

THE  
EVIDENCES AND CAUSES  
OF THE  
DECAY OF RELIGION IN THE SOUL  
DISCOVERED,  
AND THE METHOD OF ITS CURE PRESCRIBED.

Two sermons preached at Morebottle, at the celebration of the Lord's supper there.  
The first upon Sabbath, July 19, 1719.

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REV. iii. 2,

*Strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die.*

WHOSO looks on the face of the generation this day, in respect of religion, may behold a lamentable decay in spirituals therein. Great things has God done for us again and again, not only of old, but of late : but alas ! amidst all our repeated deliverances, we are like to pine away under spiritual plagues. O that on such solemn occasions we were stirred up to "strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die."

This is a direction given to the church of Sardis, which had a name to live, and yet was dead. A church which had as much as made those about her to reckon her in a good condition ; but God knew, and themselves might know, they were far from it ; death had got up into their windows, and was making havock of the spiritual case of all sorts. The directions for a recovery in this verse are two. (1.) Be watchful. Carelessness had ruined all with them ; they are called to bestir themselves to habitual watchfulness. (2.) "Strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die." In which you may notice two things.

1. The decaying and declining condition of this church. "The things which remain, that were ready to die." In which two things are to be observed,

(1.) Religion among them was brought to a very low ebb; they had some remains of it with them, but it was but remains. Their former stock was much spent, the holy fire was become very weak. There is no necessity of restraining this to the really godly among them: it is spoken to the body of that church. Time was when there was another face upon them; some had life-like stirrings by common operations of the Spirit, some by saving ones: but alas! both sorts had quenched the Spirit, and were not now what sometimes they had been.

(2.) That which was among them was like to die out; they were every day growing worse and worse; their light was growing dimmer and dimmer; their lamp like to go out.

2. A seasonable duty pressed on them for their recovering; "Strengthen the things which remain," &c. Hold hand to what is left, that it do not go too. Under-prop the tottering building, that it fall not down for altogether. Repair the breaches that are made in it. Add new fuel to the dying spark, that it may not be extinguished, but nourished and cherished, till it break out into a flame again.

DOCT. When religion with a person or people is brought to dying remains, it is high time for them to bestir themselves, and strengthen these remains, in order to a recovery.

In handling this doctrine, I shall shew,

I. When one's religion is decayed to dying remains.

II. What are the causes that bring one's religion to dying remains.

III. Wherein lies the strengthening of things that remain, and are ready to die.

IV. *Lastly*, Apply,

I. When one's religion is decayed to dying remains. This is a weighty point; and in speaking to it, I shall shew,

1. Some things from whence one's religion may seem to be brought to dying remains, while really it is not so.

2. Some things that will evince one's religion to be brought to dying remains, whether they think it or not.

*First*, I shall shew some things, from whence one's religion may seem to be brought to dying remains, while really it is not so.

1. The wearing away of violent affections and commotions of heart in religion, or the settling of flashes of affection. It is true, some never had more of religion; in that case, indeed, when these are gone, all is gone, Matth. xiii. 5, 6. But even the true convert may have more glistening affections than are true ones, when religion is

new to him : and when these settle, and he gets more solidity of religion, that is not dying remains. James and John could have fired whole towns for Christ, Luke ix. 54; but when they had more of the Spirit, they were not so fiery. See that prayer of the apostle's; Philip. i. 9, "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge, and in all judgment."

Some think, O the love they had to Christ! sometimes they could not have prayed with dry cheeks, &c. But how like ye Christ now; would ye not rather part with all than with him? are ye tender of grieving his Spirit? do ye pray oppressed with a sense of your sinfulness and unworthiness? These are not dying remains, as you may learn from what the apostle says, Rom. viii. 26, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." And 1 John v. 3, "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous."

2. One's not being able to go through with duties with that ease that sometimes they have done before. Hezekiah says, Isa. xxxviii. 15, "I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul." Self-confidence mixing itself with grace, may give more ease in the performance of duties than is welcome; the which when it is broken, so much of that ease is removed. One may have more temptations than formerly: the wind blowing harder in his face, travelling is not so easy; but the horse may retain his metal, though he go not so cleverly, carrying double, as when single. But he who in the course of his way is striving, wrestling, and pressing forward to perfection, whether with less or more ease than formerly, is not come down to dying remains.

