

SERMON X.

OF THE SIN OF INFIRMITY.

Wherein is shewed, besides other things,

- I.—THAT A MAN MAY POSSIBLY FALL INTO THE SAME SIN AGAIN AND AGAIN, YET BE A TRUE DISCIPLE.
- II.—THAT THIS SIN MAY BE BUT A SIN OF INFIRMITY.
- III.—THAT BEING SO, CHRIST WILL NOT LEAVE HIM IN IT, BUT WILL COME AGAIN, AND NOT CAST HIM OFF.

PREACHED AT STEPNEY, A. D. 1656.

“ And he came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy.”—MATT. xxvi. 43.

IN the verses next precedent and consequent, you may see the difference between the true and the false disciple; both sinned, but they differ in their sin, and in the issue of it. The true disciple sleeps, when he should have prayed; and he slept again and again, that was his sin, for our Saviour commanded them to watch and pray. But Christ wakened them, and would not leave them sleeping; he came to them with his wakening mercy, and they were awakened; that was the issue of their sin. But the false disciple Judas was awake, and he watched unto what is evil. The good disciple slept unto what was good, and the false disciple watched unto what was evil; that was his sin. “ For while Christ yet spake (ver. 17), lo Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude, with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him, gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he, hold him fast: and forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, Master, and kissed him.” This was his sin, wherein our Saviour leaves him, and doth not awaken him, but suffered him to go on, leading him forth with the workers of iniquity. That was the issue of his sin.

In this verse 43, you have the true disciple’s sin, and the Lord’s grace; his dealing by Christ, and Christ’s dealing by him.

He slept when he should have been at prayer; which sin is described by the cause thereof; and by the repetition of it.

The cause of it in these words: "For their eyes were heavy." This sin, therefore, was a sin of infirmity, a sin of weakness, and so our Saviour calls it, ver. 41, for saith he, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

The repetition of this sin you have in these words: "He found them asleep again." Christ had wakened them before, and commanded them to pray; but they slept again and again. Thus did they deal by Christ.

But how did Christ deal by them? He did not leave them in their sin, nor cast them off, as he did deal by Judas; but he came to them again, and as they slept again, so Christ came again: his waking grace and mercy was as high as their slumbering sin; they sin again, and he comes again. So that the doctrine from the whole verse is this:

Though a man do sin again and again, yet if his sin be a sin of infirmity, Christ will not leave him in it, but will come again, and not cast him off.

For the opening and clearing whereof, three things will fall under our consideration.

First, That a man may possibly fall into the same sin again and again, yet be a true disciple.

Secondly, That this sin may be but a sin of infirmity.

Thirdly, That being so, Christ will not leave him in it, but will come again, and not cast him off.

First, It is possible that a good man may fall into the same sin again and again.

I confess it is an evil thing so to do, and a great evil. In some respects it may be worse to fall into the same sin, than to fall into others; for this may more waste one's peace, and destroy the assurance of God's love. Sins against light do the most darken. Now when we have repented, and then fall into that very sin which they repented of, they do sin against light; yea, it is a kind of repenting of one's repentance: for as when a man hath gone on in a sinful way, and doth return unto God, he doth then repent of his sin; so when a man hath gone on in a good way, and doth return to his sin, then he doth as it were repent of his repentance.* When God pardoneth a man, he saith, Go and sin no more:

* *Lavamini mundi estote, Esa. i. Lavatur et mundus est, qui et preterrita*

do I therefore return unto the same sin ? then am I most unthankful, disingenuous, and disobedient ; yea, it is exceedingly displeasing unto the Lord, for a man to fall into the same sin again and again. Ye shall observe, therefore, that although the Lord pardoned the children of Israel that great sin of idolatry in the matter of the golden calf, yet in reference to the land of promise, he did not pardon their unbelief and murmuring, for they entered not into Canaan ; why ? because of their unbelief, saith the apostle. Now if you look into Numb. xiv. 19, you shall find that Moses prayed, “ Pardon I beseech thee, O Lord, the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people from Egypt, even until now. And the Lord said, I have pardoned, according to thy word ; but as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord.” At ver. 22, “ Because all these men which have seen my glory, and my miracles which I did in Egypt, and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice, surely they shall not see the land, which I sware to give unto their fathers.” Though I pardon them, saith God, they shall never come into Canaan, the land of rest that I have promised : why ? because they have sinned these ten times, murmuring again, and again, and again. So that it is exceedingly displeasing unto the Lord, for a man to fall into the same sin again and again. But yet, I say, it is possible that a good man, and true disciple of Christ, may fall into the same sin again and again. It was a sin for them thus to sleep, when our Saviour had commanded them to watch and pray ; but they slept again and again. Look I pray you into Job xix., and see what Job saith concerning his friends : “ These ten times (saith he, at verse 3) have ye reproached me, yet are ye not ashamed.” It is an evil thing to reproach a man, it is worse to reproach a godly man, as it is yet worse to reproach a godly man under affliction, and to afflict the afflicted. But to reproach a man ten times, this is evil indeed ; yet saith Job, “ These ten times have ye reproached me :” and yet Job’s friends were godly. Possibly then, a good man may fall into

plangit, et iterum non admittit ; lavatur et non est mundus, qui plangit quod gessit, nec deserit, sed post lachrimas flenda, hæc quæ fleverat, repetit. — Augustini Ser. 66, de tempore.

the same sin again, and again, ten times : that is very often. And you know how it was with Abraham, the father of the faithful. You read in Gen. xii., that when he was driven by reason of famine into Egypt, he desired his wife, Sarah, to say that she was his sister ; which indeed was no lie, but his sin of unbelief, and very evil, for thereby he put his wife upon a great temptation. He was reprov'd for it, as you read in the chapter ; yet if you look into chap. xx., you shall find that he was at the same work again. " And Abraham journeyed towards the south country ; and Abraham said (ver. 2) of Sarah his wife, She is my sister." And so also if you look into 2 Chron. xix., you shall find it was thus with that good king Jehoshaphat, complying too much with the king of Israel, for which he is reprov'd, at ver. 2 : " And Jehu went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord ? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord." Yet if you look into chap. xx. you shall find that he falls into the same sin again : " And Eliezer prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, (at the last verse) Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the Lord hath broken thy works : and the ships were broken, that they were not able to go to Tarshish." Jehoshaphat a good man, yet he falls into the same sin again. So that I shall not need to spend longer time in this, it is too apparent : possibly a good man, a true disciple of Christ, may fall into the same sin again and again. That is the first.

Secondly. Though a man do fall into the same sin again and again, yet it may be but an infirmity.

For the opening and clearing of this, we must consider what a sin of infirmity is, and what is the true notion of it : which being cleared, the truth proposed will naturally fall into your bosom. Properly, therefore, a sin of infirmity is that sin which doth rather arise from want of strength to resist, than from will to commit, else it should be wickedness and not weakness.

