

Sermon VI.

Prov. xxvii. 1.—“Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.”

There are some peculiar gifts that God hath given to man in his first creation, and endued his nature with, beyond other living creatures, which being rightly ordered and improved towards the right objects, do advance the soul of man to a wonderful height of happiness, that no other sublunary creature is capable of. But by reason of man's fall into sin, these are quite disordered and turned out of the right channel; and, therefore, as the right improvement of them would make man happy, so the wrong employment of them loadens him with more real misery than any other creature. I mean, God hath given to man two notable capacities beyond other things;—one is, to know and reflect upon himself, and to consider what conveniency is in any thing towards himself,—what goodness or advantage redounds to himself from them, and in that reflection and comparison to enjoy what he hath; another is to look forward beyond the present time, and, as it were, to anticipate and prevent the slow motions of time, by a kind of foresight and providence. In a word, he is a creature framed unto more understanding than others, and so capable of more joy in present things, and more foresight of the time to come. He is made mortal, yet with an immortal spirit of an immortal capacity, that hath its eye upon the morrow,—upon eternity. Now, herein consists either man's happiness or misery, how he reflects upon himself, and what he chooseth for the matter of his joy and gloriation, and what providence he hath for the time to come. If those be rightly ordered, all is well; but if not, then woe unto him, there is more hope of a beast than of him.

[387]

Man's nature inclines to boasting—to glorying in something, and this ariseth from some apprehended excellency or advantage, and so is originated in the understanding power of man, which

is far above beasts. Beasts find the things themselves, but they do not, they cannot reflect upon their own enjoyment of them, and therefore they are not capable of such pleasure; for the more distinct knowledge of things in relation to ourselves, the more delight ensueth upon it. Many creatures have singular qualities and virtues, but they are nothing the happier; for they know them not, and have no use of them, but are wholly destinated to the use of man, who therefore is only said to enjoy them, because he only is capable of joy from them. And this, I suppose, may give us a hint at the absolute incomprehensible blessedness, self-complacency, and delight of God. It cannot but be immeasurably great, seeing the knowledge of himself and all creatures is infinite; he comprehends all his own power, and virtue, and goodness, and therefore his delight and rejoicing is answerable. There is a glorying and boasting then that is good, which man is naturally framed unto; and this is that which David expresses, Psal. xxxiv. 2, "My soul shall make her boast in God;" and Psal. xlv. 8, "In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever." When the soul apprehends that all-sufficiency, and self-sufficient fulness of God; what infinite treasures of goodness, and wisdom, and power are in him, and so how suitable and convenient he is to the condition of the soul; what a sweet correspondence there is between his fulness and our emptiness—his mercy and our misery—his infiniteness and our unsuitableness; that there is in him to fill and overflow the soul: the apprehension of this cannot but in a manner perfume the soul with the delight. You find how the senses are refreshed, when they meet with their suitable object; how a pleasant smell refresheth the scent; how lively and beautiful colours are delightful to the eye. But much more here, God is the proportioned object of the immortal spirit; he corresponds to all its capacities, and fills it with unconceivable sweetness. But, my beloved, boasting and glorying in him, ariseth not only from the proportionableness and conveniency of him to our spirits; but this must be superadded,—propriety in him. Things are loved,

because excellent in themselves, or because they are our own; but we boast in nothing, we glory in nothing, but because it is both excellent in itself, and ours besides. It is the apprehended interest in any thing makes the soul rise and lift up itself after this manner,—to have such a one to be ours,—such a Lord to be our God,—one so high and sublime,—one so universally full, to be made over to thee; here is the immediate rise of the soul's gloriation. And truly, as there is nothing can be so suitable a portion, so there is nothing that can be so truly made ours as God. Of all things a believer hath, there is nothing so much his own as God,—nothing so indissolubly tied unto him,—nothing so inseparably joined. See Paul's triumph upon that account, Rom. viii. Nothing can truly be said to be the soul's own, but that which is not only coetaneous with it, that survives mortality, and the changes of the body, but likewise is inseparable from it. What a poor empty sound is all that can be spoken of him, till your souls be once possessed of him! it cannot make your hearts leap within you, but it cannot but excite and stir up a believer's heart.

Now there may be a lawful kind of gloriation, rejoicing in the works of God, consequent to the first, which is a little stream from that greater river which runs out from it, and flows into it again. A soul that truly apprehends God will take delight to view the works of God, which make such an expression of him, and are a part of the magnificence of our heavenly Father. But this is all in reference to him and not to ourselves; for then it degenerates and loseth its sweetness, when once it turns the channel towards the adorning of the creature. True boasting in God hath necessarily conjoined with it an humble and low esteem of a man's self, Psal. xxxiv. 2, "The humble shall hear thereof, and be glad." As humility and self-emptiness made David go out of himself, to seek satisfaction in God, and having found it, he boasts and triumphs, so there were none capable of understanding his triumph, or partaking with him in his delights, but the humble souls. Now

