his enemies and never suspect it: you want comfort, and they want pardon and life: if your disease should never here be cured, it is but going more sadly to heaven, but if they be not recovered by regeneration, they must lie for ever in hell. And should we not then pity them more than you; and study more for them; and preach more for them; and rather forget you in a sermon than them? Should you not wish us so to do? Should we more regard the comforting of one, than the saving of a hundred? Nay more, we should not only neglect them, but dangerously hurt them,

if we should preach too much to the case of troubled souls ; for you are not so apt to misapply passages of terror, and to take their portion, as they are apt to apply to themselves such passages for comfort, and take your portion to themselves.

I know some will say, that it is preaching Christ, and setting forth God's love, that will win them best, and terrors do but make unwilling, hypocritical professors. This makes me remember how I have heard some preachers of the times, blame their brethren for not preaching Christ to their people, when they preached the danger of rejecting Christ, disobeying him, and resisting his Spirit. Do these men think that it is no preaching Christ (when we have first many years told men the fulness of his satisfaction, the freeness and general extent of his covenant or promise, and the riches of his grace, and the incomprehensibleness of his glory, and the truth of all) to tell them afterwards the danger of refusing, neglecting and disobeying him ; and of living after the flesh, and preferring the world before him ; and serving mammon, and falling off in persecution, and avoiding the cross, and yielding in temptation, and quenching the Spirit, and declining from their first love, and not improving their talents, and not forgiving and loving their brethren, yea, and enemies ? &c. Is none of this Gospel ? nor preaching Christ ? Yea, is not repentance itself (except despairing repentance) proper to the Gospel, seeing the law excludeth it, and all manner of hope ? Blame me not, reader, if I be zealous against these men, that not only know not what preaching Christ is, but in their ignorance reproach their brethren for not preaching Christ, and withal condemn Christ himself and all his apostles. Do they think that Christ himself knew not what it was to preach Christ ? Or that he set us a pattern too low for our imitation ? I desire them soberly to read Matt. v. vi. vii. x. xxv. Rom. viii. iv. from the first verse to the fourteenth. Rom. ii. Heb. ii. iv. v. x. and then tell me whether we preach as Christ and his apostles did. But to the objection ; I answer first, We do set forth God's love, and the fulness of Christ, and the sufficiency of his death and satisfaction for all, and the freeness and extent of his offer and promise of mercy, and his readiness to welcome returning sinners : this we do

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first (mixing with this the discovery of their natural misery by sin, which must be first known) and next we shew them the danger of rejecting Christ and his office. 2. When we find men settled under the preaching of free grace, in a base contempt or sleepy neglect of it, preferring the world and their carnal pleasures and ease, before all the glory of heaven, and riches of Christ and grace, is it not time for us to say, "How shall ye escape, if ye neglect so great salvation?" Heb. ii. 3. "And of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy, that treads under foot the blood of the covenant?" Heb. x. 26. When men grow careless and unbelieving, must we not say, "Take heed lest a promise being left, of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it?" Heb. iv. 1. 3. Hath not Christ led us, commanded us, and taught us this way? "Except ye repent, ye shall all perish," was his doctrine; Luke xiii. 3. 5. "Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature:" (what is that Gospel?) "He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned;" Mark xvi. 16. "Those mine enemies that would not I should reign over them, bring hither and slay them before me;" Luke xix. 27. Doth any of the apostles speak more of hell-fire, and the worm that never dieth, and the fire that never is quenched, than Christ himself doth? And do not his apostles go the same way; even Paul, the great preacher of faith? (2 Thess. i. 7—9. ii. 12, &c.) What more common? Alas, what work should we make, if we should stroke and smooth all men with Antinomian language? It were the way to please all the sensual, profane multitude, but it is none of Christ's way to save their souls. I am ready to think that these men would have Christ preached as the Papist would have him prayed to; to say, 'Jesu, Jesu, Jesu,' nine times together, and this oft over, is their praying to him; and to have Christ's name oft in the preacher's mouth, some men think is the right preaching Christ.

Let me now desire you hereafter, to be glad to hear ministers awaken the profane and dead-hearted hearers, and search all to the quick, and misapply nothing to yourself; but if you think any passage doth nearly concern you, open your mind to the minister privately, when he may satisfy you more fully, and that without doing hurt to others: and con-

sider what a strait ministers are in, that have so many of so different conditions, inclinations, and conversations to preach to.

Direct. XXIX. 'Be sure you forget not to distinguish between causes of doubting of your sincerity, and causes of mere humiliation, repentance, and amendment; and do not raise doubtings and fears, where God calleth you but to humiliation, amendment, and fresh recourse to Christ.'

This rule is of so great moment to your peace, that you will have daily use for it, and can never maintain any true, settled peace without the practice of it. What more common than for poor Christians to pour out a multitude of complaints of their weaknesses, and wants, and miscarriages; and never consider all the while that there may be cause of sorrow in these, when yet there is no cause of doubting of their sincerity. I have shewed before, that in gross falls and great backslidings, doubtings will arise, and sometimes our fears and jealousies may not be without cause; but it is not ordinary infirmities, nor every sin which might have been avoided, that is just cause of doubting; nay, your very humiliation must no further be endeavoured than it tends to your recovery, and to the honouring of mercy: for it is possible that you may exceed in the measure of your griefs. You must therefore first be resolved, wherein the truth of saving grace doth consist, and then in all your failings and weaknesses first known, whether they contradict sincerity in itself, and are such as may give just cause to question your sincerity: if they be not (as the ordinary infirmities of believers are not), then you may and must be humbled for them, but you may not doubt of your salvation for them. I told you before by what marks you may discern your sincerity; that is, wherein the nature of saving faith and holiness doth consist; keep that in your eye, and as long as you find that sure and clear, let nothing make you doubt of your right to Christ and glory. But, alas! how people do contradict the will of God in this! When you have sinned, God would have you bewail your folly and unkind dealing, and fly to mercy through Christ, and this you will not do; but he would not have you torment yourselves with fears of damnation, and questioning his love, and yet this you will do. You may discern by this, that humiliation and reformation are sure of God, man's

heart is so backward to it; and that vexations, doubts and fears in true Christians that should be comfortable, are not of God, man's nature is so prone to them (though the ungodly that should fear and doubt, are as backward to it).

I think it will not be unseasonable here to lay down the particular doubts that usually trouble sincere believers, and see how far they may be just, and how far unjust and causeless; and most of them shall be from my own former experience; and such as I have been most troubled with myself, and the rest such as are incident to true Christians, and too usual with them.

Doubt I. 'I have often heard and read in the best divines, that grace is not born with us, and therefore satan hath always possession before Christ, and keeps that possession in peace, till Christ come and bind him and cast him out; and that this is so great a work that it cannot choose but be observed, and for ever remembered by the soul where it is wrought; yea, the several steps and passages of it may be all observed: first casting down, and then lifting up; first wounding and killing, and then healing and reviving. But I have not observed the distinct parts and passages of this change in me, nay, I know of no such sudden observable change at all: I cannot remember that ever I was first killed, and then revived: nor do I know by what minister, nor at what sermon, or other means that work which is upon me was wrought: no, nor what day, or month, or year it was begun. I have slided insensibly into a profession of religion, I know not how; and therefore I fear that I am not sincere, and the work of true regeneration was never yet wrought upon my soul.'

Ans. I will lay down the full answer to this, in these propositions. 1. It is true that grace is not natural to us, or conveyed by generation. 2. Yet it is as true that grace is given to our children as well as to us. That it may be so, and is so with some, all will grant who believe that infants may be, and are saved: and that it is so with the infants of believers, I have fully proved in my Book of Baptism; but mark what grace I mean. The grace of remission of original sin, the children of all true believers have at least a high probability of, if not a full certainty; their parent accepting it for himself and them, and dedicating them to Christ, and engaging them in his covenant, so that he takes them

for his people, and they take him for their Lord and Saviour. And for the grace of inward renewing of their natures or disposition, it is a secret to us, utterly unknown whether God use to do it in infants or no. 3. God's first ordained way for the working of inward holiness is by parents' education of their children, and not by the public ministry of the word; of which more anon. 4. All godly parents do acquaint their children with the doctrine of Christ in their infancy, as soon as they are capable of receiving it, and do afterwards inculcate it on them more and more. 5. These instructions of parents are usually seconded by the workings of the Spirit, according to the capacity of the child, opening their understandings to receive it, and making an impression thereby upon the heart. 6. When these instructions and the inward workings of the Spirit are just past the preparatory part, and above the highest step of common grace, and have attained to special saving grace, is ordinarily undiscernible: and therefore, as I have shewed already, in God's usual way of working grace, men cannot know the just day or time when they began to be in the state of grace. And though men that have long lived in profaneness, and are changed suddenly, may conjecture near at the time; yet those that God hath been working on early in their youth, yea, or afterwards by slow degrees, cannot know the time of their first receiving the Spirit. 8. The memories of all men are so slippery, and one thought so suddenly thrust out by another, that many a thousand souls forget those particular workings which they have truly felt. 9. The memories of children are far weaker than of others; and therefore it is less probable that all the Spirit's workings should by them be remembered. 10. And the motions of grace are so various, sometimes stirring one affection, and sometimes another, sometimes beginning with smaller motions, and then moving more strongly and sensibly, that it is usual for later motions which are more deeply affecting, to make us overlook all the former, or take them for nothing. 11. God dealeth very variously with his chosen in their conversion, as to the accidentals and circumstantialia of the work. Some he calleth not home till they have run a long race in the way of rebellion, in open drunkenness, swearing, worldliness and derision of holiness: these he usually humbleth more deeply, and they can better observe the several steps of the

Spirit in the work ; (and yet not always neither). Others he so restraineth in their youth, that though they have not saving grace, yet they are not guilty of any gross sins, but have a liking to the people and ways of God : and yet he doth not savingly convert them till long after. It is much harder for these to discern the time or manner of their conversion ; yet usually some conjectures they may make : and usually their humiliation is not so deep. Others, as is said, have the saving workings of the Spirit in their very childhood, and these can least of all discern the certain time or order. The ordinary way of God's dealing with those that are children of godly parents, and have good education, is, by giving them some liking of godly persons and ways, some conscience of sin, some repentance and recourse by prayer to God in Christ for mercy ; yet youthful lusts and folly, and ill company, do usually much stifle it, till at last, by some affliction, or sermon, or book, or good company, God setteth home the work, and maketh them more resolute and victorious Christians. These persons now can remember that they had convictions, and stirring consciences when they were young, and the other forementioned works, perhaps they can remember some more notable rousings and awakenings long after, and perhaps they have had many such fits and steps, and the work hath stood at this pass for a long time, even many years together. But at which of all these changes it was that the soul began to be savingly sincere, I think is next to an impossibility to discern. According to that experience which I have had of the state of Christians, I am forced to judge the most of the children of the godly that ever are renewed, are renewed in their childhood, or much towards it then done, and that among forty Christians there is not one that can certainly name the month in which his soul first began to be sincere ; and among a thousand Christians, I think not one can name the hour. The sermon which awakened them, they may name, but not the hour when they first arrived at a saving sincerity.

My advice therefore to all Christians, is this : Find Christ by his Spirit dwelling in your hearts, and then never trouble yourselves, though you know not the time or manner of his entrance. Do you value Christ above the world, and resolve to choose him before the world, and perform

these resolutions? Then need you not doubt but the Spirit of Jesus is victorious in you.

Doubt 2. 'But I have oft read and heard, that a man cannot come to Christ till he feel the heavy burden of sin. It is the weary and heavy-laden that Christ calleth to him. He bindeth up only the brokenhearted; he is a Physician only to those that feel themselves sick; he brings men to heaven by the gates of hell. They must be able to say, I am in a lost condition, and in a state of damnation, and if I should die this hour I must perish for ever, before Christ will deliver them. God will throw away the blood of his Son on those that feel not their absolute necessity of it, and that they are undone without it. But it was never thus with me to this day.'

Ans. 1. You must distinguish carefully between repentance as it is in the mind and will, and as it shews itself in the passion of sorrow. All that have saving interest in Christ, have their judgments and wills so far changed, that they know they are sinners, and that there is no way to the obtaining of pardon and salvation but by Christ, and the free mercy of God in him; and thereupon they are convinced that if they remain without the grace of Christ, they are undone for ever. Whereupon they understanding that Christ and mercy is offered to them in the Gospel, do heartily and thankfully accept the offer, and would not be without Christ, or change their hopes of his grace for all the world, and do resolve to wait upon him for the further discovery of his mercy, and the workings of his Spirit, in a constant and conscionable use of his means, and to be ruled by him, to their power. Is it not thus with you? If it be, here is the life and substance of repentance, which consisteth in this change of the mind and heart, and you have no cause to doubt of the truth of it, for want of more deep and passionate humiliation. 2. I have told you before, how uncertain and inconstant the passionate effects of grace are, and how unfit to judge by, and given you several reasons of it. Yet I doubt not but some work upon the affections there is, as well as on the will and understanding; but with so great diversity of manner and degrees, that it is not safe judging by it only or chiefly. Is there no degree of sorrow or trouble that hath touched your heart for your sin or misery? If your affections were no whit stirred, you would

hardly be moved to action, to use means, or avoid iniquity, much less would you so oft complain as you do. 3. If God prevented those heinous sins in the time of your unregeneracy, which those usually are guilty of who are called to so deep a degree of sorrow, you should rather be thankful that your wound was not deeper, than troubled that the cure cost you no dearer. Look well whether the cure be wrought in the change of your heart and life from the world to God by Christ, and then you need not be troubled that it was wrought so easily. 4. Were you not acquainted with the evil of sin, and danger and misery of sinners, in your very childhood, and also of the necessity of a Saviour, and that Christ died to save all sinners that will believe and repent? And hath not this fastened on your heart, and been working in you by degrees ever since? If it be so, then you cannot expect that you should have such deep terrors as those that never hear of sin and Christ till the news come upon them suddenly in the ripeness of their sin. There is a great deal of difference betwixt the conversion of a Jew, or any other infidel, who is brought on the sudden to know the doctrine of sin, misery and salvation, by Christ; and the conversion of a professor of the Christian religion, who hath known this doctrine in some sort from his childhood, and who hath a sound religion, though he be not sound in his religion, and so needs not a conversion to a sound faith, but only to a soundness in the faith. The suddenness of the news must needs make those violent commotions and changes in the one, which cannot ordinarily be expected in the other, who is acquainted so early with the truth, and by such degrees. 5. But suppose you heard nothing of sin and misery, and a Redeemer in your childhood, or at least understood it not (which yet is unlikely), yet let me ask you this: Did not that preacher, or that book, or whatever other means God used for your conversion, reveal to you misery and mercy both together? Did not you hear and believe that Christ died for sin, as soon as you understood your sin and misery? Sure I am that the Scripture reveals both together; and so doth every sound preacher, and every sound writer (notwithstanding that the slanderous Antinomians do shamefully proclaim that we preach not Christ, but the law). This being so, you must easily apprehend that it must needs abate very much of the terror, which would else have been

unavoidable. If you had read or heard that you were a sinner, and the child of hell, and of God's wrath, and that there was no remedy, (which is such a preaching of the law, as we must not use to any in the world, nor any since the first promise to Adam, must receive); yea, or if you had heard nothing of a Saviour for a year, or a day, or an hour after you had heard that you were an heir of hell, and for the remedy had been but concealed from you, though not denied (which ordinarily must not be done), then you might in all likelihood have found some more terrors of soul that hour. But when you heard that your sin was pardonable, as soon as you heard that you were a sinner, and heard that your misery had a sufficient remedy provided, if you would accept it, or at least that it was not remediless, and this as soon as you heard of that misery, what wonder is it if this exceedingly abate your fears and troubles! Suppose two men go to visit two several neighbours that have the plague, and one of them saith 'It is the plague that is on you; you are but a dead man.' The other saith to the other sick person, 'It is the plague that you have; but here is our physician at the next door that hath a receipt that will cure it as infallibly and as easily as if it were but the prick of a pin, he hath cured thousands, and never failed one that took his receipt, but if you will not send to him, and trust him, and take his receipt, there is no hopes of you.' Tell me now whether the first of these sick persons be not like to be more troubled than the other? And whether it will not remove almost all the fears and troubles of the latter, to hear of a certain remedy as soon as he heareth of the disease? Though some trouble he must needs have to think that he hath a disease in itself so desperate or loathsome. Nay, let me tell you, so the cure be but well done, the less terrors and despairing fear you were put upon, the more credit is it to your physician and his apothecary, Christ and the preacher, or instrument, that did the work; and therefore you should rather praise your physician, than question the cure.

