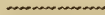


of Lazarus four days dead; but not so at the raising of the young man of Nain, or Jarius' daughter. Jer. xiii. 23. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." Their number increaseth; the devil who comes alone at first, at length his name is Legion. The heart grows harder, the mind blinder, the will more perverse, the affections more carnal.

MOTIVE 7. A moment's delay may be an eternal loss, because thou knowest not any moment that may not be thy last.

MOTIVE ult. God commands you to repent presently, Heb. iv. 7. Therefore upon your peril it is, if ye delay any more.

OBJECTION. The thief on the cross repented at the last gasp. ANSWER. His repentance was one of the miracles at Christ's death; and he glorified God more at his death than ye could if ye had been a penitent all your days. But though there was one that none might despair, yet there was but one that none might presume. The other thief even died as he lived.



THE EXTRAORDINARY CASE OF THE THIEF ON THE CROSS NO
ARGUMENT FOR DELAYING REPENTANCE.

Two Sermons preached, at Etrick, in June, 1717.

LUKE xxiii. 42,

And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.

THE love that sinners bear to their lusts, and the conviction men generally have of the necessity of repentance, each of them putting in for a share, do natively produce a delay. And Satan and the corrupt heart join to support the delaying temper, both by pretended reasons, and abused examples: amongst which last none is more so than this of the thief who repented on the cross.

My great design being to convince you, that this instance can be no encouragement to delay repentance, I need not here lay for a foundation the proof of this man's sincerity, which the text and context put beyond all doubt; nor insist on explaining this his prayer, full of faith and repentance, which had a most gracious answer.

Every body knows the story ; and they that know very little of the Bible, will be found acquainted with this instance of the penitent thief on the cross ; and they abuse it to their own ruin, drawing encouragement from it to put off repentance till they come to a death-bed.

We need not much wonder, that this becomes a stumbling-stone to many, on which they are ruined. Hearing the thief was converted near the last gasp, and having led a sinful life, the thread was suddenly broken, and he died happily ; his day was a dark day all over, till in the evening, the sun broke out with a bright though short glimpse, and then set ; That this, I say, is abused and turned to a stumbling-stone by impenitent sinners, is no great wonder, if ye consider the following things.

1. As a vicious stomach corrupts the best of meat ; so impenitent sinners abuse the best things to their own ruin : so that what raises up others taught of God, is an occasion of falling to them. The altar of God, and the whole law was so to the unbelieving Jews, Rom. xi. 9. Is not the very gospel, and the preachers thereof, a savour of death to some ? 2 Cor. ii. 16. Nay, Christ himself is a stumbling-block to them. 1 Pet. 7, 8.

2 There is a particular disposition in the hearts of impenitent sinners to abuse and wrest the Scriptures. Hence Peter, speaking of Paul's epistles, says, " In them are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction," 2 Pet. iii. 16. The Scripture is a light, and a rule of divine authority ; and it may well be expected, that if sinners can persuade themselves of a shelter there for their sins, it will be the most effectual one. This is the most feasible means for stilling the clamours of an ill conscience, and cheating men into their own ruin.

3. Abused Scripture is one of the chief pieces of Satan's armour, wherewith he maintains and promotes his kingdom among those that have the Scriptures. Thus Satan said to Christ, Matt iv. 6. " If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down : for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." Hence unclean persons still their consciences with the example of David, swearers with that of Joseph by the life of Pharaoh, or Peter's, &c. Men that are mere moralists screen themselves with that, Mic. vi. 8, " He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good ; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God ?" And others satisfy themselves with good meanings and desires, because

of that, Matt. v. 6, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." Others think, they may repent at any time, from that Scripture, Ezek. xviii. 27, "When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive." And thus it becomes harder to convince men that have some notional knowledge of the Bible, than those that never knew it.

