

4. Do not slight means, seeing God worketh by them; and he that hath appointed the end orders the means necessary for gaining the end. Do not rely upon means, for they can do nothing without God, Matth. iv. 4. Do not despond if there be no means, for God can work without them, as well as with them; Hos. i. 7. 'I will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen.' If the means be unlikely, he can work above them, Rom. iv. 19. 'He considered not his own body now dead, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb.' If the means be contrary, he can work by contrary means, as he saved Jonah by the whale that devoured him. That fish swallowed up the prophet, but by the direction of providence, it vomited him out upon dry land.

5. *Lastly*, Happy is the people whose God the Lord is: for all things shall work together for their good. They may sit secure in exercising faith upon God, come what will. They have ground for prayer; for God is a prayer-hearing God, and will be inquired of by his people as to all their concerns in the world. And they have ground for the greatest encouragement and comfort amidst all the events of providence, seeing they are managed by their covenant God and gracious friend, who will never neglect or overlook his dear people, and whatever concerns them. For he hath said, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,' Heb. xiii. 5.



THE WISE OBSERVATION OF PROVIDENCES ILLUSTRATED AND ENFORCED.

PSAL. CVII. 43.—*Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord.*

WHOSOEVER would walk with God, must be due observers of the word and providence of God, for by these in a special manner he manifests himself to his people. In the one we see what he says; in the other what he does. These are the two books that every student of holiness ought to be much conversant in. They are both written with one hand, and they should both be carefully read, by those that would have not only the name of religion, but the thing. They should be studied together, if we would profit by either; for being taken together, they give light the one to the other; and as it is our duty to read the word, so it is also our duty to observe the work of God, Psal. xxviii. 5. The one I formerly recommended; and I am now to press the other, as a proper addition to our late

discourse on the providence of God, from the text now read. Wherein we have two things.

1. The observing of providences recommended, *Whoso is wise, &c.* In the Hebrew it runs, *Who is wise, and will observe these things.* Wherein we may observe,

1st, The duty itself recommended, *observing these things.* Where we are to consider the act and the object.

(1.) The object *these things*; that is, the dispensations of providence. These are the things the Psalmist would have men to observe. For the design of this psalm is to praise God for his wonderful works of providence in the world, especially in the church. For this cause he sets before us, (1.) Wonderful deliverances wrought by providence, instanced in the seasonable relief given to, (1.) Needy and bewildered strangers, far from their own, ver. 3.—9. (2.) Captives and prisoners, ver. 10.—16. (3.) Sick people at the gates of death, ver. 17.—22. (4.) To seafaring men in a storm, ver. 23.—32. (2.) Strange and surprising changes in human affairs. (1.) Fruitful places made barren, and barren places fruitful, ver. 33.—35. For an instance of which we need but consider this our own country, sometime a forest, for little use but to be a hunting-field, now comfortably maintaining many families, and useful to the nation by its great store. (2.) Mean families raised by a blessing on their husbandry and store, and cast down again from their prosperity by cross providences, ver. 36.—39. (3.) Those that were high in the world abased, and those that were mean and despicable raised to honour, ver. 40, 41. These turns of providence are of use to solace saints, and silence sinners, ver. 42. Now, here is a field opened for serious observation. These and such like things we are called to notice.

(2.) The act, *observation.* We must not let providences pass without remark, but observe them carefully, as men that are neither fools nor atheists, but have eyes in their heads, and do not think the world is guided by blind chance, but by an infinitely wise God. The word signifies to take heed, and retain, as a watchman in a city does. We must take heed to them as they fall out, and carefully keep them in mind, that they be not forgot, or slip out of our minds.

2dly, The qualification necessary to fit a man for this duty, *wisdom.* This is true spiritual wisdom; for in scripture language all strangers to serious godliness are accounted fools, however sharp-sighted otherwise they be. As for others, they neither will nor can rightly observe these things.

3dly, The manner of the expression. It intimates, (1.) That

there are few so wise as to observe providences. Most part of the world are stupid on that point; they let them go and come without notice, Jer. ix. 12. (2.) That those who are truly wise will do it, Hos. xiv. ult.

2. The advantage accruing from a wise observation of providences. They shall understand thereby the loving-kindness, goodness, and mercy of God, written out in his dispensations towards themselves and others; as we know how one stands affected to us by his behaviour towards us. His works will give us a clearer discovery of his glorious perfections; and these observations will enrich us with experiences. It is remarkable that some of these things are cross providences; yet a right observation of them will shew us God's kindness; for the divine goodness may be seen in cross providences as well as in favourable ones.

From the text I shall only observe one doctrine at present.

Doctr. "It is the duty of Christians wisely to observe providences."

This is a weighty point in practical religion, that requires observation in speaking to it, and practising it.

In discoursing from this doctrine, I shall shew,

I. What it is to observe providences wisely.

II. What are the objects about which we are to make our observations.

III. What we are to observe in them.

IV. The reasons why Christians should wisely observe providences.

V. Make some practical improvement.

I. I am to shew what it is to observe providences wisely. It presupposes some things, and imports some things.

First, It presupposes these four things.

1. That there is a providence. The world is not managed by fortune, nor do things fall out by blind chance. That there is a God, and that there is a providence, have been always looked on by men of sound judgment as certain maxims, establishing one another. And indeed to set up the creatures to act otherwise than under the providence of God, is to set them up for independent beings, that is, for gods. The scripture is plain that it reacheth all things, Rom. xi. 36. 'For of him, and through him, and to him are all things;' even from the greatest to the least, as ye will see from Mat. x. 29. 30, 31. 'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing; and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not, therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.' And unless it were so, how could he foresee and foretel things, Isa. xlvi. 10.

Some think this would disturb his repose, and is unworthy of him,

and his purity and wisdom. But do not these atheists see the sun in the heavens undisturbed, with his (yet) universal influence, shine on the dunghill as well as the garden, without contracting any spot? And is it unworthy of God to govern what he has created? As for the wisdom in the management of the world, they are fools who judge it folly before they see the end.

2. The faith of this providence. We must believe the doctrine of providence, if we would be wise observers thereof. The faith of the saints in this point may be shaken in an hour of temptation; as was the case with Asaph, *Psal. lxxiii. 13, 14, 15.* ‘Verily (says he) I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning. If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children.’ And the unbelief of others therein makes them half atheists, *Mal. iii. 14, 15.* ‘Ye have said, it is vain to serve God: and what profit is it, that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts? And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.’ And the slender belief there is of it in the world makes men overlook providence, *Hab. i. 16.* ‘Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag: because by them their portion is fat and their meat plenteous.’ Labour ye firmly to believe providence, that ye may observe it; nay, believe it, and ye will observe it.

3. Providence has a language to the children of men. It is a clear part of the name of God whereby he manifests himself to the world, and has served to convince men of his eternal power and Godhead, whom no other arguments could reach: *Dan. iv. ult.* ‘Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise, and extol, and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment, and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.’ *Psal. xix. 3, 4.* ‘There is no speech, nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.’ Rods have a language, *Micah vi. 9.* ‘The Lord’s voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.’ And so also have mercies a language, *Rom. ii. 4.* ‘Not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.’ And providences being the work of a rational agent, they must have a design.

4. A disposition to understand the language and design of providence. It is for this end they are observed wisely, *Micah vi. 9.* forecited. God speaks by providence, and the wise hearken by ob-

servation, that they may know what is meant by those characters, in which God writes his mind towards them. Hence the more one pursues communion with God, he will the more narrowly observe providence; and when he grows remiss and negligent as to communion with God, he lets these things easily pass. But these are the prints of the Lord's feet, which one walking with God will set himself to observe.

Secondly, To observe providences wisely, imports these five things.

1. A watching for them till they come. Hence says the prophet, Hab. ii. 1. 'I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.' This is to wait on the Lord in the way of his judgments, Isa. xxvi. 8. A practice necessarily following on the serious practice of godliness, in laying matters before the Lord by prayer, and depending on him according to his word, Psal. cxxx. 1. 5, 6. 'Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. I wait for the Lord, and my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning: I say more, than they that watch for the morning.' Some providences have a glaring light with them, that cannot but strike the eye of the beholder; but others not being so may pass unobserved, if people be not on their watch. Providence sometimes works long under ground, and wraps itself up in a long night of darkness; but the wise observer will wait the dawning of the day, and the setting up its head above ground, Psal. lxxix. 3. 'Mine eyes fail while I wait for my God,' Lam. iii. 49, 50. 'Mine eye trickleth down and ceaseth not, without any intermission: till the Lord look down, and behold from heaven.' For they that believe will not make haste.

2. A taking heed to them, and marking them when they come, Isa. xxv. 9. 'Lo this is our God, we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord, we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.' Heeding them, I mean, as from the hand of the Lord; for though men heed the thing, if they do not heed the hand it comes from, they have but the carcase without the soul of providences. The threads of providence are sometimes so small and fine, and our senses so little exercised to discern, that they may come and go without our notice, Luke xix. 44. 'Thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.' Therefore the eyes of the wise man are in his head, to observe what comes from heaven; looking aforehand, and in the time; for he that looks sees, Ezek. i. 15, Zech. vi. 1.