Doubt 3. 'But it is common with all the world to consent to the religion that they are bred up in, and somewhat affected with it, and to make conscience of obeying the precepts of it. So do the Jews in theirs; the Mahometans in

theirs. And I fear it is no other work on my soul but the mere force of education, that maketh me religious, and that I had never that great renewing work of the Spirit upon my soul; and so that all my religion is but mere opinion, or notions in my brain.'

Ans. 1. All the religions in the world, besides the Christian religion, have either much error and wickedness mixed with some truth of God, or they contain some lesser parcel of that truth alone (as the Jews); only the Christian religion hath that whole truth which is saving. Now so much of God's truth as there is in any of these religions, so much it may work good effects upon their souls; as the knowledge of the Godhead, and that God is holy, good, just, merciful, and that he sheweth them much undeserved mercy in his daily providences, &c. But mark these two things, 1. That all persons of false religions do more easily and greedily embrace the false part of their religion than the true; and that they are zealous for, and practise with all their might, because their natural corruption doth befriend it, and is as combustible fuel for the fire of hell to catch in; but that truth of God which is mixed with their error, if it be practical, they fight against it, and abhor it while they hold it, because it crosseth their lusts, insomuch that it is usually but some few of the more convinced and civil that God in providence maketh the main instruments of continuing those truths of his in that part of the wicked world. For we find that even among Pagans, the profaner and more sensual sort did deride the better sort, as our profane Christians do the godly whom they called Puritans. 2. Note, That the truth of God which in these false religions is still acknowledged, is so small a part, and so oppressed by errors, that it is not sufficient to their salvation (that is, to give them any sound hope), nor is it sufficient to make such clear, and deep, and powerful impressions in their minds, as may make them holy or truly heavenly, or may overcome in them the interest of the world and the flesh.

This being so, you may see great reason why a Turk or a heathen may be zealous for his religion without God's Spirit, or any true sanctification, when yet you cannot be so truly zealous for yours without it. Indeed the speculative part of our religion, separated from the practical, or from the hard and self-denying part of the practical, many a wicked

man may be zealous for ; as to maintain the Godhead, or that God is merciful, &c. Or to maintain against the Jews that Jesus is the Christ ; or against the Turks, that he is the only redeemer and teacher of the church ; or against the Papists, that all the Christians in the world are Christ's church as well as the Romans ; and against the Socinians and Arians that Christ is God, &c. But this is but a small part of our religion ; nor doth this, or any heathenish zeal, sanctify the heart, or truly mortify the flesh, or overcome the world. They may condemn life, and cast it away for their pride and vain-glory ; but not for the hopes of a holy and blessed life with God. This is but the prevalency of one corruption against another, or rather of vice against nature. There is a common grace of God that goeth along with common truths, and according to the measure of their obedience to the truth, such was the change it wrought ; which was done by common truths, and common grace together, but not by their false mixtures at all. But God hath annexed his special grace only to the special truths of the Gospel or Christian religion. If therefore God do by common grace, work a great change on a heathen, by the means of common truths, and do by his special grace work a greater and special change on you, by the means of the special truths of the Gospel, have you any reason hereupon to suspect your condition ? Or should you not rather both admire that providence and common grace which is manifested without the church, and humbly, rejoicingly, and thankfully embrace that special saving grace, which is manifested to yourself above them ?

2. And for that which you speak of education, you have as much cause to doubt of your conversion, because it was wrought by public preaching, as because it was wrought by education. For, 1. Both are by the Gospel : for it is the Gospel that your parents taught you, as well as which the preacher teacheth you. 2. I have shewed you, that if parents did not shamefully neglect their duties, the word publicly preached would not be the ordinary instrument of regeneration to the children of true Christians, but would only build them up, and direct them in the faith, and in obedience. The proof is very plain : If we should speak nothing of the interest of our infants in the covenant grace, upon the conditional force of their parents' faith, nor of their

baptism ; yet, Deut. vi. Ephes. vi. and oft in the Proverbs, you may find, that it is God's strict command, that parents should teach God's word to their children, and bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord ; yea, with a prediction or half promise, that if we " train up a child in the way he should go, when he is old he shall not depart from it ;" Prov. xxii. 6. Now it is certain that God will usually bless that which he appointeth to be the usual means, if it be rightly used. For he hath appointed no means to be used in vain.

I hope therefore by this time you see, that instead of being troubled, that the work was done on your soul by the means of education : 1. You had more reason to be troubled if it had been done first by the public preaching of the word ; for it should grieve you at the heart to think, 1. That you lived in an unregenerate state so long, and spent your childhood in vanity and sin, and thought not seriously on God and your salvation, for so many years together. 2. And that you or your parent's sin should provoke God so long to withdraw his Spirit and deny you his grace. 3. You may see also what inconceivable thanks you owe to God, who made education the means of your early change. 1. In that he prevented so many and grievous sins which else you would have been guilty of. (And you may read in David's and Manasseh's case, that even pardoned sins have oftentimes very sad effects left behind them.) 2. That you have enjoyed God's Spirit and love so much longer than else you would have done. 3. That iniquity took not so deep rooting in you, as by custom it would have done. 4. That the devil cannot glory of that service which you did him, as else he might ; and that the church is not so much the worse, as else it might have been by the mischief you would have done ; and that you need not all your days look back with so much trouble, as else you must, upon the effects of your ill doing ; nor with Paul, to think of one Stephen ; yea, many saints, in whose blood you first embrued your hands ; and to cry out, ' I was born out of due time. I am not worthy to be called a Christian, because I persecuted the church of God. I was mad against them, and persecuted them into several cities. I was sometimes foolish, disobedient, serving divers lusts and pleasures.' Would you rather that God had permitted you to do this ? 5. And

methinks it should be a comfort to you, that your own father was the instrument of your spiritual good; that he that was the means of your generation, was the means of your regeneration, both because it will be a double comfort to your parents, and because it will endear and engage you to them in a double bond. For my part, I know not what God did secretly in my heart, before I had the use of memory and reason; but the first good that ever I felt on my soul, was from the counsels and teachings of my own father in my childhood; and I take it now for a double mercy, being more glad that he was the instrument to do me good, than if it had been the best preacher in the world. How foul an oversight is it then, that you should be troubled at one of the choicest mercies of your life, yea, that your life was capable of, and for which you owe to God such abundant thanks!

Doubt 4. 'But my great fear is, that the life of grace is not yet within me, because I am so void of spiritual sense and feeling. Methinks I am in spiritual things as dead as a block, and my heart as hard as a rock, or the nether millstone. Grace is a principle of new life, and life is a principle of sense and motion; it causeth vigour and activity. Such should I have in duty, if I had the life of grace. But I feel the great curse of a dead heart within me. God seems to withdraw his quickening Spirit, and to forsake me; and to give me up to the hardness of my heart. If I were in covenant with him, I should feel the blessing of the covenant within me; the hard heart would be taken out of my body, and a heart of flesh, a soft heart would be given to me. But I cannot weep one tear for my sins. I can think on the blood of Christ, and of my bloody sins that caused it, and all will not wring one tear from mine eyes; and therefore, I fear, that my soul is yet destitute of the life of grace.'

Answ. 1. A soft heart consisteth in two things. 1. That the will be persuadable, tractable, and yielding to God, and pliable to his will. 2. That the affections or passions be somewhat moved herewithal about spiritual things. Some degree more or less of the latter, doth concur with the former; but I have told you, that it is the former, wherein the heart and life of grace doth lie, and that the latter is very various, and uncertain to try by. Many do much overlook the Scripture meaning of the word hardheartedness. Mark

it up and down concerning the Israelites, who are so oft charged by Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other prophets, to be hardhearted, or to harden their hearts, or stiffen their necks ; and you will find that the most usual meaning of the Holy Ghost is this, They were an intractable, disobedient, obstinate people ; or as the Greek word in the New Testament signifieth, which we often translate unbelieving, they were an unpersuadable people ; no saying would serve them. They set light by God's commands, promises, and severest threatenings, and judgments themselves ; nothing would move them to forsake their sins, and obey the voice of God. You shall find that hardness of heart is seldom put for want of tears, or a melting, weeping disposition ; and never at all for the want of such tears, where the will is tractable and obedient. I pray you examine yourself then according to this rule. God offereth his love in Christ, and Christ with all his benefits to you. Are you willing to accept them ? He commandeth you to worship him, and use his ordinances, and love his people, and others, and to forsake your known iniquities, so far that they may not have dominion over you. Are you willing to this ? He commandeth you to take him for your God, and Christ for your Redeemer, and stick to him for better and worse, and never forsake him. Are you willing to do this ? If you have a stiff, rebellious heart, and will not accept of Christ and grace, and will rather let go Christ than the world, and will not be persuaded from your known iniquities, but are loath to leave them, and love not to be reformed, and will not set upon those duties as you are able, which God requireth, and you are fully convinced of, then are you hardhearted in the Scripture sense. But if you are glad to have Christ with all your heart, upon the terms that he is offered to you in the Gospel, and you do walk daily in the way of duty as you can, and are willing to pray, and willing to hear and wait on God in his ordinances, and willing to have all God's graces formed within you, and willing to let go your most profitable and sweetest sins, and it is your daily desires, O that I could seek God, and do his will more faithfully, zealously, and pleasingly than I do ! O that I were rid of this body of sin ! These carnal, corrupt, and worldly inclinations, and that I were as holy as the best of God's saints on earth ! And if when it comes to practice, whether you

should obey or no, though some unwillingness to duty, and willingness to sin be in you, you are offended at it, and the greater bent of your will is for God, and it is but the lesser which is towards sin, and therefore the world and flesh do not lead you captive, and you live not wilfully in avoidable sins, nor at all in gross sin. I say, if it be thus with you, then you have the blessing of a soft heart, a heart of flesh, a new heart ; for it is a willing, obedient, tractable heart, opposed to obstinacy in sin, which Scripture calleth a soft heart. And then for the passionate part, which consisteth in lively feelings of sin, misery, mercy, &c. and in weeping for sin I shall say but this : 1. Many an unsanctified person hath very much of it, which yet are desperately hardhearted sinners. It dependeth far more on the temper of the body, than of the grace in the soul. Women usually can weep easily (and yet not all), and children, and old men. Some complexions incline to it, and others not. Many can weep at a passion-sermon, or any moving duty, and yet will not be persuaded to obedience ; these are hardhearted sinners for all their tears. 2. Many a tender, godly person cannot weep for sin, partly through the temper of their minds, which are more judicious and solid, and less passionate ; but mostly from the temper of their bodies, which dispose them not that way. 3. Deepest sorrows seldom cause tears, but deep thoughts of heart ; as greatest joys seldom cause laughter, but inward pleasure. I will tell you how you shall know whose heart is truly sorrowful for sin, and tender ; he that would be at the greatest cost or pains to be rid of sin, or that he had not sinned. You cannot weep for sin, but you would give all that you have to be rid of sin ; you could wish when you dishonoured God by sin, that you had spent that time in suffering rather ; and if it were to do again on the same terms and inducements, you would not do it ; nay, you would live a beggar contentedly, so you might fully please God, and never sin against him, and are content to pinch your flesh, and deny your worldly interest for the time to come, rather than wilfully disobey. This is a truly tender heart. On the other side, another can weep to think of his sin ; and yet if you should ask him, What wouldst thou give, or what wouldst thou suffer, so thou hadst not sinned, or that thou mightest sin no more ? Alas, very little. For the next time that he is put to it, he will

rather venture on the sin, than venture on a little loss, or danger, or disgrace in the world, or deny his craving flesh its pleasures. This is a hardhearted sinner. The more you would part with to be rid of sin, or the greatest cost you would be at for that end, the more repentance have you, and true tenderness of heart. Alas, if men should go to heaven according to their weeping, what abundance of children and women would be there for one man! I will speak truly my own case. This doubt lay heavy many a year on my own soul, when yet I would have given all that I had to be rid of sin, but I could not weep a tear for it. Nor could I weep for the death of my dearest friends, when yet I would have bought their lives, had it been God's will, at a dearer rate than many that could weep for them ten times as much. And now since my nature is decayed, and my body languished in consuming weakness, and my head more moistened, and my veins filled with phlegmatic, watery blood, now I can weep; and I find never the more tenderheartedness in myself than before. And yet to this day so much remains of my old disposition, that I could wring all the money out of my purse, easier than one tear out of my eyes, to save a friend, or rescue them from evil: when I see divers that can weep for a dead friend, that would have been at no great cost to save their lives. 5. Besides, as Dr. Sibbs saith, "There is oft sorrow for sin in us, when it doth not appear; it wanteth but some quickening word to set it a foot. It is the nature of grief to break out into tears most, when sorrow hath some vent, either when we use some expostulating, aggravating terms with ourselves, or when we are opening our hearts and case to a friend; then sorrow will often shew itself that did not before. 6. Yet do I not deny, but that our want of tears, and tender affections, and heartmeltings, are our sins. For my part, I see exceeding cause to bewail it greatly in myself, that my soul is not raised to a higher pitch of tender sensibility of all spiritual things than it is. I doubt not but it should be the matter of our daily confession and complaint to God, that our hearts are so dull and little affected with his sacred truths, and our own sins. But this is the scope of all my speech, Why do not you distinguish between matter of sorrow, and matter of doubting? No question but you should lament your dulness and stupidity, and use all God's means for the quickening of your affections, and

to get the most lively frame of soul; but must it cause you to doubt of your sincerity, when you cannot obtain this? Then will you never have a settled peace or assurance for many days together, for aught I know. I would ask you but this, Whether you are willing or unwilling of all that hardness, insensibleness, and dulness which you complain of? If you are willing of it, what makes you complain of it? If you are unwilling, it seems your will is so far sound; and it is the will that is the seat of the life of grace which we must try by. And was not Paul's case the same with yours, when he saith, "The good which I would do, I do not; and when I would do good, evil is present with me;" Rom. vii. 19. I know Paul speaks not of gross sins, but ordinary infirmities. And I have told you before, that the liveliness and sensibility of the passions or affections, is a thing that the will, though sanctified, cannot fully command or excite at its pleasure. A sanctified man cannot grieve or weep for sin when he will, or so much as he will. He cannot love, joy, be zealous, &c. when he will. He may be truly willing, and not able. And is not this your case? And doth not Paul make it the case of all Christians? "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary one to the other, so that we cannot do the things that we would;" Gal. v. 17. Take my counsel therefore in this, if you love not self-deceiving and disquietness. Search whether you can say unfeignedly, 'I would with all my heart have Christ and his quickening and sanctifying Spirit, and his softening grace, to bring my hard heart to tenderness, and my dull and blockish soul to a lively frame! O that I could attain it?' And if you can truly say thus, Bless God that hath given you saving sincerity; and then let all the rest of your dulness, and deadness, and hardheartedness be matter of daily sorrow to you, and spare not, so it be in moderation, but let it be no matter of doubting. Confess it, complain of it, pray against it, and strive against it; but do not deny God's grace in you for it.

And here let me mind you of one thing, That it is a very ill distemper of spirit, when a man can mourn for nothing, but what causeth him to doubt of his salvation. It is a great corruption, if when your doubts are resolved, and you are persuaded of your salvation, if then you cease all your humiliation and sorrow for your sin; for you must sorrow that

you have in you such a body of death, and that which is so displeasing to God, and are able to please and enjoy him no more, though you were never so certain of the pardon of sin, and of salvation.

7. Lastly, Let me ask you one question more; What is the reason that you are so troubled for want of tears for your sin? Take heed lest there lie some corruption in this trouble that you do not discern. - If it be only because your deadness and dulness is your sin, and you would fain have your soul in that frame, in which it may be fittest to please God and enjoy him; then I commend and encourage you in your trouble. But take heed lest you should have any conceit of a meritoriousness in your tears; for that would be a more dangerous sin than your want of tears. And if it be for want of a sign of grace, and because a dry eye is a sign of an unregenerate soul, I have told you, it is not so, except where it only seconds an impenitent heart, and comes from, or accompanieth an unrenewed will, and a prevailing unwillingness to turn to God by Christ. Shew me, if you can, where the Scripture saith, He that cannot weep for sin, shall not be saved, or hath no true grace. Is not your complaint in this the very same that the most eminent Christians have used in all times? That most blessed, holy man, Mr. Bradford, who sacrificed his life in the flames against Romish abominations, was wont to subscribe his spiritual letters (indited by the breath of the Spirit of God) thus: 'The most miserable, hardhearted sinner, John Bradford.'