4. Reigning love to sin makes people very dexterous to find out shifts to preserve their lusts; as in Saul's speech to Samuel, 1 Sam. xv. 15, "They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God, and the rest we have utterly destroyed." What people would fain have to be true, it is easy to persuade them of: and what they are loathe to part with, it is not hard to invent shifts to hold it still. Were men willing to be the Lord's, they would be so presently; and they would be loathe to delay one moment, lest they should never see another.

To come to this particular instance in the text, I must tell you, That though here is ground of hope for poor trembling sinners, that they may be brought to repentance, and be accepted of God; yet there is no ground here for crafty delaying sinners to put off repentance, in hopes to go through with it afterwards, especially in a dying hour.

I. There is ground of hope for trembling sinners. And we may learn from this instance these following lessons.

1. They may go long on, and far on in the way to hell, whom yet God may bring home to himself. Here is a man, a thief, whose course brought him to an ill end, to a violent death, and yet grace reaches him. See the following remarkable passage, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, 11, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." From this it appears, that some of the Corinthian converts had been formerly the vilest of wretches, and guilty of the most enormous lewdness and impiety; and yet became famous monuments of the triumphs of sovereign efficacious grace. What a length did Manasseh and Paul go; and yet what illustrious penitents did they afterwards become? The latter justly acquired the

character of the greatest of saints, and the most eminent of all the apostles.

2. Grace sometimes catches them that in appearance, and to the eyes of the world, are farthest from it. It passeth by the most likely, and pitches on the most unlikely objects. While chief priests, scribes, and elders mock Christ, the thief on the cross is converted. The Lord loves to set up the trophies of his victory in the midst of the devil's kingdom. Hence is that promise, Is. lv. 5, "Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee, shall run unto thee, because of the Lord thy God; and for the holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee."

3. Grace makes a vast difference betwixt those betwixt whom it finds none. Here are two thieves, both on the cross: grace touches the heart of the one, but passeth by the other; and makes the one a convert, while the other dies hardened. So true is Paul's observation, Rom. ix. 16, "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy."

4. *Lastly*, While there is life there is hope. Here is one converted when near the last gasp; while his last sand was running, grace overtakes him, opens the eyes that before were closed, wins the heart that had been all along hardened. But I stay not on these things. Only the use that is to be made of this, is,

1. Let those that seek God early be encouraged from this, that they shall find him: Prov. viii. 17, "I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me." Was he so ready to receive a penitent soul coming in at the last hour, then surely he will be very ready to receive thee that comes in before that time. He rejected him not because he was long a-coming; but received him because he came. Come then forward with assured hope of thy acceptance upon thy early return.

2. Let not those whose day is almost gone, before they have begun their work, despair. Who knows but that may be done in the evening, that was neglected the whole day before? A gale for heaven may blow, that may put life in an old sinner, and make his flesh fresher than that of a child. The door of the vineyard stands open for labourers to come in even at the eleventh hour. Sovereignty is not pent up to times and ways, but takes a latitude in both.

3. *Lastly*, Let us sow beside all waters, in the morning and in the evening. It depends on the working of free grace, which shall prosper. We are ready to be hopeless of success, where persons have long stood out against the Lord. But God's heavy hand on a

man, and a view of eternity, may afford a season wherein the wild ass may be caught.

II. But there is no ground here for the crafty delaying sinner to put off repentance, especially till a dying hour. To set this matter in a true light, consider these following things.

1. It is a most rare example. There is not an instance like it in all the book of God, unless it be that of Achan, Josh. vii. 20, 21. Yet the Lord has left that case of Achan's much under a cloud; so that it is not positively determined as this is, though we may charitably hope the best in his case too. Now, here I would have you to consider,

1st, What less could there have been to have cleared a possibility of acceptance with God, for a sinner at the last, after he has spent all his days in sin? If we had not had this instance, what could have been said to shew such wretched misspenders of time, that ever any that was so long a setting off in their journey to heaven did get in? And because this says, that none should despair; must it therefore import, that they may safely delay? The sun once stood still in the days of Joshua; which says it is possible such a thing may be: but will any man delay his work in hope of such an extraordinary cast again? And why will ye?