3. The marks of the decay of natural vigour left on religious duties. Christ says for his disciples, Matth. xxvi. 41, "The Spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Though the being of religion does not depend on the ease of the body; yet there is such a close union betwixt the soul and body, that the body may sometimes be a clog to the soul in religious duties, which is yet going forward in the way of God, not backward. It is not dying remains with old professors, who, in the way of believing and holy tenderness, are pressing towards the mark; that sometimes they could have remembered much of sermons, continued long in prayers, and holy exercises, heard or prayed not with dry cheeks; but now it is not so. Why, natural vigour is gone, moisture is dried up, memory is failed, &c. Was David's courage gone, when Abishai, the son of Zeruiah, having succoured him, and smote the Philistine, and killed him, his

men swear unto him, saying, "Thou shalt go no more out with us to battle, that thou quench not the light of Israel?" 2 Sam. xxi. 17. The man may have as great love to God, hatred of sin, desire to remember the word as much as ever: and the impressions abide, though the expressions slip from him, as much as ever. But he cannot make so good music as he did; not because the skill is failed, but the instrument is cracked.

*Lastly*, More felt stirring of corruption than before. The apostle Paul says, Rom. vii. 21, "I find a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me." And ver. 24, he cries, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" This did not speak him under a decay, because the struggle was kept up. Corruption may stir more than it did, when it has less strength than before; as when death strikes to the heart of the patient, there are greater fightings than formerly, not because he has more strength, but that then what he has is put forth to the utmost.

*Secondly*, I shall shew some things that will evince one's religion to be brought to dying remains, whether they think it or not.

1. When the conscience boggles not but at gross outbreakings. That speaks very little tenderness left with the man, that conscience has little of God's bonds on it; it has so little feeling, that it is very near to being past feeling, Jude ver. 23. It is not so with thriving Christians; Psalm cxix. 113, the Psalmist says, "I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love." The conscience is the first thing that is awakened, and becomes lively, when the Lord is at work with the soul; and when it becomes untender, it is an evidence little is left.

The untender conscience is an unfaithful watch in the soul, which may quickly involve it in ruin. (1.) It easily lets pieces of one's religion go, one after another. (2.) It easily admits into one's practice, things that have not the King's stamp on them, one after another. And thus churches, and particular professors, hasten to ruin, the spiritual building being taken down piecemeal, by growing untenderness, Prov. xxv. ult., "He that hath no rule over his own spirit, (says Solomon), is like a city that is broken down, and without walls."

2. When one's conscience is strait in the circumstantial of religion, but lax and wide in the substantial of it, as in the case of the scribes and Pharisees, Matth. xxiii. 23, 24, where Christ says, "Wo unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith," &c. These are come to dying remains; for alas! the main channel wherein tenderness ought

to run is dry, or shamefully shallow. Where lies the main of religion? in holiness of heart and life, that is, in moral duty to God and our neighbour, according to the ten commands. All the ordinances of church communion and society are but means to that end; and therefore they shall be laid by, when this is fully attained; and they avail nothing when they do not advance holiness. Wherefore we ought to be tender of both, Matth. xxiii. 23, "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." And whether one make bold with the one or the other, his religion is like the legs of the lame, not equal; and what he has of it, is but dying remains.

3. When there is any one thing lacking to the perfection of one's religion in parts; see the text. That religion is in a ruinous condition, that is not entire, Jam. i. 4; like the house that stands wanting the cope-stone. The parts of religion are so necessarily to be joined together, that if one part be lacking, the rest cannot but moulder away, Mark x. 21. So the whole of what the man has, is but dying remains, in regard of what is wanting. And hence it comes to pass, as one may bleed to death at a neglected wound, while all the rest are taken care of: so one allowed lust will eat out the life of the soul, whatever execution seem to be made on the rest.