Doubt 5. 'O but I am not willing to good, and therefore I fear that even my will itself is yet unchanged: I have such a backwardness and undisposedness to duty, especially secret prayer, meditation, and self-examination, and reproving and exhorting sinners, that I am fain to force myself to it against my will. It is no delight that I find in these duties that brings me to them, but only I use violence with myself, and am fain to pull myself down on my knees, because I know it is a duty, and I cannot be saved without it; but I am no sooner on my knees, but I have a motion to rise, or be short, and am weary of it, and find no great miss of duty when I do omit it.'

Ans. This shews that your soul is sick, when your meat goes so much against your stomach that you are fain to force it down: and sickness may well cause you to com-

plain to God and man. But what is this to deadness ! The dead cannot force down their meat, nor digest it at all. It seems by this, that you are sanctified but in a low degree, and your corruption remains in some strength ; and let that be your sorrow, and the overcoming of it be your greatest care and business : but should you therefore say that you are unsanctified ? It seems that you have still the flesh lusting against the Spirit, that you cannot do the good you would. When you would pray with delight and unweariedness, the flesh draws back, and the devil is hindering you. And is it not so in too great a measure with the best on earth ? Remember what Christ said to his own apostles, when they should have done him one of their last services, as to the attendance of his body on earth, and should have comforted him in his agony, they are all asleep. Again and again he comes to them, and findeth them asleep : Christ is praying and sweating blood, and they are still sleeping, though he warned them to watch and pray, that they enter not into temptation. But what doth God say to them for it ? Why, he useth this same distinction between humiliation for sin, and doubting of sincerity and salvation, and he helps them to the former, and helps them against the latter. “ Could ye not watch with me one hour ? ” saith he. There he convinceth them of the sin, that they may be humbled for it. “ The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak,” saith he. There he utterly resisteth their doubtings, or preventeth them ; shewing them wherein sincere grace consisteth, even in the spirit’s willingness ; and telling them that they had that grace ; and then telling them whence came their sin, even from the weakness of the flesh.

2. I have shewed you that as every man’s will is but partly sanctified (as to the degree of holiness) and so far as it is imperfect, it will be unwilling ; so that there is something in the duties of secret prayer, meditation and reproof, which makes most men more backward to them than other duties. The last doth so cross our fleshly interests ; and the two former are so spiritual, and require so pure and spiritual a soul, and set a man so immediately before the living God, as if we were speaking to him face to face, and have nothing of external pomp to draw us, that it is no wonder, if while there is flesh within us, we are backward to them ! Especially while we are so unacquainted with God, and

while strangeness and consciousness of sin doth make us draw back: besides that, the devil will more busily hinder us here than anywhere.

3. The question, therefore, is not, Whether you have an unwillingness and backwardness to good: for so have all. Nor yet, Whether you have any cold ineffectual wishes: for so have the ungodly. But, Whether your willingness be not more than your unwillingness: and in that, 1. It must not be in every single act of duty; for a godly man may be actually more unwilling to a duty at this particular time, than willing, and thereupon may omit it: but it must be about your habitual willingness, manifested in ordinary, actual willingness. 2. You must not exclude any of those motives which God hath given you to make you willing to duty. He hath commanded it, and his authority should move you. He hath threatened you, and therefore fear should move you; or else he would never have threatened. He hath made promises of reward, and therefore the hope of that should move you. And therefore you may perceive here, what a dangerous mistake it is to think that we have no grace, except our willingness to duty be without God's motives, from a mere love to the duty itself, or to its effect. Nay, it is a dangerous Antinomian mistake to imagine, that it is our duty to be willing to good, without these motives of God; I say, To take it so much as for our duty, to exclude God's motives, though we should not judge of our grace by it. For it is but an accusation of Christ (and his law) who hath ordained these motives of punishment and reward, to be his instruments to move the soul to duty. Let me therefore put the right question to you, Whether all God's motives laid together and considered, the ordinary prevailing part of your will, be not rather for duty than against it? This you will know by your practice. For if the prevailing part be against duty, you will not do it; if it be for duty, you will ordinarily perform it, though you cannot do it so well as you would. And then you may see that your backwardness and remaining unwillingness must still be matter of humiliation and resistance to you, but not matter of doubting. Nay, thank God that enableth you to pull down yourself on your knees when you are unwilling; for what is that but the prevailing of your willingness against your unwillingness? Should your unwillingness once pre-

vail, you would turn your back upon the most acknowledged duties.

Doubt 6. ‘But I am afraid that it is only slavish fear of hell, and not the love of God, that causeth me to obey; and if it were not for this fear, I doubt whether I should not quite give over all. And perfect love casteth out fear.’

Answ. I have answered this already. Love will not be perfect in this life. In the life to come it will cast out all fear of damnation; and all fear that drives the soul from God, and all fear of men, (which is meant in Rev. xxi. 8. where the fearful and unbelievers are condemned; that is, those that fear men more than God). And that 1 John iv. 17, 18. speaketh of a tormenting fear, which is it that I am persuading you from, and consisteth in terrors of soul, upon an apprehension that God will condemn you. But it speaketh not of a filial fear, nor of a fear lest we should by forsaking God, or by yielding to temptation, lose the crown of life, and so perish; as long as this is not a tormenting fear, but a cautelous, preserving, preventing fear. Besides the text plainly saith, “It is that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, that love casteth out this fear;” and at that day of judgment, love will have more fully overcome it. It is a great mistake to think that filial fear is only the fear of temporal chastisement, and that all fear of hell is slavish. Even filial fear is a fear of hell; but with this difference. A son (if he know himself to be a son) hath such a persuasion of his father’s love to him, that he knows he will not cast him off, except he should be so vile as to renounce his father; which he is moderately fearful or careful, lest by temptation he should be drawn to do, but not distrustfully fearful, as knowing the helps and mercies of his father. But a slavish fear, is, when a man having no apprehensions of God’s love, or willingness to shew him mercy, doth look that God should deal with him as a slave, and destroy him whenever he doth amiss. It is this slavish tormenting fear which I spend all this writing against. But yet a great deal, even of this slavish fear, may be in those sons, that know not themselves to be sons.

But suppose you were out of all fear of damnation; do not belie your own heart, and tell me, Had you not rather be holy than unholy; pleasing to God than displeasing? And would not the hope of salvation draw you from sin to duty,

without the fear of damnation in hell? But you will say, 'That is still mercenary, and as bad as slavish fears.' I answer, 'Not so, this hope of salvation is the hope of enjoying God, and living in perfect pleasingness to him, and pleasure in him in glory; and the desire of this is a desire of love: it is love to God that makes you desire him, and hope to enjoy him.'

Lastly, I say again take heed of separating what God hath joined. If God, by putting in your nature the several passions of hope, fear, love, &c. and by putting a holiness into these passions, by sanctifying grace, and by putting both promises and dreadful threatenings into his word: I say, if God by all these means hath given you several motives to obedience, take heed of separating them. Do not once ask your heart such a question, 'Whether it would obey if there were no threatening, and so no fear?' Nor on the other side, do not let fear do all, without love. Doubtless, the more love constraineth to duty, the better it is; and you should endeavour with all your might that you might feel more of the force of love in your duties: but do you not mark how you cherish that corruption that you complain of? Your doubts and tormenting fears are the things that love should cast out. Why then do you entertain them? If you say, 'I cannot help it:' why then do you cherish them, and own them, and plead and dispute for them? and say you do well to doubt, and you have cause? Will this ever cast out tormenting fears? Do you not know that the way to cast them out, is, not to maintain them by distrustful thoughts or words; but to see their sinfulness, and abhor them, and to get more high thoughts of the lovingkindness of God, and the tender mercies of the Redeemer, and the unspeakable love that he hath manifested in his sufferings for you, and so the love of God may be more advanced and powerful in your soul, and may be able to cast out your tormenting fears. Why do you not do this instead of doubting? If tormenting fears and doubtings be a sin, why do you not make conscience of them, and bewail it that you have been so guilty of them? Will you therefore doubt because you have slavish fears? Why that is to doubt because you doubt; and to fear because you fear; and so to sin still because you have sinned. Consider well of the folly of this course.

Doubt 7. 'But I am not able to believe; and without faith there is no pleasing God; nor hope of salvation; I fear unbelief will be my ruin.'

Ans. 1. I have answered this doubt fully before. It is grounded on a mistake of the nature of true faith. You think that faith is the believing that you are in God's favour, and that you are justified; but properly this is no faith at all, but only assurance, which is sometimes a fruit of faith, and sometimes never in this life obtained by a believer. Faith consisteth of two parts. 1. Assent to the truth of the Word. 2. Acceptance of Christ as he is offered, which immediately produceth a trusting on Christ for salvation, and consent to be governed by him, and resolution to obey him; which in the fullest sense are also acts of faith. Now do not you believe the truth of the Gospel? And do you not accept of Christ as he is offered therein? If you are truly willing to have Christ as he is offered, I dare say you are a true believer. If you be not willing, for shame never complain. Men use rather to speak against those that they are unwilling of, than complain of their absence, and that they cannot enjoy them.

2. However, seeing you complain of unbelief, in the name of God do not cherish it, and plead for it, and by your own cogitations fetch in daily matter to feed it; but do more in detestation of it, as well as complain.

Doubt 8. 'But I am a stranger to the witness of the Spirit, and the joy of the Holy Ghost, and communion with God, and therefore how can I be a true believer?'

Ans. 1. Feeding your doubts and perplexities, and arguing for them, is not a means to get the testimony and joy of the Spirit, but rather studying with all saints to know the love of God which passeth knowledge, to comprehend the height, and breadth, and length, and depth of his love; and seeking to understand the things that are given you of God. Acknowledge God's general love to mankind, both in his gracious nature, and common providences, and redemption by Christ, and deny not his special mercies to yourself, but dwell in the study of the riches of grace, and that is the way to come to the joy of the Holy Ghost. 2. I have told you before what the witness of the Spirit is, and what is the ordinary mistake herein. If you have the graces and holy operations of the Spirit, you have the witness of

the Spirit, whether you know it or not. 3. If by your own doubtings you have deprived yourself of the joy of the Holy Ghost, bewail it, and do so no more; but do not therefore say you have not the Holy Ghost. For the Holy Ghost often works regeneration and holiness before he works any sensible joys. 4. You have some hope of salvation by Christ left in you: you are not yet in utter despair; and is it no comfort to you to think that you have yet any hope? And are not quite past all remedy? It may be your sorrows may so cloud it that you take no notice of it; but I know you cannot have the least hope without some answerable comfort. And may not that comfort be truly the joy of the Holy Ghost? 5. And for communion with God let me ask you; Have you no recourse to him by prayer in your straits? Do you not wait at his mouth for the law and direction of your life? Have you received no holy desires, or other graces from him? Nay, are you sure that you are not a member of Christ, who is one with him? How can you then say, that you have no communion with him? Can there be communication of prayer and obedience from you; yea, your ownself delivered up to Christ; and a communication of any life of grace from God, by Christ and the Spirit? And all this without communion? It cannot be. Many a soul hath most near communion with Christ that knows it not.

Doubt 9. 'I have not the spirit of prayer: when I should pour out my soul to God, I have neither bold access, nor matter of prayer, nor words.'

Ans. Do you know what the spirit of prayer is? It containeth, 1. Desires of the soul after the things we want, especially Christ and his graces. 2. An addressing ourselves to God with these desires, that we may have help and relief from him. Have not you both these? Do you not desire Christ and grace, justification and sanctification? Do you not look to God as him who alone is able to supply your wants, and bids you ask that you may receive? Do you utterly despair of help, and so seek to none? Or do you make your addresses by prayer to any but God? But perhaps you look at words and matter to dilate upon, that you may be able to hold out in a long speech to God, and you think that it is the effect of the spirit of prayer. But where do you find that in God's word? I confess that in many, and most, the Spirit which helpeth to desires, doth

also help to some kind of expressions ; because if a man be of able natural parts, and have a tongue to express his own mind, the promoting of holy desires will help men to expressions. For a full soul is hardly hindered from venting itself : and experience teacheth us, that the Spirit's inflaming the heart with holy affections, doth very much furnish both the invention and expression. But this is but accidental and uncertain ; for those that are either men of unready tongues, or that are so ill bred among the rude vulgar, that they want fit expressions of their own minds, or that are of over-bashful dispositions, or especially that are of small knowledge, and of little and short acquaintance with those that should teach them to pray by their example, or that have been but of short standing in the school of Christ, such a man may have the spirit of prayer many a year, and never be able, in full expressions of his own, to make known his wants to God ; no, nor in good and tolerable sense and language, before others to speak to God, from his own invention. A man may know all those articles of the faith that are of flat necessity to salvation, and yet not be able to find matter or words for the opening of his heart to God at length. I would advise such to frequent the company of those that can teach and help them in prayer, and neglect not to use the smallest parts they have, especially in secret, between God and their own souls, where they need not, so much as in public, to be regardful of expressions ; and in the mean time to learn a prayer from some book, that may most fitly express their necessities ; or to use the book itself in prayer, if they distrust their memories, not resolving to stick here, and make it a means of indulging their laziness and negligence, much less to reproach and deride those that express their desires to God from the present sense of their own wants (as some wickedly do deride such) ; but to use this lawful help till they are able to do better without it than with it, and then to lay it by, and not before. The Holy Ghost is said, (Rom. viii. 16.) to help our infirmities in prayer ; but how ? 1. By teaching us what to pray for ; not always what matter or words to enlarge ourselves by ; but what necessary graces to pray for. 2. By giving us sighs and groans inexpressible, which is far from giving copious expressions ; for groans and sighs be not words, and if they be groans that we cannot express, it would rather

seem to intimate a want of expression, than a constant abounding therein, where the Spirit doth assist; though indeed the meaning is, that the groans are so deep, that they are past the expression of our words: all our speech cannot express that deep sense that is in our hearts. For the understanding hath the advantage of the affections herein; all the thoughts of the mind may be expressed to others, but the feelings and fervent passions of the soul can be but very defectively expressed.

Lastly, All have not the spirit of prayer in like measure; nor all that have it in a great measure at one time, can find it so at pleasure. Desires rise and fall, and these earnest groans be not in every prayer where the Holy Ghost doth assist. I believe there is never a prayer that ever a believer did put up to God for things lawful and useful, but it was put up by the help of the Spirit. For the weakest prayer hath some degree of good desire in it, and addresses to God with an endeavour to express them; and these can come from none but only from the Spirit. Mere words without desires, are no more prayer, than a suit of apparel hanged on a stake, is a man. You may have the spirit of prayer, and yet have it in a very weak degree.

Yet still I would encourage you to bewail your defect herein as your sin, and seek earnestly the supply of your wants; but what is that to the questioning or denying your sincerity, or right to salvation?

Doubt 10. 'I have no gifts to make me useful to myself or others. When I should profit by the word I cannot remember it: when I should reprove a sinner, or instruct the ignorant, I have not words: if I were called to give an account of my faith, I have not words to express that which is in my mind: and what grace can here be then?'

Ans. This needs no long answer. Lament and amend those sins by which you have been disabled. But know, that these gifts depend more on nature, art, industry and common grace, than upon special saving grace. Many a bad man is excellent in all these, and many a one that is truly godly is defective. Where hath God laid our salvation upon the strength of our memories, the readiness of our tongues, or measure of the like gifts? That were almost as if he should have made a law, that all shall be saved that have sound complexions, and healthful and youthful bodies;

and all be damned that are sickly, aged, weak, children, and most women.

Doubt 11. 'O but I have been a grievous sinner, before I came home, and have fallen foully since, and I am utterly unworthy of mercy! Will the Lord ever save such an unworthy wretch as I? Will he ever give his mercy and the blood of his Son, to one that hath so abused it?'