2dly, As one swallow makes not spring, so neither can this one event make a general rule that you or I may trust to. The ordinary rule is, that as men live, so they die; a holy life, a happy end; a graceless, careless life, an unhappy and miserable end. Because Providence may go off the ordinary road, and do that in a few minutes with some, that ordinarily costs many years to others; can you venture eternity on that, that he will do so with you? Moses fasted forty days and nights, Exod. xxxiv. 28: yet who will venture on that in hopes of having his life preserved without food?

3dly, Are there not eminent instances to the contrary, wherein men living in their sin have been struck down in a moment, getting no time to repent of them, but fiery wrath has put an end to their days? Consider the case of Nadab and Abihu, Lev. x. 1, 2, of whom it is thought they had erred through drink, ver. 9; Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, Numb. xvi. 31, &c.; Ananias and Sapphira, Acts v., who died instantly with a lie in their mouth. But why do I instance in particular persons? Did not millions die together in their sins, by the deluge that swept away the old world, the fire and brimstone that burned up Sodom, Gomorrhah, Admah, and Zeboim? What multitudes were there there, who, being warned, put off to the day they never saw? And shall this one instance encourage you to delay, over the belly of the dreadful example of millions on the other hand?

4thly, The most that this so rare an example can amount to, is a possibility. It is not to so much as a probability or likelihood. That is a probable event, which though it does not always fall out, yet for the most part it does so; as that the husbandman shall get more than his seed again. But from what is said it appears, that for the most part it falls out otherwise, namely, that people even die as they live. So that it is probable, that if thou do not repent before, God will deny thee grace to repent at the last. How then can a man that has any belief of a God, a heaven, and a hell, venture his salvation on a mere possibility, while the probability lies the other way?

2. Though there were two thieves on the cross at that time, yet it was but one of them that got grace to repent. The one indeed was a true penitent; but the other died as he lived, hardened in his sin; nay, perhaps worse; for he died blaspheming the Son of God, before whose tribunal he was to appear, ver. 39. Now, upon this I would make these rational reflections.

1st, Is it not possible that thou mayst die blaspheming, if thou do not repent now in time? Thou canst not deny the possibility of it, when there is such a plain instance of it in the case of one of these thieves. Thou thinkest it may be thou may die a penitent with the good thief; and I say, it may be thou mayst die blaspheming with the other. The one is even as certain, as to us, as the other. Thou livest impenitent all thy days; when thou comest to a death-bed, God may withhold his grace from thee which thou hast all along refused; he may let thee see thy case hopeless for ever, and thou mayst be filled with despair; and in that case it is more than possible that both tongue and heart may rise against God.

2dly, It is at least an equal venture, that thou mayst die impenitent, as that thou mayst die a penitent. Thou hopest to repent at the last; why? because the thief on the cross repented. And I must say, that delaying repentance till then, thou runnest the risk of dying impenitent; for the other thief died so. And who has told thee, whether thy lot shall be with the one or with the other? Now, to repent presently, makes thy salvation certain; to delay it, does at best leave it to a venture. And consider with yourself seriously, if salvation and damnation be such trifling things, as to be left to an uncertainty, you do not know how it may fall.

3dly, It is inconsistent with common sense, to leave that thing to a venture, which may be made sure, where a hit or a miss is of the utmost concern. Suppose a rebel might certainly have his life by a willing submission to his prince, should he choose to stay till he were apprehended by the officers, he would act most unrea-

sonably, and put his life in hazard where there is no need; as in the case of Shimei, 1 Kings ii. 42. A thousand times more unreasonable art thou in such delays of repentance, for now thou mayst make heaven sure: but if thou delay, thy soul is left to a dreadful venture; and if thou miss when it comes to the point, thou art ruined for ever.

