

**DIRECT. xiv.** *Give diligent attendance upon the ordinances.*—Set thyself in the sight of God, to hear what God will speak, as Cornelius did; (Acts x. 33;) and rejoice to do it: such “shall walk in the light of God’s countenance.” (Psalm lxxxix. 15.) Take heed of the common humour; we begin to be very squeamish and carnal; one is of Paul, another of Apollos; we attend more the man and his artifice, than God and his word. Mr. Bolton, in his florid but profane wit, thought Perkins was a sneaking fellow; but when God changed his heart, he was of another mind.

**DIRECT. xv.** Lastly. *Be more intent upon your duty than upon your comfort; and comfort will follow.*—Order your steps in the paths of divine precepts; walk in all relations according to the rule, and be not so earnest after comfort, so solicitous in that behalf. Walk uprightly, and the face of God will behold the upright. You pray for assurance; be sure your ends be right; let it be more for holiness, that the name of Jesus Christ may be glorified by you, than for comfort. I think, some good people are too carnal in their prayers for assurance; they desire it not so much for holiness as for safety. I have known such; take heed, look well to your aims.

I will conclude with Paul’s prayer, 2 Thess. ii. 16, 17: “Now our Lord Jesus, and God our Father, who hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.”

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## SERMON XXVI.

BY THE REV. THOMAS JACOMBE, D.D.,

SOMETIME FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

HOW CHRISTIANS MAY LEARN IN EVERY STATE TO BE CONTENT.

*For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*—  
Philippians iv. 11.

THE OCCASION OF THE WORDS.

OUR apostle makes this profession of his high attainments in the grace of contentation upon a very weighty reason or motive; namely, that he might obviate all misconstructions and bad interpretations which possibly some might put upon what he had said in the foregoing verse, and should further say in verses 14—16. In every [one] of which we have him expressing his great and affectionate resentment of the Philippians’ bounty and liberality to him: “I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again. Ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction,” &c. “No church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity.” Now he foresaw, that this his just acknowledgment might have some base and ugly censures put upon it, which therefore he makes it

his business to prevent. And he enters a double *caveat* about them: "Not because I desire a gift." As if he had said, "O Philippians, I have received your gifts, and I am very thankful to you for them; but do not think I do this out of any base spirit, as if I desired thereby to be enriched or advanced in worldly possessions.\* No," saith he; "it is not so with me: all that my eye is upon in your kindness to me is this,—'I desire fruit that may abound to your account.'" (Verse 17.) Again: "'Not that I speak in respect of want,' as if I were so exceeding low in the world, that I could not live without your supply; or as if I were a person so tender and delicate, that I could not bear a little want or hardship. No; it is not so with me, neither; for, let my outward condition be what it will, never so low as to outward things, yet I have one reserve always by me,—a contented mind: I cannot have so little but that little shall suffice."† So the text comes in: "Not that I speak in respect of want; for I have learned," &c.

In the words wherein I am concerned, we have,

#### THE TEXT DIVIDED.

1. A lesson to be learned: "To be content."—A rare and excellent lesson, than which there is scarce any one higher and harder in the whole compass of Christianity!

2. Paul's great proficiency in this lesson: "I have learned in whatsoever state I am," or, as it is in the Greek,‡ "in whatsoever things I am," "therewith to be content."—He had in the course of his life passed through various states; and some of them were bad enough, according to the account which he himself gives of them, 2 Cor. iv. 8—10; vi. 4, 5; xi. 23. But no condition came amiss to him; his spirit was always composed and calm; he lived in the constant practice of divine contentment. "I have learned," saith he, and we may believe him, "in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." What an apt scholar, what an admirable proficient, was this blessed man in this high and difficult piece of practical knowledge! Surely, he that can master such a lesson as this, may well be placed in the highest form of Christ's school.

#### OF THE SUPERNATURALNESS AND MYSTERIOUSNESS OF CONTENTMENT.

When he saith, he had "learned to be content," two things are implied in that expression,—the *supernaturalness*, the *mysteriousness*, of contentment.

1. The *supernaturalness* of it: "I have learned" it. As if he had said, "It was not a thing known by me from the first; I brought not this frame with me into the world; it was not ingenite or connate with me;

\* *Gratam sibi esse testatur eorum beneficentiam, &c.; ita tamen orationem temperans, ut ab omni sordium suspitione se purum esse testetur.*—BEZA. "The apostle declares how grateful their bounty was to him; yet so qualifies his expressions as to evince his entire freedom from any thing that might be construed into a sordid avarice."—EDIT. † *Non quòd penuriam passus sim, id dico; didici enim, ut sufficiat mihi id quod habeo.*—*Versio Syriaca.* ‡ *Ev ois equi In quibus sum; id est, Qualiscunque sit mea conditio, &c.*—CALVINUS. ["In what things I am; that is, 'Whatever may be my condition.'"] It is more than if he had said, *In iis quæ habeo*: ["I have learned to be content with what I possess."] *Vide MUSCULUM in loc.*

I had it not from nature or natural light. No; it was purely adventitious, being in part infused by God, and in part acquired by myself. I was not made with it, but I was taught it." Where and how did he learn it? Not at the feet of Gamaliel, not in the schools of the great philosophers; but in the school of Christ, and by the teachings of the Spirit. He might say of this, what he saith of his office: It was "not of men, nor by man, but of God." (Gal. i. 1.) (1.) He attained unto it, not by the teachings of man's wisdom, but by the teachings of the Holy Ghost, to allude to that, 1 Cor. ii. 13. This blessed Spirit set up a supernatural light in him, wrought a supernatural work in him, gave-in divine and supernatural discoveries to him; and so he arrived at his contentment. (2.) And further, he learned it, in a subordinate sense, by his own prudent observation, Christian experience, daily and constant exercise; \* all of which, when sanctified and blessed by God, do contribute much to the making of the heart quiet in every condition.

2. The word notes also the *mysteriousness* of heavenly contentation:—"I have learned" it, saith the apostle, as a great secret, as a thing that lies out of the common road, and is not so easy to be understood.—This notion is not so fully reached by the word here used, *εμαθον*, as it is by another word used in the next verse: "Everywhere and in all things I am instructed," &c. It is *μεμυημαι*, which we render by "instructed," others by "initiated." It implies both initiation and also instruction in things sacred and mysterious, as is commonly observed.† Now, saith Paul, "I am instructed both to be full and

\* *Αρα διδασκαλιας εστι το πραγμα, και γυμνασιας, και μελετης ου γαρ ευκαταστατος εστιν, αλλα και σφοδρα δυσκολον και πονον εχον πολυν.*—CHRYSOSTOMI *Homil. 11. in Philip. iv. 11.* "This grace is not to be attained but by instruction, exercise, and care: for it is not all at once firmly established, but is acquired only with great labour and difficulty." *Διδαχης αδρα το πραγμα και ασκησεως.*—ECUMENIUS. "A matter requiring much instruction and practice." *Γεγυμνασμενος ειμι εν πασι.*—PHOTIUS. "I have been trained and exercised in all things." *Dicens, Didici, significat hanc rem esse disciplina et exercitationis, atque hujus rei habitum longo usu se assecutum.*—ESTIUS. "When the apostle says, 'I have learned,' he implies that this virtue is the result of discipline and practice, and is a habit acquired only by long use."—EDIT. † *Initiatus sum.*—BEZA. "I am initiated." *Utitur verbo quod rebus sacris convenit ut significet pios esse ad hac omnia a Spiritu Sancto sanctificatos et consecratos: μεμυηται enim est sacris initiari. Est igitur sacra institutio.*—ZANCHIUS. "St. Paul here uses a word appropriated to sacred subjects, to denote that pious persons are sanctified and consecrated to all these by the Holy Spirit; for the Greek verb signifies 'to be initiated into religious things.' It is, therefore, a holy training and institution."—EDIT. "I am consecrated to this knowledge of contentment in all estates."—DR. SIBBS'S "Saint's Coriial," p. 4. *Est proprie initiari mysteriis.*—ERASMUS. "It is properly 'to initiate in mysteries.'"—EDIT. *Dicit, Institutus sum, ut innuet hanc rationem vite, velut sacrum mysterium, se divinitus eductum esse. Est enim in Græco verbum a quo mysteria dicuntur.*—ESTIUS. "He says, 'I have been instructed,' to intimate that he had been divinely taught this manner of life, as a sacred mystery. For the Greek word here employed is that from which 'mysteries' derive their name."—EDIT. *Initiatus sum, id est, institutus. Non formidavit apostolus vocem Græcæ superstitionis ad meliores usus transferre; nam et μυστηριον vox hinc venit. In Glossario μωε, initio, imbue.*—DIODORUS SICULUS: *Μνευ τους ανθρωπους, τουτο δε εστι, διδασκειν τα καλα.*—GROTIUS. "I am initiated,' that is, 'instructed.' St. Paul has not feared to transfer to better uses a word appertaining to Grecian superstition; for it is the root of the term 'mystery.' In the Glossary, it is explained as meaning 'to initiate, to imbue.' Diodorus Siculus says, 'To initiate men, is to teach them virtuous principles.'"—EDIT. *Usurpavit hoc verbum omnium pertinentissimè: nam omnino sacra est hæc disciplina Christianæ scientiæ, &c.; et institutio illius non est simpliciter παιδευσις, sed sacra μωησις.*—MUSCULUS. "He has used this word of all others most appositely: for the knowledge gained in the Christian school is wholly sacred; and tuition in it is not merely 'instruction,' but holy 'initiation.'"—EDIT. *Innuens apostolus hanc vite rationem, velut grande sacrumque mysterium, a Deo divinitus*

to suffer hunger." As if he had said, "This indeed is a very mysterious thing; yet God hath brought me to the knowledge and practice of it." So that contentment is not a facile or common matter, such as is open and obvious to every person; but it is an abstruse, hidden, secret thing; there are mysteries in it which only some few do discern; it carries a holy art and skill in it, which he that hath learned is one of the greatest artists in the world. Paul had arrived at this art, for he had "learned in every," &c.

## OBSERVATIONS RAISED.

The observations from the words are four:

OBSERVATION I. *Such who are true disciples of Christ, partakers of the true spirit of Christianity,—they have learned to be content.*

OBSERV. II. *True contentment is a divine and supernatural thing.*—It is a flower which doth not grow in nature's garden, but God plants it in the soul. He only knows and lives it who is taught of God, and who learns it by the teaching of the Spirit. Some of the heathen moralists have spoke much and wrote very well of it;\* but yet they, it is to be feared, were great strangers to the practice of it.† It is the sincere Christian only who doth indeed live it. There must be a divine light beamed into the soul, the communication of special grace from Christ, the supernatural workings of God's Spirit in the heart; or else there can be no true contentment.

OBSERV. III. *Christian contentment hath great mysteries wrapped up in it.*—A contented life is a mysterious life. The apostle, speaking of the doctrine of godliness, saith, It is a "great mystery." (1 Tim. iii. 16.) We may say the same of the practical part of godliness, as it lies in contentment: It is a "great mystery." Here is a man that hath very much, and yet he is not contented; here is another that hath little or nothing, and yet he is contented; surely there is a mystery in the case.‡

OBSERV. IV. *Then a man doth truly know and live contentment, when he hath learned in every state and condition therewith to be content.*—Paul's contentment was universal, extending to all occurrences of Providence: "I have learned in every state," &c. "Everywhere and in all things I am instructed," &c. It is not enough in this or that want and cross to be contented; but in *every thing* that befalls us we must be so; and then we have indeed learned this heavenly lesson.

These are the doctrinal truths which the text presents us with: I have named them, but shall not fall upon the prosecution of all or any one of them. It is the duty itself which I am only to speak unto. And concerning that, too, I am not to launch out into the general handling of it, so as to treat upon the several heads which are proper to it, which work is already done fully and profitably by many of our own writers: I am confined to one particular about it, which will be mainly directive; to show, how, and by what means, this blessed contentation may be attained.

*accepisse.*—VELASQUEZ. "The apostle hints that this course or rule of life was divinely communicated to him, as a great and holy mystery, by God."—EDIT.

\* PLUTARCHUS Περὶ Ευθυμίας. SENECA *De Tranquillitate Animi*. † AS AUSTIN speaks of Seneca upon another account: *Libertas, quæ scribenti affuit, viventi deficit.* "The liberty which appears in his writings, he did not enjoy in his life."—EDIT. ‡ See this opened in MR. BURROUGHS "Of Contentment," p. 17, &c.

## THE MAIN QUESTION PROPOUNDED AND ANSWERED.

It is a very important question which I am to answer this morning; namely, *What are all Christians to do, that they, with Paul, may learn in every state to be content?*

## A THREEFOLD NOTION OF CONTENTMENT.

For the more distinct answering of which, I will consider contentment in a threefold notion; as it consists, I. *In self-sufficiency.* II. *In the bounding of the desires.* III. *In the calmness and quietness of the spirit in every condition.*

## HOW IT MAY BE ATTAINED AS IT LIES IN SELF-SUFFICIENCY.

I. As it lies in *self-fulness*, or *self-sufficiency*.—So it is opposed to emptiness, want, indigence, and to that vexation and dissatisfaction of mind which ariseth from that emptiness. Contentment is a blessed autarchy or “self-sufficiency.” When may a man be said to be contented? Why, when his soul is full in his possessing of that good which is commensurate and adequate to all his desires and wants. This is one explification of contentment, and it is that which the *notatio nominis* [“etymology of the word”] directs us unto; for the Greek word by which it is set forth is *αυταρχεια*, rendered by “sufficiency,” 2 Cor. ix. 8; by “contentment,” 1 Tim. vi. 6. It is the word used in my text: “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am,” *αυταρχεις ειναι*, “therewith to be content:” so that Paul’s being contented was, his having a fulness and sufficiency in himself, insomuch that he wanted nothing. And this is the happiness of every believer; he is *αυταρχεις*, “self-sufficient;” and therein lies his contentment, if not formally, yet fundamentally. “A good man shall be satisfied from himself.” (Prov. xiv. 14.) It is very emphatical, that of the apostle in 2 Cor. ix. 8: “That ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.” He is speaking to the Corinthians of God’s supplying of them in temporal blessings, that they might always have a stock by them, and be thereby in a capacity to relieve the poor. I take the expression more generally, and bring it to the thing which I am upon. A godly man hath “sufficiency” in himself, and that too, *εν παντι παντοτε πασαν αυταρχειαν*, “in all things always all sufficiency;” for so full it is in the original.

OBJECTION. It may be objected, “How can this be? Can any creature be self-sufficient? Is not that a thing peculiar to God himself? Are not all here in themselves indigent and necessitous?”