you may perceive how far this boasting here spoken of is degenerated from that, and so how far man's nature is spoiled,—“Boast not thyself,” &c. The true boasting we were created unto, hath a sufficient foundation, even such as will bear the weight of triumph, but that which men's spirits are now naturally set upon, cannot carry, cannot sound such gloriation, and therefore this boasting makes men ridiculous. If you saw a man glorying in rags, setting forth himself to be admired in them, or boasting in some vain, despicable, and base thing, you would pity him, or laugh at him as one distempered. The truth is, the natural man is mad, hath lost his judgment, and is under the greatest distraction imaginable since the fall. That fall hath troubled his brains, and they are never settled, till the new creation come to put all right again, and compose the heart of man. I say, all other distractions are but particular, in respect to particular things, but there is a general distraction over all mankind, in reference to things of most general and most eternal concernment. Now, fools and mad persons, they retain the same affections and passions that are in men, as anger, love, hatred, grief, joy, &c., but it is so much the worse, since the judgment, which is the only directive and guide of them, is troubled. Now they are set on wrong objects, they run at random, and are under no kind of rule, and so they hurry the poor man and put him in a pitiful case. Now indeed so it is with us,—since sin entered, the soul is wholly turned off God, the only true object of delight, in which only there can be solid gloriation. The mind of man is blinded, and his passions are strong, and so they are now spent upon empty vanities, and carried headlong without judgment. Oftentimes he glories in that which is his shame, and boasts in that which is his sin, and which will cause nothing but shame, the more weight be laid upon it. There is in man an oblivion and forgetfulness of God, and in this darkness of the ignorance of God, everything is apprehended or misapprehended as present sense suggests, and as it fancies a conveniency or excellency. Thither the soul is carried, as if it

were something, and then it is but the east-wind. There is nothing beside God that is a fit matter of boasting, because it lacks one of the essential ingredients—either it is not suitable to the soul, or it is not truly our own. There wants either proportion to the vast capacity and void of our desires, and so cannot fill up that really, but only in a deluding dream or imagination, and therefore will certainly make the issue rather vexation than gloriation, or there wants property and interest in them, for they are changeable and perishing in their own nature, and by divine appointment, that they cannot be conceived to be the proper good of the immortal soul. They cannot be truly our own, because they will shortly cease to be, and before they cease to be, they may in a moment cease to be ours. That tie of interest is a draw knot, whatsoever catcheth hold of the end of it looseth it.

The object of degenerate and vicious boasting is here held out: “Boast not thyself,” or “of thyself.” Whatsoever be the immediate matter of it, this is always the ultimate and principal object. Since man fell from God, self is the centre of all his affections and motions. This is the great idol, the Diana, that the heart worships, and all the contention, labour, clamour, and care that is among men, is about her silver shrines, so to speak, something relating to the adorning or setting forth this idol. It is true, since the heart is turned from that direct subordination to God, the affections are scattered and parted into infinite channels, and run towards innumerable objects, for the want of that original unity, which comprehends in its bosom universal plenty, must needs breed infinite variety, to supply the insatiable appetite of the soul. And this might be enough to convince you, that your souls are quite out of course, and altogether wandered from the way of happiness because they are poured out on such a multiplicity of insufficient, unsatisfying things, every one of which is narrow, limited and empty, and the combination and concurrence of all being a thing either impossible or improbable to be attained. But we may conceive that men's affections put themselves into three

great heads of created things, one of which runs towards the goods or perfections of the mind, another towards the goods or advantages of the body, and a third towards those things that are without us, *bona fortunæ*, riches and honour, &c. Now each of these sends out many streams and rivulets as so many branches from it, but all of them, though they seem to have a direct course towards other things, yet wind about and make a circular progress to the great ocean of self-estimation, whence they issued at first. [389]

You may find all of these, (Jer. ix. 23,) falling under a divine interdiction and curse, as being opposite to glorying in God. While men reflect within themselves, and behold some endowments and abilities in their minds beyond other men, of which wisdom is the principal, and here stands for all inward advantages or qualifications of the soul in that secret reflection and comparison, there is a tacit gloriation, which yet is a loud blasphemy in God's ears. It is impossible almost for a man to recognise²⁷⁵ and review his own parts such as ingine,²⁷⁶ memory, understanding, sharpness of wit, readiness of expression, goodness and gentleness of nature, but that in such a review, the soul must be puffed up, apprehending some excellency beyond other men, and taking complacency in it, which are the two acts of robbery that are in gloriation and boasting. Commonly this arises from unequal comparisons. We please ourselves that we are *deterioribus meliores*, "better than the worst," and build self-estimation upon the ruins of other men's disadvantages, as if it were any point of praise in us that they are worse, like men that stand upon a height, and measure their own altitude, not from their just intrinsic quantity, but taking the advantage of the

²⁷⁵ [Recognise.—*Ed.*]

²⁷⁶ [That is, genius or ingenuity (from *ingenium*, Lat.) "But gif corporall doth be commoun to all. Why will ye jeopardde to lois eternall life to eschap that which neither ryche nor pure, neither wise nor ignorant, proud of stomoke nor febill of corage, and finally, no earthlie creature by no craft or engine of man, did ever avoid?" Letter of John Knox from Dieppe.—*Ed.*]

bottom, whereby we deceive our own selves. I remember a word of Solomon's, that imports how dangerous a thing it is for a man to reflect upon, or search into his own glory, Prov. xxv. 27. "It is not good to eat much honey, so for men to search their own glory is not glory."

