

## A DISCOURSE UPON GOD'S PATIENCE.

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*The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked; the Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.*—NAHUM I. 3.

THE subject of this prophecy is God's sentence against Nineveh, the head and metropolis of the Assyrian empire,—a city famous for its strength and thickness of its walls, and the multitude of its towers for defence against an enemy. The forces of this empire did God use as a scourge against the Israelites, and by their hands ruined Samaria, the chief city of the ten tribes, and transplanted them as captives into another country, 2 Kings xvii. 5, 6, about six years after Hezekiah came to the crown of Judah, 2 Kings xviii. compared with chap. xvii. ver. 6. In whose time, or (as some think) later, Nahum uttered this prophecy. The name Nahum signifies comforter; though the matter of his prophecy be dreadful to Nineveh, it was comfortable to the people of God. For a promise is made, ver. 7, 'The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him;' and an encouragement to Judah to keep their solemn feasts, ver. 15, and also in chap. ii. 3, with a declaration of the misery of Nineveh, and the destruction of it.

Observe,

1. In all the fears of God's people, God will have a comforter for them. Judah might well be dejected with the calamity of their brethren, not knowing but it might be their own turn shortly after. They knew not where the ambition of the Assyrian would stop, but God, by his prophets, calms their fears of their furious neighbour, by predicting to them the ruin of their feared adversary.

2. The destruction of the church's enemies is the comfort of the church. By that God is glorified in his justice, and the church secured in its worship.

3. The victories of persecutors secure them not from being the triumphs of others. The Assyrians, that conquered and captived Israel, were themselves to be conquered and captived by the Medes. The whole oppressing empire is threatened with destruction in the ruin of their chief city; accordingly it was accomplished, and the empire extinguished by a greater power. God burns the rod when it hath done the work he appointed it for; and the wisp of straw wherewith the vessels are scoured is flung into the fire or upon the dunghill.

Nahum begins his prophecy majestically, with a description of the wrath and fury of God: ver. 2, 'God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth; the Lord revengeth, and is furious; the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and reserveth wrath for his enemies.' And therefore the whole of it is called, ver. 1, 'The burden of Nineveh,' as those prophecies are which are composed of threatenings of judgments, which lie as a mighty weight upon the heads and backs of sinners.

*God is jealous.* Jealous of his glory and worship, and jealous for his people and their security. He cannot long bear the oppressions of his people, and the boast of his enemies. He is jealous for himself, and is jealous for you of Judah who retain his worship. He is not forgetful of those that remember him, nor of the danger of those that are desirous to maintain his honour in the world. In this first expression, the prophet uses the covenant name, *God*; the covenant runs, 'I am your God,' or 'the Lord your God;' mostly *God* without *Lord*, never *Lord* without *God*. And therefore his jealousy here is meant of the care of his people, and the relation that his actions against his enemies have to his servants. He is a lover of his own, and a revenger on his enemies.

*The Lord revengeth, and is furious.* He now describes God by a name of sovereignty and power, when he describes him in his wrath and fury, 'and is furious.' *Heb.*, בעל חמה, Lord of hot anger. God will vindicate his own glory, and have his right on his enemies in a way of punishment, if they will not give it him in a way of obedience. It is three times repeated, to shew the certainty of the judgment, and the name of *Lord* added to every one, to intimate the power wherewith the judgment should be executed.\* It is not a fatherly correction of children in a way of mercy, but an offended sovereign's destruction of his enemies in a way of vengeance. There is an anger of God with his own people, which hath more of mercy than wrath; in this his rod is guided by his bowels. There is a fury of God against his enemies where there is sole wrath without any tincture of mercy, when his sword is all edge, without any balsam-drops upon it; such a fury as David deprecates: Ps. vi. 1, 'O Lord, rebuke me not in thy anger, nor chasten me in thy sore displeasure;' with a fury untempered with grace, and insupportable wrath.

*He reserves wrath for his enemies.* He lays it up in his treasury, to be brought out and expended in a due season. Wrath is supplied by our translators, and is not in the Hebrew. He reserves what? That which is too sharp to be expressed, too great to be conceived. A vengeance it is. And ונוטר הוא, he reserves it. He that hath an infinite wrath, he reserves it, that hath a strength and power to execute it.

Ver. 3. *The Lord is slow to anger:* *Heb.* ארך אפים, of broad nostrils. The anger of God is expressed by this word, which signifies nostrils. As Job ix. 13, 'If God will not withdraw his anger;' *Heb.*, 'his nostril.' And the anger whereby the wicked are consumed is called the breath of [his] nostrils, Job iv. 9; and when he is angry, smoke and fire are said to go out of his nostrils, 2 Sam. ii. 9; and in the 74th Psalm, ver. 1, 'Why doth thy anger smoke?' *Heb.* 'Why do thy nostrils smoke?' So the rage of a horse, when he is provoked in battle, is called 'the glory of his nostrils,' Job xxxix. 20. He breathes quick fumes, and neighs with fury.

And slowness to anger is here expressed by the phrase of long or wide nostrils. Because in a vehement anger, the blood boiling about the heart exhales men's spirits, which fume up, and break out in dilated nostrils; but where the passages are straiter, the spirits have not so quick a vent, and

\* Ribera *in loc.*

therefore raise more motions within ; or because the wider the nostrils are, the more cool air is drawn in to temper the heat of the heart where the angry spirits are gathered, and so the passion is allayed and sooner calmed. God speaks of himself in Scripture often after the rate of men. Jeremiah prays, Jer. xv. 15, that God would not 'take him away in his long-suffering;' *Heb.*, 'in the length of his nostrils;' *i. e.* be not slow and backward in thy anger against my persecutors, as to give them time and opportunity to destroy me. The nostrils, as well as other members of a human body, are ascribed to God. He is slow to anger ; he hath anger in his nature, but is not always in the execution of it.

*And great in power.* This may refer to his patience as the cause of it, or as a bar to the abuse of it.

1. *He is slow to anger, and great in power ; i. e.* his power moderates his anger ; he is not so impotent as to be at the command of his passions, as men are. He can restrain his anger under just provocations to exercise it. His power over himself is the cause of his slowness to wrath. As, Num. xiv. 17, 'Let the power of my Lord be great,' saith Moses, when he pleads for the Israelites' pardon. Men that are great in the world are quick in passions, and are not so ready to forgive an injury, or bear with an offender, as one of a meaner rank. It is a want of a power over a man's self that makes him do unbecoming things upon a provocation. A prince that can bridle his passions is a king over himself as well as over his subjects. God is slow to anger, *because* great in power. He hath no less power over himself than over his creatures. He can sustain great injuries without an immediate and quick revenge. He hath a power of patience, as well as a power of justice.

2. Or thus, he is slow to anger, and great in power. He is slow to anger, but not for want of power to revenge himself ; his power is as great to punish, as his patience to spare. It seems thus, that slowness to anger is brought in as an objection against the revenge proclaimed. What do you tell us of vengeance, vengeance, nothing but such repetitions of vengeance, as though we were ignorant that God is slow to anger ? It is true, saith the prophet, I acknowledge it as much as you, that God is slow to anger, but withal great in power. His anger certainly succeeds his abused patience ; he will not always bridle in his wrath, but one time or other let it march out in fury against his adversaries. The Assyrians who had captived the ten tribes, and been victorious a little against the Jews, might think that the God of Israel had been conquered by their gods, as well as the people professing him had been subdued by their arms ; that God had lost all his power, and the Jews might argue from God's patience to his enemies, against the credit of the prophet's denouncing revenge. The prophet answers to the terror of the one, and the comfort of the other, that this indulgence to his enemies, and not accounting with them for their crimes, proceeded from the greatness of his patience, and not from any debility in his power. As it refers to the Assyrian, it may be rendered thus : You Ninevites, upon your repentance after Jonah's thunderings of judgments, are witnesses of the slowness of God to anger, and had your punishments deferred ; but falling to your old sins, you shall find a real punishment, and that he hath as much power to execute his ancient threatenings, as he had then compassion to recall them. His patience to you, then, was not for want of power to ruin you, but was the effect of his goodness toward you. As it refers to the Jews, it may be thus paraphrased : Do not despise this threatening against your enemies, because of the greatness of their might, the seeming stability of their empire, and the terror they possess all the nations with round about

them. It may be long before it comes ; but assure yourselves, the threatening I denounce shall certainly be executed, though he hath patience to endure them a hundred thirty-five years (for so long it was before Nineveh was destroyed after this threatening, as Ribera\* *in loc.* computes from the years of the reigns of the kings of Judah), yet he hath also power to verify his word, and accomplish his will ; assure yourselves, he will not at all acquit the wicked.

*He will not acquit the wicked.* He will not always account the criminal an innocent, as he seems to do by a present sparing of them, and dealing with them as if they were destitute of any provoking carriage towards him, and he void of any resentment of it. He will not acquit the wicked. How is this ; who then can be saved ? Is there no place for remission ? He will not acquit the wicked, *i. e.* he will not acquit obstinate sinners. As he hath patience for the wicked, so he hath mercy for the penitent. The wicked are the subjects of his long-suffering, but not of his acquitting, grace. He doth not presently punish their sins, because he is slow to anger ; but without their repentance he will not blot out their sins, because he is righteous in judgment. If God should acquit them without repentance for their crimes, he must himself repent of his own law, and righteous sanction of it.

He will not acquit, *i. e.* he will not go back from the thing he hath spoken, and forbear, at long run, the punishment he hath threatened.

*The Lord hath his way in the whirlwind.* The way of God signifies sometimes the law of God, sometimes the providential operations of God : Ezek. xviii. 25, 'Is not my way equal ?' It seems there to take in both.

*And in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.* The prophet describes here the fight of God with the Assyrians, as if he rushed upon them with a mighty noise of an army, raising the dust with the feet of their horses, and motion of their chariots.† Symbolically, it signifies the multitude of the Chaldean and Median forces, invading, besieging, and storming the city.

It signifies,

1. The rule of providence. The way of God is in every motion of the creature. He rules all things, whirlwind, storms, clouds ; his way is in all their walks, in the whirlings and blusterings of the one, in the raising and dissolving the other. He blows up the winds, and compacts the clouds, to make them serviceable to his design.

2. The management of wars by God. His way is in the storm. As he was the captain of the Assyrians against Samaria, so he will be the captain of the Medes against Nineveh. As Israel was not so much wasted by the Assyrians, as by the Lord, who levied and armed their forces, so Nineveh shall be subverted rather by God than by the arms of the Medes. Their force is described not to be so much from human power as divine ; God is president in all the commotions of the world ; his way is in every whirlwind.

3. The easiness of executing the judgment. He is of so great power that he can excite tempests in the air, and overthrow them with the clouds, which are the dust of his feet. He can blind his enemies, and avenge himself on them ; he is Lord of clouds, and can fill their womb with hail, lightnings and thunders, to burst out upon those he kindles his anger against. He is of so great force, that he needs not use the strength of his arm, but the dust of his feet, to effect his destroying purpose.

4. The suddenness of the judgment. Whirlwinds come suddenly, without any harbingers to give notice of their approach ; clouds are swift in their motion : Isa. lx. 8, 'Who are those that fly as a cloud,' *i. e.* with a mighty

\* Page 359, col. 1.

† Tirinus *in loc.*

nimbleness? What God doth, he shall do on the sudden, come upon them before they are aware, be too quick for them in his motion to overrun and overreach them. The winds are described with wings, in regard of the quickness of their motion.

5. The terror of judgments. The Lord hath his way in the whirlwind, *i. e.* in great displeasure. The anger of the Lord is often compared to a storm: he shall bring clouds of judgments upon them, many and thick, as terrible as when a day is turned into night, by the mustering of the darkest clouds that interpose between the sun and the earth. 'Clouds and darkness are round about him; and a fire goes before him, when he burns up his enemies,' Ps. xcvii. 2, 3. The judgments shall have terror without mercy, as clouds obscure the light, and are dark masks before the face and glory of the sun, and cut off its refreshing beams from the earth. Clouds note multitude and obscurity; God could crush them without a whirlwind, beat them to powder with one touch; but he will bring his judgments in the most surprising and amazing manner to flesh and blood, so that all their glory shall be changed into nothing but terror, by the noise of the bellowing winds, and the clouds like ink blacking the heavens.

6. The confusion of the offenders upon God's proceeding. A whirlwind is not only a boisterous wind, that hurls and rolls everything out of his place, but by its circular motion, by its winding to all points of the compass, it confounds things, and jumbles them together. It keeps not one point, but by a circumgyration toucheth upon all. Clouds like dust shall be blown in their face, and gum up their eyes. They shall be in a posture of confusion, not know what counsels to take, what motions to resolve upon. Let them look to every point of heaven and earth, they shall meet with a whirlwind to confound them, and cloudy dust to blind them.

7. The irresistibleness of their judgment. Winds have more than a giant-like force, a torrent of compacted air, that with an invincible wilfulness bears all before it, displaceth the firmest trees, and levels the tallest towers, and pulls up bodies from their natural place. Clouds also are over our heads, and above our reach. When God places them upon his people for defence, they are an invincible security, Isa. iv. 5; and when he moves them as a chariot against a people, they end in an irresistible destruction. Thus the ruin of the wicked is described: Prov. x. 25, 'As the whirlwind passes, so is the wicked no more.' It blows them down, sweeps them away, they irrecoverably fall before the force of it. 'What heart can endure, and what hands can be strong, in the days wherein God doth deal with them?' Ezek. xxii. 14. Thus is the judgment against Nineveh described: God hath his way in the whirlwind to thunder down their strongest walls, which were so thick, that chariots could march abreast upon them, and batter down their mighty towers, which that city had in multitudes upon their walls.

They are the first words I intend to insist upon, to treat of the patience of God, described in those words, 'The Lord is slow to anger.'

*Doct.* Slowness to anger, or admirable patience, is the property of the divine nature. As patience signifies suffering, so it is not in God. The divine nature is impassible, incapable of any impair; it cannot be touched by the violences of men, nor the essential glory of it be diminished by the injuries of men; but as it signifies a willingness to defer, and an unwillingness to pour forth his wrath upon sinful creatures, he moderates his provoked justice, and forbears to revenge the injuries he daily meets with in the world. He suffers no grief by men's wronging him, but he restrains his arm from punishing them according to their merits. And thus there is patience in every cross a man meets with in the world, because, though it be a punish-

ment, it is less than is merited by the unrighteous rebel, and less than may be inflicted by a righteous and powerful God.

This patience is seen in his providential works in the world: 'He suffered the nations to walk in their own way;' and the witness of his providence to them was his 'giving them rain, and fruitful seasons, filling their heart with food and gladness,' Acts xvi. 17. The heathens took notice of it, and signified it by feigning their god Saturn to be bound a whole year in a soft cord, a cord of wool; and expressed it by this proverb, 'The mills of the gods grind slowly;' *i. e.* God doth not use men with that severity that they deserve, the mills being usually turned by criminals condemned to that work. This in Scripture is frequently expressed by a slowness to anger, Ps. ciii. 8; sometimes by long-suffering, which is a patience with duration, Ps. cxlv. 8; and, Joel ii. 13, he is slow to anger, he takes not the first occasions of a provocation; he is long-suffering, Rom. ix 22; and, Ps. lxxxvi. 15, he forbears punishment upon many occasions offered him.\* It is long before he consents to give fire to his wrath, and shoot out his thunderbolts. Sin hath a loud cry, but God seems to stop his ears, not to hear the clamour it raises and the charge it presents. He keeps his sword a long time in the sheath. One calls the patience of God the sheath of his sword,† upon those words, Ezek. xxi. 3, 'I will draw forth my sword out of his sheath.' This is one remarkable letter in the name of God, he himself proclaims it: Exod. xxxiv. 6, 'The Lord, the Lord God, merciful, gracious, and long-suffering.' And Moses pleads it in the behalf of the people, Num. xiv. 18, where he placeth it in the first rank: 'The Lord is long-suffering, and of great mercy.' It is the first spark of mercy, and ushers it to its exercises in the world. In the Lord's proclamation it is put in the middle, linking mercy and truth together. Mercy could have no room to act if patience did not prepare the way, and his truth and goodness in his promise of the Redeemer would not have been manifest to the world if he had shot his arrows as soon as men committed their sins and deserved his punishment. This perfection is expressed by other phrases, as keeping silence: Ps. l. 21, 'These things hast thou done, and I kept silence;' אלה עשית יחור שתי, it signifies to behave one's self as a deaf or dumb man. I did not fly in thy face, as some do with a great noise upon a light provocation, as if their life, honour, estates were at the stake. I did not presently call thee to the bar, and pronounce judicial sentence upon thee according to the law, but demeaned myself as if I had been ignorant of thy crimes, and had not been invested with the power of judging thee for them: *Chald.* 'I waited for thy conversion.' God's patience is the silence of his justice, and the first whisper of his mercy.