ANSWER. I answer, Original and inherent self-sufficiency belongs only to God; but there is a dependent, derived, and borrowed self-sufficiency, and *that* every gracious person hath. He having God for his God, and he possessing this God, the catholic and universal Good, in and from him he hath all that ever he can desire or need; and so, in a borrowed sense, he is self-sufficient. Jacob told his brother, he had “all;” (Gen. xxxiii. 11;) for so it is in the Hebrew. “As having nothing, and yet possessing all things.” (2 Cor. vi. 10.) “I have all, and abound: I am full,” &c. (Phil. iv. 18.)

QUESTION. Now let us bring the question to contentment in this notion: *How may men come up to this self-sufficiency?*

ANSWER. *By their getting a covenant-interest in God, and then by their improving and living upon that God who is theirs by covenant.*—Till this be done, there is no self-fulness, nothing but want and emptiness; and consequently no contentment or satisfaction. Whatever good is in the creature, it is a finite, scanty, defective good; and therefore that can never fill up all the desires, or answer all the wants, of a soul. We see, even where there is much of that good, yet the heart is restless and unsatisfied: "In the fulness of his sufficiency he shall be in straits." (Job xx. 22.) But God is a perfect, complete, comprehensive good; all goodness whatsoever centres and concurs in him; and thereupon, when a man is once brought to have and to possess God, he is satisfied, all his desires are answered; in the having of God he hath all, and this must needs content him. This explication of contentment is not so much taken notice of; but it points to that which is the highest and most excellent part of it. O, to be self-sufficient, for the poor creature to have all in himself, he having that God who is All, how near doth this bring him to that which is the incommunicable glory and perfection of God himself! As ever you desire to be partakers of this, follow the direction here given you. We should be contented, that is, quiet and composed, under the *least* of the creature; but men shall never be contented, that is, fully satisfied, under the *all* of the creature. The soul being made by God and for God, nothing can fill it but God.\* Let a man enjoy never so much of the world, yet if there be but some petty thing, which his fancy is much set upon, withheld from him, this is the bane of his contentment; as we see in Ahab and Haman. On the other hand, let a child of God enjoy never so little of the world, yet he having and knowing God to be his God, and he by faith living upon this God, his soul is at rest, he hath full contentment and satisfaction.

#### HOW, AS IT LIES IN THE BOUNDING OF THE DESIRES AFTER EARTHLY THINGS.

II. Contentment lies in the bounding and moderating of the desires after earthly possessions.—So that the heart is not still craving and desiring more and more, but well contented with the present proportion allotted by God. So it is opposed to covetousness: "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have." (Heb. xiii. 5.) A covetous person never thinks he hath enough: like one that is hydropical,—the more he drinks, the more he thirsts; † so it is with the man I am speaking of,—the more he hath, the more he desires to have. He is like the four things spoken of by Solomon, Prov. xxx. 15, 16, "that are never satisfied, that never

\* *Non nisi beatitudine animæ indigentia expletur, nec eidem explendæ nisi Deus sufficit.*—AUGUSTINI *Confessiones*, lib. i. cap. 1; et *De Civitate Dei*, lib. xii. cap. 1. "The soul's want is satisfied with nothing short of bliss, nor is any thing except God sufficient to satiate it."—EDIT. *Omnis copia, quæ non est Deus meus, mihi est egestas.*—Idem, *Soliloquia*, cap. 13. "All my plenty that does not consist in God, is to me poverty."—EDIT.

† *Crescit indulgens sibi dirus hydrops, Nec sitim pellit.*—HORATI *Carm.* lib. ii. od. ii. 13.

"The dropsy, by indulgence nursed, Pursues us with increasing thirst."—FRANCIS'S Translation.

say, It is enough:" an insatiable greediness of wealth possesseth him, so that his pounds must be hundreds, his hundreds thousands, and so *in infinitum*. Contentment, now, suppresseth these exorbitant and extravagant desires; it makes a person to enjoy with cheerfulness what he hath, and not to be always reaching after more. "O," saith the contented person, "the Lord hath very well provided for me! I have enough for me and mine. God gives me food and raiment; it is enough; I have as much as I need, a great deal more than what I deserve; and had I more, it would be but burdensome. It is very well, God hath made a good choice for me; others may have more, I have that which is sufficient." Here is contentment.

QUESTION. Let us bring the question to it, as thus stated. *How may persons learn to be content with what they have, so as not to be covetously greedy of having more?*

ANSWER. I answer, This must be attained,

1. *By the mortification of that inbred lust or natural corruption from which all these inordinate desires after more wealth do proceed.*

2. *By a deep conviction of the greatness of the sin of covetousness, as also of the greatness of the folly that accompanieth that sin.*

3. *By frequent and serious meditation upon death and the eternity which follows upon it.*

4. *By the getting true notions of the vanity of riches and all things here below.*

5. *By the turning the desires into the right channel, and the placing of them upon their proper objects,—God, and Christ, and spiritual things.*

6. *By considering how well others do, who have but a slender proportion of these things, and how thankful they are for that little which God measures out to them.*

I do not at all enlarge on these things, both because this is not that notion of contentment which I most design, as also because I shall have occasion to speak more to them in what will follow.

HOW, AS IT LIES IN THE QUIETNESS OF THE MIND, &C.

III. Therefore we are to consider contentment, as it imports *a calmness and composedness of mind in every condition, stillness and sedateness of spirit under all occurrences of providence*.—When a man likes whatsoever God doeth to him or with him, doth quietly submit unto and acquiesce in God's disposal of him; this is contentment. And so there is a great affinity, though not a perfect identity, betwixt it and patience; so it is opposed to all vexing, fretting, and murmuring, to all undue perturbations of mind under God's dispensations toward us, though they be never so cross to our natural desires. Unquestionably this was one thing, if not the main, intended by our apostle, when he saith, "I have learned in every state to be content." It is as if he had said, "I am brought to this,—always to think well of God and of every state into which he is pleased to bring me: whatever pleases him, pleaseth me; be it imprisonment, poverty, sickness, reproach, death itself; let but God's will be done, and I am content. I am taught to bear all things with great equanimity, or evenness of spirit."\*

\* *A Christo omnia æquanimiter ferre sum edoctus.*—HIERONYMUS.

## THREE HELPS TO CONTENTMENT.

QUESTION. The question, then, will come to this: *How may we and others get this excellent frame, to have the heart in every state calm and quiet, without being disturbed and discontented under any thing that doth befall us?*—The resolving of this question will be my present work.

ANSWER. For answer to it, I will reduce all to these three helps or means; *consideration, grace or godliness, prayer.* He that would learn and live contentment must be a considering man, a godly man, a praying man. Consideration will do *much*, godliness will do *more*, prayer will do *most* of all. In the former, we have what *reason and judgment* can do; in the second, we have what *a divine principle* can do; in the third, we have what *God himself* can do. In consideration, we have the strength of *the man*; in grace, the strength of *the Christian*; in prayer, the strength of *God*: all of which being united, they must needs do the work effectually.

Now, as to these three directions, it is with me as it sometimes is at the head of a spring, where the stream at first is so narrow, that with ease any may stride over it; but afterwards it doth very much widen and dilate itself, insomuch that the little stream is turned into a vast river. So here: take these three heads in the general, and at the first naming of them, so my work seems to lie in a very small compass; but when I come to make a further and more distinct inquiry into them, truly there is a vast sea before me, where it is hard to find any bounds or limits. I shall go over them with as much brevity as the subject will admit of, and as may best conduce to the great end,—the furtherance of contentment.

## OF THE FIRST HELP; NAMELY, CONSIDERATION.

I. The first means is *consideration*.—By which I understand, not only that which is rational and proper to a man, as a man, but that which is religious and divine: both together, but especially the latter, have a great influence upon contentment. Few do live contentation, because few do act consideration: we are passionate, because we are inconsiderate. Were there but more considering doubtless there would be less murmuring. David said in his haste, "All men are liars." (Psalm cxvi. 11.) Men are hasty and sudden and indeliberate; they do not duly weigh and ponder things, and thereupon passion and discontent prevail over them. It is good advice, that in Eccles. vii. 14: "In the day of adversity consider." When we meet with any thing which runs cross to our desires, which makes it a "day of adversity," did we but sit down and "consider" about the matter, this would much tend to the quieting of our spirits. Consideration is an excellent help to contentation. He who is not thoughtful, will never learn the lesson of the text. Discomposures of mind are not to be kept off by any spells or charms, but by solid and judicious consideration.

But we must leave the general, and come to particulars; and now I am going out of the straits, and launching out into the main ocean.



The inquiry is, *How is a Christian to manage consideration in order to his attaining of contentment?*

**DIRECTIONS HOW TO MANAGE CONSIDERATION IN ORDER TO CONTENTMENT.**

For your direction in this, I will,

(I.) *Set before you that special matter which you are to consider upon for this end.*

(II.) *Instance in some of those common cases wherein contentment or discontent are usually acted, and show what those considerations are which are proper to each, for the promoting of the one, and the preventing of the other.*

(III.) *Speak a little to the manner wherein consideration is to be managed.*

**OF THE SPECIAL MATTER OF IT.**

(I.) For the first. Would you know *what is that special and proper matter which your consideration is to work upon, to further contentment in every state?* Then bring it to these three heads. Consider,

1. *Who it is that orders the state.*
2. *What there is in the state itself.*
3. *The excellency of a contented frame.*

**WHO ORDERS THE STATE, AND HOW IT IS ORDERED.**

1. *Who it is that orders the estate.*—Surely, the supreme, sovereign, all-disposing God. “My times are in thy hands.” (Psalm xxxi. 15.) It is so with every man in the world, and with every thing about every man; all is in God’s hands. There is a Hand above, which directs all events here below. He that numbers our hairs, orders our state. Good and evil do not come by chance, or happen in a casual and fortuitous way; but both are disposed by God’s providence, and according to his will. This we seem to give a full assent unto, and yet in practice we do either wholly forget it or flatly deny it. My advice, therefore, is this: When at any time your hearts begin to storm and fret at your condition, pray sit down, and seriously consider, who it is that orders that condition. Let your thoughts dwell upon that, and see if it be not to your advantage, for the suppressing of all undue perturbations of mind. David tells us, while he “was musing, the fire burned;” (Psalm xxxix. 3;) that is, the fire of passion, as many do expound it. There is indeed a musing which tends to heart-disquietment, when all our thoughts are taken-up in poring upon that which troubles us; but that musing which I am now urging hath a quite other effect; it will quench the fire, not kindle it.\* Methinks that Christian should not easily be disturbed at what befalls him, who considers, let it be what it will, it is all of God. What! believe and own a providence, as carving out every condition, and yet be discontented? That is very sad! Is it fit for the creature to be angry with God, as Jonah was? (Jonah iv. 9.) Shall man dispute with God? “the clay say to” the potter, “Why hast thou made me thus?” (Isai. xlv. 9; Rom. ix. 20.)

\* Vide BOETIUM *De Consolatione Philos.* lib. i. Prosa 6.

Must Providence be arraigned at our tribunal, and our will clash with God's? By no means. There is all the reason in the world, that whatsoever pleaseth God should please the creature. "It is the Lord," saith Eli: "let him do what seemeth him good." (1 Sam. iii. 18.) "I was dumb," saith David, "I opened not my mouth, because thou," Lord, "didst it." (Psalm xxxix. 9.) "The Lord gave," saith Job, "and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job i. 21.) I do not know a more effectual help to stillness of spirit, than the consideration of this, that all is ordered by God: and certainly he that is quiet and composed upon this, that frame demonstrates him to have not only a good, but a great and a noble, spirit. It is an excellent passage, that of Seneca: "It is a great soul which surrenders up itself to God; but that is a poor low soul which contends, and thinks ill of the ordering of the world, and which would rather mend the gods than itself."\*

But here in our considering, in order to the having of the heart smooth and calm, it is good to take-in more; namely, not only to employ our thoughts upon the thing, but also upon the modification and circumstances thereof; not only to think of this, that all is ordered by God, but *how and in what manner* all is ordered by him. O, this, if duly weighed and digested, would be of great efficacy to further contentation.

Now, take an account of this in four things:—

(1.) All is ordered by God *irresistibly*.—Isai. xliii. 13: "I will work, and who shall let it?" It is applicable to God's providential dealings with every single person in the world. These are carried on with such a mighty power, that it is a vain thing for any to go about to resist and hinder God in what he will do. If man will be cross, and thwart and control Him, what doth it signify? God's will shall be done for all that; he will do all his pleasure: (Isai. xli. 10:) there is no contending with him. "Should it be according to thy mind? He will recompense it, whether thou refuse, or whether thou choose," &c. (Job xxiv. 33.) Christian, thou passionately desirest such a mercy: thou shalt have it never the sooner for that. If God will bestow it, thou shalt have it; if he will withhold it, all thy earnestness and striving will do no good. Or thou wouldest fain have such an affliction removed: that will not do thy work. If God will take it off from thee, there is an end of it; if he will continue it, thou must bear it still. Humble contentment may do much; but proud contending will do nothing. God knows what he hath to do, and he will not be hindered in what he sees fit to do. Pray, therefore, whenever passion begins to rise in the soul, think of this speedily. If it be thus, that the tide of providence will have its course, that there is no hindering of the almighty and sovereign-acting God; "for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him," (Eccles. viii. 3,) "and worketh all things after the counsel of his own will;" (Eph. i. 11;) then our reason and judgment will tell us, that it is best to yield and submit to this God, and to comply with that which we cannot alter.

(2.) All is ordered by God *righteously*.—He is righteous, and he doeth

\* *Magnus est animus qui se Deo tradidit, pusillus et degener qui obluatur, et de ordine mundi male existimat, et deos mavult emendare quam se.*—Epist. cvii.

nothing but what is righteous. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. xviii. 25.) "The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works." (Psalm cxlv. 17.) "Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints." (Rev. xv. 3.) "Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne." (Psalm cxvii. 2.) "He will not lay upon man more than right; that he should enter into judgment with God." (Job xxxiv. 23.) This is an excellent subject for our thoughts to dwell upon, when any thing troubles us. Well may there be our contentment in every state, when there is God's righteousness in every state. Providence may sometimes be dark and mysterious, yet it is always just and righteous. God may sometimes cross us, but he never wrongs us. He doth not see it good in all our desires to gratify us; but it is good for us in all his dispensations to justify him. (Psalm li. 4; Lam. i. 18.) Doth he remove a mercy which we have not forfeited? Doth he lay on an affliction which we by sin have not deserved? And if so, doth it not become us to be silent before him? "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" (Lam. iii. 39.) "O," saith the church, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him." (Micah vii. 9.) It is a smart passage, that in Prov. xix. 3: "The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the Lord." We provoke God to afflict us, and then we are angry with him; whereas we have reason only to be angry with ourselves, our own sins being the procuring cause of all our miseries. We have often too just grounds of being troubled with our own hearts, because of their pride, carnality, unthankfulness, unbelief, &c.: this is good discontent. But we never have any just grounds of being disturbed at what God doeth, he being in all his actings holy and righteous. Bring it to this in your consideration: "Such a good I want, such an evil I feel; but is God unrighteous in either? Surely, no; for do I deserve the one; and do I not deserve the other? Why, then, should I quarrel or fret against God?" Discontent is a bold impeachment of God's righteousness; and is not that a thing of a very heinous nature, grounded upon the greatest falsehood that is imaginable? O, take heed of it. When you are wronged, *then* complain; but do not do it till then, and then I am sure you will never complain. In a word: let this heart-quieting consideration be much upon your thoughts: All is righteously ordered by God; and therefore all must be contentedly undergone by you.

