

Sermon II.

Deut. xxxii. 4, 5.—“He is the Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are judgment, a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he. They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of his children,” &c.

There are none can behold their own vileness as it is, but in the sight of God's glorious holiness. Sin is darkness, and neither sees itself, nor any thing else, therefore must his light shine to discover this darkness. If we abide within ourselves, and men like ourselves, we cannot wisely judge ourselves, our dim sparkle will not make all the imperfections and spots appear. But, if men would come forth into the presence of his Majesty, who turns darkness into light, and before whom hell is naked,—O how base and vile would they appear in their own eyes! Is it any wonder that the multitude of you see not yourselves, when holy Isaiah and Job had this lesson to learn? Isaiah gets a discovery of his own uncleanness in the sight of God's glorious holiness, (chap. vi. 5,) which I think made all his former light darkness. He cries out “unclean,” as if he had never known it before, and so Job, “Since I saw thee I abhorred myself in dust and ashes.” Ye hear much of him, and it doth not abase you, but if ye saw him, ye would not abide yourselves; ye would prefer the dust you tread on to yourselves. Ye who know most, there is a mystery of iniquity in your hearts, that is not yet discerned, ye are but yet on the coast of that bottomless sea of abomination and vileness. Among all the aggravations of sin, nothing doth so demonstrate the folly, yea, the madness of it, as the perfection, goodness, and absolute unspottedness of God. It is this that takes away all pretence of excuse, and leaves the same nothing—no place in which to hide its confusion and nakedness and shame. And therefore it is that Moses, when he would convince this people of their ways, and make them inexcusable, draws the parallel of God's ways

and their ways, declares what God is, how absolutely perfect in himself, and in his works, who had given no cause of provocation to them to depart from him, and then, how odious must their departing be! When both are painted on a board before their eyes it makes sin become exceedingly sinful. When the Lord would pierce the hearts of his people, and engrave a challenge with the point of a diamond, he useth this as his pen,—“Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness? Why say my people, We are lords, we will come no more to thee?” Jer. ii. 31. “What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity?” Jer. ii. 5.

There are two things in sin that exceedingly abuse the creature,—the iniquity of it, and the folly and madness of it. It is contrary to all equity and reason to depart from him that hath made us, and given us a law, to whom we are by so many obligations tied, but what is the folly and madness of it, to depart from the fountain of living waters, and dig broken cisterns that can hold none? verse 13. This is a thing that the heavens may be astonished at, and, if the earth had sense to understand such a thing, the whole fabric of it would tremble for horror at such madness and folly of reasonable souls and this evil hath two evils in it,—we forsake life and love death, go from him and choose vanity. It is great iniquity to depart without an offence on his part. He may appeal to all our consciences, and let them sit down and examine his way most narrowly,—“What iniquity have ye found in me? What cause have ye to leave me!” But when withal he is a living fountain, he is our glory, he is a fruitful land, a land of light, our ornament and attire, in a word, our life and our consolation, our happiness and our beauty; what word shall be found to express the extreme madness of men to depart from such an one, and change their glory into that which doth not profit? If either he were not a fountain of living waters, or if there were any fountain beside, that could yield water to satisfy the insatiable desires of men, it were more excusable,

but what shadow shall be found to cover such an iniquity that is both infinite sin, and incomparable loss? It is the scripture's style given to natural men, "fools and simple." All sin hath folly in it, but the people of God's departing from him hath extremity of folly in it, beside iniquity, because they do embrace a dunghill instead of a throne, they make the maddest exchange that can be imagined, glory for shame, life for death,—at least, consolation and peace, for vanity and vexation and anguish of spirit.

If ye would be duly affected with the sight of your own evils, look upon them in this consideration, and, in the view of God, your large portion, ye will be forced to confess yourselves beasts in his sight, Psal. lxxiii. 22. Oh! that men would consider how good and blessed the Lord is, how he is alone, and nothing beside him in heaven and earth,—all broken cisterns, all dung and unprofitable, all vanity and vexation,—he only self-sufficient, all others insufficient, and therefore a proportioned good for our necessity and desires, and I am sure ye would be constrained to cry out with David, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, or in the earth beside thee? It is good for me to draw near to God." Ye would look on drawing near, and walking with him, and before him, not only as the most reasonable thing, but the best thing, most beautiful for you, most profitable for you, and all other ways would be looked on as the ways of death.

"His work is perfect." The Lord looked, and behold all was good that was made. So it was at first. The fabric of this world was an exquisite and perfect work, a suitable demonstration of his infinite wisdom, wonderful in all the parts of it, and in the unity and harmony of the whole. But so also his work of providence is perfect. Divine wisdom hath framed and contrived all, and it cannot be better. If anything seem imperfect in itself, yet it is perfect in relation to his glorious ends he directs it unto. And so would we look on all the works among us. If anything seemed a spot and disgrace of the creation, certainly the sin of men and angels,—nay, but even that is so ordered by his holy sovereignty,

that in relation to his majesty, it may be called a perfect work. If ye do but consider what a glorious high throne he hath erected to himself for justice and judgment to be the habitation of it, and mercy and truth to go before it upon the ruins of defaced man, what a theatre of justice he hath erected upon the angels fall, ye would call it as perfect a work as is in the world. His work is one in the world, subordinate to one great design of manifesting his own glorious justice and mercy, omnipotency and wisdom. Now what do ye see of it but parcels? Though ye comprehend all your time in one thought, yet certainly ye cannot judge it aright, for it is but one work that all the several buildings and castings down, all the several dispensations of his providence, from the beginning to the end, make up, and when we think upon these disjointed, limit our consideration within the bounds of our own time, can we rightly apprehend it? Nay, which is worse, we use to have no more within the compass of our thought, but some present thing, and how much more do we err then? What beauty, what perfection can such a small part have? But it is present to him, who beholds with a glance all these parts. Though succeeding in many generations, he sees it altogether, joins the end with the beginning, sees the first mould, the first foundation stone, and the last completing, all flowing from himself, and returning thither, and ending in himself. He hath made an interchange in nature, which might teach us—the night alone hath no beauty. Nay, but it beautifies the day. Your darkest hours and tempests, public and personal, are they perfect works? Yes, certainly, if ye compound them with your sunshines and calms. Several colours make pictures beautiful,—the one is as needful as the other, and if ye did consider your profit more than your honour and pleasure, ye would say so. He doth not model his works according to our fancy to please us, but our good to profit us, and he is wiser than we, and so then it is the most perfect work in itself, that possibly displeaseth us most. Therefore ye would judge of his dealing by another rule

than your own satisfaction, for please you and perish you. If he spared the rod, he should hate us indeed, fond love is real hatred. Christians, if ye would judge his works by his word, and not by your sense,—by your well, and not by your will, certainly we would say, as the men did of Christ, “He hath done all well.” The world would discover to you a perfection, even in imperfection, a perfection in infirmities, that ye should not only rejoice in them, but glory in them. “Most gladly therefore will I glory,” &c. saith Paul. Are infirmities a perfect work? Or is the suffering of Paul, to be buffeted and tempted, a perfect work? What comfort is in it? Yes, much. Infirmities alone are infirmities indeed, nay but infirmities in me, and strength in Jesus, weakness in me, and strength dwelling in me,—these make up one perfect work that could as little want the infirmities as the strength. The glory of God, and our well and consolation, require the one, as well as the other, they could not be complete without any of them. What do ye think of the times now? Are England's apostacy, and Ireland's desolation,²⁶² perfect works? That great work of reformation, that seemed to be above our shoulders, is now razed to the ground, and the very foundations removed? Is deformation a perfect work? Certainly, if we look on these things in the scripture's light, and consider them in relation to him who is the chief builder, and doth in heaven and earth what he pleaseth, that deformation is a perfect work, though not a perfect reformation. Though we could not inform you of the perfection of it, yet the general might silence us; all this shall be no miss, no mar in the end. His work, at the end of accounts, shall appear so complete,