It is also expressed by 'not laying folly' to men, Job xxiv. 12. Men groan under the oppressions of others, 'yet God lays not folly to them,' *i. e.* to the oppressors; God suffers them to go on with impunity. He doth not deliver his people, because he would try them; and takes not revenge upon the unrighteous, because in patience he doth bear with them. Patience is the life of his providence in this world. He chargeth not men with their crimes here, but reserves them upon impenitency for another trial. This attribute is so great a one, that it is signally called by the name of perfection, Mat. v. 45, 48. He had been speaking of divine goodness and patience to evil men, and he concludes, 'Be you perfect,' &c.; implying it to be an amazing perfection in the divine nature, and worthy of imitation.

In the prosecution of this,

\* Rhodigi. l. vi. c. 14.

† Διήλυν δε ὅτι ἐγγχειρίδιον την τιμωρίαν καλεῖ, καλεῖν δὲ, τουτέστι τὴν θάλασσαν τοῦ ἐγγχειρίδιου, μακροθυμίαν ὀνομάζει.—Theodoret in loc.

- I. Let us consider the nature of this patience.
- II. Wherein it is manifested.
- III. Why God doth exercise so much patience.
- IV. The use.

#### I. The nature of this patience.

1. It is part of the divine goodness and mercy, yet differs from both. God being the greatest goodness, hath the greatest mildness; mildness is always the companion of true goodness, and the greater the goodness, the greater the mildness. Who so holy as Christ, and who so meek? God's slowness to anger is a branch or slip from his mercy: Ps. cxlv. 8, 'The Lord is full of compassion, slow to anger.' It differs from mercy in the formal consideration of the object; mercy respects the creature as miserable, patience respects the creature as criminal; mercy pities him in his misery, and patience bears with the sin which engendered that misery, and is giving birth to more.

Again, mercy is one end of patience, his long-suffering is partly to glorify his grace; so it was in Paul, 1 Tim. i. 16. As slowness to anger springs from goodness, so it makes mercy the butt and mark of its operations: Isa. xxx. 18, 'He waits that he may be gracious.' Goodness sets God upon the exercise of patience, and patience sets many a sinner on running into the arms of mercy. That mercy which makes God ready to embrace returning sinners, makes him willing to bear with them in their sins, and wait their return.

It differs also from goodness in regard of the object. The object of goodness is every creature, angels, men, all inferior creatures, to the lowest worm that crawls upon the ground. The object of patience is primarily man, and secondarily those creatures that respect men's support, conveniency, and delight; but they are not the objects of patience as considered in themselves, but in relation to man, for whose use they were created, and therefore God's patience to them is properly his patience with man. The lower creatures do not injure God, and therefore are not the objects of his patience but as they are forfeited by man, and man deserves to be deprived of them. As man in this regard falls under the patience of God, so do those creatures which are designed for man's good. That patience which spares man, spares other creatures for him, which were all forfeited by man's sin, as well as his own life, and are rather the testimonies of God's patience than the proper objects of it. The object of God's goodness, then, is the whole creation; not a devil in hell but, as a creature, is a mark of his goodness, but not of his patience. There is a kind of sparing exercised to the devils, in deferring their complete punishment, and hitherto keeping off the day wherein their final sentence is to be pronounced; yet the Scripture never mentions this by the name of slowness to anger or long-suffering. It can no more be called patience, than a prince's keeping a malefactor in chains, and not pronouncing a condemning sentence, or not executing a sentence already pronounced, can be called a patience with him, when it is not out of kindness to the offender, but for some reasons of state. God's sparing the devils from their total punishment (which they have not yet, but are 'reserved in chains under darkness' for it, Jude 6), is not in order to repentance, or attended with any invitations from God, or hopes in them, and therefore cannot come under the same title as God's sparing man. Where there is no proposal of mercy, there is no exercise of patience. The fallen angels had no mercy reserved for them, nor any sacrifice prepared for them: God 'spared not the angels,' 2 Peter ii. 4, 'but delivered them into chains of

darkness, to be reserved unto judgment ;' *i.e.* he had no patience for them, for patience is properly a temporary sparing a person, with a waiting for his relenting, and a change of his injurious demeanour. The object of goodness is more extensive than that of patience. Nor do they both consider the object under the same relation. Goodness respects things in a capacity or in a state of creation, and brings them forth into creation, and nurseth and supports them as creatures. Patience considers them already created, and fallen short of the duty of creatures ; it considers them as sinners, or in relation to sinners. Had not sin entered, patience had never been exercised ; but goodness had been exercised had the creature stood firm in its created state, without any transgression. Nay, creation could not have been without goodness, because it was goodness to create ; but patience had never been known without an object, which could not have been without an injury. Where there is no wrong, no suffering, nor like to be any, patience hath no prospect of any operation. So then goodness respects persons as creatures, patience as transgressors ; mercy eyes men as miserable and obnoxious to punishment, patience considers men as sinful and provoking to punishment.

2. Since it is a part of goodness and mercy, it is not an insensible patience. What is the fruit of pure goodness, cannot be from a weakness of resentment ; he is 'slow to anger.' The prophet doth not say he is incapable of anger, or cannot discern what is a real object of anger ; it implies that he doth consider every provocation, but he is not hasty to discharge his arrows upon the offenders ; he sees all, while he bears with them ; his omniscience excludes any ignorance. He cannot but see every wrong, every aggravation in that wrong, every step and motion from the beginning to the completing it ; for he knows all our thoughts ; he sees the sin and the sinner at the same time ; the sin with an eye of abhorrency, and the sinner with an eye of pity. His eye is upon their iniquities, and his hatred edged against them, while he stands with arms open, waiting a penitent return. When he publisheth his patience in his keeping silence, he publisheth also his resolution to set sin in order before their eyes : Ps. l. 21, 'I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thy eyes.' Think me not such a piece of phlegm, and so dull, as not to resent your insolencies ; you shall see in my final charge, when I come to judge, that not a wry look escaped my knowledge, that I had an eye to behold, and a heart to loathe, every one of your transgressions. The church was ready to think that God's slowness to deliver her, and his bearing with her oppressors, was not from any patience in his nature, but a drowsy carelessness, a senseless lethargy : Ps. xlv. 23, 'Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord ?' We must conclude him an inapprehensive God, before we can conclude him an insensible God. As his delaying his promise is 'not slackness' to his people, 2 Peter iii. 9, so his deferring of punishment is not from a stupidity under the affronts offered him.

3. Since it is a part of his mercy and goodness, it is not a constrained or faint-hearted patience. It is not a slowness to anger, arising from a despondency of his own power to revenge. He hath as much power to punish as he hath to forbear punishment. He that created a world in six days, and that by a word, wants not a strength to crush all mankind in one minute, and with as much ease as a word imports, can give satisfaction to his justice in the blood of the offender. Patience in man is many times interpreted, and truly too, a cowardice, a feebleness of spirit, and a want of strength. But it is not from the shortness of the divine arm that he cannot reach us, nor from the feebleness of his hand that he cannot strike us. It is not because he cannot level us with the dust, dash us in pieces like a potter's



vessel, or consume as a moth. He can make the mightiest to fall before him, and lay the strongest at his feet the first moment of their crime. He that did not want a powerful word to create a world, cannot want a powerful word to dissolve the whole frame of it, and raze it out of being. It is not therefore out of a distrust of his own power that he hath supported a sinful world for so many ages, and patiently borne the blasphemies of some, the neglects of others, and the ingratitude of all, without inflicting that severe justice which righteously he might have done; he wants no thunder to crush the whole generation of men, nor waters to drown them, nor earth to swallow them up. How easy is it for him to single out this or that particular person to be the object of his wrath, and not of his patience! What he hath done to one he may to another; any signal judgment he hath sent upon one is an evidence that he wants not power to inflict it upon all. Could he not make the motes in the air to choke us at every breath, rain thunderbolts instead of drops of water, fill the clouds with a consuming lightning, take off the reverence and fear of man, which he hath imprinted upon the creature, spirit our domestic beasts to be our executioners, unloose the tiles from the house-top to brain us, or make the fall of a house to crush us? It is but taking out the pins, and giving a blast, and the work is done. And doth he want a power to do any of those things? It is not, then, a faint-hearted or feeble patience that he exerciseth towards man.

4. Since it is not for want of power over the creature, it is from a fulness of power over himself. This is in the text: 'The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power;' it is a part of his dominion over himself, whereby he can moderate and rule his own affections, according to the holiness of his own will. As it is the effect of his power, so it is an argument of his power; the greatness of the effect demonstrates the fulness and sufficiency of the cause. The more feeble any man is in reason, the less command he hath over his passions, and he is the more heady to revenge. Revenge is a sign of a childish mind; the stronger any man is in reason, the more command he hath over himself: Prov. xvi. 32, 'He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty: and he that rules his own spirit, than he that takes a city.' He that can restrain his anger is stronger than the Cæsars and Alexanders of the world, that have filled the earth with slain carcasses, and ruined cities. By the same reason God's slowness to anger is a greater argument of his power than the creating a world, or the power of dissolving it by a word; in this he hath a dominion over creatures, in the other over himself. This is the reason he will not return to destroy: because 'I am God, and not man,' Hosea xi. 9. I am not so weak and impotent as man, that cannot restrain his anger. This is a strength possessed only by a God, wherein a creature is no more able to parallel him than in any other; so that he may be said to be the Lord of himself, as it is in the verse before the text, that he is 'the Lord of anger,' in the Hebrew, instead of 'furious,' as we translate it, so he is the Lord of patience. The end why God is patient is to shew his power: Rom. ix. 22, 'What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endureth with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?' to shew his wrath upon sinners, and his power over himself, in bearing such indignities, and forbearing punishment so long, when men were vessels of wrath fitted for destruction, of whom there was no hopes of amendment. Had he immediately broken in pieces those vessels, his power had not so eminently appeared as it hath done, in tolerating them so long, that had provoked him to take them off so often. There is indeed the power of his anger, and there is the power of his patience, and his power is more seen in his patience than in his wrath. It is no wonder that he

that is above all is able to crush all, but it is a wonder that he that is provoked by all doth not, upon the first provocation, rid his hands of all. This is the reason why he did bear such a weight of provocations from vessels of wrath, prepared for ruin, that he might *γνωρίσαι τὸ δυνατὸν αὐτοῦ*, shew what he was able to do, the lordship and royalty he had over himself. The power of God is more manifest in his patience to a multitude of sinners, than it could be in creating millions of worlds out of nothing; this was the *δυνατὸν αὐτοῦ*, a power over himself.

5. This patience being a branch of mercy, the exercise of it is founded in the death of Christ. Without the consideration of this, we can give no account why divine patience should extend itself to us, and not to the fallen angels. The threatening extends itself to us as well as to the fallen angels. The threatening must necessarily have sunk man, as well as those glorious creatures, had not Christ stepped in to our relief. Had not Christ interposed to satisfy the justice of God, man upon his sin had been actually bound over to punishment, as well as the fallen angels were upon theirs, and been fettered in chains as strong as those spirits feel.\* The reason why man was not hurled into the same deplorable condition upon his sin, as they were, is Christ's promise of taking our nature, and not theirs. Had God designed Christ's taking their nature, the same patience had been exercised towards them, and the same offers would have been made to them, as are made to us. In regard of the fruits of his patience, Christ is said to buy the wickedest apostates from him: 2 Peter ii. 1 'Denying the Lord that bought them;' such were bought by him as 'bring upon themselves just destruction, and whose damnation slumbers not,' ver. 3; he purchased the continuance of their lives, and the stay of their execution, that offers of grace might be made to them. This patience must be either upon the account of the law or the gospel, for there are no other rules whereby God governs the world; a fruit of the law it was not, that spake nothing but curses after disobedience; not a letter of mercy was writ upon that, and therefore nothing of patience.

Death and wrath was denounced, no slowness to anger intimated. It must be therefore upon the account of the gospel, and a fruit of the covenant of grace, whereof Christ was mediator. Besides, this perfection being God's 'waiting that he might be gracious,' Isa. xxx. 18, that which made way for God's grace made way for his waiting to manifest it. God discovered not his grace but in Christ, and therefore discovered not his patience but in Christ; it is in him he met with the satisfaction of his justice, that he might have a ground for the manifestation of his patience. And the sacrifices of the law, wherein the life of a beast was accepted for the sin of a man, discovered the ground of his forbearance of them to be the expectation of the great sacrifice, whereby sin was to be completely expiated, Gen. viii. 21. The publication of his patience to the end of the world is presently after the sweet savour he found in Noah's sacrifice. The promised and designed coming of Christ was the cause of that patience God exercised before in the world; and his gathering the elect together is the reason of his patience since his death.

The naturalness of his veracity and holiness, and the strictness of his justice, are no bars to the exercise of his patience.

(1.) His veracity. In those threatenings where the punishment is expressed, but not the time of inflicting it prefixed and determined in the threatening, his veracity suffers no damage by the delaying execution; so it be once done, though a long time after, the credit of his truth stands unshaken; as when God promises a thing without fixing the time, he is at

\* Testard. de Natur. et Grat. thes. 119.

liberty to pitch upon what time he pleases for the performance of it, without staining his faithfulness to his word, by not giving the thing promised presently. Why should the deferring of justice upon an offender, be any more against his veracity, than his delaying an answer to the petitions of a suppliant? But the difference will lie in the threatening: Gen. ii. 17, 'In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt die the death.' The time was there settled, In that day thou shalt die. Some refer day to eating, not to dying; and render the sentence thus, I do not prohibit thee the eating this fruit for a day or two, but continually; in whatsoever day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt die; but not understanding his dying that very day he should eat of it, referring *day* to the extensiveness of the prohibition, as to time. But to leave this as uncertain, it may be answered, that as in some threatenings a condition is implied, though not expressed, as in that positive denouncing of the destruction of Nineveh, Jonah iii. 4, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed,' the condition is implied, unless they humble themselves and repent, for upon their repentance the sentence was deferred, so here, 'In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt die the death,' or 'certainly die,' unless there be a way found for the expiation of thy crime, and the righting my honour. This condition, in regard of the event, may as well be asserted to be implied in this threatening, as that of repentance was in the other. Or rather, thou shalt die, thou shalt die spiritually, thou shalt lose that image of mine in thy nature, that righteousness which is as much the life of thy soul, as thy soul is the life of thy body; that righteousness whereby thou art enabled to live to me, and thy own happiness. What the soul is to the body, a quickening soul, that the image of God is to the soul, a quickening image. Or thou shalt die the death, or certainly die, thou shalt be liable to death. And so it is to be understood, not of an actual death of the body, but the merit of death, and the necessity of death;\* thou wilt be obnoxious to death, which will be avoided, if thou dost forbear to eat of the forbidden fruit; thou shalt be a guilty person, and so under a sentence of death, that I may when I please inflict it on thee. Death did come upon Adam that day, because his nature was vitiated. He was then also under an expectation of death, he was obnoxious to it, though that day it was not poured out upon him in the full bitterness and gall of it. As when the apostle saith, Rom. viii. 10, 'The body is dead because of sin,' he speaks to the living, and yet tells them, the body was dead because of sin, he means no more than that it was under a sentence, and so a necessity of dying, though not actually dead; so thou shalt be under the sentence of death that day, as certainly as if that day thou shouldst sink into the dust. And as by his patience towards man, not sending forth death upon him in all the bitter ingredients of it, his justice afterwards was more eminent upon man's surety than it would have been, if it had been then employed in all its severe operations upon man, so was his veracity eminent also in making good his threatening, in inflicting the punishment included in it upon our nature assumed by a mighty person, and upon that person in our nature, who was infinitely higher than our nature.

(2.) His justice and righteousness are not prejudiced by his patience. There is a hatred of the sin in his holiness, and a sentence passed against the sin in his justice, though the execution of that sentence be suspended, and the person reprieved by patience, which is implied: Ecces. viii. 11, 'Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil;' sentence is passed, but a speedy execution is stopped.