(3.) All is ordered by God *wisely*.—He is "a God of judgment." (Isai. xxx. 18.) We read of the rings, Ezek. i. 18, that they "were full of eyes." Take the several rounds and windings of providence,—they are all full of wisdom. As God at the first made all things with infinite wisdom, (Psalm civ. 24,) so he doth also dispose and govern all things with infinite wisdom. And this holds true, not only with respect to the whole creation in the general lump and mass thereof, but also with respect to every part and parcel of the creation; especially to man, and to every individual man in the world. Now, if this was believed and considered, it could not but much conduce to make us contented in every condition; for certainly it must be most absurd folly in us to find fault with or dislike that which is done by God in admirable wisdom. In our

worldly affairs, wherein we have to do with men, if we apprehend them to be persons endued with understanding and prudence, we can upon this wholly refer ourselves and our concerns to them, and quietly acquiesce in what they advise and order. The patient likes the physic, though never so nauseous, which his skilful physician prescribes. If the pilot be skilful, the passenger saith, "Let him alone, he knows how to order the vessel." And so in several other instances. And why do not we in all our concerns carry it thus toward God, whose wisdom and faithfulness do infinitely transcend what is in man? Shall we not contentedly rest in what he sees to be fittest and best for us? "Vain man would be wise:" (Job xi. 12 :) he thinks he could order things better than God doth; he will be finding faults in God's disposal of him; but this his wisdom is the highest folly. What a wise choice doth God always make for men! The saints shall see it, when they come to heaven, if not before. May they not, therefore, quietly resign up themselves to him, saying, "Thou shalt choose our inheritance for us?" as it is, Psalm xlvi. 4. On the other hand, what a sad choice do men make for themselves, when in their discontent they will be their own choosers! Rachel must have a child, or she dies; she had her desire, but it cost her her life. Jacob cannot stay God's time for the blessing; by which hastiness, in what a world of troubles did he involve himself! Poor creature, thou needest nothing more to undo thee, than to be left to choose thy own condition. Didst thou but consider this, wouldest thou not be contented when the wise God chooseth for thee? Reason with thyself in secret thus: "Did God know how to make my person, and doth he not know how to order my condition? \* He that hath wisdom enough to steer the great vessels of the world and of the church, hath he not wisdom enough to steer my little boat? He that hath by an unerring providence brought so many saints safe to heaven, doth he not know the best way to bring me safe thither also? Shall he mistake, in my case, who never yet in all the works that have passed through his hands, was guilty of the least mistake?" I say, reason thus, and it is to be hoped this will lay all storms of passion. O what a blessed serenity of mind should we have in every state, did we but live in the steady belief and serious consideration of God's unsearchable wisdom!

(4.) All is ordered by God *graciously*.—Psalm xxv. 10: "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies." Is it poverty, pain, sickness, loss of relations, worldly crosses? All is in mercy, or in order to mercy, to God's covenant-people. I do not say, that all is mercy to these formally, as to the things themselves which befall them; but I say, All is mercy, or in order to mercy. Afflictions are not mercy in their formal nature, but they are *of* mercy *originally*, they coming from God's love, and *for* mercy *finally*, God by them designing good, and nothing but good, to them that love him. This is a thing in special to be thought of by those who belong to God. Others have the sovereignty and righteousness of God to awe them; but saints have the mercy and goodness of God to work their hearts to a quiet submission to his will. And how much is there in this for the furtherance of such a frame of heart in them, could they but by

\* *Qui creare noverat, ordinare non noverat?*—AUGUSTINUS.

consideration draw it out and work it home upon the soul! What! a child of God to vex and fret at this or that, when all is intended for his good, and shall be for good to him? according to that great promise, Rom. viii. 28.

God always knows what is best for his, such is his wisdom! and he always doeth what is best for his, such is his mercy! What a heart-composing meditation is this! There is much in the other attributes before-mentioned to suppress inward perturbations; but there is more in that which I am now upon. Is mercy and goodness the ingredient in every condition? Then, be it never so bitter, the sense of this must needs sweeten it. Is all ordered by a Father in love? not to hurt men, but to do them good? O why then should I give way to discontent? The truth is, it is too low for the saints in every state barely to be content; there is something higher that they should come up unto; namely, to "rejoice evermore in the Lord," and "in every thing to be giving thanks." (Phil. iv. 4; 1 Thess. v. 16, 18.)

So much for the first thing that I would have you fix upon, as the special matter of your consideration, in order to the learning of contentment; and, I beseech you, put it in practice. Whenever heart-disquietment begins to rise in you, sit down, consider, pause upon it,—who it is that orders your condition, and how he orders it: "Irresistibly, righteously, wisely, graciously."

#### CONSIDERATION ABOUT THE STATE ITSELF.

2. Secondly. Act your consideration *upon the state itself in which you are*.—For out of that much may be fetched to further contentment. Paul, our great instance in the text, weighed and considered every state into which he was brought; and by that means he "learned in every state to be content." Let us take the same course, and, through the blessing of God, we shall find the same effect.

*It is mixed.*

QUESTION. *How is a Christian to manage consideration with respect to his state?*

ANSWER. I answer, (1.) Let him consider that *his state is mixed*.—It is neither purely good, nor purely evil; but there is a mixture of the one with the other. It is sweet and bitter mingled together: it is not all mercy,—that is reserved for heaven; nor all misery,—that is reserved for hell; but something of both,—that is proper to the middle state of earth. "God hath set the one over against the other," prosperity and adversity, comforts and crosses, mercies and afflictions, "to the end that man should find nothing after him," (Eccles. vii. 14,) so as to find fault with what God doeth, or to say, This and that might have been better ordered by him. Now, if men would but let their thoughts dwell upon this, how would it tend to the quieting of their minds in every condition! For, "shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job ii. 10.) Especially when we consider, (i.) *That the good is much more than the evil*; and, (ii.) *That the evil is our desert, the good of mere grace*. We take but a partial view of our condition, eyeing the dark side of it only; and then we vex and repine under it: whereas, did we

view the whole, and think of our mercies as well as of our afflictions, we should not carry it so disingenuously toward God. Hezekiah had a sad message sent to him; but he received it with all submission, because there was a mixture of mercy in it: "Good is the word of the Lord," &c. "For there shall be peace and truth in my days." (Isai. xxxix. 8.) There is no state so sad,\* in which a good man may not pick out something to comfort and quiet him: therefore, Christian, deal wisely and faithfully in this; set the good against the bad, and there will be no discontent.

*It is common.*

(2.) This is to be thought of: be the estate what it will, *it is but common*.—Whatever your troubles are, you have many sharers and companions therein. The prophet fancied he was left alone, which made him the more froward in his condition; but God told him, he had reserved some thousands in Israel, who had not bowed their knees to Baal. (1 Kings xix. 14, 18.) And so some in their trials are apt to think they are alone, their case is singular, none so crossed, so afflicted as they; when, God knows, there are many thousands who drink of the same cup. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man," *οὐ μὴ ἀνθρώπινος*. (1 Cor. x. 13.) "Knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world." (1 Peter v. 9.) If this was but considered by persons under afflictions, their spirits would not be so disturbed as they are. When it is but with me as it is with others, why should not I be content? "Men will quietly submit to that which is the lot of others as well as their own." *Ferre quam sortem patiuntur omnes nemo recusat*. The Greek tragedian brings-in one as heightening his misery, and crying out, "Woe is me!" "But why," saith he, "'Woe is me,' when we suffer nothing but what is incident to all mortals?" † Did we but in time of need revive this upon our thoughts, it would much alleviate our grief and obviate all heart-disquietment.

*That which is proper to the present life.*

(3.) *This state doth but agree and suit with the present life*.—Thou canst not expect it should be much better whilst thou art here below; consider this, and be content. We forget where we are, and look for that here on earth which we cannot have; and this betrays us to impatience and discontent. Did we but remember and urge it upon ourselves, that this life is the time of trials, that we are born to trouble here, that it is vanity to expect rest, and ease, and comfort, and felicity in this world; surely we should not be much disturbed at any trouble that doth befall us. Shall Israel, when in the wilderness, murmur, if there they meet with hardships? Shall they who are at sea be angry, if they meet with storms? Shall the traveller be offended at a little bad way? In the

\* *Acquiescendum conditioni suæ, et quàm minimè de illâ querendum; et quicquid hæret circa se commodi apprehendendum est. Nihil tam acerbum est, in quo non æquus animus solutium inveniat.*—SENECA *De Tranquillitate Animi; et Ad Helviam de Consolatione*, cap. 10. "A virtuous man should acquiesce in his condition, and complain of it as little as possible; and he should fully appreciate every advantage of his situation. Nothing is too bitter for a tranquil mind, which draws consolation from every thing."—EDIT. † *Ομοιοι. Τις ὁμοιοι; Θνητα τοι παροσθαμεν.*—EURIPIDES, as quoted by PLUTARCH, *Περὶ Ευθυμίας*, p. 475. (*Ed. Steph.*)

lower region would we have nothing but serenity and calmness? It is a thing no less foolish and absurd, for Christians to be discomposed in their minds, if here troubles and afflictions seize upon them. Alas! these are inseparable from the present life.

*It might be worse.*

(4.) *No state is so bad as it might be.*—Ponder upon that, and it will teach you “in every state to be content.” It is bad, but it might be worse; yea, it *is* worse with many: their wants are more pinching than thine, their pains more acute than thine, their losses greater than thine, &c. Thou hast cause rather to be thankful than impatient, inasmuch as a lesser evil carries mercy in it. But why do I instance in these lower matters? Thy state is an afflicted state, but it is not a damned estate; it is chastening, but it is not condemning; it is some temporary cross, but it is not the everlasting curse; it is affliction for a moment, but it is not eternal misery. It might be hell, separation from God for ever, burning in that fire which is unquenchable. Thou that art freed from these tremendous things, wilt thou fret because of some petty trials or calamities? O, think of this, and be still. Shall the malefactor fret at his judge for sentencing him to some corporal punishment, when he might have passed the sentence of death upon him? Shall the offending son be angry with his father for correcting him, when he might have disinherited him? O Christian, this is thy case toward God: act thy reason and consideration upon it, to suppress all passion.

#### CONSIDERATION OF THE FRAME OF CONTENTMENT.

3. The third thing that thoughts must dwell upon and be employed about in order to contentment, is contentment itself; in considering *what a happy and excellent frame that is.*—And indeed the due consideration of what it is to be content, as *e contra* what it is to be discontented, is not only a strong motive, but also a very proper means, to further the exercise and practice of contentment.

As to the large handling of this subject, the excellency of a contented frame, I must not engage therein; for that I refer you to others, who have done it fully. I will but hint a few things for your thoughts to work upon as occasion shall require. Contentment, therefore,

*It is a gracious frame.*

(1.) *Is a frame that carries much grace in it.*—It is a holy, good, and gracious temper of soul.\* It speaks the creature to have a due sense of God in his sovereignty, righteousness, wisdom, goodness, &c. It speaks the creature to have a due sense of what he is in himself,—a poor, vile, worthless nothing, “less than the least of all the mercies” of God. (Gen. xxxii. 10.) It speaks the due subjection of the creature’s will to the will of his Creator, and that he lives in an entire surrender and resignation of himself to the disposal of his Maker. Is not this holy and gracious? Wherein doth grace more show itself, than in such

\* Την αυταρκειαν αγαθον μεγα νομιζομεν.—DIOGENES LAERTIUS in *Vita Epicuri*.  
“Contentment we account a great blessing.”—EDIT.

things as these? Contentment evidenceth much grace, discontentment much sin. The former is a compound of several graces, the latter a compound of several sins. In a contented frame there is humility, faith, hope, patience, heavenly-mindedness, crucifixion to the world, &c.; in a discontented frame, there is pride, unbelief, impatience, carnality, nay, practical atheism itself. The truth is, contentment is better than any comfort which we want, discontent is worse than any evil which we feel: no outward enjoyment is comparable to the good of the one, no outward affliction is comparable to the evil of the other.

*Highly pleasing to God.*

(2.) *It is a frame highly pleasing to God.*—When a man is once brought to this,—to lay himself and all his concerns at God's feet; to say, “‘It is the Lord, let him do’ with me and mine ‘what seemeth him good:’ I will like well of whatsoever he doeth;” O, this pleaseth God greatly. We are well-pleasing to him, when his providences are well-pleasing to us. The discontented person is angry with God; for which, to be sure, God is angry with him. Nothing provokes God more than a murmuring and fretful spirit; nothing pleases him more than a quiet spirit.

*Greatly advantageous to ourselves.*

(3.) *The advantages of it to ourselves are very great:*

(i.) *It fills with comfort.*—He never wants comfort that lives contentment. A contented spirit is ever a cheerful spirit. It is a heaven upon earth, as the opposite to it is a hell upon earth. It is the mind at rest in every condition. A contented man hath not only the comfort of what he hath, but also of what he hath not. What he wants in outward possession is made up to him in inward submission.

(ii.) *It fits for duty.*—Lord! when the heart is repining and mutinying against God, how unfit is a man for duty! but when the spirit is still and quiet, all is done well. Passion unfits us for converse with men, much more for converse with God in holy duties. It is sad praying, when discontent prevails.

(iii.) *It always procures that very mercy which we desire, or some other that is better for us.*—Discontent makes us to lose what we have; contentment gets us what we want.\* Fretting never removed a cross, nor procured a comfort: quiet submission doth both. The father continues to correct the froward child; but when once it yields and is quiet, he gives it any thing.

(iv.) *It sweetens every bitter cup.*—This ingredient takes off the bitterness of every state, as the wood cast by Moses did the bitterness of the waters. Nothing can come amiss to him that hath learned to be content.

Many such advantages do accrue from contentment: but as to the contrary vice, it is a thing greatly mischievous.

(i.) *It is a sad inlet to sin.*—What will not a man do, when he is under the power of discontent? He will shift for himself, use unlawful

\* *Animus æquus optimum est ærumnæ condimentum.*—PLAUTUS. “Equanimity is the best seasoning of grief and trouble.”—EDIT.



means, do any thing to better his condition; if nothing will do this for him, he can even lay violent hands upon himself. O that we had not too many sad examples of this!