3. A serious review of them, pondering and narrowly considering

them. We should not only look to them, but into them, Psal. cxi. 2. 'The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.' And the more we see of them, the more of God we will see in them; for the further we wade in these waters, the deeper. Providence is a wheel within a wheel, a piece of the nice workmanship of heaven, which may make us cry out with wonder many a time, *O wheel!* Ezek. x. 13. The design of providence oftentimes lies hid, not to be seen at first view; but we must look again and again, and narrowly inspect it, ere we can comprehend it. It is a mystery many times, looking at which our weak eyes will begin to dazzle. And that we may unravel the clue by a sanctified judgment, Psal. lxxvii. 6. it will be needful to call in the help of prayer, with much humility, faith, and self-denial, Job x. 2. and of the scripture, Psal. lxxiii. 16.

4. Laying them up, and keeping them in record, Luke i. 66. We should keep them as one would do a treasure, for the time to come. Then are they experiences, which will be notable provision for after-times. O, if these observations were wisely made, and carefully laid up, the former part of our life might furnish noble helps for the latter part of it; and the longer we lived, the richer would we be in this spiritual treasure: even as in war one victory helps to get another. And the old disciple might have a body of practical experimental divinity in his head, drawn forth from his own observation. We find David, when young, improving providences formerly thus observed, 1 Sam. xvii. 37. 'The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine;' and when old doing the same, Psal. xxxvii. 25. 'I have been young, and now am old: yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.'

5. *Lastly*, It is a practical observation of them. They who observe providences wisely do not observe them only to clear their judgments, and inform their understandings, as by matters of speculation; but to influence their hearts and affections in the conduct of their life, Micah vi. 9. The more that one wisely observes providence, he will be the more holy. The observing the work of providence about himself and others, will advance the work of grace in the heart, and holiness in the life, Rom. v. 4. 'Patience worketh experience; and experience hope,' Psal. lxiv. 7, 9. 'God shall shoot at them with an arrow, suddenly shall they be wounded. And all men shall fear, and shall declare the work of God; for they shall wisely consider his doing.' It is a woful observation of providence, when it has no good effect on people to make them better.

Hence Moses says to the Israelites, Deut. xxix. 2, 3, 4. 'Ye have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, unto Pharaoh, and unto all his servants, and unto all his land; the great temptations which thine eyes have seen, the signs and those great miracles: yet the Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day.' But it is yet worse when people are made worse thereby, as in the case of him who said, 'Behold this evil is of the Lord, what! should I wait for the Lord any longer?' 2 Kings vi. 33. But it is a kindly effect of it when men accommodate their spirits to the divine dispensations they are under, according to that, Eccl. vii. 14. 'In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider.'

II. I come now to speak of the objects about which we are wisely to make our observations, *these things*. This is a spacious field, as broad as the universe, or the whole creation, so far as we come to the knowledge any manner of way of the works of God. For providence reacheth to all things, and in every thing the finger of God is to be seen. None of all God's works of providence laid open to our view are excepted, nor allowed to be overlooked, Psal. xxviii. 5. And all of them may be profitably noticed. But more particularly, I shall offer you a sample of the admirable web of providence; a sample, I say, for how small a part of his ways do we know? The dispensations of providence may be considered,

1. With respect to their objects.
2. With respect to their kinds.
3. With respect to the time of their falling out.

FIRST, Providences may be considered with respect to their objects, which are all the creatures and all their actions. And here let us, .

FIRST, Look into the invisible world, and trace providence a little there. It becomes Christians to cause their eye to follow there where God's hand is before them at work. David tells us, Psal. cxxxix. 8. 'If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.' God is there with his hand of providence, ver. 10. 'Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.' And the apostle gives the Christian that character, 2 Cor. iv. 18. that 'he looks not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.'

First, Look to the lower part of that world, the kingdom of darkness, and there you see devils and damned spirits of men, with the providence of God about them in an awful manner. A fearful web of providence encompasses them.

1. Concerning devils, view the awful providences they are under, and observe,

(1.) How these once glorious creatures are now irrecoverably lost, and reserved to a certain and dreadful judgment, 2 Pet. ii. 4. Jude 6. Behold and learn the severity of God's justice from this his work; how no natural excellency will preserve the creature from wrath when once defiled with sin. They were the first that ventured to break over the hedge of the holy law, and God set them up for dreadful examples to the whole creation. Behold the power of God, whose hands devils themselves cannot rid themselves out of. And understand the loving-kindness of the Lord, in providing a Saviour for man, and not for them, Heb. ii. 16.

(2.) How, notwithstanding, these malicious creatures are not so pent up in their prison, but they are permitted to go about through the world; yet this world is generally inhabited without molestation from them. Only now and then, in some very rare cases, they are suffered to molest men, by a particular providential permission as in the case of Job, chap. ii. This general case of the world is a continued wonder of providence. How is it that ever we get any rest from them in house or field? It is not for want of will or natural power, but from the restraint of providence upon them, continued upon them, notwithstanding the world's wickedness. Observe this thankfully, and understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.

2. Concerning damned spirits, who are in hell under the wrath of God, see the awful providences about them, and observe how miserable they are, Luke xvi. 23. being 'punished from the presence of the Lord,' 2 Thess. i. 9. all hopes of recovery being now lost for ever. And learn how precious time is, that what we have to do, ye may do quickly: how deceitful sin and the world are; and how severely God punishes at length, though he may long bear with sinners. And understand the loving-kindness of the Lord, that ye are yet in the land of the living, under means of grace, and hopes of glory.

Secondly, Look to the upper part of the invisible world, the regions of bliss; and there you will see angels and the spirits of just men made perfect wrapt up in a glorious web of providence, sparkling with goodness and mercy. See the Larger Catechism on Providence.

Concerning the blessed angels, observe,

1. How they are established in holiness and happiness, 1 Tim. v. 21. They were of the same changeable nature with those that fell; but God held them up, and has confirmed them, that they cannot fall now. And learn the power of sovereign grace, which can establish one tottering creature when another falls; and how happy

they are who cheerfully do the will of God, for so the angels do in heaven. Though proud shining hypocrites fall away and perish, yet trembling saints shall be made to stand.

2. How they are employed in the administration of his power, mercy, and justice, 2 Kings xix. 35. In one night the angel of the Lord smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand, Heb. i. 14. 'Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?' God sends them to take care of his children, who no doubt receive many benefits off their hands, which they are not sensible of. Understand the loving-kindness of the Lord in sending them, and their love to God and man in taking such employment. The living creatures have the wheels going by them.

Concerning the souls of the blessed, observe how blessed and happy they are in the enjoyment of God, where no clouds interpose betwixt them and the light of his countenance, Heb. xii. 23. Luke xvi. 22. And learn here what a vain thing this world is, and how we may be happy without it, yea cannot be completely happy till we be beyond it. What a rich harvest the seed of grace in the soul brings in, and how holiness leads the way to complete happiness. Wonderful is the loving-kindness of the Lord, that takes those who serve him here, to be his attendants in his palace and brings them to the full enjoyment of himself in glory.

Let this suffice for a sample of providence in the invisible world.

SECONDLY, Look to the visible world, and trace providence there. See how the hand of the Lord is constantly at work about these his creatures which he has made, John v. 17. 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.'

1. Consider the inanimate or lifeless creatures, which are the objects of providence as well as other things. They are not capable of self-governing, but he that made them guides them to their ends.

The heavenly bodies, sun, moon, and stars, are under the government of wise providence. They got their orders at first, Gen. i. 16. 'God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also.' And they have still observed these orders since. Psal. civ. 19. 'He appointeth the moon for seasons: the sun knoweth his going down.' Sometimes indeed by a particular commission, they have altered their ordinary course as in Joshua's time, chap. x. 12, 13, when the sun stood still upon Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon, for a whole day; but they returned to their course again. The sun keeps his course allotted him by the divine decree; for should he go at random, our earth would either be burnt or quite frozen up, that

we could not live on it. O the loving-kindness of the Lord, that makes the very heavenly bodies punctually to keep pace with our necessities, and has not avenged himself on men's disorders, by suffering these to go into disorder and confusion!

The raging sea is under the management of providence. God manages it as easily as the nurse does the infant, whom she swaddles and lays in its cradle, from whence it cannot get out, while she will have it to stay there; Job xxxviii. 11. 'Hitherto shalt thou come (says Providence to this unruly element), but no farther; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.' O look to his work and learn his loving-kindness, Psal. civ. 24, 25, 26. 'O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches. So is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts. There go the ships; there is that leviathan, whom thou hast made to play therein.' Behold his greatness, and adore him, Matth. viii. 27. 'What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?' Fear before such a mighty One, Isa. xxviii. 2. And let it quiet your hearts under all the tossings ye meet with in the world; for it will cost him but to say, 'Peace and be still;' Psal. xciii. 4. 'The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea.'

