

A CONTINUATION
OF THE
MORNING-EXERCISE QUESTIONS.

SERMON I.

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HOW IS THE ADHERENT VANITY OF EVERY CONDITION MOST
EFFECTUALLY ABATED BY SERIOUS GODLINESS?

Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what is man the better? For who knoweth what is good for man in this life?—
Ecclesiastes vi. 11, 12.

I BEGAN my “Morning Exercises” with this comprehensive case, *How to be in all things, at all times, exactly conscientious*; and “the Supplement” with this, *How to attain and improve such love to God, as may influence all the graces, actions, and passages of our lives*; and now I would fain direct you, *How to prevent or cure the vanity that is incident to every condition.*

Solomon—upon the review of his life; the honours, pleasures, wealth, and wisdom he had so abundantly enjoyed; the many observations he had made of things, natural, moral, domestical, civil, sensual, and divine; the curious, critical inquiries he had made after true happiness, and what contribution all things under the sun afford toward it—at last demonstrates the utter insufficiency of all things merely worldly to make us happy. In the first six chapters of this book, he shows wherein happiness doth *not* consist, confuting the vain opinions of all sorts of irreligious persons; and in the six last chapters, he shows wherein it *doth* consist, rectifying the judgment of all those who seek after it.

In this chapter is continued a further description of the vanity of riches, and honours, and children, and long life, &c.; and in these two last verses he takes-up a general conclusion of all the precedent vanities: “Since there are so many things that increase vanity, what is man the better” for all of them? Considering our ignorance, we do not know what is best for ourselves; many and great things do but distract us: and if we did know, and could obtain, what is good for us, we can enjoy these things but a little while; and what will

come to pass hereafter, we know not. To make every condition as easy as it is possible, I shall endeavour to discuss this

QUESTION.

How is the adherent vanity of every condition most effectually abated by serious godliness?

You will all grant, that Solomon was the fittest man that ever lived, to find out the very quintessence of creature-excellences, and to extract what was possible to be extracted out of worldly vanities: he doth, upon both his own impartial scrutiny, and the infallible guidance of the Holy Ghost, give you the total sum at the head of the account: "Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities;" (Eccles. i. 2;) that is, extreme vanity. This he demonstrates by an induction of particulars; but to dispel, as much as it is possible, that vexation of spirit that steams from such multiplication of vanity, he doth, upon his own experience, and the Holy Ghost's direction, commend this prescription at the foot of the account, namely, serious godliness: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments," &c. (Eccles. xii. 13.) And do it now, as you will wish you had done it when you come to judgment. For the discussing my question, I shall lay down these

PROPOSITIONS.

PROP. I. *Every condition is clogged with vanity.*—All things that men generally set their hearts upon, are vanity. Vanity is that which seemeth to be something, and is nothing; it is a shadow,—empty, without substance,—unprofitable, without fruit: if you put any confidence in it, it will not only deceive you, but hurt you. We are loath to think so, more loath to believe it; every one hath a kind of unaccountable confidence about the things of this world, that if they might but be their own carvers, they doubt not of an earthly happiness; whereas they cannot but be mistaken. For,

1. *God never made the world, nor any condition in it, to be a place of rest and satisfaction.*—And since sin hath so far marred the beauty of the universe, there is a judicial vanity upon the whole creation. (Rom. viii. 20.) Now men must needs fail of their expectation, when they look for that in the creature that God never placed there; as if we could mend the works of creation and providence. I confess, it is ordinary for persons to attempt it, and to glory in their achievements. For instance: God made *man* only to have the use of speech; but how do persons please themselves with teaching birds to speak some few words, which they cannot possibly furnish them with reason to make use of; and yet they are delighted to hear them speak what they understand not, more than to hear the most edifying discourse of a serious Christian! How have others cried-up some chemical extracts to make men immortal, when their own being cut-off in the midst of their days unanswerably confuted their ill-grounded boasting! How do others prate of governing the world by stars, as if they would ease God of the trouble of it; while they know not one

star of a thousand, nor what is their influence! Just as the old world would fence themselves against another deluge; when God did nothing to defeat them, but let them forget their mother-tongue, and so speak gibberish one to another, that they ran up and down like persons distracted, till they could find out any to understand them, and ran away from the rest as savages. So true is that of the Psalmist: "Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah. Surely every man walketh in a vain show." (Psalm xxxix. 5, 6.)