(ii.) *It is a sad preparation to all temptations.*—The devil will be sure to be fishing where the waters are troubled: as flies settle upon the galled back, so the Tempter betakes himself to the man that is in pain with his condition.

(iii.) *It deprives of happiness.*—For the discontented person always “thinks himself miserable, and so he can never be happy.”\*

(iv.) *It exposes to dreadful judgments.*—What severe punishments did the Israelites’ murmuring bring upon them! Read Num. xiv. through-out; Psalm cvi. 24—27; 1 Cor. x. 10.

Now if these things were but laid to heart and seriously considered by Christians, would not the consideration thereof much conduce to their attaining and living of contentment? Certainly the due fixing and working of the thoughts upon the excellency of this frame, on the sin and evil of the contrary frame, would be of great use, and very effectual toward the composing and quieting of their spirits in every condition. “Suppose it pleaseth the Lord so or so to afflict me, to exercise me with such or such things, which are very cross to my desires; and hereupon I find my heart to begin to be moved; what is now to be done to prevent the further growth of passion? Why, I will retire, and weigh with myself what a gracious temper of soul contentment is, what a sinful and cursed temper of soul discontent is; how much I shall please God and profit myself by the one, how much I shall offend God and prejudice myself by the other. This my thoughts shall stay upon, and I will reason with myself, ‘Why art thou, O my soul, thus disquieted within me?’ (Psalm xlii. 11.) This is the course which I resolve to take in my afflicted condition, to keep my heart still and composed, hoping that God will bless it to the end.” Ay, and so do; for it is a good one, and many by experience have found the benefit of it.

But, to close this head: we are undone for want of consideration; the world groans under the mischievous effects of inconsideracy; which might be made out in several particulars. I shall go no further than that one thing which I am upon. Whence is it that there is amongst men, amongst professors, so little of contentment? that so few have learned in every state to be content? that impatience, repining, quarrelling with God, discontent, are so epidemical? that the most live in the dialike of their condition? I say, Whence is this? I answer, It is in a great measure from the general neglect of consideration. Could we but bring men to this, contentation would not be so rare a thing as now it is. I do not assert this one means to be sufficient, but, believe me, it would go very far. Well, as any of you desire for the time to come to be as here Paul was, whenever any thing troubles you, see that you fall upon consideration; and draw it to these three heads,—who orders your state; how your state is circumstantiated; what the frame itself is.

So much for the First thing in the direction,—the special matter upon which consideration is to be acted in order to contentment.

\* *Nemo felix est, qui suo judicio miser est.*—SALVIANUS *De Providentiâ Dei.*

PARTICULAR CASES WHEREIN CONSIDERATION IS TO BE ACTED  
IN ORDER TO CONTENTMENT.

(II.) I go on to the Second; namely, *To instance in some of those special cases, unto which contentment doth mainly refer; and to show, how consideration is to be managed to help-on the practice of the duty in each of them.*—I have in what hath gone before seldom made any particular mention of these instances, because I designed to speak particularly and apart to them under this head. To speak to all, and that too according to the copiousness of the subject, would be a vast work. I shall only single out some few of the most usual cases, and be also but very brief upon them.

Heart-inquietude, or discontent, doth too often arise from what is in and about the inner man, and is of a spiritual nature; as, lowness of gifts, weakness of grace, the continuance and strength of sin, temptations by Satan, God's withdrawals, want of assurance and of the comforts of the Spirit, and the like. But most commonly it ariseth from things of a worldly nature, wherein the outward part is concerned; (for that is our tenderest part, and therefore, if we be troubled there, we are most apt to complain;) such as lowness of estate, crosses in relations, bodily infirmities, badness of the times, injuries and bad usages of men, meanness of rank and quality in the world, &c. These are the things which usually disturb and disquiet us. But now for each of them, there is that consideration which is proper for the settling and composing of our minds. I must speak only to the two first:—

(I.) LOWNESS OF ESTATE.

*As to lowness of estate.*—How is the world filled with discontent about that! Poverty is an affliction which few do with patience undergo: when the belly pines, the back starves, it is hard to keep the heart in a submissive frame. It is an easy matter for them that are full to advise them that are in want to be content; but if they themselves were in wants, they would not find it so easy a matter to follow their own advice. To live faith and patience under straits as to worldly things, is sooner spoken of than done.

THE SEVERAL DISCONTENTS OF SEVERAL MEN ABOUT WORLDLY THINGS.

But, to take-in more than what this head in strictness leads me to, (because I would speak a little to the several discontents of men about their earthly estates,) I will consider them as thus diversified:—

First. *Some are poor indeed*, having little or nothing of this world's goods.

Secondly. *Some have a competency, some have abundance*, but yet they are not satisfied.

Thirdly. *And some lose what once they had.*

Now all of these, though in different circumstances, are to endeavour after contentment. "How?" By consideration.

*Such who are in poverty, what they are to consider of in order to contentment.*

“How is that to be managed?” Thus:—

First. Is *extreme poverty* the case? Consider, then,

1. “*The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich.*” (1 Sam. ii. 7.)—God measures out to every person his proportion of these things. He makes what dividend and gives what allowance he pleases to every man in the world. Is this considered? I wish we could see it, in the calmness of *their minds who* are under a low estate. The father divides his estate among his children, giving to every one of them his share, more or less, as he thinks meet; and this being his act and will, they all submit and acquiesce therein. And shall your heavenly Father’s allotting to you what he thinks meet signify nothing to the making of you contentedly to rest in his will? May not this great Dispenser of blessings do with his own what he pleaseth?

2. *None so poor but they have more than what they deserve.*—Who can claim or challenge any thing at God’s hands? Surely he that merits nothing must not murmur because he hath but little. (Matt. xx. 15.) Thy apparel is very mean, thy diet is very coarse, thy habitation very uncomfortable: be it so, yet even in these there is mercy; it is from the wisdom of God that thou hast no better, from the mercy of God that thou hast so good.

3. As low as you are in these things, *hitherto the Lord hath provided for you and yours; and assuredly, you being his people, walking in his fear, trusting of him, he will still provide.*—You have in the promise what you want in the visible estate. Discontent is in part founded in distrust; take but this out of the heart, and the other vanisheth. Now, why should God’s poor (I speak only of such) distrust his provision? What abundant assurance hath he given thereof! Read Psalm lxxiii. 3; xxxvii. 25; cxi. 5; cxxiii. 15; Matt. vi. 25, to the end of the chapter; Rom. viii. 32; Heb. xiii. 5; with many other scriptures.

4. *A little with God’s blessing will go very far, and do very well.*—“I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread.” (Psalm cxxxii. 15.) “Ye shall serve the Lord your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water.” (Exod. xxiii. 25.) Daniel and his companions fed upon nothing but pulse and water; and yet “their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat of the portion of the king’s meat.” (Dan. i. 12, 15.) The widow was reduced to a low ebb: there was left but a little oil in the cruse and a little meal in the barrel; yet these held out, and the more she spent of them the more they increased. (1 Kings xvii. 12.) What strange things are done with small pittances, where the blessing of God is!

5. *The saint’s little is better than the sinner’s all.*—“Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith.” (Prov. xv. 16.) “A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked.” (Psalm xxxvii. 16.)

6. *No man can judge of God’s love or hatred by these things.* (Eccles. ix. 1.)—For he often “gives riches to those whom he hates, and denies

them to those whom he loves."\* It is very usual for those who have most of his love to have least of worldly things. Joseph and Mary themselves could bring but "a pair of turtle-doves," the poor man's offering. (Luke ii. 24.) Nay, how poor was our Lord himself! "The foxes have holes," &c. (Matt. viii. 20; 2 Cor. viii. 9.)

7. God keeps you low in earthly possessions, but *how is it with you in higher and better things?*—You are poor without; are you not rich within?† "There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches." (Prov. xiii. 7.) "I know thy poverty, but thou art rich." (Rev. ii. 9.) No riches like to soul-riches. To be "rich in faith," (James ii. 5,) "in good works," (1 Tim. vi. 18,) "toward God," (Luke xii. 21,) this is to be rich indeed. Mountains of gold are nothing to one dram of true grace in the soul.

8. You think God is strait-handed toward you in temporal, but *is he not abundantly gracious in spiritual and eternal, blessings?*—He denies the pebble, but gives you the pearl; withholds shadows and trifles, but gives you what is solid and substantial. You have not worldly wealth, but you have the pardon of sin, the love of God, adoption, union with Christ, &c. You have no inheritance here, but you are "heirs of the kingdom;"‡ (James ii. 5;) the "inheritance" that is "incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away," (1 Peter i. 4,) is yours; you have little in the stream, but all in the fountain; God is yours, and in him all is yours.§

And are these things true? Certainly; then, you have no reason to complain or to be discontented because of your poverty. Pray, under heart-risings because of this, turn your thoughts upon what hath been hinted, work these and such like considerations home upon your hearts, be intent upon them, weigh them thoroughly; and I hope this will very much settle and quiet your spirits under the lowness of your estates.

*Such who have better estates, what are they to consider in order to contentment?*

Secondly. *There are some with whom it is much better.*—They have a good allowance from God, a comfortable supply in these things, so that they want nothing convenient or necessary: nay, there are some who abound in wealth; riches flow-in upon them; their coffers are full of silver and gold, their incomes vast and great: and yet neither of these have learned to be content, no, not in their good state. Discontentedness

\* *Et iratus dat, et propitius negat.*—AUGUSTINUS.

† *Intus dives, foris pauper; pauper in cellâ, dives in conscientiâ: arcam respicit auro inane, conscientiam respice Deo plenam.*—AUGUSTINUS in *Psalm xxxvi.* "Inwardly thou art rich, though outwardly poor; poor in thy hut, but rich in thy conscience. Thou lookest into a chest empty of gold, but inspect thy conscience, which is filled with God."—EDIT. *In animo divitiæ sunt, non in patrimonio.*—SENECA. "Riches consist of the treasures of the mind, and not of patrimonial possessions."—EDIT. † *Dejectæ mentis est, qui familiaris rei meminit, cum vocatur ad regnum.*—CHRYSOLOGUS, *Serm. 22.* "He must be of a low mind, who bestows a thought upon his private fortune, when he is called to the possession of a kingdom."—EDIT.

§ *Semper est dives Christiana paupertas, quia plus est quod habet, quam quod non habet; nec pavet injusto mundo indigentiam laborare, cui donatum est in omnium rerum Domino omnia possidere.*—LEO MAGNUS, *Serm. 4. De Quadragesimâ.* "Christian poverty is always rich, because its possessions are greater than its privations; nor can it fear to suffer indigence in an unjust world, when to it is given to possess all things in Him who is the Lord of all."—EDIT.

lodges not only in the breasts of them who have nothing, but of some who have a competency, yea, of some who have abundance of these things: both are dissatisfied with their condition, as thinking they have not enough, and therefore are full of vexatious desires after more. Now if this be your condition without, and your frame within, then it is a most necessary inquiry, how and wherein you are to act consideration, so as thereby to arrive at contentment. For answer to which I shall direct you to a few things: Consider, therefore,

1. *The greatness of the sin of discontent in you above what it is in the persons spoken of before.*—It is in them who want what is necessary very sinful; but in you to whom God is so good and bountiful, it is out of measure sinful. We blame the beggar that is angry, though we give him nothing; but if we give him something, be it never so little, especially if we give liberally to him, and yet he grumbles and repines, this aggravates his crime exceedingly. So here, it is a great sin in the poorest to murmur against the Lord: but in you, to whom he is so liberal, at least to give you enough, the sin is much greater. This speaks you to be guilty of prodigious ingratitude to God, and of very inordinate love to the world; both of which are sins of a crimson tincture.

2. *How contented and thankful would many be, if it was but with them as it is with you!*—Had they but pence for your shillings, shillings for your pounds, and pounds for your hundreds, they would think themselves well provided for, and serve the Lord with joyfulness.\* Nay, you yourselves, in your first entrance upon the world, when your beginnings were very low, when, Jacob-like, you had little more than a staff in your hands, (Gen. xxxii. 10,) did not you then think, if you might but have that measure of worldly things which now you have, you would look upon God as dealing very graciously with you? And now he hath answered your expectations and desires, and yet you are not contented!

3. *Christians are to bound their desires after things below, not to seek great things for themselves here.* (Jer. xlv. 5.)—If God will give them but what is necessary, they are not to quarrel for the want of what is superfluous. The covenant-indenture goes no further than food and raiment: therefore, “having food and raiment let us be therewith content.” † (1 Tim. vi. 8.) Jacob went no higher than those. (Gen. xxviii. 20, 21.) Christ directs us to go no further in our prayers than “daily bread.” (Matt. vi. 11.) If we may be supplied with these, we have no reason to be discontented for the withholding of what is more. A competency is all that we can or should expect. The Israelites murmur if they have not quails; manna would not content them. They had their quails; but they had better have been without them.

\* *Quam multos esse conjectus qui sese colo proximos arbitrentur, si de fortuna tue reliquis pars iis contingat?*—BOETHIUS *De Consol. Philosoph.* lib. ii. prosa 4. “How many persons dost thou suppose there are, who would think their happiness almost heavenly, if they could only obtain a portion even of the refuse of thy fortune?”—EDIT. † *Τροφήν, ἢ τρυφήν·σκεπασματα, ἢ κοσμηματα.*—ISIDORUS. “‘Food,’ not luxurious delicacies; ‘raiment,’ not ornaments.”—EDIT. *Nihil habet dives de divitiis, nisi quod ab illo postulat pauper, victum et vestitum: cetera omnia superflua sunt.*—AUGUSTINUS *De Verbo Domini.* “A man of opulence possesses no riches, except such as one that is poor asks of him,—food and clothing: all other things are superfluities.”—EDIT. *Cibus et potus sunt divitiarum Christianorum.*—HIERONYMUS. “The earthly riches of Christians extend not beyond meat and drink.”—EDIT.

4. *A little sufficeth nature, less sufficeth grace ; but covetousness is never satisfied.*—Was it not for this, how happy might we be, and always say, as to God's allowance, "It is enough!" Nature is content, grace is thankful ; corruption only is ravenous and querulous.\*

5. *A great and overgrown estate is not the best estate.*—Which if men did consider, they would not be greedy to have it, or discontented upon the not having of it. As to the truth of this, do but set ambition and avarice aside, and let reason, experience, prudent observation be consulted, and the thing will be unquestionable. There is a middle state, both as to honour and riches, which certainly is the best state.† Agur made a wise choice, when he prayed, "Give me neither poverty nor riches ; feed me with food convenient for me." (Prov. xxx. 8.)