The air and wind, which no man can lay hold of, are entirely under the conduct of Providence, John iii. 8. 'The wind bloweth where it listeth,' in respect of man; but in respect of God, where he listeth, Matth. viii. 27. forecited. What a wonder is it, (not to speak of tempests, hail, rain, snow, &c. Psal. cxlvii. 15.—18), that such a thin invisible body should bear up all the fowls of the air, the heavy clouds also, and carry them from place to place, so that we may say, as Psal. xviii. 10. 'He rode upon a cherub, and did fly; yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind! How then can our God be at a loss for means to support us? He has filled the world with it; it is about us, in us, in our nostrils, in our bowels, nay, in every pore of our bodies; yea, without it we could not breathe, yet we see it not. Shall we then think it strange, that the God who made it is every where present? Nay, he is without and within us, though we see him not. If he mix pestilential vapours with it, we are dead men, as if poison were mixed with our drink: for at every breathing we draw it in; so entirely do we depend on the Lord. O then understand the loving-kindness of the Lord in this respect.

The earth is under the care and government of the same wise Providence. He made it, and that was a great work; he preserves it and governs it, and that is another. He supports it, Heb. i. 3.

The earth bears us, but what bears the earth? You cannot think it is infinite or boundless, and therefore it must have another side opposite to that we are on. Yes, and by the powerful providence of God it hangs like a ball in the air, Job xxvi. 7. 'He hangeth the earth upon nothing.' O then, is there any thing too hard for our God to do? He fills it with his riches, the surface of it, and the bowels of it, Psal. civ. 24. But what is most necessary for men's use is on the surface of it, easiest to be come at, Job xxviii. He feeds it, that it may feed us, Deut. xi. 11. Hos. ii. 21, 22. When the strength thereof is weakened with new influences from the heavens, he renews it, Psal. civ. 30. And since the flood, the promise then given, Gen. viii. 22. that 'while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease,' has been punctually performed. O understand the loving-kindness of the Lord in these things, what a gracious and bountiful God he is! And learn how surely all his promises to his people shall be accomplished.

2. Consider the vegetative part of the world, things that have life, but not sense, such as trees, plants, &c. how Providence cares for and manages them. Our Lord calls us to observe these things, and thereby understand the loving-kindness of the Lord, Matth. vi. 28. 'Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they toil not, neither do they spin.' Lilies of the field have not the care of man about them, as those of the garden, but Providence cares for them. This teaches us to lay by anxiety, and trust God, ver. 30. See how the earth is kindly furnished with vegetables by providence, not only for men's necessity, but their conveniency and delight, Psal. civ. 14,—17. And shall not this good God be loved and cheerfully served by us? Every pile of grass is a preacher of the loving-kindness of the Lord.

3. Consider the sensitive part of the world, such as have life and sense, but not reason; as birds, beasts, and fishes. And observe what a vast family are maintained on the Creator's cost. And though we cannot trust providence, yet what an innumerable company there is of dependents on mere providence! Psal. civ. 27. 'These all wait upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season.' Observe this provision, and thence learn to believe even where ye cannot see, Matth. vi. 26, 'Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?' For Providence does for them that have none to do for them; Psal. cxlvii. 9. 'He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens that cry.' Observe how providence has subjected

them to man as servants that could easily be his masters in respect of strength, as the horse, ox, &c. yet the face of man strikes a damp upon them, which is the more remarkable, that man by sin did forfeit his dominion over the creatures. But this must be resolved into the virtue of that word, executed daily by providence, Gen. ix. 2. 'The fear of you, and the dread of you, shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea.' O what a power is in a word of divine appointment?

4. Consider the rational part of the world, men having life, sense, and reason. In these providence shews itself most brightly. Man is the compend of the creation, having a spirit as angels are spirits, and a body with the rest. And he is the peculiar care of Heaven. This is the main object of our observation.

1st, We should observe the dispensations of providence towards societies; and the nearer our relation to them be, we should observe them the more narrowly.

(1.) Towards societies of men in the world, kingdoms, churches, congregations, families, &c.

[1.] Much of the power, wisdom, goodness, justice, &c. of God, might be learned from the revolutions and changes in states and kingdoms, which should make us inquisitive for the knowledge of public affairs. And O what a glorious scene of providence has been opened of late in Britain, shining with illustrious mercy to the church and nation, in delivering us when at the brink of ruin; depth of wisdom, in baffling in a moment the cunning projects of enemies; almighty power, in so easily crushing their towering hopes; radiant justice, in making the stone tumble down on the heads of those that rolled it, and making enquiry for the blood of the saints shed many years ago.*

[2.] Providences toward the church of God are mainly to be observed, 1 Sam. iv. 13. The angels themselves notice these, to learn something from them, Eph. iii. 10. What concerns the church is the greatest work on the wheel of providence; and in most, if not all the great works of God through the world, he has in them an eye to his church. As she is for God, so other things are for her.

Particularly we should observe the way of providence towards the church of Scotland, whereof we are members; which has been as admirable a mixture of mercy and judgment, as perhaps any church since the apostles days has met with. How high has she

* This refers to the suppression of the rebellion in 1715. This part of the subject was preached in December 1716.

been raised in peace and purity, and how low laid at other times! How often has she been at the brink of ruin, and wonderfully preserved? How have her faithful friends been signally owned of God, and her enemies often borne the evident marks of God's displeasure! &c. And yet, more particularly,

We should observe the way and aspect of providence towards the congregation, how the Lord has been and is dealing with us, that we may accommodate ourselves to his dispensations, and answer the call of them.

[3.] Towards families. Sometimes the Lord causes a warm sunshine of prosperity on families, and sometimes the heavens are lowering above them; they have their risings and fallings, as all other societies in this changeable world, as is beautifully described by the Psalmist, Psal. cvii. 38, 39, 41. 'He blesseth them also, so that they are multiplied greatly, and suffereth not their cattle to decrease. Again they are minished and brought low through oppression, affliction, and sorrow. Yet setteth he the poor on high from affliction, and maketh him families like a flock.' How does Job mournfully observe the way of providence with his family, chap. xxix. 2.—5. and David on his death-bed the humbling circumstances of his! 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

There are few of our families but God has of late one way or other visited them; his voice has cried to our houses, as well as to the land. It is our duty to observe the same, read the language of it, and comply with the design thereof.

2dly Towards particular persons; for we may learn something from God's way with every one. And,

(1.) Towards others, whether godly or wicked. This was the Psalmist's practice to have his eyes in his head, and to look about him in the world, and learn something for his own establishment, both from the harms and happiness of others, Psal. xxxvii. 35.—37. 'I have seen the wicked in great power; and spreading himself like a green bay-tree. Yet he passed away, and lo, he was not; yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.' It is observable, that the holy scripture is not written as a system of precepts, with the reasons of them; but the body of it is a cluster of examples, wherein we may see, as in a glass, what we are to follow if we would be happy, and what we are to shun, Rom. xv. 4. 'For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning.' A plain evidence, that whoso would please God, must observe those things that are set before his eyes in providence.

(2.) Towards ourselves in particular. These providences come

nearest us, and therefore should be most narrowly observed. In these we are the parties to whom God directs his speech immediately; but, alas! often it is not observed, Job xxxiii. 14. 'For God speaketh once, yea twice, but man perceiveth it not.' There is none of us that are not the objects of wonderful providences, but especially true Christians, who may well say, as Psal. xl. 5. 'Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.' We might each of us fill a volume with accounts of the wonderful works of God, and yet confine ourselves to what has happened to ourselves, if we had but the wisdom to observe the same. Every moment we would be a wonder to ourselves, if we could but discern the beautiful mixture of that web of providence wherein every moment we are wrapt up.

(1.) Let us observe how we are powerfully preserved by Providence, Heb. i. 3. Psal. xxxvi. 6. 'Lord, thou preservest man and beast.' When we consider how unlike our souls are to our bodies, we may more wonder at the continuance than the breach of that union. When we think how death has as many gates to come in by, as our body has pores, how the seeds of a thousand diseases are in our bodies, what a train of perishing principles they are made up of, how easily, while we walk amidst the creatures of God here, fire may be set to the train, and the house of clay quickly blown up, we may say there is something more astonishing in our life than in our death. And it must be a powerful providence that preserves this life of ours, as a spark of fire in the midst of an ocean of water, or as a bag of powder amidst sparks of fire flying on every hand.

Besides, how few of us are there, but sometimes there has been but as a hair-breadth betwixt death and us, by reason either of diseases or unforeseen accidents, which we could not therefore ward off. So that we might say of our preservation, This is the finger of God.

What remarkable deliverances has the Lord wrought for some by unordinary means, as Jonah preserved by a whale, and Elijah fed by the ravens!

(2.) How we are holily, wisely, and powerfully governed by Providence, our persons and actions disposed of according to his will, either in mercy or in wrath, Dan. iv. 35. 'All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he doth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand or say unto him, What dost thou?' Psal. cxxxv. 6. 'Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places.' While we sail the sea

of this world, we may well perceive, that it is not we ourselves, but holy providence that guides the ship: Jer. x. 23. 'O Lord, (says the prophet), I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.' And while men will not see this, to engage them to a life of holiness, faith, and dependence on God, they are often made to feel it, by their dashing on rocks, to the bruising, if not to the splitting of them, Isa. xxvi. 11. 'Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see; but they shall see, and be ashamed.' Let me instance here but in two things, to shew that God sits King, and rules among men.