Athly, Nay but the venture is very unequal; for it is far more likely that delaying thou mayst die impenitent, than that thou mayst die penitent. Few took part with the good thief amongst all the crowd of spectators; the multitude went the other thief's way, mocking, ver. 35. And what casts the balance here in case of likelihood, is,

(1.) Common observation, that tells us, that most people even die as they live. Repentance is a flower rarely seen springing up from a death-bed. A melting of heart for sin, because of the dishonour done to God by it, is seldom seen in such as have lived a graceless, careless, presumptuous life; but that disposition even hangs about them to the end.

(2.) It is certain that few are saved, in comparison of them that are left: Matt. vii. 14, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." As to what some say of the infants of all mankind; all that are saved must go by the strait gate, and still these are few. It is evident, that most men live impenitent; yet all must die; and therefore it follows, that few get grace to repent at their last, but most of those that live impenitent even die so too.

(3.) The sad threatenings denounced against sinners going on in their sin, with respect to their latter end: Prov. i. 24—27, "Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you." Ezek. xxiv. 13, "In thy filthiness is lewdness: because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee." Now, show me one promise in all the Bible, promising the grace of repentance to those that delay, for to balance this. It is true, the gospel-offer is general, and excludes none while in this world: but O what a hazard is there, that these threatenings be accomplished to the denying the grace to lay hold on them then.

(4.) Corrupt nature sticks fast in thee; and it will harden thee in

the face of death as well as it does now, unless thou get grace from above. Now, that corruption has possession long continued already, thou art sure of it; but thou hast no certainty for the grace of God to break it in thee, and work repentance in thy so long impenitent heart. And therefore I must conclude the venture to be very unequal.

(5.) Repentance is not to be wrought by the sinner's being brought to an extremity, as you may possibly imagine. Here was a man that was hanging on a cross, bleeding to death in great torment, having a present prospect of eternity before him, who could have no more pleasure in the world. But did that humble him? No, no. His heart remains obdured to the last gasp. He is going into eternity; yet he is adding sin to sin, and going out of the world as he lived in it, if not worse. We find from Matt. xxvii. 44, that after the chief priests, scribes, and elders had mocked and railed on Christ, it is added, that "the thieves also which were crucified with him" joined in the railing. Whence some think, that even the other too joined in this railing on Christ, till grace broke in upon him and overcame his nature.

(6.) The most powerful and likely means of grace will not prevail, unless accompanied with a special operation of the Spirit. This blaspheming thief was near Christ himself, and might hear his words and groans. He had the example of his companion moving him to repent. Grace was at work working wonders upon his neighbour. He had a dying preacher to call him to repent. The sun's light was eclipsed, the earth quaked, the rocks rent, the graves opened: yet for all these he died impenitent, and hard-hearted. Think on this, ye that deem it so easy to repent, if ye were come to your last.

(7.) They that delay repentance till a dying hour, readily find they have another thing to do then, than to repent; as is evident from the case of the other thief on the cross, ver. 39. "And one of the malefactors which were hanged, railed on him, saying, if thou be Christ save thyself and us." Death is the destruction of nature, and therefore nature wrestles against it, though there be no hope. This man was more concerned to get his body saved than to get his soul saved. And, alas! is not this the case of the most part at that time? They have so much ado with the disease, that they can hardly get a due concern for their souls, or a composed thought.

3. There is no evidence that this thief had before such means of grace as you have. Who can say, that ever he heard the gospel preached by Christ or any of his disciples? It is most likely he was a rake; that if he heard any thing of God, it was from the

Scribes and Pharisees at times; and may be, when he might have heard either them, or Christ and his disciples, he was about his thievish trade. Now,

1st, It is unreasonable to think, that it should fare at the last with those who have had means of grace all their days, and despised them, as it may do with those who never have such means till they come to die. One would think it no wonder at all, to see a man converted at his last, who gets the first notice of Christ and the way of salvation when on his death-bed. But what is that to thee, who hast all along been invited to repent, and come to Christ, but wouldst not? The former is no wonder in comparison of the latter.