(1.) A full estate is not best for *duty*.—For we often see, through the naughtiness of men's hearts, that they who have most in the way of mercy do least in the way of duty. I deny not but that some who are very rich are also very good, living in all due piety toward God, and doing much good in their places toward men ; and it is pity it should be otherwise : but I fear this conjunction is somewhat rare. The ground that lies lowest usually is most fruitful ; the earth that hath the richest mines in it commonly is most barren. Who serves God less than they who are most wealthy ? To their shame be it spoken. You would have more of this world, and fret that God keeps you so much under. Alas ! you know not what you desire : had you more, it would be hurtful ; if the estate was better, the heart would be worse. (Eccles. v. 13.)

(2.) Again : as it is not best for duty, so neither for *safety*.—Who are exposed to so many dangers as they who swim in earthly treasures ? The higher is the building, the more it is endangered by fierce winds ; great vessels strike where lesser go with safety ; the ship that sails with a full wind, and all its sails up, is more apt to overset ; such who feed high are in most danger of fevers and surfeits.‡ Every condition hath its snares : but the high condition is exceeding full of them.

(3.) And, once more : it is not the best for *comfort*.—The poor envy the rich, when in truth they have more cause to pity them. O the cares,

\* *Satis est populis fluviisque Ceresque.*—LUCANUS. "The river and the corn the people's wants supply."—EDIT. *Citò expletur natura necessitas ; frigus et fames simplici vestitu et cibo expelli potest.*—HIERONYMUS in *Jovinum*. "The calls of nature are quickly appeased : cold and hunger may be warded off by simple clothing and food."—EDIT. *Ad manum est quod sat est.*—SENECA. "A bare sufficiency is always within reach."—EDIT. *Parabile et expositum quod natura desiderat.*—Idem. "What nature demands is accessible and easy of acquirement."—EDIT. *Quod natura satis est, homini non est.*—Idem, *Epist.* 119. "Man is not contented with that which satisfies nature."—EDIT.

*Discite quàm parvo liceat producere vitam.*—LUCANUS.

"Learn with how little life may be prolong'd."—EDIT.

† *Optimus pecunia modus est, qui nec in paupertatem cedit, nec procul a paupertate discedit.*—SENECA *De Tranquillitate Animi*. "That measure of riches is best, which neither approaches very near to poverty, nor yet recedes far from it."—EDIT.

‡ *Sæpius ventis agitatur ingens*

*Pinus ; et celsa graviore casu*

*Decidunt turres ; feriuntque summos*

*Fulmina montes.*—HORATII *Carm.* lib. ii. od. x. 9.

"When high in air the pine ascends,  
To every ruder blast it bends ;  
The palace, from its airy height,  
Falls tumbling down with heavier weight ;  
And when from heaven the lightning flies,  
It blasts the hills which proudest rise."—FRANCIS'S Translation.

distractions, hurries, that they live under! \* In all their great enjoyments, how little do they enjoy either God or themselves! and can any state be comfortable without these? "Take heed of covetousness: for a man's life," that is, the comfort of his life, "consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." (Luke xii. 15.) The easiness of the garment or shoe doth not lie in its bigness, but in its fitness: and so, it is not the greatness of the estate that gives comfort, but the suiting of the mind and of the estate, be it what it will. There often is that serenity of mind in a poor cottage which is not enjoyed in the stately palace; the mean man sleeps better on a hard bed, than he who lies upon his bed of down; and there is a more cheerful spirit where the fare is coarse, than where there are the greatest dainties. You fondly imagine, could you but screw up your estates to such a height, then you should and would live with comfort: but, I pray you, why may you not do so now, under what you have already? as that commander answered Pyrrhus, designing so and so to enlarge his conquests; which when he had done, then he would sit down and be quiet and live merrily. Should you arrive at what you aspire after, you would find yourselves then to be as far from what you promise to yourselves as now you are. It appearing, then, that the great estate is not the best, why should any vex and be disturbed because that is denied to them?

6. *The contented man is never poor, let him have never so little; the discontented man is never rich, let him have never so much.*—He is not rich who possesseth much, but he who desires no more than what God gives him. The way to be rich indeed, is not to increase the wealth, but to lessen the covetings of the heart after more: he that is ever desiring is ever wanting, and he that is ever wanting is ever poor.†

7. *What are these earthly riches, that any should be thus insatiably greedy of them?*—Surely there is but little in them,—fancy, mistakes, ignorance, being laid aside: they are no better than unsatisfying, perish-

\* *Pauperes ditioribus eò plerumque lætiores, quò animus eorum in paucioribus distringitur.*—SENECA *Ad Helviam*, cap. 12. "The poor are generally so much the more cheerful and happy than the rich, as fewer cares occupy their attention."—EDIT.

*Tantis parva malis, curd majore metuque*

*Servantur. Misera est magni custodia census.*—JUVENALIS *Sat.* xiv. 303.

"Wealth, hardly earn'd, is kept with double pain.

How cursed the guardian of a great domain!"—HODGSON'S Translation.

† *Cui cum paupertate bene convenit, dives est.*—SENECA. "He is a rich man, who is on good terms and contented with his poverty."—EDIT. *Non qui parum habet, sed qui plus cupit, pauper est.*—Idem, *Epist.* 2. "He is not a poor man who has little, but he who covets more than he already possesses."—EDIT. *Nihil interest, utrum non desideres, an habes.*—Idem, *Epist.* 119. "There is little or no difference between thy possessing and thy not desiring it."—EDIT. *Desunt inopia multa, avaritiæ omnia.*—Idem, *Epist.* 108. "Indigence is in want of many things; avarice, of all."—EDIT. *Nunquam porum est quod satis est, nunquam multum est quod satis non est.*—Idem, *Epist.* 119. "That can never be called 'a little' which is sufficient; nor is that rightly said to be 'much' which is insufficient."—EDIT. *Semper inops quicumque cupit.*—CLAUDIUS. "The covetous is always poor."

*Multa petentibus*

*Desunt multa. Bene est cui Deus obtulit*

*Parca quod satis est manu.*—HORATI *Carm.* lib. iii. od. xvi. 42.

"He that, repining, covets more,  
Is ever wanting, ever poor:

But those art bless'd, to whom indulgent Heaven

Enough, but with no lavish hand, has given."—DUNCOMBE'S Translation.

*Μη περιω την κτησιν αυξειν, αλλα την επιθυμιαν μειωσαι.*—PLATO. "Endeavour not to increase thy possessions, but abate and diminish thy desires."—EDIT.

ing, uncertain things. "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase." (Eccles. v. 10.) Men may fill their bags and chests with silver and gold, but they cannot with them fill their souls: no, the soul is a thing too great to be filled with such little things as these are. Had you all that you desire, you would be but where you are, dissatisfied still; for your desires would still grow as fast as your riches should grow: yet more must be had, and that is the bane of satisfaction.\* Alexander could conquer the world, but the world could not satisfy him; he wept because there were no more worlds to conquer.† "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity and vexation." I say, too, They are perishing and uncertain things. That is the epithet of the apostle: "Trust not in uncertain riches." (1 Tim. vi. 17.) "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away, as an eagle toward heaven." (Prov. xxiii. 5.) This we see verified every day; and if so, doth it become a man, much more a Christian, to be discontented, because he hath but little of such vain things as these are? Methinks, such should scorn to have their generous minds discomposed for such trifles.

8. *As they are dying things, so we are dying persons.*—What, though we be straitened in them? it is not necessary our estates should be very large, when our lives are not likely to be very long. "A little money serves the traveller that hath but a short journey to go:" *Parum vie, quid multum viatici?* Might we either always live, or when we die carry with us into another world what we have laid up in this, then our greediness of these things would be more excusable; but neither of these are to be expected. "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither." (Job i. 21.) "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." (1 Tim. vi. 7.) Grace will accompany us into the other world, but other things must be all left behind. And, which I would further add, is it not stupendous folly for dying men, who yet have never-dying souls, to trouble themselves so much about dying things? Have not they other things to mind? and should not all their solitudes be employed about those things? such as "the things above," "the kingdom of God, and his righteousness," "treasures in heaven," &c. (Col. iii. 1; Matt. vi. 33, 20.) If eternal things and the eternal state were but thought of, every state here would be good enough.

9. *The less any have, the less they are to account for at the great day.*—Every man is accountable to God for what he hath of this world's good; for that is but a trust, and he that is the Lord and Owner of all will reckon with men how this trust is fulfilled; and according to the

\* *Auri namque fames parto fit major ab auro.*—PRUDENTIUS. "The thirst for gold increases in proportion to the quantity which is acquired."—EDIT.

*Crescentem sequitur cura pecuniam,  
Majorumque fames.*—HORATIUM Carm. lib. iii. od. xvi. 17.

"But gloomy care, and thirst of more,  
Attend the still-increasing store."—FRANCIS'S Translation.

*Instammatur lucro avaritia, non restinguitur.*—AMBROSIIUS. "Acquisition does not extinguish, but inflame, avarice."—EDIT.

† *Unus Pellæo juveni non sufficit orbis:*

*Est aut infelix angusto limite mundi.*—JUVENALIS Sat. x. 168.

"One world the ambitious youth of Pella found  
Too small; and toss'd his feverish limbs around."

GIFFORD'S Translation.



proportion which they are intrusted with, so will the account be taken. They, therefore, who have great estates, and do but little good with them, will have a sad account to make at the great day. Now, how little is this considered! We are always grasping at more, not considering that, the more we have, the more we stand accountable for when we shall be judged. Do we improve what we have? If we do not, it is mercy that the Lord intrusts us with no more. One talent will be too much, if that be not traded for God; why then should we be angry, if we have not five? All would live in large houses; but will they be able to pay the rent that such houses are set at? If not, it is better for them to content themselves with a meaner habitation: and so it is with the thing which I am upon. Many at the great day will rejoice they had no more, whilst many will wish they had not had so much.

10. To conclude this head: *Doth any man better his estate by discontent?*—Is that the way to improve it? Certainly, no. It often makes us to lose what we have, but it never gets us what we want,\* as was said before in the general. In the distribution of his blessings, God will not be dealt with in this way. He that will eat or drink more than what is sufficient, often vomits up all; so, he that will have more than what God sees convenient for him, loseth all by this greediness.

I have been large upon this, because of the commonness of discontent in this case, and the exceeding great sinfulness of it. You whom the Lord hath blessed with competent estates, especially you whom the Lord hath blessed with full estates, be sure you learn and live contentment; and whenever the heart begins to be unquiet about the proportion allotted to you, go over in your thoughts what hath been propounded for you to consider of, and I trust you will find good by it.

*Consideration to further contentment under losses.*

Thirdly. There is a third case; namely, *some have lost what once they had, or God pursues them in the way of their callings with loss upon loss.*—This is a trial under which men's hearts are prone to be inflamed; it is no easy thing to bear it with patience and contentment. Especially when losses come thick, and go very deep; when a considerable part of the estate is taken away, nay, as it often falls out, the whole; O, this is greatly afflictive, and wounds the spirits of men very much. Of the two, we find it by experience an easier matter to be contented under that poverty which a person hath always been in, than under that which he is brought into by some severe interposures of Providence. Former plenty puts more bitterness into present penury; it is a greater affliction to common sense to have an estate and to lose it, than to be without an estate where it was never had; this *fuisse felicem* ["past state of happiness"] is a great aggravation of misery.† But to the thing itself. It

\* PLUTARCHUS Περὶ Φιλολουτίας. † *Cogitandum est quantum levior dolor sit non habere quàm perdere, et intelligemus paupertati eò minorem tormentorum quò minorem damnorum esse materiam.*—SENECA *De Tranquillitate Animi.* "We must reflect how much lighter an affliction it is, not to possess at all than to lose what we have; and we shall then perceive, that the very little of which poverty can be deprived, is the less in danger of inflicting torments of this description."—EDIT. *Tolerabilius est faciliusque non acquirere, quàm emittere; idèoque lætiores videbis quos nunquam Fortuna respexit, quàm quos deseruit.*—Idem, *ibid.* "The non-acquisition of property is much easier to be borne than its loss; and therefore thou wilt always find those more happy on whom Fortune never smiled, than those whom once she favoured but has deserted."—EDIT.

pleased the Lord lately to lay this city in ashes; and O, how great, how universal, were the losses then sustained! Your houses were burnt down, many of your goods consumed by the merciless flames, the great supports of your livelihood removed, and many thousands of you had that wound then given you that you must halt-of all your days. Since that, you feel the sad effects of war, losses at sea, decay of trade, &c., upon which it is not with you as formerly it was; there is a great diminution in your estates. Now, was and is all this undergone with contentment? In these dispensations of providences, have you learned contentment? Would to God it was so! If it be not so as yet, I would desire you to fall upon consideration; and I hope, for the future it will be so.

1. How, or wherein, is consideration to be acted, so as that under worldly losses you may be contented? Why, thus: Consider, *God's hand is in them, and they all issue out of his will.*—Men may be the instruments, but that is all; they do but accomplish that which God will have to be done. Therefore, whatever thy loss be, for the matter and degree of it, however it befalls thee, eye God in it, see it as ordained and ordered by him; let thy thoughts fix upon this, and thy heart will not dare to murmur. What are thy losses to those which Job underwent? All was swept away from him in a moment; yet he considered the Supreme Agent in all this, and this kept down all passion: “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” (Job i. 21.) “O,” saith he, “it is the Lord, and the Lord who gave; \* I submit.” May not the great Sovereign of the world do with us and ours what he pleaseth? May not he diminish and withdraw all our blessings as he sees good? He that gives, may not he take? Hath not he a greater propriety in what we have than we ourselves? It being his corn, his wine, his wool, and flax, (Hosea ii. 9,) may not he dispose of it at his pleasure? Doth it not become us contentedly to return what he sees meet to lend us but for such a time? † Pray, think of this, or you will never learn in a losing state to be content.

2. *Possibly something is taken away, but all is not.*—More is left than what is taken: He that might have stripped thee to nakedness, hath only cut off a skirt of thy garment. Hast thou any reason to fret against the Lord? That would be highly base and disingenuous. He to whom all was forfeited takes but a part instead of the whole; surely thou art not to impeach his justice, but to admire his goodness.

3. Whenever we meet with these rebukes, it would be well to consider, *whether we did not need them.* (1 Peter i. 6.)—A full diet is naught for distempered bodies; therefore the physician prescribes a more sparing diet. When we are full fed with these comforts, have no losses or crosses in the world, we are apt to grow proud, secure, wanton, to forget God, to cast off duty, to dream of an earthly paradise, to say, “It is good being here,” to neglect spiritual and divine things. It is high time, therefore, for God by these ways to cut us short, thereby to reduce us to

\* *Abstulit, sed et dedit.*—SENECÆ *Epist.* 64. “He has taken away; but then, it was he who gave.”—EDIT. † *Quandocunque reddere jubebitur, non queretur cum Fortunâ; sed dicet, Gratias ago pro eo quod possedi habuique.*—Idem, *De Tranquillitate Animi.* “When the wise man is commanded to render up his possessions, he will not querulously expostulate with Fortune; but will say, ‘I return thee thanks for what I have held and enjoyed.’”—EDIT.

a little better temper of soul. If the sap run out too much into the branches, there is no way to preserve the root but by the cutting off the luxuriant branches. God will have a thousand estates to be lost, rather than that one soul should be lost: the burning of cities is nothing, if that be necessary to the saving of souls.

