

## A DISCOURSE UPON THE ETERNITY OF GOD.

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*Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.—*

PSALM XC. 2.

THE title of this psalm is a prayer; the author, Moses. Some think not only this, but the ten following psalms were composed by him. The title wherewith he is dignified is 'the man of God,' as also in Deut. xxxiii. 1: one inspired by him, to be his interpreter, and deliver his oracles; one particularly directed by him; one who, as a servant, did diligently employ himself in his Master's business, and acted for the glory of God.\* He was the minister of the Old Testament, and the prophet of the New.†

There are two parts of this psalm.

1. A complaint of the frailty of man's life in general, ver. 3-6; and then a particular complaint of the condition of the church, ver. 8-10.‡

2. A prayer, ver. 12.

But before he speaks of the shortness of human life, he fortifies them by the consideration of the refuge they had and should find in God: ver. 1, 'Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations.'

We have had no settled abode in the earth since the time of Abraham's being called out from Ur of the Chaldees. We have had Canaan in a promise, we have it not yet in possession; we have been exposed to the cruelties of an oppressing enemy, and the incommodities of a desert wilderness; we have wanted the fruits of the earth, but not the dews of heaven. 'Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations.' Abraham was under thy conduct, Isaac and Jacob under thy care. Their posterity were multiplied by thee, and that under their oppressions. Thou hast been our shield against dangers, our security in the times of trouble. When we were pursued to the Red sea, it was not a creature delivered us; and when we feared the pinching of our bowels in the desert, it was not a creature rained manna upon us. Thou hast been our dwelling-place; thou hast kept open house for us, sheltered us against storms, and preserved us from mischief, as a house doth an inhabitant from wind and weather, and that not in one or two, but in all generations. Some think an allusion is here made to the ark, to which they were to have recourse in all emergencies. Our refuge and defence have not been from created things; not from the ark, but from the God of the ark.

\* Coccei *in loc.*

† Austin *in loc.*

‡ Pareus *in loc.*

Observe,

1. God is a perpetual refuge and security to his people. His providence is not confined to one generation; it is not one age only that tastes of his bounty and compassion. His eye never yet slept, nor hath he suffered the little ship of his church to be swallowed up, though it hath been tossed upon the waves. He hath always been an haven to preserve us, a house to secure us. He hath always had compassions to pity us, and power to protect us. He hath had a face to shine, when the world hath had an angry countenance to frown.\* He brought Enoch home by an extraordinary translation from a brutish world; and when he was resolved to reckon with men for their brutish lives, he lodged Noah, the Phoenix of the world, in an ark, and kept him alive as a spark in the midst of many waters, whereby to rekindle a church in the world. In all generations he is a dwelling-place, to secure his people here, or entertain them above.

His providence is not wearied, nor his care fainting. He never wanted will to relieve us, for 'he hath been our refuge;' nor ever can want power to support us, for he is a God 'from everlasting to everlasting.' The church never wanted a pilot to steer her, and a rock to shelter her, and dash in pieces the waves which threaten her.

2. How worthy is it to remember former benefits, when we come to beg for new! Never were the records of God's mercies so exactly revised as when his people have stood in need of new editions of his power. How necessary are our wants to stir us up to pay the rent of thankfulness in arrear! He renders himself doubly unworthy of the mercies he wants, that doth not gratefully acknowledge the mercies he hath received. God scarce promised any deliverance to the Israelites, and they in their distress scarce prayed for any deliverance, but that from Egypt was mentioned on both sides: by God to encourage them, and by them to acknowledge their confidence in him. The greater our dangers, the more we should call to mind God's former kindness. We are not only thankfully to acknowledge the mercies bestowed upon our persons, or in our age, but those of former times. Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations.

Moses was not living in the former generations, yet he appropriates the former mercies to the present age. Mercies as well as generations proceed out of the loins of those that have gone before. All mankind are but one Adam, the whole church but one body.

In the second verse he backs his former consideration.

1. By the greatness of his power in forming the world.

2. By the boundlessness of his duration; 'from everlasting to everlasting.' As thou hast been our dwelling-place, and expended upon us the strength of thy power and riches of thy love, so we have no reason to doubt the continuance on thy part, if we be not wanting on our parts; for the vast mountains and fruitful earth are the works of thy hands, and there is less power requisite for our relief than there was for their creation; and though so much strength hath been upon various occasions manifested, yet thy arm is not weakened; for 'from everlasting to everlasting thou art God.'†

Thou hast always been God, and no time can be assigned as the beginning of thy being.‡ The mountains are not of so long a standing as thyself; they are the effects of thy power, and therefore cannot be equal to thy duration. Since they are effects, they suppose a precedency of their cause. If we would look back, we can reach no further than the beginning of the creation, and account the years from the first foundation of the world; but after that we must lose ourselves in the abyss of eternity. We have no

\* Theodoret *in loc.*

† **BN**, *strong.*

‡ Amyrald. *in loc.*

clue to guide our thoughts; we can see no bounds in thy eternity; but as for man, he traverseth the world a few days, and by thy order, pronounced concerning all men, returns to the dust, and moulders into the grave.

By mountains some understand angels, as being creatures of a more elevated nature; by earth they understand human nature, the earth being the habitation of men. There is no need to divert in this place from the letter to such a sense. The description seems to be poetical, and amounts to this: he neither began with the beginning of time, nor will expire with the end of it.\* He did not begin when he made himself known to our fathers, but his being did precede the creation of the world, before any created being was formed, and any time settled.

'Before the mountains were brought forth,' or before they were begotten or born, the word being used in those senses in Scripture; before they stood up higher than the rest of the earthly mass God had created. It seems that mountains were not casually cast up by the force of the deluge softening the ground, and driving several parcels of it together, to grow up into a massy body, as the sea doth the sand in several places, but they were at first formed by God.

The eternity of God is here described.

1. In his priority 'before the world.'

2. In the extension of his duration: 'From everlasting to everlasting thou art God.' He was before the world, yet he neither began nor ends. He is not a temporary, but an eternal God. It takes in both parts of eternity, what was before the creation of the world, and what is after. Though the eternity of God be one permanent state without succession, yet the Spirit of God, suiting himself to the weakness of our conception, divides it into two parts, one past before the foundation of the world, another to come after the destruction of the world; as he did exist before all ages, and as he will exist after all ages.

Many truths lie couched in the verse.

1. The world had a beginning of being. It was not from eternity; it was once nothing. Had it been of a very long duration, some records would have remained of some memorable actions done of a longer date than any extant.

2. The world owes its being to the creating power of God. 'Thou hadst formed it' out of nothing into being. *Thou*, that is, God. It could not spring into being of itself: it was nothing; it must have a former.

3. God was in being before the world. The cause must be before the effect; that Word which gives being must be before that which receives being.

4. This Being was from eternity: 'from everlasting.'

5. This Being shall endure to eternity: 'to everlasting.'

6. There is but one God, one Eternal: 'From everlasting to everlasting thou art God.' None else but one hath the property of eternity; the gods of the heathen cannot lay claim to it.

*Doct.* God is of an eternal duration. The eternity of God is the foundation of the stability of the covenant, the great comfort of a Christian. The design of God in Scripture is to set forth his dealing with men in the way of a covenant. The priority of God before all things begins the Bible: 'In the beginning God created,' Gen. i. 1. His covenant can have no foundation but in his duration before and after the world.† And Moses here mentions his eternity, not only with respect to the essence of God, but to his federal providence; as he is the dwelling-place of his people in all

\* *ἀναρχος καὶ ἀτελεύτητος*, Theodoret in loc.

† Calv. in loc.

generations. The duration of God for ever is more spoken of in Scripture than his eternity *à parte ante*, though that is the foundation of all the comfort we can take from his immortality. If he had a beginning, he might have an end, and so all our happiness, hope, and being would expire with him; but the Scripture sometimes takes notice of his being without beginning as well as without end: 'Thou art from everlasting,' Ps. xciii. 2; 'Blessed be God from everlasting to everlasting,' Ps. xli. 13; 'I was set up from everlasting,' Prov. viii. 23. If his wisdom were from everlasting, himself was from everlasting. Whether we understand it of Christ the Son of God, or of the essential wisdom of God, it is all one to the present purpose. The wisdom of God supposeth the essence of God, as habits in creatures suppose the being of some power or faculty as their subject. The wisdom of God supposeth mind and understanding, essence and substance.

The notion of eternity is difficult, as Austin said of time: \* If no man will ask me the question what time is, I know well enough what it is; but if any ask me what it is, I know not how to explain it. So may I say of eternity; it is easy in the word pronounced, but hardly understood, and more hardly expressed; it is better expressed by negative than positive words.

Though we cannot comprehend eternity, yet we may comprehend that there is an eternity; as though we cannot comprehend the essence of God, what he is, yet we may comprehend that he is; we may understand the notion of his existence, though we cannot understand the infiniteness of his nature. Yet we may better understand eternity than infiniteness; we can better conceive a time with the addition of numberless days and years, than imagine a being without bounds; whence the apostle joins his eternity with his power: 'His eternal power and Godhead,' Rom. i. 20; because, next to the power of God apprehended in the creature, we come necessarily, by reasoning, to acknowledge the eternity of God. He that hath an incomprehensible power, must needs have an eternity of nature. His power is most sensible in the creatures to the eye of man, and his eternity easily from thence deducible by the reason of man.

1. Eternity is a perpetual duration, which hath neither beginning nor end. Time hath both. Those things we say are in time, that have beginning, grow up by degrees, have succession of parts. Eternity is contrary to time, and is therefore a permanent and immutable state, a perfect possession of life without any variation. It comprehends in itself all years, all ages, all periods of ages. It never begins! It endures after every duration of time, and never ceaseth. It doth as much outrun time as it went before the beginning of it. Time supposeth something before it, but there can be nothing before eternity; it were not then eternity. Time hath a continual succession; the former time passeth away, and another succeeds; the last year is not this year, nor this year the next. We must conceive of eternity contrary to the notion of time. As the nature of time consists in the succession of parts, so the nature of eternity in an infinite immutable duration.† Eternity and time differ as the sea and rivers; the sea never changes place, and is always one water, but the rivers glide along, and are swallowed up in the sea; so is time by eternity.

A thing is said to be eternal, or everlasting rather, in Scripture,

2. When it is of a long duration, though it will have an end; when it hath no measures of time determined to it. So circumcision is said to be in the flesh 'for an everlasting covenant,' Gen. xvii. 14; not purely everlasting, but so long as that administration of the covenant should endure.

And so when a servant would not leave his master, but would have his

\* Consul. lib. ii. Confes. 15.