To surfeit in the excess of honey or sweet things drives to vomit, and cloyes the stomach, ver. 16. Though it be sweet, there is great need, yea, the more need of caution and moderation about it, so for a man either to search into his own breast, and reflect upon his own excellencies, to find matter of gloriation or studiously to affect it among others, and inquire into other men's account and esteem of him, it is no glory—it is a dangerous and shameful folly. Now this is not only incident to natural spirits, upon their consideration of their own advantages, but even to the most gracious, upon the review of spiritual endowments and prerogatives. It is such a subtle and insinuating poison that it spreads universally, and infects the most precious ointments of the soul, and, as it were, poisons the very antidote and counterpoison. So forcible is this that was first dropped into man's nature by Satan's envy, that it diffuses itself even into humility, and humiliation itself, and makes a man proud because of humility. The apostle found need to caveat this, Rom. xi. 18-20, "Boast not," "be not high minded, but fear,"—"thou standest by faith," and chap. xii. 16, "Mind not high things," "be not wise in your own conceits," and 1 Cor. viii. 2, "If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing as he ought to know." All which gives us a plain demonstration of this, that self gloriation and complacency, in reflection upon ourselves, is both the greatest ignorance and the worst sacrilege. It is an argument of greater ignorance for a man to think he knows than not to know indeed. It is the worst and most dangerous ignorance, to have such an opinion of our knowledge, gifts, and graces, for that puffs up, swells with empty wind, and makes a vain tumour and then it is great sacrilege, a robbing of the honour that is due to God. For what hast thou

that thou hast not received? That appropriating of these things to ourselves as ours, is an impropriating of them from their right owner, that is, God, 1 Cor. iv. 7. For if thou didst apprehend that thou received it, where then is glorying? I would desire then, that whenever you happen to reflect upon yourselves, and observe any advantage, either natural or spiritual, in yourselves, that you may think this word sounds from heaven, "Let him that glorieth glory in the Lord." Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, and so not the learned man in his learning, nor the eloquent man in his speaking nor the ingenious man in his quickness nor the good man in his goodness. All these things though sweet, yet will surfeit, gloriation in them is neither glory nor gain, neither honourable nor profitable.

[390]

Then the stream of gloriation flows in the channel of bodily gifts as might, strength of body, beauty and comeliness of parts, and other such endowments which, besides that it is as irrational as the former, is a sacrilegious impropriation of the most free and arbitrary gifts of God to ourselves, it is withal absurd, in that it is not so truly of ourselves. These bodily ornaments and endowments do not perfect or better a man as a man, they are but the alterable qualities of the vessel or tabernacle of a man, in which other baser creatures may far excel him. How many comely and beautiful souls are lodged within obscure and ugly cottages or bodies of clay, which will be taken down! And the great advantage is, that the soul of a man, which is a man, cannot be defiled from without, that is, from the body, though never so loathsome or deformed, the vilest body cannot mar the soul's beauty. But then, on the other hand, the most beautiful body is defiled and deformed by the filthiness of sin in the soul, and O how many deformed and ugly souls dwell in beautiful and comely bodies, which truly is no other thing than a devil in an image well carved and painted. Christians, you had need to correct this within you, even a self complacency, joined with despising of others in the consideration of those external gifts

God hath given you. What an abominable thing is it to cast up in reproach, or in your hearts to despise any other for natural imperfections, such as blindness, lameness, deformity or such like? Let that word sound always in your ears, Who made thee to differ from another? “Boast not thyself, &c.” But there is as strong a stream runs in the third channel as in any, gloriation arising from those outward and extrinsic differences that the providence of God makes among men, such as riches, honour, gain, &c. You find such men, Psalm xlix. 6, Prov. xviii. 11, and x. 15. That which a godly man makes the name of the Lord,—that is, the ground and foundation of his confidence for present and future times,—that the most part of men make their riches, that is, their strong city, and their high wall, their hope and expectation is reposed within it. This is the tower or wall of defence against the injuries and calamities of the times, which most part of men are building, and if it go up quickly, if they can get these several stones or pieces of gain scraped together into a heap they straightway imagine themselves safe, as under a high wall. But there is no truth in it, it is all but in their imagination, and therefore it comes often down about their ears, and offends them, instead of being a defence. Let a man creep, as it were, from off the ground where the poor lie, and get some advantage of ground above them, or be exalted to some dignity or office, and so set by the shoulders higher than the rest of the people, or yet grow in some more abundance of the things at this life, and strange it is, what a vanity or tumour of mind instantly follows! He presently thinks himself somebody, and forgetting either who is above him, to whom all are worms creeping and crawling on the footstool, or what a sandy foundation he stands upon himself, he begins to take some secret complacency in himself, and to look down upon others below him. He applauds, as it were, unto himself, and takes it in evil part to want the approbation and *plaudite* of others. Then he cannot so well endure affronts and injuries as before, he is not so meek and condescending to his

equals or interiors. While he was poor he used entreaties, but now he answers roughly, (Prov. xviii. 23,) as Solomon gives the character of him. How many vain and empty gloriations are there about the point of birth and place, and what foolish contentions about these, as if it were children struggling among themselves about their order and rank! There is no worth in these things, but what fancy and custom impose upon them and yet poor creatures boast in these empty things. The gentlemen despise citizens, the citizens contemn the poor countrymen, and yet their bloods in a basin have no different colours, for all this hot contention about blood and birth. “Boast not of thyself.” Nay, to speak properly, this is not thyself,—*Qui genus laudat suum, aliena jactat.*²⁷⁷ Such parents, and such a house are nothing of thy own; these are mere extrinsic things, which are neither an honour to unworthy men, nor a disgrace to one who is worthy.

