

will give you an heart of flesh." Ver. 32. "Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel."

6. *Lastly*, What ye do, do quickly. The sooner you begin, the easier will the work be.

Take the three following marks of true repentance.

1. Sorrow for sin, as offensive to a good and gracious God, Zech. xii. 10.

2. Hatred of sin, as the most abominable thing, Rev. ii. 6. This will be, 1. universal, against all known sin; 2. constant, without intermission; 3. implacable, without reconciliation; and, 4. vehement, without tolerating it.

3. A fixed purpose and desire of eschewing sin, and following duty; guarding against present sins, and the occasions of these we are in hazard of; honestly endeavouring after it in the use of means, and labouring to remove the hinderances to a holy life.

THE DANGER OF DELAYING REPENTANCE.

PROV. vi. 10, 11.

*Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep.
So shall thy poverty come as one that travaileth, and thy want as an
armed man.*

I HAVE been pressing sinners to repentance from the former text, and I hope by this time all of you may be convinced of the necessity of it. But, alas! delays in this matter kills their ten thousands. Men put off the work from time to time, till time be gone, and they are surprised into ruin, as we may learn from this text. Where,

1. We have the sluggard's picture drawn in reference to his eternal concerns; which is the main thing here aimed at. He is one that puts off his great work from time to time, "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep."

In the 6th verse the slothful sinner is set to school to learn a lesson of the emmet; which though she has not the advantages that he has, yet has so much natural sagacity, as to provide for winter, in the time of summer and harvest, when meat is to be got. In the 9th verse there is a rousing call to the sinner to follow that example. But behold how he entertains it; as a person that is loath to

arise, he begs "a little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep." Here is,

1st, Something supposed; and that is threefold.

(1.) The sleeper convinced that he has slept, and neglected his work. There are many who see themselves wrong, yet have no heart to endeavour to get right. They are convinced that their great work is far behind, yet have no heart to stir to set it forward.

(2.) The sleeper convinced that he must awake, and set to his work. Slothful sinners may see that the case they are in, is not a case they would venture to die in: they see that it is necessary to turn over a new leaf, to mind their salvation at another rate than they have done, or are doing.

(3.) The sleeper resolved to awake, and mind his business. He would fain sleep, but he does not design to sleep long, to sleep always. No; he designs but a little sleep, if ye will believe him, and afterwards to awake; though, poor soul, he does not consider that he is sleeping within the sea-mark, and may be swallowed up ere he awake out of his little sleep.

2dly, Something expressed; and that is threefold too,

(2.) A delay craved: "Yet a little sleep," &c. He is not thinking never to waken, never to repent, but only he cannot think on doing it as yet. However long a sleep he has taken in sin, yet he must have more. For as men, the more they sleep, the more they would sleep; so the more they continue in sin, the more they would continue. And the more they put off repentance, they are the more unfit for it.

(2.) The quantity of this delay: it is but a little in the sluggard's conceit. Though the Spirit of the Lord be grieved and wearied with waiting on his awakening, yet he thinks that all is but little. If the sluggard considered that his whole time is but little in comparison of eternity, the least time he spends in his sleep would appear very great. But, alas! he considers it not.

(3.) The mighty concern he is in for this delay. Though his ruin be wrapt up in it, he is fond of it, his heart is set upon it; and he pleads for it, as a starving man for bread. Ease is sweet to him; and so he speaks, "A little sleep, a little slumber." There are three things here which he craves, each less than the other; which shews how loathe he is to bestir himself. (1.) "A little sleep;" not a dead sleep, but a moderate one. (2.) If that cannot be granted, let him have but "a little slumber;" a napping, as it were, a middle betwixt sleeping and waking. (3.) If he cannot get that, yet he would have "a folding of the hands to sleep;" (Heb.) to lie a-bed. Let him but lie still loitering, and embracing his sweet self, and not

presently be obliged to rise to put hand to work. Love to folded hands goes deep with him.

Observe, how the hearts of sinners are glued to their sins, and carnal security. When conscience begins to draw them out of their bed of sloth, they will not yield, they will dispute every foot of ground with it. And they will take very little ere they want all. O were we as nice in the point of our salvation, as in the state of blindness, in the point of our ruin, how happy might we be?

2. We have the fatal issue of this course. Delays are dangerous, but most of all in matters of eternal concern. The issue of these delays is, the man is ruined, he never awakes till it is out of time. His little sleep, &c. spends all his little time, and throws him out quite unprovided into a long eternity. Here consider,

1st, What ruin comes upon him: Poverty and want. It is held forth under these notions, to answer to the provision the ants make for themselves. They provide for themselves in summer and harvest: so that when the winter comes, when they cannot stir out of their holes, they live on the provision they have laid in. There is a winter abiding us, a time wherein no man can work, when there will be no access to God's grace and favour. Death brings in this. This time is our summer and harvest, wherein matters may be secured for eternity: but, alas! the sluggard sleeps in working time; and so when it is over, he must starve and perish for ever.