But, in Scripture phrase, it is called a weakness, as here in this chapter, " The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak ;" and Rom. vi. 19, " I speak after the manner of men, because of the infirmity (or weakness) of your flesh." And, therefore, it must be in one that hath spiritual life. You do not say

that a stone is infirm or weak ; why ? because a stone hath no life in it : infirmity is a defect in one that hath life.

And, I say, it doth arise, not from wilfulness, but want of strength to resist. Now this want of strength to resist, doth either arise from some natural cause, which one cannot avoid, of which Paul speaks in Rom. vii. 19, "The good that I would, I do not ; but the evil that I would not, that I do : " and why so ? he gives the reason at verse 21, "I find, then, a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me ; " and verse 23, "I find a law in my members fighting against the law of my mind, and leading me captive," &c. : or else it doth arise from some present distemper, and that either in the mind and judgment, and then it is called an error, "Who knoweth the errors of his life ? " Psalm xix., Heb. iii. 2 : or else this distemper doth arise from some present passion, fear or the like, whereby a man is hurried into evil, and then he is said to be overtaken, Gal. vi. 1. So that when a man is alive unto God, and doth commit a sin for want of strength to resist, then he is said to sin out of infirmity.

Therefore if you ask whether every sin that a godly man doth commit be a sin of infirmity ? I answer, No ; because there are some sins that a godly man doth commit which he hath strength to avoid. Sometimes the word infirmity is taken largely, for all sin, which Jesus Christ our High Priest doth sympathize with us in. So Heb. iv. : "We have not such an high priest who cannot be touched with our infirmities." And thus all the sins of the godly may be and are sins of infirmity. But, properly and strictly, an infirmity is that sin which a man is taken captive by against his will, Rom. vii., that is, against the general bent and frame of his heart which he hath not present strength to resist. So Rom. xv. 1, "Ye which are strong ought to bear the infirmities of those that are weak." And thus every sin that a godly man commits is not a sin of infirmity.*

If you ask whether any sin that a wicked man doth com-

* The sins whereinto the godly falleth, are not presumptuous, but are ordinarily of weakness and infirmity.—Perkins' Cases, book i. chap. 2.

Peccatum ex infirmitate est, cujus est determinatur causa instigans, ita ut sine tali causa non fieret.—Corduba, lib. ii. quest. 8.

Ut peccatum sit ex infirmitate, ita debere fieri ex passione ut ipsa sit sufficiens causa qua ablata, tale peccatum non sequeretur.—Vasquez in 12. Co. 1, q. 77. art. 3.

mit be a sin of infirmity? I answer, No; because he hath no spiritual life, and infirmity is in one that hath life; and therefore a wicked man being dead, his sin that he commits cannot be called a sin of infirmity.*

If you ask whether any great, gross, foul, scandalous sin be or can be a sin of infirmity? I answer, No; because it is a sickness, as Austin well observes, and not a weakness; for, saith he, there is a great deal of difference between *agrotus* and *infirmus*. If a man have some distemper and ailment in his body, and yet he bears up to his meat and to his work, he is not sick, but he hath an infirmity; this is weakness: but if a man have a distemper and illness in his body, whereby he is driven both from meat and work, and doth lie by it, then it is not an infirmity but a sickness. So spiritually, if a man have a failing, and yet through the grace of God he bears up to meat and work, it is an infirmity; but if he sin, and thereby be driven both from meat and work, through the commission of some gross sin, this is a sickness, this is no weakness or infirmity. So then, properly, the sin of infirmity is that sin which is committed by one that is spiritually alive unto God, and which doth arise from want of strength to resist, and not from will to commit. And thus you see, briefly, what the nature of this sin of infirmity is.†

But yet this doth not come near enough. When may a man be said to sin a sin of infirmity, and how shall I know whether my sin be of that rate of sins or no; for if the Lord will not cast a man off for a sin of infirmity, it concerns me to consider what kind of sins my sins are: there are some sins that God doth reject men for, as in the case of Saul, God rejected him for his sin; when may a man, therefore, be said to sin out of infirmity?

For answer unto this, First, I shall speak unto some mistakes. Secondly, I will speak something unto it negatively, and something affirmatively.

For mistakes. There are mistakes on both hands. Some think that the sins which they commit are not sins of in-

* Infirmity cannot properly be said to be in them, in whom sin hath firmity and strength, and where there is no power of grace at all.—Perkins' Cases, book i. chap. 2

† Sic ut corpori noxium est escam corporalem non posse percipere, ita animæ periculosum est spiritalis delicias fastidire.—Augustin.

firmity, when indeed they are; and some think that their sins are sins of infirmity when indeed they are not. Both on the right hand and on the left hand, men are mistaken about this matter.

On the left hand, men think that their sins are infirmities, when indeed they are not, and that upon a four-fold account because their sin is but small in bulk; or because that they are tempted and drawn into their sin by others; and because they do strive against their sin; and because they are troubled after it.

I think, will some say, that my sin is a sin of infirmity because it is but small. But if you look into 1 Sam. xv. you may read that Saul's sin, for which the Lord rejected him, was of no great outward bulk; for he spared the fatlings that he might sacrifice thereby; and though he spared the king Agag, it was neither murder that he committed, nor adultery, nor drunkenness; yet saith the Lord unto him, "Thy sin is as the sin of witchcraft." A great many small sins may make as great a bulk as one gross sin; yea, possibly there may be much sinfulness and evil in committing of a small sin; for as amongst men, it is the greatest incivility to break with another for a small matter; so with God, to break with God for a small thing, is a great unworthiness and ingratitude. Thus did Adam in eating the forbidden fruit; the smallness of the thing to be done aggravated his sin; and the smaller the thing is, the more unworthiness it is to break with God in so little; a small leak neglected may sink the ship, as well as the most boisterous and greatest wave: and much skill may be seen in a small work; a little watch, &c. So your skill in sinning may be seen in a small sin; his sin is never small that thinks it small. And if this be true, that there is no sin that a wicked man commits which is a sin of infirmity, because he is dead; then a man may commit a sin that is but small in the bulk, and yet no sin of infirmity.*

* *Minuta peccata si negligentur, occidunt minutæ sunt guttæ quæ flumina impleant, minuta sunt grana arenæ, sed si multa arena imponatur, premit atque opprimit; hoc facit sentina neglecta, quod facit fluctus irruens, Paulatim per sentinam intrat sed diu intrando et non ex hauriendo mergit navim. August. Tom. vi. 9. Tract. 13. in Joan. 2.*

Ne putemus parvum esse has culpas quæ sunt plures, arenulæ parvæ sunt sed

But I think my sin is a sin of infirmity because I am tempted to it, and because I am drawn on by others. But I pray, was not Adam tempted unto the eating of the forbidden fruit by Eve? And was not Eve tempted by Satan? And will you call that a sin of infirmity that condemned all the world as Adam's sin did? And I pray you, was not Aaron put upon making the golden calf by the people; and will you call that sin of idolatry a sin of infirmity? Possibly a man may be tempted, drawn unto sin by others, and put upon it by others, and yet the sin may be no sin of infirmity.