† Moulin. Cor. i., Ser. 2, p. 52.

ear bored, it is said he should be a servant 'for ever,' Deut. xv. 17; *i. e.*, till the jubilee, which was every fiftieth year. So the meat-offering they were to offer is said to be perpetual, Lev. vi. 20. Canaan is said to be given to Abraham for an everlasting possession, Gen. xvii. 8, whereas the Jews are expelled from Canaan, which is given a prey to the barbarous nations. Indeed, circumcision was not everlasting, yet the substance of the covenant, whereof this was a sign, viz., that God would be the God of believers, endures for ever; and that circumcision of the heart which was signified by circumcision of the flesh, shall remain for ever in the kingdom of glory. It was not so much the lasting of the sign, as of the thing signified by it, and the covenant sealed by it. The sign had its abolition, so that the apostle is so peremptory in it, that he asserts that if any went about to establish it, he excluded himself from a participation of Christ, Gal. v. 2. The sacrifices were to be perpetual in regard of the thing signified by them, viz., the death of Christ, which was to endure in the efficacy of it. And the passover was to be for ever, Exod. xii. 24, in regard of the redemption signified by it, which was to be of everlasting remembrance. Canaan was to be an everlasting possession in regard of the glory of heaven typified, to be for ever conferred upon the spiritual seed of Abraham.

3. When a thing hath no end, though it hath a beginning. So angels and souls are everlasting: though their being shall never cease, yet there was a time when their being began. They were nothing before they were something, though they shall never be nothing again, but shall live in endless happiness or misery.

But that properly is eternal that hath neither beginning nor end; and thus eternity is a property of God. In this doctrine I shall shew,

I. How God is eternal, or in what respects eternity is his property.

II. That he is eternal, and must needs be so.

III. That eternity is only proper to God, and not common to him with any creature.

IV. The use.

I. How God is eternal, or in what respects he is so. Eternity is a negative attribute, and is a denying of God any measures of time, as immensity is a denying of him any bounds of place; as immensity is the diffusion of his essence, so eternity is the duration of his essence; and when we say God is eternal, we exclude from him all possibility of beginning and ending, all flux and change. As the essence of God cannot be bounded by any place, so it is not to be limited by any time; as it is his immensity to be everywhere, so it is his eternity to be always. As created things are said to be somewhere in regard of place, and to be present, past, or future in regard of time, so the Creator in regard of place is everywhere, in regard of time is *semper*.\* His duration is as endless as his essence is boundless; he always was and always will be, and will no more have an end than he had a beginning; and this is an excellency belonging to the Supreme Being.† As his essence comprehends all beings and exceeds them, and his immensity surmounts all places, so his eternity comprehends all times, all durations, and infinitely excels them.‡

1. God is without beginning.

'In the beginning God created' the world,' Gen. i. 1. God was then before the beginning of it; and what point can be set wherein God began, if he were before the beginning of created things? God was without beginning, though all other things had time and beginning from him. As

\* Gassend. † Crellius, de Deo, cap. xviii. p. 41. ‡ Lingend, tom. ii. p. 496.



unity is before all numbers, so is God before all his creatures. Abraham called upon the name of the 'everlasting God,' *אל עולם*, Gen. xxi. 33, the eternal God. It is opposed to heathen gods, which were but of yesterday, new coined, and so new; but the eternal God was before the world was made. In that sense it is to be understood: Rom. xvi. 26, 'The mystery which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the command of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.' The gospel is not preached by the command of a new and temporary God, but of that God that was before all ages. Though the manifestation of it be in time, yet the purpose and resolve of it was from eternity.

If there were decrees before the foundation of the world, there was a decreer before the foundation of the world. Before the foundation of the world he loved Christ as a mediator, John xvii. 24; a foreordination of him was before the foundation of the world, Eph. i. 4. A choice of men, and therefore a chooser before the foundation of the world; a 'grace given in Christ before the world began,' 2 Tim. i. 9, and therefore a donor of that grace. From those places, saith Crellius, it appears that God was before the foundation of the world; but they do not assert an absolute eternity. But to be before all creatures, is equivalent to his being from eternity.\* Time began with the foundation of the world, but God being before time, could have no beginning in time; before the beginning of the creation and the beginning of time, there could be nothing but eternity, nothing but what was uncreated, that is, nothing but what was without beginning. To be in time, is to have a beginning; to be before all time, is never to have a beginning, but always to be; for as between the Creator and creatures there is no medium, so between time and eternity there is no medium. It is as easily deduced that he that was before all creatures is eternal, as he that made all creatures is God; if he had a beginning, he must have it from another, or from himself. If from another, that from whom he received his being would be better than he, so more a God than he. He cannot be God that is not supreme, he cannot be supreme that owes his being to the power of another. He would not be said 'only to have immortality' as he is, 1 Tim. vi. 16, if he had it dependent upon another; nor could he have a beginning from himself. If he had given beginning to himself, then he was once nothing, there was a time when he was not; if he was not, how could he be the cause of himself? It is impossible for any to give a beginning and being to itself; if it acts, it must exist, and so exist before it existed. A thing would exist as a cause before it existed as an effect. He that is not cannot be the cause that he is. If therefore God doth exist, and hath not his being from another, he must exist from eternity. Therefore when we say God is of and from himself, we mean not that God gave being to himself; but it is negatively to be understood, that he hath no cause of existence without himself.

Whatsoever number of millions of millions of years we can imagine before the creation of the world, yet God was infinitely before those; he is therefore called 'the Ancient of days,' Dan. vii. 9, as being before all days and time, and eminently containing in himself all times and ages. Though indeed God cannot properly be called ancient, that will testify that he is decaying, and shortly will not be; no more than he can be called young, which would signify that he was not long before. All created things are new and fresh, but no creature can find out any beginning of God. It is impossible there should be any beginning of him.

\* Coccei, Sum. Theol. p. 48; Gerhard, Exeges. cap. lxxxvi. 4, p. 266.

2. God is without end. He always was, always is, and always will be what he is. He remains always the same in being; so far from any change, that no shadow of it can touch him, James i. 17. He will continue in being as long as he hath already enjoyed it; and if we could add never so many millions of years together, we are still as far from an end as from a beginning, for 'the Lord shall endure for ever,' Ps. ix. 7. As it is impossible he should not be, being from all eternity, so it is impossible that he should not be to all eternity. The Scripture is most plentiful in testimonies of this eternity of God, *à parte post*, or after the creation of the world. He is said to 'live for ever,' Rev. iv. 9, 10. The earth shall perish, but God shall endure for ever, and his years shall have no end, Ps. cii. 27. Plants and animals grow up from small beginnings, arrive to their full growth and decline again, and have always remarkable alterations in their nature; but there is no declination in God by all the revolutions of time. Hence some think the incorruptibility of the Deity was signified by the Shittim or cedar wood, whereof the ark was made, it being of an incorruptible nature, Exod. xxv. 10.

That which had no beginning of duration can never have an end, or any interruptions in it. Since God never depended upon any, what should make him cease to be what eternally he hath been, or put a stop to the continuance of his perfections? He cannot will his own destruction; that is against universal nature in all things to cease from being, if they can preserve themselves. He cannot desert his own being, because he cannot but love himself as the best and chiefest good. The reason that anything decays, is either its own native weakness, or superior power of something contrary to it.\* There is no weakness in the nature of God that can introduce any corruption, because he is infinitely simple, without any mixture. Nor can he be overpowered by anything else; a weaker cannot hurt him, and a stronger than he there cannot be. Nor can he be outwitted or circumvented, because of his infinite wisdom. As he received his being from none, so he cannot be deprived of it by any. As he doth necessarily exist, so he doth necessarily always exist. This indeed is the property of God; nothing so proper to him as always to be. Whatsoever perfection any being hath, if it be not eternal it is not divine. God only is immortal,† 1 Tim. vi. 16; he only is so by a necessity of nature. Angels, souls, and bodies too, after the resurrection, shall be immortal; not by nature but grant; they are subject to return to nothing, if that word that raised them from nothing should speak them into nothing again. It is as easy with God to strip them of it as to invest them with it; nay, it is impossible but that they should perish, if God should withdraw his power from preserving them, which he exerted in creating them. But God is immovably fixed in his own being, that as none gave him his life, so none can deprive him of his life, or the least particle of it. Not a jot of the happiness and life which God infinitely possesses can be lost; it will be as durable to everlasting as it hath been possessed from everlasting.

3. There is no succession in God. God is without succession or change; it is a part of eternity: 'From everlasting to everlasting he is God,' *i.e.* the same. God doth not only always remain in being, but he always remains the same in that being: 'Thou art the same,' Ps. cii. 27. The being of creatures is successive, the being of God is permanent, and remains entire with all its perfections, unchanged in an infinite duration. Indeed, the first notion of eternity is to be without beginning and end, which notes to us the duration of a being in regard of its existence; but to have no succession,

nothing first or last, notes rather the perfection of a being in regard of its essence.

The creatures are in a perpetual flux; something is acquired, or something lost, every day. A man is the same in regard of existence when he is a man as he was when he was a child, but there is a new succession of quantities and qualities in him. Every day he acquires something till he comes to his maturity, every day he loseth something till he comes to his period. A man is not the same at night that he was in the morning, something is expired and something is added; every day there is a change in his age, a change in his substance, a change in his accidents; but God hath his whole being in one and the same point or moment of eternity. He receives nothing as an addition to what he was before, he loseth nothing of what he was before; he is always the same excellency and perfection in the same infiniteness as ever. His 'years do not fail,' Heb. i. 12; his years do not come and go as others do, there is not this day, to-morrow, or yesterday with him. As nothing is past or future with him in regard of knowledge, but all things are present, so nothing is past or future in regard of his essence. He is not in his essence this day what he was not before, or will be the next day and year what he is not now.\* All his perfections are most perfect in him every moment, before all ages, after all ages. As he hath his whole essence undivided in every place, as well as in immense space, so he hath all his being in one moment of time, as well as in infinite intervals of time.† Some illustrate the difference between eternity and time by the similitude of a tree or a rock standing upon the side of a river or shore of the sea; the tree stands, always the same and unmoved, while the waters of the river glide along at the foot. The flux is in the river, but the tree acquires nothing but a diverse respect and relation of presence to the various parts of the river as they flow. The waters of the river press on, and push forward one another, and what the river hath this minute it hath not the same the next; so are all sublunary things in a continual flux. And though the angels have no substantial change, yet they have an accidental, for the actions of the angels this day are not the same individual actions which they performed yesterday; but in God there is no change, he always remains the same.