2dly, How this ruin comes upon him. It comes on,

(1.) Swiftly and speedily. So the word rendered one that travaileth, imports: one that walketh vigorously, as a man in a haste upon the road. Though the sinner lies at ease on his bed of sloth, yet his ruin hasteth on apace, 2 Pet. ii. 3. The sun stands not still, though the sluggard's work goes slowly on. Every breath he fetches in his spiritual sleep, draws his destruction a step nearer.

(2.) Silently and surprisingly; "Thy poverty shall come as one that travaileth." If we send one on an errand, we will be looking for him again at the time appointed; but we know nothing of the traveller, till he come at us. So ruin comes on the delaying sinner ere he is aware; destruction is at his bedside ere he is awakened, Prov. xxix. 1.

(3.) Irresistibly: "Thy want shall come as an armed man;" (Heb.) a man of a buckler, who may hurt thee; but not thou him, for his buckler defends him. Were this traveller unarmed, the danger were not so great; or were the party attacked watching, and armed too, he might possibly come off safe. But alas! the poor man is naked, and sleeping too; how then can he make his part good against his enemy? He cannot; he must fall a sacrifice to his own sloth. Which brings me to consider,

3dly, What all this is owing to: "So shall thy poverty come as one that travaileth," &c. It is all owing to the cursed love of ease, to sloth, to the delays and put-offs, wherewith precious time is squandered away, and the precious soul is irrecoverably lost. They delay and delay on, till the golden opportunity is lost, and they are swept away into the pit, with all their good resolutions for the time to come, which they never see.

The point I intend to speak to from these words, is,

DOCTRINE, The delaying and putting off of repentance or salvation-work, is a soul-ruining course among gospel hearers.

In discoursing this doctrine, I shall shew,

- I. Why it is that gospel hearers delay and put off repentance.
- II. That this delaying is a soul-ruining course.
- III. *Lastly*, Make application.

I. I shall shew why it is that gospel hearers delay and put off repentance. There is a generation that are not resolved never to repent, never to ply salvation-work; but only they are not for it yet. They hope to mend and reform afterwards, but for the present they have no heart to it: so by cheating themselves out of their present time, they put a cheat on themselves for ever. They are called by the word, and by their own consciences, to make ready for another world, to work out their salvation; but their hearts say, "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep;" and their practice is conformable thereto. Why is it so?

1. Satan has a great hand in this. If he cannot hold out the light altogether from disturbing them, he will do what he can to lull them asleep again, before they be fully wakened: Luke xi. 21. "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace." Thus he did with Felix, Acts xxiv. 25, who, "as Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." When the soul begins to think on making its escape, all the art of hell will be employed to hold it fast; and it is easier to get one to put off salvation-work till afterwards, than downright to refuse it altogether. And thus Satan is always on one of the two extremes, urging either that it is too soon, or else that it is too long a doing.

2. The cares and business of the world contribute much to this. Hence our Lord explained "the seed which fell among thorns, to be those, who when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches, and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection," Luke viii. 14. How often are people in such an un-

sanctified throng of business, that they cannot find a convenient season for putting their salvation-work to a point? They have so many other cares upon their hands, that they jostle out the care of their souls. They find themselves wrapt up in a cloud of cares; but think with themselves, that were they but once through that, they shall ply their main work. Well, but they are no sooner out of that, than they are in to another; and so on, till the work being put off from time to time, is quite neglected. The truth is, persons in such a case will hardly find a time for that work, till they be resolute that they shall take it as they can find it.

3. The predominant love of carnal ease: Prov. xxvi. 15, "The slothful hideth his hand in his bosom, it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth." We are all naturally like Issachar, who saw "that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant; and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute," Gen. xlix. 15. Could people get sleeping to heaven on the sluggard's bed, would drowsy wishes carry them thither, many would be the passengers in that way. But that will not do. Men must labour, strive, and wrestle; and that is hard in the eyes of carnal men; and therefore, if it cannot be altogether refused, it is put off as long as may be. And hence never will a soul ply salvation-work in earnest, till it be effectually roused out of its lazy disposition.

4. The predominant love of sin. Why do persons stave off repentance, but because they are like those who entertaining their friends whom they have no will to part with, do therefore put off their departure from day to day? The parting with sin is like the cutting off of a member of the body, Matth. v. 30; which one will never yield to, unless he be very resolute. No man will delay a minute to throw a burning coal out of his bosom; but they will love to keep a sweet morsel under the tongue, who yet know that they must spit it out at length. And hence it is, that no purpose of reformation, which is only for afterwards, can be sincere; because it argues a love to, and loathness to part with sin.