²⁶² [The narrative of Hume presents an affecting posture of the cruelties perpetrated at the time of the Irish insurrection and massacre. (Hist. of Eng. vol. iv. pp. 361-366, Lond. 1825). It is said that “200,000 Protestants in two months space, were murdered, and many by exquisite torments, and many more were despoiled of all their worldly fortunes.” (May's Brevary, p. 33. First printed in the year 1655. Reprinted London 1813). For several years after this period, Ireland was laid waste by contending armies and by the wild rage of the native inhabitants.—*Ed.*]

as if it had never had interruption. He is wise, and knows what he doth, if this were not for his glory and his people's good, certainly it should not be. Was not the people wandering in the wilderness forty years a most strange work—a longer interruption of the expected and begun voyage out of Egypt? What human reason would have stiled this work with perfection? Did they not often murmur against it? Yet Moses calls this a perfect work also. What if the Lord be digging the ground deeper in England, that the foundation may be the surer? What if he be on a work of judgment, filling the cup of many deluded blasphemers, that he may have another cup of wrath prepared? What if this be his great purpose, to execute vengeance upon a profane generation, that will not abide the very name and form of godliness, by those who pretend to the name of it as their honour? What if the Lord hath defaced all that this kingdom was instrumental in building up in England, that he alone may have the glory in a second temple more glorious?²⁶³ Many things there may be in his mind, and “he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doth, and this may be enough to satisfy us, he sees and knows all his works from the beginning.”

And without all controversy he hath provided it so, that the reproach of his name shall be made up with²⁶⁴ the more shining of his glory, and the afflictions of his people shall be compensated with songs of deliverance. May ye not give him so much credit, as ye would give to a skilful man in his own trade? Ye know it is his name, “excellent in counsel, and wonderful in working.” Then take his work, expound it according to his word, and not your apprehension. It may be his work appears not excellent, nay, but if ye knew his counsel, ye would think it so. His wonderful counsel makes all his works excellent, and therefore do not take upon you to judge his works unless ye could wade the depth

²⁶³ [A reference to this passage may be seen in the Life of the Author prefixed to the Work.—*Ed.*]

²⁶⁴ [That is, compensated.—*Ed.*]

of his counsels, else ye declare yourselves to be both ignorant and presumptuous. “There is a time to build, and a time to cast down, a time for every thing,” saith the wise man. Now, I say, he knows the time and season, he does every thing in his time. If ye come by a workman that is casting down a house that in your appearance seems good, would ye condemn him presently? No, [369] but stay till ye see what he will do next, wait till the due time, and when ye see a better piece of workmanship on that ground, ye shall absolve him. Though God often change his work, do not think he changes his counsel and purposes as men do, no, “he is in one mind, and who can turn him?” Therefore he had that change in his mind when he made the work, when he erected such a throne, he had this in his mind to cast it down within such a space, and so his change—his throwing down—is as perfect in his mind, as his building up. Ye have large and big apprehensions of temporal kingdoms and crowns of government, and such like, as if they were great, yea, only things, but they are not so to him. All this world and its standing, all the kingdoms and their affairs are not his great work and business. He hath a great work, the bringing of many sons to glory, and the completing of Jesus Christ; building of that glorious mystical building, the holy temple made up of living stones, of which Christ is the foundation, and chief corner-stone both, and it is this that he attends to most. Other works among men, though they have more noise, they are less concerned. All these are but in the by, and subservient to his great design, and like the scaffolds of a building, that are, it may be, sometimes very needful. Nay, but when the building is completed, he shall remove all these, he hath no more use of them: kings shall be thy nurse fathers, kings shall bow to thee. He is not much concerned in government nor in governors, but for his little flock's sake, and if these were gathered, all these shall have an end, and the flock alone abide for ever.

“And all his ways are judgment.” This is to the same purpose,—his ways and his works are one. And this is the perfection

of his work, that it is all right and equal; whether they be in justice or mercy, they are all righteous and holy, no iniquity in them, his ways are straight and equal, exact as if they were measured by an exact even rule, but because we make application of a crooked rule to them, we do imagine that they are crooked, as the blind man judges no light to be, because he sees it not. How may the Lord contend and plead with us, as with that people, Ezek. xviii. 25. Is it possible that any can challenge him and clear themselves, who will be justified of all when he is judged, and before whom no flesh can be justified? And yet, behold the iniquity of men's hearts. There is a secret reflection of our spirits upon his Majesty, as if his ways were not equal, whenever we repine against them, and when we do not take with our iniquity, and stop our mouths with dust. Behold, the Lord will assert his own ways, and plead with all flesh this controversy, that all his proceedings are full of equity. He walks according to a rule, though he be not tied to a rule. He walks according to the rules of wisdom, justice, and mercy, though his illimited sovereignty might be a sufficient ground of clearing of all his proceedings. But we walk not according to a rule, though we be bound to a rule, and a rule full of equity.

Here is the equity and justice of his ways, the gospel holds it forth in a twofold consideration. *First*, If any man turn from his iniquity, and flee unto my Son as the city of refuge, he shall live, he hath eternal life, iniquity shall not be his ruin, although he hath done iniquity. O "who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity!" Is not this complete mercy? Whatever iniquity hath been, aggravate it as ye can, though it could have ruined a world yet it could not have ruined thee that turnest in to Jesus Christ from iniquity. What exception can all the world have against this, or his walking according to it? And *on the other hand*, whosoever continueth in sin, though he appear to himself and others never so righteous, if he entertain and love any known sin, and will not part with it for Jesus Christ, shall not he die in his

iniquity? Is there any iniquity in this, that he receive the wages of his works—his reward that he eat of the fruit of his own ways, and drink of his own devices? But how many hearts censure this way as a rigid and strict severe dealing! The multitude think it cruelty to condemn any christened soul—to put so many in hell. The civil man will think it is too hard measure that he should be ranked in hell with the profane. But certainly, all mouths shall be stopped one day, and he shall be justified when he judges. Ye that will not justify him in his sayings, and set to your seal to the truth of the word, you shall be constrained to justify him, when he executes that sentence. Ye shall precipitate your own sentence, and rather wonder at his clemency in suffering you so long.