But I think my sin is a sin of infirmity because I do strive against it. And, I pray, did not Pilate strive against the crucifying of Christ? He would have delivered him from the Jews, calls for a bason of water, and washed his hands, saying, I am free from the blood of this man, used means, and did strive against it, and yet the sin of Pilate no sin of infirmity: Possibly therefore a man may strive against his sin, and yet the sin be no sin of infirmity.

But my sin is a sin of infirmity because I am troubled after it. And was not Esau troubled after he had sold his birth-right for a mess of pottage; did he not seek it with tears? And when Judas had betrayed his master, and our Saviour, it is said that he repented of what he had done, and was troubled. Surely then, though the sin that I commit, may be lesser in bulk, than another's sin, and small comparatively, and though I be drawn into it by others, and though I do strive against it, and though I am troubled after it, yet it may be no sin of infirmity. Yet, good Lord, how many poor souls are there that deceive themselves, and think that their sins are but sins of infirmity; and thus are mistaken on the left hand.

But as some are mistaken on the left hand, thinking that their sins are sins of infirmity, when indeed they are not:

tot possunt esse ut obruant citius quam saxum ingens, infirma res est una locusta sed quæ plaga major agris quam multitudo illarum. Euseb. Nieremberg. de adoratione, Lib. ii. Cap. 13.

Cum Deus tantus sit nihil est parvum quod ei displicet aut quod ei placet quicquid est bonum statim est magnum quicquid malum statim hic non est parvum.

Non est parvum quod censetur minimum cum in minimis stet perfectio.

Erubesse te vinci a parvis nam ad hoste exili et pumilione sterna turpissimum et ignavi signum. Id. Cap. 14.

so others on the right hand are mistaken, and think that their sins are not sins of infirmity, but of a worse nature, when indeed they are : and that upon these accounts :

Because they sin knowingly.

Because they fall into the same sin again and again, and do lie therein.

Because they fall into the sin after admonition.

Oh, saith one, I fear my sin is no sin of infirmity, for I sin knowingly, and with deliberation ; I sin against my knowledge, and against my conscience, and therefore my sin, can be no sin of infirmity.

But for answer hereunto, you must know, it is one thing for a man to sin knowingly, and another thing for a man to sin out of knowledge, or against his knowledge. As in the case of ignorance ; it is one thing for a man to sin *ignoranter*, and another thing to sin *ex ignorantia*. A man sins ignorantly when ignorance is the companion of his sin only : a man sins out of ignorance, when ignorance is the only cause of his sin, and not the companion only. As for example : Suppose a man be in fight, in a great battle, and he kill another ; he kills him because he did not know him, if he had known him in the battle, he would not have killed him ; here his ignorance is not the companion only, but the cause of it : so that it is one thing to sin ignorantly, and another thing to sin out of ignorance. A man sins ignorantly, when ignorance is the companion of his fact : a man sins out of ignorance, when ignorance is the cause of it. So a man sins knowingly, when knowledge is the companion of his fact : but a man sins out of knowledge, or he sins against knowledge, when knowledge is the cause thereof ; as when a man doth use his knowledge to make distinctions and shifts for his sin, whereby he is emboldened to it, and continues in it. Knowledge is sometimes only a companion of sin ; as when a man knows that the first risings of sin are evil ; this knowledge is no cause of them, but merely a companion : sometimes knowledge is the cause of sin ; as when a man doth know that his way is naught, and he doth deliberately consult and devise excuses and lies to hide the same ; here his knowledge is the cause of those sinful excuses, and the man doth not only sin knowingly and with knowledge, but out of knowledge, and against his knowledge ; and this cannot

stand with infirmity, but the former may: for the disciples knew that it was evil for them to sleep; yet their sin was a sin of infirmity.*

Oh, but I fear that my sin is no sin of infirmity, because I fall into it again and again, and do lie in it.

But do ye know what it is to lie in sin? there is much mistake about lying in sin. Possibly a man may lie in a sin, yet never fall into the gross acts thereof; he may lie in the breach of the seventh commandment, and yet never commit the gross act of adultery; he may lie in the sin of covetousness, yet never be any great oppressor. So on the other side, a man may possibly fall divers times into the same sin, and yet not lie therein; for properly a man is said to lie in sin, when he doth continue in it, and not purge it out; so he that is born of God sinneth not, because his heart is as a fountain or spring, that purifies itself from that dirt and filth of sin which doth fall into it: but as the apostle speaks, "The whole world lies in wickedness;" why? because a wicked man's heart is as a lake or standing pool, which keeps all that dirt which is thrown into it. Now if you do thus keep and lie in your sin, why do you so complain? this your complaining argues that there is some purging out, and therefore you do not lie in sin.

Oh, but I fear my sin cannot be a sin of infirmity, because I fall into it after I have been admonished of the evil of it.

To that I say no more, but desire you to consider the instance that is here before you. The disciples slept, our Lord and Saviour Christ comes and wakens them; yea, and he chides them too: "What (saith he) cannot ye watch with me one hour! watch and pray;" and yet they slept again: and he comes and wakens them again, and admonisheth them again, and yet they slept again. Possibly, therefore, a man may fall into the same sin again and again, yea, even after

* Adrian. sic definit peccatum ex infirmitate, est actus vel omissio culpabilis sine deliberatione propter passionis impetum facta: hac tamen definitione non complectitur omne peccatum ex infirmitate; nam potest peccatum ex infirmitate accidere cum deliberatione imo vero ut sit peccatum debet esse aliqua deliberatio Vasquez. xii. Q. 77. A. 3.

Utrum sit possibile quod aliquis sciens ex infirmitate peccat.

Dicendum quod communiter ab omnibus ponitur aliqua peccata ex infirmitate committi quæ a peccatis ex ignorantia non distinguerentur nisi contingeret aliquem scientem ex infirmitate peccare. Tho. Aquinas Quest. Disputat. de causa peccati. Art. ix. p. 96.

admonition, and yet it may be a sin of infirmity. Yet how many poor souls are there, that are mistaken here on the right hand, and do think that their sins are no sins of infirmity, when indeed they are.

But if there be such mistakes, how shall we then know whether our sins be sins of infirmity ?

Negatively, That is no sin of infirmity, which is a gross, foul, scandalous sin, committed with deliberation and consultation. It is said of David, that he turned not aside to the right hand or to the left, save only in the matter of Uriah. It seems then, that in this matter he did turn aside ; but why is it said that he turned aside here, and not in other things ; did he not sin at other times ? Yes, very often : but there is a difference between missing one's way, and turning aside out of one's way ; a man may ignorantly miss his way, or unadvisedly, but he that turns aside out of his way, doth it voluntarily and deliberately : and so did David here in this case, and not in others ; this act was a foul fact, which he was able and had strength to avoid, committed with much deliberation, and therefore it was no sin of infirmity. So that if a man's sin committed, be a gross, foul, scandalous sin, committed with deliberation and consultation, this is no sin of infirmity.