5. A natural aversion and backwardness to holiness: Rom viii. 7. "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." The heart will never be reconciled to the yoke of Christ, till grace make it so, Psal. cx. 3. But like as the bullock unaccustomed to the yoke is loath to stoop to it, and therefore still draws aback; so will the heart of man do, till overcoming grace reach it, Jer. xxxi. 18. Hence, when light is let into the mind, but the aversion still remains in the will, what can be expected, but that the business of repentance, which they dare not absolutely refuse, will be delayed?

6. The hope of finding the work easier afterwards. The sluggard thinks with himself, that a little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep, would make it easier to him to get out of his bed; though, on the contrary, the more he sleeps unseasonably, the more he would sleep; and the longer persons delay the work of repentance, it is the harder to go through with it. For sin is a disease, which, the longer it lasts, gathers the more strength, and is harder to cure. And he that is not fit to-day to repent, will be less fit to-morrow.

7. A large reckoning on the head of time that is to come: Hence the rich man reckoned, "I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." But let us hear the judgment of God concerning this speech: "But God said unto him, thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" Luke xii. 19. 20: God has given no man a tack of years, no nor hours; yet every body is ready to tell what they will do to-morrow, next month, or next year. The young people think they have a great deal of time before their hand for repentance; the old people think they have enough before them for that too: and in people's conceit there is always enough, till their time be gone quite, and they be wakened out of their dream. Hopes of long life have ruined many a soul. O to be wise! James iv. 13. 14. "Go to now, ye that say, to-day or to-morrow we will go unto such a city, and continue there a year, and buy, and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow: For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." But what folly is it to venture eternity on such uncertainty!

8. A fond conceit of the easiness of salvation-work. There is a generation that please themselves with the thought, that it is but to believe and repent, and that is soon done. What persons can do with a touch of their hand, they think they need to be in no haste with. But O how contrary is this to the whole strain of Scripture, and the saint's experience? Matth. vii. 14, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Luke xiii. 24. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." Eph. i. 19, 20, "The apostle speaks of the exceeding greatness of God's power toward them who believe, according to the working of his mighty power; which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead. 1 Pet. iv. 18. "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Did men believe

this, that there is such a difficulty in getting to heaven, they would not dare delay for a minute entering on the way.

9. A conceit of sufficient ability in ourselves to turn ourselves from sin unto God. That the doctrine advancing the power of natural reason and ability in spiritual things, does take so much with the world, is no wonder, since man naturally is such a stranger to his own spiritual impotency. Hence it is observed, that the first question with the awakened is, "What shall I do to be saved?" It is worth observing how the carnal heart turns itself into different shapes, to retain its sinful lusts. Sometimes the man says, that he is not able to do any good; but when his sin cannot find shelter under this covert but he is pursued hot with conviction, he puts off his reformation and repentance to another time; thereby in effect declaring that he can do it, if he had but a season for it. He that is to use his oars may row at what hour he pleases; but he that must sail by the help of the wind must set off while it blows, because he cannot command it.

II. I shall show that this delaying is a soul-ruining course.

This is evident if ye consider,

1. It is directly opposite to the gospel call; which is for to-day, not for to-morrow: Heb. iii. 7, 8, "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." All the calls of the gospel require present compliance, and do not allow sinners to put off till another day. It is true, salvation-work must be deliberate work; but ye are not allowed a time to deliberate whether ye will come to Christ and be holy or not. It is like the call to quench fire in a house, that must presently be done, yet done deliberately, so as the work be not marred in the making. How then can it be but a soul-ruining course?

2. It is threatened with ruin. The text is very express, "So shall thy poverty come as one that travaileth, and thy want as an armed man." And one with a thousand times more safety might venture on a sword-point, than the edge of such a divine threatening. See Prov. xxiii. 21; Eccl. x. 18. And this threatening has been accomplished in many, whom their slothful delays have caused to perish; as in the case of Ephraim, Hos. xiii. 13. and of Felix, Acts xxiv. 25. Many have been not far from the kingdom of God, who yet never came to it.

3. Whenever grace touches the heart, men see that it is so. Hence says the Psalmist, Psal. cxix. 60, "I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments." When men are in earnest to get into Christ by faith, and to get back to God by repentance, they dare linger no more in the state of wrath, they flee out of it,

as one fleeing for his life, Matt. iii. 7. Their eyes are opened to see their danger, and therefore they are presently determined.