2. *We know but very little of the true nature of things, nor of ourselves, nor of our temptations, nor of our interests.*—And therefore we cannot find out that good that is possible to be had in the creature; there must be some distinct knowledge of these things, or we can never find out what is best for us. For example: let one that is utterly unacquainted with *Materia Medica* go into a physic-garden, where are all manner of simples, and thence into an apothecary's shop, where are all manner of drugs and compounds, with which medicines are made for all diseases. He knows not what to do with them; his disease may to him be incurable, though surrounded with remedies. "We are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow." (Job viii. 9.)

3. *That little that we do know of any thing, we come so droppingly to the knowledge of it, that, ere we can lay things together, so as to compare them, and separate them, and sort them, and compound them, so as to make a judgment, either things themselves or our circumstances are altered, or upon alteration.*—There is such a mutability both in persons and things and times, that it is as if one would undertake to gather at the same time primroses and violets, and roses and gilliflowers, to make a nosegay, when some of these are withered ere the others be budded. When we call in the help of wiser heads than our own, there is nothing more ordinary than [that] when wise men give good advice, those [whom] they give it to, want wisdom to receive it, suspecting some over-reaching design, and therefore dare not trust them. And who can say how soon "his breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth? In that very day his thoughts perish." (Psalm cxlvi. 4.) The prince's thoughts perish, and the thoughts of him that trusted in him perish.

OBJECTION. "This is the way utterly to dispirit men from every thing, and make them fit for nothing. Whither can such doctrine as this tend, but to put us into a maze, and to confound us in our thoughts and endeavours?"

ANSWER I. Will nothing but flatteries and lies encourage you to the duties of your several stations? Must things be presented better than they are, or you will needs be worse than otherwise you would be? Are you so ridiculously proud as to delight to dress yourselves by a false glass? "Because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not." (John viii. 45.) Will you only believe those truths that humour you?

ANSWER II. The true discovery of the evils and dangers of every condition is so far from discouraging men from their duty, that it is

the best way to bring them to the best resolutions for the well discharge of their duty. Cowards wink when they fight; but the truly valiant dare face their danger. It was Christ's method, in the whole course of his ministry, to tell his hearers the worst they should meet with: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple." (Luke xiv. 26, 27.) And, "Ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake." (Matt. xxiv. 9.)

ANSWER III. Religion is best able to manage and master all the evils that are in any condition, and every thing on this side the power of godliness is too feeble to grapple with any one inconvenience. Let but grace be asleep, (if I may so speak,) and how weak is the best! How was Peter, the forwardest of all the disciples, in a fright, foiled by a servant-maid! But to grace in exercise nothing is impossible. (Mark ix. 23.)

PROP. II. *All things on this side religion, whereby men endeavour to get above vanity, increase it.*—The multiplication of cyphers amounts to less than nothing. "All nations," the persons and things of all nations, "before him," compared with God, ay, and in the esteem of the godly, "are as nothing; and they are counted to him," and, so far as they are gracious, to them, "less than nothing, and vanity." (Isai. xl. 17.) Happiness is that which every one aims at. Now that which can make us happy, must supply all the wants, satisfy all the desires, fill all the capacities, of the soul, and, above all these, be of equal duration and continuance with the soul itself. Now none of all these are to be found in any thing on this side serious godliness, but the quite contrary; and therefore every thing that pretends to it doth but "increase vanity." Can any thing of the world supply the soul with grace, satisfy the desires in so much as any one thing, or fill any one faculty of the soul to satisfaction? Can the world fill the mind with heavenly light, or the will with heavenly love, or the conscience with that "peace that passeth understanding?" But you will say, "This is to beg, not prove." Forbear me a little, till I have answered a by-question; and I will, in the prosecution of the next proposition, prove this by little less than demonstration.

QUESTION. "What makes all sorts of persons dote so much upon vanity, and upon adding one vanity to another, and upon heaping one vanity upon another, if they can be no better for them? We see wise men as eager as others: Solomon himself, though he had his extraordinary wisdom given him in his youth, yet he continued trying experiments till his old age; and though he so much decried the vanity of all things, yet he was scarce able to bear the thoughts of his son's inability to carry on the search. (Eccles. ii. 18—23.)"

To this several things may be said, more plausibly than satisfactorily, if you but thoroughly consider the allegations; but, to avoid tediousness, I will mix the pretended and real causes.