\* *Perer. in loc.*

Some of the heathens, who would not imagine God unjust, and yet seeing the villanies and oppressions of men in the world remain unpunished, and frequently beholding prosperous wickedness, to free him from the charge of injustice, denied his providence and actual government of the world; for if he did take notice of human affairs, and concern himself in what was done upon the earth, they could not think an infinite goodness and justice could be so slow to punish oppressors and relieve the miserable, and leave the world in that disorder under the injustice of men. They judged such a patience as was exercised by him, if he did govern the world, was drawn out beyond the line of fit and just. Is it not a presumption in men to prescribe a rule of righteousness and conveniency to their Creator? It might be demanded of such, whether they never injured any in their lives? and when certainly they have, one way or other, would they not think it a very unworthy, if not unjust thing, that a person so injured by them should take a speedy and severe revenge on them? And if every man should do the like, would there not be a speedy despatch made of mankind? Would not the world be a shambles, and men rush forward to one another's destruction, for the wrongs they have mutually received? If it be accounted a virtue in man, and no unrighteousness, not presently to be all on fire against an offence, by what right should any question the consistency of God's patience with his justice? Do we praise the lenity of parents to children, and shall we disparage the long-suffering of God to men? We do not censure the righteousness of physicians and chirurgeons, because they cut not off a corrupt member this day as well as to-morrow? And is it just to asperse God because he doth defer his vengeance, which man assumes to himself a right to do? We never account him a bad governor that defers the trial, and consequently the condemnation and execution of a notorious offender, for important reasons, and beneficial to the public, either to make the nature of his crime more evident, or to find out the rest of his accomplices by his discovery. A governor indeed were unjust if he commanded that which were unrighteous, and forbade that which were worthy and commendable; but if he delays the execution of a convicted offender for weighty reasons, either for the benefit of the state whereof he is the ruler, or for some advantage to the offender himself, to make him have a sense of, and a regret for, his offence, we account him not unjust for this. God doth not by his patience dispense with the holiness of his law, nor cut off anything from its due authority. If men do strengthen themselves by his long-suffering against his law, it is their fault, not any unrighteousness in him. He will take a time to vindicate the righteousness of his own commands, if men will wholly neglect the time of his patience, in forbearing to pay a dutiful observance to his precept. If justice be natural to him, and he cannot but punish sin, yet he is not necessitated to consume sinners, as the fire doth stubble put into it, which hath no command over its own qualities to restrain them from acting; but God is a free agent, and may choose his own time for the distribution of that punishment his nature leads him to. Though he be naturally just, yet it is not so natural to him as to deprive him of a dominion over his own acts, and a freedom in the exerting them what time he judgeth most convenient in his wisdom. God is necessarily holy, and is necessarily angry with sin; his nature can never like it, and cannot but be displeased with it; yet he hath a liberty to restrain the effects of this anger for a time, without disgracing his holiness, or being interpreted to act unrighteously, as well as a prince or state may suspend the execution of a law, which they will never break, only for a time and for a public benefit.

If God should presently execute his justice, this perfection of patience,

which is a part of his goodness, would never have an opportunity of discovery. Part of his glory, for which he created the world, would lie in obscurity from the knowledge of his creature. His justice would be signal in the destruction of sinners, but this stream of his goodness would be stopped up from any motion. One perfection must not cloud another, God hath his seasons to discover all, one after another; 'The times and seasons are in his own power,' Acts i. 7; the seasons of manifesting his own perfections as well as other things; succession of them in their distinct appearance makes no invasion upon the rights of any. If justice should complain of an injury from patience, because it is delayed, patience hath more reason to complain of an injury from justice, that by such a plea it would be wholly obscured and unactive. For this perfection hath the shortest time to act its part of any, it hath no stage but this world to move in; mercy hath a heaven, and justice a hell, to display itself to eternity, but long-suffering hath only a short-lived earth for the compass of its operation.

Again, justice is so far from being wronged by patience, that it rather is made more illustrious, and hath the fuller scope to exercise itself. It is the more righted for being deferred, and will have stronger grounds than before for its activity. The equity of it will be more apparent to every reason, the objections more fully answered against it, when the way of dealing with sinners by patience hath been slighted. When this dam of long-suffering is removed, the floods of fiery justice will rush down with more force and violence. Justice will be fully recompensed for the delay, when, after patience is abused, it can spread itself over the offender with a more unquestionable authority, it will have more arguments to hit the sinner in the teeth with, and silence him. There will be a sharper edge for every stroke; the sinner must not only pay for the score of his former sins, but the score of abused patience, so that justice hath no reason to commence a suit against God's slowness to anger. What it shall want by the fulness of mercy upon the truly penitent, it will gain by the contempt of patience on the impenitent abusers. When men by such a carriage are ripened for the stroke of justice, justice may strike without any regret in itself, or pull-back from mercy. The contempt of long-suffering will silence the pleas of the one, and spirit the severity of the other. To conclude; since God hath glorified his justice on Christ as a surety for sinners, his patience is so far from interfering with the rights of his justice, that it promotes it. It is dispensed to this end, that God might pardon with honour, both upon the score of purchased mercy and contented justice; that, by a penitent sinner's return, his mercy might be acknowledged free, and the satisfaction of his justice by Christ be glorified in believing; for he is long-suffering, from an 'unwillingness that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance,' 2 Pet. iii. 9; *i.e.* all to whom the promise is made, for to such the apostle speaks, and calls it 'long-suffering to us-ward.' And repentance being an acknowledgment of the demerit of sin, and a breaking off unrighteousness, gives a particular glory to the freeness of mercy and the equity of justice.

II. The second thing, how this patience or slowness to anger is manifested.

1. To our first parents. His slowness to anger was evidenced in not directing his artillery against them when they first attempted to rebel. He might have struck them dead when they began to bite at the temptation, and were inclinable to a surrender; for it was a degree of sinning, and a breach of loyalty, as well, though not so much, as the consummating act. God

might have given way to the floods of his wrath at the first spring of man's aspiring thoughts, when the monstrous motion of being as God began to be curdled in his heart; but he took no notice of any of their embryo sins, till they came to a ripeness, and started out of the womb of their minds into the open air. And after he had brought his sin to perfection, God did not presently send that death upon him which he had merited, but continued his life to the space of 930 years, Gen. v. 5. The sun and stars were not arrested from doing their office for him, creatures were continued for his use, the earth did not swallow him up, nor a thunderbolt from heaven raze out the memory of him. Though he had deserved to be treated with such a severity for his ungrateful demeanour to his Creator and benefactor, and affecting an equality with him, yet God continued him with a sufficiency for his content after he turned rebel, though not with such a liberality as when he remained a loyal subject. And though he foresaw that he would not make an end of sinning but with an end of living, he used him not in the same manner as he had used the devils. He added days and years to him after he had deserved death, and hath for this five thousand years continued the propagation of mankind, and derived from his loins an innumerable posterity, and hath crowned multitudes of them with hoary heads. He might have extinguished the human race at the first, but since he hath preserved it till this day, it must be interpreted nothing else but the effect of an admirable patience.

2. His slowness to anger is manifest to the Gentiles. What they are, we need no other witness than the apostle Paul, who sums up many of their crimes, Rom. i. 29-32. He doth preface the catalogue with a comprehensive expression, 'being filled with all unrighteousness;' and concludes it with a dreadful aggravation, 'They not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.' They were so soaked and naturalised in wickedness, that they had no delight, and found no sweetness, in anything else but what was in itself abominable. All of them were plunged in idolatry and superstition; none of them but either set up their great men or creatures beneficial to the world, and some the damned spirits in his stead, and paid an adoration to insensible creatures or devils, which was due to God. Some were so depraved in their lives and actions, that it seemed to be the interest of the rest of the world that they should have been extinguished, for the instruction of their contemporaries and posterity. The best of them had turned all religion into a fable, coined a world of rites, some unnatural in themselves, and most of them unbecoming a rational creature to offer and a Deity to accept; yet he did not presently arm himself against them with fire and sword, nor stopped the course of their generations, nor tare out all those relics of natural light which were left in their minds. He did not do what he might have done, but he 'winked at the times of that ignorance,' Acts xvii. 30, their ignorant idolatry; for that it refers to, ver. 29, 'They thought the Godhead was like to gold or silver, or stone graven by art, and men's device'; ὑπεριδών, overlooking them. He demeaned himself so as if he did not take notice of them. He winked as if he did not see them, and would not deal so severely with them. The eye of his justice seemed to wink, in not calling them to an account for their sin.

3. His slowness to anger is manifest to the Israelites. You know how often they are called 'a stiff-necked people;' they are said to do evil 'from their youth,' *i.e.* from the time wherein they were erected a nation and commonwealth; and that 'the city had been a provocation of his anger and of his fury from the day that they built it even to this day,' *i.e.* the day of Jeremiah's prophecy, 'that he should remove it from before his face,' Jer.

xxxii. 31; from the days of Solomon, say some, which is too much a curtailment of the text, as though their provocations had taken date no higher than from the time of Solomon's rearing the temple and beautifying the city, whereby it seemed to be a new building. They began more early, they scarce discontinued their revolting from God, they were a 'grief to him forty years together in the wilderness,' Ps. xcv. 10; 'yet he suffered their manners,' Acts xiii. 18. He bore with their ill behaviour and sauciness towards him; and no sooner was Joshua's head laid, and the elders that were their conductors gathered to their fathers, but the next generation forsook God, and smutted themselves with the idolatry of the nations, Judges ii. 7, 10, 11. And when he punished them, by prospering the arms of their enemies against them, they were no sooner delivered upon their cry of humiliation, but they began a new scene of idolatry. And though he brought upon them the power of the Babylonian empire, and laid chains upon them, to bring them to their original mind; and at seventy years' end he struck off their chains, by altering the whole posture of affairs in that part of the world for their sakes, overturning one empire and settling another, for their restoration to their ancient city; and though they did not after disown him for their God, and set up Baal in his throne, yet they multiplied foolish traditions, whereby they impaired the authority of the law, yet he sustained them with a wonderful patience, and preferred them before all other people in the first offers of the gospel. And after they had outraged, not only his servants the prophets, but his Son the Redeemer, yet he did not forsake them, but employed his apostles to solicit them, and publish among them the doctrine of salvation; so that his treating this people might well be called much long-suffering, it being above fifteen hundred years wherein he bore with them, or mildly punished them far less than their deserts. Their coming out of Egypt being about the year of the world 2450, and their final destruction as a commonwealth not till about forty years after the death of Christ; and all this while his patience did sometimes wholly restrain his justice, and sometimes let it fall upon them in some few drops, but made no total devastation of their country, nor wrote his revenge in extraordinary bloody characters, till the Roman conquest, wherein he put a period to them both as a church and state.

In particular this patience is manifest,

(1.) In his giving warning of judgments before he orders them to go forth. He doth not punish in a passion, and hastily. He speaks before he strikes, and speaks that he may not strike. Wrath is published before it is executed, and that a long time. An hundred and twenty years' advertisement was given to a debauched world, before the heavens were opened to spout down a deluge upon them. He will not be accused of coming unawares upon a people. He inflicts nothing but what he foretold, either immediately to the people that provoke him, or anciently to them that have been their forerunners in the same provocation: Hosea vii. 12, 'I will chastise them as their congregation hath heard.' Many of the leaves of the Old Testament are full of those presages and warnings of approaching judgment. These make up a great part of the volume of it in various editions, according to the state of the several provoking times. Warnings are given to those people that are most abominable in his sight: Zeph. ii. 1, 2, 'Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired,'—it is a *meiosis*, O nation abhorred,—'before the decree bring forth.' He sends his heralds before he sends his armies. He summons them by the voice of his prophets, before he confounds them by the voice of his thunders. When a parley is beaten, a white flag of peace is hung out, before a black flag of fury is set

up. He seldom cuts down men by his judgments before he hath 'hewed them by his prophets,' Hosea vi. 5. Not a remarkable judgment but was foretold,—the flood to the old world by Noah, the famine to Egypt by Joseph, the earthquake by Amos, chap. i. 1, the storm from Chaldaea by Jeremiah, the captivity of the ten tribes by Hosea, the total destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by Christ himself. He hath chosen the best persons in the world to give those intimations: Noah, the most righteous person on the earth, for the old world; and his Son, the most beloved person in heaven, for the Jews in the later time. And in other parts of the world, and in the later times, where he hath not warned by prophets, he hath supplied it by prodigies in the air and earth. Histories are full of such items from heaven. Lesser judgments are fore-warners of greater, as lightnings before thunder are messengers to tell us of a succeeding clap.

[1.] He doth often give warning of judgments. He comes not to extremity, till he hath often shaken the rod over men; he thunders often before he crusheth them with his thunderbolt; he doth not, till after the 'first and second admonition,' punish a rebel, as he would have us reject a heretic. 'He speaks once, yea, twice,' Job xxxiii. 14, 'and man perceives it not;' he sends one message after another, and waits the success of many messages before he strikes. Eight prophets were ordered to acquaint the old world with approaching judgment; 2 Peter ii. 5, He 'saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly,' called the eighth in respect of his preaching, not in regard of his preservation; he was the eighth preacher, in order from the beginning of the world, that endeavoured to restore the world to the way of righteousness. Most indeed consider him here as the eighth person saved; so do our translators, and therefore add *person*, which is not in the Greek. Some others consider him here as the eighth preacher of righteousness, reckoning Enoch, the son of Seth, the first, grounding it upon Gen. iv. 26, 'Then began men to call on the name of the Lord;' *Heb.* 'Then it was begun to call in the name of the Lord;' τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου θεοῦ, *Sept.*, 'He began to call in the name of the Lord,' which others render, he began to preach, or call upon men in the name of the Lord. The word קרא signifies to preach, or to call upon men by preaching: Prov. i. 21, 'Wisdom crieth' or 'preaches.' And if this be so, as it is very probable, it is easy to reckon him the eighth preacher, by numbering the successive heads of the generations, Gen. v., beginning at Enoch, the first preacher of righteousness; so many there were before God choked the old world with water and swept them away.\* It is clear he often did admonish, by his prophets, the Jews of their sin, and the wrath which should come upon them. One prophet, Hosea, prophesied seventy years; for he prophesied in the days of four kings of Judah and one of Israel; Jeroboam the son of Joash, Hosea i. 1, or Jeroboam the second of that name. Uzziah, king of Judah, in whose reign Hosea prophesied, lived thirty-eight years after the death of Jeroboam; the second Jotham, Uzziah's successor, reigned sixteen years; Ahaz, sixteen; Hezekiah, twenty-nine years. Now, take nothing of Hezekiah's time, and date the beginning of his prophecy from the last year of Jeroboam's reign, and the time of Hosea's prophecy will be seventy years complete; wherein God warned those people, and waited the return particularly of Israel.† And not less than five of those we call the lesser prophets, were sent to foretell the destruction of the ten tribes, and to call them to repentance, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Micah, Jonah. And though we have nothing of Jonah's prophecy in this concern of Israel, yet that he lived in

\* Vid. Gell's ἀγγελολογία.

† Sanctius. Prolegom. in Hosea, Proleg. the 3d.



the time of the same Jeroboam, and prophesied things which are not upon record in the book of Jonah, is clear, 2 Kings xiv. 15. And besides those, Isaiah prophesied also in the reign of the same kings as Hosea did, Isa. i. 1. And it is God's usual method to send forth his servants, and when their admonitions are slighted, he commissions others before he sends out his destroying armies, Mat. xxii. 3, 4, 7.

[2.] He doth often give warning of judgments that he might not pour out his wrath. He summons them to a surrender of themselves, and a return from their rebellion, that they might not feel the force of his arms. He offers peace before he shakes off the dust of his feet, that his despised peace might not return in vain to him to solicit a revenge from his anger. He hath a right to punish upon the first commission of a crime, but he warns men of what they have deserved, of what his justice moves him to inflict, that by having recourse to his mercy he might not exercise the rights of his justice. God sought to kill Moses for not circumcising his son, Exod. iv. 24. Could God that sought it miss of a way to do it? Could a creature lurch or fly from him? God put on the garb of an enemy, that Moses might be discouraged from being an instrument of his own ruin. God manifested an anger against Moses for his neglect, as if he would then have destroyed him, that Moses might prevent it by casting off his carelessness, and doing his duty. He sought to kill him by some evident sign that Moses might escape the judgment by his obedience. He threatens Nineveh by the prophet with destruction, that Nineveh's repentance might make void the prophecy. He fights with men by the sword of his mouth that he might not pierce them by the sword of his wrath. He threatens, that men might prevent the execution of his threatening; he terrifies, that he might not destroy, but that men by humiliation may lie prostrate before him, and move the bowels of his mercy to a louder sound than the voice of his anger; he takes time to whet his sword, that men may turn themselves from the edge of it; he roars like a lion, that men, by hearing his voice, may shelter themselves from being torn by his wrath. There is patience in the sharpest threatening, that we may avoid the scourge. Who can charge God with an eagerness to revenge, that sends so many heralds, and so often before he strikes, that he might be prevented from striking? His threatenings have not so much of a black flag as of an olive branch. He lifts up his hand before he strikes, that men might see and avert the stroke, Isa. xxvi. 11.