Ans. 1. The question is not, with God, what you have been, but what you are? God takes men as they then are, and not as they were. 2. It is a dangerous thing to object the greatness of your guilt against God's mercy and Christ's merits. Do you think Christ's satisfaction is not sufficient? Or that he died for small sins and not for great? Do you not know that he hath made satisfaction for all, and will pardon all, and hath given out the pardon of all in his covenant, and that to all men, on condition they will accept Christ to pardon, and heal them in his own way? Hath God made it his great design in the work of man's redemption, to make his love and mercy as honourable and wonderful, as he did his power in the work of creation? And will you after all this, oppose the greatness of your sins against the greatness of this mercy and satisfaction? Why, you may as well think yourself to be such a one, that God could not or did not make you, as to think your sins so great, that Christ could not or did not satisfy for them, or will not pardon them, if you repent and believe in him. 3. And for worthiness, I pray you observe; there is a two-fold worthiness and righteousness: There is a legal worthiness and righteousness, which consisteth in a perfect obedience, which is the performance of the conditions of the law of pure nature and works. This no man hath but Christ; and if you look after this righteousness or worthiness in yourself, then do you depart from Christ, and make him to have died and satisfied in vain: you are a Jew and not a Christian, and are one of those that Paul so much disputeth against, that would be justified by the law. Nay, you must not so much as once imagine that all your own works can be any part of this legal righteousness or worthiness to you. Only Christ's satisfaction and merit is instead of this our legal righteousness and worthiness. God never gave Christ and mercy to any but the unworthy in this sense. If you know not yourself to be unworthy and unrighteous in the

sense of the law of works, you cannot know what Christ's righteousness is. Did Christ come to save any but sinners, and such as were lost? What need you a Saviour, if you were not condemned? And how come you to be condemned, if you were not unrighteous and unworthy? But then, 2. There is an evangelical personal worthiness and righteousness, which is the condition on which God bestows Christ's righteousness upon us; and this all have that will be saved by Christ. But what is that? Why, it hath two parts: 1. The condition and worthiness required to your union with Christ, and pardon of all your sins past, and your adoption and justification; it is no more but your hearty and thankful acceptance of the gift that is freely given you of God by his covenant grant; that is, Christ and life in him; 1 John v. 10—12. There is no worthiness required in you before faith, as a condition on which God will give you faith; but only certain means you are appointed to use for the obtaining it: and faith itself is but the acceptance of a free gift. God requireth you not to bring any other worthiness or price in your hands, but that you consent unfeignedly to have Christ as he is offered, and to the ends and uses that he is offered; that is, as one that hath satisfied for you by his blood and merits, to put away your sins, and as one that must illuminate and teach you, sanctify, and guide, and govern you by his word and Spirit; and as King and Judge will fully and finally justify you at the day of judgment, and give you the crown of glory. Christ on his part, 1. Hath merited your pardon by his satisfaction, and not properly by his sanctifying you. 2. And sanctifieth you by his Spirit, and ruleth you by his laws, and not directly by his bloodshed. 3. And he will justify you at judgment as King and Judge, and not as Satisfier or Sanctifier. But the condition on your part, of obtaining interest in Christ and his benefits, is that one faith which accepteth him in all these respects (both as King, Priest and Teacher) and to all these ends conjunctly. But then, 2. The condition and worthiness required to the continuation and consummation of your pardon, justification, and right to glory, is both the continuance of your faith, and your sincere obedience, even your keeping the baptismal covenant that you made with Christ by your parents, and the covenant which you in your own person made with him in your first true believing. These indeed

are called Worthiness and Righteousness frequently in the Gospel. But it is no worthiness consisting in any such works, which make the reward to be of debt, and not of grace (of which Paul speaks) but only in faith, and such Gospel-works as James speaks of, which make the reward to be wholly of grace and not debt.

Now if you say you are unworthy in this evangelical sense, then you must mean (if you know what you say,) that you are an infidel or unbeliever, or an impenitent, obstinate rebel, that would not have Christ to reign over him; for the Gospel calleth none unworthy, (as non-performers of its conditions,) but only these. But I hope you dare not charge yourself with such infidelity and wilful rebellion.

Doubt 12. 'Though God hath kept me from gross sins, yet I find such a searedness of conscience, and so little averseness from sin in my mind, that I fear I should commit it if I lay under temptations; and also that I should not hold out in trial if I were called to suffer death, or any grievous calamity. And that obedience which endureth merely for want of a temptation, is no true obedience.'

Ans. 1. I have fully answered this before. If you can overcome the temptations of prosperity, you have no cause to doubt distrustfully, whether you shall overcome the temptation of adversity. And if God give you grace to avoid temptations to sin, and flee occasions as much as you can, and to overcome them where you cannot avoid them; you have little reason to distrust his preservation of you, and your steadfastness thereby, if you should be cast upon greater temptations. Indeed if you feel not such a belief of the evil and danger of sinning, as to possess you with some sensible hatred of it, you have need to look to your heart for the strengthening of that belief and hatred; and fear your heart with a godly, preserving jealousy, but not with tormenting, disquieting doubts. Whatever your passionate hatred be, if you have a settled, well-grounded resolution, to walk in obedience to the death, you may confidently and comfortably trust him for your preservation, who gave you those resolutions.

2. And the last sentence of this doubt had need of great caution, before you conclude it a certain truth. It is true that the obedience, which by an ordinary temptation, such as men may expect, would be overthrown, is not well ground-

ed and rooted before it is overthrown. But it is a great doubt whether there be not degrees of temptation possible, which would overcome the resolution and grace of the most holy, having such assistance as the Spirit usually giveth believers in temptation? and whether some temptations which overcome not a strong Christian, would not overcome a weak one, who yet hath true grace? I conclude nothing of these doubts. But I would not have you trouble yourself upon confident conclusions, on so doubtful grounds. This I am certain of, 1. That the strongest Christian should take heed of temptation, and not trust to the strength of his graces, nor presume on God's preservation, while he wilfully casteth himself in the mouth of dangers; nor to be encouraged hereunto upon any persuasion of an impossibility of his falling away. O the falls, the fearful falls that I have known (alas, how often!) the most eminent men for godliness that ever I knew, to be guilty of, by casting themselves upon temptations. I confess I will never be confident of that man's perseverance, were he the best that I know on earth, who casteth himself upon violent temptations, especially the temptations of sensuality, prosperity, and seducement. 2. I know God hath taught us daily to watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation, and to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." (I never understood the necessity of that petition feelingly, till I saw the examples of these seven or eight years last past.) This being so, you must look that your perseverance should be by being preserved from temptation; and must rather examine, whether you have that grace which will enable you to avoid temptations, than whether you have grace enough to overcome them, if you rush into them. But if God unavoidably cast you upon them, keep up your watch and prayer, and you have no cause to trouble yourself with distrustful fears.

Doubt 13. 'I am afraid, lest I have committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost, and then there is no hope of my salvation.'

Ans. It seems you know not what the sin against the Holy Ghost is. It is this, When a man is convinced that Christ and his disciples did really work those glorious miracles which are recorded in the Gospel, and yet will not believe that Christ is the Son of God, and his doctrine true,

though sealed with all those miracles, and other holy and wonderful works of the Spirit, but do blasphemously maintain that they were done by the power of the devil. This is the sin against the Holy Ghost. And dare you say that you are guilty of this? If you be, then you do not believe that Christ is the Son of God, and the Messiah, and his Gospel true. And then you will sure oppose him, and maintain that he was a deceiver, and that the devil was the author of all the miraculous and gracious workings of his Spirit. Then you will never fear his displeasure, nor call him seriously either Lord or Saviour! nor tender him any service, any more than you do to Mahomet. None but infidels do commit the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost; nor but few of them. Unbelief is eminently called "sin" in the Gospel; and that "unbelief" which is maintained by blaspheming the glorious works of the Holy Ghost, which Christ and his disciples through many years time did perform for a testimony to his truth, that is called singularly, "The sin against the Holy Ghost!" You may meet with other descriptions of this sin, which may occasion your terror; but I am fully persuaded that this is the plain truth.

Doubt 14. 'But I greatly fear lest the time of grace be past, and lest I have out-sat the day of mercy, and now mercy hath wholly forsaken me. For I have oft heard ministers tell me from the word, "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of your visitation; to-day, while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts, lest God swear in his wrath, that they shall not enter into his rest." But I have stood out long after, I have resisted and quenched the Spirit, and now it is I fear departed from me.'

Ans. Here is sufficient matter for humiliation, but the doubting ariseth merely from ignorance. The day of grace may in two respects be said to be over: The first (and most properly so called) is, When God will not accept of a sinner, though he should repent and return. This is never in this life for certain. And he that imagineth any such thing as that it is too late, while his soul is in his body, to repent and accept of Christ and mercy, is merely ignorant of the tenor and sense of the Gospel! For the new law of grace doth limit no time on earth for God's accepting of a returning sinner. True faith and repentance do as surely save at the last hour of the day, as at the first. God hath said,

that whosoever believeth in Christ shall not perish, but have everlasting life. He hath no where excepted late believers or repenters. Shew any such exception if you can.

2. The second sense in which it may be said that the day of grace is over, is this: When a man hath so long resisted the Spirit, that God hath given him over to the wilful, obstinate refusals of mercy, and of Christ's government, resolving that he will never give him the prevailing grace of his Spirit. Where note, 1. That this same man might still have grace as soon as any other, if he were but willing to accept Christ, and grace in him. 2. That no man can know of himself or any other, that God hath thus finally forsaken him; for God hath given us no sign to know it by (at least who sin not against the Holy Ghost). God hath not told us his secret intents concerning such. 3. Yet some men have far greater cause to fear it than others; especially those men, who under the most searching, 'lively sermons, do continue secure and wilful in known wickedness; either hating godliness and godly persons, and all that do reprove them, or at least being stupified, that they feel no more than a post, the force of God's terrors, or the sweetness of his promises; but make a jest of sinning, and think the life of godliness a needless thing. Especially if they grow old in this course, I confess such have great cause to fear, lest they are quite forsaken of God; for very few such are ever recovered. 4. And therefore it may well be said to all men, "To day if you will hear his voice harden not your hearts," &c. And "This is the acceptable time; this is the day of salvation;" both as this life is called, "The day of salvation;" and because no man is certain to live another day, that he may repent; nor yet to have grace to repent if he live. 5. But what is all this to you that do repent? Can you have cause to fear that your day of grace is over, that have received grace? Why, that is as foolish a thing, as if a man should come to the market and buy corn, and when he hath done, go home lamenting that the market was past before he came. Or as a man should come and hear a sermon, and when he hath done, lament that the sermon was done before he came. If your day of grace be past, tell me (and do not wrong God), Where had you the grace of repentance? How came you by that grace of holy desires? Who made you willing to have Christ for your Lord and Saviour? So that you had

rather have him, and God's favour, and a holy heart and life, than all the glory of the world? How came you to desire that you were such a one as God would have you to be? And to desire that all your sins were dead, and might never live in you more? And that you were able to love God, and delight in him, and please him even in perfection? And that you are so troubled that you cannot do it? Are these signs that your day of grace is over? Doth God's Spirit breathe out groans after Christ and grace within you? And yet is the day of grace over? Nay, what if you had no grace? Do you not hear God daily offering you Christ and grace? Doth he not entreat and beseech you to be reconciled unto him? (2 Cor. v. 19, 20.) And would he not compel you to come in? (Matt. xxii.) Do you not feel some uneasiness in your sinful condition? And some motions and strivings at your heart to get out of it? Certainly (though you should be one that hath yet no grace to salvation), yet these continued offers of grace, and strivings of the Spirit of Christ with your heart, do shew that God hath not quite forsaken you, and that your day of grace and visitation is not past.

Doubt 15. 'But I have sinned since my profession, and that even against my knowledge and conscience. I have had temptations to sin, and I have considered of the evil and danger, and yet in the most sober deliberations, I have resolved to sin. And how can such a one have any true grace, or be saved?'

Answ. 1. If you had not true grace, God is still offering it, and ready to work it.

2. Where do you find in Scripture, that none who have true grace do sin knowingly or deliberately. Perhaps you will say in Heb. x. 24. "If we sin wilfully, after the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a fearful looking for of judgment, and fire, which shall devour the adversaries." *Answ.* But you must know, that it is not every wilful sin which is there mentioned; but, as even now I told you, unbelief is peculiarly called sin in the New Testament. And the true meaning of the text is, If we utterly renounce Christ by infidelity, as not being the true Messiah, after we have known his truth, then, &c. Indeed none sin more against knowledge than the godly when they

do sin; for they know more, for the most part, than others do. And passion and sensuality (the remnant of it which yet remaineth) will be working strongly in your very deliberations against sin, and either perverting the judgment to doubt whether it be a sin, or whether there be any such danger in it; or whether it be not a very little sin; or else blinding it, that it cannot see the arguments against the sin in their full vigour. Or at least, prepossessing the heart and delight, and so hindering our reasons against sin from going down to the heart, and working on the will, and so from commanding the actions of the body. This may befall a godly man. And moreover, God may withdraw his grace as he did from Peter and David in their sin. And then our considerations will work but faintly, and sensuality and sinful passion will work effectually. It is scarce possible, I think, that such a man as David could be so long about so horrid a sin, and after contrive the murder of Uriah, and all this without deliberation, or any reasonings in himself to the contrary.

3. The truth is, though this be no good cause for any repenting sinner to doubt of salvation, yet it is a very grievous aggravation of sin, to commit it against knowledge and conscience, and upon consideration. And therefore I advise all that love their peace or salvation, to take heed of it. For as they will find that no sin doth more deeply wound the conscience, and plunge the sinner into fearful perplexities; which oftentimes hangs on him very long, so the oftener such sin is committed, the less evidence will such a one have of the sincerity of their faith and obedience; and therefore, in the name of God, beware. And let the troubled soul make this the matter of his moderate humiliation, and spare not. Bewail it before God. Take shame to yourself, and freely confess it, when you are called to it before men. Favour it not, and deal not gently with it, if you would have peace; but give glory to God, by taking the just dishonour to yourselves. Tender dealing is an ill sign, and hath sad effects. But yet for every sin against knowledge, to doubt of the truth of grace, is not right, much less to doubt of the pardon of that sin when we truly repent of it. Are you unfeignedly sorry for your sins against conscience, and resolve against them for the future, through the help of God's

grace? If so, then that sin is pardoned now, through the blood of Christ believed in, whether you had then grace or not.

Doubt 16. ‘But I have such corruptions in my nature, that I cannot overcome. I have such a passionate nature, and such a vanity of mind, and such worldly desires, that though I pray and strive against them daily, yet do they prevail. And it is not striving without overcoming that will prove the truth of grace in any. Besides, I do not grow in grace as all God’s people do.’

Ans. 1. Do you think sin is not overcome as long as it dwelleth in us, and daily troubleth us, and is working in us? Paul saith, “The evil that I would not do, that I do;” and, “We cannot do the things that we would.” And yet Paul was not overcome with these sins, nor had they dominion over him. You must consider of these sins as in the habit, or in the act. In the habit as they are in the passions they will be still strong; but as they are in the will they are weak and overcome. Had you not rather you were void of these passions than not, and that you might restrain them in the act? Are you not weary of them, and daily pray and strive against them? If so, it seems they have not your will. 2. And for the actual passion (as I may call it) itself, you must distinguish between, 1. Those which the will hath full power of, and which it hath but partial power over. 2. And between the several degrees of the passion. 3. And between the inward passion and the outward expressions.

Some degree of anger and of lust will oft stir in the heart, whether we will or not. But I hope you restrain it in the degree; and much more from breaking out into practices of lust, or cursed speeches, or railings, backbitings, slanderings, or revenge. For these your will, if sanctified, hath power to command. Even the acts of our corruptions, as well as the habits, will stick by us in this life; but if it be in gross sins, or avoidable infirmities carelessly or wilfully continued, I can tell you a better way to assurance and comfort than your complaints are. Instead of being afraid lest you cannot have your sin and Christ together, do but more heartily oppose that sin, and deal roundly and conscientiously against it, till you have overcome it, and then you may ease yourself of your complaints and troubles. If you say, ‘O but it is not so easily done. I cannot overcome it.