ANSWER I. "There is a necessity of these things, while we are

in the world; and we need variety of them, more than for present use. For instance: childhood and age are helpless, and need greater supplies: there is difference between sickness and health, and we must provide for both." And is not this very plausible? Whereas, did but persons consider, how many superfluities shroud themselves under the wing of necessities, and how persons love to be at their own finding, rather than God's, though there is no comparison between them; as Israel, Num. xi. 5: "We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic: but now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes." They preferred the food which the Egyptians gave their slaves, before manna, which, if the inhabitants of the upper world needed food, were fit for them. We would not only have mercies, but we would be humoured in the circumstances of them. Rachel must presently have children, or she will be weary of her life; whereas she might have learned from her own husband and grandfather, that those children of patiently-believing parents were the greatest blessings, that came from teeming prayers and barren wombs. But she considers not this; she must have children, or die. Well, God so far gratifies her; she shall have children: but that which she reckoned would be the greatest comfort of her life, proved to be her death.

ANSWER II. The flattery of worldly things prevails with many. The grandeur of the world,—*that* pleaseth the eye; the esteem of the world,—*that* pleaseth the fancy. Whereas, would but these persons consider, all things of the world appear better at a distance than we find them near at hand. I dare confidently make this offer,—and, without imposing upon God any thing indecent, pre-emptorily assure you, God will make it good,—that if you can but give any one instance of any one person made happy, satisfyingly happy, by any worldly enjoyment, you shall be the second. I grant, many are through grace contented with a little pittance of the world; but where dwelt the man that was ever yet contented merely with the world? The wealth of the world promiseth satisfaction: "Money answereth all things:" (Eccles. x. 19:) but "he that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase." (Eccles. v. 10.) The pleasures of the world promise refreshment, to relieve us of all our cares: but instead of it, they are "all vanity and vexation of spirit." (Eccles. ii. 11.) The honours of the world promise quiet and contentment: but surely they are "set in slippery places," as upon a pinnacle, whence though they do not presently fall, yet they are "utterly consumed with terrors" of falling. (Psalm lxxiii. 18, 19.) In short: "Man that is in honour, and understandeth not" how to honour God with it, "is like the beasts that perish;" (Psalm xlix. 20;) degrades himself into a beast; and the time is at hand when he would count it a greater happiness than ever he shall obtain, if his soul and body might die together like a beast.

ANSWER III. "Experience is beyond speculation: we see others

grow great ; they fare better, and go finer, and are more esteemed in the world ; every one respects them ; and if he but grow rich, he must presently be the best in the parish. Whereas, those that are low and mean in the world,—they are despised, though never so well qualified.” This thou speakest upon thine own observation ; thou canst name the persons and the places whence thou hast this experience. Very well : thou takest this for a demonstration that there is such a thing as an earthly happiness ! Hold a little ; be but entreated to push the observation a little further, and consider impartially, how loath thou wouldest be to take-up with that for thy happiness which thou so much admirest. Single out any one of those thou accountest most happy in their outward enjoyments, and be sure thou art as thoroughly acquainted with all the circumstances of his condition as thou art with thine own ; and then sit down and seriously consider : is this the person whose happiness thou admirest ? View him inside and outside ; and tell me, wouldest thou have his condition, and all the circumstances of it ? It is true, he is great in the world ; but wouldest thou have all his cares and fears ? his restless nights and troublesome days ? Wouldest thou have just his qualifications of mind ? that half-wittedness that makes him ridiculous ? his peevish humours, which make him a burden to himself and others ? Wouldest thou have just his temper of body ? to be always sickly, or conceited to be so ? He cannot eat this, nor digest that, nor relish any thing, as do meaner persons. Those relations that should be the greatest comfort of his life, hanker after his death ; his children, upon one account or other, almost break his heart ; his servants are vexatious ; his business distracting, or his idleness wearisome. Whereas, perhaps, his next neighbour, that hath scarce bread to eat, hath a quieter frame of mind, a better temper of body, a better stomach, better digestion, better health, more comfort in relations, and longer life to enjoy all these, than he [whom] thou countest the world’s darling. Think of this before thou concludest for an earthly happiness.

ANSWER IV. The restlessness of the mind of man upon so many disappointments, makes him eager after any thing that promiseth satisfaction ; he hath experience of the uneasiness of his present condition, and none of that which flatters him : so that he becomes like one that hath been long sick, who is willing to try every medicine that every visitant commends, never considering how he heightens his disease by the use of false remedies. For example, shouldest thou take medicines proper for an erysipelas, to cure a dropsy ; or medicines for the stone, to cure a consumption ; though those medicines would not presently kill thee, they would never cure thee, but thou must still complain of disappointments, and be worse and worse, instead of having any amendment. Do not deceive yourselves ; one vanity will never cure another.