4. *Suppose all be lost ; in that all we lost but little.*—For the all of this world is but one remove from a mere nothing. *Perdidit infelix totum nil,\** is applicable to the losses of the rich as well as of the poor. Is there any thing in this but what might be expected from the nature of the thing? Therefore there should be no disturbance about it. Who will be concerned at the melting of snow? What wise man will be moved for the breaking of a glass? It is strange that a Jonah should be in such a pet for the withering of a gourd. “Riches are not for ever: and doth the crown endure to every generation?” (Prov. xxvii. 24.) “The fashion of this world passeth away.” (1 Cor. vii. 31.) All the estate here is made up of movables: that usual distinction which is good in law is not so in divinity.

5. Again: thou sayest, “All is lost;” but *if thou be a child of God, the best is yet secure.*—God, and Christ, and grace, and heaven are yet thine; and no loss is very considerable, so long as these are safe. O believer, in all thy losses be quiet and cheerful! God, who is thy portion, is the same for ever. Job “lost all he had from God; but God himself he did not lose; and in him he had all that he had lost.” † Never complain, till God be lost. *Fas tibi non est de Fortunâ conqueri, salvo Cæsare,‡* said Seneca to Polybius. Let the stars disappear; if we may have the sun, who will be troubled? Let earthly things vanish; so long as God abides, it is enough. Had we the whole world to lose, one God would abundantly recompense the loss of all of it. Many are inward gainers by their outward losses; by having the less of the creature, they have the more of God. O happy exchange! the worse their condition is without, the better it is within in respect of grace and comfort.

6. *It is an excellent frame of spirit under losses to be patient and contented.*—All the possessions of Job, when he was in the height of them, did not reflect so much glory upon him, as his blessed submission when he was deprived of them. Then God blessed him; now, in another sense, he blessed God. All are convinced they should do this when God gives, but it is very rare for any to do it when God takes away. Micah’s mother had some shekels of silver taken from her, and she falls a-cursing. (Judges xvii. 2.) This precious saint had all taken from him, yet no cursing, as Satan had belied him; no, nothing but blessing God. It is an excellent temper, “comfortably to enjoy outward blessings whilst God shall continue them, contentedly to part with them when God shall remove them.” *Suave est, si quid das; parvus dolor, hoc ubi tollis.* When I see any carrying it thus, I conclude that earthly things are not too fast rivetted in their hearts, (as it is a sign the tooth is loose which is drawn out without much pain,) and that they are duly affected toward God, heaven, and heavenly things.

\* “The unhappy wretch has lost his entire nothing.”—EDIT. † *Perdiderat omnia quæ dederat Deus; sed habuit ipsum qui omnia dederat Deum.*—AUGUSTINUS. ‡ “It is not lawful for thee to complain of Fortune, while the emperor is safe.”—EDIT.

These are some of the things the due consideration whereof would much help-on contentment under losses. And so much for the using of this means toward the furtherance of tranquillity of mind, with respect to what may disturb it in and about the estate.

(II.) HOW CONSIDERATION OUGHT TO BE ACTED IN ORDER TO CONTENTMENT UNDER CROSSES IN RELATIONS.

Secondly. I will instance in *relations*; in and about whom there is as much of mercy or affliction, of comfort or discomfort, and consequently of content or discontent, as in any one thing whatsoever. The discontent usually is occasioned and vented in these three cases: 1. *The want of relations much desired.* 2. *The death of relations much beloved.* 3. *The uncomfortableness of relations who are spared.* Now consideration, wisely and faithfully managed, would be of great use to allay all storms, and to keep the heart even and calm, in all these cases: and therefore my next work is to show, what we are, under each of them, to consider, in order to the promoting of this frame. But I must of necessity be briefer under this head than I was under the former, that I may not draw out this discourse to too great a length. Wherefore I will but shortly set the particulars before you that you are to consider of, and leave the enlargement of them to yourselves in your consideration.

1. *How as to the want of relations desired.*

First. *When relations are much desired, but denied and withheld, there is too often discontent.*—As, to instance only in children: what daily iniquities of spirit are there in some, because of the want of these! They have many other comforts, but the not having of this embitters all. Abraham himself was much troubled about it: “Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless? Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.” (Gen. xv. 2, 3.) But Rachel’s passion rose very high: “Give me children,” saith she to her husband, “or else I die.” (Gen. xxx. 1.) Children are very great blessings; they are promised as such, Psalm cxxviii. 3, 4, and in other places; and indeed they are one of the sweetest flowers that grow in the garden of earthly comforts. Hence it is hard for persons contentedly to bear the want of them. But whoever you are upon whom this affliction lies, pray labour after a contented mind under it; and in order thereunto, consider,

(1.) *It is the Lord who withholds this mercy.*—For he gives it, or withholds it, as seems good to him. Providence is not more seen in any of the affairs and concerns of men, than in this of children; that there shall be many or few, some or none, all falls under the good pleasure and disposal of God. When Rachel was so passionate under the want of these, Jacob rebuked her sharply: “Am I in God’s stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?” (Gen. xxx. 2.) “Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.” (Psalm cxxvii. 3.) “He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children.” (Psalm cxiii. 9.) Now if this was duly thought of, would it not quiet the heart? When the thing is ordered by God, shall we dislike and fret at what he doeth?

May not he dispense his blessings where he pleaseth? O, if he will give, we should be thankful in the owning of his goodness; if he will deny, we must be patient in the owning of his sovereignty.

(2.) *Sometimes this mercy is denied, but better are bestowed.*—God doth not give children, but he gives himself; and is not he “better than ten sons?” as Elkanah said of himself to Hannah. (1 Sam. i. 8.) There is “a better name than of sons and of daughters” promised, Isai. lvi. 5; they who have that “better name” have no reason to murmur because they have not that which is worse. They who have God for their Father in heaven may well be content to go childless here on earth. If God will not give me the lesser, yet if he gives me the greater good, have I cause to be angry? Surely, no more than he hath to be angry with me, to whom I deny a brass farthing, and give him a purse of gold.

(3.) *Children sometimes are withheld a long time, but they are given at last.*—Of which we have many instances. The case is never desperate, so long as we can submit and wait; it is to be hoped God designs to give us that comfort, under the want of which we can be contented.

(4.) *If children be given after froward and irregular desires of them, it is to be questioned whether it be done in mercy.*—And it is to be feared, this frame will very much spoil the mercy. What we get by discontent, we seldom enjoy with comfort. How many parents have experienced the truth of this! They were not quiet till they had children, and less quiet after they had them; they proved so undutiful, stubborn, naughty, that there was much more of vexation in the having than there was in the wanting of them.

(5.) *Many wanting the comfort of this relation, it pleaseth God to fill up the comfort of their other relations.*—The husband or the wife are the better because there are no children; and so the Lord recompenses what is denied in one relation by doubling the comfort of another relation.

(6.) *Children are great comforts, but they are but mixed comforts.*—The rose hath its sweetness, but it hath its pricks too; and so it is with children. O the cares, fears, distractions, that parents are filled with about them! They are certain cares, uncertain comforts, as we usually express it. We eye the sweet only of this relation, and that makes us fretful: did we eye the bitter also, we should be more still and calm.

(7.) *Had we this mercy in the height of it filled up in all respects according to our desires and expectations, it is a thousand to one but our hearts would be too much set upon it.*—And that would be of fatal consequence to us upon many accounts; and therefore, God foreseeing this, it is out of kindness and love that he withholds it from us.

These things being considered as to this affliction, methinks they should very much dispose the heart to contentation under it.

## 2. How as to the loss of relations.

Secondly. *When dear relations are taken away by death, then it is a time of discontent.*—To lose a tender husband, an affectionate wife, a hopeful child, a faithful friend, O! this is a cutting trial, a very smarting rod, under which it is no easy thing to keep the spirit sedate, free from

all passion and discomposures! Yet, as hard as it is, consideration would much facilitate it. Consider, therefore,

(1.) *About the true stating of this affliction.*—It is great to us, because of the greatness of our affection; but otherwise, as to the thing in itself, is it more than the breaking of a pitcher? than the dying or withering of a flower? than the nipping of a blossom? and will any considerate person be much moved at such things as these? The Heathen bore the death of his child very well upon this consideration: when news thereof was brought to him, he was not disturbed; for, said he, "I knew I begot my child mortal." We forget what these comforts are, and then we fret at the loss of them.

(2.) *Think of the commonness of this affliction.*—You think, never was any sorrow like to yours, never did any lose such a husband, or such a wife, or such a child, as you have done! Alas! this is but the fondness and excess of love. Many have lost as dear relations as you have lost, let them be what they will; you are not the first, nor will be the last, who are thus exercised. When a mercy is common in our eye, we set it too low; when an affliction is singular in our eye, we set it too high.

(3.) *It is God himself who makes this rod.*—If a sparrow doth not fall to the ground without him, certainly a dear relation doth not. (Matt. x. 29.) Shall we not be silent before him? He that gave, he hath taken; he that hath a greater right to husband, wife, child, than any of the possessors have, he hath seen good to call back what is his own: shall any vex at this? Dead relations are not lost, but restored to their first Owner;\* and though it is our affliction to lose them, yet it is mercy that ever we had them: † both must be put together, and then the heart will be quiet.

(4.) *Is all taken?*—If not, thou hast no reason to complain. The child is taken, but it is but one of many,—but the husband is yet spared. Thou must not be impatient for what is removed, but thankful for what is continued; as Themistocles, when Amyntas took away some of his dishes, bore it contentedly, saying, "He might have taken all!" And pray keep down all passion; for this may make you lose what you have, though it will not regain you what you have lost. "O, but," some will say, "my only child is dead." Is it so? Thy affliction is the greater, but thy contentation must be never the less. He that gave an only son to thee, may take an only child from thee. Isaac was an only son, and yet Abraham willingly offered him up to God.

(5.) *It was high time for God to make a breach upon you.*—It is the wisdom of God to his, he will not let them have long what they overlove: had you loved less, the child might have lived longer. When these comforts are too much in our hearts, they must not be long in our hands. It is infinite mercy that God will secure our love to himself,

\* Μηδενοτε επι μηδενος εως οτι Απωλεσα αυτο, αλλ' οτι Απεδωκα. "Never, on any deprivation, say, 'I have lost this;' but rather, 'I have restored it.'"—EDIT. † *Sus-tulisti liberos quos ipse dederas: non contristor quòd recepisti, ago gratias quòd dedisti*—HIERONYMUS *Ad Julianum*. "Thou hast taken away the children which thou didst thyself bestow: I do not grieve that thou hast retaken them; I thank thee that ever thou gavest them."—EDIT. *Non maceremus quòd talcm amisimus, sed gratias agimus quòd habuimus.*—Idem. "We do not lament that we have lost one of such excellence; but we are grateful that we were ever blessed with the possession of him."—EDIT.

and take that away from us which would take off our affections from him.

(6.) *It is that temper of soul which Christianity calls for, quietly and readily to resign up all our comforts to God's disposal.*—Christian, it is a great part of thy religion to be content under these crosses; not to have thy comforts torn from thee as the plaster is from the flesh, but to come off easily as the glove doth from the hand.\*

(7.) *Where there is ground of hope that the everlasting state of dead relations is secured,* (as there is for the adult who lived in the fear of God, for children descending from parents in covenant with God,) *there it is mere self-love which must cause discontent.*—For, had we true love to the dead, we should rejoice in their advancement; as Christ saith: “If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I go unto the Father.” (John xiv. 28.) You are troubled because they are not with you; but you should joy in this,—that they are “with Christ, which is far better.” (Phil. i. 23.)

(8.) *Think how others have undergone this trial.*—Aaron had his sons cut off by a dreadful judgment; but it is said of him, he “held his peace.” (Lev. x. 3.) So it was with Job; and yet he “blessed the Lord.” (Job i. 21.) So long as there was hope of the life of the child, David prayed and fasted; but when he saw God's will was done, he rose up, and ate, and afflicted himself no more. (2 Sam. xii. 15—23.) Nay, I might recite several examples of Heathens, who did, to the shame of us Christians, bear the death of dear relations with great equanimity and undisturbedness of spirit.† Well, I hint these several things to you: when any of you are thus tried, I allow you a due and regular grief and sense of God's afflicting hand; but there must be no vexing or discontent under it; which the considering of the forementioned particulars may very much prevent or remove.

### 3. *How as to uncomfortable relations.*

Thirdly. *When relations continued prove uncomfortable.*—This occasions daily risings of heart and much discontent. O the sad fires of passion which hereby are kindled in many, too many, hearts and houses! The comfort of relations is grounded upon suitableness; where that is not, the rose is turned into a brier or thorn. What is unsuitable is uncomfortable, as the yoke that doth not suit or fit the neck is always uneasy. Now this unsuitableness refers either to the *natural temper*, or to *something of a higher nature*: in both it is very afflictive; but especially in the latter.

(1.) *There is an unsuitableness in respect of the natural temper or disposition.*—I intend in this, principally, husband and wife. The one is loving, mild, gentle, of an even and calm spirit, sweet and obliging in his or her converse: the other is quite contrary, froward, passionate, choleric, hard to be pleased, always quarrelling, &c. Here is a cross, now, and a heavy cross too; but what is to be done by them that bear it, so as that

\* *Omnia ista nobis accedant, non hæreant; ut, si abducantur, sine ulla nostri laceratione discedant.*—SENECÆ *Epist.* 74. “These things may approach us, but must not cleave to us; so that, if they be taken from us, they may not wound or lacerate us.”—EDIT. † See VALERIUS MAXIMUS, lib. v. cap. 10.

they may learn contentment under it? Why, let them be often in considering these things :—

(i.) *That God hath a special hand in this affliction.*—It is he who brings persons together in this relation ; he made the match in heaven, before it was made on earth ; and therefore he is to be eyed in all the consequences that attend it. If it be comfort, he is to be blessed for it ; if it be discomfort, he is to be submitted to under it.

(ii.) *Though this be a sharp trial, yet it is for good, where it is sanctified.*—It drives many nearer to God, weans them more from the world, keeps them humble, draws out their graces, gives them experience of supporting mercy, learns them to be more pitiful to others, and the like.

(iii.) *May be, this is the only affliction with which some are exercised.*—In all things else it is mercy ; only in this thing God sees it good to afflict. Surely such have little reason to be discontented. What ! under such variety of signal mercies, canst thou not bear contentedly one signal affliction ?