I have prayed and strove against it long.' I answer, But are you heartily willing to be rid of it? If you will, it will be no impossible matter to be rid of the outward expressions, and the high degree of the passion, though not of every degree. Try this course awhile, and then judge. 1. Plainly confess your guiltiness. 2. Never more excuse it, or plead for it, to any that blameth you. 3. Desire those that live and deal with you, to tell you roundly of it as soon as they discern it, and engage yourself to them to take it well, as a friendly action which yourself requested of them. 4. When you feel the passion begin to stir, enter into serious consideration of the sinfulness, or go and tell some friend of your frail inclination, and presently beg their help against it. If it be godly persons that you are angry with, instead of giving them ill words, presently as soon as you feel the fire kindle, say to them, 'I have a very passionate nature, which already is kindled, I pray you reprehend me for it, and help me against it, and pray to God for my deliverance.' Also go to God yourself, and complain to him of it, and beg his help. Lastly, be sure that you make not light of it, and see that you avoid the occasions as much as you can. If you are indeed willing to be rid of the sin, then do not call these directions too hard. But shew your willingness in ready practising them. And thus you may see that it is better to make your corruptions the matter of your humiliation and reformation, than of your torment.

And for the other part of the doubt that you grow not in grace, I answer: 1. The promises of growth are conditional, or else signify what God will usually do for his people: but it is certain that they be not absolute to all believers. For it is certain that all true Christians do not always grow; nay, that many do too oft decline, and lose their first fervour of love, and fall into sin, and live more carelessly. Yea, it is certain that a true believer may die in such decays, or in a far lower state than formerly he hath been in. If I thought this needed proof, I could easily prove it; but he that openeth his eyes may soon see enough proof in England. 2. Many Christians do much mistake themselves about the very nature of true grace; and then no wonder if they think that they thrive when they do not, and that they thrive not when they do. They think that more of the life and truth of grace doth lie in passionate

feelings of sin, grace, duty, &c. In sensible zeal, grief, joy, &c. And do not know that the chief part lieth in the understanding's estimation, and the will's firm choice and resolution. And then they think they decline in grace, because they cannot weep, or joy so sensibly as before. Let me assure you of this as truth : 1. Young people have usually more vigour of affections than old ; because they have more vigour of body, and hot blood, and agile, active spirits ; when the freezing, decayed bodies and spirits of old men must needs make an abatement of their fervour in all duties. 2. The like may be said of most that are weak and sickly in comparison of the strong and healthful. 3. All things affect men most deeply when they are new, and time wear-eth off the vigour of that affection. The first hearing of such a fight, or such a victory, or such a great man, or friend dead, doth much affect us ; but so it doth not still. When you first receive any benefit, it more delighteth you than long after. So married people, or any other in the first change of their condition, are more affected with it than afterward. And indeed man's nature cannot hold up in a constant elevation of affections. Children are more taken with every thing that they see and hear than old men, because all is new to them, and all seems old to the other. 4. I have told you before that some natures are more fiery, passionate, and fervent than others are ; and in such a little grace will cause a great deal of earnestness, zeal and passion. But let me tell you, that you may grow in these, and not grow in the body of your graces. Doubtless satan himself may do so much to kindle your zeal, if he do but see it void of sound knowledge, as he did in James and John when they would have called for fire from heaven, but they knew not what spirit they were of. For the doleful case of Christ's churches in this age hath put quite beyond dispute that none do the devil's works more effectually, nor oppose the kingdom of Christ more desperately, than they that have the hottest zeal with the weakest judgments. And as fire is most excellent and necessary in the chimney, but in the thatch it is worse than the vilest dung ; so is zeal most excellent when guided by sound judgment ; but more destructive than profane sensuality when it is let loose and misguided.

On the other side, you may decay much in feeling and fer-

your of affections, and yet grow in grace, if you do but grow in the understanding and the will. And indeed this is the common growth which Christians have in their age. Examine therefore whether you have this or no. Do you not understand the things of the Spirit better than you formerly did? Do you not value God, Christ, glory, and grace at higher rates than formerly? Are you not more fully resolved to stick to Christ to the death than formerly you have been? I do not think but it would be a harder work for satan to draw you from Christ to the flesh than heretofore. When the tree hath done growing in visible greatness, it groweth in rootedness. The fruit grows first in bulk and quantity, and then in mellow sweetness. Are not you less censorious, and more peaceable than heretofore? I tell you that is a more noble growth than a great deal of austere and bitter, youthful, censorious, dividing zeal of many will prove. Mark most aged, experienced Christians, that walk uprightly, and you will find that they quite outstrip the younger. 1. In experience, knowledge, prudence, and soundness of judgment. 2. In well-settled resolutions for Christ, his truth, and cause. 3. In a love of peace, especially in the church, and a hatred of dissensions, perverse contendings and divisions. If you can shew this growth, say not that you do not grow.

3. But suppose you do not grow, should you therefore deny the sincerity of your grace? I would not persuade any soul that they grow, when they do not. But if you do not, be humbled for it, and endeavour it for the future. Make it your desire and daily business, and spare not still. Lie not complaining, but rouse up your soul, and see what is amiss, and set upon neglected duties, and remove those corruptions that hinder your growth. Converse with growing Christians, and under quickening means; endeavour the good of other men's souls as well as your own; and then you will find that growth, which will silence this doubt, and do much more for you than that.

Doubt 17. 'I am troubled with such blasphemous thoughts and temptations to unbelief, even against God, and Christ, and Scripture, and the life to come, that I doubt I have no faith.'

Ans. To be tempted is no sign of gracelessness, but to yield to the temptation; not every yielding neither, but to

be overcome of the temptation. Most melancholy people, especially that have any knowledge in religion, are frequently haunted with blasphemous temptations. I have oft wondered that the devil should have such a power and advantage in the predominancy of that distemper. Scarce one person of ten, whoever was with me in deep melancholy, either for the cure of body or mind, but hath been haunted with these blasphemous thoughts; and that so impetuously and violently set on and followed, that it might appear to be from the devil; yea, even many that never seemed godly, or to mind any such thing before. I confess it hath been a strengthening to my own faith, to see the devil such an enemy to the Christian faith; yea, to the Godhead itself.

But perhaps you will say, 'It is not mere temptation from satan that I complain of; but it takes too much with my sinful heart. I am ready to doubt oftentimes whether there be a God, or whether his providence determine of the things here below; or whether Scripture be true, or the soul immortal,' &c.

Ans. This is a very great sin, and you ought to bewail and abhor it, and, in the name of God, make not light of it, but look to it betime. But yet let me tell you, that some degree of this blasphemy and infidelity may remain with the truest saving faith. The best may say, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief." But I will tell you my judgment, When your unbelief is such as to be a sign of a graceless soul in the state of damnation: if your doubtings of the truth of Scripture and the life to come, be so great that you will not let go the pleasures and profits of sin, and part with all, if God call you to it, in hope of that glory promised, and to escape the judgment threatened, because you look upon the things of the life to come but as uncertain things; then is your belief no saving belief; but your unbelief is prevalent. But if for all your staggerings, you see so much probability of the truth of Scripture and the life to come, that you are resolved to venture (and part with, if called to it) all worldly hopes and happiness for the hope of that promised glory, and to make it the chiefest business of your life to attain it, and do deny yourself the pleasures of sin for that end; this is a true saving faith, as is evident by its victory; notwithstanding all the infidelity, Atheism, and blasphemy that is mixed with it.

But again, let me advise you to take heed of this heinous sin, and bewail and detest the very least degree of it. It is dangerous when the devil strikes at the very root, and heart, and foundation of all your religion. There is more sinfulness and danger in this than in many other sins. And therefore let it never be motioned to your soul without abhorrence. Two ways the devil hath to move it. The one is by his immediate inward suggestions; these are bad enough. The other is by his accursed instruments; and this is a far more dangerous way; whether it be by books, or by the words of men. And yet if it be by notorious, wicked men, or fools, the temptation is the less; but when it is by men of cunning wit, and smooth tongues, and hypocritical lives (for far be that wickedness from me, as to call them godly, or wise, or honest), then it is the greatest snare that the devil hath to lay. O just and dreadful God! Did I think one day that those that I was then praying with, and rejoicing with, and that went up with me to the house of God in familiarity, would this day be blasphemers of thy sacred name, and deny the Lord that bought them, and deride thy holy word as a fable, and give up themselves to the present pleasures of sin, because they believe not thy promised glory? O righteous and merciful God, that hast preserved the humble from this condemnation, and hast permitted only the proud and sensual professors to fall into it, and hast given them over to hellish conversations according to the nature of their hellish opinions, that they might be rather a terror to others than a snare? I call their doctrine and practice hellish, from its original, because it comes from the father of lies, but not that there is any such opinion or practice in hell. He that tempts others to deny the godhead, the Christian faith, the Scripture, the life to come, doth no whit doubt of any one of them himself, but believes and trembles. O fearful blindness of the professors of religion, that will hear, if not receive these blasphemies from the mouth of an apostate professor, which they would abhor if it came immediately from the devil himself. With what sad complaints and trembling do poor sinners cry out (and not without cause), ‘O I am haunted with such blasphemous temptations, that I am afraid lest God should suddenly destroy me, that ever such thoughts should come into my heart.’ But if an instrument of the devil come and plead

against the Scripture or the life to come, or Christ himself, they will hear him with less detestation. The devil knows that familiarity will cause us to take that from a man, which we would abhor from the devil himself immediately. I intend not to give you now a particular preservation against each of these temptations. Only let me tell you, that this is the direct way to infidelity, apostacy, and the sin against the Holy Ghost; and if by any seducers the devil do overcome you herein, you are lost for ever, and there will be no more sacrifice for your sin, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and that fire which shall devour the adversaries of Christ.

Doubt 18. 'I have so great fear of death, and unwillingness to be with God, that I am afraid I have no grace; for if I had Paul's spirit, I should be able to say with him, "I desire to depart and to be with Christ," whereas now, no news would be to me more unwelcome.'

Answ. There is a loathness to die that comes from a desire to do God more service; and another that comes from an apprehension of unreadiness, when we would fain have more assurance of salvation first; or would be fitter to meet our Lord. Blame not a man to be somewhat backward, that knows it must go with him for ever in heaven or hell, according as he is found at death. But these two be not so much a loathness to die, as a loathness to die now at this time. 3. There is also in all men living, good and bad, a natural abhorrence and fear of death. God hath put this into men's nature (even in innocency) to be his great means of governing the world. No man would live in order, or be kept in obedience, but for this. He that cares not for his own life, is master of another's. Grace doth not root out this abhorrence of death, no more than it unmanneth us; only it restrains it from excess, and so far overcometh the violence of the passion, by the apprehensions of a better life beyond death, that a believer may the more quietly and willingly submit to it. Paul himself desireth not death, but the life which followeth it. "He desireth to depart and be with Christ;" that is, he had rather be in heaven than on earth, and therefore he is contented to submit to the penal sharp passage. God doth not command you to desire death itself, nor forbid you fearing it as an evil to nature, and

a punishment of sin. Only he requireth you to desire the blessedness to be enjoyed after death, and that so earnestly as may make death itself the easier to you. Thank God, if the fear of death be somewhat abated in you, though it be not sweetened. Men may pretend what they please, but nature will abhor death as long as it is nature, and as long as man is man; else temporal death had been no punishment to Adam, if his innocent nature had not abhorred it as it was an evil to it. Tell me but this, If death did not stand in your way to heaven, but that you could travel to heaven, as easily as to London, would not you rather go thither and be with Christ, than stay in sin and vanity here on earth, so be it you were certain to be with Christ? If you can say yea to this, then it is apparent that your loathness to die is either from the uncertainty of your salvation, or from the natural averseness to a dissolution, or both; and not from an unwillingness to be with Christ, or a preferring the vanities of this world before the blessedness of that to come. Lastly, It may be God may lay that affliction on you, or use some other necessary means with you yet, before you die, that may make you more willing than now you are.

Doubt 19. 'God layeth upon me such heavy afflictions, that I cannot believe he loves me. He writeth bitter things against me, and taketh me for his enemy. I am afflicted in my health, in my name, in my children, and nearest friends, and in my estate. I live in continual poverty, or pinching distress of one kind or other; yea, my very soul is filled with his terrors, and night and day is his hand heavy upon me.'

Answ. I have said enough to this before, nor do I think it needful to say any more, when the Holy Ghost hath said so much; but only to desire you to read what he hath written in Heb. xii. and Job throughout; and Psal. xxxvii. lxxiii. and divers others. The next doubt is contrary.

Doubt 20. 'I read in Scripture, that through many tribulations we must enter into heaven, and that all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, must suffer persecution; and that he that taketh not up his cross, and so followeth Christ, cannot be his disciple. And that if we are not corrected, we are bastards, and not sons. But I never had any affliction from God, but have lived in constant prosperity to this day. Christ saith, "Woe to you when all men speak well

of you." But all men, for aught I know, speak well of me; and therefore I doubt of my sincerity.

Ans. I would not have mentioned this doubt, but that I was so foolish as to be troubled with it myself; and perhaps some others may be as foolish as I; though I think but few in these times. Our great friends have done so much to resolve them more effectually than words could have done. 1. Some of those texts speak only of man's duty of bearing persecution and tribulation, when God lays it on us, rather than of the event, that it shall certainly come. 2. Yet I think it ordinarily certain, and to be expected as to the event. Doubtless tribulation is God's common road to heaven. Every ignorant person is so well aware of this, that they delude themselves in their sufferings, saying, that God hath given them their punishment in this life, and therefore they hope he will not punish them in another. If any soul be so silly as to fear and doubt for want of affliction; if none else will do the cure, let them follow my counsel, and I dare warrant them for this, and I will advise them to nothing but what is honest, yea, and necessary, and what I have tried effectually upon myself; and I can assure you it cured me, and I can give it a 'Probatum est.' And first, see that you be faithful in your duty to all sinners within your reach; be they great or small, gentlemen or beggars, do your duty in reproving them meekly and lovingly, yet plainly and seriously, telling them of the danger of God's everlasting wrath; and when you find them obstinate, tell the church-officers of them, that they may do their duty; and if yet they are unreformed, they may be excluded from the church's communion, and all Christian familiarity. Try this course awhile, and if you meet with no afflictions, and get no more fists about your ears than your own, nor more tongues against you than formerly, tell me I am mistaken. Men basely baulk and shun almost all the displeasing, ungrateful work of Christianity of purpose, lest they should have sufferings in the flesh, and then they doubt of their sincerity for want of sufferings. My second advice is, Do but stay awhile in patience (but prepare your patience for a sharper encounter), and do not tie God to your time. He hath not told you when your afflictions shall come. If he deal easier with you than with others, and give you longer time to prepare for them, be not you

offended at that, and do not quarrel with your mercies. It is about seventeen years since I was troubled with this doubt, thinking I was no son, because I was not afflicted; and I think I have had few days without pain for this sixteen years since together, nor but few hours, if any one, for this six or seven years. And thus my scruple is removed.

And if yet any be troubled with this doubt, if the church's and common trouble be any trouble to them, shall I be bold to tell them my thoughts? (only understand that I pretend not to prophesy, but to conjecture at effects by the position of their moral causes.) I think that the righteous King of saints is even now, for our over-admiring rash zeal, and sharp, high profession, making for England so heavy an affliction, and a sharp scourge, to be inflicted by seduced, proud, self-conceited professors, as neither we nor our fathers did ever yet bear. Except it should prove the merciful intent of our Father, only to suffer them to ripen for their own destruction, to be a standing monument for the effectual warning of all after-ages of the church, whither pride and heady zeal may bring professors of holiness. And when they are full ripe, to do by them as at Munster, and in New England, that they may go no further, but their folly may be known to all: Amen. I have told you of my thoughts of this long ago, in my Book of Baptism.

All these doubts I have here answered, that you may see how necessary it is, that in all your troubles you be sure to distinguish between matter of doubting and matter of humiliation. Alas, what soul is so holy on the earth, but must daily say, "Forgive us our trespasses?" and cry out with Paul, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?" But at the same time we may thank God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. If every sin should make us doubt, we should do nothing but doubt. I know you may easily tell a long and a sad story of your sins; how you are troubled with this and that, and many a distemper, and weak and wanting in every grace and duty, and have committed many sins. But doth it follow that therefore you have no true grace? Learn therefore to be humbled for every sin, but not to doubt of your sincerity and salvation for every sin.

Direct. XXX. 'Whatsoever new doubtings do arise in

your soul, see that you carefully discern whether they are such as must be resolved from the consideration of general grace, or of special grace. And especially be sure of this, that when you want or lose your certainty of sincerity and salvation, you have presently recourse to the probability of it, and lose not the comforts of that. Or if you should lose the sight of a probability of special grace, yet see that you have recourse at the utmost to general grace, and never let go the comforts of that at the worst.'