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This way of the Lord is equal and right in itself, but it is not so to every one. The just man shall walk in it and not stumble; as in an even way, nothing shall offend him, Hosea xiv. last verse. Yet for as equal and straight as it is, many other transgressors shall fall therein; they stumble even in the noon-day and highway, where no offence is. It is true, often his own people stumble in it, as David, Psal. lxxiii, and xciv. David's foot was slipping, yet a secret hold was by mercy. It often requires a wise and prudent man to understand it, because his footsteps are in the deep waters; Psal. lxxxvii. 19. His way is in the depths of the sea, his paths in great waters, so that men must wait till the Lord expound his own ways, till he come out of the waters, and make them a dry plain. And this is our advantage; the word says, "He is near thee, in thy mouth, and neither above, nor beneath in the depths, that thou needest neither descend nor ascend to know it," Deut. xxx. 11-14. But his way is in the depths, and his footsteps are not known, so that we ought to hold us by the word till he expound his work. His word will teach us our duty, and we may commit unto him his own way; the word is a commentary to expound his ways. David lost the sight of God's footsteps and was like to wander, till he came to the sanctuary, and this shined as a candle

in a dark place; he learned there to know the unknown footsteps and to follow them. By all means embrace the word, and be satisfied with it, when ye do not comprehend his work; it teaches as much in general, as may put us to quietness; all his ways are judgment, just and true in all his ways is the King of saints. If I do not comprehend how it is,—no wonder, for he makes darkness his covering, he spreads over his most curious engines and pieces of workmanship a vail of darkness for a season; and “who can behold him when he hides himself?” says Job; and though he withdraw the covering, yet what am I? “Who can by searching find out God?” If I shall examine his way, what rule shall I take to try it by? If I measure by my shallow capacity, or by my crooked way, shall I have any just account of it? Will my arm measure the heavens as his doth? If I examine it, or try it by himself, he is high as heaven and unsearchable. Therefore it becomes us to hearken to his word, and believe its sentence of his work, when reason cannot comprehend it.

One thing, if it were deeply engraven on our hearts, would be a principle, of settling our spirits, in all the mysteries and riddles of providence,—the knowledge and faith of his sovereignty, of his highness, and of his wisdom. Should he give account of his matters to us? He is wise and knows his works; but is he bound to make us know them? His ways are above our thoughts and ways, as heaven is above the earth, Isa. lv. And therefore, O grasshopper in the earth, that dwelleth in tabernacles of clay, do not presume to model his ways according to thy conceptions. One thing is certain,—this is enough for faith, “all his ways are mercy and truth to those that keep his covenant and his testimonies,” Psal. xxv. 10. And there is no way or path of God so far above our reach, and unsearchable, as his mercy in pardoning sin; and this is only the satisfying answer to all your objections and scruples. In these ye do but vent your own thoughts: but says the Lord, my thoughts are above your thoughts, as heaven above earth. Ye but speak of your own ways, but my ways are far above yours, they

are not measured by your iniquity; and therefore, David subjoins, Psal. xxv. ver. 11, "Pardon my iniquity, for it is great."

Sermon III.

Deut. xxxii. 4, 5.—“He is the rock, his work is perfect. For all his ways are judgment. A God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he. They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of his children. They are a perverse and crooked generation.”

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“All his ways are judgment,” both the ways of his commandments and the ways of his providence, both his word which he hath given as a lantern to men's paths, and his works among men. And this were the blessedness of men, to be found walking in his ways, and waiting on him in his ways, having respect to all his commandments, and respect to himself in all his works. We all know in general that he doth all well, and that all his commandments are holy and just. Nay, but our practice and affections belie our knowledge; and for the most part, we stand cross in our humours, and affections, and conversation, both to his word and providence, and this is our misery. “Great peace have they that love thy law.” What peace then can keep that heart and mind that is daily at variance with his statutes and judgments, when the heart would wish such a command were not, when it is an eyesore to look upon it? “Blessed are the meek.” “It is good for a man, both quietly to wait, and hope, and keep silence.” How then must that spirit be miserable, that stands cross unto God's dispensations, and would limit the Holy One! Do not our hearts often say, “I do well to be angry, why is it thus with me?” But, “who hath hardened himself against him and prospered?” His counsel must stand; and you may vex yourself, and disquiet your soul in the mean time, by impatience, but you cannot by your thought add one cubit to your stature. You may make your case worse than providence hath made it, but you cannot make it better by so doing, so that at length you must bow to him or be broken. Oh then that this were engraven on our hearts with the

point of a diamond! "All his ways are judgment;" that ye might be overcome with the equity of his command and dispensation, and your heart and tongue might not move against them. It was enough of old with the saints, "It is the Lord, let him do what seems good in his eyes." God's sovereignty alone pondered, may stop our mouth; but, if ye withal consider, it is perfect equity that rules all, it is divine wisdom that is the square of his works; then how ought we to stoop cheerfully unto them! One thing, ye would remember, his ways and paths are judgment, and if you judge aright of him, ye must judge his way and not his single footsteps. Ye will not discern equity and judgment in one step or two; but consider his way, join adversity with prosperity, humbling with exalting; take along the thread of his providence, and one part shall help you to understand another. There is reason in all, but the reason is not visible to us in so small parts of his way and work.

"A God of truth." Strange it is that his majesty is pleased to clothe himself with so many titles and names for us. He considers what our necessity is, and accordingly expresses his own name. I think nothing doth more hold forth the unbelief of men, and atheism of our hearts, than the many several titles that God takes in scripture. There is a necessity of a multitude of them, to make us take up God; because we staying upon a general notion of God, rather frame in our imaginations an idol than the true God. As there is nothing doth more lively represent the unbelief of our hearts, than the multitude of promises; men that consider such frequent repetitions of one thing in scripture, so many divers expressions of one God, may retire into their own hearts, and find the cause of it, even the necessity of it. But while we look so slightly on these, we must judge it superfluous and vain. Needed there any more to be said, but, "I am your God, I am God," if our spirits were not so far degenerated unto atheism and unbelief? Certainly that word *Jehovah* holds forth more to angels than all the inculcated names and titles of God to

us, because we are dull and slow of heart. Therefore wonder at these two when ye read the scriptures, God's condescendency to us, and our atheism and unbelief of him: they are both mysteries, and exceeding broad. There is not a name of God, but it gives us a name, and that of reproach and dishonour, so that for every one, some evil may be written down. And it is to this purpose Moses draws them out in length, that in the glass of his glorious name, the people might behold their own ugly face. This name is clear, "he is a God of truth," not only a true God, but truth itself: to note his excellency and eminency in it. It is Christ's name, "I am the truth," the substantial truth, in whom all the promises are truth, "are yea and amen." His truth is his faithfulness in performing his promises, and doing what his mouth hath spoken: and this is established "in the very heavens," Psal. lxxxix. 2. His everlasting purpose is in heaven where he dwells; and if any man can ascend up to heaven, if any creature can break through the clouds, then may his truth be shaken. His word comes down among men; nay, but the foundation of it is in heaven, and there is his purpose established; and therefore, there is nothing done in time can impair or hinder it. Ye think this world very sure, the earth hangs unmoveable, though it hang upon nothing. All the tumults, confusions, and reels which have been in the world have never moved it to the one side. Heaven goeth about in one tenour perpetually, keeping still the same distance. Nay, but his truth is more established than so. Heaven and earth depend but upon a word of command, he hath said, "Let it be so," and so it is. Nay, but his word is more established. Of it saith Christ, one jot or tittle of it cannot fail, though heaven and earth should fail. He may change his commands as he pleases, but he may not change his promise, this puts an obligation on him, as he is faithful and true, to perform it, and when an oath is superadded, O how immutable are these two!—when he promises in his truth and swears in his holiness. Is there any power in heaven and earth can break that double cord? Matth. v. 18, Heb. vi. 18. There is