(1.) Man proposeth, but God disposeth, Lam. iii. 37. 'Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?' How often are men's towering hopes levelled with the ground in a moment? Their projects are laid with all the wit and industry they are capable of, managed with all diligence and circumspection, so that they cannot see how they can misgive, but must take effect according to their wish. But he that sits in heaven, in a moment looses a pin, and all the fabric falls to the ground, their projects are baffled, their measures disconcerted, some stroke of providence, which ungodly men call an unlucky accident, mars all. This was evident in Haman's case. Sometimes it is done by an invisible hand, whereby the wheels are taken off, that they can drive no farther, Job xx. 26. 'All darkness shall be hid in his secret places: a fire not blown shall consume him; it shall go ill with him that is left in his tabernacle.' How often do men find their greatest cross where they looked for their greatest comfort! and things turn about quite the contrary way to what was their design.

(2.) Man's extremity is God's opportunity, Gen. xxii. 14. How often does the Lord begin his work where man ends his, and can do no more? When men know not what to do, God opens a door; and when they have no firm ground of their own left to stand upon, he sets their foot on a rock, Psal. cvii. 27, 28. 'They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses.' Their hopes are disappointed, but their fears and desperate conclusions are prevented. Something threatens them a stroke, which they see not how to escape; but an invisible arm wards off the blow; and what they look for their ruin in, there they find by an over-ruling providence, healing and upmaking, Est. ix. 1. What is most unlikely is brought about, while the fairest hopes are made like the blossom that goes up as dust. Thus God baffles men's hopes on the one hand, and their fears on the other, that they may see, there is a wheel within a wheel that moves and guides all.

SECONDLY, We may consider providences with respect to their kinds, Psal. xl. 5. forecited. The wisdom of God is manifold wisdom, and produces works accordingly, Psal. civ. 24. And each of them is to be observed. I will instance in these three distinctions of providence.

First, Providences are either cross, or smiling and favourable. Both ought to be observed, and may be so profitably.

1. We should observe cross providences that we or others meet with. They come not by chance, but under the guidance of a holy sovereign God, Job v. 6. 'Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground.' Amos iii. 6. 'Shall there be an evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?' God makes himself known by them, his justice, truth, holiness, wisdom, and power, Psal. ix. 16. 'The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth.' And he requires us to observe them, Micah vi. 9. 'Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.' And it is a horrible provocation not to observe them, Isa. xxvi. 11. forecited, and not to comply with the design of them; to murmur, but not kindly mourn under them, Job xxxv. 9, 10. and xxxvi. 13. Sometimes men meet with crosses in the way of their duty, Gal. vi. 17. and sometimes in the way of sin, as Jonah. The design of both is to purge away sin, Isa. xxvii. 9. But, without observations, the plaister is not applied to the sore.

2. Smiling and favourable providences towards ourselves or others, Psal. xl. 5. Many, in their observations of providence, are like the flies that pass over the sound places, and swarm about the sores. They are still complaining of their crosses and sorrows, and will nicely reckon them up: but as to their mercies, they will not go the length of the unjust steward, of a hundred to set down fifty, Luke xvi. 6. They have their language, but it cannot be understood without observation, Rom. ii. 4. Dependance on God, and humility of heart, would teach us carefully to observe our mercies, Lam. iii. 22. Gen. xxxii. 10. even when we are meeting with heavy crosses, Job i. 21.

Secondly, There are great lines and small lines of providence. And,

1. We should observe the great lines of providence in signal events. Some dispensations bear such a signature of a divine hand, and so flash like lightning on men's face, that one can hardly miss to observe, but must say, as Exod. viii. 19. 'This is the finger of God.' 2 Chron. xvi. 19, 20. 'Then Uzziah was wroth, and had a censer in his hand, to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead, before the priests in

the house of the Lord, from beside the incense altar. And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests looked upon him, and behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence, yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the Lord had smitten him.' It is rare that God leaves himself without a witness, by some such signal providences; yet such is the perverseness of the heart of man, that as the blind cannot observe the flash of lightning, even these are lightly looked at, 1 Sam. vi. 9.

2. The small lines of providence. The most minute things are guided by the all-ruling hand, Matth. x. 29, 30. And if God do manage them, it becomes us to notice them. All the king's coin, from the massiest piece of gold to the smallest penny, bears the king's image and superscription, and therefore the least as well as the greatest is current in trade. So the smallest lines of providence pass current with those that keep a trade with heaven. Gideon notices his hearing a fellow tell a dream, Judges vii. 13, &c. He-man, the removing of an acquaintance, Psal. lxxxviii. 8. and Jacob, a kind word, the shew of his brother's countenance, Gen. xxxiii. 10.

Thirdly, There are common and uncommon providences.

1. We should observe common and ordinary dispensations, such as fall out every day in the common road of providence. These, because they are common, lie neglected: yet the 104th Psalm is penned on that subject. I have observed to you already, how providence appears in the constant revolutions of seasons, day and night; by the one the weary earth is refreshed, and by the other weary man, the night being fit for rest. The subjection of the beast, to man, by virtue of that divine word, Gen. ix. 2. forecited, without which man could not have his necessary designs served. I add, that wonderful diversity of faces and features, without which the man could not know his wife, nor the parents their own children, nor the judge the criminal; so that without this there could be no orderly society, no government, commerce, &c. These are a sample of common providences, which studied might be of great use.

2. Uncommon and unordinary providences, as miracles, which are beyond the power of nature; extraordinary deliverances, judgments, discoveries of secret crimes; which are bright spots here and there interspersed in the web of providence, and challenge a peculiar regard.

THIRDLY, we may consider providences with respect to the time of their falling out. The works of providence run parallel with the line of time, and the continuance of the world, John v. 17.

1. We should observe the past dispensations of providence, Psal. lxxvii. 5. 'I have considered the days of old, (says Asaph), the

years of ancient times.' An observer of providence must look off unto others, look into himself, and, with respect to himself and others, look back also.

(1.) Past providences towards others afford a large field for observation, reaching from the creation till now, Psal. cxliii. 5. 'I remember the days of old,' says David. He remembered how the Lord dealt with Nimrod, Abimelech, Pharaoh, &c. What a chain of wise providences has encompassed the world in the several generations thereof? what a beautiful mixture of providences has always appeared towards the church, while the mystery of God, not yet finished, has been a carrying on! What very remarkable things have fallen out in the life and death of particular persons! From all the particulars of these we might draw something for our spiritual advantage, as the bee from every flower extracts her honey.

(2.) Past providences towards ourselves in particular afford also a large field, reaching from our first being till now. Look back and consider that wonderful providence that framed thee in the womb, Job x. 10, 11. The Psalmist finds himself in a transport of wonder upon this reflection, Psal. cxxxix. 14, &c. Consider how the same kind providence brought thee safe out of the womb, that the womb was not made thy grave, or that thou wast not stifled in the birth, Psal. xxii. 9. How thou wast provided for and preserved from the dangers in infancy, by the same kind providence, whilst thou couldst do nothing for thyself, Psal. xxii. 9, 10. Observe the providences of God towards thee in thy childhood, youth, middle age, and forward to the present time; and thou must say as old Jacob, Gen. xlviii. 15. 'God fed me all my life long unto this day;' and with the Psalmist, Psal. lxxi. 17. 'O God thou hast taught me from my youth.' Observe how God gave thee such and such education, ordered thy lot in such and such a place in his earth, and in such sort as he has done, how he brought thee into such and such company, saved thee from such and such dangers, &c.

2. We should observe the present dispensations of providence towards ourselves and others, Zech. vi. 1, 2. It is a stream that still runs by us, like those rivers that bring down the golden ore, Psal. lxxv. 11. By day nor night it ceaseth not, Psal. xix. 2. Providence with the one hand bids us stoop and take on the day's load of benefits, Psal. lxxviii. 19. and with the other hand lays on the day's burden of evils, Matth. vi. ult. And therefore that is our duty, Psal. iv. 4. 'Commune with your own hearts upon your bed and be still;' that having made our observations through the day, we may cast up our accounts against night.

Thus far of the objects on which we are to make observations.

III. The next general head is, to shew what we are to observe in providences. It is not enough to observe the work itself, but we must be as particular as we can about it. This is like the bruising of the spices and the pouring out of the ointment, whereby their fragraney is best perceived. There are these nine things I recommend to your observation.

1. The timing of providences, the great weight of a dispensation sometimes lies in this very circumstance, that then it came, and neither sooner nor later. And O the admirable wisdom that appears in thus jointing of them! Gen. xxiv. 45. Abraham's servant prays to be guided to the woman appointed to be Isaac's wife; and in the very time Rebekah comes. Gideon in the very time when he comes near the enemy's camp, hears one of them telling his dream, Judges vii. 13, &c. Uzziah is smitten in the very time when he is attempting to offer incense upon the altar of incense. And here particularly observe the timing of providences,

(1.) With respect to the frame of our spirit; for much lies in observing what frame of spirit a mercy or stroke overtakes us in. So the church observes the timing of her deliverance, that it came when they were not looking for it, Psal. cxxvi. 1. And that made it look the greater. Job observes, that his trouble came on him when he was far from security, and that made him wear it the better, Job iii. ult. Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar's trouble began when their hearts had quite forgot God, and that made the heavy hand of God the heavier. O notice carefully what frame of spirit your mercies or crosses find you in; ye will see much in that.