This rule is of unspeakable necessity and use for your peace and comfort. Here are three several degrees of the grounds of comfort. It is exceeding weakness for a man that is beaten from one of these holds, therefore to let go the other two. And because he cannot have the highest degree, therefore to conclude that he hath none at all.

I beseech you in all your doubtings and complainings, still remember the two rules here laid down. 1. All doubts arise not from the same cause, and therefore must not have the same cure. Let the first thing which you do upon every doubt, be this: To consider, whether it come from the unbelieving or low apprehensions of the general grounds of comfort, or from the want of evidence of special grace. For that which is a fit remedy for one of these, will do little for the cure of the other. 2. If your doubting be only, Whether you be sincere in believing, loving, hoping, repenting, and obeying, then it will not answer this doubt, though you discern never so much of God's merciful nature, or Christ's gracious office, or the universal sufficiency of his death and satisfaction, or the freeness and extent of the promise of pardon. For I profess considerably, that I do not know in all the body of popery concerning merits, justification, human satisfactions, assurance, or any other point about grace, for which we unchurch them, that they err half so dangerously as Saltmarsh, and such Antinomians, do in this point, when they say, That Christ hath repented and believed for us; meaning it of that faith and repentance which he hath made the conditions of our salvation. And that we must no more question our own faith, than we must question Christ the object of it. It will be no saving plea at the day of judgment to say, Though I repented not, and believed not, yet Christ died for me, or God is merciful, or Christ repented and believed for me, or God made me a free promise and

gift of salvation, if I would repent and believe. What comfort would such an answer give them? And therefore doubtless it will not serve now to quiet any knowing Christian against those doubts that arise from the want of particular evidence of special grace, though in their own place, the general grounds of comfort are of absolute necessity thereto.

2. On the other side, If your doubts arise from any defect in your apprehensions of general grace, it is not your looking after marks in yourself that is the way to resolve them. I told you in the beginning, that the general grounds of comfort lie in four particulars (that square foundation which will bear up all the faith of the saints). First, God's merciful and inconceivable good and gracious nature, and his love to mankind. Secondly, The gracious nature of the Mediator God and Man, with his most gracious, undertaking office of saving and reconciling. Thirdly, The sufficiency of Christ's death and satisfaction for all the world, to save them if they will accept him and his grace. I put it in terms beyond dispute, because I would not build up believer's comforts on points which godly divines do contradict (as little as may be.) Yet I am past all doubt myself, that Christ did actually make satisfaction to God's justice for ALL, and that no man perisheth for want of an expiatory sacrifice, but for want of faith to believe and apply it, or for want of repentance and yielding to recovering grace. The fourth is, The universal grant of pardon, and right to salvation, on condition of faith and repentance. If your doubt arise from the ignorance or overlooking of any of these, to these must you have recourse for your cure.

Where note, That all those doubts which come from the greatness of your sin, as such, that you think will not therefore be forgiven, or that come from the sense of unworthiness (in a legal sense), or want of merit in yourself, and all your doubts, whether God be willing to accept and forgive you, though you should repent and believe: or, whether any sacrifice was offered by Christ for your sins; I say, all these come from your ignorance or unbelief of some or all of the four general grounds here mentioned; and from them must be cured.

Note also in a special manner, That there is a great difference between these four general grounds, and your parti-

cular evidences in point of certainty. For these four corner-stones are fast founded beyond all possibility of removal, so that they are always of as undoubted certainty as that the heaven is over your head; and they are immutable still the same. These you are commanded strictly to believe with a divine faith, as being the clearly revealed truths of God; and if you should not believe them, yet they remain firm and true, and your unbelief should not make void the universal promise and grace of God. But your own evidences of special grace are not so certain, so clear, or so immutable; nor are you bound to believe them, but to search after them that you may know them. You are not bound by any word of God strictly to believe that you do believe, or repent, but to try and discern it. This then is the first part of this Direction, That you always discover whether your troubles arise from low unbelieving, or ignorant thoughts of God's mercifulness, Christ's gracious nature and office, general satisfaction, or the universal promise. Or, whether they arise from want of evidence of sincerity in yourself. And accordingly in your thoughts apply the remedy.

The second part of the Direction is, that you hold fast probabilities of special grace, when you lose your certainty, and that you hold fast your general grounds, when you lose both your former. Never forget this in any of your doubts.

You say, your faith and obedience have such breaches and sad defects in them, that you cannot be certain that they are sincere. Suppose it be so: Do you see no great likelihood or hopes yet that they are sincere? If you do (as I think many Christians easily may, that yet receive not a proportionable comfort) remember that this is no small mercy, but matter of great consolation.

But suppose the worst, that you see no grace in yourself, yet you cannot be sure you have none; for it may be there, and you not see it. Yea, suppose the worst, that you were sure that you had no true grace at all, yet remember that you have still abundant cause of comfort in God's general grace. Do you think you must needs despair, or give up all hope and comfort, or conclude yourself irrecoverably lost, because you are graceless? Why, be it known to you, there is that ground of consolation in general grace, that

may make the hearts of the very wicked to leap for joy. Do I need to prove that to you? You know that the Gospel is called, "Glad tidings of salvation," and the preachers of it are to tell those to whom they preach it, "Behold, we bring you tidings of great joy, and glad tidings to all people." And you know before the Gospel comes to men they are miserable. If then it be glad tidings, and tidings of great joy to all the unconverted where it comes, why should it not be so to you? And where is your great joy? If you be graceless, is it nothing to know that God is exceeding merciful, "slow to anger, ready to forgive, pardoning iniquities, transgression, and sin," loving mankind? Is it nothing to know that the Lord hath brought infinite mercy and goodness down into human flesh? And hath taken on him the most blessed office of reconciling, and is become the Lamb of God? Is it nothing to you, that all your sins have a sufficient sacrifice paid for them, so that you are certain not to perish for want of a ransom? Is it nothing to you that God hath made such an universal grant of pardon and salvation to all that will believe? And that you are not on the terms of the mere law of works, to be judged for not obeying in perfection? Suppose you are never so certainly graceless, is it not a ground of unspeakable comfort, that you may be certain that nothing can condemn you, but a flat refusal or unwillingness to have Christ and his salvation? This is a certain truth, which may comfort a man as yet unsanctified, that sin merely as sin shall not condemn him, nor any thing in the world, but the final, obstinate refusal of the remedy, which thereby leaveth all other sin unpardoned.

Now I would ask you this question in your greatest fears that you are out of Christ: Are you willing to have Christ to pardon, sanctify, guide, and save you, or not? If you are, then you are a true believer, and did not know it. If you are not, if you will but wait on God's word in hearing, and reading, and consider frequently and seriously of the necessity and excellency of Christ and glory, and the evil of sin, and the vanity of the world, and will but beg earnestly of God to make you willing, you shall find that God hath not appointed you this means in vain, and that this way will be more profitable to you than all your complainings. See therefore when you are at the very lowest, that you forsake not the comforts of general grace.

And indeed those that deny any general grace or redemption, do leave poor Christians in a very lamentable condition. For, alas! assurance of special grace (yea, or a high probability) is not so common a thing as mere disputers against doubting have imagined. And when a poor Christian is beaten from his assurance (which few have), he hath nothing but probabilities; and when he hath no confident, probable persuasion of special grace, where is he then? And what hath he left to support his soul? I will not so far now meddle with that controversy, as to open further how this opinion tends to leave most Christians in desperation, for all the pretences it hath found. And I had done more, but that general redemption or satisfaction, is commonly taught in the maintaining of the general sufficiency of it, though men understand not how they contradict themselves.

But perhaps you will say, 'This is cold comfort; for I may as well argue thus, Christ will damn sinners; I am a sinner, therefore he will damn me; as to argue thus, Christ will save sinners; I am a sinner, therefore he will save me.' I answer, There is no shew of soundness in either of these arguments. It is not a certainty that Christ will save you, that can be gathered from general grace alone; that must be had from assurance of special grace superadded to the general. But a conditional certainty you may have from general grace only, and thus you may soundly and infallibly argue, 'God hath made a grant to every sinful man, of pardon and salvation through Christ's sacrifice, if they will but repent and believe in Christ; but I am a sinful man, therefore God hath made this grant of pardon and salvation to me.'

Direct. XXXI. 'If God do bless you with an able, faithful, prudent, judicious pastor, take him for your guide under Christ in the way to salvation; and open to him your case, and desire his advice in all your extraordinary, pressing necessities, where you have found the advice of other godly friends to be insufficient; and this not once or twice only; but as often as such pressing necessities shall return. Or if your own pastor be more defective for such a work, make use of some other minister of Christ, who is more meet.'

Here I have these several things to open to you. 1. That it is your duty to seek this Direction from the guides of the church. 2. When and in what cases you should do this,

3. To what end, and how far. 4. What ministers they be that you should choose thereto. 5. In what manner you must open your case, that you may receive satisfaction.

1. The first hath two parts, (1.) That you must open your case. (2.) And that to your pastor. 1. The devil hath great advantage while you keep his counsel; two are better than one; for if one of them fall, he hath another to help him. It is dangerous, resisting such an enemy alone. An uniting of forces oft procureth victory. God giveth others knowledge, prudence, and other gifts for our good; that so every member of the body may have need of another, and each be useful to the other. An independency of Christian upon Christian, is most unchristian; much more of people on their guides. It ceaseth to be a member, which is separated from the body; and to make no use of the body or fellow members, is next to separation from them. Sometimes bashfulness is the cause, sometimes self-confidence (a far worse cause); but whatever is the cause of Christians smothering their doubts, the effects are oft sad. The disease is oft gone so far, that the cure is very difficult, before some bashful, or proud, or tender patients will open their disease. The very opening of a man's grief to a faithful friend, doth oft ease the heart of itself. 2. And that this should be done to your pastor, I will shew you further anon.

2. But you must understand well when this is your duty. 1. Not in every small infirmity, which accompanies Christians in their daily most watchful conversation. Nor yet in every lesser doubt, which may be otherways resolved. It is a folly and a wrong to physicians to run to them for every cut finger or prick with a pin. Every neighbour can help you in this. 2. Nor except it be a weighty case indeed, go not first to a minister. But first study the case yourself, and seek God's direction: if that will not serve, open your case to your nearest bosom friend that is godly and judicious. And in these two cases always go to your pastor. 2. In case more private means can do you no good, then God calls you to seek further. If a cut finger so fester that ordinary means will not cure it, you must go to the physician. 3. If the case be weighty and dangerous; for then none but the more prudent advice is to be trusted. If you be struck with a dangerous disease, I would not have you delay so long, nor wrong yourself so much, as to stay while you tamper with

every woman's medicine, but go presently to the physician. So if you either fall into any grievous sin, or any terrible pangs of conscience, or any great straits and difficulties about matters of doctrine or practice, go presently to your pastor for advice. The devil, and pride, and bashfulness, will do their utmost to hinder you ; but see that they prevail not.

3. Next consider to what end you must do this. Not, 1. Either to expect that a minister can of himself create peace in you ; or that all your doubts should vanish as soon as ever you have opened your mind. Only the great Peacemaker, the Prince of peace, can create peace in you : ascribe not to any the office of the Holy Ghost, to be your effectual comforter. To expect more from man than belongs to man, is the way to receive nothing from him, but to cause God to blast to you the best endeavours. 2. Nor must you resolve to take all merely from the word of your pastor, as if he were infallible : nor absolutely to judge of yourself as he judgeth. For he may be too rigorous, or more commonly too charitable in his opinion of you : there may be much of your disposition and conversation unknown to him, which may hinder his right judging. But, 1. You must use your pastor as the ordained instrument and messenger of the Lord Jesus and his Spirit, appointed to speak a word in season to the weary, and to shew to man his righteousness, and to strengthen the weak hands and feeble knees ; yea, and more, to bind and loose on earth, as Christ doth bind and loose in heaven. As Christ and his Spirit do only save in the principal place, and yet ministers save souls in subordination to them as his instruments ; Acts xxvi. 17, 18. 1 Tim. iv. 15, 16. James v. 20. So Christ and the Spirit are, as principal causes, the only comforters ; but his ministers are comforters under him. 2. And that which you must expect from them are these two things. 1. You must expect those fuller discoveries of God's will than you are able to make yourself, by which you may have assurance of your duty to God, and of the sense of Scripture, which expresseth how God will deal with you : that so a clearer discovery of God's mind may resolve your doubts. 2. In the mean time, till you can come to a full resolution, you may and must somewhat stay yourself on the very judgment of your pastor : not as infallible, but as a discovery of the probability of your

good or bad estate ; and so of your duty also. Though you will not renounce your own understanding, and believe any man when you know he is deceived, or would deceive you, yet you will so far suspect your own reason, and value another's, as to have a special regard to every man's judgment in his own profession. If the physician tell you that your disease is not dangerous, or the lawyer that your cause is good, it will more comfort you than if another man should say as much. It may much stay your heart till you can reach to clear evidences and assurance, to have a pastor that is well acquainted with you, and is faithful and judicious, to tell you that he verily thinks that you are in a safe condition. 3. But the chief use of his advice is, not so much to tell you what he thinks of you, as to give you Directions how you may judge of yourself, and come out of your trouble : besides the benefit of his prayers to God for you.

4. Next let me tell you what men you must choose to open your mind to : and they must be, 1. Men of judgment and knowledge, and not the ignorant, be they never so honest : else they may deceive you, not knowing what they do ; either for want of understanding the Scripture, and the nature of grace and sin ; or for want of skill to deal with both weak consciences, and deep, deceitful hearts. 2. They must be truly fearing God, and of experience in this great work. For a troubled soul is seldom well resolved and comforted merely out of a book, but from the book and experience both together. Carnal or formal men will but make a jest at the doubts of a troubled Christian ; or at least will give you such formal remedies as will prove no cure : either they will persuade you, as the Antinomians do, that you should trust God with your soul, and never question your faith : or that you do ill to trouble yourself about such things : or they will direct you only to the comforts of general grace, and tell you only that God is merciful, and Christ died for sinners ; which are the necessary foundations of our peace ; but will not answer particular doubts of our own sincerity, and of our interest in Christ : or else they will make you believe that holiness of heart and life (which is the thing you look after) is it that troubleth you, and breeds all your scruples. Or else with the Papists, they will send you to your merits for comfort ; or to some vindictive penance in fastings, pilgrimages, or the like ; or to

some saint departed, or angel, or to the pardons or indulgences of the pope ; or to a certain formal, carnal devotion, to make God amends. 3. They must be men of downright faithfulness, that will deal plainly and freely, though not cruelly ; and not like those tender surgeons that will leave the cure undone for fear of hurting : meddle not with men-pleasers and daubers, that will presently speak comfort to you as confidently as if they had known you twenty years, when perhaps they know little of your heart or case. Deal not with such as resolve to humour you. 4. They must be men of fidelity, and well tried to be such, that you must trust them with those secrets which you are called to reveal. 5. They must be men of great staidness and wisdom, that they may neither rashly pass their judgment, nor set you upon unsound, unwarrantable, or dangerous courses. 6. It is suspicious if they be men that are so impudent as to draw out your secrets, and screw themselves deeper into your privatest thoughts and ways than is meet : yet a compassionate minister, when he seeth that poor Christians do endanger themselves by keeping secret their troubles, or else that they hazard themselves by hiding the greatest of their sins, like Achan, Saul, or Ananias and Sapphira, and so play the hypocrites ; in these cases he may and must urge them to deal openly. 7. Above all be sure that those that you seek advice of, be sound in the faith, and free from the two desperate plagues of notorious false doctrine, and separating, dividing inclinations, that do but hunt about to make disciples to themselves. There are two of the former sort, and three of the latter, that I would charge you to take heed of (and yet all is but four.) 1. Among those that err from the faith, (next to pagans, Jews, and infidels, whether Ranters, Seekers, or Socinians, which I think few sober, godly men are so much in danger of, because of their extreme vile-ness,) I would especially have you avoid the Antinomians, being the greatest pretenders to the right comforting afflicted consciences in the world ; but upon my certain knowledge I dare say, they are notorious subverters of the very nature of the Gospel ; and that free grace which they so much talk of, and the great dishonourers of the Lord Jesus, whom they seem so highly to extol. They are those mountebanks and quacksalvers that delude the world by vain ostentation, and kill more than they will cure. 2. Next to

them, take heed of Papists, who will go to Rome, to saints, to angels, to merits, to the most carnal, delusory means for comfort, when they should go to Scripture and to heaven for it.