4. It has a native tendency to soul-ruin, which inevitably overtakes them, if they do not at length break off all delays, and come away. This is evident, if ye consider,

1st, The state of sin is a state of wrath, where ruin must needs compass a man about on every hand: John iii. 36, "He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." To have staid in Sodom that day it was to be burnt, was dangerous; but to abide a moment in the state of wrath, is far more dangerous. Who would venture into a house that is about to fall? who would not presently leave it? And will men venture "yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep," in a state of enmity with God? Surely such persons know not God's greatness, nor the worth of their own souls.

2dly, The longer ye continue in sin, your spiritual death advanceth the more upon you. Every sin sets you a step farther from God, is a new bar in the way of your peace with him, strengthens your natural enmity against him, and alienates you more from the life of God. And where can this natively end, but in your souls' ruin? Ah! are we not far enough on in that way already? why delay more, that we may go yet farther off from God?

3dly, While ye remain in this state, there is but a step betwixt you and death, which you may be carried over by a delay of ever so short a time. All that is your security in this case, so far as ye can see, is the brittle thread of your life, which may be broken with a touch, and then ye are ruined without remedy. So that every delay, shorter or longer, of repentance, is a venturing of eternity on that uncertain life of yours, which in a moment may be taken from you.

USE I. For Information. This lets us see,

1. That delayers of repentance are self-destroyers, self-murderers. Well may it be said to such, as Ezek. xviii. 31, "Why will ye die?" Should a man wilfully neglect a remedy for his disease, which puts him in hazard of his life, he could not be guiltless of his own death; more than one who being called to rise and quench the fire in his house, and yet would lie still till it were consumed to ashes, would be blameless of its ruin. Self-love, that is, love of sinful self, is the source of the greatest cruelty; whereby lusts are spared to the destruction of the life of the soul.

2. By delays the interest of hell is advanced; where many are this day who had resolved to repent, but death did not wait their time, and so they were disappointed. No wonder new grounds of

delay be still laid to persons' hands, for it is Satan's great drift to get men entangled in the wilderness, that they may not make forward to Canaan's land. And every new entanglement sets the soul a step nearer to destruction: and who questions but Satan has art enough to coin new pretences for delays?

3. No wonder Satan is most busy to ply the engine of delays, when a sinner is somewhat awakened by conviction; as he did with Felix, Acts xxiv. 25. "A soft answer turneth away wrath;" and delays will blunt the edge of convictions, as much as a peremptory refusal. Under convictions, at a sermon, or on a sick-bed, the sinner is awakened out of his sleep; but then nothing can serve Satan's purpose better, than yet a little sleep: which if they get, they sleep off the edge of convictions.

4. They are sinners' best friends, that give them least rest in a sinful course. And whatever men think of them now, they will think so afterwards, Prov. v. 11, 12, 13. Every body loves ease, and therefore faithful preaching and dealing with souls, is a torment to those who love to be undisturbed in their rest in sin, Rev. xi. 10. But what suits best with our sinful inclinations, is worst for our souls, and will in the end be found so. Flattery has ruined many, when plain dealing and fair warning has brought many out of the snare.

USE 2. Of Lamentation. We may lament here the case of many, nay of most that hear the gospel. They put off their work from time to time, and so their spiritual case is going to wreck day by day. This is the case in natural things: Eccl. x. 18. "By much slothfulness the building decayeth, and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through." They are in a dying condition, the physician comes to their bed-side, and offers them a remedy; they do not absolutely refuse it, only they put off the taking of it. In the meantime their distemper increases, and death is advancing apace. The market of free grace is opened, and they are called to come and buy: they see they need to buy, yet they are not like to stir till the market be over. O madness and folly to be lamented with tears of blood! Poor slothful creature, that is yet for a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep, there are four things thou knowest not.

1. Thou knowest not the worth of a precious soul, which thou art throwing away for what will not profit. Will the sweet sleep in sin quit the cost of the soul's ruin? No, no: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Matth. xvi. 26. Christ left the bosom of the Father, and shed his precious blood to

redeem the soul. He was wise that paid the price; and if less would have done, he would not have been at needless expense of blood: he was a Father that received it; and would not have put his Son to that if it had not been necessary. Satan goes about without intermission to ruin it. But what low thoughts dost thou entertain of it, that wilt not break thy rest to save it from ruin?

2. Thou knowest not the excellency of precious Christ; sleep locks up thine eyes that thou canst not see the ravishing sight, John i. 10. The eyes of saints and angels are fixed on him, as the glory of the upper house: the eyes opened here by grace, are arrested by his overcoming glory. Hence are these rapturous expressions in Scripture, Psal. lxxiii. 25. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." Cant. i. 3. "Because of the savour of thy good ointments, thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee." Zion's crowned King is making his progress through the city where thou dwellest; the cry to come out and behold him, reaches thine ears, Cant. iii. ult; but while he goes by, thou must have "yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep," and so thou lovest the sight. The royal Bridegroom stretches forth his hand unto thee, to espouse thee, saying, Behold me, behold me: thou openest thy drowsy eyes, and beginnest to stretch forth the hand; but sleep overcomes thee, thine eyes close, and thy hand falls down again, and the match is marred. The chariot of the covenant that is driving on to his Father's house halts at thy door, and thou art called out: the ship is to sail to Immanuel's land, thou art called to come aboard: but "yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep," and all is lost.