Of a creature it may be said, he was, or he is, or he shall be.‡ Of God it cannot be said but only he is; he is what he always was, and he is what he always will be; whereas a creature is what he was not, and will be what he is not now. As it may be said of the flame of a candle, it is flame, but it is not the same individual flame as was before, nor is it the same that will be presently after; there is a continual dissolution of it into air, and a continual supply for the generation of more; while it continues it may be said there is a flame, yet not entirely one, but in a succession of parts: so of a man it may be said, he is in a succession of parts; but he is not the same that he was, and will not be the same that he is. But God is the same without any succession of parts, and of time; of him it may be said, he is; he is no more now than he was, and he shall be no more hereafter than he is. God possesses a firm and absolute being, always constant to himself; § he sees all things sliding under him in a continual variation; he beholds the revolutions in the world without any change of his most glorious and immoveable nature. All other things pass from one state to

\* Lessius, de perfect. divin. lib. iv. cap. 1.

† Gamacheus in Aquin. part i. qu. 10, cap. 1.

‡ Gassend, tom. i.; Physic. sec. i. l. 2, c. 7, p. 223.

§ Daille, Melange de Sermons, p. 252.



another, from their original to their eclipse and destruction; but God possesses his being in one indivisible point, having neither beginning, end, nor middle.

(1.) There is no succession in the knowledge of God. The variety of successions and changes in the world make no succession or new objects in the divine mind, for all things are present to him from eternity in regard of his knowledge, though they are not actually present in the world in regard of their existence. He doth not know one thing now and another anon, he sees all things at once: 'Known unto God are all things from the beginning of the world,' Acts xv. 18, but in their true order of succession, as they lie in the eternal counsel of God, to be brought forth in time. Though there be a succession and order of things as they are wrought, yet there is no succession in God in regard of his knowledge of them. God knows the things that shall be wrought, and the order of them in their being brought upon the stage of the world; yet both the things and the order he knows by one act. Though all things be present with God, yet they are present in him in the order of their appearance in the world, and not so present with him as if they should be wrought at once. The death of Christ was to precede his resurrection in order of time; there is a succession in this; both at once are known by God, yet the act of his knowledge is not exercised about Christ as dying and rising at the same time, so that there is succession in things when there is no succession in God's knowledge of them. Since God knows time, he knows all things as they are in time; he doth not know all things to be at once, though he knows at once what is, has been, and will be. All things are past, present, and to come in regard of their existence; but there is not past, present, and to come in regard of God's knowledge of them,\* because he sees and knows not by any other but by himself; he is his own light by which he sees, his own glass wherein he sees; beholding himself, he beholds all things.

(2.) There is no succession in the decrees of God. He doth not decree this now which he decreed not before, for as his works were known from the beginning of the world, so his works were decreed from the beginning of the world; as they are known at once, so they are decreed at once; there is a succession in the execution of them, first grace, then glory; but the purpose of God for the bestowing of both was in one and the same moment of eternity: Eph. i. 4, 'He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy;' the choice of Christ, and the choice of some in him to be holy, and to be happy, were before the foundation of the world. It is by the eternal counsel of God all things appear in time; they appear in their order, according to the counsel and will of God, from eternity. The redemption of the world is after the creation of the world, but the decree whereby the world was created, and whereby it was redeemed, was from eternity.

(3.) God is his own eternity. He is not eternal by grant, and the disposal of any other, but by nature and essence. The eternity of God is nothing else but the duration of God, and the duration of God is nothing else but his existence enduring, *existentia durans*.\* If eternity were anything distinct from God, and not of the essence of God, then there would be something which was not God necessary to perfect God. As immortality is the great perfection of a rational creature, so eternity is the choice perfection of God, yea, the gloss and lustre of all others. Every perfection would be imperfect if it were not always a perfection.

God is essentially whatsoever he is, and there is nothing in God but his

\* Parisiensis.

† Calov. Socinian.

essence. Duration or continuance in being in creatures differs from their being, for they might exist but for one instant, in which case they may be said to have being, but not duration, because all duration includes *prius et posterius*. All creatures may cease from being, if it be the pleasure of God; they are not therefore durable by their essence, and therefore are not their own duration, no more than they are their own existence; and though some creatures, as angels and souls, may be called everlasting, as a perpetual life is communicated to them by God, yet they can never be called their own eternity, because such a duration is not simply necessary nor essential to them, but accidental, depending upon the pleasure of another; there is nothing in their nature that can hinder them from losing it, if God, from whom they received it, should design to take it away; but as God is his own necessity of existing, so he is in his own duration in existing.\* As he doth necessarily exist by himself, so he will always necessarily exist by himself.

(4.) Hence all the perfections of God are eternal. In regard of the divine eternity, all things in God are eternal: his power, mercy, wisdom, justice, knowledge. God himself were not eternal if any of his perfections, which are essential to him, were not eternal also; he had not else been a perfect God from all eternity, and so his whole self had not been eternal. If anything belonging to the nature of a thing be wanting, it cannot be said to be that thing which it ought to be; if anything requisite to the nature of God had been wanting one moment, he could not have been said to be an eternal God.

II. The second thing, God is eternal. The Spirit of God in Scripture condescends to our capacities in signifying the eternity of God by days and years, which are terms belonging to time, whereby we measure it, Ps. cii. 27; but we must no more conceive that God is bounded or measured by time, and hath succession of days because of those expressions, than we can conclude him to have a body because members are ascribed to him in Scripture, to help our conceptions of his glorious nature and operations.

Though years are ascribed to him, yet they are such as cannot be numbered, cannot be finished, since there is no proportion between the duration of God and the years of men: 'The number of his years cannot be searched out, for he makes small the drops of water, they pour down rain according to the vapour thereof,' Job xxxvi. 26, 27. The numbers of the drops of rain which have fallen in all parts of the earth since the creation of the world, if subtracted from the number of the years of God, would be found a small quantity, a mere nothing to the years of God. As all the nations in the world compared with God are but as the 'drop of a bucket, worse than nothing, than vanity,' Isa. xl. 15, so all the ages of the world, if compared with God, amount not to so much as the one hundred thousandth part of a minute. The minutes from the creation may be numbered, but the years of the duration of God, being infinite, are without measure.

As one day is to the life of man, so are a thousand years to the life of God, Ps. xc. 4. The Holy Ghost expresseth himself to the capacity of man, to give us some notion of an infinite duration, by a resemblance suited to the capacity of man.† If a thousand years be but as a day to the life of God, then as a year is to the life of man, so are three hundred sixty-five thousand years to the life of God; and as seventy years are to the life of man, so are twenty-five millions four ‡ hundred and fifty thousand years to the life of God. Yet still, since there is no proportion between time and eternity, we

\* Gassend.

† Amyrald, Trin. p. 44.

‡ 'five.'—ED.

must dart our thoughts beyond all those,\* for years and days measure only the duration of created things, and of those only that are material and corporeal, subject to the motion of the heavens, which makes days and years.

Sometimes this eternity is expressed by parts, as looking backward and forward, by the differences of time past, present, and to come, 'which was, and is, and is to come.†' Though this might be spoken of anything in being, though but for an hour, it was the last minute, it is now, and it will be the next minute, yet the Holy Ghost would declare something proper to God, as including all parts of time; he always was, is now, and always shall be; it might always be said of him he was, and it may always be said of him he will be. There is no time when he began, no time when he shall cease. It cannot be said of a creature he always was, he always is what he was, and he always will be what he is; but God always is what he was, and always will be what he is, so that it is a very significant expression of the eternity of God, as can be suited to our capacities.

1. His eternity is evident, by the name God gives himself: Exod. iii. 14, 'And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM; thus 'shalt thou say to the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.' This is the name whereby he is distinguished from all creatures. I AM is his proper name. This description being in the present tense, shows that his essence knows no past nor future. If it were *he was*, it would intimate he were not now what he once was; if it were *he will be*, it would intimate he were not yet what he will be; but *I am*; I am the only being, the root of all beings; he is therefore at the greatest distance from not being, and that is eternal; so that *is* signifies his eternity, as well as his perfection and immutability. As *I am* speaks the want of no blessedness, so it speaks the want of no duration; and therefore the French, wherever they find this word *Jehovah* in the Scripture, which we translate *Lord*, and *Lord eternal*, render it the *Eternal*,—I am always and immutably the same. The eternity of God is opposed to the volubility of time, which is extended into past, present, and to come. Our time is but a small drop, as sand to all the atoms and small particles of which the world is made; but God is an unbounded sea of being,—'I am that I am,' *i. e.* am infinite life. I have not that now which I had not formerly; I shall not afterwards have that which I have not now. *I am* that in every moment which I was, and will be in all moments of time. Nothing can be added to me, nothing can be detracted from me. There is nothing superior to him which can detract from him, nothing desirable that can be added to him. Now if there were any beginning and end of God, any succession in him, he could not be *I am*;‡ for in regard of what was past he would not be, in regard of what was to come he is not yet. And upon this account a heathen§ argues well, of all creatures it may be said they were, or they will be, but of God it cannot be said anything else but *Est*, God *is*, because he fills an eternal duration. A creature cannot be said to be if it be not yet, nor if it be not now, but hath been.||

God only can be called *I am*: all creatures have more of not being than being; for every creature was nothing from eternity, before it was made something in time; and if it be corruptible in its whole nature, it will be nothing to eternity after it hath been something in time; and if it be not corruptible in its nature, as the angels, or in every part of its nature, as man in regard of his soul, yet it hath not properly a being, because it is depen-

\* Daille, Vent. Sermons, Ser. i. sur. Ps. cii. 27, p. 21.

† Rev. i. 8 iv. 8. Crellius weakens this argument, de Deo, cap. 18, p. 42.

‡ Thes. Salmur., p. i. p. 145. Thes. 14. § Plutarch, de *Et* i. p. 462.

|| Perer. in Exod. iii. Disput. 13.

dent upon the pleasure of God to continue it, or deprive it of it; and while it is, it is mutable, and all mutability is a mixture of not being. If God, therefore, be properly *I am*, *i. e.* *being*, it follows that he always was; for if he were not always, he must, as was argued before, be produced by some other, or by himself. By another he could not, then he had not been God, but a creature; nor by himself, for then, as producing, he must be before himself, as produced; he had been before he was. And he always will be, for being *I am*, having all being in himself, and the fountain of all being to everything else, how can he ever have his name changed to *I am not*?