And then take heed that you fall not into the hands of separating dividers of Christ's church. The most notorious and dangerous of them are of these three sorts. 1. The last mentioned, the Papists: they are the most notorious schismatics and separatists that ever God's church did know on earth. For my part, I think their schism is more dangerous and wicked than the rest of their false doctrine. The unmerciful, proud, self-seeking wretches, would, like the Donatists, make us believe that God hath no true church on earth but they; and that all the Christians in Ethiopia, Asia, Germany, Hungary, France, England, Scotland, Ireland, Belgia, and the rest of the world, that acknowledge not their pope of Rome to be head of all the churches in the world, are none of Christ's churches, nor ever were. Thus do they separate from all the churches on earth, and confine all religion and salvation to themselves, who so notoriously depart from Christ's way of salvation. Indeed the extreme diligence that they use in visiting the sick, and soliciting all men to their church and way, is plainly to get themselves followers; and they are everywhere more industrious to enlarge the pope's kingdom than Christ's. So far are they from studying the unity of the Catholic church, which they so much talk of, that they will admit none to be of that church, nor to be saved, but their own party, as if indeed the pope had the keys of heaven. Indeed they are the most impudent sectaries and schismatics on earth. 2. The next to them are the Anabaptists, whose doctrine is not in itself so dangerous as their schism, and gathering disciples so zealously to themselves. And so strange a curse of God hath followed them hitherto, as may deter any sober Christian from rash adventuring on their way. Even now when they are higher in the world than ever they were on earth, yet do the judicious see God's heavy judgment upon them, in their congregations and conversation. 3. Lastly, Meddle not with those commonly called Separatists, for they will make a prey of you for the increase of their party. I do not mean that you should separate from these two last, as they do from us, and have nothing to do with them, nor

acknowledge them Christians : but seek not their advice, and make them not of your counsel. You will do as one that goes to a physician that hath the plague, to be cured of a cut finger, if you go for your comfort to any of these seducers. But if you have a pastor that is sound in the main doctrines of religion, and is studious of the unity and peace of the church, such a man you may use, though in many things mistaken ; for he will not seek to make a prey of you by drawing you to his party ; let him be Lutheran, Calvinist, Arminian, Episcopal, Independent, or Presbyterian, so he be sound in the main, and free from division. Thus I have shewn you the qualifications of these men, that you must seek advice of.

2. Let me next add this ; Let them be rather pastors than private men, if it may be ; and rather your own pastors than others, if they are fit. For the first consider, 1. It is their office to be guides of Christ's disciples under him, and to be spiritual physicians for the curing of souls. And experience telleth us (and sadly of late) what a curse followeth those that step beyond the bounds of their calling by invading this office, and that God blesseth means to them that keep within his order ; 1 Thess. v. 12, 13. Heb. xiii. 7, 17. Not but that private men may help you in this, as a private neighbour may give you a medicine to cure your disease ? but you will not so soon trust them in any weighty case as you will the physician. 2. Besides, ministers have made it the study of their lives, and therefore are liker to understand it than others. As for those that think long study no more conducive to the knowledge of the Scriptures, than if men studied not at all, they may as well renounce reason, and dispute for preeminency of beasts above men, as renounce study, which is but the use of reason. But it appears how considerably these men speak themselves, and whence it comes, and how much credit a sober Christian should give them ! Let them read Psalm i. 2, 3. Heb. v. 11—14. 1 Tim. iv. 13—16. and 2 Tim. ii. 15. and then let them return to their wits. Paul commands Timothy, though he was from his youth acquainted with the Scriptures, "Meditate upon these things ; give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all." How much need have we to do so now ? 3. Also ministers are usually most experienced in this work ; and wisdom requires you no more

to trust your soul, than you would do your body, with an unexperienced man.

2. And if it may be (he being fit) let it be rather your own pastor than another: 1. Because it belongeth to his peculiar place and charge, to direct the souls of his own congregation. 2. Because he is likelier to know you, and to fit his advice to your estate, as having better opportunity than others to be acquainted with your conversation.

5. Next consider, in what manner you must open your grief, if you would have cure. 1. Do it as truly as you can. Make the matter neither better nor worse than it is. Especially take heed of dealing like Ananias, pretending to open all (as he did to give all) when you do but open some common infirmities, and hide all the most disgraceful distempers of your heart, and sins of your life. The vomit of confession must work to the bottom, and fetch up that hidden sin, which is it that continueth your calamity. Read Mr. T. Hooker in his "Soul's Preparation," concerning this confession, who shews you the danger of not going to the bottom.

2. You must not go to a minister to be cured merely by good words, as wizards do by charms; and so think that all is well when he hath spoken comfortably to you. But you must go for directions in your own practice, that so the cure may be done by leisure when you come home. Truly most even of the godly that I have known, do go to a minister for comfort, as silly people go to a physician for physic. If the physician could stroke them whole, or give them a penny-worth of some pleasant stuff that would cure all in an hour, then they would praise him. But alas, the cure will not be done, 1. Without cost. 2. Nor without time and patience. 3. Nor without taking down displeasing medicines; and so they let all alone. So you come to a minister for advice and comfort, and you look that his words should comfort you before he leaves you, or at least, some short, small direction to take home with you. But he tells you, if you will be cured you must more resolve against that disquieting corruption and passion; you must more meekly submit to reproof; you must walk more watchfully and conscionably with God and men; and then you must not give ear to the tempter, with many the like. He gives you, as I have done here, a bill of thirty several Directions, and tells you, you

must practise all these. O this seems a tedious course, you are never the nearer comfort for hearing these; it must be by long and diligent practising them. Is it not a foolish patient that will come home from the physician, and say, 'I have heard all that he said, but I am never the better?' So you say, 'I have heard all that the minister said, and I have never the more comfort.' But have you done all that he bid you, and taken all the medicines that he gave you? Alas, the cure is most to be done by yourself (under Christ) when you come home. The minister is but the physician to direct you what course to take for the cure. And then as silly people run from one physician to another, hearing what all can say, and desirous to know what every man thinks of them, but thoroughly follow the advice of none, but perhaps take one medicine from one man, and one from another, and let most even of those lie by them in the box, and so perish more certainly than if they never meddled with any at all; so do most troubled souls hear what one man saith, and what another saith, and seldom thoroughly follow the advice of any: but when one man's words do not cure them, they say, 'This is not the man that God hath appointed to cure me.' And so another, and that is not the man: when they should rather say, 'This is not the way,' than, 'This is not the man.' This lazy complaining is not it that will do the work, but faithful practising the Directions given you.

But I know some will say, That it is near to Popish auricular confession, which I here persuade Christians to, and it is to bring Christians under the tyranny of the priests again, and make them acquainted with all men's secrets, and masters of their consciences.

Ans. 1. To the last I say to the railing devil of this age, no more but "The Lord rebuke thee." If any minister have wicked ends, let the God of heaven convert him, or root him out of his church, and cast him among the weeds and briars. But is it not the known voice of sensuality and hell, to cast reproaches upon the way and ordinances of God? Who knoweth not that it is the very office of the ministry, to be teachers and guides to men in matters of salvation, and overseers of them? and that they watch for their souls, as those that must give an account, and the people, therefore, bound to obey them? Heb. xiii. 7. 17. Should not the shepherd know his sheep, and their stray-

ings and diseases; how else shall he cure them? Should not the physician hear the patient open all his disease, yea, study to discover to the utmost every thing he knows; and all little enough to the cure? A disease unknown is unlike to be cured; and a disease well known is half cured. Mr. Thomas Hooker saith truly, it is with many people as with some over-modest patients, who having a disease in some secret place, they will not for shame reveal it to the physician till it be past cure, and then they must lose their lives by their modesty: so do many by their secret and more disgraceful sins. Not that every man is bound to open all his sins to his pastor; but those that cannot well be otherwise cured, he must; either if the sense of the guilt cannot be removed, and true assurance of pardon obtained: or else, if power against the sin be not otherwise obtained; but that it still prevaieth; in both these cases we must go to those that God hath made our directors and guides. I am confident many a thousand souls do long strive against anger, lust, flesh-pleasing, worldliness, and trouble of conscience to little purpose, who if they would but have taken God's way, and sought for help, and opened all their case to their minister, they might have been delivered in a good measure long ago. 2. And for Popish confession, I detest it. We would not persuade men that there is a necessity of confessing every sin to a minister, before it can be pardoned. Nor do we do it in a perplexed formality only at one time of the year; nor in order to Popish pardons or satisfactions; but we would have men go for physic to their souls, as they do for their bodies, when they feel they have need. And let me advise all Christian congregations to practise this excellent duty more. See that you knock oftener at your pastor's door, and ask his advice in all your pressing necessities; do not let him sit quietly in his study for you; make him know by experience, that the tenth part of a minister's labour is not in the pulpit. If your sins are strong, and you have wounded conscience deep, go for his advice for a safe cure; many a man's sore festers to damnation for want of this; and poor, ignorant and scandalous sinners have more need to do this than troubled consciences. I am confident, if the people of my congregation did but do their duty for the good of their own souls in private, seeking advice of their ministers, and opening their cases to them,

they would find work for ten ministers at least; and yet those two that they have, have more work than they are able to do already. Especially ministers in small country congregations, might do abundance of good this way; and their people are much to blame that they come not oftener to them for advice; this were the way to make Christians indeed. The devil knows this, and therefore so envies it, that he never did more against a design in the world; he hath got the maintenance alienated that should have maintained them, that so they may have but one minister in a congregation, and then among the greater congregations this work is impossible for want of instruments; yea, he is about getting down the very churches and settled ministry, if God will suffer him. He setteth his instruments to rail at priests and discipline, and to call Christ's yoke tyranny; because while the garden is hedged in, he is fain, with envy, to look over the hedge. What if a man (like those of our times) should come to a town that hath an epidemical pleurisy or fever, and say, 'Do not run like fools to these physicians, they do but cheat you, and rob your purses, and seek themselves, and seek to be lords of your lives.' It is possible some do so; but if by these persuasions the silly people should lose their lives, how well had their new preacher befriended them? Such friends will those prove at last to your souls, that dissuade you from obeying the guidance and discipline of your overseers, and dare call the ordinances of the Lord of glory tyrannical, and reproach those that Christ hath set over them. England will not have Christ by his officers rule over them, and the several congregations will not obey him. But he will make them know, before many years are past, that they refused their own mercy, and knew not the things that belong to their peace, and that he will be master at last in spite of their malice, and the proudest of his foes. If they get by this bargain of refusing Christ's government, and despising his ministers, and making the peace, unity, and prosperity of his church, and the souls of men, a prey to their proud misguided fancies and passions, then let them boast of the bargain when they have tried it. Only I would entreat one thing of them, not to judge too confidently till they have seen the end.

And for all you tender-conscienced Christians, whom by the ministry the Lord hath begotten or confirmed to himself,

as ever you will shew yourselves thankful for so great a mercy, as ever you will hold that you have got, or grow to more perfection, and attain that blessed life to which Christ hath given you his ministers to conduct you; see that you stick close to a judicious, godly, faithful ministry, and make use of them while you have them. Have you strong lusts, or deep wounds in conscience, or a heavy burden of doubts or distress? Seek their advice. God will have his own ordinance and officers have the chief instrumental hand in your cure. The same means oftentimes in another hand shall not do it. Yet I would have you make use of all able private Christians' help also.

I will tell you the reason why our ministers have not urged this so much upon you, nor so plainly acquainted their congregations with the necessity of opening your case to your minister, and seeking his advice.

1. Some in opposition to Popery have gone too far on the other extreme; perhaps sinning as deeply in neglect, as the Papists do in formal excess. It is a good sign that an opinion is true, when it is near to error. For truth is the very next step to error. The small thread of truth runs between the close adjoining extremes of error.

2. Some ministers knowing the exceeding greatness of the burden, are loath to put themselves upon it. This one work, of giving advice to all that ought to come and open their case to us, if our people did but what they ought to do for their own safety, would itself, in great congregations, be more than preaching every day in the week. What then is all the rest of the work? And how can one man, yea, or five, do this to five thousand souls? And then when it lieth undone, the malicious reproachers rail at the ministers, and accuse the people of unfitness to be church-members; which howsoever there may be some cause of, yet not so much as they suggest; and that unfitness would best be cured by the diligence of more labourers, which they think to cure, by removing the few that do remain.

3. Also some ministers seeing that they have more work than they can do already, think themselves incapable of more, and therefore that it is vain to put their people on it, to seek more.

4. Some ministers are over-modest, and think it to be unfit to desire people to open their secrets to them; in con-

fessing their sins and corrupt inclinations, and opening their wants ; and indeed any ingenuous man will be backward to pry into the secrets of others. But when God hath made it our office, under Christ, to be physicians to the souls of our people, it is but bloody cruelty to connive at their pride and carnal bashfulness, or hypocritical covering of their sins, and to let them die of their disease rather than we will urge them to disclose it.

5. Some ministers are loath to tell people of their duty in this, lest it should confirm the world in their malicious conceit; that we should be masters of men's consciences, and would lord it over them. This is as much folly and cruelty, as if the master and pilot of the ship should let the mariners govern the ship by the major vote, and run all on shelves, and drown themselves and him, and all for fear of being thought lordly and tyrannical, in taking the government of the ship upon himself, and telling the mariners that it is their duty to obey him.

6. Most godly ministers do tell people in general, of the necessity of such a dependance on their teachers, as learners in the school of Christ should have on them that are ushers under him the chief master ; and they do gladly give advice to those that do seek to them : but they do not so particularly and plainly acquaint people with their duty, in opening to them the particular sores of their souls.

It is also the policy of the devil, to make people believe that their ministers are too stout, and will not stoop to a compassionate hearing of their case ; especially if ministers carry themselves strangely, at too great a distance from their people. I would earnestly entreat all ministers therefore to be as familiar, and as much with their people as they can. Papists and other seducers, will insinuate themselves into their familiarity, if we be strange. If you teach them not in their houses, these will creep into their houses, and lead them captive. I persuade others of my brethren to that which myself am disabled from performing ; being by constant weakness (besides unavoidable business) confined to my chamber. But those that can perform it, will find this a most necessary and profitable work. And let not poor people believe the devil, who tells them that ministers are so proud, only to discourage them from seeking their advice. Go try them once before you believe it.

Lastly, Remember this, that it is not enough that you once opened your case to your pastor, but do it as often as necessity urgeth you to call for his advice; though not on every light occasion. Live in such a dependance on the advice and guidance of your pastor (under Christ) for your soul, as you do on the advice of the physician for your body. Read Mal. ii. 7. And let ministers read 6. 8, 9.

Direct. XXXII. 'As ever you would live in peace and comfort, and well-pleasing unto God, be sure that you understand and deeply consider wherein the height of a Christian life, and the greatest part of our duty doth consist; to wit, 'In a loving delight in God, and a thankful and cheerful obedience to his will; and then make this your constant aim, and be still aspiring after it, and let all other affections and endeavours be subservient unto this.'

This one rule well practised, would do wonders on the souls of poor Christians, in dispelling all their fears and troubles, and helping not only to a settled peace, but to live in the most comfortable state that can be expected upon earth. Write therefore these two or three words deep in your understandings and memory; that the life which God is best pleased with, and we should be always endeavouring, is, A loving delight in God through Christ; and a thankful and cheerful obedience to him. I do not say, that godly sorrows, and fears, and jealousies are no duties; but these are the great duties, to which the rest should all subserve. Misapprehending the state of duty, and the very nature of a Christian life, must needs make sad distempers in men's hearts and conversations. Many Christians look upon brokenheartedness, and much grieving, and weeping for sin, as if it were the great thing that God delighteth in, and requireth of them; and therefore they bend their endeavours this way; and are still striving with their hearts to break them more, and wringing their consciences to squeeze out some tears; and they think no sermon, no prayer, no meditation, speeds so well with them, as that which can help them to grieve or weep. I am far from persuading men against humiliation and godly sorrow, and tenderness of heart. But yet I must tell you, that this is a sore error that you lay so much upon it, and so much overlook that great and noble work and state to which it tendeth. Do you think that God hath any pleasure in your sorrows as

such? Doth it do him good to see you dejected, afflicted, and tormented? Alas, it is only as your sorrows do kill your sins, and mortify your fleshly lusts, and prepare for your peace and joys, that God regards them. Because God doth speak comfortably to troubled, drooping spirits, and tells them that he delighteth in the contrite, and loveth the humble, and bindeth up the brokenhearted; therefore men misunderstanding him, do think they should do nothing, but be still breaking their own hearts. Whereas God speaks it but partly to shew his hatred to the proud, and partly to shew his tender compassions to the humbled, that they might not be overwhelmed or despair. But, O Christians, understand and consider, that all your sorrows are but preparatives to your joys; and that it is a higher and sweeter work that God calls you to, and would have you spend your time and strength in.