If the sin be a ringleader unto other foul sins, it is no sin of infirmity. The ringleading sin is the most heinous sin. You shall observe, therefore, that when Samuel was raised up, (whether it was true Samuel, or false, I will not now debate,) when he was raised up by the witch of Endor, 1 Sam. xxviii., the only sin that Samuel lays to the charge of Saul, is this, ver. 18, that he obeyed not the voice of the Lord, in executing his fierce wrath upon Amalek : " Because thou obeyedst not the voice of the Lord, nor executedst his fierce wrath upon Amalek (saith Samuel), therefore hath the Lord done this thing unto thee this day. Moreover, the Lord will also deliver Israel with thee into the hands of the Philistines." If you read this story you shall find, that this only sin Samuel doth instance in. Saul had committed other sins, Saul had persecuted David, and out of malice, and had committed great sins ; why doth Samuel instance in this sin above all other sins ? but because this sin was the ringleading sin unto all the sins that Saul did commit ; and therefore this is

charged upon him especially, as a great and a heinous sin. And you see how it is amongst men; if there be a rebellion or insurrection, they take the ringleader and hang up him, for say they, This is the great transgressor, for he is the ringleader. So amongst sins, the great sin is the ringleader; and therefore if your sin be a ringleader unto other foul sins, it is not a sin of infirmity.

A sin of presumption is not a sin of infirmity. Sins of presumption and sins of infirmity are set in opposition one to the other in Numb. xv. and Psalm xix. Now, I pray, when doth a man sin out of presumption, but when he sinneth because God is merciful; when he sinneth because his sin can and may stand with grace; when he sinneth because the sin is but an infirmity; when he sinneth because he shall repent afterwards? Now this is ordinary. I have read of a certain young man, who being admonished of the evil of his way and course, and pressed to leave his wickedness by the consideration of judgment, eternity and death a coming, that he said, Why tell ye me of these things; I will do well enough; for when death comes I will speak but three words, and will help all; and so he went on in the way of his sin: but in the end, coming to a bridge on horse-back, to go over a deep water, the horse stumbling, and he labouring to recover his horse, could not, but at last he let go the bridle, and gave up himself and horse to the waters, and was heard to say these three words: *Diabolus capiat omnia*: Devil take all. Here was three words indeed, and an example for all men who think to repent with a three word repentance at last, viz. *Miserere mei Deus*; Lord have mercy; to take heed by. Such is the end of presumption. And when a man doth therefore sin the rather because God is merciful, or because the sin is but a sin of infirmity, or because he hopes to repent afterward, or because his sin may and can stand with grace; this is a sin of presumption, and is no sin of infirmity: sins of presumption are no sins of infirmity.

Again, If the sin be a reigning sin, then it is no sin of infirmity, for when sin reigns, grace doth not; therefore saith the apostle, Rom. vi., "Let not sin have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law but under grace;" and when sin reigns it is in its full strength. Now a sin of infirmity is not therefore called infirmity because, as the schoolmen would, it

doth make a man infirm, by impeding and hindering the vital operations of the soul, for then all sins, and especially the greatest, should be sins of infirmity; but it is said to be a sin of infirmity, because it doth arise from weakness, the strength thereof being taken out and mortified; and therefore a reigning sin can be no sin of infirmity. Now sin reigneth in a man,*

1. When it hath the command of his duties, his spiritual duties. When a master commands a servant from his meat, it argues that he rules over him; and if you see a man rise from his meat at the command of another, you say, Surely this man is the other's servant, for he was at dinner or supper, and the other did but speak or come by him, and he took his hat and cloak, and left all his meat, and followed him. So when a man shall sit down to duty, and he shall ordinarily be commanded from his duty by his sin, what doth this argue, but that his sin is his master, and doth rule and reign over him.

2. When men do yield the members of their bodies as weapons of unrighteousness unto sin, then sin reigns in them. "Let not sin reign in your mortal body (saith the apostle), that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof; neither yield ye your members as weapons of unrighteousness unto sin," Rom. vi. 12. 13.†

3. Sin reigns when it usually riseth by opposition. It was with sin as with grace; when grace is in power it riseth by opposition; "I will yet be more vile," saith David; and when the believing blind man was commanded to hold his peace, he cried so much the more, "Jesus, thou Son of Da-

* Potest autem dici infirmitas in anima ad similitudinem infirmitatis corporis, dicitur autem corpus esse infirmum, quando debilitatur vel impeditur in executione propriæ operationis propter aliquam inordinationem partium corporis ita scilicet quod humores et membra hominis non subdantur virtuti regitivæ et motivæ corporis, unde et membrum dicitur infirmum esse, quando non potest perficere operationem membri sani: unde et infirmitas animæ dicitur quando impeditur anima in propria operatione propter inordinationem partium ipsius, partes autem corporis dicuntur esse inordinatæ, quando non sequuntur ordinem naturæ ita et partes animæ dicuntur esse inordinatæ quando non subduntur ordini rationis, &c. —Thom. Aquin. xii. quest. 77. art. 3.

† Illicitæ delectationi si resistamus, si non consentiamus, si membra velut arma non ministremus non regnat peccatum in nostra mortali corpore peccatum enim ante regnum perdidit et sic perfit, in hac ergo vita, quantum ad sanctos attinet regnum perdit, in alia perit.—Augustin de Verbis Apost. Ser. 66.

vid, have mercy on me." Herein the power of godliness is distinguished from the form. Godliness in power rises by opposition, but the form doth not; but the power of faith doth, the power of love doth, and the power of repentance doth: even as a little fire is quenched with water, but if the fire be strong, it flames and burns out the more by that dish of water which ye do cast upon it. So in regard of sin, where it is in power it will not be quenched by opposition, but it flames out the more; witness that powerful malice of the Jews against Christ, who when they were but a little checked by Pilate, they cried out so much the more, Crucify him, crucify him. Doth thy sin, therefore, ordinarily rise by opposition? this argues that it is sin in power, that it reigns in thee, that it is no sin of infirmity; for a reigning, full-breathed sin is no sin of infirmity.* Thus negatively.

But how shall we know, then, affirmatively, whether our sin be a sin of infirmity?

Thus: If it do merely proceed from want of age in christianity, then it is, without doubt, a sin of infirmity. There are several ranks and forms of christians in the school of Christ. The apostle John doth allude unto three ages: "I write unto you fathers (saith he), I write unto you young men, and I write unto you babes." There are the grown children of God, and there are babes. Babes are weak and full of weaknesses. And if your sin be such as doth arise merely from want of age and time in grace, then it must needs be a sin of a babe, and so a sin of infirmity.

If it be no other sin than what is incident unto all the saints, then it is a sin of infirmity; for that sin which is committed by all the saints, is no reigning sin, but a sin mortified, enervated and weakened; there is no reigning sin in the child of God: sin reigning and being under grace are opposed, Rom. vi., "Let not sin have dominion over you, for ye are under grace." Those that are under grace have their sin at an under: and if the sin be committed by all the saints, then it doth rather arise from want of strength to resist than from will to commit. Is thy sin, therefore, no other than what is

* Manifestum igitur est quod credere improbabilia, fortitudinis est, atque vigoris nostri intellectus, sicut amare damnosa, molesta et ignominiosa fortitudines est et vigoris nostri affectus.—Parisiens. de fide, p. 2.

incident unto all God's people? then surely it is no other than a sin of infirmity.