no name of God but it is comfortable to some, and as terrible to others. What comfort is it to a godly man that trusts in his word, he is a God of truth! An honest man's word is much, his oath is more. What shall his word be who is a God of truth? Though all men should be liars, yet God is true. Ye who have ventured your souls on his word, ye have an unspeakable advantage, his truth endures for ever, and it is established in the heavens, the ground of it is without beginning, the end of it without end. Ye are more sure than the frame of heaven and earth, for all these shall wax old as a garment. We speak of a naked word of truth, indeed it is no naked word that is God's word. His works of providence, and his dispensation to you, is a naked and bare foundation, nay, a sandy foundation, and ye who lean so much to them, is it any wonder ye so often shake and waver? All other grounds beside the word are uncertain, unstable, this only endures for ever. The creature's goodness and perfection is but as the grass, and the flower of the field. Venture not much on your dispositions and frames, thou knowest not what a day may bring forth, but his truth is to all generations, and it is well tried as gold seven times,—all generations have tried it and found it better than pure gold. His dispensations are arbitrary—no rule to you. He loveth to declare his sovereignty here and to expatiate in the creature's sight beyond its conceiving, but he hath limited himself in his word and come down to us, and laid bonds on himself. Will he then untie them for us? Give him liberty where he loves it, take him bound where he binds himself. How may God expostulate with this generation, as those of little faith? “How long shall I be with you?” saith Christ. How long will Christians tempt the Lord in seeking signs, and will not rest upon his only word and promises? “O adulterous generation, how long shall I be with you and ye will not believe?” Is it not righteousness in him, either to give you no sign at all, or to give you a sign darker than the thing itself, as he did to the Pharisees? Ye will give credit to a man's word, and will ye not believe God's? An honest man will

get more trust of us, than the true and living God! Shall he not be offended with this? We declare it unto you, that he is truth itself, and will not fail in his promise, let that be your castle and refuge to enter into. Mercy and truth are two sweet companions to go along with you in your pilgrimage. David prayed for them Psal. lxi. 7. "O prepare thy mercy and truth to preserve me." Who will not be safe within these everlasting arms? What power can break through them? And this he promised to himself, (Psal. lvii. 3.) God shall send them out. Mercy made so many precious promises, and truth keeps them. Mercy is the fountain and source of all our consolation, and truth and faithfulness convey it to us, and keep it for us. It is these two that go before his face when he sits on a throne of majesty, and makes himself accessible to sinners (Psalm lxxxix. 14,) and so they are the pathway he walks in towards those who seek him, Psalm xxv. 10.

But this sweet and precious name, that is as ointment poured forth to those who love him, how doth it smell of death to those who walk contrary to him? "He is a God of truth" to execute his threatenings on those who despise his commands, and though ye flatter yourselves in your own eyes, and cry, "Peace, peace," even though ye walk in the imagination of your own heart, yet certainly "he is a God of truth." I pray you read that sad and weighty word, that will be like a millstone about many men's necks to sink them in hell, Deut. xxix. 20, 21, ye who "add drunkenness to thirst," whose rule of walking is your own lust, and whatsoever pleaseth you, without respect of his commands, and yet flatter yourselves with a dream of peace, know this for a truth, "the Lord will not spare thee, he that made thee will not have mercy on thee. His jealousy will smoke against thee, and all the curses written in this book shall be upon thee, and thy name shall be blotted out from under heaven." It was unbelief of God's threatening that first ruined man, it is this still that keeps so many from the remedy, and makes their misery irrecoverable. The serpent brought them to this question, "Hath God said ye

shall die.” And then presently the question entertained becometh a conclusion, Ye shall not surely die. Thus ye see how the liar, from the beginning, was contrary to the God of truth, and he murdered us by lying of that God of truth, and it is the same that shuts out all hope of remedy. Ye do not as yet believe and consider that curse that was pronounced against Adam, but is now also inflicted upon us, therefore, there is no solid belief can be of the promises of the gospel, and ye who think ye believe the gospel, do but indeed fancy it, except ye have considered the true curse of God on all flesh. But if any man have set to his seal that God is true in his threatening, and subscribed unto the law, then, I beseech you, add not the unbelief of the gospel unto your former disobedience. He is “a God of truth,” in promises and threatenings. It is strange how untoward and froward we are,—a perverse generation. We do not believe his threatenings, but fancy we receive his promises, or else, believing his threatenings we question his promises. But know this for a truth, his last word is more weighty, and the unbelief of it is most dangerous. Ye have not kept his commands, and so the curse is come upon you? Do ye believe that? If ye do, then the gospel speaks unto you, the God of truth hath one word more, “He that believes shall be saved,” notwithstanding of all his breaking of the law. If ye do not set your seal to this also, then ye say he is not a God of truth, ye say he is a liar. And as for you who have committed your souls to him, as to a faithful keeper, and acquiesced unto his word of promise for salvation, think how unsuitable it is for you to distrust him in other lesser things. Ye have the promise of this life, whoever hath the promises of the life to come. Therefore do not make him a liar in these. He is “a God of truth,” and will let you want no good thing. “Say to the righteous, it shall be well with him, whatever be.” Let heaven and earth mix through other, yet ye may be as mount Sion unmoved in the midst of many floods, because of the promises.

“Without iniquity.” Who doubts of that, say ye? What needs

this be added? Who charges him with iniquity or sin? Nay, but stay and consider, and you shall find great weight in this. It is true, none dare charge him openly, or speak in express terms against his holiness, yet, if we judge of our own and other's practices and dispositions, as the Lord useth to construct of them, if we resolve our murmurings, impatience, self absolutions, and excuses to hold off convictions, into plain language, if we would translate them into a scripture style, certainly it will be found that the most part of men, if not all, use to impute iniquity to God, and accuse him rather than take with accusations laid against themselves. And therefore the Lord useth to go to law with his people. He who is the judge of the world, that cannot do unrighteousness, he who is the potter, and we all the clay, yet he so far condescends to us for convincing us, as sometimes to refer the controversy between him and his people to other creatures, as Micah vi. 2. He calls the mountains and the foundations of the earth to judge between him and his people, and sometimes he appeals unto their own consciences and is content, though judge, to stand and be judged by those who were guilty, as ver. 3 and Jer. ii. ver. 5, and 31. All this supposes, that when the Lord would endeavour to convince them of iniquity, they did rather recriminate, and took not with their own faults. This is a truth generally acknowledged by all, "He who is the judge of the world doth no iniquity," but O! that ye considered it, till the meditation of it were engraven on your spirits, the seal of God's holiness, that ye might fear before him, and never call him to account for his matters. Who can say, I have purged my heart from iniquity? Among men the holiest are defiled with it, and so are all their actions. But here is one that ye may give him an implicit faith so to speak, he is "a God of truth," and can speak no lie, he does no iniquity, and cannot do wrong to any man. Would there be so much impatience amongst you, and fretting against his dispensations, if ye believed this solidly? Would ye repine against his holy and just ways, were it not to charge God with

iniquity? Your murmuring and grudging at his dispensations is with child of blasphemies, and he who can search the reins sees it, and constructs so of it. You say by interpretation, that if ye had the government of your own matters, or of kingdoms, ye would order them better than he doth. How difficult a thing is it to persuade men to take with their own iniquity! O how many excuses and pretences, how many extenuations are used that this conviction may not pierce deeply! But all this speaks so much blasphemy,—that iniquity is in God. Ye cannot take with your own iniquities, but ye charge his Majesty with iniquity.