You see, beloved in the Lord, what is now the natural posture or inclination of our souls in this degenerate and fallen estate. As the rivers of paradise have changed their channels and course since the fall, so hath man's affections, and so hath his gloriation, so that it may be truly said, that our glory is our shame and not our glory. Many glory in iniquity and sin, (Psal. x. 3, and xciv. 4), but that shall undoubtedly be their shame and confusion before men and angels. How many godless persons will glory in swearing heinous and deep oaths, and some have contended about the victory in it! You account it a point of gallantry, but this triumph is like the devils in hell upon the devouring of souls. Some boast of drinking, and being able to drink others under the table, but we should be humbled and mourn for such abominations. Certain I am, that many boast of wicked designs, and malicious projects against their neighbours, if they can accomplish them. They account their glory not to take a wrong without giving a greater, nor to suffer an evil word without twenty worse in recompense. [391]

²⁷⁷ [That is, “He who cries up his descent boasts of that which is another's.”—*Ed.*]

Alas! this boasting will one day be turned into gnashing of teeth, and this gloriatio into that gnawing and ever-tormenting worm of conscience. And what will ye do in the day of that visitation? And where shall be your glory? But the most part glory and boast in things that profit not, and will become their shame, because they glory in them, that is, those gifts of God, outward or inward, temporal or spiritual, wherein there is any advancement above others; unto whom I would seriously commend this sentence to be pondered duly, "Boast not" of thyself. Whatsoever thou art, or whatsoever thou hast, boast not of thyself for it, think not much of thyself because of it. Though there be a difference in God's donation, yet let there be none in thy self estimation. Hast thou more wisdom and pregnancy of wit, or more learning than another? Think not more of thyself for that, than thou thinkest of the ignorant and unlearned who want it. Have that same reflection upon thine own unworthiness, that thou would think reasonable another that wants these endowments should have. Is there a greater measure of grace in thee? Boast not, reckon of thyself as abstracted and denuded of that, and let it not add to thy value or account of thyself, put not in that to make it down weight, and to make thee prefer thyself secretly to another. Whether it be some larger fortune in the world, or some higher place and station among men, or some abilities and perfections of body or mind, which may entice thee secretly to kiss thy hand, and bow down to thyself, yet remember that thou boast not, glory not in any thing but in the Lord. Let nothing of that kind conciliate more affection to thyself, or more contempt toward others. Let not any thing of that kind be the rule of thy self judging, but rather entertain the view of the other side of thyself, that is the worst, and keep that most in thy eye, that thou may only glory in God. If thou be a gentleman, labour to be as humble in heart as thou thinkest a countryman or poor tenant should be, if thou be a scholar, be as low in thy own sight as the unlearned should be, if rich, count not thyself any whit better than the poor, yea, the

higher God sets thee in place, or parts, the lower thou oughtest to set thyself. “Boast not” of thyself, nor any thing in thyself, or belonging to thyself, for the property of all good is taken from us since the fall, and is fallen into God's hand since we forfeited it, and there is nothing now properly ours but evil,—that is our self.

Sermon VII.

Prov. xxvii. 1.—“Boast not thyself of to morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.”

[392] As man is naturally given to boasting and gloriation in something (for the heart cannot want some object to rest upon and take complacency in, it is framed with such a capacity of employing other things), so there is a strong inclination in man towards the time to come, he hath an immortal appetite, and an appetite of immortality; and therefore his desires usually stretch farther than the present hour, and the more knowledge he hath above other creatures, the more providence he hath and foresight of the time to come. And so he often anticipates future things by present joy and rejoicing in them, as he accelerates in a manner by his earnest desires and endeavours after them. Now, if the soul of man were in the primitive integrity, and had as clear and piercing an eye of understanding as once it had, this providence of the soul would reach to the furthest period in time, that is, to eternity, which is the only just measure of the endurance of any immortal spirit. But since the eye of man's understanding is darkness, and his soul disordered, he cannot see afar off, nor so clearly by far. He is now, as you say, sand blind,—can see nothing at such a distance as beyond the bounds of time, can see nothing but at hand.

“To-morrow!” This is the narrow sphere of poor man's comprehension, all he can attain unto is to be provident for the present time. I call it ill present, even that which is to come of our time, because, in regard of eternity, it hath no parts, it hath no flux or succession, it is so soon cut off as a moment, as the twinkling of an eye, and so, though a man could see the end of it, it is but a short and dim sight, it is as if a man could only behold that which is almost contiguous with his eye. These, then, are the two great ruins and decays of the nature of man, he is

degenerated from God to created things, and seeks his joy and rest in them, in which there is nothing but the contrary, that is, vexation. And then he is fallen from apprehension of eternity, and the poor soul is confined within the narrow bounds of time, so that now all his providence is to lay up some perishing things for some few revolutions of the sun, for some few morrows, after which, though an endless morrow ensue, yet he perceives it not, and provides not for it, and all his glorying and boasting is only upon some presumptuous confidence and ungrounded assurance of the stability of these things for the time to come, which the wise man finding much folly in, he leaves us this counsel, “Boast not thyself of to-morrow,”—with a most pungent reason, taken partly from the instability and inconstancy of all these outward things in which men fancy an eternity of joy, and partly from the ignorance we have of the future events,—“for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.”

This boasting is an evil so predominant among men, that I know not any more universal in its dominion, or more hurtful to us, or displeasing to God. If it could be so embowelled unto you, as that you might truly discern the many monstrous conceptions of atheism and irreligion that are in it, it were worth the while, but I shall not digress upon the general head, I had rather keep within the limits of the text. Self boasting, you see, is that which is here condemned, and the very name is almost enough to condemn the nature of it. But there is another particular added to restrict that, “of to-morrow.” Of all boastings the most irrational and groundless is that which arises from presumption of future things, which are so uncertain both in themselves and to us.