3. Thou knowest not the worth of precious time. The Apostle will have time redeemed, Eph, v. 16; but thou squanderest it away as a thing of no value; and working time is turned by thee into sleeping time. Precious moments slip away, and thou regardest not; though once gone, they can never be recalled. What would those who are past hope, give for an hour of that time, whereof thou lettest days, months, and years slip, without any improvement for eternity? O unhappy soul, who "knowest not in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace!"

4. Thou knowest not the weight of the wrath of God. It is true none can have a full comprehension of it, Psal. xc. 11. "Who knoweth the power of thine anger?" But all the elect of God get such a notion of it, as rouses them up to fly from it, 2 Cor. v. 11. "Knowing the terror of the Lord," says the Apostle, "we persuade men." And if thou hadst tolerable apprehensions of it, it would

break off thy sleep and slumber, and cause thee put forth thy hands to work. Didst thou consider what a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God, and how when thou fallest down again into thy bed of sloth, thou art truly in hazard of it, it would give thee such a gliff as would keep the waking.

There are three things thou dost not observe.

1. Thou dost not observe what speed thy ruin is making, while thou liest at ease; how thy judgment lingereth not, "and thy damnation slumbereth not," 2 Pet. ii. 3. The avenger of blood is pursuing thee, though thou art not fleeing from the wrath to come. Thou art like a man sleeping in a leaky ship, which is drawing water every moment, and within a little it will be full, and sink to the bottom of the sea, if he do not awake and help it. Every hour thy debt is growing, the cup of wrath is filling, and fills so much the faster, as thou art secure.

2. Thou dost not observe how near thy destruction may be. Thou art like the old world, who "were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away," Matt. xxiv. 38, 39. Thy spiritual lethargy and dead sleep hinders thee from hearing the sound of the feet of the approaching stroke. Thou liest open to the most terrible surprise, to sleep the sleep of death, which thou mayest never awake out of till in hell, Luke xii. 19, 20. and xvi. 23. And O how sad is it for men to be past hope, ere they begin to fear; to have the house falling, ere they get over their bed!

3. Thou dost not observe how utterly unable thou art to ward off the blow when it comes: Is. xxxiii. 14, "The sinners in Zion are afraid, fearfulness hath surprized the hypocrites: who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who amongst us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" Ezek. xxii. 14, "Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong in the days that I shall deal with thee? I the Lord have spoken it, and will do it." Can worm man stand before the almighty God, whose patience may be worn out ere thou awake? And if mercy and patience quit the field, justice will succeed into their room; and then there shall be no more sleeping, nor ease for ever.

USE 3. Of Reproof to delayers of salvation-work. Why do ye go on in this soul-ruining course? Have ye no respect to the calls of the gospel, none to your souls, none to eternity? Why do not ye with all your might whatever your hand findeth to do? I would apply myself here,

1. To delaying saints.

2. To delaying sinners.

1. To delaying saints; for such there may be, and of such there are many at this day, Cant. v. 2, 3; and our text is a general truth and warning. Spiritual sloth is so interwoven with our corrupt natures, that it will never be quite rooted out, till the corrupt nature be perfectly expelled. And as it remains in great measure in the saints, so it is fruitful of delays. There are these five delays incident even to the saints.

1. A delay of righting their case when matters are wrong, by renewing their repentance, and the actings of faith. Sometimes their case is quite out of order: their graces are not in exercise; they are strangers to the Spirit's influences, and to access to and communion with God in duties. They have a secret dissatisfaction with this, and are resolved to get to their feet again; but sloth masters them, and the work is put off from time to time; as was the case with the spouse, Cant. v. 2, 3, "I sleep, but my heart waketh," says she, "it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night. I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?"

2. The delaying to give up with some bosom-idol that mars their communion with God, Cant. iii. 1; Psal. lxvi. 18. They are convinced, that the harbouring of it does much harm to their souls' case, and many resolutions they have to put the knife to the throat of it, but still they draw back their hand. And from one time to another the crucifying of it is put off; so that still it lives, like a waster in the candle, causing the soul's case to wreck.

3. The delaying to clear their state before the Lord. They see need to have marches rid, and to be brought to a point whether they be in Christ or not, whether in a state of grace or not. They have resolutions to put it to a solemn trial, to examine themselves, and search what evidences they have for a title to heaven: but still the heart draws back, and the trial is put off.