If it be such a sin as you cannot avoid, which breaks in upon you before you are aware, even before you can call in for help from your reason and consideration, and which the general bent and frame of your heart and soul is against, then it is a sin of infirmity, for then it doth arise from want of strength to resist, and not from will to commit. This was the case of Paul, Rom. vii., when evil was present with him, being against the general bent and frame of his soul; for saith he, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man, and yet the thing that I would not do, that do I." Can you, therefore, say with Paul, "It is no more I that do it," &c, for my delight is otherwise, and the general bent and frame of my heart is otherwise? then you may also say, This is mine infirmity.*

If your sin be your burden, because it is the burden of your grace, then is your sin your infirmity. I speak not of gross, foul and scandalous sins. But the apostle tells us, Gal. vi., that this sin of infirmity is our burden, for having said in verse 1, "If any one be overtaken, you that are spiritual restore him," &c; he then gives the reason of it at verse 6, "Bear ye one another's burdens." It seems, then, that this sin of infirmity is a burden unto him that commits it. Now a man may be burdened with sin upon a twofold account: either because he is or shall be burdened with it, in regard of pain and punishment, or, because it is the luggage and burden of his grace and duty. In the first sense, all men may be burdened with sin, even the most wicked man: Cain was so burdened when he cried out, and said, "My sin (or burden) is greater than I can bear." In the second sense, only those are burdened with sin that are godly. Dost thou, therefore, groan under the burden of this evil, though it be no gross and scandalous sin, and that because it is a burden to your grace and duties? surely it is no other than a sin of infirmity.

* *Hæc peccata quæ accidunt ratione operationis sensitivi prevenientis rationem, dici peccata ex infirmitate, nam infirmitas humanæ voluntatis contracta ex peccato originali magna ex parte consistit in rebellione appetitus, hoc est in illa potestate quam habet operandi ante usum rationis ex sola apprehensione sensus.*—Caspens. *Cursus Theolog. Tract. de Peccat. Disp. v. § 4.*

Ego sum in carne, ego sum in mente, sed magis ego sum in mente quam in carne, et quia mens regit ego sum in regente.—August. de *Verbis Apost. Serm. 5.*

An infirmity will hardly acknowledge itself to be a sin of infirmity; but the person in whom it is, fears lest it should be worse. It is in this case as in the matter of temptation; though a wicked man's sins be his own, the brat of his own conception and corruption, yet he will hardly acknowledge them to be his own corruption: no, but saith he, These are the temptations of Satan and not mine own corruption: a good man, on the contrary, saith, Nay, but these are mine own corruptions, not the devil's temptations; oh, these are worse than temptations, they are all mine own. Witness David, 1 Chron. xxi. 8, "And David said unto God, I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing, I have done very foolishly;" yet the devil provoked him to it, and it was originally his temptation, for it is said, verse 1, "And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number the people." David doth not lay the fault upon the devil, but upon himself; he did not say, I was thus and thus tempted by Satan, no, but I, even I have sinned and done foolishly. Temptation will hardly acknowledge itself to be a temptation; and so infirmity will hardly acknowledge itself to be infirmity; but the person in whom it is, doth fear worse, saying, This my sin is great, and I fear it is no infirmity. Wicked men excuse their sin by infirmity, because it is no infirmity; but a good man fears it is worse than infirmity. And therefore is thy sin no gross and foul sin, and yet art thou afraid that it is worse than infirmity? this doth rather argue that it is no other than a sin of infirmity.

If your sin do arise chiefly from some outward cause, it is a sin of infirmity; for then it is not so much from will to commit, as from want of strength to resist. The sin which the apostle speaks of, Gal. vi. 1, is a sin of infirmity, and the man that commits it is said to be overtaken. Now when a man is upon his journey travelling and is overtaken by another person, his inward inclination and disposition was not to meet the other: so when a man is overtaken by sin, it argues that his sin doth proceed from some outward cause; and when it doth proceed from some outward cause, then he is truly said to be overtaken with it. It is true the worst of men say they are overtaken when they sin. Oh, saith the drunkard, I confess I was drunk at such a time, and in such a place, but I was drawn into it; my inward disposition was otherwise, but I was so and so overtaken. But if men were

only overtaken and surprized by their sin, then why are they angry with those who keep them from their sin? why are they in their own element, and never more at home than in the way of their sin? and why do they so heartily will that which is the cause of their sin? It may be they do not will the effect, namely, drunkenness, but do they not will that which is the cause thereof? He that is overtaken with a sin, is unexpectedly surprized with the cause thereof; and therefore if it be not a gross and scandalous sin, it is a sin of infirmity.

Infirmitie loves admonition: I mean, the person that sins out of infirmity, loves to be admonished, takes admonition kindly, and doth bless God for it. Possibly the admonition may be given scalding hot, and so he may refuse to take it down; but ordinarily, he will take the admonition kindly. Ye know how it was with David, when he was going against the house of Nabal in a great passion: Abigail came forth to meet him, and having admonished him of his duty, he did not only forbear the evil intended, but he blessed God for her and her words, who kept him that day from shedding innocent blood. Tell an honest man that he is out of his way, and direct him into it, and he will thank you for it. Tell a thief that he is out of his way, and he will laugh at you. So, tell a wicked man that he is out of his way, and he will despise you for it; tell a good man that he is out of his way, and he will bless God for it, and for you: why? because he hath but missed his way. Canst thou, therefore, take an admonition kindly, when thou art out of thy way? This argues that thy sin is one of those infirmities, which Christ our great High Priest will forgive, "Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he also was compassed with infirmities," Heb. v. 2.

An infirmity discovers good, though it be in itself evil; it is an ill sin, but a good sign. The thistle is an ill weed, yet it discovers a fat and a good soil; smoke is ill, but it discovers fire. So do the saints' infirmities; though they be in themselves weaknesses, yet they discover life. Moses was angry, but his anger did discover his zeal: Job was somewhat impatient, but his impatience did discover his innocency and his great goodness: Abraham failed in saying Sarah was his sister, but there was a faith which this unbelief grew upon:

the woman that came behind Christ, touching the hem of his garment, came fearing and trembling, discovering her unbelief; yet she discovered her faith therewithal: the disciples failed, when they said, "Lord, save us, carest thou not that we perish?" yet they discovered their faith too. Infirmity sometimes is an excrescence which doth grow out of duty, and upon duty. Doest thou therefore fail in thy duty, or exercise of thy grace; and doth thy duty go on, and thy grace go on? Though thy failing may be thy burden, yet it being but an excrescence and discoverer of thy grace, it is no other than a sin of infirmity.