(iv.) *The cross is heavy, but patience and contentedness will make it lighter.*—*Levis fit patientiâ quod corrigere est nefas.\** The more the beast strives, the more the yoke pinches ; the more quiet he is, the less it hurts him : and so it is in that case which I am upon.

(v.) *Possibly more suitable relations were once enjoyed, but forfeited.*—So that if you will be angry, it must be with yourselves, not with God.

(vi.) *Death will soon put an end to this cross.*—And we shall shortly be in that state wherein we shall have nothing unsuitable to us.

(2.) But there is an unsuitableness in *higher things*.—Such as do more immediately concern the honour of God, and the everlasting condition of souls ; as grace and no grace, holiness and sin, godliness and ungodliness. Here now I principally intend parents and children, though other relations may be included also. Here is a parent that fears God, that lives a holy and godly life, that owns the good ways of God, and walks in them, &c. But his child or children are of a quite other spirit, and take a quite other course. O ! they live in sin and wickedness, in open enmity to God, carrying it as the sons of Belial ; they curse, swear, drink, defile their bodies, profane sabbaths, neglect duties, scoff at godliness, puff at all good counsel, discover a spirit obstinately set against God, &c. This is an affliction of a very great stature, taller by the head and shoulders than several that have been spoken unto before ; yet many godly parents groan under it, whose head and hearts are broken by ungodly children ; and never was this affliction more common than now, when youth is so much debauched. I verily believe, many good parents could with much less grief bear the death of their sons, were they but fit for it, than that which they daily undergo through the wickedness of their lives. Truly these are much to be pitied ; yet I would desire them to labour to be contented, and submissively to bear this heavy cross. In order to which frame, let them consider,—

(i.) *That it is no new thing for good parents to have bad children.*—Sometimes it so happens that when the father is bad, the son is good ; but it more frequently happens, (and God suffers it to be so, that the world may see, grace doth not run in a blood,) that when the father is

\* “ That which cannot be amended is made more tolerable by patience.”—EDIT.



good, the son is bad. It hath been so from the beginning. Adam had his Cain, Noah his Ham, Abraham his Ishmael, Isaac his Esau, David his Amnon, and so in many others: and it will be so to the end of the world. Pray think of this: though it is a cutting, yet but a common, affliction.

(ii.) *Children are ungodly, yet there is hope at last they may be reclaimed.*—As stubborn as they are, God can make them yield; he can change their hearts, and alter their course: and who knows at what day or hour he will come? So long as there is life, there is hope of their conversion. What a wicked son was Manasseh! Yet God wrought upon him at last. What a sad life did the Prodigal live! Yet he returned to his father at last. God can turn notorious sinners into eminent saints. Wait therefore, but do not fret.

(iii.) *The case is sad, but discontent will do no good in it.*—Earnest prayer and quiet submission may do much, but impatience will do nothing. It troubles me much, when I see gracious parents vexing themselves for their ungracious children. Alas! by this they do but hurt themselves, but do no good to them.

(iv.) *I suppose it to be but your affliction, not your sin.\**—You have done your duty in godly education, in setting a good example, in exhorting, reproofing, &c., in praying to God for your children. If, after all this, they will be naught, their blood will be required of themselves; you have freed your souls from their eternal ruin and perdition.

(v.) *God will secure and advance his own glory.*—That is the thing that cuts you, that God should be dishonoured by any that descends from you: but as to that, satisfy yourselves,—He will, even by your sinful relations, one way or other promote his honour. If he be not glorified by them, which we should desire, he will be glorified upon them, which we must submit unto. It is to many divines an unquestionable truth, that, when at the day of judgment the sentence of condemnation shall be pronounced upon wicked children, their godly parents shall so rest in God's will, and be so swallowed up in his glory, that they shall not grieve at this sentence, but rather rejoice at it. Now, then, if God here will harden their hearts, and give them up to their own lusts, though you are not to rejoice at this, yet you ought quietly to submit to it.

(vi.) *It is good to reflect upon the grace of God to yourselves.*—And to consider that it is infinite mercy that you are not as bad as they. Discriminating grace, if duly thought of, would be an excellent antidote against passion in the present trial. But I must say no more of this.

I have, as briefly as I could, for the matter would have admitted of far greater enlargement, gone over two grand cases;—the one referring to the estate, the other to relations; and shown under each, how consideration is to be acted in order to contentment. There is a third,—referring to the body, (1.) With respect to *deformity*; (2.) To *defects*; (3.) To *infirmities, pain, sickness*; an affliction both very common and also very great,† to which I would fain have spoken something; but I must for-

\* Εκεως ἁμαρτημα, σον δε ατυχημα.—METROCLE to Stίλο, concerning his bad daughter, in PLUTARCH'S "Morals," p. 468. Ed. Steph. "It is her sin, but thy misfortune."—EDIT.

† Των κακων το απευκτοτατον και βαρυτατον.—GREGORII NAZIANZENI Orat. 16. "Of all evils this is the heaviest and most to be deprecated."—EDIT.

bear, lest I should too much exceed the bounds of such a discourse as this is.

HOW CONSIDERATION IS TO BE MANAGED FOR THE MANNER OF IT.

(III.) Only there is a third general which I propounded at the first to say something of, which I will but just touch upon, and so dispatch this first help or means to the learning of contentment. Hitherto I have been directing you as to the *matter* of consideration; now I am to direct you as to the *manner* of it. He that would so consider as thereby to get and keep his heart settled and composed under every trouble,—he must be therein *frequent, speedy, serious*.

1. *Frequent*.—If you be but seldom in the practice of this duty, you will never arrive at being masters of the divine art of contentment. You must consider again and again, by repeated thoughts to work upon your hearts that which is proper for the quieting of them. By much chafing the ointment pierceth into the part affected; and so it gives ease: when the disease is hard to be cured or apt to return, the remedy must be often used. And so it is here: as to the prevention or removal of discontent, the mind must be often in consideration. The fiercest creatures, by frequent converse, become more tame and governable. Dogs bark not at those to whom they are used. The moralist applies it to the passions of the mind, which do in a great measure lose their fierceness, and are more easily brought under command, when a man inures himself to consideration.\*

2. *Speedy*.—As soon as ever the hellish fire of discontent begins to kindle in thy heart, presently think of that which may be as water for the quenching of it. If you let it alone, like other fires, it will get such a head that it will be too hard for you. Impatience is the soul in mutiny against God: now mutinies in an army must be suppressed speedily. It is good to take the distemper at the beginning: as soon as there is any commotion in the spirit because of this or that cross, immediately retire, ply the heart with consideration, reason with yourselves: “Is not all of God? Shall not all be for good?” and so on, as hath been directed. Nay, indeed, it would be of great advantage to us to be beforehand with the affliction; not only to see it before it comes, but to lay up heart-quieting thoughts for it against it shall come. How “is an evil lessened by the foresight of it!” *Prævisi mali mollior ictus*. How patiently is it undergone when one hath had some forecast in his thoughts about it! † Few are so fit for consideration after a trouble as they are before it; the fore-game is much easier to be played than the after-game: and its efficacy, too, is the greater when persons are so early at it. Before God strikes the blow, cast with yourselves: “What, if my child, or my estate, should be taken from me, how should I bear such an affliction contentedly? Why, things stand thus or thus; and therefore I must be contented.” What would follow upon this? Why, matters being digested beforehand, the mind would be the more still when the evil shall actually seize upon you.

\* PLUTARCHUS Περὶ Εὐθυμίας. † *Res adversas infringit quisquis prior vidit.*—*SENECA De Tranquillitate Animi.* “He who foresees adversity, lessens its force.”—EDIT.

3. *Serious.*—Loose and careless and sudden thoughts signify but little to a froward heart ; but when they are intent and fixed, so as to dwell upon what lies before them, then they have a good effect. The plaster must lie upon the sore, and then it works the cure : when consideration is managed with the utmost intension of the mind, with the staying of the soul upon the proper object, then, and never but then, doth it further contentation. So much for the first help or means.

#### THE SECOND HELP TO CONTENTMENT ; NAMELY, GODLINESS.

II. The second is *godliness*.—The apostle links them together, 1 Tim. vi. 6 : “Godliness with contentment is great gain.” What may be the reason of this connexion? Not only because they do ever accompany each the other ; or because they, being conjoined, do make the Christian complete,—in godliness he submitting to the preceptive, in contentment to the providential, will of God ; or because godliness gives the highest motives to contentment, and that again reflects a great beauty and lustre upon godliness : but chiefly because godliness issues out in contentment, and causes that blessed frame of heart ; and because without godliness there can be no contentment. He that is not a godly man,—that is, a sanctified and gracious man ; for I shall consider godliness principally in its habitual notion,—cannot be a contented man, in that sense wherein the apostle speaks of it in the text. Many of the old Heathens seemed to go very far in contentment, to have a great mastery over passion, in all occurrences to be very sedate and calm. They notably improved their reason and consideration, if not wholly to suppress discontent, yet, however, to keep it in, so as that others should not perceive it ; and many of them, through the firmness and greatness of their spirits, could and did bear much with great tranquillity of mind ; for “the spirit of a man” may bear “his infirmity.” (Prov. xviii. 14.) But yet, as to true evangelical contentment, they knew nothing of it ; for that necessarily requires a divine principle within, and a divine and special assistance from above,—to both of which they were altogether strangers. And so it is still with all mere moral men, such as are destitute of grace and of the Spirit. So that, as ever you desire to learn in every state to be content, you must look to this,—that ye be renewed and sanctified. All motives without, let them be never so high, all consideration within, let it be never so serious, will not prevail to the keeping of the heart quiet under crosses, unless there be a work of saving grace there. The true and only way to be content, is to be godly ; for indeed contentment is the daughter of godliness.

#### HOW GODLINESS DOTHS FURTHER CONTENTMENT.

QUESTION. For the better opening of this direction, it will be requisite that we inquire, *How godliness or grace doth produce this effect of contentation.*

ANSWER. It doth it by these ways or methods :—

1. *As it rectifies and works in and upon the several faculties of the soul.*—For this is necessary to be done in order to contentment ; and it being done, contentment cannot but follow upon it. Let me make this out particularly :—

(1.) *Grace rectifies the understanding.*—Which it doth by dispelling its natural darkness, and setting up a clear and saving light in it. Now this light hath a great influence upon contentment; for, the understanding being thus enlightened, fancy and imagination do not carry it in the soul as before they did; and hereupon the heart is brought to a more quiet temper. Our inquietudes of mind are founded in the power and prevalence of fancy: we fancy such and such things to be evil, when in truth they are not so, at leastwise as God sanctifies them; or to be more evil than in truth they are: and upon this, when those things are laid upon us, we fret and vex. Whereas, do but “take away this vanity, and mistake of fancy, there would be no such great evil in what we suffer.” *Nihil admodum atrox passus es, nisi id tu tibi fingis*, as he of old truly said.\*

And again: we fancy such and such things to be good, yea, good in a very high degree; and then, upon the want of them, we are disturbed. Whereas, if fancy did not delude us, they have but very little good in themselves, and as to us, in our special circumstances, may be none at all: and therefore, why should we be troubled about them? The winds, then, arising from this point, grace lays them by freeing the person from the power of fond imagination, and instead thereof by setting-up solid judgment in him; so that he shall be able to judge aright of things, and not to perplex himself, one way or another, further than the nature of the thing before him will bear. Men generally are unquiet, because they are injudicious: if sanctifying grace, therefore, by that heavenly light which it brings into the understanding, shall make them more judicious, by doing of this it must also make them more quiet. An enlightened head promotes a submissive heart; when it is right counting about worldly things, then it is contentedness. No wonder that Paul had learned in every estate to be content, he having before learned to “count” all things but “loss for Christ.”

(2.) *Grace rectifies the will.*—Thus: in causing it to comply with, and yield unto, the will of God. Whenever this supernatural habit is infused into a man, there is a melting of his will into God’s will; so that there is but one and the same will between them. Now, by this means it doeth the work which I am speaking of; for when it is thus, certainly there can be nothing but contentment. What can put the spirit into disorder, when it is come to this?—“Not as I will, but as thou wilt.” When wind and tide go contrary ways, then the waters are rough and boisterous; but when they both go the same way, then all is calm and smooth. So here; when God’s will and ours differ, then storms of passion rise; but when they agree, there is nothing then but evenness and stillness in the spirit. O! we are never discontented but it is from the jarring and clashing of our wills with God’s.† As he said, *Cesset voluntas propria, non erit infernum*; so say I, “Let but Christians lay aside their own will, and rest in the will of God; and assuredly there will be no perturbation of mind in them.” Indeed, the duty of universal contentment is

\* *Nihil est miserum nisi cum putes.*—BOETHIUS *De Consolatione Philosophiæ*, lib. iii. cap. iii. sect. 8. “Thou art never in a miserable condition, except when thou fanciest thyself so to be.”—EDIT. † *Quod sis, esse velis, nihilque malis.* “Whatever thy condition is, be content with it, and long for no other.”—EDIT.

unpracticable till it come to this; and grace bringing the creature to it, so it works contentment.

(3.) *Grace rectifies the affections.*—In taking away their inordinacy toward earthly things, in keeping of them within their due bounds and limits; and so it works contentment. What is it that causes unquietness in us? For the most part we may resolve it into the unmortifiedness of some affection or other. Lust is the fuel that kindles and feeds this fire, that makes us to quarrel and fall-out with God, because our conditions are so and so. Great vessels must have much water, or else they split themselves. Where the love is too great to earthly things, if much of them be not possessed, there is great danger of discontent; but where it is duly bounded, a little of these things sufficeth, as smaller vessels sail well enough even in shallow waters. The pain in the head proceeds from the foulness of the stomach; purge but that, and the head hath ease. Purge but the heart from its unholy affections, and a man hath ease and comfort in every condition. That which engenders impatience, is the greatness of the affliction. But what puts a greatness into the affliction? Why, the greatness of the affection. If the relation was not over-loved, the loss of him would not amount to such an affliction as it is usually made. "He that over-oves will over-grieve:" *Qui nimis amat nimis dolet*; and he that over-grieves will be apt to murmur. Grace, then, confining the affections to these sublunary things, so it furthers contentment.

(4.) *It makes the conscience good.*—And a good conscience is that ark into which God uses to put the manna of contentment. It carries joy in it; it is "a continual feast." (Prov. xv. 15.) Now he that hath this joy within is not easily or much moved at any trouble without; let the weather be what it will, there is nothing but serenity in his soul. If the part be sore, you cannot touch it but it is in pain; let it be but firm and sound, and it can bear a smart blow without complaining. When conscience is sound and good, a man can bear any thing; but when it is not so, he can bear nothing without being under great anguish of mind.