It is worth the observation, that whatever be the immediate and particular matter and occasion of men's gloriation, yet self is the great and ultimate object of it; it is self that men glory in, whatsoever created thing be the reason or occasion of it. “Boast not thyself of to morrow.” Here we might stand and take a look of the crookedness and perverseness of man's spirit since his

departure from God. Self love and pride were the first poison that the malice of Satan dropped into man's nature, and this is so strong and pestilent, that it has spread through the whole of mankind, and the whole in every man. Every one is infected, and all in every one. What are all the disordered affections in men but so many streams from this fountain? And from these do men's affections flow next, so that there is nothing left uncorrupted, and free of this abominable and vile ingredient, all flowing from self and returning to it again, which is both sacrilegious and unnatural. There is heinous sacrilege in it,—the spoiling of the glorious divine Majesty of his indubitable prerogative and incommunicable right of all the glory, and honour of his creature. There is no usurpation like this for the worm that crawls on the footstool to creep up to the throne, and, as it were, to king it there, to deify and adore itself, and gather in all the tribute of praise and glory and love, that is only due to the Lord God Almighty; and invert and appropriate these to ourselves, which is, as if the axe should boast itself, as if it were no iron, or the staff, as if it were no timber. Hence it is, that of all evils in man's nature, God hath the most perfect antipathy and direct opposition against pride and self love, because it is sacrilege and idolatry in the highest manner. It strikes at the sovereignty and honour of God's name, which is dear to him as himself, it sets up a vile idol in the choicest temple of God, that is, in the heart, and this is the abomination of desolation. Other evils strike against his holy will, but this peculiarly points at the very nature and being of the most high God, and so it is with child of blasphemy,—atheism is the very heart and life of it. And then it is most unnatural, and so monstrous and deformed. For, consider all the creation, though every one of them have particular inclinations towards their own proper ends, and so a happiness suitable to their own nature; yet how diverse, how contrary soever they be, there is no selfishness in them, they all concur and conspire to the good of the whole, and the mutual help of each other. If once that poison should

infect the material world, which hath spoiled the spiritual; let once such a selfish disposition or inclination possess any part of the world, and presently the order, harmony, beauty, pleasure, and profit of the whole world should be interrupted, defaced, and destroyed. Let the sun be supposed to boast itself of its light and influence, and so disdain to impart it to the lower world, and all would run into confusion. Again, I desire you but to take a view of this humour in another's person, (for we are more ready to see others evils than our own,) and how deformed is it? So vile is self-seeking and self boasting, that all men loathe it in others, and hide it from others. It disgraces all actions, how beautiful soever, it is the very bane of human society, that which looses all the links of it, and makes them cross and thwart one another.

But, alas! how much more easy is it, to point out such an evil in a deformed visage, than to discern it in ourselves, and how many will hate it in the picture, who love and entertain it in their own persons! Such deceitfulness is intermingled with most desperate wickedness. I verily believe that it is the predominant of every man, good and bad, except in so far as it is mortified by grace. O the turnings and windings of the heart upon itself, in all the most apparently direct motions towards God and the good of men! What serpentine and crooked circumgirations and reflections are there in the soul of man when the outward action and expression seems most regular and directed towards God's glory, and others edification! Whoever of you have any acquaintance with your own spirits cannot but know this, and be ashamed and confounded at the very thought of it. Self boasting, self complacency, self seeking, all those being of kin one to another, are insinuated into your best notions, and infect them with more atheism before God, than the strongest pious affection can instil of goodness into them. How often will men's actions and expressions be outwardly clothed with a habit of condescendency and self-denial! And many may declaim with such zeal and vehemency against this evil, and yet, *latet anquis*,

the serpent is in the bosom and his venom may be diffused into the heart, and the poison of self-seeking and self-boasting may run through the veins of humble-like carriage and passionate discourses for self denial. O that we could above all things establish that fundamental principle of Christianity in our hearts, even as we would be his disciples, truly and sincerely, and not in outward resemblance,—to deny ourselves, to renounce ourselves and our lusts, to make a whole resignation of our love, will, glory, and all to him, in whom to be lost it is only truly to find ourselves.

But, though man have this strange self idolizing humour, and a self glorying disposition, yet he is so poor and beggarly a creature, that he hath not sufficient matter within himself to give complacency to his heart, therefore he must borrow from all external things, and when there is any kind of propriety in, or title to them, then he glories in himself for them, as if they were truly in himself. We are creatures by nature most indigent, yet most proud, which is unnatural. No man is satisfied within himself (except the good man, Prov. xiv. 14), but he goes abroad to seek it at the door of every creature, and when there are some plumes or feathers borrowed from other birds, like that foolish bird in the fable, we begin to raise our crests, and boast ourselves, as if we had all these of our own, and were beholden to none, but as things that are truly our own will not be sufficient to feed this flame of gloriation, without the accession of outward things; so present things, and the present time, will not afford aliment enough, or fuel for this humour, without the addition of the morrow.

[394]

“Boast not thyself of to-morrow.” No man's present possession satisfies him, without the addition of hope and expectation for the future, and herein the poverty of man's spirit appears, and the emptiness of all things we enjoy here, that our present revenue, as it were, will not content the heart. The present possession fills not up the vacuities of the heart, without the supply of our imaginations, by taking so much in upon the head of the morrow,