(2.) With respect to your circumstances. How often does kind providence catch the child at the very halting, Psal. xciv. 18. and an angry God set fire on people's nest just when they had well feathered it, and throw them down when they are just come to their height? Job xx. 23. So he did with holy Job, chap. xxix. 18. Observe it, and ye will find either a sting or a sweet ingredient in what you meet with.

There is a piece of holy foresight that an exercised Christian may have by observing the timing of a dispensation. If thou be such an one, and wouldst know whether a mercy thou hast got will last or no, how was it timed; came it to thee when thy spirit was weaned, lying at the Lord's feet? Thou hast a sure hold of it. But came it when thy spirit was upon the fret, unhumbled, unsubdued, and thou wouldst needs have it? It will stick short while in thy hand, Psal. xviii. 17, 18. Hos. xiii. 11. Fruit plucked off the tree of providence ere it be ripe, will last short while, and set their teeth on edge while they have it.

2. The beginnings and dawnings of providences, Psal. cxxx. 6. 'My soul,' says the Psalmist, 'waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning.' So did those mentioned, Luke i. 66. 'All they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be?' Sometimes a work that God has upon the wheel of providence will be but like the cloud, as big as a man's hand; but being observed, it will spread. Good Jacob observed the dawnings of providence in Joseph's case, though he little knew what a bright day it would end in, Gen. xxxvii. 11. It may be long betwixt the beginning and the end; but it is good to notice, as the holy penman does, the door of hope a little after the midnight of the captivity, Jer. liii. 31. There is a great advantage in being able to follow the thread of providence from the beginning of it.

3. The progress of providence, endeavouring always to notice the several steps of it, Luke ii. 19. and 51. and to follow the thread. For God ordinarily brings great works to pass by degrees, that so men that are weak may have the greater advantage for observation, Hos. vi. 3. Mercies and strokes may be long a-working, the decree may go long ere it bring forth: but much of the wisdom of God may be seen in the several steps it takes, and the advances it makes.

4. The turns of providence. The wheel of providence is a wheel within a wheel, and sometimes it runs upon the one side, and sometimes on the other. Observe the change of the sides. For providence to our view has many turnings and windings, and yet really it is going straight forward, Zech. xiv. 7. It runs fast to the evening with the church there; but behold the turn, 'In the evening it shall be light.' See the turn of the wheel in Joseph's case, Gen. xli. 14. in Pharaoh's taking him from prison; in the church's case, Est. vi. 3, 4. in Ahasnerus's inquiring whether any honour had been done to Mordecai for his discovering a plot formed against the king's life; and in that of Hagar and Ishmael, Gen. xxi. 17. in the angel's calling to them out of heaven, to know what ailed them. And ye may see the wheel ordinarily turns at the brow of the hill.

5. The end of providence, James v. 11. There seemed to be many dismal circumstances in Job's case, concurring to his ruin. His substance goes, his family, his health and ease; his wife bids him blaspheme and die; his friends represent his case as that of an hypocrite; many a black thread appears in the web: but O what a beautiful piece does it appear when it is wrought out! Job xlii. 10, 12.

6. The mixture of providence. The unmixed dispensation is reserved for another world; there is mercy unmixed, Rev. xxii. 1. and

judgment unmixed, chap. xiv. 10. But here all we meet with is mixed. There is never a mercy we get, but there is a cross in it; and never a cross, but there is a mercy in it. Observe the mixture of your mercies, to make you humble and heavenly; for the fairest rose that grows here has a prickle with it, and there is a tartness in our sweetest enjoyments. Observe the mixture of your crosses, to make you patient and thankful; for the bitterest pill God gives you to swallow has a vehicle of mercy, Lam. iii. 22. 'It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.' And wise observers will see many mercies in one cross, if they will but allow themselves to see how God could and might have made it worse.

7. The concurrence of providences. Sometimes several dispensations of providence meet together in one's case. One while there may be a meeting of several mercies together, which make a golden spot of time among them to a person. At other time several afflictions meet together, one wave comes on the back of another, till the furnace is by several coals heated seven times. Job had experience of both in his case, a train of troubles first, and a train of mercies succeeded. Jacob, when he came homeward to Canaan, had a train of troubles that waited on him. And in the case of the people of God, a very fair blink forebodes a heavy shower. The duty in that case is, 'In the day of prosperity be joyful; but in the day of adversity consider,' Eccl. vii. 14. Sometimes there is a meeting of several kinds, and one gets his bed strewed with a rose and a thorn, &c.

8. The design and language of providences, Micah vi. 9. They are the works of infinite wisdom, and therefore cannot be without a design. And seeing God speaks to us by his providences, and we ought to hear and obey when he speaks, we should be very careful to know the meaning of dispensations, that we may fall in with the call of providence. And the Lord takes it heinously ill if we do not, Jer. vii. 7. If it be dark and doubtful let us lay it before the Lord in prayer, set it in the light of the word, and meditate on it till we find it out, Psal. lxxiii. 16, 17.

9. *Lastly*, The harmony of providences. There is a fourfold harmony to be observed in providences.

1st., Their harmony with the word, which they agree with as the copy with the original. The sealed book of God's decrees is opened in providences. Hence that of the opening the seals, in the Revelation. And the book of the scripture is written over again in providence, so that as in water face answereth to face, so do God's works to his word, Psal. xlviii. 8. Providence is a most regular

building, and the word is the draught of that building. Providence is a curious piece of embroidery, and the word is the pattern. So that in providence the word has been a-fulfilling ever since it was given, and still it is a-fulfilling, and the pattern will be wrought out when the mystery of God is finished, and not till then, Mat. v. 18. And thus it is a-fulfilling, not only by the extraordinary but ordinary providences. If a man quarrel any thing in a building or embroidery, there must be a comparing it with the draught or pattern of the house or embroidery, and he will be satisfied. Psal. lxxiii. 16, 17.

Ye will never observe providences aright, if ye do not observe their harmony with the word; for the word is the instituted means of the conveyance of influences, Isa. lix. ult. By neglecting of this, some dispensations prove stumbling-blocks, over which some break their necks, Mal. iii. 15. Many draw harsh and ungodly conclusions against others, whereby they only discover their own ignorance of the scriptures, and of the method of providence, Luke xiii. 1.—5. John ix. 2, 3. like Job's censorious uncharitable friends, Job v. 1.

O Sirs, learn this lesson, that all providences which you, or I, or any person or society in the world meet with, are accomplishments of the scripture. And they may be reduced to and explained by one of these five things. Either they are accomplishments of,

(1.) Scripture-doctrines, Psal. xlvi. 8. 'As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God.' May not every one see, that few great men are good men? Do not stumble at it; it is but a fulfilling of the scripture, 1 Cor. i. 26. 'Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.' That the safest condition for the soul is the medium between great wealth and pinching poverty, according to Agur's prayer, Prov. xxx. 8, 9. 'Give me neither poverty, nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.'—That Satan and the corruptions of the heart are sometimes most busy, when people are setting themselves to serve the Lord, agreeable to Paul's experience, Rom. vii. 21. 'I find a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me.'—That the generality of the hearers of the gospel are not savingly wrought on by it, according to these scripture-passages, Isa. liii. 1. 'Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?' Matt. xxii. 14. 'Many are called, but few are chosen.' And so in other cases. Or of,

(2.) Scripture-prophecies, 1 Tim. i. 18. 'This I commit unto thee,

O Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee.' What astonishing providences were the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, the expulsion of the Canaanites, Cyrus' overturning the Babylonian empire, and loosing the captivity, and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans? But all these were but a fulfilling of scripture-prophecies. What an astonishing providence was the rise, reign, and continuance of the Antichristian kingdom, and the reformation of religion in many nations, after they had lain many hundreds of years under Popish darkness; These are the fulfilling of the apocalyptic prophecies. And what an astonishing providence was the introduction of the gospel into Britain, and the preservation of it hitherto, amidst so many attempts to destroy it? It is an accomplishment of that prophecy, Isa. xlii. 4. 'The isles shall wait for his law.' Or of,

(3.) Scripture-promises, Josh. xxi. 45. 'There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel: all came to pass,' Psal. cxix. 65. 'Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according unto thy word.' You see the orderly revolutions of the year, and seasons thereof; that is the fulfilling of the scripture, Gen. viii. 22.—That those who have suffered loss in the cause of Christ, have been bountifully treated with so much in hand, that they have had more content and inward satisfaction in that, than any other time of their life, is a fulfilling of scripture, Mark x. 29, 30. 'There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred-fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.'—That the way of duty has been not only the most honourable but the safest way, is an accomplishment of scripture-promises, Prov. x. 9. 'He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely.' Chap. xvi. 7. 'When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.'—That communion with God is to be had in ordinances, is conformable to promise, Exod. xx. 24. 'In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.' Or of,

(4.) Scripture threatenings, Lev. x. 3. 'This is that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the congregation I will be glorified.' Hos. vii. 12. 'I will chastise them, as their congregation hath heard.'—You may observe how dangerous it is to meddle for the ruin of the work and people of God, from that passage, Micah iv. 11, 12. 'Now also many nations are gathered against thee, that say, Let her be de-

filed, and let our eye look upon Zion. But they know not the thoughts of the Lord, neither understand they his counsel: for he shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor.' How their faces are covered with shame that despise the Lord, from 1 Sam. ii. 30. 'The Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed, that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me, I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.'—How the faster people clave to their temporal comforts, they have the looser hold, from Ezek. xxiv. 25. 'I will take from them their strength, the joy of their glory, the desire of their eyes, and that whereupon they set their minds, their sons and their daughters.'—How people may run long in an evil way, but their foot will slip at length, from Dent. xxxii. 35. 'Their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.'