Sins of infirmities are servants and drawers of water unto your graces; though in themselves evil, yet through the overruling hand of God's grace, they will make you more gracious another way. Ye know how it is with a young tradesman, who hath but a small stock; he keeps his shop diligently, and will not spend as others do. If you ask him the reason, saying, Such and such men are of your trade, and they will spend their shilling with us, and their time with us; why will not you do as they? He answers presently, True, they do so, and they may do so, their estate will bear it; but as for me, my stock is small, very little, therefore I may not do as they do, but I must be diligent, and a good husband; I am but a young beginner, and have little skill in the trade, therefore it behoves me to be diligent. His very weakness is the cause of his diligence. So here, the more infirmities that a gracious soul labours under, the more diligent he will be; and if you ask him, Why do you take so much pains in following the means, and the like? he answers, Alas, I am a poor weak creature: such and such an one there is that hath an excellent memory, all that ever he reads or hears is his own; but my memory is naught, my head and heart is naught, and therefore by the grace of God I will take the more pains in following after Christ. Thus his very infirmity is a provocation unto all his diligence. The Gibeonites served the Israelites, and were hewers of wood and drawers of water for them; why? but because the Gibeonites were at an under. So now, if your very sins be drawers of water, servants, and handmaids to your graces, it argues that your sins are at an under; and being so, they are weak, and but

sins of infirmity, if they be not gross, foul, and scandalous sins.*

Infirmity doth constantly keep a man's heart low, down, and humble. If one have an infirmity in his speech, he will not be so forward to speak as others are; but being conscious of his own infirmity, he is always low, and afraid to speak. So spiritually. There are two sorts of sins that men do commit: some are foul, gross, and scandalous sins; others are weaknesses and infirmities: those that fall into great and gross sins, will be much troubled, much trouble and sorrow they do meet with presently, in case they repent; but those that lie under a constant infirmity, are constantly kept low and humble thereby.† Do you therefore complain of your sin, and would you know of what sort of sins it is? Why, if it be not a gross and scandalous sin, and thy heart be kept constantly low thereby, then without doubt it is no other than this sin of infirmity. For though God could have wholly delivered his people from the filth of sin, as well as from the guilt of it, and as well from lesser sins as from great and scandalous; yet he hath left these infirmities and weaknesses in the hearts and lives of his people, that they may be constantly humbled in themselves, and prize Christ the more. And if this be the manner of an infirmity, then surely a good man, a true disciple of Christ, may possibly fall into the same sin again and again, and yet the sin be but a sin of infirmity. Which was the second thing proposed to be cleared by us.

But suppose that my sin be no other than a sin of infirmity, what then?

* *Mirabilis Deus in consiliis super filiis hominum, multos per peccata sanat a peccatis, sicut venenum pellitur a veneno.*—Luther.

Non solum mala passiva, quæ nobis irrogantur, in bonum cedunt, sed etiam activa, hoc est, mala quæ nos ipsi facimus; quorsum hoc inquis? quia homo pius cum videt lapsum suum, pudesit, et confunditur, sic lapsus ille principio operatur humilitatem, deinde invocationem ardentem, ac malum illud quod in carne reliquam est ceu calcar est quod nos excitat, ut nobis ipsis irascamur, nos damnemus et clamemus cum Paulo. Infelix ego, quis me liberabit a corpore hujus peccati, sic crescit fides occasione vitiorum, &c.—Luther, Com. 2. Gen. fol. 151, in cap. 20.

† Datus est mihi stimulus carnis, ne extollar inquit Paulus, o venenum quod non curatur nisi veneno; caput cædebatur ne caput extolleretur o antidotum quasi quod de serpente conficitur et propterea theria cum dicitur.—Augustin de verbis Apost. Serm. 3.

The third particular answers you. Then, your sin being but an infirmity, Christ will never leave you for it, nor cast you off for it; but if you sleep, he will waken you; and if you sleep again, he will waken you again; and if you yet sleep again, he will come again with his wakening mercy, and will never cast you off for it. Oh, what sweet grace is this.

Is there no evil then in this sin of infirmity?

Yes, much, very much: for though it be a drawer of water to your grace, yet it is a Gibeonite, a native, a Canaanite, that will upon all occasions be ready to betray you, and to open the door unto greater thieves, and will always be a thorn and goad in your sides; and though it do not put out your light, yet it is a thief in your candle, which may smear out much of your comfort, and blemish your duty. Ye know how it is with a good writing pen; if there be a small hair in it, though the hair be never so little a thing, yet if it be not pulled out, it will blot and blemish the whole writing sometimes. So may the sin of infirmity do; your whole duty may be blotted and blemished by this small hair, and although God can and doth make use of your infirmities for to keep your graces, yet they are but your lees and dregs, whereas your graces should be all refined. The word of God is as gold refined seven times; your ordinances are refined ordinances, refined by the hand of reformation; your comforts and mercies and privileges, are refined mercies, privileges and comforts: surely therefore your graces should be refined graces, and your duties refined duties. When Christ "shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, he shall purify the sons of Levi as gold and silver, and then shall the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord," Mal. iii. 3, 4. Oh, what an evil thing therefore is it, for a man to be unrefined. Is it not an evil thing to be burdensome unto others? By your sin, though it be but an infirmity, you may be a burden to others; for the apostle speaking of infirmities saith, "Bear ye one another's burdens," Gal. vi. 1, 6; and, "Ye that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak," Rom. xiv. 1. And although Christ will not cast you off for a sin of infirmity, yet you may provoke him thereby to chide you, and to be angry with you. The unbelief of the disciples was but their infirmity, yet Christ did upbraid them because of their unbelief. The remissness and loss of first love

in the church of Ephesus, is by Christ called a *somewhat*, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee;" and yet Christ threatens her, that he will for this somewhat come against her quickly, and remove her candlestick, if she did not repent. And, Rev. ii. 16, the Lord Christ threatens the church of Smyrna, that unless she repented, he would come unto her quickly: yet he saith not to her, I have many things, but a few things against thee; or if you will, for the word is *ολιγα*, I have some small or little things against thee. So that although your sin be not of so great a bulk as others, yet you may provoke Christ thereby, and he may be angry, and chide you for it. Thus here he did chide the disciples, yet their sin was but a sin of infirmity. Surely, therefore, there is evil, and much evil in the sin, though it be but a sin of infirmity. But,

Thirdly, Though there be much evil in this sin, Christ will not cast you off for it.

For it is an honour to a man to pass by infirmities, saith Solomon; much more is it for the honour of Christ to pass by the infirmities of his people.

The saints and people of God are in covenant with God by Jesus Christ, and that covenant is a conjugal covenant. Hosea ii. But what husband will put away his wife for her infirmities? That covenant is a paternal covenant, and what father will thrust his child out of doors for his infirmities? A child, though deformed, is more pleasing to the father, because the child is his own, than another beautiful child that is not his own. Yea, that covenant is a covenant of grace: now in the covenant of works, the least sin breaks the covenant; but in the covenant of grace, the greatest sin doth not break the covenant between God and the soul: in the covenant of works, the least sin provokes God to hatred; in the covenant of grace, the greatest sin provokes and moves God to pity. If a master should turn away his servant for every failing and weakness, who would serve him? But God hath many servants in the world, who do serve him with cheerfulness; surely, therefore, he doth not and he will not cast men off for their infirmities.