“Just and right is he.” Is this any new thing? Was it not said already, that he is “without unquity, and his ways judgment?” But, alas! how ignorant are we of God, and slow of heart to conceive of him as he is, therefore is there “line upon line, and precept upon precept,” and name upon name, if it be possible, that at length we may apprehend God as he is. Alas! our knowledge is but ignorance, our light darkness, while it is shut up in the corner of our mind, and shines not into the heart, and hath no influence on our practice. And the truth is, the belief of divine truths is almost no more but a not contradicting them, we do not seriously think of them as either to consent to them, or deny them. Is there any consideration amongst us now of God's justice and righteousness, though it be frequently spoken of? And what advantage shall we have if ye do not consider them? O how hard is it to persuade men's hearts of this, that God is just, and will by no means acquit the guilty? There are so many delusions drunk in in men's hearts, contrary to his truth. “Let no man deceive you,” “be not deceived” with vain words, “know ye not,” saith our apostle. These are strange prefaces. Would ye not think the point of truth subtile that there needed so much prefacing unto it? and yet what is it? Even that which all men grant,—God's wrath comes on the children of disobedience, but, alas! few men consider, but deceive themselves with dreams of escaping it. Though men know it, yet they know it not, for they

walk as if they knew no such thing.

Always however this is of little moment to affect our spirits now, yet in the day that God shall set your iniquities before your face, and set his justice also before your eyes. O how sad and serious a thing will it be then! If these two verses were engraven on our hearts,—God's justice and holiness, our corruption and vileness,—I think there would be other thoughts among us than there are.

Sermon IV.

Deut. xxxii. 5.—“They have corrupted themselves; their spot is not the spot of his children; they are a perverse and crooked generation.”

We doubt this people would take well with such a description of themselves as Moses gives. It might seem strange to us, that God should have chosen such a people out of all the nations of the earth, and they to be so rebellious and perverse, if our own experience did not teach us how free his choice is, and how long-suffering he is, and constant in his choice. His people are called to a conformity with himself, “Be ye holy, for I am holy,” (Lev. chap. xix. and xx.) and to a deformity and separation from the rest of the world in their conversation, from whom God had separated them in profession and privileges, Lev. xviii. 24. But behold what unlikeness there is between God and his people. If ye were to paint out to the life a heathen people, you needed no other image or pattern to copy at but this same description of this people. It is this that makes Moses in the preface turn to the heavens and earth, and call them to hear his song, and Isaiah begins his preaching thus, “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, &c.” A strange thing it must be, that senseless creatures are called to wonder at. It must surpass all the wonders and prodigies of nature and art. And what is that? “I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me,” &c. If we consider what this people seemed once to be, and thought themselves to be, we may easily know how they corrupted themselves. If ye look on them at one time, (Exod. xix. 8, Deut. v. 27,) ye would call them children. There was never a fairer undertaking of obedience than this, “All that the Lord hath spoken we will do,” so that the Lord commends them for speaking well, verse 28, “They have well said all that they have spoken,” verse 29, “O that there were such an heart in

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them!” But compare all this people's practice with this profession, and you shall find it exceeding contrary; they indeed corrupted themselves, though they got warning to take heed of it. “Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves, lest ye corrupt yourselves,” Deut. iv. 15, 16. But alas, it was within them that destroyed them; there was not such a heart in them as to hear and obey, but they undertake, being ignorant of their own deceitful hearts, which were desperately wicked. And therefore, behold what corruption ensued and followed upon such a professed resolution. They never sooner promised obedience, but they disobeyed; they did abominable works, and did no good, and this is to corrupt their way, Psalm xiv. 1, &c. We need not instance this longer in this people, we ourselves are a sufficient proof of it. We may make this song our own, “we have corrupted ourselves.” Once we had a fair show of zeal for God, of love and desire of reformation of life, many solemn undertakings were that we should amend our ways and doings, but what is the fruit of all? Alas, we have

as a counter association to the Holy League, which had been formed by the most powerful popish princes in Europe with a view to extirpate the reformed religion. When the national covenant was renewed in 1638, and once more subscribed by all classes of the community, the Bond which accompanied it was altered to suit the circumstances of the times. It expressed a solemn determination on the part of those who subscribed it to aim at “a personal reformation,” as well as a resolution to withhold their sanction from the late innovations in religion, “till they be tried and allowed in free Assemblies, and in Parliaments.” These are the words—“And because we cannot look for a blessing from God upon our proceedings, except with our profession and subscription we join such a life and conversation as besemeth Christians who have renewed their covenant with God. We therefore faithfully promise for ourselves, our followers, and all others under us, both in public, and in our particular families and personal carriage, to endeavour to keep ourselves within the bounds of Christian liberty, and to be good examples to others of all godliness, soberness, and righteousness, and of every duty we owe to God and man” (Dunlop's Confessions vol. II., p. 136.). The following corresponding clause is contained in the Solemn League and Covenant, which was ratified by the parliaments both of England and Scotland, and subscribed generally by the people of both kingdoms in 1643, and renewed in Scotland in 1648.—“And because these kingdoms are guilty of many sins and provocations against God,

corrupted ourselves more than they. Israel promised, but we vowed and swore to the Most High, reformation and amendment of life in our conversations and callings. Lay this rule to our practices, and are we not a perverse and crooked generation? Oh! that we were more affected with our corruptions, and were more sensible of them, then we could not choose but mourn for our own and the land's departing from God. Did not every man vow and swear to the most high God to endeavour reformation of his life, even a personal reformation?²⁶⁵ But alas, where is it? "He that is filthy" is "filthy still." Nay, which is worse, the evil man waxeth worse and worse. There is a great noise of a public reformation of ordinances and worship, but alas, the deformation of life and practice outcries all that noise. Nay, certainly all that is done in the public, must come to no account before God since our practices outcry it. Public reformation is abomination, where personal corruptions do not cease. This made the Jews' solemn

and his Son Jesus Christ, as is too manifest by our present distresses and dangers, the fruits thereof, we profess and declare before God and the world, our unfeigned desire to be humbled for our own sins, and for the sins of these kingdoms, especially that we have not, as we ought, valued the inestimable benefit of the gospel; that we have not laboured for the purity and power thereof, and that we have not endeavoured to receive Christ in our hearts, nor to walk worthy of him in our lives, which are the causes of other sins and transgressions so much abounding among us, and our true and unfeigned purpose, desire, and endeavour for ourselves, and all others under our power and charge, both in public and in private, in all duties we owe to God and to man, to amend our lives, and each one to go before another in the example of a real reformation, that the Lord may turn away his wrath and heavy indignation, and establish these churches and kingdoms in truth and peace."—*Ed.*]

²⁶⁵ [When the national covenant was first subscribed by King James and his household, and by persons of all ranks, in the year 1581, a number of Jesuits and popish priests had unexpectedly made their appearance in the country. Various dispensations from the Pope likewise had been intercepted, whereby the Catholics were permitted to *promise, swear, subscribe, and do what else should be required of them, so as in mind they continued firm, and did use their diligence to advance in secret the Roman faith.* These dispensations, says Archbishop Spotswood, "being showed to the king, he caused his minister,

days hateful, their hands were “full of blood.” Isa. i. 15. All that ye have spent on the public will never be reckoned, since ye will not consecrate your lives to God, will not give your lusts up to him. Ye are his enemies in the mean time, though you account yourselves religion's friends. I beseech you consider your ways. Would any of us have thought to have seen such profanity, mocking of godliness, and ignorance in Scotland in so short a time? Nay, it is to be feared that the day is not far off, when ye will corrupt yourselves, and do abominable things, yea, defile yourselves as ill as the nations that know not God.