(5.) *Lastly*, Or they are the parallels of scripture-examples. Psal. cxliii. 5. 'I remember the days of old.' The serious observer will find a surprising fulness here, as in the other parts of scripture. I will instance in three very astonishing pieces of providence, which often put good men to their wits end, to know how to account for them; yet being brought to the glass of scripture-examples, such a harmony appears betwixt the one and the other, as cannot but be extremely satisfying.

(1.) Sometimes we see men walking contrary to God, and yet providence smiling on them, and caressing them, as if they were the darlings of heaven. This has puzzled the best of men. It put Jeremiah sore to it, chap. xii. 1, 2, 'Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously? Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root: they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit; thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins.' It was near carrying Asaph quite off his feet, Psal. lxxiii. 13. 'Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. But, O! is there not a beautiful harmony in this with scripture-examples? How did all Israel as one man back Absalom in his rebellion? How did Haman rise till he could come no higher, unless he had got the throne? And the tyrant Nebuchadnezzar carries all before him according to his wish, &c. And scripture-doctrine unriddles the mystery, Psal. xcii. 5, 6, 7. 'O Lord, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep. A brutish man knoweth not: neither doth a fool understand this.'

When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish: it is that they shall be destroyed for ever.'

(2.) How often do astonishing strokes light on those who are dear to God, as if God selected them from among the rest of the world, to shew his hatred of them? Eccl. viii. 14, 'There is a vanity which is done upon the earth, that there be just men unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked: again, there be wicked men to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous.' O Sirs, this has been very puzzling to those that have met with it. But behold the harmony with scripture-examples; as in Job's case. Eli loses his two sons at one blow, his daughter-in-law dies, and himself breaks his neck. Aaron the saint of God has two sons slain by fire from heaven. The apostles were set forth as appointed for death, &c. 1 Cor. iv. 9. Babylon is at ease when Zion lies in ruins. See Lam. ii. 20. But further,

(3.) How often has it been the lot of some of God's people to meet with heavy strokes from the hands of the Lord, when they have been going in the way which God himself bade them take? That will try people to purpose that observe these things. But blessed be God for the Bible, that lets us see this is no untrodden path. Jacob has an express command to return to Canaan, Gen. xxxi. 13. But O what a train of heavy trials attend him! Laban pursues him as a thief, Esau meets him with four hundred to slay him, the angel puts the knuckle of his thigh out of joint, his daughter is ravished by the Shechemites, his sons murder the Shechemites, Deborah dies, and his beloved wife Rachel dies, and Renben defiles Bilhah. It was no wonder he said, 'Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.' Gen. xlvii. 9.

2dly, There is a harmony of providences among themselves. It is observed of the wheels, that the four had 'one likeness,' Ezek. i. 16. The dispensations of providence of the same kind, at the greatest distance of time from one another, have a beautiful likeness to one another. And therefore Solomon observes, Eccl. i. 10. 'Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? It hath been already of old time, which was before us.' Did ever any meet with such a temptation and trial as I have met with? say some. But says the apostle, 1 Cor. x. 13. 'There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man.' Was ever any afflicted at the rate that I am? says another. But hear what the apostle says. 1 Pet. iv. 12. 'Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.' See how Solomon accounts for this, Eccl. i. 9, 10, 11. 'The Thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done, is that

which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us. There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall their be any remembrance of things that are to come, with those that shall come after.'

(1.) They are all wrought after the same pattern, namely, the word, in the various parts thereof. The same word which was accomplished on a nation or person thousands of years ago, is accomplished on others at this very day. The same word fulfilled in one's case some time ago, may be fulfilled over again when their case comes to be the same it was then.

(2.) They have all the same specific end, to reward or punish, check, direct, &c. And where the ends are alike, it is no wonder the measures be so too. God designed to make his enemies fall, and to deliver his church at the brink of ruin, in Esther's days; and so in ours of late. Hence the plot was suffered to succeed; and when all seemed to be done, providence struck a sudden stroke, and turned the wheel on the wicked. But is there any thing new here? was it not just so in Esther's days?

It is good to observe this harmony; for by these means one sees himself in a paved road, and so may the better know how to steer his course. When one finds himself in a road where providence has led him before, he may consult his way-marks that he set up when he was there formerly, and so may travel it the more easily. And the same may he do when he is in the road, where he observes others have been before him. He may beware of the steps where they stumbled, and keep the road by which he sees they got through.

3dly, There is a harmony of providences with their design and end, Deut. xxxii. 4. 'All his ways are judgment.' There is an admirable fitness in God's measures to reach his holy ends. The wheels were full of eyes as guided by infinite wisdom; and whithersoever the living creatures had a face looking, the wheels had a side to go on. Whatsoever God created was very good, Gen. i. ult. that is, very fit for the end of its creation. And so are all God's works of providence exactly answering their end. It is often observed of the wheels, *They turned not when they went*, as a chariot must needs do, when the chariotcer has driven the horses the wrong way. If they were to go to another quarter, they were but to go on that side that looked that way all along. There is a twofold harmony to be observed here.

(1.) The harmony of every piece of providence with its particular end and design. Where there lie a great many pieces of wright-work framed and shapen by the tradesman, should a bungler take

them in hand, he cannot join them; he complains that one mortise is too strait, and another too wide: but the artificer can sort them, and put each in its own place, and they answer exactly. So it is with providence. Every piece answers to its end, Eccl. iii. 11. 'He hath made every thing beautiful in his time.' There is a glaring instance of this in the strokes that providence reaches sinners to punish them for particular sins, where there is such an affinity betwixt the sin and the stroke, that the sin may be read in the punishment. This is done many ways, which yet perhaps may be all reduced to one of these four. The stroke answers the sin, either,

(1.) In time, the stroke following hard at the heels of the provocation, as 1 Kings xiii. 4. When Jeroboam put forth his hand from the altar, saying, lay hold on the man of God, immediately his hand dried up. So God punished Dinah's gadding abroad unnecessarily, David's security by his adultery, and Peter's going into the high priest's hall. Or,

(2.) In kind, whereby God justly pays home a person in the same coin as he sinned. Adonibezek is a notable instance of this, Judg. i. 7. 'Threescore and ten kings (says he) having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table; as I have done, so God hath requited me.' David's injury to Uriah's bed is punished by Absalom's doing the same to his. So many disobedient to their parents are paid home by their children again. Some wrong and oppress others, and afterwards others deal just so by them. Or,

(3.) In likeness, the stroke bearing a resemblance to the sin. The Sodomites burn in lust, and they are burnt with fire from heaven. Nadab and Abihu sinned by offering strange fire, and they are consumed with fire from the Lord. Jacob beguiles his father, pretending he was Esau, and Laban beguiles him with Leah instead of Rachel. As sinners measure to God in spirituals, he measures to them in temporals, 1 Cor. xi. 30.

(4.) In flat contrariety. Adam will be as God, and he becomes like the beast that perisheth. David's pride of the numbers of his people is punished by the loss of seventy thousand of them. Rachel must have children, or she cannot live; she gets them, and dies in bringing one forth. The Jews crucify the Lord of glory, lest the Romans should come and take away their place and their nation; and that is the very thing that brings them.

(2.) The harmony of the several pieces among themselves with respect to their common end and design. And here there is often a beautiful mixture of contraries to make together one beautiful piece, Rom. viii. 28. 'All things shall work together.' Strike the

strings of a viol one by one, they make but a sorry sound; but strike them together by art, they make a pleasant harmony. The nicest piece of work lying in pieces, is but a confused heap. Joseph is sold for a slave; and he is brought into Pharaoh's presence. How contrary do these seem? but the former was as necessary as the latter to accomplish the design of providence. Haman is advanced, and the good deed done by Mordecai is forgotten, till the fittest time of remembering it. Both harmonize to Haman's ruin. Providence loses no ground in all the compasses we imagine it takes: every circumstance is necessary to the carrying on of the common end.

4thly, There is a harmony of providences with the prayers of the people of God, that have the Spirit of prayer, Gen. xxxii. compared with xxxiii. 10. Many dispensations of providence are the returns of prayer. This seems to be the ground of that conclusion, Psal. xli. 11. 'By this I know that thou favourest me, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me;' and puts an additional sweetness in mercies. There is one general rule as to the hearing of prayer, John xvi. 23. Whatsoever prayers are believingly put up in Christ's name are heard. And so we should notice the harmony of providence with prayer. Concerning which I offer these five observations.