to speak so. As one prodigal and riotous waster, who cannot be served with his yearly income, but takes so much on upon his estate, upon the next year's income, before it come, begins to spend upon it, before it come itself, and then, when it comes, it cannot suffice itself, so the insatiable and indigent heart of man cannot subsist and feed its joy in complacency upon the whole world, if it were presently in its possession, without some accession of hopes and expectations for the time to come. Therefore the soul, as it were, anticipates and forestalls the morrow, and borrows so much present joy and boasting upon the head of it, which when it comes itself, perhaps it will not fill the hand of the reaper, let be²⁷⁸ pay for that debt of gloriation that was taken on upon its name, or compensate the expectation which was in it, see Job xi. 18, 20, viii. 13. Hope is like a man's house to him, but to many it is no better than a spider's web. We have then a clear demonstration of the madness and folly of men, who hang so much upon things without, and suffer themselves to be moulded and modelled in their affections, according to the variety of external accidents. First of all, consider the independence of all things upon us and our choice; there is nothing more unreasonable than to stir our passions upon that which falls not under our deliberation, as the most part of things to come are. What shall be to-morrow, what shall come of my estate, of my places; what event my projects and designs shall have,—this is not in my hand, these depend upon other men's wills, purposes, and actions, which are not in my power, and therefore, either to boast of glory upon that which depends upon the concurrence of so many causes unsubordinate to me, or to be vexed and disquieted upon the fore-apprehension of that which is not in my hand to prevent, is not only irreligious, as contrary to our Saviour's command, Matt. vi. 25, but unreasonable also, as that which even nature condemns. "Take not thought for to-morrow," and

²⁷⁸ [Much less.—*Ed.*]

so by consequent, “Boast not thyself of to-morrow,” and there is one argument from the vanity of such affections. “Thou canst not make one hair black, nor add one cubit to thy stature,” &c. To what purpose, then, are either those vexations or gloriations, which cannot prevent evil, nor procure good? Why should our affections depend upon others motions? This makes a man the greatest slave and captive, so that he hath not the dominion and power of himself. But the vanity of such affections is the more increased, if we consider that supreme eternal will, by which all these things are determined, and therefore, it is in vain for creatures to make themselves more miserable, or put themselves in a fool's paradise, which will produce more misery afterwards, and that, for those things which are bound up in that fatal chain of his eternal purpose. Then, in the next place, the folly of men appears from the inconstancy of these things. There is such an infinite variety of the accidents of providence, that it is folly for a man to presume to boast of any thing, or take complacency in it, because many things fall between the cup and the lip,²⁷⁹ the chalice and the chin, as the proverb is. There is nothing certain, but that all things are uncertain,—that all things are subject to perpetual motion, revolution, and change,—to-day a city, to-morrow a heap. And there is nothing between a great city and a heap but one day, nothing between a man and no man but one hour. Our life is subject to infinite casualties, it may receive the fatal stroke from the meanest thing, and most unexpected, it is a bubble floating upon the water, for this world is a watery element, in continual motion with storm; and in these, so many poor dying creatures rise up, and swim and float awhile, and are tossed up and down by the wind and wave; and the least puff of wind or drop of rain sends it back to its own element. We are a vapour appearing for a very little time—a creature of

[395]

²⁷⁹ [This is a literal translation of a Greek proverb which is quoted by Aulus Gellius (Noct. Att. lib. xiii. cap. 17) and which has been rendered into Latin thus:—*Multa cadunt inter calicem labrumque supremum.*—Ed.]

no solidity—a dream—a shadow and appearance of something; and this dream or apparition is but for a little time, and then it evanisheth, not so much into nothing, for it was little distant from nothing before, but it disappears rather. All human affairs are like the spokes of a wheel, in such a continual circumgiration, as a captive king, who was drawing Sesostris's chariot, said, when he was looking often behind him. The king of Egypt, Sesostris, demanded for what end did he look so often about him? Says he, “I am looking to the wheel, musing upon the vicissitudes and permutations of it, how the highest parts are instantly the lowest.” And this word repressed the king's vain glory.²⁸⁰ Now, in this constant wheeling of outward things, which is the soul that enjoys true quiet and peace? Even that soul that is fixed, as it were, in the centre upon God, that hath its abode in him; though the parts without be in a continual violent motion, yet the centre of the wheel is at much peace, is not violently turned, but gently complies to the changes of the other. And then consider the madness of this,—“Thou knowest not, &c.” There are two reasons in the things themselves,—inconstancy, and independency on us; but this is as pressing as any,—our ignorance of them; they are wholly in the dark to us, as it were in the lower parts of the earth. As there is no more in our power but the present hour,—for to yesterday we are dead already, for it is past and cannot return, it

²⁸⁰ [Diod. Sic. Bibl. lib. i. p. 68.]

Venit ad occasum, mun lique extrema Sesostris,
Et Pharios currus regum cervicibus egit.
Lucan lib. x. ver. 276.

The farthest west our great Sesostris saw,
Whilst captive kings did his proud chariot draw.
May's Translation.

Sesostris was so much affected and humbled, by the delicate appeal of the enslaved monarch, that he immediately commanded him, and the other unhappy kings who were harnessed to his car, to be removed from it.—Theophylact Hist. Maurit. lib. vi. chap. ii. Joan Tzetz. Hist. Chibad. iii. 69.—*Ed.*]

is as it were buried in the grave of oblivion, and to to-morrow we are not yet born, for it is not come to the light, and we know not if ever it will come,—so there is no more in our knowledge but the present hour. The time past, though we remember it, yet it is without our practical knowledge, it admits of no reformation by it; and the time to come is not born to us, and it is all one as if we were not born to it. And indeed, in the Lord's disposing of all affairs under the sun, after this method, there is infinite wisdom and goodness both, though at the first view men would think it better that all things went on after an uniform manner, and that men knew what were to befall them. Yet, I say, God hath herein provided for his own glory and the good of men,—his own glory, while he hath reserved to himself the absolute dominion and perfect knowledge of his works, and exercises them in so great variety, that they may be seen to proceed from him; and for our good,—for what place were there for the exercise of many Christian virtues and graces, if it were not so? What place for patience, if there were no cross dispensations? What place for moderation, if there were no prosperity? If there were not such variety and vicissitude, how should the evenness and constancy of the spirit be known? Where should contentment and tranquillity of mind have place? For it is a calm in a storm properly, not a calm in a calm,—that is no virtue. If the several accidents of providence were foreseen by us, what a marvellous perturbation and disorder would it make in our duty! Who would do his duty out of conscience to God's command, to commit events to him? Now, there is the trial of obedience, to make us go by a way we know not, and resign ourselves to the all seeing providence, whose eyes run to and fro throughout the earth. Therefore that no grace may want matter and occasion of exercise; that no virtue may die out for want of fuel, or rust for lack of exercise, God hath thus ordered and disposed the world. There is no condition, no posture of affairs, in which he hath not left a fair opportunity for the exercising of some grace. Hath he shut up and precluded