(2.) His patience is manifest in long delaying his threatened judgments, though he finds no repentance in the rebels. He doth sometimes delay his lighter punishments, because he doth not delight in torturing his creatures, but he doth longer delay his destroying punishments, such as put an end to men's happiness, and remit them to their final and unchangeable state, because he doth not delight in the death of a sinner. While he is preparing his arrows, he is waiting for an occasion to lay them aside, and dull their points that he may with honour march back again, and disband his armies. He brings lighter smarts sooner, that men might not think him asleep, but he suspends the more terrible judgments, that men might be led to repentance. He scatters not his consuming fires at the first, but brings on ruining vengeance with a slow pace: 'Sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed,' Eccles. viii. 11. The Jews therefore say, that Michael, the minister of justice, flies with one wing, but Gabriel, the minister of mercy, with two. A hundred and twenty years did God wait upon the old world, and delay their punishment all the time 'the ark was preparing,' 1 Peter iii. 20; wherein that wicked generation did not enjoy only a bare patience, but a striving patience: Gen. vi. 3, 'My Spirit shall not always strive with man,

yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years,' the days wherein I will strive with him, that his long-suffering might not lose all its fruit, and remit the objects of it into the hands of consuming justice. It was the tenth generation of the world from Adam when the deluge overflowed it, so long did God bear with them; and the tenth generation from Noah, wherein Sodom was consumed. God did not come to keep his assizes in Sodom, till 'the cry of their sins was very strong,' that it had been a wrong to his justice to have restrained it any longer. The cry was so loud that he could not be at quiet, as it were, on his throne of glory for the disturbing noise, Gen. xviii. 20, 21. Sin transgresseth the law; the law being violated, solicits justice; justice being urged, pleads for punishment; the cry of their sins did as it were force him from heaven to come down, and examine what cause there was for that clamour. Sin cries loud and long before he takes his sword in hand. Four hundred years he kept off deserved destruction from the Amorites, and deferred making good his promise to Abraham, of giving Canaan to his posterity, out of his long-suffering to the Amorites: Gen. xv. 16, 'In the fourth generation they shall come hither again, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.' Their measure was filling then, but not so full as to put a stop to any further patience till four hundred years after. The usual time in succeeding generations from the denouncing of judgments to the execution is forty years; this some ground upon Ezek. iv. 6, 'Thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days,' taking each day for a year. Though Hosea lived seventy years, yet from the beginning of his prophesying judgments against Israel, to the pouring them out upon that idolatrous people, it was forty years. Hosea, as was mentioned before, prophesied against them in the days of Jeroboam the Second, in whose time God did wonderfully deliver Israel, 2 Kings xiv. 26, 27. From that time to the total destruction of the ten tribes it was forty years, as may easily be computed from the story, 2 Kings xv., xvi., xvii., by the reign of the succeeding kings. So forty years after the most horrid villany that was ever committed in the face of the sun, viz., the crucifying the Son of God, was Jerusalem destroyed, and the inhabitants captived; so long did God delay a visible punishment for such an outrage. Sometimes he prolongs sending a threatened judgment upon a mere shadow of humiliation, so he did that denounced against Ahab. He turned it over to his posterity, and adjourned it to another season, 1 Kings xxi. 29. He doth not issue out an arrest upon one transgression; you often find him not commencing a suit against men till three and four transgressions. The first of Amos, all along that chapter, and the second chapter, for 'three and four,' *i. e.* seven, a certain number for an uncertain. He gives not orders to his judgments to march till men be obstinate, and refuse any commerce with him. He stops them till there be no remedy, 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16. It must be a great wickedness that gives vent to them: Hosea x. 15, *Heb.*, 'your wickedness of wickedness.' He is so slow to anger, and stays the punishment his enemies deserve, that he may seem to have forgot his kindness to his friends: Ps. xliv. 24, 'Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and forgettest our affliction and oppression?' He lets his people groan under the yoke of their enemies, as if he were made up of kindness to his enemies, and anger against his friends. This delaying of punishment to evil men is visible in his suspending the terrifying acts of conscience, and supporting it only in its checking, admonishing, and controlling acts. The patience of a governor is seen in the patient mildness of his deputy. David's conscience did not terrify him till nine months after his sin of murder. Should God set open the mouth of this power within us, not only the earth, but our own bodies

and spirits would be a burden to us. It is long before God puts scorpions into the hands of men's consciences to scourge them. He holds back the rod, waiting for the hour of our return, as if that would be a recompence for our offences, and his forbearance.

(3.) His patience is manifest in his unwillingness to execute his judgments when he can delay no longer. 'He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men,' Lam. iii. 33; *Heb.*, 'He doth not afflict from his heart.' He takes no pleasure in it as he is creator. The height of men's provocations, and the necessity of the preserving his rights, and vindicating his laws, obligeth him to it as he is the governor of the world; as a judge may willingly condemn a malefactor to death out of affection to the laws, and desire to preserve the order of government; but unwillingly, out of compassion to the offender himself. When he resolved upon the destruction of the old world, he spake it as a God grieved with an occasion of punishment, Gen. vi. 6, 7, compared together. When he came to reckon with Adam, he 'walked,' he did not run with his sword in his hand upon him, as a mighty man with an eagerness to destroy him, Gen. iii. 8, and that 'in the cool of the day,' a time when men tired in the day are unwilling to engage in a hard employment. His exercising judgment is a 'coming out of his place,' Isa. xxvi. 1, Micah i. 3. He comes out of his station to exercise judgment; a throne is more his place than a tribunal. Every prophecy loaded with threatenings is called the 'burden of the Lord,' a burden to him to execute it as well as to men to suffer it. Though three angels came to Abraham about the punishment of Sodom, whereof one Abraham speaks to as to God, yet but two appeared at the destruction of Sodom, as if the governor of the world were unwilling to be present at such dreadful work, Gen. xix. 1. And when the man that had the inkhorn by his side, that was appointed to mark those that were to be preserved in the common destruction, returned to give an account of the performing his commission, Ezek. ix. 10, we read not of the return of those that were to kill, as if God delighted only to hear again of his works of mercy, and had no mind to hear again of his severe proceedings. The Jews, to shew God's unwillingness to punish, imagine that hell was created the second day, because that day's work is not pronounced good by God, as all the other day's works are, Gen. i. 8.\*

[1.] When God doth punish, he doth it with some regret. When he hurls down his thunders, he seems to do it with a backward hand, because with an unwilling heart.† He created, saith Chrysostom, the world in six days, but was seven days in destroying one city, Jericho, which he had before devoted to be razed to the ground. What is the reason, saith he, that God is so quick to build up, but slow to pull down? His goodness excites his power to the one, but is not earnest to persuade him to the other. When he comes to strike, he doth it with a sigh or groan: Isa. i. 24, 'Ah, I will ease me of my adversaries, and avenge me of my enemies;' אַי, *ah*, a note of grief. So Hosea vi. 4, 'O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee?' It is an *addubitatio*, a figure in rhetoric, as if God were troubled, that he must deal so sharply with them, and give them up to their enemies. I have tried all means to reclaim you, I have used all ways of kindness, and nothing prevails. What shall I do? My mercy invites me to spare them, and their ingratitude provokes me to ruin them. God had borne with that people of Israel almost three hundred years, from the setting up of the calves at Dan and Bethel, sent many a prophet to warn them, and spent many a rod to reform them.

\* Mercer in Gen. i. 5.

† Cressol. Decad. ii. p. 163.

And when he comes to execute his threatenings, he doth it with a conflict in himself. Hosea xi. 8, 'How shall I give thee up, O Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel?' As if there were a pull-back in his own bowels, he solemniseth their approaching funeral with a hearty groan, and takes his farewell of the dying malefactor with a pang in himself. How often in former times, when he had signed a warrant for their execution, did he call it back? Ps. lxxviii. 38, 'Many a time turned he his anger away.' Many a time he recalled, or 'ordered his anger to return again,' as the word signifies, as if he were irresolute what to do. He recalled it, as a man doth his servant several times, when he is sending him upon an unwelcome message; or as a tender-hearted prince wavers, and trembles, when he is to sign a writ for the death of a rebel that hath been before his favourite, as if, when he had signed the writ, he blotted out his name again, and flung away the pen. And his method is remarkable when he came to punish Sodom: though the cry of their sin had been fierce in his ears, yet when he comes to make inquisition he declares his intention to Abraham, as if he were desirous that Abraham should have helped him to some arguments to stop the outgoings of his judgment. He gave liberty to the best person in the world to stand in the gap, and enter into a treaty with him, to shew (saith one\*) how willingly his mercy would have compounded with his justice for their redemption. And Abraham interceded so long till he was ashamed for pleading the cause of patience and mercy, to the wrong of the rights of divine justice. Perhaps, had Abraham had the courage to ask, God would have had the compassion to grant a reprieve just at the time of execution.

[2.] His patience is manifest, in that when he begins to send out his judgments, he doth it by degrees. His judgments are as the morning light, which goes forth by degrees in the hemisphere, Hos. vi. 5. He doth not shoot all his thunders at once, and bring his sharpest judgments in array at one time, but gradually, that a people may have time to turn to him, Joel i. 4: first the palmer-worm, then the locust, then the canker-worm, then the caterpillar; what one left, the other was to eat, if there was not a timely return. A Jewish writer † saith, these judgments came not all in one year, but one year after another. The palmer-worm and locust might have eaten all, but divine patience set bounds to the devouring creatures. God had been first 'as a moth to Israel;' Hos. v. 12, 'Therefore will I be to the house of Ephraim as a moth.' Rivet translates it *I have been*; in the Hebrew it is *I*, without adding, *I have been* or *I will be*, and more probably *I have been*. I was as a moth, which makes little holes in a garment, and consumes it not all at once, and as 'rotteness to the house of Judah,' or a worm that eats into wood by degrees. Indeed, this people had consumed insensibly, partly by civil combustions, change of governors, foreign invasions, yet they were as obstinate in their idolatry as ever; at last, God would be no longer to them as a moth, but as a lion, tear and go away, ver. 14. So, Hos. ii., God had disowned Israel for his spouse,—ver. 2, 'She is not my wife, neither am I her husband,'—yet he had not taken away her ornaments, which, by the right of divorce, he might have done, but still expected her reformation, for that the threatening intimates: ver. 3, let her put away her whoredom, 'lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day when she was born.' If she returned, she might recover what she had lost; if not, she might be stripped of what remained. Thus God dealt with Judah, Ezekiel ix. 3. The glory of God goes first from the cherub to the threshold of the house, and stays there, as if he had a mind to be invited back again; then

\* Pierce, Sinner Impleaded, p. 227.

† Kimchi.

it goes from the threshold of the house, and stands over the cherubims, as if upon a penitent call it would drop down again to its ancient station and seat, over which it hovered, Ezek. x. 18 ; and when he was not solicited to return, he departs out of the city, and stood upon the mountain, which is on the east part of the city, Ezek. xi. 23, looking still towards, and hovering about the temple, which was on the east of Jerusalem, as if loath to depart and abandon the place and people. He walks so leisurely with his rod in his hand, as if he had a mind rather to fling it away, than use it. His patience in not pouring out all his vials, is more remarkable than his wrath in pouring out one or two. Thus hath God made his slowness to anger visible to us in the gradual punishment of us ; first, the pestilence on this city, then firing our houses, consumption of trade, these have not been answered with such a carriage as God expects, therefore a greater is reserved. I dare prognosticate, upon reasons you may gather from what hath been spoke before, if I be not much mistaken, the forty years of his usual patience are very near expired, he hath inflicted some that he might be met with in a way of repentance, and omit with honour the inflicting the remainder.

[4.] His patience is manifest in moderating his judgments, when he sends them. Doth he empty his quiver of his arrows, or exhaust his magazines of thunder ? No ; he could roll one thunderbolt successively upon all mankind ; it is as easy with him to create a perpetual motion of lightning and thunder, as of the sun and stars, and make the world as terrible by the one as it is delightful by the other. He opens not all his store ; he sends out a light party to skirmish with men, and puts not in array his whole army. ' He stirs not up all his wrath,' Ps. lxxviii. 38 ; he doth but pinch, where he might have torn asunder ; when he takes away much, he leaves enough to support us. If he had stirred up all his anger, he had taken away all, and our lives to boot. He rakes up but a few sparks, takes but one firebrand to fling upon men, when he might discharge the whole furnace upon them ; he sends but a few drops out of the cloud, which he might make to break in the gross, and fall down upon our heads to overwhelm us ; he abates much of what he might do. When he might sweep away a whole nation by deluges of water, corruption of the air, or convulsions of the earth, or by other ways that are not wanting at his order, he picks out only some persons, some families, some cities, sends a plague into one house and not into another. Here is patience to the stock of a nation, while he inflicts punishment upon some of the most notorious sinners in it. Herod is suddenly snatched away, being willingly flattered into the thoughts of his being a god ; God singled out the chief in the herd, for whose sake he had been affronted by the rabble, Acts xii. 22, 23. Some find him sparing them, while others feel him destroying them ; he arrests some, when he might seize all, all being his debtors ; and often in great desolations brought upon a people for their sin, he hath left a stump in the earth, as Daniel speaks, Dan. iv. 15, for a nation to grow upon it again, and arise to a stronger constitution. He doth punish ' less than our iniquities deserve,' Ezra ix. 13, and ' rewards us not according to our iniquities,' Ps. ciii. 10. The greatness of any punishment in this life, answers not the greatness of the crime. Though there be an equity in whatsoever he doth, yet there is not an equality to what we deserve. Our iniquities would justify a severer treating of us ; his justice goes not here to the end of its line, it is stopped in its progress, and the blows of it weakened by his patience. He did not curse the earth after Adam's fall, that it should bring forth no fruit, but that it should not bring forth fruit without the wearisome toil of man ; and subjected him to distempers presently, but inflicted not death immediately ; while he punished him, he supported him ; and

while he expelled him from paradise, he did not order him not to cast his eye towards it, and conceive some hopes of regaining that happy place.

[5.] His patience is seen in giving great mercies after provocations. He is so slow to anger, that he heaps many kindnesses upon a rebel, instead of punishment. There is a prosperous wickedness, wherein the provokers' strength continues firm; the troubles, which like clouds drop upon others, are blown away from them, and they are 'not plagued like other men,' that have a more worthy demeanour towards God, Ps. lxxiii. 3-5. He doth not only continue their lives, but sends out fresh beams of his goodness upon them, and calls them by his blessings, that they may acknowledge their own fault and his bounty, which he is not obliged to by any gratitude he meets with from them, but by the richness of his own patient nature; for he finds the unthankfulness of men as great as his benefits to them. He doth not only continue his outward mercies, while we continue our sins, but sometimes gives fresh benefits after new provocations, that if possible he might excite an ingenuity in men. When Israel at the Red Sea flung dirt in the face of God, by quarrelling with his servant Moses for bringing them out of Egypt, and misjudging God in his design of deliverance, and were ready to submit themselves to their former oppressors, Exod. xiv. 11, 12, which might justly have urged God to say to them, Take your own course, yet he is not only patient under their unjust charge, but makes bare his arm in a deliverance at the Red Sea, that was to be an amazing monument to the world in all ages; and afterwards, when they repiningly quarrelled with him in their wants in the wilderness, he did not only not revenge himself upon them, or cast off the conduct of them, but bore with them by a miraculous long-suffering, and supplied them with miraculous provision, manna from heaven, and water from a rock. Food is given to support us, and clothes to cover us, and divine patience makes the creatures, which we turn to another use than what they were at first intended for, serve us contrary to their own genius; for had they reason, no question but they would complain, to be subjected to the service of man, who hath been so ungrateful to their Creator, and groan at the abuse of God's patience, in the abuse they themselves suffer from the hands of man.

[6.] All this is more manifest, if we consider the provocations he hath. Wherein his slowness to anger infinitely transcends the patience of any creature; nay, the spirits of all the angels and glorified saints in heaven would be too narrow to bear the sins of the world for one day, nay, not so much as the sins of the churches, which is a little spot in the whole world; it is because 'he is the Lord,' one of an infinite power over himself, that not only the whole mass of the rebellious world, but of 'the sons of Jacob' (either considered as a church and nation springing from the loins of Jacob, or considered as the regenerate part of the world, sometimes called the seed of Jacob), 'are not consumed,' Mal. iii. 6. A Jonah was angry with God for recalling his anger from a sinful people. Had God committed the government of the world to the glorified saints, who are perfect in love and holiness, the world would have had an end long ago; they would have acted that which they sue for at the hands of God, and is not granted them: Rev. vi. 10, 'How long, Lord, holy and true, dost thou not avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?' God hath designs of patience above the world, above the unsinning angels, and perfectly renewed spirits in glory. The greatest created long-suffering is infinitely disproportioned to the divine. Fire from heaven would have been showered down before the greatest part of a day were spent, if a created patience had the conduct of the world, though that creature were possessed with the spirit of patience, extracted from all

the creatures which are in heaven, or are, or ever were, upon the earth. Methinks Moses intimates this, for as soon as God had passed by, proclaiming his name gracious and long-suffering, as soon as ever Moses had paid his adoration, he falls a-praying that God would go with the Israelites: Exod. xxxiv. 8, 9, 'For it is a stiff-necked people.' What an argument is here for God to go along with them! He might rather, since he had heard him but just before say he would 'by no means clear the guilty,' desire God to stand further off from them, for fear the fire of his wrath should burst out from him, to burn them as he did the Sodomites; but he considers that as none but God had such anger to destroy them, so none but God had such a patience to bear with them. It is as much as if he should have said, Lord, if thou shouldst send the most tender-hearted angel in heaven to have the guidance of this people, they would be a lost people; a period will quickly be set to their lives, no created strength can restrain its power from crushing such a stiff-necked people; flesh and blood cannot bear them, nor any created spirit of a greater might.