4. When folks' strength against sin and temptation is abated: that is a plain indication of a decay, for "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day," Prov. iv. 18. This is a sad case, for one the longer he lives, to grow the weaker; to be the easier ensnared by a subtle devil, and deceitful world; that says the communication betwixt Christ and the soul is much stopped, if there be any at all; that corruptions wax stronger, as the nails grow in decaying folk. Maybe ye think ye can pray as well as ere ye did: but indeed ye are not so patient, so humble, denied to the world, self-denied, ye are easier led aside to sin. Then thou art come to dying remains.

5. When the work of mortification is at a stand; the man's not watching his heart, and noticing the lusts rising there, and setting himself to mortify them, Rom. viii. 13. A Christian, if he be not going forward, is going backward; if not adding to his stock, he is losing. The garden will quickly be overgrown with weeds, if one be not daily working at them to pluck them up. The leaking ship is drawing water, if one be not busy at the pump, it may quickly be swallowed up. The thriving Christian never wants work. Hence says the apostle, Phil. iii. 13, 14, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things

which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

6. When though the duties of religion be kept up, yet spiritually in duties is gone. Then what is left is but dying remains; for says our Lord, John iv. 24, "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in Spirit and in truth:" and says the apostle, Phil. iii. 3, "We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit." The sense of God's command does not stir up the man to duty; love to the Lord does not draw him to it; God's honour is not in his eye. He goes out in his duty in the power of his gifts, but no panting for the blowings of the Spirit. The spirit of the man goes not along with his body; his bodily worship, actions, and gestures, are but naked, yea, false signs; he closes his eyes, but his heart is not fixed on God; bows his knees, but his heart is not humbled; he aims not at the enjoyment of God; but all his duties run into the dead sea of self.

*Lastly*, When one is become a stranger to the life of faith in Christ Jesus, what is left is but dying remains. The soul, if it have any life in that case, is in a swoon; for "the life which we now live in the flesh, we live by the faith of the Son of God," Gal. ii. 20. The thriving soul is employing him daily, as a Prophet, a Priest, a King; growing into him, coming out of itself more and more, believing his word, prizing his imputed righteousness as its only hope, and labouring to subject the whole soul unto him in his commands, and the disposals of his providence. Where this is not, and the soul never grows more self-denied, more humble, resigned to the will of the Lord, what is there but dying remains?

II. I shall shew, What are the causes that brings one's religion to dying remains.

1. Unwatchfulness, Rev. iii. 2. Carelessness about one's body is oft-times fatal to it; about one's substance, breeds a consumption in their estate; and unwatchfulness over the heart breeds a spiritual decay. How many this day have little or nothing left them in religion, who were once in a fair way of thriving, had they but watched their hearts? Alas! there are too many enemies waiting to ensnare the soul, from without and within, for any to think they will get their attainments kept, if they do not watch.

2. Spiritual sloth, Eccl. x. 18. This is a bewitching sin; and if once Satan get men asleep on this enchanted ground, be sure they shall be robbed and spoiled there. Thus the spouse will rather let Christ go, than set her foot on the cold and wet ground, Cant. v.

3. Every one has a devil's agent within him, buzzing in his ear, Master, spare thyself; and when men sleep, the tares are sown.

3. Quenching of the Spirit, 1 Thess. v. 19. When the Spirit goes as he goes, so liveliness goes. Some cast water on this holy fire, by sinning against light, which wastes the conscience, defiles the soul, fills it with darkness and deadness. Some ruin themselves by their not nourishing and cherishing this fire, to give fuel to it, but they bring themselves into darkness and deadness by neglecting it. Some smother it, by taking part with some one lust or other against it, and so resist and rebel against the Spirit, to their own wreck.

USE. I shall drop a word to two sorts of persons.

*First*, To those with whom nothing remains, but all is died out. Time was ye had convictions and awakenings at a sermon, on a sick-bed, or otherwise: but now of all that ever they got at all the communions, sermons, afflictions, &c. nothing remains, but they are just where they were before that time, if not worse. To stir you up to see to yourselves in time, I would pose your consciences with the following queries:—

1. When ye had your awakening, would ye not have given all the world to have had that undone ye had done? Why then turn back to the same courses?