the acting of one or many through affliction, then surely he hath opened a wide door, and given large matter for self denial, humility, patience, moderation, and these are as precious as any that look fairest. In a word, I think the very frame and method of the disposing of this material world speaks aloud to this purpose. You see, when you look below, there is nothing seen but the outside of the earth, the very surface of it only appears, and there your sight is terminated, but look above, and there is no termination, no bounding of the sight,—there are infinite spaces, all are transparent and clear without and within. Now, what may this present unto us? One says, it shows us that our affections should be set upon things above and not on things below, seeing below there is nothing but an outward appearance and surface of things,—the glory and beauty of the earth is but skin deep, but heavenly things are alike throughout, all transparent, nothing to set bounds to the affections; they are infinite, and you may enlarge infinitely towards them. I add this other consideration, that God hath made all things in time dark and opaque, like the earth. Look to them, you see only the outside of them, the present hour, and what is beyond it you know no more, than you see the bowels of the earth, but eternity is both transparent and conspicuous throughout, and infinite too. Therefore God hath made us blind to the one, that we should not set our heart, nor terminate our eyes upon any thing here, but he hath opened and spread eternity before us in the scriptures, so that you may read and understand your fortune,—your everlasting estate in it. He hath shut up temporal things and sealed them, and wills us to live implicitly, and give him the trust of them without anxious foresight, but eternity he hath unveiled and opened unto us. Certain it is, that no man, till he be fully possessed of God, who is an all sufficient good (Psal. iv.) can find any satisfaction in any present enjoyment, without the addition of some hope for the future. Great things without it will not content. For what is it all to a man if he have no assurance for the time to come?

And mean things with it will content. Great things with little hope and expectation, fill with more vexation instead of joy, and the greater they be, this is the more increased. Again, mean and low things, with great hopes and large expectations, will give more satisfaction, therefore, all mankind have a look towards the morrow, and labour to supply their present defects and wants, with hope or confidence of that. I would exhort you who would indeed have solid matter of gloriation, and would not be befooled into a golden dream of vain expectations of vain things, that ye would labour to fill up the vacuities of present things with that great hope, the hope of salvation, which will be as an helmet to keep your head safe in all difficulties, 1 Pet. i. 3, Heb. vi. 18, 19, Rom. v. 5. It is true, other men's expectations of gain and credit, and such things, do in some measure abate the torment and pain of present wants and indigencies, but certain it is, that such hope is not so sovereign a cordial to the heart, as to expel all grief, but leaves much vexation within. But then also, the frequent disappointment of such projects and designs of gain, honour, and pleasure, and the extreme unanswerableness of these to the desires and hopes of the soul, even when attained, must needs breed infinitely more anxiety and vexation in the spirit, than the hope of them could give of satisfaction, yea the more the expectation was, it cannot choose but the greater shame and confusion must be. Therefore, if you would have your souls truly established, and not hanging upon the morrow uncertainly, as the most part of men are get a look beyond the morrow, unto that everlasting day of eternity, that hath no morrow²⁸¹ after it, and see what foundation you can lay up for that time to come, as Paul bids Timothy counsel the rich men in the world, who thought their riches and revenues, their offices and dignities, a foundation and well spring of contentment to them and their children, and are ready to say with that man in the parable, "Soul take thy rest,

²⁸¹ [See note page 98.—*Ed.*]

thou hast enough laid up for many years.” “Charge them, says he,” &c. 1 Tim. vi. 16-19. O a charge worthy to be engraven on the tables of our hearts, worthy to be written on the ports of all cities, and the gates of all palaces. You would all have a foundation of lasting joy, says he, but why seek you lasting joy in fading things, and certain joy in uncertain riches, and solid contentment in empty things, and not rather in the living God, who is the unexhausted spring of all good things? Therefore, if you would truly boast of to-morrow, or sing a solid *requiem* to your own hearts, there is another treasure to be laid up in store against the time to come,—the time only worthy to be called time, that is eternity, and that is study to do good, and be rich in good works, in works of piety, of mercy, of equity, of sobriety. This is a better foundation for the time to come, or, rather receive and embrace the promise of eternal life made to such,—that free and gracious promise of life in the gospel, and so you may supply all the wants and indigencies of your present enjoyments, with the precious hope of eternal life which cannot make ashamed. But what is the way that the most part of men take to mitigate and sweeten their present hardships? Even like that of the fool in the parable Luke xii. They either have something laid up for many years, or else their projects and designs reach to many years. The truth is, they have more pleasure in the expectation of such things, than in the real possession, but that pleasure is but imaginary also. How many thoughts and designs are continually turning in the heart of man,—how to be rich, how to get greater gain, or more credit? Men build castles in the air, and fancy to themselves, as it were, new worlds of mere possible things, and in such an employment of the heart, there is some poor deceiving of present sorrows, but at length they recur with greater violence. Every man makes romances for himself, pretty fancies of his own fortune, as if he had the disposing of it himself. He sits down, as it were, and writes an almanack and prognostication in his own secret thoughts, and designs his own prosperity, gain, and

[397]

advantage, and pleasures or joys, and when we have thus ranked our hopes and expectation, then we begin to take complacency in them, and boast ourselves in the confidence of them, as if there were not a supreme Lord who gives a law to our affairs, as immediately as to the winds and rains.