*First*, Consider the greatness of the provocations. No light matter, but actions of a great defiance. What is the practical language of most in the world but that of Pharaoh! 'Who is the Lord that I should obey him?' How many question his being, and more, his authority! What blasphemies of him, what reproaches of his majesty! Men 'drinking up iniquity like water,' and with a haste and ardency 'rushing into sin, as the horse into the battle.' What is there in the reasonable creature that hath the quickest capacity, and the deepest obligation to serve him, but opposition and enmity, a slight of him in everything, yea, the services most seriously performed, unsuited to the royalty and purity of so great a being! Such provocations as dare him to his face, that are a burden to so righteous a judge, and so great a lover of the authority and majesty of his laws, that, were there but a spark of anger in him, it is a wonder that it doth not shew itself. When he is invaded in all his attributes, it is astonishing that this single one of patience and meekness should withstand the assault of all the rest of his perfections. His being, which is attacked by sin, speaks for vengeance; his justice cannot be imagined to stand silent, without charging the sinner; his holiness cannot but encourage his justice to urge its pleas, and be an advocate for it; his omniscience proves the truth of all the charge, and his abused mercy hath little encouragement to make opposition to the indictment: nothing but patience stands in the gap to keep off the arrest of judgment from the sinner.

*Secondly*, His patience is manifest, if you consider the multitudes of these provocations. Every man hath sin enough in a day to make him stand amazed at divine patience, and to call it, as well as the apostle did, "all long-suffering," 1 Tim. i. 16. How few duties of a perfectly right stamp are performed! What unworthy considerations mix themselves, like dross, with our purest and sincerest gold! How more numerous are the respects of the worshippers of him to themselves than unto him! How many services are paid him, not out of love to him, but because he should do us no hurt, and some service, when we do not so much design to please him as to please ourselves, by expectations of a reward from him! What master would endure a servant that endeavoured to please him only because he should not kill him? Is that former charge of God upon the old world yet out of date, that 'the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of man was only evil, and that continually'? Gen vi. 5. Was not the new world as chargeable with it as the old? Certainly it was, Gen. viii. 21, and is of as much force this very minute as it was then. How many are the sins against

knowledge, as well as those of ignorance ; presumptuous sins, as well as those of infirmity ! How numerous those of omission and commission ! It is above the reach of any man's understanding to conceive all the blasphemies, oaths, thefts, adulteries, murders, oppressions, contempt of religion, the open idolatries of Turks and heathens, the more spiritual and refined idolatries of others.\* Add to those the ingratitude of those that profess his name, their pride, earthliness, carelessness, sluggishness to divine duties, and in every one of those a multitude of provocations ; the whole man being engaged in every sin, the understanding contriving it, the will embracing it, the affections complying with it, and all the members of the body instruments in the acting the unrighteousness of it. Every one of these faculties bestowed upon men by him, are armed against him in every act ; and in every employment of them there is a distinct provocation, though centred in one sinful end and object. What are the offences all the men of the world receive from their fellow-creatures, to the injuries God receives from men, but as a small dust of earth to the whole mass of earth and heaven too ! What multitudes of sins is one profane wretch guilty of in the space of twenty, forty, fifty years ? Who can compute the vast number of his transgressions, from the first use of reason to the time of the separation of his soul from his body, from his entrance into the world to his exit ? What are those to those of a whole village of the like inhabitants ? What are those to those of a great city ? Who can number up all the foul-mouthed oaths, the beastly excess, the goatish uncleanness committed in the space of a day, year, twenty years, in this city, much less in the whole nation, least of all in the whole world ? were it no more than the common idolatry of former ages, when the whole world turned their backs upon their Creator, and passed him by to sue to a creature, a stock, or stone, or a degraded spirit. How provoking would it be to a prince to see a whole city under his dominion deny him a respect, and pay it to his scullion, or the common executioner he employs ! Add to this the unjust invasions of kings, the oppressions exercised upon men, all the private and public sins that have been committed in the world, ever since it began. The Gentiles were described by the apostle, Rom. i. 29-31, in a black character, they were haters of God ; yet how did the riches of his patience preserve multitudes of such disingenuous persons, and how many millions of such haters of him breathe every day in his air, and are maintained by his bounty, have their tables spread and their cups filled to the brim, and that too in the midst of reiterated belchings of their enmity against him ? All are under sufficient provocations of him to the highest indignation. The presiding angels over nations could not forbear, in love and honour to their government, to arm themselves to the destruction of their several charges, if divine patience did not set them a pattern, and their obedience incline them to expect his orders before they act what their zeal would prompt them to. The devils would be glad of a commission to destroy the world, but that his patience puts a stop to their fury, as well as his own justice.

*Thirdly,* Consider the long time of this patience. He spread out his hands all the day to a rebellious world, Isa. lxx. 2. All men's day, all God's day, which is a thousand years, he hath borne with the gross of mankind, with all the nations of the world in a long succession of ages, for five thousand years and upwards already, and will bear with them till the time comes for the world's dissolution. He hath suffered the monstrous acts of men, and endured the contradictions of a sinful world against himself, from the first sin of Adam to the last committed this minute. The line of his

\* Lessius, p. 152.



patience hath run along with the duration of the world to this day, and there is not any one of Adam's posterity but hath been expensive to him, and partaken of the riches of it.

*Fourthly*, All these he bears when he hath a sense of them. He sees every day the roll and catalogue of sin increasing; he hath a distinct view of every one, from the sin of Adam to the last, filled up in his omniscience, and yet gives no order for the arrest of the world. He knows men fitted for destruction, all the instants he exerciseth long-suffering towards them, which makes the apostle call it not simply 'long-suffering' without the addition of  $\pi\omicron\lambda\lambda\eta$ , 'much long-suffering,' Rom. ix. 23. There is not a grain in the whole mass of sin that he hath not a distinct knowledge of, and of the quality of it. He perfectly understands the greatness of his own majesty that is vilified, and the nature of the offence that doth disparage him. He is solicited by his justice, directed by his omniscience, and armed with judgments to vindicate himself, but his arm is restrained by patience. To conclude; no indignity is hid from him, no iniquity is beloved by him; the hatred of their sinfulness is infinite, and the knowledge of their malice is exact. The subsisting of the world under such weighty provocations, so numerous, so long time, and with his full sense of every one of them, is an evidence of such forbearance and long-suffering that the addition of 'riches,' which the apostle puts to it, Rom. ii. 4, labours with an insufficiency clearly to display it.

### III. Why God doth exercise so much patience.

1. To shew himself appeasable. God did not declare by his patience to former ages, or any age, that he was appeased with them, or that they were in his favour, but that he was appeasable, that he was not an implacable enemy, but that they might find him favourable to them, if they did seek after him. The continuance of the world by patience, and the bestowing many mercies by goodness, were not a natural revelation of the manner how he would be appeased; that was made known only by the prophets, and after the coming of Christ by the apostles, and had indeed been intelligible in some sort to the whole world, had there been a faithfulness in Adam's posterity to transmit the tradition of the first promise to succeeding generations. Had not the knowledge of that died by their carelessness and neglect, it had been easy to tell the reason of God's patience to be in order to the exhibition of the seed of the woman, to bruise the serpent's head.

They could not but naturally know themselves sinners, and worthy of death; they might, by easy reflections upon themselves, collect that they were not in that comely and harmonious posture now, as they were when God first wrought them with his own finger, and placed them as his lieutenants in the world; they knew they did grievously offend him, this they were taught by the sprinklings of his judgments among them sometimes. And since he did not utterly root up mankind, his sparing patience was a prologue of some further favours, or pardoning grace, to be displayed to the world by some methods of God yet unknown to them. Though the earth was something impaired by the curse after the fall, yet the main pillars of it stood; the state of the natural motions of the creature was not changed: the heavens remained in the same posture wherein they were created; the sun, and moon, and other heavenly bodies continued their usefulness and refreshing influences to man: 'The heavens did still declare the glory of God; day unto day did utter speech; their line is gone throughout all the earth, and their words to the end of the world,' Ps. xix. 1-4; which declared God to be willing to do good to his creatures, and were as so many legible letters

or rudiments, whereby they might read his patience, and that a further design of favour to the world lay hid in that patience. Paul applies this to the preaching of the gospel : Rom. x. 18, ' Have they not heard the word of God ? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the end of the world.' Redeeming grace could not be spelled out by them in a clear notion ; but yet they did declare that which is the foundation of gospel mercy. Were not God patient, there were no room for a gospel mercy, so that the heavens declare the gospel, not formally but fundamentally, in declaring the long-suffering of God, without which no gospel had been framed, or could have been expected. They could not but read in those things favourable inclinations towards them. And though they could not be ignorant, that they deserved a mark of justice, yet seeing themselves supported by God, and beholding the regular motions of the heavens from day to day, and the revolutions of the seasons of the year, the natural conclusion they might draw from thence was, that God was placable, since he behaved himself more as a tender friend, that had no mind to be at war with them, than an enraged enemy. The good things which he gave them, and the patience whereby he spared them, were no arguments of an implacable disposition, and therefore of a disposition willing to be appeased. This is clearly the design of the apostle's arguing with the Lystrians, when they would have offered sacrifices to Paul, Acts xiv. 17. When ' God suffered all nations to walk in their own ways, he did not leave himself without witness, giving rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons.' What were those witnesses of ? Not only of the being of a God, by their readiness to sacrifice to those that were not gods, only supposed to be so in their false imaginations, but witnesses to the tenderness of God, that he had no mind to be severe with his creatures, but would allure them by ways of goodness. Had not God's patience tended to this end, to bring the world under another dispensation, the apostle's arguing from it had not been suitable to his design, which seems to be a hindering the sacrifices they intended for them, and a drawing them to embrace the gospel, and therefore preparing the way to it, by speaking of the patience and goodness of God to them, as an unquestionable testimony of the reconcilableness of God to them, by some sacrifice which was represented under the common notion of sacrifices.\* These things were not witnesses of Christ, or syllables whereby they could spell out the redeeming person, but witnesses that God was placable in his own nature. When man abused those noble faculties God had given him, and diverted them from the use and service God intended them for, God might have stripped man of them, the first time that he misemployed them ; and it would have seemed most agreeable to his wisdom and justice, not to suffer himself to be abused, and the world to go contrary to its natural end. But since he did not level the world with its first nothing, but healed the world so favourably, it was evident that his patience pointed the world to a further design of mercy and goodness in him. To imagine that God had no other design in his long-suffering but that of vengeance, had been a notion unsuitable to the goodness and wisdom of God. He would never have pretended himself to be a friend, if he had harboured nothing but enmity in his heart against them.

It had been far from his goodness, to give them a cause to suspect such a design in him, as his patience certainly did, had he not intended it. Had he preserved men only for punishment, it is more like he would have treated men as princes do those they reserve for the axe, or halter, give them only things necessary to uphold their lives till the day of execution, and not have

\* Amyrald, Dissert. p. 191, 192.

bestowed upon them so many good things, to make their lives delightful to them, nor have furnished them with so many excellent means to please their senses and recreate their minds; it had been a mocking of them to treat them at that rate, if nothing but punishment had been intended towards them. If the end of it, to lead men to repentance, were easily intelligible by them, as the apostle intimates (Rom. ii. 4, which is to be linked with the former chapter, a discourse of the Gentiles; 'Not knowing,' saith he, 'that the riches of his forbearance and goodness leads thee to repentance'), it also gives them some ground to hope for pardon. For what other argument can more induce to repentance, than an expectation of mercy upon a relenting and acknowledging the crime? Without a design of pardoning grace, his patience would have been in great measure exercised in vain; for by mere patience God is not reconciled to a sinner, no more than a prince to a rebel by bearing with him. Nor can a sinner conclude himself in the favour of God, no more than a rebel can conclude himself in the favour of his prince; only this he may conclude, that there is some hopes he may have the grant of a pardon, since he hath time to sue it out. And so much did the patience of God naturally signify, that he was of a reconcilable temper, and was willing men should sue out their pardon upon repentance; otherwise he might have magnified his justice, and condemned men by the law of works.

2. He therefore exercised so much patience to wait for men's repentance. All the notices and warnings that God gives men, of either public or personal calamities, is a continual invitation to repentance. This was the common interpretation the heathens made of extraordinary presages and prodigies, which shewed as well the delays as the approaches of judgments. What other notion but this, that those warnings of judgments witness a slowness to anger, and a willingness to turn his arrows another way, should move them to multiply sacrifices, go weeping to their temples, sound out prayers to their gods, and shew all those other testimonies of a repentance which their blind understandings hit upon? If a prince should sometimes in a light and gentle manner punish a criminal, and then relax it and shew him much kindness, and afterwards inflict upon him another kind of punishment as light as the former, and less than was due to his crime, what could the malefactor suspect by such a way of proceeding, but that the prince, by those gently repeated chastisements, had a mind to move him to a regret for his crime? And what other thoughts could men naturally have of God's conduct, that he should warn them of great judgments, send light afflictions, which are testimonies rather of a patience than of a severe wrath, but that it was intended to move them to a relenting, and a breaking off their sins by working righteousness? Though divine patience doth not in the event induce men to repentance, yet the natural tendency of such a treatment is to mollify men's hearts, to overcome their obstinacy, and no man hath any reason to judge otherwise of such a proceeding. 'The long-suffering of God is salvation,' saith Peter, 2 Peter iii. 15; *i. e.* hath a tendency to salvation, in its being a solicitation of men to the means of it; for the apostle cites Paul for the confirmation of it, 'Even as our beloved Paul hath written unto you,' which must refer to Rom. ii. 4, 'It leads to repentance;' *ἡ ὁδὸς*, it conducts, which is more than barely to invite; it doth, as it were, take us by the hand, and point us to the way wherein we should go; and for this end it was exercised not only towards the Jews, but towards the Gentiles; not only those that are within the pale of the church, and under the dews of the gospel, but to those that are in darkness and in the shadow of death. For this discourse of the apostle was but an inference from what

he had treated of in the first chapter, concerning the idolatry and ingratitude of the Gentiles. Since the Gentiles were to be punished for the abuse of it as well as the Jews, as he intimates, ver. 9, it is plain that his patience, which is exercised towards the idolatrous Gentiles, was to allure them to repentance as well as others; and it was a sufficient motive in itself to persuade them to a change of their vile and gross acts, to such as were morally good. And there was enough in God's dealing with them, and in that light they had, to engage them to a better course than what they usually walked in. And though men do abuse God's long-suffering, to encourage their impenitence, and persisting in their crimes, yet that they cannot reasonably imagine that to be the end of God, is evident; their own gripes of conscience would acquaint them that it is otherwise. They know that conscience is a principle that God hath given them, as well as understanding, and will, and other faculties; that God doth not approve of that which the voice of their own consciences, and of the consciences of all men under natural light, are utterly against. And if there were really in this forbearance of God an approbation of men's crimes, conscience could not frequently and universally in all men check them for them. What authority could conscience have to do it? But this it doth in all men. As the apostle, Rom. i. 22, 'They know the judgment of God, that those that do such things'—which he had mentioned before—'are worthy of death.' In this thing the consciences of all men cannot err. They could not therefore conclude from hence God's approbation of their iniquities, but his desire that their hearts should be touched with a repentance for them.

The 'sin of Ephraim is hid,' Hosea xiii. 12, 13; *i. e.* God doth not presently take notice of it to order punishment; he lays it in a secret place from the eye of his justice, that Ephraim might not be his unwise son, and 'stay long in the place of breaking forth of children;' *i. e.* that he should speedily reclaim himself, and not continue in the way of destruction. God hath no need to abuse any, he doth not lie to the sons of men; if he would have men perish, he could easily destroy them, and have done it long ago. He did not leave the woman Jezebel in being, nor lengthened out her time but as a space to repent, Rev. ii. 21, that she might reflect upon her ways, and devote herself seriously to his service and her own happiness. His patience stands between the offending creature and eternal misery a long time, that men might not foolishly throw away their souls, and be damned for their impenitency; by this he shews himself ready to receive men to mercy upon their return. To what purpose doth he invite men to repentance, if he intended to receive\* them, and damn them after they repent?

3. He doth exercise patience for the propagation of mankind. If God punished every sin presently, there would not only be a period put to churches, but to the world; without patience, Adam had sunk into eternal anguish the first moment of his provocation, and the whole world of mankind in his loins had perished with him, and never seen the light. If this perfection had not interposed after the first sin, God had lost his end in the creation of the world, which he 'created not in vain, but formed it to be inhabited,' Isa. xlv. 18. It had been inconsistent with the wisdom of God to make a world to be inhabited, and destroy it upon sin, when it had but two principal inhabitants in it; the reason of his making the earth had been insignificant; he had not had any upon earth to glorify him, without erecting another world, which might have proved as sinful, and as quickly wicked as this. God should have always been pulling down and rearing up, creating and annihilating; one world would have come after another, as

\* Qu. 'deceive'?—Ed.

wave after wave in the sea. His patience stepped in to support the honour of God and the continuance of men, without which, one had been in part impaired, and the other totally lost.