2dly, This conversion of the thief doubtless was a perfect surprise to him, a thing he was not looking for. But thou art setting tryst with repentance at thy last hours. Can you believe, that ever this thief delayed repentance in hopes of what he met with, namely, to die on a cross with Christ, and then to feel the power of his grace? Nobody can believe it. What is his example then to thee? Is it rational for thee to expect that favour which one has sometimes been surprised with, and got when he was not looking for it?

4. This thief was converted, when by the hand of public justice he was to die. When he was made a public example to the world, and as a malefactor brought to an untimely end for his crime, he got repentance at the gallows, not on a death-bed. He was cut off perhaps in the midst of his days; at least he died not by the course of nature, nor by any sickness, but was executed for his evil deeds. And it is observable, that the one other case which looks likeliest to this in the Bible, was of the same sort, namely Achan's. Now,

1st, It is evident, that wicked men who are running on in such courses as will bring them to an untimely death, by the laws of the land, such as thieves, robbers, murderers, &c. have a fairer ground from this to delay repentance till they come to the scaffold, than you have, who are looking for a death-bed, and delay repentance till you come there. For their case is nearer akin to this than yours. But are not they most foolish if they so do, even in your eyes? No doubt they are. And so are ye in the eyes of others, whose eyes God has opened.

2dly, If we compare the case of this thief put to death for his crimes, and of other malefactors so dying, with the case of men that have lived impenitently dying in their beds; though grace is alike free to both, yet, humanly speaking, there is more hope of the repentance of the former than of the latter. And this I say on these three grounds.

(1.) It is more easy to convince a malefactor upon the scaffold, of

his crime, and the evil of it, and of those other sins that have been the inlets to it, than to convince another of his sin upon a death-bed, as common observation sheweth. Hence our Lord says, "that the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before the self-righteous Pharisees," Matth. xxi. 31. Many a time is sabbath-breaking, disobedience to parents, drunkenness, neglect of the means of grace, confessed and regretted on a scaffold, while there is not one word of them from a death-bed, in cases where there is perhaps as good ground for it. When the corruption of nature breaks out in some atrocious crime that brings a person to an untimely end, there is more access to convince them of it, than others who have the same plague in them, but it has not so appeared.

(2.) The view that the thief had of eternity upon the cross, and that other malefactors have in such a case, is more certain than what impenitent sinners generally have on a death-bed. The one see they must die without peradventure, the other have some hopes of life generally while they have breath. And so the terror of death must needs be more operative in the one than the other; forasmuch as there is such a difference in the certainty of the view of it.

(3.) If we except the time wherein both are actually grappling with death, the one with a violent death, the other with a natural one; the former have less hinderances from the body to prepare for death than the latter; forasmuch as the one is tossed with bodily sickness and indisposition, the other commonly is not.

5. The conversion of the thief on the cross was an extraordinary manifestation of our Lord's power, made for special reasons. And therefore though it shows what the Lord can do; it does not show what ordinarily he will do. Consider here, to evince this, that,

1st, It was done in such a juncture of time, as the like never was, and the like never will be again; namely, when the Lord of glory, the Saviour of the world, was actually hanging upon the cross, paying the ransom for the lost elect world; Rom. vi. 9, "Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him."

2dly, It was a wonder wrought in a time allotted in a particular manner beyond all times, for God's working wonders. The time of the Lord's giving the law on Mount Sinai, was a time of wonders; but not comparable to this. The leading wonder there was God's making his voice to be heard, and speaking forth a holy law; and it was attended with other wonders, namely, thunders, lightnings, a thick cloud upon the mount, smoke, and fire, and the sound of a terrible trumpet waxing louder and louder, Exod. xix. 16, &c. But

the leading wonder on Mount Calvary was yet greater, namely, the Son of God, and Saviour of the world, hanging, groaning, dying on a cross: and therefore the attending wonders were proportionably greater. For,

(1.) The sun was under a dreadful eclipse, for the space of not a few minutes, but three hours, Matth. xxvii. 45. The eye of the visible world was struck blind at the sight.