The saints and people of God are the body of Christ; and every one a member of that mystical body, whereof our Lord Christ is the head. Now, saith Luther, what man will

cut off his nose, because there is filth in it? yea, though the nose be the sink of the brain, yet because it is a member a man will not cut it off.* And will Christ cut off one of his members, because there is filth in him, or some weakness and infirmity in him? No, surely. What woman will cast away the mortar, because it savours of the onions, or garlick which hath been beaten in it? What father will knock his child on the head, because a wart grows on his forehead? These infirmities in the saints and people of God, are their warts, which grow in the face of their conversation: the blessed martyrs themselves had these warts: Hierom of Prague had a great wart upon him, Cranmer another, Jewel another; yea, if we look into that little book of Chronicles, I mean Heb. xi., what saint is there mentioned upon record, but had one wart or another? Had not Abraham his wart, in saying, that Sarah was his sister? Had not Sarah her's in laughing? Had not Jacob, Isaac, and Joseph their's? Moses, Rahab, Samson, Jephthah, and David their's? Luther had his, and our reformers their's; yet God owned, used, and honoured them. Surely therefore, though there be much evil in a sin of infirmity, especially if a man fall into it again and again; yet Christ will not leave a man, or cast him off for it.†

But Solomon tells us, that the backslider in heart shall be satisfied with his own ways.

True: But there is much difference between the backsliding of an hypocrite, and the relapses of God's own children into their infirmities: a backslider loseth that power which once he had; but a good man relapsing into his infirmities, doth still keep that power of godliness which he had before: a backslider's judgment and principles crack and

* *Nemo nasum ideo abjicet quod impuro phlegmate abundat, et quasi cloaca cerebri, ita etiam infirmi temporis infirmitatis sunt pars regni Christi qui non ideo abjiciendi sed so vendi sanandi et erigendi sunt.*—Luther.

† *Ego non possum excusare patres ut multi faciunt nec volo, imo libenter audio lapsus et infirmitates sanctorum non quod laudem, &c. sicut non excuso apostolos fugientes a Christo, Petrum negantem et alias eorum infirmitates, stultitias et ineptias, nec scribuntur ista propter duros super bos et obstinatos sed ut ratio regni Christi ostendatur qui in grege suo pusillo habet pauperes et infirmus conscientias; est rex fortium paritur et infirmorum, &c.*—Luther in Gen. xxvi.

Scio ego me sæpe multa stulte et temere admodum egisse adeo ut cogitarem cur Deus, vocavit me ad predicandum &c.—Luther in Gen. xxvii.

alter, insomuch as he doth bless himself in his apostacy ; but the good man relapsing into his infirmities, still doth retain his judgment, keep his principles, and doth groan under his relapses. Possibly a man may fall into the same sin again and again, yet he may be no backslider, nor called a backslider in scripture language.

But again, A man may be said to be satisfied with his own ways either because he is given up to his sins, so as to be gluttoned with them, finding all delight and contentment in them ; or he is said to be satisfied with his own ways, in regard of that sorrow and affliction which he doth reap by them : in this sense a good man may have enough of his sin, and be said to be satisfied with his own ways. Thus it with Jacob ; he deceived his brother Esau, and he deceived his father Isaac ; afterwards he was deceived by Laban, and by his children ; as he deceived his own father, so was he deceived by his father-in-law ; and as he deceived his brother, so was he deceived by his children, in the reports of Joseph's death : here was he satisfied in a way of sorrow with his own ways ; he deceived others, and was deceived by others : he had enough of it. But though a good man may be thus satisfied with his own ways, yet he is never satisfied with them, so as to be given up to them. Possibly he may fall into them again and again, yet saith the Lord, Isa. [lvii. 17, "For the iniquity of his covetousness, was I wroth, and smote him ; I hid my face and was wroth : " What then ? " And he went on frowardly, turning aside again, (so the Hebrew,) in the way of his heart." But, saith the Lord, " I have seen his ways, and will heal him, and will lead him also, and restore comforts to him, and his mourners." So that though a good man may have enough of his sin, in regard of sorrow that may come thereby : yet he shall never be satisfied with his own ways, or sins, so as to be given up to them : Christ will not cast him off ; if he sleep, Christ will waken him ; and if he sleep again, Christ will wake him again ; Christ will not leave him in it, nor cast him off for it.

If these things be true, then what necessity is upon us, and what great cause have we to examine ourselves, and to consider seriously, what sort of sins those sins are, which we labour under. We do all sin, that is most certain ; but there is a great difference between sin and sin : there is a

sin unto death, and there is a sin not unto death: there is a sin which may stand with grace, and there is a sin which cannot stand with grace: there is the spot of the godly, and there is the spot of the wicked: there is a gross sin, a reigning sin; and there is a sin of infirmity: there is a sin, for which God will leave and cast off the sinner, witness Judas's sin, the sin of the false disciple: and there is a sin for which God will not cast one off; witness the sin of these true disciples: oh, then what cause have we to make it out to our own souls, whether our sins be sins of infirmity or not.

But it seems that all the sins of the godly are not sins of infirmity, and God will not cast off a godly man for any sin: what advantage, therefore, hath this sin of infirmity above other sins; or what disadvantage do the other sins of the godly labour under, which this sin of infirmity doth not?

Much, very much: for though my sin be great; yet if it be a sin of infirmity, it shall not hinder the present acceptance of my duty. Hezekiah and the people were not prepared according to the preparation of the sanctuary, that was his and their weakness; but he prayed, and the Lord heard his prayer: so David said in his haste, "I am cast out of thy sight;" this was his infirmity, yet he prayed withal; and saith he, "Nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplication." But if a man, a good man, do fall into a foul, gross, and scandalous sin, though the Lord pardon it to him afterward, yet it will suspend his present communion with God.

Although my sin be great, yet if it be but an infirmity, it shall not hinder the sense of my justification. A foul and scandalous breach upon our sanctification, will make a breach upon the sense of our justification: but though the sin be great, yet if it be but an infirmity, it shall not make a breach upon the sense of our justification.

Though my sin be great, yet if it be but an infirmity, there is a pardon that lies in course for it; and though it be good to repent of every sin, with a distinct, and particular repentance, yet it is not necessary that there should be a particular repentance for every sin of infirmity. If a man, though a good man, do commit a gross, foul, and scandalous sin, there must be a particular repentance for it; and without that,

there will be no peace, no true peace in his soul: but if the sin be only a sin of infirmity, a general repentance may, and will serve for that; "Who knows the errors of his life?" saith David; "Lord cleanse thou me from my secret faults."

Though a man's sin be great, yet if it be but an infirmity, it shall never bring a scourge upon his family. It is a great misery to a good parent, to see his family scourged for his sin. Possibly the sins of a godly man may bring a rod on his family: "Because of this," saith the Lord to David, "the sword shall never depart from thine house." But now if the sin be only a sin of infirmity, my family shall never be scourged for that.