2. God hath life in himself: John v. 26, 'The Father hath life in himself.' He is the 'living God,' therefore 'stedfast for ever,' Dan. vi. 26. He hath life by his essence, not by participation. He is a sun to give light and life to all creatures, but receives not light or life from anything, and therefore he hath an unlimited life; not a drop of life, but a fountain; not a spark of a limited life, but a life transcending all bounds. He hath life in himself; all creatures have their life in him, and from him. He that hath life in himself doth necessarily exist, and could never be made to exist, for then he had not life in himself, but in that which made him to exist, and gave him life. What doth necessarily exist, therefore, exists from eternity; what hath being of itself could never be produced in time, could not want being one moment, because it hath being from its essence, without influence of any efficient cause. When God pronounced his name, *I am that I am*, angels and men were in being; the world had been created above two thousand four hundred years.\* Moses, to whom he then speaks, was in being; yet God only *is*, because he only hath the fountain of being in himself, but all that they were was a rivulet from him. He hath from nothing else that he doth subsist; everything else hath its subsistence from him as their root, as the beam from the sun, as the rivers and fountains from the sea. All life is seated in God, as in its proper throne, in its most perfect purity. God is life; it is in him originally, radically, therefore eternally. He is a pure act, nothing but vigour and act. He hath by his nature that life which others have by his grant; whence the apostle saith, 1 Tim. vi. 16, not only that he is immortal, but he 'hath immortality' in a full possession, fee-simple, not depending upon the will of another, but containing all things within himself. He that hath life in himself, and is from himself, cannot but be. He always was, because he received his being from no other, and none can take away that being which was not given by another.† If there were any space before he did exist, then there were something which made him to exist; life would not then be in him, but in that which produced him into being. He could not then be God, but that other which gave him being would be God. And to say God sprung into being by chance, when we see nothing in the world that is brought forth by chance, but hath some cause of its existence, would be vain; for since God is a being, chance, which is nothing, could not bring forth something; and by the same reason that he sprung up by chance, he might totally vanish by chance. What a strange notion of a God would this be, such a God that had no life in himself, but from chance.

Since he had life in himself, and that there was no cause of his existence, he can have no cause of his limitation, and can no more be determined to a time than he can to a place. What hath life in itself hath life without bounds, and can never desert it, nor be deprived of it; so that he lives necessarily, and it is absolutely impossible that he should not live; whereas

\* Petav. Theol. Dogm., tom. i. lib. i. c. 6, sec. 6, 7.

† Amyrall, de Trinit., p. 48.

all other things 'live, and move, and have their being in him,' Acts xvii. 28; and as they live by his will, so they can return to nothing at his word.

3. If God were not eternal, he were not immutable in his nature. It is contrary to the nature of immutability to be without eternity; for whatsoever begins, is changed, in its passing from not being to being. It began to be what it was not, and if it ends, it ceaseth to be what it was. It cannot, therefore, be said to be God, if there were either beginning or ending or succession in it: Mal. iii. 6, 'I am the Lord, I change not;' Job xxxvii. 23, 'Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out.' God argues here, saith Calvin, from his unchangeable nature as Jehovah, to his immutability in his purpose. Had he not been eternal, there had been the greatest change, from nothing to something. A change of the essence is greater than a change of purpose. God is a sun, glittering always in the same glory; no growing up in youth, no passing on to age. If he were not without succession, standing in one point of eternity, there would be a change from past to present, from present to future. The eternity of God is a shield against all kind of mutability. If anything sprang up in the essence of God that was not there before, he could not be said to be either an eternal or an unchanged substance.

4. God could not be an infinitely perfect being, if he were not eternal. A finite duration is inconsistent with infinite perfection. Whatsoever is contracted within the limits of time, cannot swallow up all perfections in itself. God hath an unsearchable perfection: 'Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?' Job xi. 7. He cannot be found out, he is infinite, because he is incomprehensible. Incomprehensibility ariseth from an infinite perfection, which cannot be fathomed by the short lines of man's understanding. His essence, in regard of its diffusion and in regard of its duration, is incomprehensible, as well as his action. If God, therefore, had beginning, he could not be infinite; if not infinite, he did not possess the highest perfection, because a perfection might be conceived beyond it. If his being could fail, he were not perfect. Can that deserve the name of the highest perfection, which is capable of corruption and dissolution? To be finite and limited is the greatest imperfection, for it consists in a denial of being. He could not be the most blessed being if he were not always so, and should not for ever remain to be so; and whatsoever perfections he had, would be soured by the thoughts that in time they would cease, and so could not be pure perfections, because not permanent; but he is 'blessed from everlasting to everlasting,' Ps. xli. 13. Had he a beginning, he could not have all perfection without limitation; he would have been limited by that which gave him beginning; that which gave him being would be God and not himself, and so more perfect than he. But since God is the most sovereign perfection, than which nothing can be imagined perfecter by the most capacious understanding, he is certainly eternal; being infinite, nothing can be added to him, nothing detracted from him.

5. God could not be omnipotent, almighty, if he were not eternal. The title of *Almighty* agrees not with a nature that had a beginning; whatsoever hath a beginning was once nothing, and when it was nothing, could act nothing. Where there is no being, there is no power; neither doth the title of *Almighty* agree with a perishing nature. He can do nothing to purpose, that cannot preserve himself against the outward force and violence of enemies, or against the inward causes of corruption and dissolution. No account is to be made of man, because 'his breath is in his nostrils,' Isa. ii. 22. Could a better account be made of God, if he were of the like condition? He could not properly be *almighty*, that were not *always mighty*. If he be



omnipotent, nothing can impair him ; he that hath all power can have no hurt.\* If he doth whatsoever he pleaseth, nothing can make him miserable, since misery consists in those things which happen against our will. The almightiness and eternity of God are linked together : ' I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which was, and which is, and which is to come, the Almighty,' Rev. i. 8. Almighty because eternal, and eternal because almighty.

6. God would not be the first cause of all, if he were not eternal. But he is ' the first and the last,' Rev. i. 8 ; the first cause of all things, the last end of all things.† That which is the first cannot begin to be : it were not then the first. It cannot cease to be : whatsoever is dissolved, is dissolved into that whereof it doth consist, which was before it, and then it was not the first.‡ The world might not have been ; it was once nothing : it must have some cause to call it out of nothing. Nothing hath no power to make itself something ; there is a superior cause, by whose will and power it comes into being, and so gives all the creatures their distinct forms.

This power cannot but be eternal, it must be before the world ; the founder must be before the foundation,§ and his existence must be from eternity, or we must say nothing did exist from eternity. And if there were no being from eternity, there could not now be any being in time. What we see, and what we are, must arise from itself or some other. It cannot from itself. If anything made itself, it had a power to make itself ; it then had an active power before it had a being. It was something in regard of power, and was nothing in regard of existence, at the same time. Suppose it had a power to produce itself, this power must be conferred upon it by another ; and so the power of producing itself was not from itself, but from another. But if the power of being was from itself, why did it not produce itself before ? Why was it one moment out of being ? If there be any existence of things, it is necessary that that which was the first cause should exist from eternity.|| Whatsoever was the immediate cause of the world, yet the first and chief cause, wherein we must rest, must have nothing before it ; if it had anything before it, it were not the first. He therefore that is the first cause must be without beginning, nothing must be before him. If he had a beginning from some other, he could not be the first principle and author of all things. If he be the first cause of all things, he must give himself a beginning, or to be from eternity. He could not give himself a beginning : whatsoever begins in time was nothing before, and when it was nothing, it could do nothing ; it could not give itself anything, for then it gave what it had not, and did what it could not. If he made himself in time, why did he not make himself before ? What hindered him ? It was either because he could not, or because he would not. If he could not, he always wanted power, and always would, unless it were bestowed upon him, and then he could not be said to be from himself. If he would not make himself before, then he might have made himself when he would : how had he the power of willing and nilling without a being ? Nothing cannot will or nill ; nothing hath no faculties. So that it is necessary to grant some eternal being, or run into inextricable labyrinths and mazes. If we deny some eternal being, we must deny all being : our own being, the being of everything about us ; unconceivable absurdities will arise.

So then, if God were the cause of all things, he did exist before all things, and that from eternity.

\* Voet. Natural. Theol., p. 310.

† Ficin. de Immort., lib. ii. cap. 5.

‡ Coccei Sum. Theol.

§ Crellius de Deo, cap. 18, p. 43.

|| Petav. Theol. Dogmat., tom. i. l. i. c. 10, 11.

III. The third thing is, eternity is only proper to God, and not communicable. It is as great a madness to ascribe eternity to the creature, as to deprive the Lord of the creature of eternity.\* It is so proper to God, that when the apostle would prove the deity of Christ, he proves it by his immutability and eternity, as well as his creating power: 'Thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail,' Heb. i. 10-12. The argument had no strength, if eternity belonged essentially to any but God; and therefore he is said 'only to have immortality,' 1 Tim. vi. 16. All other things receive their being from him, and can be deprived of their being by him. All things depend on him, he of none. All other things are like clothes, which would consume if God preserved them not. Immortality is appropriated to God, *i. e.* an independent immortality. Angels and souls have an immortality, but by donation from God, not by their own essence; dependent upon their Creator, not necessary in their own nature. God might have annihilated them after he had created them; so that their duration cannot properly be called an eternity, it being extrinsecal to them, and depending upon the will of their Creator, by whom they may be extinguished. It is not an absolute and necessary, but a precarious, immortality. Whatsoever is not God, is temporary; whatsoever is eternal, is God.

It is a contradiction to say a creature can be eternal: as nothing eternal is created, so nothing created is eternal. What is distinct from the nature of God cannot be eternal, eternity being the essence of God. Every creature, in the notion of a creature, speaks a dependence on some cause, and therefore cannot be eternal. As it is repugnant to the nature of God not to be eternal, so it is repugnant to the nature of a creature to be eternal; for then a creature would be equal to the Creator, and the Creator, or the cause, would not be before the creature, or effect.†

It would be all one to admit many gods, as many eternals; and all one to say God can be created, as to say a creature can be uncreated, which is to be eternal.

1. Creation is a producing something from nothing. What was once nothing, cannot therefore be eternal: [its] not being was eternal; therefore its being could not be eternal, for it should be then before it was, and would be something when it was nothing. It is the nature of a creature to be nothing before it was created; what was nothing before it was, cannot be equal with God in an eternity of duration.

2. There is no creature but is mutable, therefore not eternal. As it had a change from nothing to something, so it may be changed from being to not being. If the creature were not mutable, it would be most perfect, and so would not be a creature, but God, for God only is most perfect. It is as much the essence of a creature to be mutable, as it is the essence of God to be immutable. Mutability and eternity are utterly inconsistent.

3. No creature is infinite, therefore not eternal. To be infinite in duration, is all one as to be infinite in essence. It is as reasonable to conceive a creature immense, filling all places at once, as eternal, extended to all ages; because neither can be without infiniteness, which is the property of the Deity.‡ A creature may as well be without bounds of place, as limitations of time.

4. No effect of an intellectual free agent, can be equal in duration to its cause. The production of natural agents are as ancient often as themselves: the sun produceth a beam as old in time as itself; but who ever heard of a piece of wise workmanship as old as the wise artificer? God produced a creature, not necessarily and naturally, as the sun doth a beam, but freely,

\* Bapt.