ANSWER V. Satan will not be wanting to set-in with all the other cheats,—the inclinations of the flesh, the flatteries of the world, and the various pleadings of carnal reason. Satan, you may be sure,

will do what is possible to be done, to entangle the soul in a fool's paradise, or plunge it into inextricable difficulties, especially when he hath a good second, as in this case; though one might rationally think, there should need no more to fright him to his watch, than to assure him, "The hand of Satan is in all this." Suspect him in every thing; he cannot be thy friend; he cannot make any one motion for thy good; where he seems to do so, it is to do thee greater mischief. Thus have I jumbled together something of what may be said, both with real and seeming weight, (for empty reasonings weigh most with empty understandings,) why all sorts of persons are hankering after an earthly happiness. And now I shall speak largely in the third, to what I little more than hinted in the second, proposition.

PROP. III. *It is only serious godliness that can any whit really abate the vanity that cleaves to every condition.*—Other things may, like topical medicines, (as plasters to the wrists,) repel the disease; but while they do not remove the cause, they cannot cure it. We may exchange one vanity for another, and the novelty may please us for a while; but when that is over, the vexation returns. It is true, God alone can cure us; but whatever method he takes to do it, whether of indulgence or severity, it is always by framing the heart and life to serious godliness. To hate sin and love holiness; to live a life of faith, in dependence upon God and resignation to him; to live above the transports of hopes and fears about things temporal; and to grow-up in the graces and comforts of the Holy Ghost for things eternal; in short, to be blessings to the world while we live, and to be blessed with God when we die: this is the business and fruit of serious godliness; and this alone is that which at present can effectually abate the vexatious vanities which every condition swarms with.

The wisest man in the world cannot tell what is good for man in this life; no man can tell what worldly condition is better for him than that which is his present condition. Among the variety of things under the sun, which the heart of man is apt to be drawn out unto, neither he himself, nor any other for him, is able certainly to inform him, which of all those it is best for him to enjoy and to reap comfort from; whether it be better for him to be rich or poor, high or low, in private retirement or in public service. Some men's greatness hath undone them; they had never been so wicked, had not their wealth been fuel for their lusts. Ahithophel might have lived longer, had he not been so wise. No man can tell, whether that [which] he snatcheth at with most greediness, have not a hook under the bait, or be not tempered with poison. Those that live by rapine and violence,—“they lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives.” (Prov. i. 18.) “But,” you will say, “these are hot-headed persons, live extravagantly, walk by no rule, do not take time to consider.” Well, turn your eyes from these, to those that are most accomplished for human wisdom and knowledge: “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools;” (Rom. i. 22;)

drowning their some-way right (though every-way short) notions [which] they had of God, in unreasonable idolatry. You will say, "These were but Heathens; and therefore no marvel if 'they did not like to retain God in their knowledge:' it is better with Christians." Look next upon Christians, and those of the highest notions and *form* of godliness on this side the *power* of it: "While they speak great swelling words of vanity," about that [which] they call "Christian liberty," "they themselves are the servants of corruption: and it had been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness, than" not to have walked in it. (2 Peter ii. 18, 19, 21.) "Well, but, for all this, Job tells us of some of even the worst of men that account themselves so happy as if they needed nothing from God to better their condition." But he tells you withal, in the same breath: "Lo, their good is not in their hand," (Job xxi. 15, 16,) though they think it is. They have not their "fortune," as they call it, in their own power, to retain it while they live, and dispose of it when they die: God can overturn it when he pleaseth, and will do it, to their sorrow. Whatever persons may hope or fancy, if they "fear not God, nor obey the voice of his servants," though they are not at present "in trouble like other men," but can speak loftily, "setting their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth;" though they compass themselves about with some sparks or blaze of comfort, yet this shall they have of God's hand; they "shall lie down in sorrow." (Psalm lxxiii. 5, 6, 9; Isai. i. 10, 11.)

Now, thus, when every one is rummaging among heaps of vanities, that pretend to be good for man upon earth, will you accept of a guide to direct you to what cannot but be good for you, and that in every condition? that shall not only abate the vanity, but discover the excellency, that is in every condition. This will be most distinctly done, by an induction of particulars, and setting contrary conditions one against another,—what may be said for and against each condition; and how serious godliness makes every condition amiable.