2. Did ye not resolve never to be so unconcerned about your soul, as ye have been? What have ye done with these resolutions? were ye fools to make them? or were ye fools to break them?

3. Did ye think God's wrath against sin a mere scarecrow then? why look ye on it so now? Could you sleep sound this night, if God should send you home with his arrows again in your conscience? They have need of strong armour, that have God for their party.

4. Was not death very terrible then? and is the turning back to your old courses the way to make it pleasant now? Is there any more sand in your glass now? It may be farther from your mind, but sure it is nearer your heels than then.

*Secondly*, To those with whom something remains, though ready to die. This is the prevailing case of the generation, which is in a decaying, dying condition, whereof there are several sad symptoms.

1. The stomach for our spiritual food is gone. Ordinances are not prized, but despised. We look as we had got a surfeit of the gospel. Farms and merchandize go nearer the heart than occasions of communion with God. A sign we may come to fast till we find our stomach.

2. Zion's children have generally lost their colour, their beauty gone. That heavenlieness, spirituality, tenderness, favour of godliness, sometimes about them, is much away. And self-conceit, pride, formality, worldly-mindedness, and untenderness, has made them the colour of the earth.

*Lastly*, Death is working powerfully amongst us by the most horrid ingratitude of the generation, for most signal repeated deliverances, under which the generation is nothing bettered; and by the many melancholy divisions whereby we are crumbled into many pieces; all foreboding ruin!

Stir up yourselves to strengthen what remains with you, and is ready to die. Improve this ordinance, communicants, for strengthening the dying remains, and follow on with any little you have, in order to a recovery.

MOT. 1. The longer ye be a beginning, it will be the harder to recover.

2. If ye do not, ye may come to lose more, yea, some may lose all that they have, the remaining spark die out.

*Lastly*, You may and shall get a recovery, if ye will ply the means, Hos. vi. 3; says the prophet, "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain; as the latter and former rain unto the earth."

OBJECT. I meet with many disappointments, I think I will never recover. ANSW. Consider the case of Job, chap. xxiii. and the case of the spouse, Cant. iii. Disappointments sharpen the appetite, teach honourable thoughts of sovereignty, and make the enjoyment sweeter when it comes.

OBJECT. But I grow worse and worse. ANSW. The darkest time of the night may be before day-break. See Mark ix. 20—26.

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Morebattle, Monday, July 20, 1719.

REV. iii. 2,

*Strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die.*

(The second Sermon on this text.)

I PROCEED to enquire into the causes that bring one's religion to dying remains.

4. Slacking in diligence about the duties of religion; Prov. xix. 15, says the wise man, "Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger." The heart touched with the finger of God, is like a watch, which will stand if it be not duly rolled up. Thomas having missed one occasion of communion with Christ,

his heart was overgone with the power of unbelief. If one be not diligent in the means of soul-thriving, how can he think his soul will prosper? It will be owned, that religion, among the professors of it, is not this day as it has been: but is it not as sure, folks are not so diligent now as they were in the thriving times of religion?

5. Doing any thing with a doubting conscience, doubting whether the practice be lawful or not, Rom. xiv. ult. Venturing forward, though they are not persuaded in their own minds but it is forbidden ground. This is such "a casting of God behind one's back," as the phrase is, Ezek. xxiii. 35, that it cannot miss to give one's soul's case a frem'd cast. It quenches the Spirit, gives the conscience a throw, wounds faith and confidence in the Lord, casts the soul into a kind of spiritual palsy, wherein the whole spiritual case is loosed, nothing firm, and the man decays daily, till recovered by repentance.