† Lessius de Perfect., lib. iv. cap. 2.

‡ Ibid.

as an intelligent agent. The sun was not necessary ; it might be or not be, according to the pleasure of God. A free act of the will is necessary to precede in order of time, as the cause of such effects as are purely voluntary.\* Those causes that act as soon as they exist, act naturally, necessarily, not freely, and cannot cease from acting.

But suppose a creature might have existed by the will of God from eternity : yet, as some think, it could not be said, absolutely and in its own nature, to be eternal, because eternity was not of the essence of it. The creature could not be its own duration ; for though it were from eternity, it might not have been from eternity, because its existence depended upon the free will of God, who might have chose whether he would have created it or no.

God only is eternal, 'the first and the last, the beginning and the end,' who, as he subsisted before any creature had a being, so he will eternally subsist, if all creatures were reduced to nothing.

#### IV. Use. 1. Information.

(1.) If God be of an eternal duration, then Christ is God. Eternity is the property of God, but it is ascribed to Christ : 'He is before all things,' Col. i. 17, *i. e.* all created things. He is therefore no creature ; and if no creature, eternal. 'All things were created by him,' both in heaven and in earth, angels as well as men, 'whether they be thrones or dominions,' Col. i. 16. If all things were his creatures, then he is no creature ; if he were, all things were not created by him, or he must create himself.

He hath no difference of time, for he is 'the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever,' Heb. xiii. 8 ; Rev. i. 8, 'He which is, and which was, and which is to come : ' the same with the name of God, *I am*, which signifies his eternity. He is no more to-day than he was yesterday, nor will be any other to-morrow than he is to-day ; and therefore Melchisedec, whose descent, birth and death, father and mother, beginning and end of days, are not upon record, was a type of the existence of Christ, without difference of time : 'Having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God,' Heb. vii. 3. The suppression of his birth and death was intended by the Holy Ghost as a type of the excellency of Christ's person in regard of his eternity, and the duration of his charge in regard of his priesthood. As there was an appearance of an eternity in the suppression of the race of Melchisedec, so there is a true eternity in the Son of God. How could the eternity of the Son of God be expressed by any resemblance so well, as by such a suppression of the beginning and end of this great person, different from the custom of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament, who often records the generations and ends of holy men ; and why might not this, which was a kind of a shadow of eternity, be a representation of the true eternity of Christ, as well as the restoration of Isaac to his father without death, is said to be a figure of the resurrection of Christ after a real death.† Melchisedec is only mentioned once (without any record of his extraction), in his appearance to Abraham after his victory, as if he came from heaven only for that action, and instantly disappeared again, as if he had been an eternal person.

And Christ himself hints his own eternity : 'I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world ; again I leave the world, and go to the Father,' John xvi. 28. He goes to the Father as he came from the Father ; he goes to the Father for everlasting, so he came from the Father from everlasting ; there is the same duration in coming forth from the Father as in returning to the Father. But more plainly, John xvii. 5, he speaks of a glory that he 'had with the Father before the world was,' when there was no creature

\* Crellius de Deo, cap. 18, p. 43.

† Mestrazat. *in loc.*

in being; this is an actual glory, and not only in decree; for a decreed glory believers had, and why may not every one of them say the same words, 'Father, glorify me with that glory which I had with thee before the world was,' if it were only a glory in decree? Nay, it may be said of every man, he was before the world was, because he was so in decree. Christ speaks of something peculiar to him, a glory in actual possession before the world was; glorify me, embrace, honour me as thy Son, whereas I have now been in the eyes of the world handled disgracefully as a servant. If it were only in decree, why is not the like expression used of others in Scripture, as well as of Christ? Why did he not use the same words for his disciples that were then with him, who had a glory in decree? His eternity is also mentioned in the Old Testament; 'The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old,' Prov. viii. 22. If he were the work of God, he existed before himself if he existed before all the works of God; it is not so properly meant of the essential wisdom of God, since the discourse runs in the name of a person, and several passages there are which belong not so much to the essential wisdom of God, as ver. 13, 'The evil way and the froward mouth do I hate;' which belongs rather to the holiness of God than to the essential wisdom of God; besides, it is distinguished from Jehovah, as possessed by him and rejoicing before him. Yet plainer, Micah v. 2, 'Out of thee,' i. e. Bethlehem, 'shall he come forth to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting,' עוֹלָם עוֹלָם, 'from the ways\* of eternity.' There are two goings forth of Christ described, one from Bethlehem in the days of his incarnation, and another from eternity. The Holy Ghost adds after his prediction of his incarnation, his going out from everlasting, that none should doubt of his deity. If this going out from everlasting were only in the purpose of God, it might be said of David and of every creature. And in Isa. ix. he is particularly called the Everlasting, or eternal Father; not the Father in the Trinity, but a father to us; yet eternal, the Father of eternity. As he is 'the mighty God,' so he is 'the everlasting Father.' Can such a title be ascribed to any whose being depends upon the will of another, and may be dashed out at the pleasure of a superior?

As the eternity of God is the ground of all religion, so the eternity of Christ is the ground of the Christian religion. Could our sins be perfectly expiated had he not an eternal divinity to answer for the offences committed against an eternal God? Temporary sufferings had been of little validity, without an infiniteness and eternity in his person to add weight to his passion.

(2.) If God be eternal, he knows all things as present.† All things are present to him in his eternity; for this is the notion of eternity, to be without succession. If eternity be one indivisible point, and is not diffused into preceding and succeeding parts, then that which is known in it or by it is perceived without any succession, for knowledge is as the substance of the person knowing; if that hath various actions and distinct from itself, then it understands things in differences of time as time presents them to view; but since God's being depends not upon the revolutions of time, so neither doth his knowledge; it exceeds all motions of years and days, comprehends infinite spaces of past and future. God considers all things in his eternity in one simple knowledge, as if they were now acted before him: Acts xv. 18, 'Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world;' ἀπὸ ἀιῶνος, *à seculo*, from eternity. God's knowledge is co-eternal with him. If he knows that in time which he did not know from eternity, he would not be eternally perfect, since knowledge is the perfection of an intelligent nature.

\* Qu. 'days'?—Ed.

† Petav.

(3.) How bold and foolish is it for a mortal creature to censure the counsels and actions of an eternal God, or be too curious in his inquisitions? It is by the consideration of the unsearchable number of the years of God that Elihu checks too bold inquiries: 'Who hath enjoined him his way, or who can say thou hast wrought iniquity? Behold, God is great, and we know him not, neither can the number of his years be searched out,' Job xxxvi. 26 compared with ver. 23. Eternity sets God above our inquiries and censures. Infants of a day old are not able to understand the acts of wise and grey heads. Shall we, that are of so short a being and understanding as yesterday, presume to measure the motions of eternity by our scanty intellects? we that cannot foresee an unexpected accident which falls in to blast a well laid design, and run a ship many leagues back from the intended harbour? We cannot understand the reason of things we see done in time, the motions of the sea, the generation of rain, the nature of light, the sympathies and antipathies of the creatures; and shall we dare to censure the actions of an eternal God, so infinitely beyond our reach? The counsels of a boundless being are not to be scanned by the brain of a silly worm, that hath breathed but a few minutes in the world. Since eternity cannot be comprehended in time, it is not to be judged by a creature of time. 'Let us remember to magnify his works which we behold,' because he is eternal, which is the exhortation of Elihu backed by this doctrine of God's eternity, Job xxxvi. 24, and not accuse any work of him who is the ancient of days, or presume to direct him of whose eternity we come infinitely short. Whenever therefore any unworthy notion of the counsels and works of God is suggested to us by Satan or our own corrupt hearts, let us look backward to God's eternal and our own short duration, and silence ourselves with the same question wherewith God put a stop to the reasoning of Job, chap. xxxviii. 4, 'Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?' and reprove ourselves for our curiosity, since we are of so short a standing, and were nothing when the eternal God laid the first stone of the world.

(4.) What a folly and boldness is there in sin, since an eternal God is offended thereby! All sin is aggravated by God's eternity. The blackness of the heathen idolatry was in changing 'the glory of the *incorruptible* God,' Rom. i. 23, erecting resemblances of him contrary to his immortal nature; as if the eternal God, whose life is as unlimited as eternity, were like those creatures whose beings are measured by the short ell of time, which are of a corruptible nature, and daily passing on to corruption. They could not really deprive God of his glory and immortality, but they did in estimation. There is in the nature of every sin a tendency to reduce God to a not being. He that thinks unworthily of God, or acts unworthily towards him, doth (as much as in him lies) sully and destroy these two perfections of his, immutability and eternity. It is a carriage as if he were as contemptible as a creature that were but of yesterday, and shall not remain in being to-morrow. He that would put an end to God's glory by darkening it, would put an end to God's life by destroying it. He that should love a beast with as great an affection as he loves a man, contemns a rational creature, and he that loves a perishing thing with the same affection he should love an everlasting God, contemns his eternity; he debaseth the duration of God below that of the world; the low valuation of God speaks him, in his esteem, no better than withering grass, or a gourd, which lasts for a night; and the creature, which possesses his affection, to be a good that lasts for ever. How foolish then is every sin, that tends to destroy a being that cannot destroy or desert himself; a being, without whose eternity the sinner himself could not have had the capacity of a being, to affront him! How base is that which would



not let the works of God remain in their established posture ! How much more base in not enduring the fountain and glory of all beings, that would not only put an end to the beauty of the world, but the eternity of God !

(5.) How dreadful is it to lie under the stroke of an eternal God ! His eternity is as great a terror to him that hates him, as it is a comfort to him that loves him, because he is the 'living God, an everlasting king, the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation,' Jer. x. 10. Though God be least in their thoughts, and is made light of in the world, yet the thoughts of God's eternity, when he comes to judge the world, shall make the slights of him tremble. That the judge and punisher lives for ever is the greatest grievance to a soul in misery, and adds an unconceivable weight to it, above what the infiniteness of God's executive power could do without that duration ; his eternity makes the punishment more dreadful than his power ; his power makes it sharp, but his eternity renders it perpetual ; ever to endure is the sting at the end of every lash.

And how sad is it to think that God lays his eternity to pawn for the punishment of obstinate sinners, and engageth it by an oath, that he will 'whet his glittering sword,' that his 'hand shall take hold of judgment,' that he will 'render vengeance to his enemies, and a reward to them that hate him,' a reward proportioned to the greatness of their offences, and the glory of an eternal God ! Deut. xxxii. 40, 41, 'I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever ;' *i. e.* as surely as I live for ever, I will whet my glittering sword. As none can convey good with a perpetuity, so none can convey evil with such a lastingness as God. It is a great loss to lose a ship richly fraught in the bottom of the sea, never to be cast upon the shore ; but how much greater is it to lose eternally a sovereign God,\* which we were capable of eternally enjoying, and undergo an evil as durable as that God we slighted, and were in a possibility of avoiding ? The miseries of men after this life are not eased, but sharpened by the life and eternity of God.