4. He doth exercise patience for the continuance of the church. If he be not patient towards sinners, what stock would there be for believers to spring up from? He bears with the provoking carriage of men, evil men; because out of their loins he intends to extract others, which he will form for the glory of his grace. He hath some unborn, that belong to the 'election of grace,' which are to be the seed of the worst of men. Jeroboam, the chief incendiary of the Israelites to idolatry, had an Abijah, in whom was found 'some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel,' 1 Kings xiv. 13. Had Ahaz been snapped in the first act of his wickedness, the Israelites had wanted so good a prince, and so good a man as Hezekiah, a branch of that wicked predecessor. What gardener cuts off the thorns from the rose-bush till he hath gathered the roses? And men do not use to burn all the crab tree, but preserve a stock to engraft some sweet fruit upon. There could not have been a saint on earth, nor consequently in heaven, had it not been for this perfection. He did not destroy the Israelites in the wilderness, that he might keep up a church among them, and not extinguish the whole seed that were heirs of the promises and covenant made with Abraham. Had God punished men for their sins as soon as they had been committed, none would have lived to have been better, none could have continued in the world to honour him by their virtues! Manasseh had never been a convert, and many brutish men had never been changed from beasts to angels, to praise and acknowledge their Creator. Had Peter received his due recompence upon the denial of his Master, he had never been a martyr for him; nor had Paul been a preacher of the gospel, nor any else; and so the gospel had not shined in any part of the world. No seed would have been brought in to Christ; Christ is beholding immediately to this attribute for all the seed he hath in the world. It is 'for his name's sake' that he doth 'defer his anger,' and for his 'praise' that he doth refrain from 'cutting us off,' Isa. xlviii. 9. And in the next chapter follows a prophecy of Christ. To overthrow mankind for sin, were to prevent the spreading a church in the world. A woman that is guilty of a capital crime, and lies under a condemning sentence, is reprieved from execution for her being with child. It is for the child's sake the woman is respited, not for her own; it is for the elect's sake in the loins of transgressors, that they are a long time spared, and not for their own: Isa. lxxv. 8, 9, 'As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants' sake, that I may not destroy them all; as a husbandman spares a vine for some good clusters in it.' He had spoke of vengeance before, yet he would reserve some, from whom he would bring forth those that should be inheritors of his mountains; that he might make up his church of Judea, Jerusalem being a mountainous place, and the type of the church in all ages. What is the reason he doth not level his thunder at the heads of those for whose destruction he receives so many petitions from 'the souls under the altar'? Rev. vi. 9, 10. Because God had others to write a testimony for him in their own blood, and perhaps out of the loins of those for whom vengeance was so earnestly supplicated. And God, as the master of a vessel, lies patiently at anchor till the last passenger he expects be taken in.\*

5. For the sake of his church, he is patient to wicked men. The tares are patiently endured till the harvest, for fear in the plucking up the one there might be some prejudice done to the other. Upon this account he spares

\* Smith on Creed, p. 404.

some who are worse than others, whom he crusheth by signal judgments. The Jews had committed sins worse than Sodom, for the confirmation of which we have God's oath, Ezek. xvi. 48; and more by half than Samaria or the ten tribes had done, ver. 51; yet God spared the Jews, though he destroyed the Solomites. What was the reason, but a large remnant of righteous persons, more clusters of good grapes, were found among them than grew in Sodom? Isa. i. 9. A few more righteous in Sodom had damped the fire and brimstone designed for that place, and a remnant of such in Judea was a bar to that fierceness of anger which otherwise would have quickly consumed them. Had there been but ten righteous in Sodom, divine patience had still bound the arms of justice, that it should not have prepared its brimstone, notwithstanding the clamour of the sins of the multitude. Judea was ripe for the sickle, but God would put a lock upon the torrent of his judgments, that they should not flow down upon that wicked place, to make them a desolation and a curse, as long as tender-hearted Josiah lived, who had humbled himself at the threatening, and wept before the Lord, 1 Kings xxii. 19, 20. Sometimes he bears with wicked men, that they might exercise the patience of the saints, Rev. xiv. 12. The whole time of the forbearance of antichrist in all his intrusions into the temple of God, invasions of the rights of God, usurpations of the office of Christ, and besmearing himself with the blood of the saints, was to give them an opportunity of patience. God is patient towards the wicked, that by their means he might try the righteous. He burns not the wisp till he hath scoured his vessels, nor lays by the hammer till he hath formed some of his matter into an excellent fashion. He useth the worst men as rods to correct his people, before he sweeps the twigs out of his house. God sometimes uses the thorns of the world as a hedge to secure his church, sometimes as instruments to try and exercise it. Howsoever he useth them, whether for security or trial, he is patient to them for his church's advantage.

6. When men are not brought to repentance by his patience, he doth longer exercise it to manifest the equity of his future justice upon them. As wisdom is justified by her obedient children, so is justice justified by the rebels against patience; the contempt of the latter is the justification of the former. The apostles were 'unto God a sweet savour of Christ in them that perish,' as well as in them that were saved by the acceptance of their message, 2 Cor. ii. 15. Both are fragrant to God: his mercy is glorified by the ones' acceptance of it, and his justice freed from any charge against it by the others' refusal. The cause of men's ruin cannot be laid upon God, who provided means for their salvation, and solicited their compliance with him. What reason can they have to charge the Judge with any wrong to them, who reject the tenders he makes, and who hath forborne them with so much patience, when he might have censured them by his righteous justice, upon the first crime they committed, or the first refusal of his gracious offers? *Quanto Dei magis judicium tardum est, tanto magis justum.\** After the despising of patience, there can be no suspicion of an irregularity in the acts of justice. Man hath no reason to fall foul in his charge upon God, if he were punished for his own sin, considering the dignity of the injured person, and the meanness of himself the offender; but his wrath is more justified when it is poured out upon those whom he hath endured with much long-suffering. There is no plea against the shooting of his arrows into those for whom this voice hath been loud, and his arms open for their return. As patience, while it is exercised, is the silence of his justice, so when it is abused, it silenceth men's complaints against his justice. The 'riches of

\* Minuc. Felix, page 41.

his forbearance' made way for the manifesting the 'treasures of his wrath.' If God did but a little bear with the insolencies of men, and cut them off after two or three sins, he would not have opportunity to shew either the power of his patience, or that of his wrath; but when he hath a right to punish for one sin, and yet bears with them for many, and they will not be reclaimed, the sinner is more inexcusable, divine justice less chargeable, and his wrath more powerful: Rom. ix. 22, 'What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction.' The proper and immediate end of his long-suffering is to lead men to repentance; but after they have, by their obstinacy, fitted themselves for destruction, he bears longer with them, to magnify his wrath more upon them, and if it is not the *finis operantis*, it is at least the *finis operis*, where patience is abused. Men are apt to complain of God that he deals hardly with them. The Israelites seem to charge God with too much severity, to cast them off, when so many promises were made to the fathers for their perpetuity and preservation, which is intimated, Hos. ii. 2, 'Plead with your mother, plead;' by the double repetition of the word *plead*; do not accuse me of being false, or too rigorous, but accuse your mother, your church, your magistracy, your ministry, for their spiritual fornications which have provoked me; for their נאפוּפִיה, intimating the greatness of their sins by the reduplication of the word, 'lest I strip her naked.' I have borne with her under many provocations, and I have not yet taken away all her ornaments, or said to her according to the rule of divorce, *res tuas tibi habeto*. God answers their impudent charge, 'She is not my wife, nor am I her husband.' He doth not say first, I am not her husband, but she is not my wife: she first withdrew from her duty, by breaking the marriage-covenant, and then I ceased to be her husband. No man shall be condemned, but he shall be convinced of the due desert of his sin, and the justice of God's proceeding. God will lay open men's guilt, and repeat the measures of his patience, to justify the severity of his wrath: Hosea vii. 10, 'Sins will testify to their face.' What is in its own nature a preparation for glory, men by their obstinacy make a preparation for a more indisputable punishment. We see many evidences of God's forbearance here, in sparing men under those blasphemies which are audible, and those profane carriages which are visible, which would sufficiently justify an act of severity; yet when men's secret sins, both in heart and action, and the vast multitude of them, far surmounting what can arrive to our knowledge here, shall be discovered, how great a lustre will it add to God's bearing with them, and make his justice triumph without any reasonable demur from the sinner himself! He is long-suffering here, that his justice may be more public hereafter.

#### IV. The use.

##### Use 1. For instruction.

1. How is this patience of God abused! The Gentiles abused those testimonies of it, which were written in showers and fruitful seasons. No nation was ever stripped of it, under the most provoking idolatries, till after multiplied spurns at it. Not a person among us but hath been guilty of the abuse of it. How have we contemned that which demands a reverence from us! How have we requited God's waitings with rebellions, while he hath continued urging and expecting our return! Saul relented at David's forbearing to revenge himself, when he had his prosecuting and industrious enemy in his power: 1 Sam. xxiv. 17, 'Thou art more righteous than I; thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil.' And shall we not relent at God's wonderful long-suffering, and silencing his anger so

much? He could puff away our lives, but he will not, and yet we endeavour to strip him of his being, though we cannot.

(1.) Let us consider the ways how slowness to anger is abused.

[1.] It is abused by misinterpretations of it, when men slander his patience, to be only a carelessness and neglect of his providence; as Averroes argued from his slowness to anger, a total neglect of the government of the lower world; or when men, from his long-suffering, charge him with impurity, as if his patience were a consent to their crimes; and because he suffered them, without calling them to account, he were one of their partisans, and as wicked as themselves: Ps. l. 21, 'Because I kept silence, thou thoughtest I was altogether such a one as thyself.' His silence makes them conclude him to be an abettor of, and a consort in, their sins, and think him more pleased with their iniquity than their obedience. Or when they will infer from his forbearance a want of his omniscience; because he suffers their sins, they imagine he forgets them,—Ps. x. 11, 'He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten,'—thinking his patience proceeds not from the sweetness of his nature, but a weakness of his mind. How base is it, instead of admiring him, to disparage him for it; and because he stands in so advantageous a posture towards us, not to own the choicest prerogatives of his deity? This is to make a perfection so useful to us, to shadow and extinguish those others, which are the prime flowers of the crown.

[2.] His patience is abused by continuing in a course of sin under the influences of it. How much is it the practical language of men, Come, let us commit this or that iniquity, since divine patience hath suffered worse than this at our hands! Nothing is remitted to their sensual pleasures and eagerness in them. How often did the Israelites repeat their murmurings against him, as if they would put his patience to the utmost proof, and see how far the line of it could extend? They were no sooner satisfied in one thing but they quarrelled with him about another, as if he had no other attribute to put in motion against them. They tempted him as often as he relieved them, as though the declaration of his name to Moses, *Exod. xxxiv.* to be 'a God gracious and long-suffering' had been intended for no other purpose but a protection of them in their rebellions. Such a sort of men the prophet speaks of, that were 'settled in their lees,' or dregs, *Zeph. i. 12.* They were congealed and frozen in their successful wickedness; such an abuse of divine patience is the very dregs of sin, God chargeth it highly upon the Jews, *Isa. lvii. 11,* 'I have held my peace, even of old, and thou fearest me not,' my silence made thee confident, yea, impudent in thy sin.

[3.] His patience is abused by repeating sin, after God hath, by an act of his patience, taken off some affliction from men. As metals melted in the fire remain fluid under the operations of the flames, yet when removed from the fire they quickly return to their former hardness, and sometimes grow harder than they were before, so men who, in their afflictions, seem to be melted, like Ahab confess their sins, lie prostrate before God, and seek him early, yet if they be brought from under the power of their afflictions, they return to their old nature, and are as stiff against God, and resist the blows of the Spirit as much as they did before. They think they have a new stock of patience to sin upon. Pharaoh was somewhat thawed under judgments, and frozen again under forbearance, *Exod. ix. 27, 34.* Many will howl when God strikes them, and laugh at him when he forbears them. Thus that patience which should melt us doth often harden us, which is not an effect natural to his patience, but natural to our abusing corruption.

[4.] His patience is abused, by taking encouragement from it, to mount to greater degrees of sin. Because God is slow to anger, men are more fierce



in sin, and not only continue in their old rebellions, but heap new upon them. If he spare them for 'three transgressions' they will commit 'four,' as is intimated in the first and second of Amos: 'Men's hearts are fully set in them to do evil, because sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed,' Eccles. viii. 11. Their hearts are more desperately bent; before, they had some waverings and pull-backs, but after a fair sunshine of divine patience, they entertain more unbridled resolutions, and pass forward with more liberty and licentiousness. They make his long-suffering subservient to turn out all those little relentings and regrets they had before, and banish all thoughts of barring out a temptation. No encouragement is given to men by God's patience, but they force it by their presumption. They invert God's order, and bind themselves stronger to iniquity by that which should bind them faster to their duty. A happy escape at sea makes men go more confidently into the deep afterward. Thus we deal with God as debtors do with good-natured creditors; because they do not dun them for what they owe, they take encouragement to run more upon the score, till their sum amounts above their ability of payment.

But let it be considered,

(1.) That this abuse of patience is a high sin. As every act of forbearance obligeth us to duty, so every act of it abused increaseth our guilt. The more frequent its solicitations of us have been, the deeper aggravations our sin receives by it. Every sin, after an act of divine patience, contracts a blacker guilt. The sparing us after the last sin we committed was a superadded act of long-suffering, and a laying out more of his riches upon us; and therefore every new act committed is a despite against greater riches expended, and greater cost upon us, and against his preserving us from the hand of justice for the last transgression. It is disingenuous not to have a due resentment of so much goodness, and base to injure him the more, because he doth not right himself. Shall he receive the more wrongs from us, by how much the sweeter he is to us? No man's conscience but will tell him it is vile to prefer the satisfaction of a sordid lust, before the counsel of a God of so gracious a disposition. The sweeter the nature, the fouler is the injury that is done unto it.

(2.) It is dangerous to abuse his patience. Contempt of kindness is most irksome to an ingenuous spirit, and he is worthy to have the arrows of God's indignation lodged in his heart, who despiseth the riches of his long-suffering. For,

[1.] The time of patience will have an end. Though his spirit strives with man, yet it 'shall not always strive,' Gen. vi. 3. Though there be a time wherein Jerusalem might 'know the things that concerned her peace,' yet there is another period wherein they should be 'hid from their eyes': Luke xix. 43, 'Oh that thou hadst known in this thy day.' Nations have their day, and persons have their day, and the day of most persons is shorter than the day of nations. Jerusalem had her day of forty years, but how many particular persons were taken off before the last or middle hours of that day were arrived? Forty years was God grieved with the generation of the Israelites, Heb. iii. 11. One carcase dropped after another in that limited time, and at the end not a man but fell under the judicial stroke, except Caleb and Joshua. One hundred and twenty years was the term set to the mass of the old world, but not to every man in the old world; some fell while the ark was preparing, as well as the whole stock when the ark was completed. Though he be patient with most, yet he is not in the same degree with all; every sinner hath his time of sinning, beyond which he shall proceed no further, be his lusts never so impetuous, and his affections never

so imperious. The time of his patience is in Scripture set forth sometimes by years: three years he came to find fruit on the fig-tree; sometimes by days, some men's sins are sooner ripe, and fall. There is a measure of sin, Jer. li. 18, which is set forth by the ephah, Zech. v. 8, which, when it is filled, is sealed up, and a weight of lead cast upon the mouth of it. When judgments are preparing, once and twice the Lord is prevailed with by the intercession of the prophet. The prepared grasshoppers are not sent to devour, and the kindled fire is not blown up to consume, Amos vii. from ver. 1 to ver. 8. But at last God takes the plumb-line to suit and measure punishment to their sin, and would not pass by them any more, and when their sin was ripe, represented by a 'basket of summer fruit,' God would withhold his hand no longer, but brought such a day upon them, wherein the 'songs of the temple should be howlings, and dead bodies be in every place,' chap. viii. 2, 3. He lays by any further thoughts of patience, to speed their ruin. God had borne long with the Israelites, and long it was before he gave them up. He would first 'break the bow in Jezreel,' Hos. i. 5, take away the strength of the nation by the death of Zechariah, the last of Jehu's race, which introduced civil dissensions and ambitious murders for the throne, whereby in weakening one part they weakened the whole; or, as some think, alluding to Tiglath-Pileser, who carried captive two tribes and a half. If this would not reclaim them, then follows '*Lo-ruhamah*, I will not have mercy,' I will sweep them out of the land, ver. 6; if they did not repent they should be '*Lo-ammi*, ver. 9, 'You are not my people,' and 'I will not be your God.' They should be discovenanted, and stripped of all federal relation. Here patience for ever withdrew from them, and wrathful anger took its place; and for particular persons the time of life, whether shorter or longer, is the only time of long suffering. It hath no other stage than the present state of things to act upon. There is none else to be expected after but giving account of what hath been done in the body, not of anything done after the soul is fled from the body. The time of patience ends with the first moment of the soul's departure from the body. This time only is 'the day of salvation,' *i. e.* the day wherein God offers it, and the day wherein God waits for our acceptance of it. It is at his pleasure to shorten or lengthen our day, not at ours. It is not our long suffering, but his; he hath the command of it.