2. *Godliness works contentment by making a person to have a powerful sense of God's glory, so as always to rest in that as his ultimate end and most desirable good.*—This is that glorious effect which grace produceth in the heart; and thereby it doth effectually further quietness of spirit in every condition. Pray observe it: selfishness and lowness of men's ends is at the bottom of all their discontent; they look no higher than their sensual ease, delight, and satisfaction; and if they be crossed in these, then they storm and are angry. But now, a godly man, living up to his godliness, his eye is upon God's glory, as the thing which he chiefly aims at and mainly centres in; and upon this he is content in every state. "For," saith he, "let my state be what it will, God will glorify himself by it; and it is that state which God did see would most tend to his glory, otherwise he had not put me into it. O! therefore, I will like it, yea, rejoice in it; inasmuch as it is most conducive to that which is better than all my little comforts, namely, the glory of God." Methinks *he* should live in all contentedness *who* knows and minds these two things,—that all occurrences tend to the promoting of God's honour, and then too of his own good. But the knowing and minding of these is proper only to one that is godly: how necessary, therefore, is godliness

to contentment! Take an unregenerate man: these neither do nor can signify any thing to him. For, as to the first,—the advancement of the honour of his Creator,—he being all for self, (for so every one is before conversion,) the honour of God is nothing to him; and so it can have no influence upon him for the quieting of his heart under troubles: and as to the second,—the advancement of his own good,—he, not being in covenant with God, on which the sanctification of all providences doth depend, can have no assurance of this, and therefore cannot from this fetch that which may quiet and comfort him. But both of these have their full power and strength where grace is; and thereupon it becomes an effectual means to contentment.

3. *In the general habit of grace there are contained certain special graces which do very much further contentment.*—I will instance in *humility, faith, repentance, heavenly-mindedness, self-denial.*

(1.) *Humility.*—The humble man is always a contented man; the proud man is always of a contrary temper. Pride puts us upon contending with God, humility upon yielding and submitting to him. Pride makes us think we are wiser than God, can order our conditions better than he; humility dreads this heart-blasphemy. Pride must be at the top of the pinnacle; no condition, no mercy is high enough for it. A proud person cannot bear a low state; he “looks upon himself as wronged, if he be not chief;” as he said to his daughter, *Si non dominaris, injuriam te accipere existimas.\** Humility accepts of the lowest condition and the lowest mercy. “O,” saith the humble person, “what can be too low for me who deserve to be in hell? what too little for me who am ‘less than the least of all mercies?’” (Gen. xxxii. 10.) Pride is for charging God; humility is altogether for admiring God: *that* will be finding faults with what God doeth; *this* only finds faults with what we ourselves do. Pride is the heart-disquieting sin; humility is the heart-quieting grace. It is never well enough with the proud; the angels that fell even when they were in heaven, and Adam even in Paradise in all his glory, were guilty of this: it is always very well with the humble. Well, godliness works contentment. “How?” By the rooting-out of pride and planting humility in the soul.

(2.) *Faith.*—That is another grace which doth eminently help-on contentation. How readily, and how aptly, doth it interpose upon all occasions for the keeping-down of all turbulent risings in the heart! Doth the man begin to be froward? “What will become of me and mine?” “Be still,” saith faith; “God will provide for thee and thine.” “O, but such and such blessings are denied me.” “Yet be still,” saith faith; “thou hast all in God; thou mayest say that truly, which the great conqueror once vainly said, when he had Europe and Asia in his eye: *Et hæc et hæc mea sunt*: † ‘These and these blessings, yea, all are mine; for God is mine.’” “But the providences of God toward me are very bitter.” “Yet be still,” saith faith; “there is abundant sweetness in the promise to take-off that bitterness that is in the providence.” “But it is at present very ill with me.” “Yet be still,” saith faith, “wait but a little, and it will be better.” “But what

\* SÆTONIUS. † Of the pride and vanity of this speech of Alexander see PHILLO, *Liber de Cherubim*, p. 91.

have I to comfort me?" "Why," saith faith, "enough and enough; the unchangeable love of God, the pardon of all thy sins, the covenant-state, eternal life," &c. "They," saith a holy writer, "never felt God's love or tasted the forgiveness of sin, who are discontented." Thus faith with great readiness and strength answers all objections which tend to the disturbing of the spirit. It is the grace which keeps from fainting and from fretting also. (Psalm xxvii. 13; xlii. 11.)

(3.) *Repentance*.—He that truly mourns for sin doth not easily murmur because of some outward cross. Where sin is heavy, nothing besides, comparatively, is heavy. What light things are afflictions to him who groans under the burden of sin! (2 Cor. iv. 17.) Godliness turns the grief and anger into the right channel; it works contentment by diversions. When the sinner would be grieving and complaining because of poverty, sickness, &c., this makes him to look into the naughtiness of his heart, and to grieve for that pride and passion and unbelief that is within; and so it prevents or puts a stop to inordinate sorrow for what is externally afflictive, as bleeding at the arm stops bleeding at the nose. Where it is repenting, there it is not repining.

(4.) *Heavenly-mindedness*.—The more a man doth mind things above, the less he is concerned about things below: he who hath his heart and conversation in heaven, will not be solicitous or querulous about what befalls him here on earth. (Matt. vi. 21; Phil. iii. 20.) *Nihil sentit crux in nervo, cum animus est in cælo.*\* (TERTULLIAN.)

(5.) *Self-denial*.—A grace that hath a great tendency to contentment, because it takes men off from their own wisdom, will, and affections, and causeth them wholly to resign-up themselves to the wise and gracious disposal of God. "O," saith the self-denying Christian, "I am not fit to be my own chooser; God shall choose for me. I would not have my condition brought to my mind, but my mind brought to my condition; I would not have God give me what I desire, but I would desire nothing but what God sees good to give me." As that philosopher, when one wished for him that he "might have from the gods whatever he would:" "Nay, rather," saith he, "wish for me, that I may will nothing but what the gods will give me."† Surely, when it is once come to this, it must needs be contentment.

These are some of the ways (others there are, but I must pass them over) by which godliness doth promote and work contentment. So that, as you desire to learn it, you must look to this,—that you be gracious and godly persons. Without grace, in the habit and exercise thereof, it cannot be composedness and tranquillity of spirit in every state. I do not affirm, that he who hath grace is so constant and universal in this frame, as that he is never under discontent; for even such an one hath his infirmities and surprisals, and *pro hic et nunc* ["ever and anon"] corruption may be too hard for grace: but this I say, He, as to the general course, and when he is himself, is contented; and that he is the person who is fitted and qualified to live contentment.

\* "Under excruciating bodily sufferings, when the sensibilities of nature are all on the rack, the man whose affections are fixed on heaven remains calm and unruffled."—EDIT.  
† Όσα βουλοίς παρα των θεων γερνιτο σοι. Αλλα βουλομην μαλλον οσα μοι παρα των θεων γερνιται.—JAMBlichus in *Vita Pythagoræ*, lib. i. cap. 28.

## THE THIRD HELP TO CONTENTMENT; NAMELY, PRAYER.

III. The third and last means is *prayer*.—Without this the two former will be ineffectual. Let a man be never so considerative, yea, never so godly, yet prayer is necessary to his being contented. Humility, faith, repentance, heavenly-mindedness, self-denial, are the heart-quieting graces, and prayer is the heart-quieting duty. He that hath not learned to pray, will not learn to be content. When God is seldom spoken to, he will be often hardly thought of. There must be good striving with God in prayer, or else there will be bad striving with him in the way of discontent. O sirs! are you afflicted? Pray. (James v. 13.) Do you meet with crosses? Pray. Doth the estate decay, the relations die, the body consume by pain and sickness? Pray. The best way to be content in every state is to pray in every state. We study this hard lesson best upon our knees.

Prayer furthers contentment,—

1. *As it gives a vent to the mind under trouble*.—Vessels that are full, if they have not some vent, are apt to burst; and so, when the heart is full of grief, if it hath not a vent, it breaks. “Sorrow kept-in overwhelms the spirit:” *Strangulat inclusus dolor*. Let it be vented a little, and the spirit is much at ease. Now, prayer is the best vent: the poor Christian goes to God, tells him his case, pours-out his heart before him; upon this, his heart, that was ready to break before, is now greatly relieved. When Hannah had prayed under her trouble, she “went away and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.” (1 Sam. i. 18.) What sad work doth the wind make, where it is pent-up! Whence come the dreadful shakings of the earth, but from its being shut-up in the cavities thereof? And so here, when we keep-in our troubles, do not open them, first to the Lord in prayer, and then to some experienced Christian, what commotions and perturbations of mind is that the occasion of!

2. *As it obtains grace and strength from God, to enable the creature to be contented*.—For it is he, and he only, that can work-up the heart to this excellent frame; he that stills the sea when it rages doth also still the soul in all its passions and discontents. When Paul had spoken thus high of his contentment, lest any should think he ascribed this to himself, or had it from himself, immediately he subjoins: “I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me;” to note, that the quietness of his mind was divine and supernatural.\* We read of our Saviour, how, he being at sea, and a great tempest arising, “he rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. But the men marvelled, saying, “What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!” (Matt. viii. 24—27.) Truly the calming of the

\* Επειδη εθετο μεγαλα, ειπον, περι εαυτου, φησιν, Ουκ εμον το κατορθωμα, αλλα του την ισχυν δεδωκοτος Χριστου.—THEOPHYLACTUS. “When Paul had thus set forth his own high attainments, he says, ‘My right performance of this duty is not to be attributed to my ability, but to the power of Christ who gives me strength.’”—EDIT. *Quia de marinis rebus gloriatus fuerat, ne superbia id tribueretur, vel ne aliis jactantia occasionem daret, subiicit, hęc fortitudine se a Christo instrui.*—CALVINUS in loc. “Lest his glorying in these great things should be attributed to pride, or lest it should afford to others an occasion for boasting, the apostle subjoins the declaration, that he was endued with this strength by Christ.”—EDIT.



heart in its inward storms is a thing every way as marvellous as what Christ here did, and that which requires as great a power to effect it. If, therefore, you desire to arrive at this even temper of mind in every condition, often go to God and beg it of him. Say, "Lord, I have a peevish, froward, discontented heart, that is ready upon every cross to vex and fret against thee. This, I hope, is my burden: I would fain have it otherwise; but I cannot get victory over my passion, I cannot bring myself to a calm and submissive frame. Wherefore I seek to thee to enable me thereunto. Blessed God, do thou help me; through the power of thy grace, let there be evermore a contented mind in me! Such and such crosses I meet with; but, Lord, under all let me be patient: here is a hard lesson for me to learn; but through the teachings of thy Spirit let me learn it." O, do but thus pray, and in due time God will give you what you pray for.

Thus I have answered this weighty question, *What Christians are to do, that they may learn in every state to be content.*

Now, to close all, I leave it with yourselves to inquire what your attainments are as to this contentment. It is a sad thing that even amongst Christians there is so little of it; that many mere Heathens, who had nothing but reason and the dim light of nature, seem herein to outstrip those who have far greater helps to it. O, this is much to be lamented! Let us bring it down to ourselves. Paul had learned in *every state to be content*; we have scarce learned in *any state to be content*. We are not well either full or fasting: when it is summer, then it is too hot; when it is winter, then it is too cold. Every condition is, more or less, uneasy to us.\* If it be mercy, we complain it is not enough; if affliction, we complain it is too much; and so we are always *in statu querulo et moroso*, † as he in Seneca expresseth it. The great God is willing to be pleased with what we do; but how hard are we to be pleased with what he doeth! He finds no fault with our duties, though attended with many defects, if done in sincerity: we will be finding fault with his providences, though there be nothing in them but what speaks infinite wisdom and goodness. The generality of men carry it as if the fretting leprosy was upon them; yea, many even of those who belong to God are too much sick of this disease. Surely if he was not a long-suffering and compassionate Father, he would not bear as he doth with such froward children. The most like their inward state too well, and their outward state too ill. Such who have the world are contented without God; such who have God are not contented without the world.

It being thus, is it not highly necessary that we should, for the time to come, set ourselves with our utmost diligence to get a contented spirit? May be, we dare not let the fire of our passion break forth; but it lies smothering and hid in the heart: when shall it be quite extinguished? O that *that* might be wholly cast out, and that, instead thereof, *sedate-*

\* *Nemo facilis cum fortuna sua conditione concordat.*—BOETHIUS *De Consolatione Philosophiæ*, lib. II. prosa 4. "No man is easily contented with his allotted condition."—EDIT. *Quis est tam composita felicitatis, ut non aliquid ex parte cum statu sui qualitate rixetur?*—Idem, *ibid.* "Who is of such a calm and happy disposition, as not to quarrel with the quality of his state on some ground or other?"—EDIT. † "In a state of morosity and querulousness."—EDIT.

ness of mind, submission to God, contentation in every condition, might come-in into the soul? My brethren, will you fall upon the studying of this excellent lesson of contentment? You have learned nothing in Christianity till you have learned this: you are no better than abecedarians in religion, if you have not mastered this great piece of practical knowledge. You have heard much, read much, of contentment; but have you learned it, so as to live in the daily practice of it? Pray take-up with nothing short of that.

The design of this sermon hath been to help you herein, to direct you what you are to do in order to contentment. Now will you make use of the directions that have been given? namely, to be considerative, godly, praying persons. These are the best remedies that I could think of against that spiritual choler that doth so much trouble you. Use them, and, I hope, you will find the virtue and efficacy of them to this end. Look to your state and course, that you be godly; when any thing troubles you, retire for consideration and prayer. Hold on in this way, and in time you also will be able to speak these great words as to yourselves, that you "have learned in" every "state to be content."

\* \* The variations in this excellent sermon, as well as in the succeeding one, between the first and second editions are considerable, but the readings of the second are generally preferable, being manifest improvements.

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## SERMON XXVII.

BY THE REV. WILLIAM BATES, D.D.,

OF KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

HOW TO BEAR AFFLICTIONS.

*My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.—Hebrews xii. 5.*

THE words are an excellent passage from the Book of the Proverbs; (Prov. iii. 11, 12;) wherein the Supreme Eternal Wisdom is represented giving instruction to the afflicted, how to behave themselves under troubles, so as they may prove beneficial to them. The counsel is, that they should preserve a temperament of spirit between the excess and defect of patience and courage, and neither despising the chastenings of the Lord by a sinful neglect of them, as a small unconcerning matter, nor fainting under them, as a burden so great and oppressing that no deliverance was to be expected. To enforce the exhortation, Wisdom useth the amiable and endearing title, "My son," to signify that God in the quality of a Father afflicts his people; the consideration whereof is very proper to conciliate reverence to his hand, and to encourage their hopes of a blessed issue.

The proposition that ariseth from the words is this: *It is the duty and best wisdom of afflicted Christians to preserve themselves from the vicious extremes of despising the chastenings of the Lord, or fainting under them.*