*Use 2.* The second use is of comfort. What foundation of comfort can we have in any of God's attributes, were it not for his infiniteness and eternity, though he be merciful, good, wise, faithful. What support could there be if they were perfections belonging to a corruptible God ? What hopes of a resurrection to happiness can we have, or of the duration of it, if that God that promised it were not immortal to continue it, as well as powerful to effect it ? His power were not almighty, if his duration were not eternal.

1. If God be eternal, his covenant will be so. It is founded upon the eternity of God ; the oath whereby he confirms it, is by his life. Since there is none greater than himself, he swears by himself, Heb. vi. 13, or by his own life, which he engageth, together with his eternity, for the full performance, so that if he lives for ever, the covenant shall not be disannulled, it is an immutable counsel, ver. 16, 17. The immutability of his counsel follows the immutability of his nature. Immutability and eternity go hand in hand together. The promise of eternal life is as ancient as God himself in regard of the purpose of the promise, or in regard of the promise made to Christ for us : Titus i. 2, 'Eternal life, which God promised before the world began.' As it hath an ante-eternity, so it hath a post-eternity ; therefore the gospel, which is the new covenant published, is termed 'the everlasting gospel,' Rev. xiv. 6, which can no more be altered and perish than God can change and vanish into nothing. He can as little morally deny his truth as he can naturally desert his life. The covenant is there represented in a green colour, to note its perpetual verdure. 'The rainbow,' the

\* Qu. 'good'?—ED.

emblem of the covenant 'about the throne, was like to an emerald,' a stone of a green colour, Rev. iv. 3; whereas the natural rainbow hath many colours, but this but one, to signify its eternity.

2. If God be eternal, he being our God in covenant, is an eternal good and possession. 'This God is our God for ever and ever,' Ps. xlviii. 14; he is a 'dwelling place in all generations.' We shall traverse the world a while, and then arrive at the blessings Jacob wished for Joseph: 'The blessings of the everlasting hills,' Gen. xlix. 26. If an estate of a thousand pound per annum render a man's life comfortable for a short time, how much more may the soul be swallowed up with joy in the enjoyment of the Creator, whose years never fail, who lives for ever to be enjoyed, and can keep us in life for ever to enjoy him! Death indeed will seize upon us by God's irreversible order, but the immortal Creator will make him disgorge his morsel, and land us in a glorious immortality, our souls at their dissolution, and our bodies at the resurrection; after which they shall remain for ever, and employ the extent of that boundless eternity in the fruition of the sovereign and eternal God; for it is impossible that the believer, who is united to the immortal God, that is from everlasting to everlasting, can ever perish; for being in conjunction with him who is an ever flowing fountain of life, he cannot suffer him to remain in the jaws of death. While God is eternal, and always the same, it is not possible that those that partake of his spiritual life should not also partake of his eternal; it is from the consideration of the endlessness of the years of God that the church comforts herself, that her 'children shall continue,' and 'their seed be established for ever,' Ps. cii. 27, 28. And from the eternity of God, Habakkuk, chap. i. ver. 12, concludes the eternity of believers, 'Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One? we shall not die, O Lord.' After they are retired from this world, they shall live for ever with God, without any change by the multitude of those imaginable years and ages that shall run for ever. It is that God that hath neither beginning nor end, that is our God, who hath not only immortality in himself, but immortality to give out to others. As he hath abundance of Spirit to quicken them, Mal. ii. 15, so he hath abundance of immortality to continue them. It is only in the consideration of this a man can with wisdom say, 'Soul, take thy ease, thou hast goods laid up for many years;' to say it of any other possession, is the greatest folly in the judgment of our Saviour, Luke xii. 19, 20. Mortality shall be swallowed up of immortality; rivers of pleasure shall be for evermore. Death is a word never spoken there by any, never heard by any in that possession of eternity; it is for ever put out, as one of Christ's conquered enemies.

The happiness depends upon the presence of God, with whom believers shall be for ever present. Happiness cannot perish as long as God lives: he is the first and the last; the first of all delights, nothing before him; the last of all pleasures, nothing beyond him: a paradise of delights in every point, without a flaming sword.

3. The enjoyment of God will be as fresh and glorious after many ages as it was at first. God is eternal, and eternity knows no change; there will then be the fullest possession, without any decay in the object enjoyed. There can be nothing past, nothing future; time neither adds to it, nor detracts from it; that infinite fulness of perfection which flourisheth in him now, will flourish eternally, without any discolouring of it in the least by those innumerable ages that shall run to eternity, much less any despoiling him of them. He is the same in his endless duration, Ps. cii. 27. As God is, so will the eternity of him be, without succession, without division.

The fulness of joy will be always present; without past to be thought of with regret for being gone, without future to be expected with tormenting desires. When we enjoy God, we enjoy him in his eternity without any flux, an entire possession of all together, without the passing away of pleasures that may be wished to return, or expectation of future joys which might be desired to hasten. Time is fluid, but eternity is stable; and after many ages, the joys will be as savoury and satisfying as if they had been but that moment first tasted by our hungry appetites. When the glory of the Lord shall rise upon you, it shall be so far from ever setting, that after millions of years are expired, as numerous as the sands on the sea shore, the Sun, in the light of whose countenance you shall live, shall be as bright as at the first appearance. He will be so far from ceasing to flow, that he will flow as strong, as full as at the first communication of himself in glory to the creature. God therefore, as sitting upon his throne of grace, and acting according to his covenant, is like a jasper stone, which is of a green colour, a colour always delightful, Rev. iv. 3; because God is always vigorous and flourishing, a pure act of life, sparkling now and fresh rays of life and light to the creature, flourishing with a perpetual spring, and contenting the most capacious desire; forming your interest, pleasure, and satisfaction with an infinite variety, without any change or succession. He will have variety to increase delights, and eternity to perpetuate them; this will be the fruit of the enjoyment of an infinite, an eternal God. He is not a cistern, but a fountain, wherein water is always living, and never putrifies.

4. If God be eternal, here is a strong ground of comfort against all the distresses of the church, and the threats of the church's enemies. God's abiding for ever is the plea Jeremiah makes for his return to his forsaken church: Lament. v. 19, 'Thou, O Lord, remainest for ever; thy throne from generation to generation.' The church is weak; created things are easily cut off. What prop is there but that God that lives for ever? What though Jerusalem lost its bulwarks, the temple were defaced, the land wasted, yet the God of Jerusalem sits upon an eternal throne, and from everlasting to everlasting there is no diminution of his power. The prophet intimates in this complaint that it is not agreeable to God's eternity to forget his people, to whom he hath from eternity bore good will. In the greatest confusions, the church's eyes are to be fixed upon the eternity of God's throne, where he sits as governor of the world. No creature can take any comfort in this perfection but the church; other creatures depend upon God, but the church is united to him.

The first discovery of the name I AM, which signifies the divine eternity as well as immutability, was for the comfort of the oppressed Israelites in Egypt, Exod. iii. 14, 15; it was then published from the secret place of the Almighty, as the only strong cordial to refresh them. It hath not yet, it shall not ever lose its virtue in any of the miseries that have or shall successively befall the church; it is a comfort as durable as the God whose name it is. He is still I AM, and the same to the church as he was then to his Israel. His spiritual Israel have a greater right to the glories of it than the carnal Israel could have. No oppression can be greater than theirs; what was a comfort suited to that distress hath the same suitableness to every other oppression. It was not a temporary name, but a name for ever, his 'memorial to all generations,' ver. 15, and reacheth to the church of the Gentiles, with whom he treats as the God of Abraham, ratifying that covenant by the Messiah, which he made with Abraham the father of the faithful.

The church's enemies are not to be feared; they may 'spring as the

grass,' but soon after do wither by their own inward principles of decay, or are cut down by the hand of God, Ps. xcii. 7-9. They may be instruments of the anger of God, but they shall be scattered as the workers of iniquity, by the hand of the Lord 'that is high for evermore,' ver. 8, and is engaged by his promise to preserve a church in the world. They may threaten, but their breath may vanish as soon as their threatenings are pronounced, for they carry their breath in no surer a place than their own nostrils, upon which the eternal God can put his hand, and sink them with all their rage. 'Do the prophets' and the instructors of the church 'live for ever?' Zech. i. 15. No. Shall, then, the adversaries and disturbers of the church live for ever? They shall vanish as a shadow; their being depends upon the eternal God of the faithful, and the everlasting judge of the wicked. He that inhabits eternity is above them that inhabit mortality, and must, whether they will or no, 'say to corruption, Thou art my father; and to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister,' Job. xvii. 14. When they will act with a confidence as if they were living gods, he will not be mated, but evidence himself to be a living God above them. Why then should mortal men be feared in their frowns, when an immortal God hath promised protection in his word, and lives for ever to perform it?

5. Hence follows another comfort; since God is eternal, he hath as much power as will to be as good as his word. His promises are established upon his eternity, and this perfection is a main ground of trust: Isa. xxvi. 4, 'Trust in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength,' **בִּיה יְהוָה צוּר עוֹלָמִים**. His name is doubled, that name *Jah* and *Jehovah*, which was always the strength of his people, and not a single one, but the strength or rock of eternities; not a failing, but an eternal truth and power; that as his strength is eternal, so our trust in him should imitate his eternity in its perpetuity; and therefore in the despondency of his people, as if God had forgot his promises and made no account of them, or his word, and were weary of doing good, he calls them to reflect on what they had heard of his eternity, which is attended with immutability, who hath an infiniteness of power to perform his will, and an infiniteness of understanding to judge of the right seasons of it, Isa. xl. 27, 28; his wisdom, will, truth, have always been, and will to eternity be, the same. He wants not life any more than love for ever to help us; since his word is past, he will never fail us; since his life continues, he can never be out of a capacity to relieve us; and therefore, whenever we foolishly charge him by our distrustful thoughts, we forget his love, which made the promise, and his eternal life, which can accomplish it. As his word is the bottom of our trust, and his truth is the assurance of his sincerity, so his eternity is the assurance, of his ability to perform. His 'word stands for ever,' Isa. xl. 8. A man may be my friend this day, and be in another world to-morrow; and though he be never so sincere in his word, yet death snaps his life asunder, and forbids the execution. But as God cannot die, so he cannot lie, because he is the eternity of Israel: 1 Sam. xv. 29, 'The strength of Israel will not lie nor repent,' **נֶצַח**, perpetuity or eternity of Israel. Eternity implies immutability; we could have no ground for our hopes if we knew him not to be longer lived than ourselves. The psalmist beats off our hands from trust in men, because 'their breath goes forth, they return to their earth, and in that day their thoughts perish,' Ps. cxlvi. 3, 4. And if the God of Jacob were like them, what happiness could we have in making him our help? As his sovereignty in giving precepts had not been a strong ground of obedience, without considering him as an eternal lawgiver, who could maintain his rights; so his kindness in making the promises had not been a strong ground