Now, that you may know the folly of this, consider the reason which is subjoined,—“For thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.” There is a concurrence of inconstancy in all things, and ignorance in us, which might be sufficient to check our folly of confident and presumptuous expectation from them, and gloriation in them, so that, whether we look about us to the things themselves, or within us to ourselves, all things proclaim the folly and madness of that which the heart of man is set upon. And this double consideration the apostle James opposes to the vain hopes and confident undertakings of men, chap. iv. 13, &c., which place is a perfect commentary upon this text, he brings in an instance of the resolutions and purposes of rich men, for the compassing of gain by merchandise, whereby you may understand all the several designs and plots of men, that are contrived and ordered, and laid down in the hearts of men, either for more gain, or more glory, or more pleasure and ease. Now, the grand evil that is here reprov'd, is not simply men's care and diligence in using lawful means for their accommodation in this life, or yet their wise and prudent foresight in ordering of their affairs for attaining that end, for both these are frequently recommended and commended by the wise man Prov. vi. 6, and xxiv. 27. But here is the great iniquity,—that men in all these contrivings and actings, carry themselves as if they were absolute independents, without consideration of the sovereign universal dominion of God. No man almost reflects upon that glorious Being, which alone hath the negative and definitive sentence in all the motions and affairs of the sons of men, or considers, that it is not in man that walks to direct his paths; that when all our thoughts and designs are marshalled and ordered, and the completest preparation

made for reaching our intended ends, that yet the way of man is not in himself, that all these things are under a higher and more absolute dominion of the most high God. Whose heart doth that often sound unto,—“A man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps,” and so is not bound by any rule to conform his executions to our intentions? For he works all according to the counsel of his own will, and not ours, and therefore, no wonder that the product of our actions does not answer our intentions and devices, because the supreme rule and measure of them is above our power, and without our knowledge. And therefore, though there were never so many devices in the heart of man, never so wisely or lawfully contrived and ordered, though the mine be never so well prepared, and all ready for the firing of it, yet the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand, Prov. xix. 21, and xvi. 9. That higher determination may blow up our best consultations or drown them, for man's goings are of the Lord, how then can a man understand his paths? Prov. xx. 24. And yet the most part of men, in all these things, lose the remembrance of this fatal and invincible subordination to God, and propose their own affairs and actions, as if themselves were to dispose of them, and when their own resolutions and projects seem probable, they begin to please themselves in them, in the forethought of what they will do, or what they may have or enjoy to morrow afterward; there is a present secret complacency and gloriation, without any serious reminding the absolute dependence of all things upon the will of God, and their independence upon our counsels without forecasting and often ruminating upon the perpetual fluctuation and inconstancy of human affairs, but, as if we were the supreme moderators in heaven and earth, so we act and transact our own business in a deep forgetfulness of him who sits in heaven, and laughs at all our projects and practices and therefore, the Holy Ghost would have this secret but serious thought to season all our other purposes and consultations,—“If the Lord will,” &c. Whereas though we ought to say and think this, it is scarce

minded, and then we know not what shall be to morrow for our life itself is a vapour. Herein is a strong argument,—you lay your designs for to morrow, for a year, for many years, and yet ye know not if ye shall be to morrow. How many men's projects are cast beyond that time that is measured out on God's counsel! And what a ridiculous thing must that be to him, if it be not done with submissive and humble dependence on him! In a word time is with child of innumerable things, conceived by the eternal counsel of God. Infinite and inconceivably various are those conceptions which the womb of time shall at length bring forth to light. Every day, every hour, every minute is travailing in pain, as it were, and is delivered of some one birth or another, and no creature can open its womb sooner, or shut it longer, than the appointed and prefixed season. There is no miscarrying as to him whose decrees do properly conceive them though to us they seem often abortive. Now, join unto this, to make the allusion full, as long as they are carried in the womb of time, they are hid from all the world. The womb is a dark lodging and no understanding nor eye can pierce into it, to tell what is in it, till it break forth, and therefore, children born are said to come to the light, for till then, they are to us in a cloud of darkness, that we cannot tell what they are. So then, every day, every hour, every moment is about to bring forth that which all the world is ignorant of, till they see it, and oh! that then they understood it. We know not whether the morrow's or next hour's birth may be a proportioned child, or a monster, whether it will answer the figure and mould that is in our mind, or be misshapen and deformed to our sense. Men's desires and designs may be said to conceive, for they form an inward image and idea within themselves, to which they labour to make the product and birth of time conformable, and when it answers our preconceived form, then we rejoice as for a man child. But for the most part it is a monster as to our conception, it is an aberration from our rule, it is either mutilated and defective of what we desire, or superfluous or deformed, which turns our

expectation into vexation, and our boasting into lamentation. But the truth is, time brings forth no monsters as to the Lord's decrees, which are the only just measures of all things. It may be said of every thing under the sun, as David speaks of himself in the womb, "My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously formed in the lowest parts of the earth," &c. Psal. cxxxix. 15. His eyes see all their substance, yet being unperfect, and in his everlasting book all their members are written, the portraiture of every thing is drawn there to the life, and these in continuance are fashioned just as they were written and drawn, and so they exactly correspond to his preconception of them, whatever deformity they may have as to us, yet they are perfect works, and beautiful to him.