[2.] God hath wrath to punish, as well as patience to bear. He hath a fury to revenge the outrages done to his meekness; when his messages of peace, sent to reclaim men, are slighted, his sword shall be whetted, and his instruments of war prepared: Hos. v. 8, 'Blow ye the cornet in Gibeah, and the trumpet in Ramah.' As he deals gently like a father, so he can punish capitally as a judge. Though he holds his peace for a long time, yet at last he will go forth like a mighty man, and stir up jealousy as a man of war, to cut in pieces his enemies. It is not said, he hath no anger, but that he is slow to anger, but sharp in it. He hath a sword to cut, and a bow to shoot, and arrows to pierce, Ps. xii. 13. Though he be long a-drawing the one out of its scabbard, and long a-fitting the other to his bow, yet when they are ready, he strikes home and hits the mark. Though he hath a 'time of patience,' yet he hath also a 'day of rebuke,' Hos. v. 9. Though patience overrules justice by suspending it, yet justice will at last overrule patience by an utter silencing it. God is Judge of the whole earth to right men, yet he is no less Judge of the injuries he receives to right himself. Though God a while was pressed with the murmurings of the Israelites, after their coming out of Egypt, and seemed desirous to give them all satisfaction upon their unworthy complaints, yet when they came to open hostility, in setting a golden calf in his throne, he commissions the Levites to 'kill every man his

brother and companion in the camp,' Exod. xxxii. 27 ; and how desirous soever he was to content them before, they never murmured afterwards, but they severely smarted for it. When once he hath begun to use his sword, he sticks it up naked, that it might be ready for use upon every occasion. Though he hath feet of lead, yet he hath hands of iron. It was long that he supported the peevishness of the Jews, but at last he captivated them by the arms of the Babylonians, and laid them waste by the power of the Romans. He planted by the apostles churches in the East, and when his goodness and long-suffering prevailed not with them, he tore them up by the roots. What Christians are to be found in those once famous parts of Asia, but what are overgrown with much error and ignorance ?

[3.] The more his patience is abused, the sharper will be the wrath he inflicts. As his wrath restrained makes his patience long, so his compassions restrained, will make his wrath severe. As he doth transcend all creatures in the measures of the one, so he transcends all creatures in the sharpness of the other. Christ is described with 'feet of brass,' as if they burned in a furnace, Rev. i. 15, slow to move, but heavy to crush, and hot to burn. His wrath loseth nothing by delay ; it grows the fresher by sleeping, and strikes with greater strength when it awakes. All the time men are abusing his patience, God is whetting his sword, and the longer it is whetting, the sharper will be the edge. The longer he is fetching his blow, the sharper it will be. The heavier the cannons are, the more difficultly are they drawn to the besieged town, but when arrived they recompense the slowness of their march by the fierceness of their battery : 'Because I have purged thee,' *i. e.* used means for thy reformation, and waited for it, 'and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee. I will not go back, neither will I spare ; according to thy ways, and according to thy doings shall they judge thee,' Ezek. xxiv. 13, 14. God will spare as little then, as he spared much before. His wrath shall be as raging upon them, as the sea of their wickedness was within them. When there is a bank to forbid the irruption of the streams, the waters swell, but when the bank is broke, or the lock taken away, they rush with the greater violence, and ravage more than they would have done, had they not met with a stop. The longer a stone is a-falling, the more it bruises, and grinds to powder. There is a greater treasure of wrath laid up by the abuses of patience. Every sin must have a 'just recompence of reward,' and therefore every sin, in regard of its aggravations, must be more punished, than a sign\* in the singleness and simplicity of its own nature. As treasures of mercy are kept by God for us,—'he keeps mercy for thousands,'—so are treasures of wrath kept by him, to be expended ; and a time of expense there must be ; patience will account to justice all the good offices it hath done the sinner, and demand to be righted by justice. Justice will take the account from the hands of patience, and exact a recompence for every disingenuous injury offered to it. When justice comes to arrest men for their debts, patience, mercy, and goodness, will step in as creditors, and clap their actions upon them, which will make the condition so much more deplorable.

[4.] When he puts an end to his abused patience, his wrath will make quick and sure work. He that is slow to anger, will be swift in the execution of it. The departure of God from Jerusalem is described with wings and wheels, Ezek. xi. 23. One stroke of his hand is irresistible ; he that hath spent so much time in waiting, needs but one minute to ruin ; though it be long ere he draws his sword out of his scabbard, yet when once he doth it, he despatcheth men at a blow. Ephraim, or the ten tribes, had a long

\* Qu. 'sin' ?—ED.

time of patience and prosperity, but 'now shall a month devour him with his portion,' Hosea v. 7. One fatal month puts a period to the many years' peace and security of a sinful nation. His arrows wound suddenly, Ps. lxiv. 7, and, while men are about to fill their bellies, he casts the fruits of his wrath upon them, Job. xx. 23, like thunder out of a cloud, or a bullet out of a cannon, that strikes dead before it is heard. God deals with sinners as enemies do with a town, batter it not by planted guns, but secretly undermines and blows up the walls, whereby they involve the garrison in a sudden ruin, and carry the town. God spared the Amalekites a long time after the injury committed against the Israelites in their passage out of Egypt to Canaan, but when he came to reckon with them, he would waste them in a trice, and 'make an utter consumption of them,' 1 Sam. xv. 2, 3. He describes himself by a travailing woman, Isa. xlii. 14, that hath borne long in her womb, and at last sends forth her birth with strong cries. Though he hath held his peace, been still and restrained himself, yet at last he will destroy and devour at once. The Ninevites, spared in the time of Jonah for their repentance, are in nature threatened with a certain and total ruin, when God should come to bring them to an account for his length and patience, so much abused by them. Though God endured the murmuring Israelites so long in the wilderness, yet he paid them off at last, and took away the rebels in his wrath. He uttered their sentence with an irreversible oath, that none of them should enter into his rest, and he did as surely execute it as he had solemnly sworn it.

[5.] Though he doth defer his visible wrath, yet that very delay may be more dreadful than a quick punishment. He may forbear striking, and give the reins to the hardness and corruption of men's hearts. He may suffer them to walk in their own counsels, without any more striving with them, whereby they make themselves fitter fuel for his vengeance. This was the fate of Israel; when they would not hearken to his voice, 'he gave them up to their own hearts' lusts, and they walked in their own counsels,' Ps. lxxxii. 12. Though his sparing them had the outward aspect of patience, it was a wrathful one, and attended with spiritual judgments. Thus many abusers of patience may still have their line lengthened, and the candle of prosperity to shine upon their heads, that they may increase their sins, and be the fitter mark at last for his arrows. They swim down the stream of their own sensuality with a deplorable security, till they fall into an unavoidable gulf, where at last it will be a great part of their hell to reflect on the length of divine patience on earth, and their inexcusable abuse of it.

(2.) It informs us of the reason why he lets the enemies of his church oppress it, and defers his promise of the deliverance of it. If he did punish them presently, his holiness and justice would be glorified, but his power over himself in his patience would be obscured. Well may the church be content to have a perfection of God glorified, that is not like to receive any honour in another world by any exercise of itself. If it were not for this patience, he were incapable to be the governor of a sinful world. He might, without it, be the governor of an innocent world, but not of a criminal one. He would be the destroyer of the world, but not the orderer and disposer of the extravagances and sinfulness of the world. The interest of his wisdom in drawing good out of evil would not be served, if he were not clothed with this perfection as well as with others. If he did presently destroy the enemies of his church upon the first oppression, his wisdom in contriving, and his power in accomplishing deliverance against the united powers of hell and earth would not be visible; no, nor that power in preserving his people unconsumed in the furnace of affliction. He had not got so great a name

in the rescue of his Israel from Pharaoh, had he thundered the tyrant into destruction upon his first edicts against the innocent. If he were not patient to the most violent of men, he might seem to be cruel; but when he offers peace to them under their rebellions, waits that they may be members of his church rather than enemies to it, he frees himself from any such imputation even in the judgment of those that shall feel most of his wrath. It is this renders the equity of his justice unquestionable, and the deliverance of his people righteous in the judgment of those from whose fetters they are delivered. Christ 'reigns in the midst of his enemies,' to shew his power over himself as well as over the heads of his enemies, to shew his power over his rebels. And though he retards his promise, and suffers a great interval of time between the publication and performance; sometimes years, sometimes ages to pass away, and little appearance of any preparation to shew himself a God of truth; it is not that he hath forgotten his word, or repents that ever he passed it, or sleeps in a supine neglect of it; but that men might not perish, but bethink themselves, and come as friends into his bosom, rather than be crushed as enemies under his feet: 2 Pet. iii. 9, 'The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.' Hereby he shews that he would be rather pleased with the conversion than the destruction of men.

(3.) We see the reason why sin is suffered to remain in the regenerate,—to shew his patience towards his own; for since this attribute hath no other place of appearance but in this world, God takes opportunity to manifest it; because at the close of the world it will remain closed up in the Deity, without any further operation. As God suffers a multitude of sins in the world, to evidence his patience to the wicked, so he suffers great remainders of sin in his people, to shew his patience to the godly. His sparing mercy is admirable before their conversion, but more admirable in bearing with them, after so high an obligation as the conferring upon them special converting grace.

*Use 2.* The second use is of comfort. It is a vast comfort to any when God is pacified towards them; but it is some comfort to all that God is yet patient towards them, though but very little to a refractory sinner. His continued patience to all speaks a possibility of the cure of all, would they not stand against the way of their recovery. It is a terror that God hath anger, but it is a mitigation of that terror that God is slow to it. While his sword is in his sheath, there is some hopes to prevent the drawing of it. Alas! if he were all fire and sword upon sin, what would become of us? We should find nothing else but overflowing deluges, or sweeping pestilences, or perpetual flashes of Sodom's fire and brimstone from heaven. He dooms us not presently to execution, but gives us a long breathing-time after the crime, that by retiring from our iniquities, and having recourse to his mercy, he may be withheld for ever from signing a warrant against us, and change his legal sentence into an evangelical pardon. It is a special comfort to his people that he is a 'sanctuary to them,' Ezek. xi. 16, a place of refuge, a place of spiritual communications; but it is some refreshment to all in this life that he is a defence to them, for so is his patience called, Numb. xiv. 9, 'Their defence is departed from them,' speaking to the Israelites, that they should not be afraid of the Canaanites, for their defence is departed from them. God is no longer patient to them, since their sins be full and ripe. Patience, as long as it lasts, is a temporary defence to those that are under the wing of it; but to the believer it is a singular comfort. And God is called the 'God of patience and consolation' in one breath: Rom. xv. 5,

'The God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded.' All interpreters understand it effectively. The God that inspires you with comfort, and cheers you with comfort, grant this to you. Why may it not be understood formally of the patience belonging to the nature of God? And though it be expressed in the way of petition, yet it might also be proposed as a pattern for imitation, and so suits very well to the exhortation laid down, ver. 1, which was to 'bear with the infirmities of the weak,' which he presseth them to, ver. 3, 'by the example of Christ,' and ver. 5, 'by the patience of God to them,' and so they are very well linked together. God of 'patience and consolation' may well be joined, since patience is the first step of comfort to the poor creature. If it did not administer some comfortable hopes to Adam in the interval between his fall and God's coming to examine him, I am sure it was the first discovery of any comfort to the creature after the sweeping the destroying deluge out of the world, Gen. ix. 21. After the savour of Noah's sacrifice, representing the great sacrifice which was to be in the world, had ascended up to God, the return from him is a publication of his forbearing to punish any more in such a manner; and though he found man no better than he was before, and the imaginations of men's hearts as evil as before the deluge, that he would not again smite every living thing as he had done. This was the first expression of comfort to Noah after his exit from the ark, and declares nothing else but the continuance of patience to the new world, above what he had shewn to the old.

1. It is a comfort in that it is an argument of his grace to his people. If he hath so rich a patience to exercise towards his enemies, he hath a greater treasure to bestow upon his friends. Patience is the first attribute which steps in for our salvation, and therefore called 'salvation,' 2 Peter iii. 15. Something else is therefore built upon it, and intended by it to those that believe. Those two letters of his name, 'a God keeping mercy for thousands,' and 'forgiving iniquity, transgressions, and sin,' follows the other letter of his 'long-suffering,' in the proclamation, Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. He is 'slow to anger,' that he may be merciful, that men may seek and receive their pardon. If he be 'long-suffering,' in order to be a pardoning God, he will not be wanting in pardoning those who answer the design of his forbearance of them. You would not have had sparing mercy to improve if God would have denied you saving mercy upon the improvement of his sparing goodness. If he hath so much respect to his enemies that provoke him, as to endure them with much long-suffering, he will surely be very kind to those that obey him and conform to his will. If he hath much long-suffering to those that are fitted for destruction, Rom. ix. 22, he will have a muchness of mercy for those that are prepared for glory by faith and repentance. It is but a natural conclusion a gracious soul may make: If God had not a mind to be appeased towards me, he would not have had a mind to forbear me; but since he hath forborne me, and given me a heart to see and answer the true end of that forbearance, I need not question but that sparing mercy will end in saving, since it finds that repentance springing up in me, which that patience conducted me to.

2. His patience is a ground to trust in his promise. If his slowness to anger be so great, when his precept is slighted, his readiness to give what he hath promised will be as great, when his promise is believed. If the provocations of him meet with such an unwillingness to punish them, faith in him will meet with the choicest embraces from him. He was more ready to make the promise of redemption after man's apostasy, than to execute the threatening of the law. He doth still witness a greater willingness to give

forth the fruits of the promise than to pour out the vials of his curses. His slowness to anger is an evidence still that he hath the same disposition, which is no slight cordial to faith in his word.

3. It is a comfort in infirmities. If he were not patient, he could not bear with so many peevishnesses and weaknesses in the hearts of his own. If he be patient to the grosser sins of his enemies, he will be no less to the lighter infirmities of his people. When the soul is as a bruised reed, that can emit no sound at all, or one very harsh and ungrateful, he doth not break it in pieces, and fling it away in disdain, but waits to see whether it will fully answer his pains, and be brought to a better frame, and sweeter note. He brings them not to account for every slip, but 'as a father spares his son that serves him,' Mal. iii. 17. It is a comfort to us in our distracted services; for were it not for this slowness to anger, he would stifle us in the midst of our prayers, wherein there are as many foolish thoughts to disgust him, as there are petitions to implore him. The patientest angels would hardly be able to bear with the follies of good men in acts of worship.

*Use 3.* The third use is for exhortation.

1. Meditate often on the patience of God. The devil labours for nothing more than to deface in us the consideration and memory of this perfection. He is an envious creature, and since it hath reached out itself to us, and not to him, he envies God the glory of it, and man the advantage of it. But God loves to have the volumes of it studied, and daily turned over by us. We cannot without an inexcusable wilfulness miss the thoughts of it, since it is visible in every bit of bread, and breath of air in ourselves, and all about us.

(1.) The frequent consideration of his patience would render God highly amiable to us. It is a more endearing argument than his mere goodness. His goodness to us as creatures, endowing us with such excellent faculties, furnishing us with such a commodious world, and bestowing upon us so many attendants for our pleasure and service, and giving us a lordship over his other works, deserves our affection. But his patience to us as sinners, after we have merited the greatest wrath, shews him to be of a sweeter disposition than creating goodness to unoffending creatures, and consequently speaks a greater love in him, and bespeaks a greater affection from us. His creating goodness discovered the majesty of his being, and the greatness of his mind, but this the sweetness and tenderness of his nature. In this patience he exceeds the mildness of all creatures to us, and therefore should be enthroned in our affections above all other creatures. The consideration of this would make us affect him for his nature as well as for his benefits.