of confidence, without considering him as an eternal promiser, whose thoughts and whose life can never perish.\* And this may be one reason why the Holy Ghost mentions so often the post-eternity of God, and so little his ante-eternity; because that is the strongest foundation of our faith and hope, which respects chiefly that which is future, and not that which is past, yet, indeed, no assurance of his after-eternity can be had if his ante-eternity be not certain. If he had a beginning, he may have an end; and if he had a change in his nature, he might have in his counsels; but since all the resolves of God are as himself is, eternal, and all the promises of God are the fruits of his counsel, therefore they cannot be changed. If he should change them for the better, he would not have been eternally wise, to know what was best; if for the worse, he had not been eternally good or just. Men may break their promises, because they are made without foresight; but God, that inhabits eternity, foreknows all things that shall be done under the sun, as if they had been then acting before him; and nothing can intervene, or work a change in his resolves, because the least circumstances were eternally foreseen by him. Though there may be variations and changes to our sight, the winds may tack about, and every hour new and cross accidents happen, yet the eternal God, who is eternally true to his word, sits at the helm, and the winds and the waves obey him. And though he should defer his promise a thousand years, yet he is 'not slack,' 2 Peter iii. 8, 9, for he defers it but a day to his eternity; and who would not with comfort stay a day in expectation of a considerable advantage?

Use 3 is for exhortation.

1. To something which concerns us in ourselves.
2. To something which concerns us with respect to God.
1. To something which concerns us in ourselves.

(1.) Let us be deeply affected with our sins long since committed. Though they are past with us, they are in regard of God's eternity present with him; there is no succession in eternity as there is in time. All things are before God at once; our sins are before him, as if committed this moment, though committed long ago. As he is what he is in regard of duration, so he knows what he knows in regard of knowledge; as he is not more than he was, nor shall not be any more than he is, so he always knew what he knows, and shall not cease to know what he now knows; as himself, so his knowledge is one indivisible point of eternity. He knows nothing but what he did know from eternity; he shall know no more for the future than he now knows. Our sins being present with him in his eternity, should be present with us in regard of our remembrance of them, and sorrow for them. What though many years are lapsed, much time run out, and our iniquities almost blotted out of our memory! yet since a thousand years are in God's sight, and in regard of his eternity, but as a day,—Ps. xc. 4, 'A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night,'—they are before him; for, suppose a man were as old as the world, above five thousand six hundred years, the sins committed five thousand years ago are, according to that rule, but as if they were committed five days ago, so that sixty-two years are but as an hour and a-half, and the sins committed forty years since are as if they were committed but this present hour. But if we will go further, and consider them but as a watch of the night, about three hours (for the night, consisting of twelve hours, was divided into set watches), then a thousand years are but as three hours in the sight of God, and then sins committed sixty years ago are but as if they were committed within this five minutes.

\* Crellius de Deo. cap. 18, p. 44, 45.



Let none of us set light by the iniquities committed many years ago, and imagine that length of time can wipe out their guilt. No; let us consider them in relation to God's eternity, and excite an inward remorse, as if they had been but the birth of this moment.

(2.) Let the consideration of God's eternity abate our pride. This is the design of the verses following the text, the eternity of God being so sufficient to make us understand our own nothingness, which ought to be one great end of man, especially as fallen. The eternity of God should make us as much disesteem ourselves, as the excellency of God made Job abhor himself, Job xlii. 5, 6. His excellency should humble us under a sense of our vanity, and his eternity under a sense of the shortness of our duration. If man compares himself with other creatures, he may be too sensible of his greatness; but if he compares himself with God, he cannot but be sensible of his baseness.

[1.] In regard of our impotence to comprehend this eternity of God. How little do we know, how little can we know, of God's eternity! We cannot fully conceive it, much less express it: we have a brutish understanding in all those things, as Agur said of himself, Prov. xxx. 7.

What is infinite and eternal cannot be comprehended by finite and temporary creatures. If it could, it would not be infinite and eternal; for to know a thing, is to know the extent and cause of it. It is repugnant to eternity to be known, because it hath no limits, no causes; the most soaring understanding cannot have a proportionable understanding of it.\* What disproportion is there between a drop of water and the sea, in their greatness and motion! Yet by a drop we may arrive to a knowledge of the nature of the sea, which is a mass of drops joined together; but the longest duration of times cannot make us know what eternity is, because there is no proportion between time and eternity. The years of God are as numberless as his thoughts, Ps. xl. 5, and our minds as far from reckoning the one as the other. If our understandings are too gross to comprehend the majesty of his infinite works, they are much more too short to comprehend the infiniteness of his eternity.

[2.] In regard of the vast disproportion of our duration to this duration of God.

*First*, We have more of not being than being. We were nothing from an unbegun eternity, and we might have been nothing to an endless eternity, had not God called us unto being; and if he please, we may be nothing by a short annihilating word, as we were something by a creating word. As it is the prerogative of God to be '*I am that I am*,' so it is the property of a creature to be *I am not what I am*; I am not by myself what I am, but by the indulgence of another. I was nothing formerly, I may be nothing again, unless he that is *I am* make me to subsist what I now am. Nothing is as much the title of the creature, as being is the title of God. Nothing is so holy as God, because nothing hath being as God: 1 Sam. ii. 2, 'There is none holy as the Lord; for there is none besides thee.' Man's life is an image, a dream, which are next to nothing; and if compared with God, worse than nothing, a nullity as well as a vanity; because 'with God only is the fountain of life,' Ps. xxxvi. 9. The creature is but a drop of life from him, dependent on him. A drop of water is a nothing, if compared with the vast conflux of waters, and numberless drops in the ocean.

How unworthy is it for dust and ashes, kneaded together in time, to strut against the Father of eternity! Much more unworthy for that which is

\* Charron. Vent. liv. i. chap. 5, p. 17, &c.

nothing, worse than nothing, to quarrel with that which is only being, and equal himself with him that inhabits eternity.

*Secondly*, What being we have, had a beginning. After an unaccountable eternity was run out, in the very dregs of time, a few years ago we were created, and made of the basest and vilest dross of the world, the slime and dust of the earth; made of that wherewith birds build their nests; made of that which creeping things make their habitation, and beasts trample upon. How monstrous is pride in such a creature, to aspire, as if he were the Father of eternity, and as eternal as God, and so his own eternity!

*Thirdly*, What being we have, is but of a short duration in regard of our life in this world. Our life is a constant change and flux: we remain not the same an entire day; youth quickly succeeds childhood, and age as speedily treads upon the heels of youth; there is a continual defluxion of minutes, as there is of sands in a glass. He is as a watch wound up at the beginning of his life, and from that time is running down till he comes to the bottom: some part of our lives is cut off every day, every minute. Life is but a moment, what is past cannot be recalled; what is future cannot be insured. If we enjoy this moment, we have lost that which is past, and shall presently lose this by the next that is to come.

The short duration of men is set out in Scripture by such creatures as soon disappear: a worm, Job xxv. 6, that can scarce live a winter; grass, that withers by the summer sun. Life is a flower soon withering, Job xiv. 2; a vapour soon vanishing, James iv. 14; a smoke soon disappearing, Ps. cii. 3. The strongest man is but compacted dust, the fabric must moulder, the highest mountain falls and comes to nought. Time gives place to eternity; we live now, and die to-morrow. Not a man, since the world began, ever lived a day in God's sight; for no man ever lived a thousand years. The longest day of any man's life never amounted to twenty-four hours in the account of divine eternity. A life of so many hundred years, with the addition 'he died,' makes up the greatest part of the history of the patriarchs, Gen. v.; and since the life of man hath been curtailed, if any be in the world eighty years, he scarce properly lives sixty of them, since the fourth part of time is at least consumed in sleep.

A greater difference there is between the duration of God and that of a creature, than between the life of one for a minute, and the life of one that should live as many years as the whole globe of heaven and earth, if changed into papers, could contain figures. And this life, though but of short duration according to the period God hath determined, is easily cut off; the treasure of life is deposited in a brittle vessel. A small stone hitting against Nebuchadnezzar's statue will tumble it down into a poor and nasty grave; a grape-stone, the bone of a fish, a small fly in the throat, a moist damp, are enough to destroy an earthly eternity, and reduce it to nothing.

What a nothing then is our shortness, if compared with God's eternity! our frailty, with God's duration! How humble then should perishing creatures be before an eternal God, with whom 'our days are as a hand's-breadth, and our age as nothing'! Ps. xxxix. 5. The angels, that have been of as long a duration as heaven and earth, tremble before him, the heavens melt at his presence; and shall we, that are but of yesterday, approach a divine eternity with unhumbled souls, and offer the calves of our lips with the pride of devils, and stand upon our terms with him, without falling upon our faces, with a sense that we are but dust and ashes, and creatures of time? How easily it is to reason out man's humility, but how hard is it to reason man into it!

(3.) Let the consideration of God's eternity take off our love and confidence from the world, and the things thereof. The eternity of God reproaches a pursuit of the world, as preferring a momentary pleasure before an everlasting God; as though a temporal world could be a better supply than a God whose years never fail. Alas, what is this earth men are so greedy of, and will get, though by blood and sweat! What is this whole earth, if we had the entire possession of it, if compared with the vast heavens, the seat of angels and blessed spirits! It is but as an atom to the greatest mountain, or a drop of dew to the immense ocean. How foolish is it to prefer a drop before the sea, or an atom before the world! The earth is but a point to the sun, the sun with its whole orb but a little part of the heavens, compared with the whole fabric. If a man had the possession of all those, there could be no comparison between those that have had a beginning, and shall have an end, and God, who is without either of them. Yet how many are there that make nothing of the divine eternity, and imagine an eternity of nothing!

[1.] The world hath been but of a short standing. It is not yet six thousand years since the foundations of it were laid, and therefore it cannot have a boundless excellency, as that God, who hath been from everlasting, doth possess. If Adam had lived to this day, and been as absolute lord of his posterity as he was of the other creatures, had it been a competent object to take up his heart, had he not been a madman to have preferred this little created pleasure before an everlasting, uncreated God; a thing that had a dependent beginning, before that which had an independent eternity!