I. *Who knows whether riches, or poverty, be best for man in this life?*

1. For *riches*, I need say but little, because most persons are ready to say too much. They seem to be the cause without which there can be not so much as the fancying an earthly happiness: what pleasures or esteem can worldlings have, without an estate to feed them? The riches of the mind are too spiritual to be seen by carnal eyes. But when you consider these or such-like inseparable attendants on a great estate, you will see the desirableness to shrink, as the vanity swells. For instance: some run out the greatest part of their life, before they can reach what they can call an estate; to say nothing of those that die the world's martyrs, in the pursuit of that they never attain. Those that have got an estate, or have an estate left them, have ordinarily as great care and difficulty in keeping, as they or others have had in the getting, of it. O the tiresome days, the restless nights, the broken sleeps, the wild passions, the fretting disquiet of those troublesome occurrences which

they cannot possibly prevent! And when you come to speak of an enjoyment, to speak strictly, they have nothing worth the name of an enjoyment, which they may not have as well, if not better, without what they call an estate. Yet though it is thus while they have it, they are not able to bear the parting with it; the very thoughts of losing put them into heart-convulsions. So that an estate can neither be got, nor kept, nor lost, without manifold vanity and vexation of spirit. "Alas! what remedy?"

Serious godliness carries a gracious person above all heart-breaking vexations of *getting* the world, for his thoughts are filled about getting something better;—about *keeping*, for comparatively he cares for keeping nothing but faith and a good conscience;—about *enjoying*, for he counts nothing on this side God worth the name of an enjoyment;—and as for *parting with* the world, he impartially considers, that he cannot have the possession of his heavenly inheritance, till the world and he shake hands for ever; so that there is no room, without the *regret** of grace, to edge-in so much as a distracting thought about worldly vanities. Faith in exercise treads the world under feet, and alone makes it know its place. (1 John v. 4.) When riches capacitate a gracious person for those offices and employments from which the poor are excluded, the power of godliness not only teacheth, but enforceth, them to employ all their capacities for God and to do good. They know they are God's stewards, to whom they must be accountable, God's almoners; and God makes the poor their creditors, to whom they must pay alms as debtors: Matt. vi. 1: "Your alms," *δικαιοσυνην*, your "justice." In short, it is only the holy person that receives this for a maxim, that a worldly estate is no otherwise desirable, but to capacitate him to do that good with it which he cannot do without it. This for riches. "What may be said for poverty?"

2. *Poverty* is so desirable to many thinking persons, that they have not only in words, for discourse' sake, but in practice, for happiness' sake, preferred it before the greatest wealth and grandeur in the world. And this hath been done, not only by melancholy, mopish persons, but by men of great name for wisdom and learning; and that upon great deliberation and counsel, upon weighing of circumstances, and trying [of] experiments: and, further yet, not only [by] bookish men, to whom beloved retirement is much the same, whether they are rich or poor; but [by] those that have worn an imperial diadem, that have commanded victorious armies, swayed the sceptres of flourishing kingdoms, and some of the then greatest empires of the world; † and these again not only Ethnic, but Christian. ‡ And some of these, even after their self-deposition, have been importuned to re-accept their dominion, but have refused it. § What greater demonstration can you expect of the preference of poverty before riches, and to be a cipher rather than to bear the greatest figure in the world?

* Perhaps our old word *re-greet* is here intended; and the antithesis will then lie between *the world and a good man shaking hands, and the farewell salute of grace.*—
 EDIT. † Diocletian. ‡ Charles V. § Casimir.

OBJECTION. "All this is true : but, alas ! the world is full of the miserable effects of poverty. The poor have great temptations pressing them to the use of unlawful means for their livelihood. They are generally despised, and contempt is one of the things most intolerable to human nature ; and, which is yet more, they are under an impossibility of being so serviceable as otherwise they might be. 'There was a poor wise man, who by his wisdom delivered the city ; yet no man remembered that same poor man. The poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.' (Eccles. ix. 15, 16.) As to all the instances that have been or can be given of persons quitting troublesome riches for a quiet poverty ; [in] those great men that have done it, it hath plainly proceeded from vexation of mind, that they were not able to have their will upon Christians for their extirpation. And as for the several orders of friars, that have vowed poverty and renounced property, this is to be reckoned among the damnable cheats of the Romish apostasy, whose religion is made-up of lying 'hypocrisy and doctrines of devils ;' (1 Tim. iv. 1, 2 ;) their prodigious wealth and abominable luxury sufficiently confuting their pretence of poverty. What help, then, in this case ?"