Every man useth to impute his faults to something beside himself. Ere men take with their own iniquity, they will charge God that gave no more grace, but if men knew themselves, they would deduce their corruption and destruction both from one fountain, that is, from themselves. Ignorance of ourselves maketh us oft undertake fair, and promise so well on our own head. What was the fountain of this people's corruption, and apostatizing from their professions? The Lord hints at it, Deut. v. 29, &c. “Oh that they had such a heart.” Alas, poor people, ye know not yourselves, that speak so well. I know thee better than thou dost thyself, I will declare unto thee thy own thought, thou hast not such a heart as to do what thou sayest; there is a desperate wicked heart within thee, that will destroy thee by

Mr John Craig, form a short confession of faith, wherein all the corruptions of Rome, as well in doctrine as outward rites, were particularly abjured and a clause inserted (because of these dispensations) by which the subscribers did call God to witness that in their minds and hearts they did fully agree to the said confession, and did not feign or dissemble in any sort. This confession [or covenant] the king, for an example to others, did publicly swear and subscribe; the like was done by the whole council and court.” (Hist. of Ch. of Scotland, pp. 308, 309). By an ordinance of council and at the desire of the General Assembly, the national covenant, along with a Bond for the maintenance of the true religion, and the safety of the king's person and government, was again subscribed by persons of all ranks in the year 1590. This Bond had been previously entered into and signed by his majesty, and various men of rank and station in the kingdom, in anticipation of the threatened Spanish invasion, and

lying unto thee. If thou knewest this fountain of original corruption, thou wouldest despair of doing, and say, I cannot serve the Lord. Now here is the fountain of the land's corruption this day. Why is our way corrupted? Because our hearts within were not cleansed, and because they were not known. If we had dried up the fountain, the streams had ceased, but we did only dam it up, and cut off some streams for a season; we set up our resolutions and purposes as an hedge to hold it in, but the sea of the heart's iniquity, that is above all things, hath overflowed it, and defiled our way more than in former times. Ye thought upon no other thing, but that presently ye would be all changed people, and would reform without more ado,—and thus it is with you in all your public repentances. But alas! you know not yourselves, it is still within you which will yet corrupt you, and it was within us that hath undone us, we were too confident of ourselves, and it is no wonder that the Lord suffers us to prove ourselves, that we may know what is in our heart. Now, therefore, since ye have so often tried it, I beseech you follow not such a way again. Ye are called to deny yourselves, and to follow Christ and this is a great part of it, that ye may never expect for any good within yourselves, or the helping of any evil. “In me is thy help found.” Look to the fountain of life, Jesus Christ, and despair of your own hearts, for they are desperately wicked, so wicked, that if ye knew them, ye would despair of them, and give them over to another hand, who can create a new heart within you. Ye use to impute your backslidings to the times, to temptations, to company, and such like. This is the way that men shift the challenges of sin: the drunkard puts it on his companion, the servant on his master that led him wrong, the people put rulers in the fault, and absolve themselves, and rulers put one another in the wrong, and absolve themselves. But, alas! all of us are ignorant of ourselves; it is not times nor temptations that corrupt us, but ourselves. No man is tempted, saith James, of God, “but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust

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and enticed,” James i. 14. Temptation were no temptation, if our hearts were not wicked hearts. Nay, many of us are ready to tempt temptations, to provoke the devil to temptations; we cast ourselves open to temptations. Temptations find lust within, and lust within is the mother to conceive sin, if temptation be the father. Times do not bring evils along with them, they do but discover what was hid before. All the evils and corruptions you now see among us, where were they in the day of our first love, when we were as a loving and beloved child? Have all these risen up of late? No certainly, all that you have seen and found were before, though they did not appear; before they were in the root, now you see the fruit. All the apostacy and profanity that hath been vented in these days, was all shut up within the corners of men's hearts at the beginning. Time and temptation hath but uncovered the heart, and made the inside out, hath but opened a sluice to let out this sea of corruption. It is not bred since, but seen since.

Now so it is with us, we have corrupted ourselves, and so we corrupt ourselves still more. Backsliding cometh on as gray hairs, here and there and is not perceived by beholders. *Nemo repente fit turpissimus.*²⁶⁶ No man becometh worst at first. There are many steps between that and good. Corruption comes on men's ways as in fruits, some one part beginneth to alter, and then it groweth worse, and putrifieth and corrupteth the rest of the parts. An apple rots not all at once, so it is with us. Men begin at leisure, but they run post before all be done. In some one step of our way we take liberty and think to keep the rest clean, but when that part is corrupted, “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump,” and all followeth: and then he that corrupted himself, is ready to corrupt others. “Children that are corrupters,” Isa. i. 4. Every one by his example corrupts another, and by corrupting others they again corrupt themselves more. Oh! how infectious

²⁶⁶ [Nemo repente fuit turpissimus—Juv. Sat. II. v. 83.]

an evil is sin, of a pestilentious nature, and truly our hearts are more ready to receive such impressions, than either a world or a devil is to make them.

“Their spot is not.” Why doth the Lord take pleasure to reckon their sins, to describe so abominable a people? Is not this Jacob in whom he saw no iniquity?²⁶⁷ Is not this Israel, whose transgressions are not known?²⁶⁸ Certainly if this people would have charged themselves so, he would not have done it. He loves to forget, when we remember our sins, but he must remember them when we forget them. What is the Lord's great controversy with men? Here it is,—How can ye say or think that ye are not polluted? Or if ye take with such a general, yet, why is not the conviction of your sin and misery so deeply engraven, as to pursue you out of all hope of remedy in yourselves, (Jer. ii. 22, 23)? “And therefore is thine iniquity marked before me, saith the Lord.” God hath determined not to wrong his justice. If men should go away unpunished and unjudged both, where were his righteousness? If there were no record of men's transgressions, were he a righteous judge? Therefore, those who do not judge themselves must leave judgment to him, for once the mouth of all flesh must be stopped, and all become guilty before God. Why pleads the Lord with man? Because man says, “I am innocent, I have not sinned, his anger will turn away,” Jer. ii. 35. Will any speak so in terms? No indeed, but the Lord constructs so of the most part, because they do more consider the wrongs done to them, than their own wrongs done to God. All men confess the general, that they are sinners, but who searches and tries his way to find out particulars? And in as far as ye do not charge yourselves with particular guiltiness, until ye be afraid of his anger, as long as the consideration of your sins is so superficial and shallow, that ye apprehend no danger of wrath, or immunity from it, certainly God will plead with you. Justice must so far be

²⁶⁷ [Num. xxiii. 21.—*Ed.*]

²⁶⁸ [Jer. i. 20.—*Ed.*]