[2.] The beauties of the world are transitory and perishing. The whole world is nothing else but a fluid thing, the fashion of it is a pageantry 'passing away,' 1 Cor. vii. 31. Though the glories of it might be conceived greater than they are, yet they are not consistent, but transient. There cannot be an entire enjoyment of them, because they grow up and expire every moment, and slip away between our fingers while we are using them. Have we not heard of God's dispersing the greatest empires like 'chaff before a whirlwind, or as smoke out of a chimney,' Hosea xiii. 3, which, though it appears as a compacted cloud, as if it would choke the sun, is quickly scattered into several parts of the air, and becomes invisible? Nettles have often been heirs to stately palaces, as God threatens Israel, Hosea ix. 6. We cannot promise ourselves over night anything the next day. A kingdom with the glory of a throne may be cut off in a morning, Hosea x. 15. The new wine may be taken from the mouth when the vintage is ripe, the devouring locust may snatch away both the hopes of that and the harvest, Joel i. 15; they are therefore things which are not, and nothing cannot be a fit object for confidence or affection: Prov. xxiii. 5, 'Wilt thou set thy eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings.' They are not properly beings, because they are not stable, but flitting. They are not, because they may not be the next moment to us what they are this; they are but cisterns, not springs; and 'broken cisterns,' not sound and stable; no solidity in their substance, nor stability in their duration. What a foolish thing is it then to prefer a transient felicity, a mere nullity, before an eternal God! What a senseless thing would it be in a man to prefer the map of a kingdom, which the hand of a child can tear in pieces, before the kingdom shadowed by it! How much more inexcusable is it to value things that are so far from being eternal, that they are not so much as dusky resemblances of an eternity! Were the things of the world more glorious than they are, yet they are but as a

counterfeit sun in a cloud, which comes short of the true sun in the heavens both in glory and duration; and to esteem them before God is inconceivably baser than if a man should value a parti-coloured bubble in the air before a durable rock of diamonds. The comforts of this world are as candles that will end in a snuff, whereas the felicity that flows from an eternal God is like the sun, that shines more and more to a perfect day.

[3.] They cannot therefore be fit for a soul which was made to have an interest in God's eternity. The soul being of a perpetual nature, was made for the fruition of an eternal good; without such a good, it can never be perfect. Perfection, that noble thing, riseth not from anything in this world, nor is it a title due to a soul while in this world. It is then they are said to be 'made perfect,' when they arrive at that entire conjunction with the eternal God in another life, Heb. xii. 23. The soul cannot be ennobled by an acquaintance with these things, or established by a dependence on them; they cannot confer what a rational nature should desire, or supply it with what it wants.

The soul hath a resemblance to God in a post-eternity. Why should it be drawn aside by the blandishments of earthly things, to neglect its true establishment, and lacquey after the body, which is but a shadow of the soul, and was made to follow it and serve it! But while it busieth itself altogether in the concerns of a perishing body, and seeks satisfaction in things that glide away, it becomes rather a body than soul, descends below its nature, reproacheth that God who hath imprinted upon it an image of his own eternity, and loseth the comfort of the everlastingness of its Creator. How shall the whole world, if our lives were as durable as that, be an happy eternity to us, who have souls that shall survive all the delights of it, which must fry in those flames that shall fire the whole frame of nature at the general conflagration of the world? 2 Peter iii. 10.

[4.] Therefore let us provide for an happy interest in the eternity of God. Man is made for an eternal state. The soul hath such a perfection in its nature, that it is fit for eternity, and cannot display all its operations but in eternity; to an eternity it must go, and live as long as God himself lives. Things of a short duration are not proportioned to a soul made for an eternal continuance; to see that it be a comfortable eternity, is worth all our care. Man is a forecasting creature, considers not only the present, but the future too, in his provisions for his family; and shall he disgrace his nature in casting off all consideration of a future eternity? Get possession therefore of the eternal God. A 'portion in this life' is the lot of those who shall be for ever miserable, Ps. xvii. 14; but God, an 'everlasting portion,' is the lot of them that are designed for happiness: 'God is my portion for ever,' Ps. lxxiii. 26.

Time is short, 1 Cor. vii. 29. The whole time for which God designed this building of the world is of a little compass; it is a stage erected for rational creatures to act their parts upon for a few thousand years, the greatest part of which time is run out, and then shall time like a rivulet fall into the sea of eternity, from whence it sprung. As time is but a slip of eternity, so it will end in eternity. Our advantages consist in the present instant; what is past never promised a return, and cannot be fetched back by all our vows; what is future we cannot promise ourselves to enjoy, we may be snatched away before it comes. Every minute that passeth speaks the fewer remaining till the time of death; and as we are every hour further from our beginning, we are nearer our end. The child born this day grows up, to grow nothing at last. In all ages 'there is but a step between us and death,' as David said of himself, 1 Sam. xx. 3. The little

time that remains for the devil till the day of judgment, envenoms his wrath; he rageth, because 'his time is short,' Rev. xii. 12. The little time that remains between this moment and our death, should quicken our diligence to inherit the endless and unchangeable eternity of God.

[5.] Often meditate on the eternity of God. The holiness, power, and eternity of God are the fundamental articles of all religion, upon which the whole body of it leans: his holiness for conformity to him, his power and eternity for the support of faith and hope. The strong and incessant cries of the four beasts, representing that Christian church, are 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come,' Rev. iv. 8. Though his power is intimated, yet the chiefest are his holiness, three times expressed; and his eternity, which is repeated, ver. 9, 'who lives for ever and ever.' This ought to be the constant practice in the church of the Gentiles, which this book chiefly respects. The meditation of his converting grace manifested to Paul ravished the apostle's heart, but not without the triumphant consideration of his immortality and eternity, which are the principal parts of the doxology: 1 Tim. i. 15-17, 'Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever.' It could be no great transport to the spirit to consider him glorious, without considering him immortal; the unconfinedness of his perfections in regard of time presents the soul with matter of the greatest complacency. The happiness of our souls depends upon his other attributes, but the perpetuity of it upon his eternity. Is it a comfort to view his immense wisdom, his overflowing goodness, his tender mercy, his unerring truth? What comfort were there in any of those, if it were a wisdom that could be baffled, a goodness that could be damped, a mercy that can expire, and a truth that can perish with the subject of it! Without eternity, what were all his other perfections but as glorious yet withering flowers, a great but a decaying beauty! By a frequent meditation of God's eternity, we should become more sensible of our own vanity and the world's triflingness. How nothing should ourselves, how nothing would all other things appear in our eyes! how coldly should we desire them! how feebly should we place any trust in them! Should we not think ourselves worthy of contempt to doat upon a perishing glory, to expect support from an arm of flesh, when there is an eternal beauty to ravish us, an eternal arm to protect us? Asaph, when he considered God a 'portion for ever,' thought nothing of the glories of the earth, or the beauties of the created heavens worth his appetite or complacency, but God, Ps. lxxiii. 25, 26. Besides, an elevating frame of heart at the consideration of God's eternity, would batter down the strongholds and engines of any temptation. A slight temptation will not know where to find and catch hold of a soul high and hid in a meditation of it; and if he doth, there will not be wanting from hence preservatives to resist and conquer it. What transitory pleasures will not the thoughts of God's eternity stifle! When this work busieth a soul, it is too great to suffer it to descend, to listen to a sleeveless errand from hell or the world. The wanton allurements of the flesh will be put off with indignation. The profers of the world will be ridiculous when they are cast into the balance with the eternity of God, which sticking in our thoughts, we shall not be so easy a prey for the fowler's gin.

Let us therefore often meditate upon this, but not in a bare speculation, without engaging our affections, and making every notion of the divine eternity end in a suitable impression upon our hearts. This would be much like the disciples gazing upon the heavens at the ascension of their Master, while they forgot the practice of his orders, Acts i. 11. We may else find



something of the nature of God, and lose ourselves, not only in eternity, but to eternity.

2. And hence the second part of the exhortation is to something which concerns us with a respect to God.

(1.) If God be eternal, how worthy is he of our choicest affections, and strongest desires of communion with him ! Is not everything to be valued according to the greatness of its being ? How then should we love him, who is not only lovely in his nature, but eternally lovely, having from everlasting all those perfections centred in himself, which appear in time ! If everything be lovely, by how much the more it partakes of the nature of God, who is the chief good, how much more infinitely lovely is God, who is superior to all other goods, and eternally so ! Not a God of a few minutes, months, years, or millions of years ; not of the dregs of time or the top of time, but of eternity ; above time, unconceivably immense beyond time. The loving him infinitely, perpetually, is an act of homage due to him for his eternal excellency. We may give him the one, since our souls are immortal, though we cannot the other, because they are finite. Since he encloseth in himself all the excellencies of heaven and earth for ever, he should have an affection, not only of time in this world, but of eternity in the future ; and if we did not owe him a love for what we are by him, we owe him a love for what he is in himself ; and more for what he is, than for what he is to us. He is more worthy of our affections because he is the eternal God, than because he is our Creator ; because he is more excellent in his nature than in his transient actions. The beams of his goodness to us, are to direct our thoughts and affections to him ; but his own eternal excellency ought to be the ground and foundation of our affections to him. And truly, since nothing but God is eternal, nothing but God is worth the loving ; and we do but a just right to our love, to pitch it upon that which can always possess us and be possessed by us, upon an object that cannot deceive our affection, and put it out of countenance by a dissolution.

And if our happiness consists in being like to God, we should imitate him in loving him as he loves himself, and as long as he loves himself. God cannot do more to himself than love himself ; he can make no addition to his essence, nor diminution from it. What should we do less to an eternal being, than to bestow affections upon him, like his own to himself, since we can find nothing so durable as himself, for which we should love it !

(2.) He only is worthy of our best service. The 'Ancient of days' is to be served before all that are younger than himself ; our best obedience is due to him as a God of unconfined excellency. Every thing that is excellent deserves a veneration suitable to its excellency. As God is infinite, he hath right to a boundless service ; as he is eternal, he hath right to a perpetual service. As service is a debt of justice upon the account of the excellency of his nature, so a perpetual service is as much a debt of justice upon the account of his eternity. If God be infinite and eternal, he merits an honour and comportment from his creatures suited to the unlimited perfection of his nature, and the duration of his being. How worthy is the psalmist's resolution, 'I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live ; I will sing praises to my God while I have any being,' Ps. civ. 33. It is the use he makes of the endless duration of the glory of God, and will extend to all other service as well as praise. To serve other things, or to serve ourselves, is to waste a service upon that which is nothing. In devoting ourselves to God, we serve him that is ; that was, so as that he never began ; is to come, so as that he never shall end ; by whom all things are what they are ; who hath both eternal knowledge to remember our service, and eternal goodness to reward it.