And though my sin be great, yet if it be but a sin of infirmity, it shall never spoil my gifts, nor make them unprofitable: if a man have great gifts, praying, exercising gifts, and his life be scandalous, what saith the world? Aye, this man hath exceeding good gifts indeed, but do ye see how he lives? A scandalous life soils and spoils his gifts, and doth make them unuseful. But now if my sin be only a sin of infirmity, it shall never soil my gifts, so as to make them unuseful and unprofitable unto others. Surely then, there is a great, and a vast difference between this sin of infirmity, and another sin; and therefore why should we not labour to make it out with clearness to our own souls, what kind of sins our sins are? Every man almost thinks that his sin is a sin of infirmity: come to the drunkard, swearer, adulterer, opposer, and these will tell you, that their sins, are but sins of infirmity; they will rail at and oppose the people of God, and yet their sins are but sins of infirmity; swear, and swear daily, yet their sins are but sins of infirmity; go to the tap-house, play-house, whore-house, and yet their sins but sins of infirmity: the vilest of men think their sins are only infirmities. But is there such a great difference between sins and sins; this, and the other sins? Then why should we not look wishly into our condition; consider our ways, and labour to make it out with clearness to our own souls, whether our sins, be sins of infirmity, or not?

But suppose that upon due search and examination, I find that my sin is no other than a sin of infirmity, which will not cast me off, although through my weakness, I do fall into it again and again, what then?

Then several duties follow, and accordingly you are to take up these, and the like gracious resolutions.

If my sin be a sin of infirmity, and no other, then through grace, will I observe what God's design is, in suffering and leaving such infirmities in me, and will labour what I can and may, to promote and advance that design: God could have freed me from all sin, these infirmities as well as the greater; but God had some great designs in leaving of these infirmities, as that I may be always humbled, that I may be always upon the work of mortification, that Jesus Christ may be the more sweet and precious to me, that I may live in continual dependance on him, that I may not gather up the assurance of my salvation only from my sanctification, but from the free grace of God, and his absolute promise, that I may be weary of my present state, and groan after heaven, where no imperfections are; and that I may learn to pity others, and therefore through grace, I will do what I can to help on these designs.*

If my sin be but a sin of infirmity, and God will not cast me off for it, then, through the grace of God, will I never believe these false reports of Christ, and those misrepresentations of him which Satan would put upon him, whereby he would persuade me and others, that our Lord Christ is an hard master: as Satan doth labour to present himself to me as an angel of light, so he would represent Christ as an angel of darkness. But is this true, that the Lord will not cast me off for my sins of infirmity? then will I never believe that my dear Saviour is an hard master.

If the Lord Christ will not cast me off for my sins of infirmity, then, through the grace of God, I will not question my spiritual estate and condition for every sin; I will grieve for every sin of infirmity because it is a sin, but I will not question my condition, because it is but a sin of infirmity.

Then will not I cast off myself and others for the sins of

* *Deletur iniquitas manet infirmitas.* Augustin.

Sed quare Deus talia peccato sinit fieri a suis, cur sic impingere eos permittit? respondetur ex effectis, ideo ita permittit Deus ut occasionem accipiat multarum bonarum rerum non enim labantur sancti ut pereunt sed ut copiose eis Deus benefaciat. ut lapsus principio operatur humiliatem, deinde invocationem ut nos excitat ut nobis ipsis irascamur et nos damnemus, ut majori studio caveamus.
Luth. in Gen. cap. xx.

infirmities. Shall Christ's eye be good and shall my eye be bad? Will not Christ cast me off for mine infirmities, and shall I cast off others for their infirmities? God forbid.

Then will not I cast off the things of Christ because of any infirmity that may adhere to them, or the dispensation of them. When Christ took our nature on him, his deity was veiled under our humanity, his excellency under our infirmity. So now, his grace and his dispensations are veiled under the infirmity of our administrations: as for example: preaching is an ordinance of Christ, yet the sermon may be so delivered, with so much weakness of the speaker, that the ordinance of Christ may be veiled under much infirmity. So the admonition of a fallen brother is an ordinance of Christ, yet it may be so administered, with so much passion in the speaker, that this ordinance may be veiled under much infirmity. Scarcely any ordinance but is veiled under some infirmity in regard of its administration. But is this true, that the Lord will not cast me away because of mine infirmities? surely, then, I will never cast away the ordinances, or things of Christ, because of those infirmities which may adhere or cleave unto them.

And if the Lord will not cast me off for my infirmities, then, through grace, I will never be discouraged from the performance of any duty. I will pray as I can and hear as I can, and though I be not able to pray as I would, I will pray as I am able; and though I am not able to examine mine own heart as I would, yet I will do what I am able, for the Lord will not cast me off for infirmities, and therefore I will not cast off my duties because of them.

And, lastly, if the Lord Jesus Christ will not cast me off for mine infirmities, then will I never sin because the sin is but a sin of infirmity. Will the Lord pardon my sin because it is but an infirmity, and shall I commit sin upon that ground, because it is but an infirmity? then shall I walk contrary to God, then shall I turn the grace of God into wantonness. Surely, therefore, I will never sin upon that account, because it is but a sin of infirmity. Thus ye see what we are to do, and what gracious resolutions we are to take up from the consideration of this great truth.

But though the Lord will not cast us off for our sins of infirmity, yet there is much evil in this sin, especially if we

fall into it again and again ; what shall we therefore do that we may not fall into this same sin so often ?

Be sure that you do not forget your former sins ; the slumber of grace is a preparation to sin, and the forgetfulness of a former sin is a preparation unto future sin. When we forget our old sins, then God leaves us to fall into new sins. As long as the sense of old sins abide upon your heart, so long you will be kept from new sins ; and as the sense of old sins doth wear off, so the lust after new sins will come on. Would you not, therefore, fall into the same sin again and again ? then take heed that you do not forget your old sins, or lose the sense thereof.

If you would be kept from relapses into your infirmities or other sins, then take your sin and quench it in the blood of Christ by a fresh act of faith, over and beyond all your resolutions and acts of humiliation. You know how it is with a candle ; if it be blown out only, it is easily lighted again, but if you quench it in water, it is not so easily lighted again : so in regard of sin ; if a man blow it out with a resolution, it will be soon recovered, but if besides a man's resolutions and humiliations, he takes his sin, and by an act of faith doth quench it in the blood of Christ, it will not be lighted again with that ease and facility.

And if you would not fall into the same sin again and again, then watch and pray. Our Saviour Christ here saw that his disciples were like to sleep again and again ; and, I pray you, what direction doth he give them ? only this, " Watch and pray : " as if watching with prayer, and prayer with watchfulness, were the only or chief means to keep us from falling into the same sin again and again. And indeed it is not all our habitual strength that can keep us from falling, for then Adam in the state of innocency would have been kept from falling ; nor is it want of temptation that can secure us from falling, for then the angels in heaven should not have fallen, for they had no temptation there ; but we are kept by continual dependance upon God in Christ : it is not therefore enough to watch, but we must watch in prayer ; neither is it enough to pray, but we must pray with watchfulness. What I say, therefore, to one, I say to you all, and to mine own soul, Let us watch and pray, and pray and watch, that we enter not into this temptation.