4. The delaying of some particular duty, or piece of generation-work, which they are convinced God calls them to. They have often thoughts of setting about it in earnest; but still some one thing or other intervenes, and it is put off. They begin perhaps sometimes; but it is broken off again, and they must yet have "a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep."

5. *Lastly*, The delaying of actual preparation for eternity; like the virgins, Matt. xxv. 5, who, "while the bridegroom tarried, all slumbered and slept." They see that it is no easy thing to die;

they resolve to labour to put themselves through grace into a case for it; but day after day it is delayed. The lamps are not trimmed for meeting the Bridegroom. Though they be in a good state, they have not a dying frame.

To all such I would say, as Jon. i. 6, "What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon thee, that thou perish not." Let me expostulate with you upon this head, O delaying saints.

1. Do ye find yourselves any thing the nearer your purpose by all your delays? Nay the longer ye delay, do not ye find yourselves the farther from it? Does not your aversion and backwardness to duty grow upon you the more? and is not your confidence in the Lord still the more lessened? Yes; the more ye give yourselves to spiritual sleep, the more ye will desire to sleep.

2. Do not ye find this the way to rank poverty and want? Your consciences will witness the truth of that, that where the diligent shall abound with blessings, the idle soul shall suffer hunger. Is it with you as in months past? Have ye that sense and gust of religion, that access to God in duties, which ye have had when ye were doing with your might what your hand found to do?

3. Has not your poverty come upon you as one that travaileth? Have ye not been sometimes like Samson awaked out of Delilah's lap, and found your strength gone from you when you had most to do with it? Perhaps thou hast spent many days in estrangement from God, with much ease; but at length some strong temptation, or piercing trial has overtaken you; and then you have sucked the bitter sap of your slothful delays.

4. A little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep, and the occasion may be lost, the opportunity for doing neglected duties may be lost. Either they may be taken from you, or ye from them. No man has a tack of his life, nor of occasions of doing good; and therefore "as we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith," Gal. vi. 10. And though the soul that is in Christ shall be saved surely, yet this will make the salvation to be so as by fire.

5. *Lastly*, The long delayed work is hard work when it comes to the setting too, Cant. v. 5—8. When the awakening comes, there may be little time, much opposition, and less strength than otherwise thou wouldst have had, and yet more to do with it than otherwise. The longer thy hand is from thy case the more ravelled will it be. And it will readily occasion much fear, darkness, and perplexity in a dying hour.

II. I would apply myself to delaying sinners, to those that are yet out of Christ, and have all to do for eternity still. They are living in a state of wrath, and yet they linger, and put off their removal from Sodom. They delay repentance, and go on in their sin. I would say to you, as Prov. vi. 9, "How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?" I must expostulate with you on this head.

First, Ye young people, why do ye delay repentance? why are ye like the wild asses' colts, untractable and unteachable? No doubt, ye think it is too soon for you; that it may be time enough several years after this. Ye think repentance and seriousness suits best with the wrinkled brows, the pale face, and hollow eyes, &c.; that it is pity to spoil the bloom of youth with such work. When do ye mean to repent then? It is like, it is when ye are settled in the world, or when ye grow old; at least the days of youth must be over first. But, poor fool,

1. Is the debt of sin so small upon thy head, that thou must run thyself deeper in the debt of God's justice? Dost not thou know that thou wast born a child of wrath? Eph. ii. 3; that thou broughtest that into the world with thee, that will damn thee, if thou repent not, and come to Christ? And will not that sink thee deep enough in destruction, though thou add no more to it, unless thou repent?

2. Is not the same holy law binding on thee, since thou couldst discern betwixt good and evil, that is binding on the oldest alive? Have the young a liberty to sin, and to cast off the fear of God and religion, more than the old? See Gal. iii. 10, "For as many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Here there is no exception. The follies of youth men may pass; but assure yourselves, God will not pass them: Eccl. xi. 9, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." And I doubt not, but if ye saw your sinful thoughts, words, and actions, whether vain or vile, laid before you, as you must reckon for them at length, how few soever your years have been, you will see them to be more than the hairs on your heads. And I must tell you, that being yet unrenewed, and strangers to the life of grace, all your actions have been sin: Prov. xxi. 4, "An high look, and a proud heart, and the ploughing of the wicked, is sin." And is it not then time to repent?

3. Who has assured thee, that ever thou shalt see the age thou speakest of? Go to the churchyard, and ye will see graves of all sizes, of your length and under. There are far more young corpses, than there are of those that carry gray hairs, ten to one.* Most men and women are cut off before they come to old age. What has befallen others as young and flourishing as you, may befall you too. And therefore, since ye know not but ye may die young, repent while ye are young, lest in the end ye find yourselves miserably disappointed.