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glorified, as once to conclude you under the sentence of death; if ye do it not now, then ye leave God to be your judge and party. But if any man shall take with his guiltiness, till his mouth be stopped, and condemn himself in God's sight, I say, mercy and grace in God must not be wronged, he that judges himself shall not be judged of the Lord. What a fair offer is this to you all the Lord offers to you! If ye will in time be your own judges, I will resign my judgment to you. If you will in earnest pass the sentence, I will neither pass it nor execute it. If ye come to the Mediator, Christ Jesus, to escape from the wrath of a judge, you shall meet with a reconciled Father, and with such love in him as shall hide a multitude of offences. O the depth, and height, and breadth of that love! Well then, it shall be a sea to cast your offences into, that shall drown them. Had not his people many spots? Is there any man can say, I have cleansed my heart from iniquity? No, not one. Yet behold, he sees no spots in his people. He doth not make them his people because spotless, but he seeth them spotless, because he makes them his people. There is no covering that can hide men's uncleanness from his piercing eye, but one even Jesus Christ his righteousness, and "Blessed is he whose sins are covered." If this covering were spread over the mouth of all hell, then hell should have a covering from his eyes. If ye therefore strip yourselves naked of your own pretences and leaves, and think not yourselves secure under any created shelter. If ye hide not your iniquity, then it shall be hid indeed, here is a covering that shall hide it from his eyes. There is no spot so heinous, none so ingrained, but the blood of Jesus can wash it as perfectly out, as if it had never been, Isa. i. 16, 17. Though your spots were such as are not incident to his children, yet this blood cleanses from one and all, it is of an infinite nature. But though it be so, that the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin, that there is a fountain opened in the house of David for sin and for uncleanness, for sin and separation, for such heinous offences as may separate people even from the congregation of the Lord's

people, yet there are some sins, some spots, that ordinarily his people are not defiled with, and in this respect they may be called holy and undefiled in the way. There are some marks and characters of unregenerated men so legible and express, that we may even read from men's conversation, that they are not the children of God. Though the blood of Christ wash from all, yet the child of God ordinarily is kept from some kind of spots, so that if a man shall be spotted with them it is no marvel he question if he be a child or not. There are two, which I think so gross and unclean spots that I cannot conceive how a soul washen by Jesus Christ can be defiled with them. One is, a course of profanity. The common walk of the multitude is so gross and profane, so void of God and godliness, that it witnesseth to their face that they are not the sons of God. "He that is born of God sinneth not; he maketh not sin his way and trade to walk into, and please himself into." What are the most part of you, I pray you? Is your spot like the spot of his children? Do not ye declare your sin as Sodom, ye drunkards, who wallow in it daily, and though ye profess repentance, yet never amend? Ye who have a custom of swearing and blaspheming his holy name, do not ye carry in your forehead a spot that is not like his children? The child of God may fall in many particulars, but it is not the spot of a child to continue in them to add drunkenness to thirst, and yet to dream of escaping wrath. I pray you, consider it, for it is of great moment. Do ye carry such a black mark,—the devils mark? O do not think yourselves safe. May not this persuade you? Do but compare yourselves in your converse and walk with an heathen without the church. Set aside your public profession of coming to the church, and hearing the word, and church privileges, and is the difference visible between you and them? Many of you pray no more in secret or in your families than they. Ye curse and swear as they, ye are covetous and worldly as they. If ye can, do but draw a line of difference, and if ye cannot, then I ask, what are ye? Is not this the spot of bastards? Another spot is,

hatred of godliness and the godly. This is indeed the most lively image of the devil: who hates his brother is of the devil. He that hates the Son, can he love the Father? he that hates him that is begotten, hates also him that begat him and he that loves him that begat, loves him that is begotten. Now, how can he be begotten of God, who hates that nature he is said to partake of—who hates him that is begotten? I wonder that many of your consciences are not touched with this? How can ye imagine ye are children of God, when there are none of your neighbours that your heart riseth more against, that ye can less abide, than those who seek God most diligently, whose conversation is different from the worlds? Do not flatter yourselves, as if it were hypocrisy ye hated. No, no ye can agree with profanity, and how can ye hate hypocrisy? Ye can agree with a profane hypocrite—with a profane man, that feigns and dissembles repentance but if once he were so thoroughly changed, as to hate his former way, and forsake it, then your antipathy beginneth. What a ridiculous thing is it for profanity to take upon it to censure hypocrisy! Certainly if profanity cast out with hypocrisy, it must be because it hath a form of godliness, which it so much detesteth. It is a strange hatred at godliness that a profane man hath, that he cannot abide the very shadow of it. I beseech you who love not holiness in your own persons, who hate to be reformed yourselves, do not add this height of sin to it, as to hate it in others also. If ye be not godly yourselves, do not add this declared manifest character of a child of the devil to it, to hate godliness in others. There were some hope of you, if ye held it in reverence and estimation where ye saw it. There are many other spots not incident to his children, as this, that men will not take with their sin and the curse. It is a great difficulty to convince the most part of men how miserable they are, how void of God. All the world will not put them out of a good opinion of themselves, and I think this hath been the spot of this people, they would not take with their guiltiness—a stubborn hearted people, wholehearted.

There needs no more to declare a number of you not to be God's children, but this,—ye have lived all your time in the opinion and belief that ye were God's children, that ye believed in him, ye never saw yourselves lost and miserable. This was the spot of this people that they esteemed themselves children, though they had many spots that testified to their face that they were no children. They waxed worse and worse, neither mercies nor judgments amended them. “When he slew them,” it may be, “they sought him, and flattered him with their mouth, but their hearts were not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant,” Psal. lxxviii. 34. Ye would have thought them a godly people, while under the rod for a season, but all that was but extorted and pressed out by violence of affliction, as the groans of a beast under a burden. But a little time declared that it was but flattery, though they thought themselves ingenuous, and therefore they returned to their old provocations, as a sow to the puddle, or a dog to his vomit. And is not this our spot, even the spot of great and small? If any would look upon us in our engagements and vows under trouble, we appear like his people, a praying, repenting, and believing people,²⁶⁹ but how quickly doth all this prove flattery? Do we not still return to our old ways that we have been exemplarily punished for, and which we so solemnly engaged against? The heat of the furnace dieth out,

²⁶⁹ [“About the time of the first renewing of the covenant, there was a sensible change to the better in men's carriage and conversation, most of all those who joined in opposing the defection not only reforming themselves from common and gross sins such as drunkenness, uncleanness, swearing, profaning the Lord's day, slighting of the ordinances, self seeking, covetousness, oppression, &c., but giving themselves to the duties of religion and righteousness, such as sobriety, edifying discourse, chaste behaviour, hallowing of the Lord's day, diligent seeking of the Lord in secret and in their families, attending on the preaching of the word as often as opportunity is offered, liberality, love, charity one toward another, a public spirit and zeal for God. But all these things are now decayed in many and they are again grown as ill if not worse than before.” Causes of the Lord's Wrath against Scotland. pp. 48, 49. Printed in the year 1653.—*Ed.*]

and they wax colder and harder, a little time wears away all their tenderness. Every man seeks his own things, and no man seeks the things of Jesus Christ. This was this people's sin and spot. "Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation." When their heads were lifted up to government, when they were raised out of the waters of affliction and poverty, then they forgot God, they oppressed the poor and needy, eat up his people as bread, and could not abide to have their faults told them, they said to the seers, "See not, and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things," &c. Isa. xxx. 10. I think likewise, that oppression is not the spot of his children, whoever uses it. And covetousness presses men to it, when power is in their hand to compass it. This is a vile spot, unworthy of any ruler, let be²⁷⁰ a Christian. It was abhorred among Pagans. O but it cries to heaven, saith the Scripture, it hath a double cry when other sins cry once! The heinousness of it crieth once, and the poor people cry again, and both these come up to the ears of the Lord of hosts, nay, it hath the cry of murder, and another beside. He that is greedy of gain, is said to take away the life of the owners thereof, Prov. i, 19. So he is a murderer before God, and the poor man's blood crieth for vengeance, and then himself seconds it either by prayer, or crying out for misery, Job xxxv. 9. All men's prayers and professions will not outcry these two. The people's many prayers could not be heard, (Isa. i. 15), because their hands were "full of blood," which had a louder cry than their prayers. The poor also oppressing the poor, is like a sweeping rain that leaves nothing behind it.