(2.) The veil of the temple was, without hands, rent from the top to the bottom, Matth. xxvii. 51; to shew that by this death an end was put to the ceremonial law, and the way unto the holiest of all made open.

(3.) The earth quaked at the dreadful fact of crucifying the Lord of glory, Matth. xxvii. 51.

(4.) The hard rocks rent, upbraiding the spectators and guilty multitude with the hardness of their hearts, Matth. xxvii. 51.

(5.) The graves were opened, and many of the dead saints arose, to shew that Christ by his death had overcome the power of death over his people, Matth. xxvii. 52.

(6.) The spectators of those strange things smote their breasts, being struck to the heart, Luke xxiii. 48.

(7.) *Lastly*, The centurion and his soldiers were convinced, that he whom they had crucified was the Son of God, Matth. xxvii. 54.

Now, upon all these I would make these reflections.

[1.] Is it reasonable, because the thief was converted at the last hour, in a time that the like never was, nor will be, for thee to expect that it shall fare so with thee? Thou mayst as well throw thyself into a burning fiery furnace, and hope to come forth safe, because Daniel and his fellows were once so delivered. Were Christ to come again, and to be crucified a second time between two malefactors, and thou wert one of them to be crucified with him, it might be that thou mightst be converted at thy last hour. And yet thou couldst not be sure; for it might be thy lot to be the hardened one, as it was the other thief's. But since it is not so, how darest thou trust to such a late repentance?

[2.] Is it any wise strange, that amongst all these wonders of justice, power, and faithfulness, there was one wonder of mercy upon the thief on the cross? that the same power that was rending the rocks, did mercifully open the heart of one of those thieves to receive Christ and his grace? But how canst thou think, that the time of thy departure will be a time of such wonders? And if not, how canst thou deceive thyself into a delay of repentance, in expectation of receiving such a signal display of divine grace and mercy?

[3.] Was it not very becoming the divine wisdom, that when the

divine glory of the Son of God was veiled upon the cross, a ray of it should break forth in the conversion of one of two that were hanging there with him? that when his judges, and the rulers and people had got him on the cross as a malefactor, he should have his glory owned by one of those crucified with him: but what is that to thee in a day wherein it is long since Christ was set down at his Father's right hand, and his glory published through the world by the gospel?

[4.] Is it any thing strange, that when our Lord was triumphing over principalities and powers, he set up one trophy, one sign of his victory, in the field of battle? Col. ii. 15. Was it not very natural, that he who when he should be lifted up, was to draw all men after him, should actually at the time draw one after him? But what encouragement can that be to thee to delay to the last, when that nick of time is over long ago? And now there are thousands of visible monuments of Christ's conquest by his death set up, so that thou wilt never be missed, though thou die as thou livest, impenitent.

6. *Lastly*, The penitent thief on the cross was not only sincere, but he glorified Christ more in his late repentance, than thou art capable to do by thine, nay more than if thou hadst lived a penitent all thy days. For consider,

1st, When our Lord was in his lowest step of humiliation, he professed his faith of his divine nature, and his being King of the other world: "Lord," says he, "remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." What wonderful faith was this, that while Christ was so low as hanging on a cross, he owns him King of heaven; that dying, he was going to receive a kingdom; that he has all power there; that he is full of mercy, compassion, and faithfulness; so that the very remembrance of him would be sufficient to secure his eternal welfare! thou mayst believe and profess all this, but never at such a time. He is now the exalted Redeemer, who has ascended far above all heavens, and sits on the right hand of God. But what is that to the glorifying of him in his lowest humiliation?