(2.) The consideration of his patience would make us frequent and serious in the exercise of repentance. In its nature it leads to it, and the consideration of it would engage us to it, and melt us in the exercise of it. Could we deeply think of it without being touched with a sense of the kindness of our forbearing creditor and governor? Could we gaze upon it, nay, could we glance upon it, without relenting at our offending one of so mild a nature, without being sensibly affected that he hath preserved us so long from being loaded with those chains of darkness under which the devils groan? This forbearance hath good reason to make sin and sinners ashamed. That you are in being is not for want of advantages enough in his hand against you, many a forfeiture you have made, and many an engagement you have broke; he hath scarce met with any other dealing from us than what had treachery in it. Whatsoever our sincerity is, we have no reason to boast of it, when we consider what mixtures there are in it, and what swarms of base motions

taint it. Hath he not lain pressed and groaning under our sins, 'as a cart is pressed with sheaves,' Amos ii. 13, when one shake of himself, as Samson, might have rid him of the burden, and dismissed us in his fury into hell? If we should often ask our consciences, Why have we done thus and thus against so mild a God? would not the reflection on it put us to the blush? If men would consider that such a time they provoked God to his face, and yet have not felt his sword; such a time they blasphemed him, and made a reproach of his name, and his thunder did not stop their motion; such a time they fell into an abominable brutishness, yet he kept the punishment of devils, the unclean spirits, from reaching them; such a time he bore an open affront from them, when they scoffed at his word, and he did not send a destruction, and laugh at it: would not such a meditation work some strange kind of relentings in men? What if we should consider, that we cannot do a sinful act without the support of his concurring providence? We cannot see, hear, move without his concurrence. All creatures we use for our necessity or pleasure are supported by him in the very act of assisting to pleasure us, and when we abuse those creatures against him, which he supports for our use, how great is his patience to bear with us, that he doth not annihilate those creatures, or at least embitter their use! What issue could reasonably be expected from this consideration, but, Oh wretched man that I am, to serve myself to God's power, to affront him, and of his long-suffering to abuse him! Oh infinite patience, to employ that power to preserve me: that might have been used to punish me! He is my Creator: I could not have been without him, and yet I offend him. He is my preserver, I cannot maintain my being without him, and yet I affront him. Is this a worthy requital of God? Deut. xxxii. 6, 'Do you thus requite the Lord?' would be the heart-breaking reflection. How would it give men a fuller prospect of the depravation of their nature than anything else, that their corruption should be so deep and strong, that so much patience could not overcome it! It would certainly make a man ashamed of his nature as well as his actions.

(3.) The consideration of his patience would make us resent more the injuries done by others to God. A patient sufferer, though a deserving sufferer, attracts the pity of men that have a value for any virtue, though clouded with a heap of vice. How much more should we have a concern for God, who suffers so many abuses from others, and be grieved that so admirable a patience should be slighted by men, who live solely by, and under the daily influence of, it! The impression of this would make us take God's part, as it is usual with men to take the part of good dispositions that lie under oppression.

(4.) It would make us patient under God's hand. His slowness to anger and his forbearance is visible in the very strokes we feel in this life. We have no reason to murmur against him who gives us so little cause, and in the greatest afflictions gives us more occasion of thankfulness than of repining. Did not slowness to the extremest anger moderate every affliction, it had been a scorpion instead of a rod. We have reason to bless him, who from his long-suffering sends temporal sufferings where eternal are justly due: Ezra ix. 13, 'Thou hast punished us less than our iniquities do deserve.' His indulgences towards us have been more than our corrections, and the length of his patience hath exceeded the sharpness of his rod. Upon the account of his long-suffering, our mutinies against God have as little to excuse them as our sins against him have to deserve his forbearance.

The consideration of this would shew us more reason to repine at our own repinings, than at any of his smarter dealings; and the consideration of this



would make us submissive under the judgments we expect. His undeserved patience hath been more than our merited judgments can possibly be thought to be. If we fear the removal of the gospel for a season, as we have reason to do, we should rather bless him that by his waiting patience he hath continued it so long, than murmur that he threatens to take it away so late. He hath borne with us many a year since the light of it was rekindled, when our ancestors had but six years of patience between the rise of Edward the Sixth and the ascent of Queen Mary to the crown.

2. Exhortation is, to admire and stand astonished at his patience, and bless him for it. If you should have defiled your neighbour's bed, or sullied his reputation, or rifled his goods, would he have withheld his vengeance unless he had been too weak to execute it? We have done worse to God than we can do to man, and yet he draws not that sword of wrath out of the scabbard of his patience to sheathe it in our hearts. It is not so much a wonder that any judgments are sent, as that there are no more and sharper. That the world shall be fired at last, is not a thing so strange as that fire doth not come down every day upon some part of it. Had the disciples, that saw such excellent patterns of mildness from their Master, and were so often urged to learn of him that was lowly and meek, the government of the world, it had been long since turned into ashes, since they were too forward to desire him to open his magazine of judgments, and kindle a fire to consume a Samaritan village for a slight affront in comparison of what he received from others, and afterwards from themselves in their forsaking of him, Luke ix. 52-54. We should admire and praise that here which shall be praised in heaven. Though patience shall cease as to its exercise after the consummation of the world, it shall not cease from receiving the acknowledgments of what it did when it traversed the stage of this earth. If the name of God be glorified and acknowledged in heaven, no question but this will also; since *long-suffering* is one of his divine titles, a letter in his name, as well as *merciful and gracious, abundant in goodness and truth*. And there is good reason to think that the patience exercised towards some, before converting grace was ordered to seize upon them, will bear a great part in the anthems of heaven. The greater his long-suffering hath been to men that lay covered with their own dung a long time before they were freed by grace from their filth, the more admiringly and loudly they will cry up his mercy to them, after they have passed the gulf, and see a deserved hell at a distance from them, and many in that place of torments, who never had the tastes of so much forbearance. If mercy will be praised there, that which began the alphabet of it cannot be forgot. If Paul speak so highly of it in a damping world, and under the pull-backs of a body of death, as he doth — 1 Tim. i. 17, 17, 'For this cause I obtained mercy, that Christ might shew forth all long-suffering. Now, unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen,' — no doubt but he will have a higher note for it when he is surrounded with a heavenly flame, and freed from all remains of dulness. Shall it be praised above, and have we no notes for it here below? Admire Christ too, who sued out your reprieve upon the account of his merit. As mercy acts not upon any but in Christ, so neither had patience borne with any but in Christ. The pronouncing the arrest of judgment, Gen. viii. 21, was when God smelled a sweet savour from Noah's sacrifice, not from the beasts offered, but from the antitypical sacrifice represented.

That we may be raised to bless God for it, let us consider,

(1.) The multitude of our provocations. Though some have blacker guilt than others, and deeper stains, yet let none wipe his mouth, but rather

imagine himself to have but little reason to bless it. Are not all our offences as many as there have been minutes in our lives? All the moments of our continuance in the world have been moments of his patience and our ingratitude. Adam was punished for one sin; Moses excluded Canaan for a passionate, unbelieving word; Ananias and Sapphira lost their lives for one sin against the Holy Ghost. One sin sullied the beauty of the world, defaced the works of God, had cracked heaven and earth in pieces, had not infinite satisfaction been proposed to the provoked justice by the Redeemer. And not one sin committed, but is of the same venomous nature. How many of those 'contradictions against himself' hath he borne with! Had we been only unprofitable to him, his forbearance of us had been miraculous; but how much doth it exceed a miracle, and lift itself above the meanness of a conjunction with such an epithet, since we have been provoking! Had there been no more than our impudent or careless rushings into his presence in worship; had they been only sins of omission, and sins of ignorance, it had been enough to have put a stand to any further operations of this perfection towards us. But add to those sins of commission, sins against knowledge, sins against spiritual motions, sins against repeated resolutions and pressing admonitions, the neglects of all the opportunities of repentance; put them all together, and we can as little recount them as the sands on the sea shore. But what do I only speak of particular men? View the whole world, and if our own iniquities render it an amazing patience, what a mighty supply will be made to it in all the numerous and weighty provocations under which he hath continued the world for so many revolutions of years and ages! Have not all those pressed into his presence with a loud cry, and demanded a sentence from justice? Yet hath not the Judge been overcome by the importunity of our sins. Were the devils punished for one sin, a proud thought, and that not committed against the blood of Christ, as we have done numberless times? Yet hath not God made us partakers in their punishment, though we have exceeded them in the quality of their sin. O admirable patience, that would bear with me under so many, while he would not bear with the sinning angels for one.

2. Consider how mean things we are, who have provoked him. What is man but a vile thing, that a God abounding with all riches should take care of so abject a thing, much more to bear so many affronts from such a drop of matter, such a nothing creature! that he that hath anger at his command, as well as pity, should endure such a detestable, deformed creature by sin to fly in his face. 'What is man, that thou art mindful of him?' Ps. viii. **אנוש**, miserable, incurable man, derived from a word that signifies to be incurably sick. Man is *Adam*, earth from his earthly original, and *Enosh*, incurable from his corruption. Is it not worthy to be admired that a God of infinite glory should wait upon such Adams, and worms of earth, and be as it were a servant and attendant to such Enoshes, sickly and peevish creatures?

3. Consider who it is that is thus patient. He it is that, with one breath, could turn heaven and earth, and all the inhabitants of both, into nothing; that could by one thunderbolt have razed up the foundations of a cursed world; he that wants not instruments without to ruin us, that can arm our own consciences against us, and can drown us in our own phlegm, and by taking out one pin from our bodies, cause the whole frame to fall asunder. Besides, it is a God that, while he suffers the sinner, hates the sin more than all the holy men upon earth, or angels in heaven, can do, so that his patience for a minute transcends the patience of all creatures from the crea-

tion to the dissolution of the world, because it is the patience of a God infinitely more sensible of the cursed quality of sin, and infinitely more detesting it.

4. Consider how long he hath forborne his anger. A reprieve for a week or a month is accounted a great favour in civil states. The civil law enacts that if the emperor commanded a man to be condemned, the execution was to be deferred thirty days, because in that time the prince's anger might be appeased.\* But how great a favour is it to be reprieved thirty years for many offences, every one of which deserves death more at the hands of God than any offence can at the hands of man? Paul was, according to the common account, but about thirty years old at his conversion, and how much doth he elevate divine long-suffering? Certainly there are many who have more reason, as having larger quantities of patience cut out to them, who have lived to see their own gray hairs in a rebellious posture against God, before grace brought them to a surrender. We were all condemned in the womb, our lives were forfeited the first moment of our breath, but patience hath stopped the arrest; the merciful creditor deserves to have acknowledgment from us, who hath laid by his bond for so many years without putting it in suit against us. Many of your companions in sin have perhaps been surprised long ago, and haled to an eternal prison, nothing remaining of them but their dust, and the time is not yet come for your funeral. Let it be considered that that God, that would not wait upon the fallen angels one instant after their sin, nor give them a moment's space of repentance, hath prolonged the life of many a sinner in the world to innumerable moments, to 420,000 † minutes in the space of a year, to 8 ‡ million and 400,000 minutes in the space of twenty years. The damned in hell would think it a great kindness to have but a year's, month's, nay, a day's respite, as a space to repent in.

5. Consider also how many have been taken away under shorter measures of patience. Some have been struck into a hell of misery, while thou remainest upon an earth of forbearance. In a plague, the destroying angel hath hewed down others, and passed by us; the arrows have flown about our heads, passed over us, and stuck in the heart of a neighbour. How many rich men, how many of our friends and familiars, have been seized by death since the beginning of the year, when they least thought of it, and imagined it far from them! Have you not known some of your acquaintance snatched away in the height of a crime? Was not the same wrath due to you as well as to them? and had it not been as dreadful for you to be so surprised by him as it was for them? Why should he take a less sturdy sinner out of thy company, and let thee remain still upon the earth? If God had dealt so with you, how had you been cut off, not only from the enjoyment of this life, but the hopes of a better? And if God hath made such a providence beneficial for reclaiming you, how much reason have you to acknowledge him? He that hath had least patience hath cause to admire, but those that have more ought to exceed others in blessing him for it. If God had put an end to your natural life before you had made provision for eternal, how deplorable would your condition have been?

Consider also, whoever have been sinners formerly of a deeper note, might not God have struck a man in the embraces of his harlots, and choked him in the moment of his excessive and intemperate healths, or on the sudden have spurted fire and brimstone into a blasphemer's mouth? What if God had snatched you away when you had been sleeping in some great iniquity, or sent you, while burning in lust, to the fire it merited? Might he not have

\* Cod. lib. ix. Titul. xlvii. 6, 20.

† 525,600.—Ed.

‡ 10.—Ed.

cracked the string that linked your souls to your bodies in the last sickness you had? And what then had become of you, what could have been expected to succeed your impenitent state in this world, but howlings in another? But he reprieved you upon your petitions, or the solicitations of your friends, and have you not broke your word with him? Have your hearts been steadfast, hath he not yet waited, expecting when you would put your vows and resolutions into execution? What need had he to cry out to any so loud and so long, O you fools, 'how long will you love foolishness,' Prov. i. 22, when he might have ceased his crying to you, and have by your death prevented your many neglects of him? Did he do all this, that any of us might add new sins to our old, or rather that we should bless him for his forbearance, comply with the end of it, in reforming our lives and having recourse to his mercy.

3. Exhortation. Therefore presume not upon his patience. The exercise of it is not eternal; you are at present under his patience, yet while you are unconverted you are also under his anger: Ps. vii. 11, 'God is angry with the wicked every day.' You know not how soon his anger may turn his patience aside, and step before it. It may be his sword is drawn out of his scabbard, his arrows may be settled in his bow, and perhaps there is but a little time before you may feel the edge of the one or the point of the other, and then there will be no more time for patience in God to us, or petition from us to him. If we repent here, he will pardon us. If we defer repentance, and die without it, he will have no longer mercy to pardon, nor patience to bear.

What is there in our power but the present? The future time we cannot command, the past time we cannot recall; squander not, then, the present away. The time will come when 'time shall be no more,' and then long-suffering shall be no more. Will you neglect the time wherein patience acts, and vainly hope for a time beyond the resolves of patience? Will you spend that in vain which goodness hath allotted you for other purposes? What an estimate will you make of a little forbearance to respite death, when you are gasping under the stroke of its arrows! How much would you value some few days of those many years you now trifle away! Can any think God will be always at an expense with them in vain; that he will have such riches trampled under their feet, and so many editions of his patience be made waste paper? Do you know how few sands are yet to run in your glass? Are you sure that he that waits to-day will wait as well to-morrow? How can you tell but that God, that is slow to anger to-day, may be swift to it the next? Jerusalem had but a *day* of peace, and the most careless sinner hath no more. When their day was done, they were destroyed by famine, pestilence, or sword, or led into a doleful captivity. Did God make our lives so uncertain, and the duration of his forbearance unknown to us, that we should live in a lazy neglect of his glory and our own happiness? If you should have more patience in regard of your lives, do you know whether you shall have the effectual offers of grace? As your lives depend upon his will, so your conversion depends solely upon his grace. There have been many examples of those miserable wretches that have been left to a reprobate sense, after they have a long time abused divine forbearance. Though he waits, yet he binds up sin: Hosca xiii. 12, 'The sin of Ephraim is bound up,' as bonds are bound up by a creditor till a fit opportunity. When God comes to put the bond in suit, it will be too late to wish for that patience we have so scornfully despised. Consider, therefore, the end of patience. The patience of God, considered in itself, without that which it tends to, affords very little comfort; it is but a step to pardoning mercy, and it may be without it, and often is. Many have been reprieved that

were never forgiven. Hell is full of those that had patience as well as we, but not one that accepted pardoning grace went within the gates of it. Patience leaves men when their sins have ripened them for hell, but pardoning grace never leaves men till it hath conducted them to heaven. His patience speaks him placable, but doth not assure us that he is actually appeased. Men may hope that long-suffering tends to a pardon, but cannot be assured of a pardon but by something else above mere long-suffering. Rest not, then, upon bare patience, but consider the end of it; it is not that any should sin more freely, but repent more meltingly; it is not to spirit rebellion, but give a merciful stop to it. Why should any be so ambitious of their ruin as to constrain God to ruin them against the inclinations of his sweet disposition?

4. The fourth exhortation is, Let us imitate God's patience in our own to others. He is unlike God, that is hurried with an unruly *impetus* to punish others for wronging him. The consideration of divine patience should make us square ourselves according to that pattern. God hath exercised a long-suffering from the fall of Adam to this minute on innumerable subjects, and shall we be transported with desire of revenge upon a single injury? If God were not slow to wrath, a sinful world had been long ago torn up from the foundation. And if revenge should be exercised by all men against their enemies, what man should have been alive, since there is not a man without an enemy? If every man were like Saul, breathing out threatenings, the world would not only be an Aceldama, but a desert. How distant are they from the nature of God, who are in a flame upon every slight provocation, from a sense of some feeble and imaginary honour, that must bloody their sword for a trifle, and write their revenge in wounds and death. When God hath his glory every day bespattered, yet he keeps his sword in his sheath. What a woe would it be to the world, if he drew it upon every affront! This is to be like brutes, dogs or tigers, that snarl, bite, and devour upon every slight occasion; but to be patient, is to be divine, and to shew ourselves acquainted with the disposition of God. 'Be you therefore perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect,' Mat. v. 48, *i. e.* be you perfect and good; for he had been exhorting them to bless them that cursed them, and to do good to them that hated them; and that from the example God had set them, in causing his sun to rise upon the evil as well as the good. Be you therefore perfect. To conclude; as patience is God's perfection, so it is the accomplishment of the soul. And as his slowness to anger argues the greatness of his power over himself, so an unwillingness to revenge is a sign of a power over ourselves, which is more noble than to be a monarch over others.