But here beware of confounding a doubting and a scrupling conscience. The former hangs in suspense betwixt the two parts of the question, lawful or not, assenting to neither of them. The latter assents to one part of it; but there is a certain uneasiness, arising from some difficulties in the matter, inclining the conscience to the other side. In this last case, one should endeavour to have his conscience well informed from the word, that the scruples may evanish: but if after all they remain, in case one be sure from the word, that there is no sin on the side to which the scruples tend, they may forbear the action. But otherwise they should throw them by, or act even against them; because the conscience has light on the other side, and they are but the weaknesses of conscience, and without solid foundation. If it were not so, folk might scruple themselves out of all religion. For it is certain some have been so tossed by the wiles of the tempter, striking in with a weak conscience, that they have scrupled even to pray any more, or eat any more. Though God's express command for praying, and the sixth commandment, gave light for praying and eating; yet they had such scruples against these things, that they could not answer, and made the light dim. Yet to have followed these would have been but to gratify the tempter, and dishonour God, and foster the weakness of the conscience. The case is the same in other duties of reading, hearing, communicating, &c.; all which might be shovelled away with scrupling. There is a case, Deut. xiii. 1—4, "If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee saying, Let us go after other gods, (which thou hast not known), and let us serve them; thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the Lord your God proveth you, to

know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and you shall serve him, and cleave unto him." The sign's coming to pass could hardly miss to raise scruples in favour of his doctrine, yet they were not to be regarded so as to be complied with.

6. Worldliness and carnality, Jam. i. ult. When one goes aside from God to the world, he lies down among the lions' dens, and the mountains of the leopards: and how can he come away without loss? Therefore says Christ to the church, Cant. iv. 8, "Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards." The world has given many up their foot in religion for altogether; witness Demas. And many a good stock of grace it has brought down to little. And,

*1st*, The cares of the world, Luke viii. 14. When the heart is set on the tenter-pins for getting and keeping the world, good motives evanish. One cannot hold the gripe of religion, while he takes such a greedy gripe of other things; more than one can grasp heaven and earth at once. They are Beelzebub's flies and wasps, that he sends to buzz about the soul, and disturb its rest in the Lord. Hence many, while they are young, and without care of the world, how blooming and lively are they in religion! but when once they come to get a family, they enter into a cloud of cares, and their religion melts away like snow before the sun.

*2dly*, The drenching of the heart in worldly ease, comforts, and pleasures, Luke xxi. 34. Troublous times kept the people of God waking; but now, they find ease sweet, put their hand in their bosom, and it grieveth them to bring it again to their mouth. The warm sun of worldly ease has caused many cast the cloak from them, which they held fast in spite of the boisterous wind of persecution. O deceitful world, that with silken cords draws souls into perdition! Even lawful things may prove ruining. A very gourd stole away the heart of Jonah, and cast him into a decay; two graceless sons, the heart of good Eli.

*Lastly*, The entertaining of any one lust, or idol of jealousy, Psalm lxvi. 18. While Samson lay in Deliah's lap, he lost his locks and strength; and God departed from him. How many have tampered with some bosom lust, till it has given them a deadly wound? like the fly, flying about the candle till its wings are burnt, and it falls down. Gideon had seventy sons by his wives, but one by his Shechemite concubine; but that one destroyed all the seventy but one. So one sin indulged destroyeth much good.

III. Wherein lies the strengthening of things which remain, that are ready to die? It lies in two things.

1. In blowing up the remaining spark that is ready to die out, 2 Tim. i. 6, "Wherefore I put thee in remembrance, that thou stir up the gift of God, "which is in thee by the putting on of my hands." It is weak in itself, stir it up, that it may act more vigorously. May be ye have nothing but a conviction of sinfulness, and that very weak; hold hand to it, press it forward, till it be deeper, and more lively. If conscience has got the first touch, the heart may get the next. If sin is become uneasy to the conscience, it may become a burden to the heart next, and the sweet morsel be vomited up. May be hearing, or joining in prayer, to purpose is gone: but praying alone remains, though ready to die: why, stir up that, when alone, pray more believingly, fervently, &c., so shall you "strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die."