(1.) That where God has no mind to give such a mercy, the spirit of prayer for that mercy will be restrained, Jer. vii. 16. 'Pray not thou for this people,' &c. As, upon the other hand, when God minds his people a favour, he will open their lips to pray for it, Ezek. xxxvi. 37. 'Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them.' And this is no wonder, if we consider, that the Spirit of the Lord dictated the word whereof providence is the accomplishment, and the same Spirit guides the wheel of providence, Ezek. i. 20. and the same Spirit is the author of acceptable prayer, by which the sap of the word is sucked out in providence, Rom. viii. 26, 27.

(2.) God hears believing prayers, either by granting the mercy itself which is sought, as Gen. xxiv. 45. in Rebekah's appearing at the well, and drawing water as Abraham's servant had prayed for; or else the equivalent, something that is as good, 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9. in Paul's obtaining grace sufficient for him. Either of these ways providence brings the answer of prayer. For God's bond of promise that faith lays hold on, and pleads in prayer, may be paid either (as it were) in money or money-worth. And the harmony betwixt prayer and providence is to be acknowledged either of the ways.

(3.) Providence may for a time seem to go quite contrary to the

saints' prayers, and yet afterwards come to meet exactly. It is an astonishing piece of providence that the saints sometimes meet with, namely, that a case never is more hopeless than just after they have had a particular concern upon their spirits before the Lord about it; so that they are made to say, as Psal. lxxv. 5. 'By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation.' But it is very usual in the Lord's dealings with his people to pass a sentence of death on their mercies ere they get them, as he did with the Israelites in Egypt, who were worse treated by Pharaoh after the application made to him to let them go, than before, Exod. v. ult. Providence acts like a man that is to fetch a stroke, swinging the axe back, that he may come forward with the greater vigour.

(4.) Providence often very discernibly keeps pace with the prayers of his people, that as they go up or down, so it goes. An eminent instance whereof we have Exod. xvii. 11. in that while Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. Hence sometimes a matter will go fairly on, while the soul is helped to believe and wrestle; but when unbelief makes the soul fag, the wheel begins to stand too. And it is no wonder this takes place, where the same Spirit is in the creature, and in the wheel.

(5.) *Lastly*, Providence may sweetly harmonize with the spirit of prayer, and the believer's expression in prayer, and yet not with the desires of their own spirit, which perhaps they went to lay before the Lord, Rom. viii. 26, 27. The not distinguishing of these two makes many see a great jarring betwixt providence and their prayers, while in very deed there is a notable harmony betwixt them. And if they would carefully mark the words in which, under the influence of the Spirit, they presented their petitions to the Lord, they might find them wonderfully agree with the dispensation of providence, though not with the desire of their own spirits.

IV. I proceed, in the next place, to assign reasons why Christians should wisely observe providences.

1. Because they are God's works, Psal. cxxxv. 6. The world, in the framing of it, was not a work of chance; neither is it so in the management of it. Whoever be the instruments and second causes by which any thing falls out in our lot, God has the guiding of the wheels, and has a negative on the whole creation, Lam. iii. 37. 'Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?' Meet me with a favourable event? we are debtors to God for it, As Abraham's servant acknowledged, on the favourable answer he received relating to Rebekah, in his bowing

his head, and worshipping the Lord, Gen. xxiv. 26. Do we meet with a cross one? It is the finger of God, though we see a creature's whole hand in it, Amos iii. 6. 'Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?' Now, seeing they are his works, they ought to be observed.

2. Because they are great works, Psal. cxl. 2. 'The work of the Lord is great.' Every work of providence bears the signature of a divine hand upon it. But the stamp is sometimes so fine, and our eyes so dull, that we are slow to perceive it. I told you that there are small lines of providence as well as great: but the great God does nothing but what is great and suitable to himself. Though some of his works are comparatively small, they are all great absolutely. And therefore with respect to those I called small ones, I must say to you, as Deut. i. 17. 'Ye shall hear the small as well as the great.' And good reason is there for it. For,

(1.) The smaller a piece of work is, the greater and more curious is the workmanship. Galen confessed the hand, and extolled the wisdom of God in the thigh of a gnat. An ordinary artificer will fit out a mill; but the small wath requires a curious hand, and pictures of the least size shew most of the painter's skill. That frogs should have been a plague to Pharaoh, or Herod eaten up of worms, was more admirable, than if the one had been plagued with an armed host, and the other devoured by a lion. The rats devouring hats and poppies. (Turn. hist. Prov. chap. 112.) was truly more admirable than the conquests of Alexander and Cæsar both.

(2.) Great things may be lying hid in the bosom of very minute and ordinary things. Search into the rise of that wonderful turn of providence with the church in Esther's days, and ye shall find it to be the king's falling off his rest one night, Est. vi. 1. of that wonderful overthrow of the Moabites, and ye will find it a mere fancy, 2 Kings iii. 22, 23. The curse of God may be in the miscarrying of a basket of bread, Deut. xxviii. 17. And it may be big with a great mercy. They say the whale is mightily beholden to the little fish called *musculus*, which swims as a guide before her, without which she would be in danger in straits and betwixt great rocks. The little cloud like a man's hand often darkens the heavens ere all be done.

3. Because they are often very mysterious works, and therefore they need observation, Psal. xcii. 5. It is necessary to give us right views of providence, and to keep us from mistakes. The making judgment of providences is a very tender point, wherein the best of men have gone far wrong. Was not Jacob far out when he said, Gen. xlii. 36. 'All these things are against me,' if we compare

the promise, Rom. viii. 28. 'All things shall work together for good,' &c. and the event too? Many a time the outside of providence is very unlike it inside. The greatest cross may be wrapt up in what we take to be our greatest comfort; and the greatest comfort may be inwrapt in what we call our greatest cross. Observation must break the shell, that we may look in.

4. Because they are always perfect works. They will abide the strictest search and the most narrow inquiry, Deut. xxxii. 4. Whatever faults we find with them, as we do many, it is for want of due observation. But at length he shall gain that testimony and recantation, 'He hath done all things well,' Mark vii. 37. In these his works no flaw is to be found, no mistake; nothing too much, nothing too little; nothing too soon done, nothing too late done; nothing misplaced, nothing in or over; nay, nothing done that is not best done; nothing that man or angel could make better. The world will startle at this as a paradox: but faith will believe it, on the solid ground of infinite wisdom, though sense contradict it, Isa. xxxviii. 8. Jer. xii. 1. O that they who will debate this truth would come near and observe.

5. *Lastly*, Because they are speaking works, Micah vi. 9. They speak Heaven's language to the earth, and therefore should be observed. And they speak,

(1.) Of him, Psal. xix. 2. They preach to us that he is, what a God he is, how holy, just, wise, good, and powerful, &c. We may see there his perfections as in a glass. Each pile of grass speaks a God, a wise, good, and powerful one. So many creatures as there are, so many mouths to speak of him. And it is man's work to observe and hear. When God had replenished the heavens with sun, moon, and stars, and the earth with variety of creatures, the creation was still imperfect till man was made. For what avails the musical instrument, if there be nobody to play on it?

(2.) For him. Cross providences speak for him, Micah vi. 9. And favourable providences also, Rom. ii. 4. Hereby sinners are instructed in the way they should go, Psal. xxxii. 8. reprov'd, as Joseph's brethren; and comforted, as Paul was, Phil. ii. 27. And, in a word, they call us from sin unto God; by them, where the word goes before, Christ knocks at the door of sinners' hearts, and calls for access.

I come now to the improvement of this doctrine. And,

I. It may serve for lamentation. Ah! may we not say, Who is wise to observe these things? Wise observers of providence are thin sown in the world; because there are few exercised to godliness. God has given us enough to observe in the public and in our

private case. He is speaking by his providence to the land, he is speaking loudly at this day to the parish, to you and to me, and to every one in particular. But, alas! it is not observed to purpose. Graceless people are presumptuous, and will not observe; and even many godly are heedless, and do not observe. There are these six evidences that this wise observation of providence is very rare.

1. How many are there who see God no more in their mercies and crosses, than if they were a parcel of atheists, that did not think there were a God, or that believed no providence at all? If they get a mercy, God is not owned in it; they sacrifice to their own net. If they get a cross, they cry out by reason of the arm of the Almighty. But none saith, Where is God my Maker! In all the turns of their life and lot, they never seriously look to the wheel within the wheel.

2. How many are there to whom God in his providence is speaking plain language, that he who runs may read it, yet they will not understand it? Psal. lxxxii. 5. God plagues the Philistines for the ark most visibly, yet they are at a loss, saying, It may be it is a chance. Balaam's ass refuses to carry him forward on the way, but he is in a rage against her. God meets sinners in their way, with speaking providences; but on they go; they do not hear, they will not be stopped. Like the dog, they snarl at the stone, but look not to the hand that threw it.

3. How few are exercised to know the design of providences that they meet with? Many signal mercies they meet with, but put not the question, What is God saying to me by these things? Many a heavy dispensation they meet with, partly by the rod's hanging over their heads, partly by its lying on them; yet they never seriously take up Job's exercise, chap. x. 2. 'I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me.' These things let them come and go with as little concern to know the design of them, as if they had none.