4. Who has best right to your youth and strength? God or the devil? God is courting you for his own gift: Eccl. xii. 1, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." Satan will labour to keep his possession. God is the first and last; and he required the first and best, the first-fruits, the first-born, the morning-sacrifice; and he requires the first of your days, and he takes pleasure therein: Jer. ii. 2, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." And will ye devote the first and best to sin and Satan, reserving the last and worst to your Creator?

5. Great is the advantage of those that get a gripe of religion while they are young, beyond others, in many respects. (1.) Readily their passage in the pangs of the new birth will be easier than that of others. In none is that scripture fulfilled more, Mark iv. 27. of the seed's springing and growing up, none knoweth how, than where grace joins with good education in young persons. The nail lately driven, draws easily in comparison of that which has been long rusted in. Where grace catches persons before they begin to dip into the gross pollutions of the world, it frees them of much remorse that these must occasion to those that have been led away with them. (2.) Young people's affections are easiest moved; and as they move easiest, so they move most vigorously, whatever way they be set. Hence they lie most fair for tasting the sweet of religion: Hos. ii. 14, "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her." God sometimes dandling young converts upon the knees, and giving them sensible tastes of the pleasure of religion, is agreeable to the particular promise made for their encouragement, Prov. viii. 17, "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me." (3.) They are in the fairest way to have most access to serve God in their generation.

* It is observed, by those who have accurately examined the records of the dead, that one half of mankind die before five years of age, and near a third more before twenty. How few then must arrive at old age?

Suppose a man to be converted when he is old, his salvation will be secure; but, alas! his time for serving God's honour in the world is almost gone ere he puts hand to work.

6. *Lastly*, God commands you to repent presently, and therefore it is on the peril of your soul, that ye venture to delay a moment longer: Heb. iii. 7, 8, "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Remember that word, Eccl. xi. 9, 10, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity." A sinful youth will at length make a sad soul. Ye know not how soon God may be provoked against you to cut you off, if you delay. Monuments of the Lord's anger have been set up in childhood and youth, as well as in old age. Witness the children at Bethel, 2 Kings ii. 23, 24.

Let not Satan deceive you, as if there were no pleasure in religion. No, Wisdom's "ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace," Prov. iii. 17. There is a sweet in religion a thousand times preferable to all the pleasures and vanities youth gades after.

Secondly, Ye middle-aged people, why do ye delay repentance? why do not ye think with yourselves seriously, where ye are like to take up your eternal lodging, and prepare for eternity by repentance? No doubt ye think ye have time enough too; but no time at present, for ye have another thing ado, the care of a family upon your heads, Luke xiv. 20. When is your term-day of repentance? It is like it is when ye shall have more time than now, or when ye grow old. But, O sirs,

1. What know ye that ever you shall see old age? Yea what dost thou know, but, as Luke xii. 20, "this night thy soul shall be required of thee"? Alas! shall men thus from time to time venture their eternal state upon a mere uncertainty? Thy life is but a day, a short day, a winter day, and thou hast a long journey to go; thy forenoon is past already, and wilt thou sleep on till the evening that will soon be upon thee? The declining sun calls thee to awake.

2. What reason is there, that thy business in the world should shuffle out thy business for eternity? Remember they had as good excuses as you, who upon the sending of them were rejected, and it was declared their day of grace was past, Luke xiv. 18, 19, 20, 24. Oh hast thou not a soul to provide for, thy eternal state to look after? Can ye wonder, if, as ye prefer the world to Christ now, he

give you your portion in this life; and if ever the time come that thou set thyself to repent, he deny thee his grace, and bid thee go to the gods thou hast served?

3. Consider the advantages thou hast now for seriousness, when the foam of youth has settled, and the infirmities of old age have not yet drawn on. O consider, and shew yourselves men. Ye have spent your youth in vanity, and will ye spend this age too that way? What is it ye design for God, the dregs of thy years, that age that is the sink of infirmities? and ye will part with sin, when ye can follow it no longer. O sirs, what confidence can ye have, that God will accept that off your hand? Mal. i. 8. "And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor, will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts."

4. Suppose ye should live till ye grow old, O how few are there that get grace to repent when they are old? I shall not say, there are none such; but truly though they be, they are very rare. Be not ye encouraged to delay, because some were called at the eleventh hour, Matth. xx. 6; for if ye mark the text, these were others than those that were standing there at the third, sixth, and ninth hour. We set no bounds to sovereignty; but as for those that live under the gospel, and spend their best days in sin and estrangedness from religion, common observation tells us, that it is God's ordinary way to plague them with hardness of heart, when they grow old: Job xx. 11. "His bones are full of the sin of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust." About three hundred years after Christ, there was one that had lived a pagan till he was an old man; when he told Simplicianus that he was a Christian, he would not believe him: but when the Church saw that he was really so, their was great shouting and gladness, saying, Caius Marius Victorius is become a Christian! They wondered to see a man when he was old born again.