2dly, When others had crucified him as a malefactor, and were mocking him, and railing on him, as one that deserved not common compassion, he was praying to him, as Lord of the other world. If thou shouldst now do so too; yet remember how small a thing is that in comparison of what the good thief did in these circumstances.

Lastly, All this he did, and more, publicly before a multitude of spectators, which thou art not likely to have when thou comest to a

death-bed. He justifies God before them all; he condemns himself; he does what he can to convince and convert his poor graceless companion, who possibly sinned with him as he did suffer; he condemns those that crucified Christ, and gives his public testimony against them, as men that feared not God.

To conclude this matter: Repent ye timeously, and trust not to a late repentance. Let not this example of the thief on the cross, or any thing else, make you to delay. Many a call ye have had to return to the Lord; but, alas! to the most part they have been ineffectual. God is giving us a providential call to repentance, at this time: he is saying to us, as he did to the church of Ephesus, Rev. ii. 5, "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent." God knows what our present trial may end in. But in that dark dispensation we may clearly see that God is a jealous God, and makes people's sins to find them out. Repentance would be the most feasible means to extricate us out of our difficulties. If there were a spirit of prayer and mourning for the causes of the Lord's controversy with us, it would be a token for good. But, alas! the work of repentance for the most part is put off from time to time, till it be put off to a death-bed; and who can secure the tryst to be kept there?

There are three things I would say of death-bed repentance.

1. If it be got, it is the most unuseful repentance for God, and the most uncomfortable for one's self. Unuseful; for then men begin their work for God, when their time is ending; and so though they may be saved, yet God gets little honour from them. And uncomfortable to persons themselves; for being saved, they are saved so as by fire; they must go to heaven by the brink of hell; while they see their last sand running, and get their consciences awakened, eternity must be to them a dreadful spectacle.

2. Death-bed-repentance is seldom sincere. The king of terrors may make a Pharaoh say, I have sinned. But what sincerity is in the most part of those things that begin on death-beds, may be learned from the case of many, who being past hopes of recovery from their sickness, either as to themselves or others, do yet recover, and turn just the old men and women they were before. When the best appearances of death-bed repentance are, it is hard to make sure conclusions; but as Augustine said in such a case, *Non dico damnabitur, non dico salvabitur; sed tu, dum sanus es, pœnitentium age.**

* *i. e.* I don't say, that such a person shall be damned, or that he shall be saved; but do thou, whilst thou art in health, mind the business of repentance.

3. *Lastly*, Many trust to deathbed repentance that never see it. Some are surprised into eternity; some are tossed so with sickness that they cannot have a composed thought; some quickly lose the use of their senses and reason; and most part die as they live: Therefore repent ye in time, and delay no more, lest ye bring the ruin on your souls that will never be recovered.



GOD'S DELAY OF EXECUTING THE SENTENCE OF CONDEMNATION
AGAINST UNGODLY MEN, OFTEN MISERABLY ABUSED BY THEM.

Several sermons preached at Ettrick, in summer, 1728.

ECCLES. viii. 11.

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily; therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

THIS book of Ecclesiastes is in a particular manner a book of providence, wherein Solomon gives his observations upon it. It is a subject that has puzzled the best of men, how to reconcile it with the being and attributes of God: but there is no inconsistency; all odds will be made even at length.

He had observed some set on high to their ruin, made rulers of others to their own destruction, to the feeding of their own lusts, and so aggravating their own condemnation, ver. 9. He had observed them live prosperously in their wickedness, die in honour, and buried magnificently, ver. 10. He opens the secret of this dispensation in the text, namely, That a reprieve is no pardon. In the words we have,

1. God's patience with, and forbearance exercised towards ungodly sinners: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily." (1.) It is supposed that sentence is passed in their case. There is a righteous sentence standing against an evil work, and the evil worker for what he has done: it is not overlooked, nor forgotten. (Heb.) doing of the evil; by which is meant an ungodly course. This is plain from 1 John iii. 8, 9, "He that committeth sin, is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he can-