2. In adding to the remains, 2 Pet. i. 5—7, "And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience, and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity." Is there a remaining coal, put to another; that will strengthen the dying remains. O decaying Christians, look about you, and you will see several gaps in your religion; make up these gaps, fill up the void spaces, if ever ye would strengthen the dying remains. Many a one's religion this day is like a city-wall, wherein there are many fearful slaps, and at these the enemy brings in, and carries out, to the ruin of the city: and ay the longer the gaps are not made up, they grow the wider; and the enemy has the easier access. If ye would strengthen the dying remains, ye must repair the wall, and fill up what is the gap; and so what remains will stand firm. Make up what is wanting in external duties, in internal duties and graces.

USE. O decayed Christians, professors, all ye with whom it is come to dying remains, stir up yourselves to "strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die." And as for you with whom it is better, who are in a thriving case, what is said to them, may be of use to you, to look to yourselves, that ye come not to that pass.

MOT. 1. Dying remains are not for the work a Christian has to do in the world. Ye have much work, much opposition from the devil, the world, and the flesh, and ye have little time to do it in; ye have need of strength; they that have most grace will have enough ado with it.

1. Salvation-work is on your hand; hence is that exhortation of the apostle's, Phil. ii. 12, "Wherefore, my beloved,—work out your

own salvation with fear and trembling." How will that be done with dying remains? Faint wishes and languishing endeavours will not work that work. The garden will grow over with weeds, if there be not plying in earnest.

2. Generation-work is on your hands, namely, to be useful for God in the world; and not to take up room there for no good purpose, according as it is said of David, Acts xiii. 36, that "after he had served his own generation by the will of God, he fell on sleep." But will ever your dying remains make you useful for God? Eccl. ix. 10. I will say two things.

1. Dying remains are very unfit for any time, the best of times, there are difficulties in the way to heaven that will be enough to try the strength of the most grown Christian. There is holy violence to be used, Matth. xi. 12. There will be striving to enter in at the strait gate, Luke xiii. 24; wrestling with principalities and powers; a race to be run; a good fight to be fought, and victory to be obtained. How will dying remains suit these?

2. They are especially very unfit for our time we live in; the stream of profanity and wickedness runs violently among many of this generation; the stream of formality, deadness, and untenderness among professors, that it may be hard to keep what remains from dying out, if not strengthened, Rev. iii. 4. And the Lord is threatening the generation, as a generation of his wrath, so that we are very like to see suffering times, which our dying remains make us very unfit for; hence is that, Jer. xii. 5, "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?"

MOR. 2. If ye do not stir up yourselves to "strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die," and recover, it will be bitterness in the end. Sleeping, decaying Christians, if they awake not at the Lord's call, will readily get a sad awakening. If ye hold on, take heed ye get not,

1. Jonah's awakening, being plunged into a deep sea ere ye are aware, getting a whale's belly to seek strengthening in, for the things that remain. Consider the case of Joseph's brethren. The Lord will not let a people he has any kindness for decay on and on, till what remains die quite out. But a midnight-cry they will get; and what the word does not, his heavy hand will perform; Rev. iii. 3, "Remember therefore how thou has received and heard, and hold fast and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee."

2. David's awakening, over head and ears in a deep mire, ere ye are aware. A fall into some scandalous sin, that will make you go halting to the grave. It is a fearful threatening against Laodicea, Rev. iii. 16, "So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." Many keep up the carcase of religion, but the soul and life of it is gone; and God even lets them fall, so as the world may see they were never sound at the heart. "Wherefore let him that standeth, take heed lest he fall."

MOT. ult. It is hard work, but must be done. The fire almost out is ill to kindle. Ye have all to undo ye have been doing since ye went back from God. Ye have been weaving a net to entangle your own feet; building a partition-wall betwixt God and you; setting up idols of jealousy in every corner of thy heart and life; ye must open out the net, demolish the wall, sacrifice the idols to the jealousy of an angry God. But it must be done, else ye will repent it bitterly in time, or in eternity, according as your state is.

What shall we do to recover from a decay, to strengthen the dying remains?

1. Labour to work on your hearts a deep sense of the ill of this decaying case. Hear God saying to thee as to Adam, Where art thou? Consider how ye are robbed and spoiled, and snared and taken. How it mars all ye do, your praying, hearing, communicating, &c. And try to bring meat out of the eater, and sweet out of the strong, when ye observe it. (1.) Humiliation of soul before the Lord, saying with Asaph, Psalm lxxiii. 22, "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee." (2.) Sense of the need of grace, while ye see what sad work ye make in your decaying condition, crying out with the apostle, Rom. vii. 24, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!"