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It is read in the margin, "that they are not his children,—that is their blot." And indeed it is so. It is a great blot and stain in the face of any man whoever he be, that he is not born of God—that he can reckon kindred to none but Adam. But what indignity is it and disgrace, for a people professing his name, yet to have

²⁷⁰ [Much less.—*Ed.*]

no other generation, to reckon no higher than the earth and the earthly. What is now the great blot of our visible church? Here it is, the most part are not God's children, but called so; and it is the greater blot that they are called so, and are not.²⁷¹ O poor saints, esteem your honour and high privilege; ye have received this, to be the sons of God! It is no blot to you that you are poor and despised in the world; but it is and shall be an eternal blot to the great and rich, and wise in the world, that they are not the children of God. Christianity is no blot, though it be in reproach among men, but it is really the glory and excellency of a man; but the want of it, alas! how doth it abase many high and noble, impoverish many rich, and infatuate many wise! Ye think all of you are the children of God, because ye are in the church, and partake of the ordinances and sacraments; and so did this people. But Moses did not flatter these Jews, but told both princes and people in their face, that they were not children of God, because

²⁷¹ [An inference unfavourable to the religious character of the countrymen of Binning, has been too hastily drawn from this and some other passages in his works. (Orme's Mem. of Dr. Owen, p. 129). The late Dr M'Crie observed, that this was like "the attempts of popish writers to prove the *Reformation* a *Deformation*, by culling quotations from the sermons of such Protestant preachers as inveighed most freely against prevailing vices." (Christ. Inst. vol. xx. p. 624). In the "Representation, Propositions, and Protestations," however, "of divers Ministers, Elders, and Professors," printed in the year 1652, and probably about the time this sermon was preached, it is affirmed, that the religious aspect of the country had undergone an unhappy change, in the course of the two preceding years. "If we look back," it is said, p. 3 "to that which we have already attained of the work of Reformation, (notwithstanding our short-coming in the power and practice of godliness,) what purity was there of worship, what soundness of doctrine, unity of faithful pastors, order and authority of assemblies, what endeavours for promoting the power of godliness, for purging of the ministry, judicatories and armies, and for employing such in places of power and trust as were of constant integrity and good affection to the cause, and of blameless conversation? And again, if we consider how in place of these, within these two years, have succeeded, for unity, division, for order, confusion, for purity of worship, outward contempt; for the power of godliness, atheism and profaneness; for purging of the ministry, judicatories

only Israel in the letter, they had not children's manners. O that it might not be said of the most part of you, that ye are not children of God, and that that is your blot and shame! It is the shame of rulers not to be the children of God. They are wise, they are active, they are noble, but one spot disgraceth all, one fly maketh their ointment to stink, they are not gracious, many of them, but sons of men at the farthest reckoning, are not begotten again to a lively hope. "Not many wise, not many noble, not many rich." The scantiness of gracious men is the spot of judicatories,²⁷² that there are many children of the world, but few children of light in them. O how beautiful and glorious would judicatories be, if all the members were children of light! What glory would there be, if all of them did shine and enlightened one another! But what beauty or comeliness, what majesty can be in rulers or judicatures, when the image of God is not in them! This is also the spot of assemblies, synods, presbyteries, that there are few godly ministers. Alas, that this complaint should be, even among

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ut supra, pp. 11, 12). The protesters, moreover, are found complaining at this period, "how gracious and well qualified elders are removed and kept out from church judicatories, and ignorant and profane persons brought in, and more endeavoured to be brought in in their room, how gifted and gracious young men are debarred from entering into the ministry, and a door is opened to others, whereof some are loose and profane, and many are ignorant and strangers to the work of the Lord upon their own hearts."—Letter from Protesters, subscribed in the name of many ministers, &c. met at Edinburgh, 17th of March 1653, by Mr. Andrew Cant, p. 6. See what is said in reply to this, in "The Asserter's Answer," printed in the same year, p. 18.—*Ed.*]

and armies, sinful mixtures; for zeal, lukewarmness and toleration,—it is too palpable that we are far gone on in the way of declining, having lost much of that which we had attained, and that which remains being ready to die."—*Ed.*]

²⁷² [The author and the other protesters disapproved not only of the proceedings of the civil and ecclesiastical judicatures, but of the composition of these courts, after the act of classes had been rescinded on the 30th of May, 1651. In consequence of the repeal of this act, they who, on account of what was in the language of the times called malignancy, had formerly been excluded from their places in the Scottish parliament, were allowed to take possession of their seats, by signing a bond, the terms of which the parliament prescribed. This the protesters considered to be wrong as a matter both of policy and principle. They

those whose office it is to beget many children to God! How few of them are begotten, or have the image of their Father! And thus church assemblies have no beauty, such as the courts of Jesus Christ should have. O that we were in love with Christianity and grace; that it were our grand question, how shall I be put among the children? The Lord seems to wonder at it, and make a question of it, How can such as we be put among the children? Jer. iii. 19. But he answers it himself, "Thou shalt call me, My Father, and shall not turn away from me." There is no more to do, but to take with²⁷³ your wanderings and wrongs done to God, embrace him in Jesus Christ, and he becomes your Father; and if ye be children, sure ye will resolve to abide in your Father's house, and turn no more to a present world, or your former lusts.

They are a "perverse and crooked generation." What pleasure hath the Lord in speaking thus, when he upbraids none? Certainly, in a manner it is drawn out of him. Would he object our faults, if we did not defend them by obstinacy? Perverseness and crookedness is obstinacy and incorrigibleness against mercies and judgments,—“that that which is crooked cannot be made straight,” saith Solomon. Then doth the Lord take notice of sins, when men refuse to return, and so maintain their sins. It is this which heightens provocations, and makes out the controversy,—perverseness in sin. It is not ordinary common infirmities that the Lord punisheth, either in a land or person; but when

likewise declared the assembly, which in July, 1651, met at St. Andrews, and afterwards adjourned to Dundee, and also that which was held in Edinburgh, in July, 1652, to be "unlawful and corrupt," adding, that "although with the renewing of the national covenant, and with the casting out of prelates, and the corruptions introduced by them, the Lord was graciously pleased to give repentance to not a few who were involved in that defection; yet, since that time, there hath always remained a corrupt party of insufficient, scandalous, and ill-affected ministers in the kirk, enemies to the power of godliness, and obstructors to the work of reformation, ... that party perceiving that they were not able to endure trial in a time of reformation and purging, began the last year to lift up their heads, and speak a language of their own," &c. (Representation,²⁷³ [Acknowledge.—*Ed.*])

infirmities are discovered by the light of the word, when the Lord useth means to reclaim men in his providence, and yet no means prevail, then are they reckoned perverse. Now, perverseness is not the spot of his children: the child of God daily bows and folds to him, receives challenges from him, takes with iniquity and yields unto God. O that this title might not be written above the head of this generation deservedly—“This is a perverse and crooked generation!”