1. The first part of it is love. A work that is wages to itself. He that knows what it is to live in the love of God, doth know that Christianity is no tormenting and discontented life.
2. The next part is, "Delight in God, and in the hopes and forethoughts of everlasting glory." Psal. xxvii. 4. "Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thy heart." This is it that you should be bending your studies and endeavours for, that your soul might be able to delight itself in God.
3. The third part is thankfulness and praise. Though I say not as some; that we should be moved by no fears or desires of the reward (that is, of God), but act only from thankfulness (as though we had all that we expect already) yet let me desire you to take special notice of this truth; that thankfulness must be the main principle of all Gospel-obedience. And this is not only true of the regenerate after faith, but even the wicked themselves, who are called to repent and believe, are called to do it in a glad and thankful sense of the mercy offered them in Christ. All the world being fallen under God's wrath and deserved condemnation, and the Lord Jesus having become a sacrifice and ransom for all, and so brought all from that legal necessity of perishing which they were under, the Gospel which brings them the news of this, is glad tidings of great joy to them; and the very justifying act which they are called to, is, thankfully to accept Christ as one that hath already satisfied for their sins, and will save them, if they accept him, and will follow his saving counsel,

and use his saving means ; and the saving work which they must proceed in, is, thankfully to obey that Redeemer whom they believe in. So that as general redemption is the very foundation of the new world and its government, so thankfulness for this redemption is the very life of justifying faith and Gospel obedience. And therefore the denial of this universal redemption (as to the price and satisfaction) doth both disable wicked men (if they receive it) from coming to Christ by true justifying faith (which is, the thankful acceptance of Christ as he is offered with his benefits): and this thankfulness must be for what he hath done in dying for us ; as well as for what he will do in pardoning and saving us, and it doth disable all true believers from Gospel, grateful obedience, whenever they lose the sight of their evidences of special grace (which, alas, how ordinary is it with them !) For when they cannot have special grace in their eye to be thankful for, according to this doctrine they must have none ; because they can be no surer that Christ died for them, than they are that themselves are sincere believers and truly sanctified. And when thankfulness for Christ's death and redemption ceaseth, Gospel obedience ceaseth, and legal and slavish terrors do take place. Though the same cannot be said of thankfulness for special renewing, pardoning grace.

4. The fourth part of the Christian life is cheerful obedience. God loveth a cheerful giver, and so he doth in every part of obedience, " Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness and with gladness of heart for the abundance of all things, thou shalt serve thy enemies in hunger and thirst," &c. Deut. xxviii. 47.

Will you now lay all this together, and make it for the time to come your business, and try whether it will not be the truest way to comfort, and make your life a blessed life ? Will you make it your end in hearing, reading, praying, and meditation, to raise your soul to delight in God ? Will you strive as much to work it to this delight as ever you did to work it to sorrow ? Certainly you have more reason ; and certainly there is more matter of delight in the face and love of God, than in all the things in the world besides. Consider but the Scripture commands, and then lay to heart your duty. Phil. iv. 4. " Rejoice in the Lord always, and again, I say, rejoice." Chap. iii. 1. Zech. x. 7. Joel ii. 23. Isa.

lxi. 16. Psal. xxxiii. 1. "Rejoice in the Lord O ye righteous, for praise is comely for the upright." Psal. xcvi. 12. 1 Thess. v. 16. "Rejoice evermore." 1 Pet. i. 6. 8. Rom. v. ii. John iv. 36. Psal. v. 11. xxxiii. 21. xxxv. 9. lxvi. 6. lxxiii. 3, 4. lxxi. 23. lxxxix. 16. cv. 3. cxlix. 2. xliii. 4. xxvii. 6. John xvi. 24. Rom. xv. 13. xiv. 17. "The kingdom of God is in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." Gal. v. 22. Psal. xxxii. 11. "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice O ye righteous, and shout for joy all ye that are upright in heart." Psal. cxxxiii. 9. 16. v. 11. xxxv. 27. Heb. iii. 18. With a hundred more the like. Have you made conscience of this great duty according to its excellency and these pressing commands of God? Have you made conscience of the duties of praise, thanksgiving, and cheerful obedience, as much as for grieving for sin? Perhaps you will say, 'I cannot do it for want of assurance. If I knew that I were one of the righteous, and upright in heart, then I could be glad, and shout for joy.' *Ans.* 1. I have before shewed you how you may know that; when you discover it in yourself, see that you make more conscience of this duty. 2. You have had hopes and probabilities of your sincerity. Did you endeavour to answer those probabilities in your joys? 3. If you would but labour to get this delight in God, it would help you to assurance; for it would be one of your clearest evidences.

O how the subtle enemy disadvantage the Gospel, by the misapprehensions and dejected spirits of believers! It is the very design of the ever blessed God, to glorify love and mercy as highly in the work of redemption, as ever he glorified omnipotency in the work of creation. And he hath purposely unhinged the Sabbath which was appointed to commemorate that work of power in creation, to the first day of the week, That it might be spent as a weekly day of thanksgiving and praise for the now more glorious work of redemption, that love might not only be equally admired with power, but even go before it. So that he hath laid the foundation of the kingdom of grace in love and mercy; and in love and mercy hath he framed the whole structure of the edifice; and love and mercy are written in legible indelible characters upon every piece. And the whole frame of his work and temple-service, hath he so composed, that all might be the resounding echos of love, and the praise and

glorious commemoration of love and mercy might be the great business of our solemn assemblies. And the new creation within us, and without us, is so ordered, that love, thankfulness, and delight, might be both the way and the end. And the serpent who most opposeth God where he seeketh most glory, especially the glory of his grace, doth labour so successfully to obscure this glory, that he hath brought multitudes of poor Christians to have poor, low thoughts of the riches of his grace. And to set every sin of theirs against it, which should but advance it; and even to question the very foundation of the whole building, whether Christ hath redeemed the world by his sacrifice. Yea, he puts such a vail over the glory of the Gospel, that men can hardly be brought to receive it as glad tidings, till they first have assurance of their own sanctification! And the very nature of God's kingdom is so unknown, that some men think it to be unrighteousness, and libertinism, and others to be pensive dejections, and tormenting scruples and fears; and but few know it to be righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. And the very business of a Christian's life and God's service, is rather taken to be scrupling, quarrelling, and vexing ourselves and the church of God, than to be love and gratitude, and a delighting our souls in God, and cheerfully obeying him. And thus when Christianity seems a thralldom and torment; and the service of the world, the flesh, and the devil, seems the only freedom, and quiet, and delight, no wonder if the devil have more unfeigned servants than Christ; and if men tremble at the name of holiness, and fly away from religion as a mischief. What can be more contrary to its nature, and to God's design in forming it, than for the professors to live such dejected and dolorous lives? God calls men from vexation and vanity, to high delights and peace. And men come to God as from peace and pleasure to vexation. All our preaching will do little to win souls from sensuality to holiness, while they look upon the sad lives of the professors of holiness; as it will more deter a sick man from meddling with a physician, to see all that he hath had in hand to lie languishing in continual pains to their death, than all his words and promises will encourage them. O what blessed lives might God's people live, if they understood the love of God in the mystery of man's redemption, and did addict themselves to

the consideration and improvement of it, and did believably eye the promised glory, and hereupon did make it the business of their lives to delight their souls in him that hath loved them ! And what a wonderful success might we expect to our preaching, if the holy delights and cheerful obedience of the saints did preach, as clearly to the eyes of the world, as we preach loudly to their ears.

But flesh will be flesh yet awhile ! And unbelief will be unbelief ! We are all to blame ! The Lord forgive our overlooking his lovingkindness ; and our dishonouring the glorious Gospel of his Son ; and our seconding satan, in his contradicting of that design which hath contrived God's glory in so sweet a way.

And now, Christian reader, let me entreat thee in the name and fear of God, hereafter better to understand and practise thy duty. Thy heart is better a thousand times in godly sorrow than in carnal mirth, and by such sorrow it is often made better ; Eccles. vii. 2—4. But never take it to be right till it be delighting itself in God. When you kneel down in prayer, labour so to conceive of God, and bespeak him that he may be your delight ; so do in hearing and reading ; so do in all your meditations of God ; so do in your feasting on the flesh and blood of Christ at his supper. Especially improve the happy opportunity of the Lord's day, wherein you may wholly devote yourselves to this work. And I advise ministers and all Christ's redeemed ones, that they spend more of those days in praise and thanksgiving, especially in commemoration of the whole work of redemption (and not of Christ's resurrection alone) or else they will not answer the institution of the Lord. And that they keep it as the most solemn day of thanksgiving, and be more brief on that day in their confessions and lamentations, and larger at other times ! O that the congregations of Christ through the world were so well informed and animated, that the main business of their solemn assemblies on that day might be to sound forth the high praises of their Redeemer ; and to begin here the praises of God and the Lamb, which they must perfect in heaven for ever ! How sweet a foretaste of heaven would be then in these solemnities ! And truly, let me tell you, my brethren of the ministry, you should by private teaching and week-day sermons, so further the knowledge of your people, that

you might not be forced to spend so much of the Lord's day in sermons as the most godly use to do; but might bestow a greater part of it in psalms and solemn praises to our Redeemer. And I could wish that the ministers of England, to that end, would unanimously agree on some one translation of the English Psalms in metre, better than that in common use, and if it may be, better than any yet extant (not neglecting the poetical sweetness under pretence of exact translating), or at least to agree on the best now extant; (the London ministers may do well to lead the way) lest that blessed part of God's solemn worship should be blemished for want either of reformation or uniformity. And in my weak judgment, if hymns and psalms of praise were new invented, as fit for the state of the Gospel church and worship (to laud the Redeemer come in the flesh, as expressly as the work of grace is now express) as David's Psalms were fitted to the former state and infancy of the church, and more obscure revelations of the Mediator and his grace, it would be no sinful, human invention or addition; nor any more want of warrant, than our inventing the form and words of every sermon that we preach, and every prayer that we may make, or any catechism or confession of faith. Nay, it may seem of so great usefulness, as to be next to a necessity. (Still provided that we force not any to the use of them that through ignorance may scruple it.) And if there be any convenient parcels of the ancient church that are fitted to this use, they should deservedly be preferred. I do not think I digress all this while from the scope of my discourse. For doubtless if God's usual solemn worship on the Lord's days were more fitted and directed to a pleasant, delightful, praising way, it would do very much to frame the spirits of Christians to joyfulness, and thankfulness, and delight in God; than which there is no greater cure for their doubtful, pensive, self-tormenting frame. O try this, Christians, at the request of one that is moved by God to importune you to it! God doth pity you in your sorrows! But he delighteth in you when you delight in him. See Isai. lviii. 14. compared with Zeph. iii. 17. And if sin interpose and hinder your delights, believe it, a cheerful amendment and obedience is that which will please God better than your self-tormenting fears. Do not you like that servant better that will go cheerfully about your

work, and do it as well as he can, accounting it a recreation, and will endeavour to mend where he hath done amiss, than him that will at every step fall a crying, "O I am so weak, I can do nothing as I should." A humble sense of failings you will like; but not that your servant should sit still and complain when he should be working; nor that all your service should be performed with weeping, disquietness and lamentations; you had rather have your servant humbly and modestly cheerful, and not always dejected, for fear of displeasing you. O how many poor souls are overseen in this! You might easily perceive it even by the devil's opposition and temptations. He will further you in your self-vexations (when he cannot keep you in security and presumption), but in amending, he will hinder you with all his might. How oft have I known poor, passionate creatures, that would vex and rage in anger, and break out in unseemly language, to the disquieting of all about them; and others that would drop into other the like sins, and when they have done lament it, and condemn themselves; and yet would not set upon a resolute and cheerful reformation! Nay, if you do but reprove them for any sin, they will sooner say, 'If I be so bad, God will condemn me for an hypocrite,' and so lie down in disquietness and distress; than they will say, 'I see my sin, and I resolve to resist it, and I pray you warn me of it, and help me to watch against it. So that they would bring us to this pass, that either we must let them alone with their sins, for fear of tormenting them, or else we must cause them to lie down in terrors. Alas, poor mistaken souls! It is neither of these that God calls for! Will you do any thing save what you should do? Must you needs be esteemed either innocent, or hypocrites, or such as shall be damned? The thing that God would have is this; That you would be glad that you see your fault, and thank him that sheweth it you, and resolvedly do your best to amend it, and this in faith and cheerful confidence in Christ, flying to his Spirit for help and victory. Will you please the devil so far, and so far contradict the gracious way of Christ, as that you will needs either sit still or despair? Is there not a middle between these two? To wit, cheerful amendment? Remember that it is not your vexation or despair, but your obedience and peace that God

desireth. That life is most pleasing to him, which is most safe and sweet to you.

If you say still, you cannot delight in God, I say again, Do but acknowledge it the great work that God requireth of you, and make it your daily aim, and care, and business, and then you will more easily and certainly attain it. But while you know not your work, or so far mistake it, as to think it consisteth more in sorrows and fears; and never endeavour, in your duties or meditations, to raise your soul to a delight in God, but rather to cast down yourself with still poring on your miseries, no wonder then if you be a stranger to this life of holy delight.

By this time I find myself come up to the subject of my book of the "Saints' Rest;" wherein having said so much to direct and excite you, for the attainment of these spiritual and heavenly delights, I will refer you to it, for your help in that work; and add no more here, but to desire you, through the course of your life, to remember, That the true love of God in Christ, and delight in him, and thankful, cheerful obedience to him, is the great work of a Christian, which God is best pleased with, and which the blessed angels and saints shall be exercised in for ever.

And O thou the blessed God of love, the Father of mercy, the Prince of peace, the Spirit of consolation, compose the disquieted spirits of thy people, and the tumultuous, disjointed state of thy churches; and pardon our rashness, contentions, and blood-guiltiness, and give us not up to the state of the wicked, who are like the raging sea, and to whom there is no peace! Lay thy command on our winds and waves, before thy shipwrecked vessel perish; and rebuke that evil spirit whose name is Legion, which hath possessed so great a part of thine inheritance. Send forth the spirit of judgment and meekness into thy churches, and save us from our pride and ignorance with their effects; and bring our feet into the way of peace, which hitherto we have not known. O close all thy people speedily in loving consultations, and earnest inquiries after peace. Let them return from their corruptions, contentions, and divisions, and jointly seek thee, asking the way to Zion with their faces thitherward; saying, Come let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten. Blast all

opposing policies and powers. Say to these dead and dry bones, Live. And out of these ruins do thou yet erect a city of righteousness, where thy people may dwell together in peaceable habitations; and in the midst thereof a temple to thy holiness: let the materials of it be verity and purity: let the Redeemer be its foundation: let love and peace cement it into unity: let thy laver and covenant be the doors; and holiness to the Lord be engraven thereon; that buyers and sellers may be cast out, and the common and unclean may know their place; and let no desolating abomination be there set up. But let thy people all in one name, in one faith, with one mind, and one soul, attend to thine instructions, and wait for thy laws, and submit unto thine order, and rejoice in thy salvation; that the troubled spirits may be there exhilarated, the dark enlightened, and all may offer thee the sacrifice of praise, (without disaffections, discords, or divisions;) that so thy people may be thy delight, and thou mayest be the chiefest delight of thy people; and they may please thee through him that hath perfectly pleased thee. Or if our expectation of this happiness on earth be too high, yet give us so much as may enlighten our eyes, and heal those corruptions which estrange us from thee, and may propagate thy truth, increase thy church, and honour thy holiness, and may quicken our desires, and strengthen us in our way, and be a foretaste to us of the everlasting rest.

END OF THE RIGHT METHOD FOR A SETTLED PEACE OF
CONSCIENCE.