2. Be sensible of your inability to recover yourself, saying, with Ephraim, Jer. xxxi. 18, "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God." Sometimes grace prevents the decaying Christian, and puts him in a fair way of recovery: but all is marred by self-confidence, and turning in to strength of resolution instead of going out of one's self to Christ. And so the resolution breaks and gives way, and he is where he was before.

3. Believe, accept, or renew your acceptance of Christ offered in the gospel-covenant, as if ye had never done it before. And look to him for quickening influences, depend on him for them; to him the Father sends you for quickening, Rev. iii. 1. And believe the promise suited to your case, and that with application to yourself; Hos. xiv. 7, "They that dwell under his shadow shall return, they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent

thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon." Mal. iv. 2, "But unto you that fear my name, shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings: and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall."

4. Reflect on former experiences, muse on the days when it was better with you, Hos. ii. 7. Recal to mind the particular times and places where ye had something of God ye have not now. God says to Jacob, Gen. xxxi. 13, "I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me." Old experiences sometimes give a fresh smell when handled anew, as in Jacob's case, Gen. xxxv. 3, "Let us arise, (says he), and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went." They help to fill the face with holy shame. Every one of them comes out with that inscription, Jer. ii. 31, "O generation, see ye the word of the Lord: have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness? wherefore say my people, we are lords, we will come no more unto thee?" They strengthen faith, according to that, Isa. li. 9, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?"

5. Repent, or renew your repentance, Rev. iii. 3. Search your ways, take a review of your decay in the several steps of it, in the doleful effects of it on your heart and life. Trace it to the source thereof; and let your eye affect your heart with indignation against sin, and self-loathing. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and lament your backslidings, with sincere purposes to endeavour to return to your first love.

6. Begin forthwith, and watch, Rev. iii. 2. Satisfy not yourselves to be affected with your decay on a Sabbath, or at a communion season, and to stuff your prayers with dry unactive complaints of deadness and decay: but forthwith set your watch, and call in your heart from its wandering. Watch heart, life, the whole man; watch the beginnings of a revival, and blow the coal, Hos. vi. 3.

7. Consider the signs of the times, as did Noah, Heb. xi. 7, who "by faith being warned of God, of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house." Behold how the harvest ripens for the sickle of wrath. Look over your bed, and see how the house is like to go up in a fire about our heads, that ye may bend to your feet. Concern about the public, not improved for the behoof of one's soul is little worth.

8. Make use of godly conference. It is said, Luke xxiv. 15, "While the two disciples communed together, and reasoned, Jesus

himself drew near and went with them." Conversation with lively Christians is very animating, Prov. xiii. 20. These are rare, ye may say: but ye that ever had any experience of religion, tell your case one to another, and though you and your fellow be both alike, two cold flint-stones struck together may produce fire. See Prov. xxvii. 17; Eccl. iv. 9, 10, 11. Christ sent out his disciples by pairs.

9. Fix your eyes on the particular ills of your heart, and pursue them with the knife of mortification, Gal. v. 24. These are the suckers that draw away the sap from thy soul, and have made it wither. And be sure, as any of them thrives, ye will decay. And beguile not yourself with what you call your weak side; for if ever ye see heaven, ye must get above it, Matth. v. 29. Remember what is written, Mark x. 21, "Then Jesus beholding him, loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor; and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow me."

*Lastly*, Be much in prayer; fervent in it, Rom. xii. 11. If your hearts be dead, yet impel them to liveliness, if I may so say. One benumbed with cold, walking he becomes capable to run, and running he gathers heat. Stint not yourselves to morning and evening prayers; but take occasions between hands, if ye would thrive, and can get them. Use secret fasting and prayer; a most proper remedy for the worst of decays; for some devils are not cast out but by prayer and fasting.

END OF VOLUME SEVENTH.