5. *Lastly*, Will ye see the deceit of delays. When ye were young, did ye not put it off to this time? and now when that is come, ye are as unready as before. Delay no more then lest ye sleep the sleep of death.

Thirdly, Old people, why do ye delay repentance: why is not your heart bowing to God's call, when ye are begun to bow to meet the grave? Ye that have always thought ye had time enough all your days, ye will think there is time enough yet. But when is your term-day for repentance? a death-bed, it is like. And when ye come there, ye will hope it will be but a sick-bed, and so drive off your work till the utmost point. But, O sirs,

1. May not the time past of your life suffice to have wrought the will of the flesh? Must ye have "yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep?" Well, when ye have taken it over the belly of God's call to you all your days, what confidence can ye have to look for grace or mercy then? Sin, Satan, and the world shall have all your time, and ye will look to God, and seek his favour, when ye can do no more. O, are ye not afraid, that that be accomplished on you? Prov. i. 24. &c. "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 have 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," &c. I trow, if your conscience were awakened just now, ye should have enough ado to fasten your feet on a promise of mercy.

2. How do you know, that ye will get a death-bed or sick-bed? What do ye know, but that in a moment ye may drop into eternity, as many have done? Mind him who used to say, three words would do his turn at death. Death does not always send messengers to warn us of its approach. Nay, see what our Lord says expressly, Matth. xxiv. 48—51. "If that evil servant shall say in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming. And shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken: the Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not ware of; and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

3. *Lastly*, And is dying such an easy business, that ye must be laying up other work, yea your main work, for a dying time? I should think, that dying itself, with the pains, throes, and sickness that ordinarily attend it, were enough of themselves. Surely, if we were rightly exercised in health, we would endeavour, that when we come to die, we should have nothing ado but to die. But I pray you remember, you may come to die roving, without the exercise of your reason. But though ye should have it to the last, I pray you consider, is the work of repentance such an easy work as to leave it till the time you can do nothing else? Will ye put off turning to God, till ye are not able to turn yourselves on a bed, but as ye are lifted? taking heaven by storm, till your strength be gone? crying to God, till ye are not able to speak two sentences at once? making ready for death, till it be come to your bed-side?

USE ult. I exhort you all to delay repentance and salvation-work no longer.

MOTIVE 1. Consider ye do but mock God, and cheat yourselves by your delaying. For it is inconsistent with a sincere purpose to repent and turn from sin, 1 Pet. iv. 1, 2, 3. For he that sincerely minds to turn from sin, will presently turn from it.

MOTIVE 2. Repentance is not in your power; it is God's gift, which he gives when he will, Acts v. 31. "God hath exalted Christ with his right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel." The time of God's grace is limited: a time wherein he will be found, and when not: Is. lv. 6. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." Death certainly puts a period to it. But it seems to be clear, that men may outlive their day of grace: Luke xiv. 24. "I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden, shall taste of my supper." Time was when Esau might have had the blessing, but then he despised it; but the time came when he could not have it: Heb. xii. 17. "Ye know how that afterward when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears." Strike in then with the occasion; for if wind and tide fail, there can be no setting to sea.

MOTIVE 3. Though we knew certainly, that our day of grace were far from the end; yet it is a most unworthy thing so to deal with God. Shall men abuse mercy and grace because the Lord waiteth to be gracious? Will men abuse the divine patience, because it suffers long? What a folly is it to stand off as long as we can from him to whom we must needs submit ourselves at length?

MOTIVE 4. The time is short, the work great, and so is the opposition. Salvation-work is a great work; it is no easy thing to be a Christian; ye must lay your account with all the opposition the devil, the world, and the flesh can make you; ye have but an age that is an handbreadth, as nothing to do it in.

MOTIVE 5. Your life is most uncertain. We are tenants-at-will, we have no tack for to-morrow, Jam. iv. 13, 14. forecited. We are agreed about the necessity of repentance; the only question is, When shall it be done? God says, To-day; and to-morrow is not yours, but God's. How then can ye destinate for this use the time that is not yours? Return to God one day before thy death, say the Jewish doctors. Wisely said; return then to-day, for it may be ye shall die to-morrow.

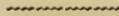
MOTIVE 6. The longer ye delay, the work will be the harder. For sin becomes stronger, as the waters, the farther from the head, the greater they grow. And the arrow that going from the bow strays from the mark, how far wide will it be ere it come to the utmost point? It is observed, that Christ groaned at the raising

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.