4. How few are exercised to comply with the design of providences, to accommodate themselves to the divine dispensations? Job xxxiii. 13, 14. If men were wise observers of providence, it would be their constant practice to be answering the several calls thereof, still facing about towards it, as the shadow on the dial to the body of the sun, Psal. xxvii. 8. 'When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' But, alas! men meet with humbling providences, but they are not exercised to mortify their pride: they meet with awakening providences, yet they are not exercised to rouse up themselves to their duty: they meet with afflicting providences in worldly things, yet they are not exer-

eised to get their hearts weaned from the world; they meet with reprovng providences, yet they are not exercised to repent and mourn over the sins thereby pointed out. But they really strive with their Maker, and while he draws by his providence, they hold fast, and will not let it go, Jer. vi. 29.

5. The little skill^t that people have in judging of providences. A man will readily have skill in his own trade: but it is no wonder to see people unacquainted with things in which their business does not lie. O what commentaries on providence are in the world, that destroy the text! How miserably is the doctrine of particular dispensations perverted! Despisers of God and his ordinances are very easy; and therefore the world concludes, 'it is vain to serve God, and that there is no profit in keeping his ordinances,' Mal. iii. 14. 'The proud are called happy,' ver. 15. They are best that have least to do with them. Good men meet with signal strokes: the world concludes that they are hypocrites, and they must be guilty of some heinous wickedness beyond other people, Job v. 1. Luke xiii. 1, 2. And a thousand such blunders there are.

6. *Lastly*, They rank poverty in respect of Christian experience found among professors. What a learned Egyptian said to a Greek, *Vos Græci semper pueri*, may be said to many in whom there is some good thing towards the God of Israel. Ye professors are ever children, 2 Cor. iii. 1. Heb. v. 12. And what is the reason, but that we have never yet fallen close to the study of observing providences? See the text. There is a daily market in providence, but ye do no trade in it; and therefore ye are always poor. There is perhaps a lesson put in your hands this day, that ye had several years since, but ye did not learn it; and so it is now as great a mystery to you as then.

USE II. Of exhortation. O be exhorted to become wise observers of providence. O fall at length upon this piece of practical religion. Many of us have it, I fear, yet to begin; and all have need to mend their pace in it. For enforcing this exhortation, I shall give you some other points of doctrine from the words, by way of motives and direction, and so shut up this subject.

For motives take these doctrines.

1. Wise observing of providence is a rare thing in the world: *Who is wise, and will observe these things*, as the words may bear. And the reason is, the truth of religion is rare, and close and tender walking with God is yet rarer, Matth. xxii. 14. and xxv. 5. The most part of the world go the broad way to destruction, Matth. vii. 14. and therefore they are not concerned to observe the works of the Lord. Many Christians there are, that, alas! in these dregs of

time are not exercised Christians. Up then and be doing, and conspire not with the multitude to put a slight on God's speaking by his providence, lest his fury break forth as fire on you with the rest, John vi. 66.

The more rare the observing of providence is, it is the more precious. Stones may be gathered from the surface of the earth, while gold must be dug with much labour out of the bowels of it, The finest things are hardest to be won at: *Nulla virtus sine lapide*. As Christ himself had a stone rolled on him, so every grace, work, and way of Christ has one. But there is a pearl underneath; and the heavier the stone, the more precious is the pearl. Come and see in this particular.

II. They that are wise will be observers of providences, *Whoso is wise, and will observe these things*. And at what pitch your wisdom arrives, your observation of providences will follow it, Eccl. ii. 14. The eating of the forbidden fruit cast all mankind into a spiritual madness; and the truth is, the most part of the world are in that respect as madmen, regarding neither the word nor works of the Lord. But if thou wert come to thyself, it would not be so, Luke xv. 17. How long hast thou acted as a fool, in matters of greatest weight, being penny-wise and pound-foolish, careful for a mite, and in the meantime letting talents slip through thy fingers? Luke x. 41, 42.

O Sirs, how do unobserved providences aggravate our guilt, and increase our accounts! When the day shall come, the Lord will reckon with the sinner, for all the pains he has bestowed on him to bring him to himself: when his slighting the call of the word shall be aggravated with so many items of providences. How will the sinner look, when the Lord shall say, Did I not give thee such and such mercies to draw thee from thy sin? lay such and such crosses in thy way to drive thee from it? What hast thou done with all the instructive up-stirring providences I gave thee? with all the providential warnings, rebukes, &c. given thee? Remember that passage, Prov. ix. 12. 'If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.'

III. The wise observation of providences is a soul-enriching trade. *They shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord*. This is so on two accounts, both deducible from the text.

1. That which seems the most barren piece of providence, becomes fruitful by wise observation. Some of *these things* in the text are very cross providences; yet even by them one shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord. Behold a holy art, whereby ye may not only gather honey out of every sweet-smelling flower, but may gather grapes of spiritual profit off the thorns of afflictions, and figs

of thistles. The apostle tells us a mystery, of a pleasure in infirmities, distresses, &c. 2 Cor. xii. 10. Wise observation would let you into the secret.

2. It has the promise, in the text. God has said, such a one shall know more and feel more in religion than others. 'To him that hath (*i. e.* improves what he has) shall be given.' And the more a man sets himself to observe, the more he will get to observe, and the more sappy will his observations be. By the wise observation of providences,

(1.) Sin and duty in particular cases is discovered. No dispensations of providence whatsoever can warrant us to go over the belly of God's commands, 1 Sam. xiii. 11, &c. But where two lawful things are before us, providence may point out what is present duty, and which of them we are to choose. And so the word teacheth, Psal. xxxii. 8. 'I will instruct thee, and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.'

(2.) One gets a clear view of the divine authority of the scriptures, very necessary in such an age wherein atheism, profaneness, and immorality so much abound. For the wise observer sees the fulfilling of it exactly, and so is confirmed. While he observes providences, he sees scripture-doctrines, promises, threatenings, and prophecies accomplished, and the parallels of scripture-examples; and so reads the truth of God's word in his works, Psal. lviii. 11.

(3.) Hereby a Christian is established in the good ways of the Lord, and that by those very things that make others to stagger, yea, themselves also, when they do not observe, Psal. lxxiii. 22, &c. It is the woful estrangedness to this exercise that makes so many here-away there-away professors, tossed about with every wind that rises, while amidst all these reelings the wise observer sits firm like the expert mariner among the boisterous waves, Psal. cxliii. 5.

(4.) Hereby a Christian gets store of experiences, to lay by him for use at another time. How did Joseph sustain Egypt in time of the dearth, but by the corn laid up in time of plenty? So the Psalmist says, 'O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar,' Psalm xlii. 6. But for want of this some people are always from hand to mouth, always to begin; ever learning, never coming to the knowledge of the truth, Mark vi. 52.

(5.) *Lastly*, It is a nurse to all the graces of the Spirit. It is a notable help to faith, Exod. xiv. ult. A short-limbed faith will reach far up, when it stands upon experiences.—To love; see the text. Now, the love of God perceived kindles the flame of love in us.—To patience and waiting on the Lord; for observation will keep them from being hasty while the work is on the wheel, Psal.

xxxvii. 2.—To hope; ‘for experience worketh hope,’ Rom. v. 4; for former mercies are pledges of future ones.—To contempt of the world.—To holy fear, Exod. xiv. ult.—To delight and joy in the Lord, Psal. xcii. 4.—To self-loathing, and thankfulness, Psal. cxliv. 1, 2, 3, &c.

And now for direction take this doctrine, *There is need of true wisdom to fit a man for right observation of providence.* And that wisdom is,

1. Spiritual wisdom, 1 Cor. ii. 15. Carnal wisdom is no good observer of providence, as the blind man is no fit judge of colours.

2. Scripture wisdom; for the scripture is the pattern, and providence the work. They that study the language of Heaven in providence, must consult the scriptures as the dictionary for that language.

3. Practical wisdom, Psal. cxi. 2. Even scripture-notions floating in the head will do but little service, but sinking into the heart, reduced into practice, will be of good use here. And the more to fit you for this work, take these following lessons from the word concerning providences.

(1.) The design of Providence may sometimes lie very hid; and therefore it is good to wait, and not to be rash, Psal. lxxvii. 19.

(2.) Sometimes providence seems to forget the promise; but it is not so, but only the time of the promise is not then come, Gen. xv. 4. with xvi. 2.

(3.) Sometimes providence seems to go quite cross to the promise, and his work to go contrary to his word. But wait ye, they will assuredly meet, Gen. xxii.

(4.) Ofttimes providence favours a design, which yet will be blasted in the end, for that it was not the purpose of God, Jonah i. 3.

(5.) Ofttimes providence will run counter in appearance to the real design, and by a tract of dispensations will seem to cross it more and more, till the grave-stone appear to be laid on it. And yet, ‘at evening-time it shall be light,’ Zech. xiv. 7.

(6.) Providence many times lays aside the most likely means and brings about his work by that which nothing is expected of, 2 Kings v. 11, 12.

(7.) *Lastly*, Sometimes providence works by contraries, as the blind man was cured with laying clay on his eyes.

Learn to live by faith, and be frequent in meditation and self-examination, and be much in prayer.

Thus I have laid before you the duty of observing providences. May the Lord pity them that make no conscience of practising what they hear, and get nothing of all but a testimony against themselves. And may he give us all understanding in all things.