ANSWER. *Serious godliness* sweetens all the bitterness of a poor condition, bears-up the heart under all those difficulties that were otherwise intolerable. God makes-up their worldly poverty with riches of grace. It is the poor [that] receive the gospel and the blessings of it : it is the poor that are best contented with their condition ; and without content every condition is uneasy. What, though the poor are secluded from serving offices ? They are also excused from the oaths and snares that attend them. At first, when Christianity was managed without tricks and artifice ; when, for once, upon particular circumstances never to be repeated, the disciples of Christ used a compassionate levelling ; it is said, "Great grace was upon them all." (Acts iv. 33.) They were greatly in God's favour ; they were greatly enriched with the graces of the Holy Ghost ; and they were greatly honoured by those that did but gaze at them. You may easily observe that very few grow better by growing rich ; but it is ordinary for God to advance holiness by worldly abasement : and who live more in heaven, who have more satisfying communion with God, than those that are mean in the world ? In short : to be poor and wicked, is to be in some respect more miserable than devils ; to be poor and gracious, is to be conformable to our blessed Jesus and his chiefest apostle, who were "poor, yet made many rich ; who had nothing, and yet possessed all things." (2 Cor. vi. 10.) And thus I have endeavoured to set forth the vanity of the first pair, *riches and poverty*, and how *serious godliness* wears-off the vanity that cleaves to them. I see I must not, indeed I need not, be so large in the rest.

II. *Who knows whether a life of pleasure, or a life of sorrow, be best for him?*—Whereas your vain persons will presently determine, without weighing one against the other ; yet you will find, it is only the practical Christian that can improve either, as God shall deal with him.

1. For *pleasure* : to live without the pleasure of life, seems in some respect worse than to be buried alive ; most prefer a short life and a merry, before a long life and a sad ; and those that are not sensualists, yet would fain have their lives comfortable in all the circumstances of it. In every change of life, from the birth to the grave, in every new employment, relation, preferment, it is the universal salutation to "wish them joy : " so that a life of comfort is the desire of mankind.

But now, when we consider the unreasonable cravings of a carnal mind, and how impossible to be satisfied, and, when most satisfied, soonest cloyed, wearisome to the flesh that is most gratified, and infamous in their eyes whose esteem we value ; most of our carnal pleasures are the same with brutes : only they have the better relish of them in the use, and no after-claps when past ; they eat, and drink, and frisk, and sleep, without any disturbing cares, or subsequent reflections ; you cannot force them to excess in the use, nor impose upon them any corroding remembrances. For example : let but a voracious glutton be bound to sit at a well-furnished table but two hours after he hath filled his paunch, he would account it an intolerable penance. Let but the crop-sick drunkard be forced to drink-on with those that drink him down, how is he a burden to himself, and a scorn to his fellow-drunkards ! And for those that glory of their conquest in out-drinking others, how are their best friends ashamed of them, as "glorying in their shame !" Let but a lazy sluggard be confined three days to his bed, and how weary will he be of his bed of down ! How is the idle person more weary of his idleness than another is of work ! I am loath to blot paper with naming the loathsome rottenness of filthy persons, the unpitied poverty of huffing gamesters, and, in a word, the unpleasant *exit* of most pleasure-mongers ; and for those that escape these common effects, they as commonly contract a carnal security, which is as bad as the worst of these. And for those pleasures that are above sensual, I will say no more at present, but this : The better the objects of our delights are on this side God, and the pleasing of God, the more our carnal wisdom is fortified against the true method to real happiness. Upon the whole matter, then, pleasures are a kind of dangerous fruit, which, if not well corrected, are poison : we can scarce taste without danger of surfeiting.

" But now, what doeth the *power of godliness* in this case ? " What ! It will not meddle with unlawful pleasures, though never so tempting ; it will strain-out the dregs of lawful pleasures, that they may not be unwholesome ; it will moderate the use of unquestionable delights, that they may not be inordinate ; and it will teach us to be thankful to God for making our pilgrimage any way comfortable. It will raise the soul to prepare and long for heaven, where are pure and full joys, and that for evermore. Thus for a life of pleasure.

2. What shall we say to a life of *sorrow and pensiveness* ? to live a recluse from the flattering vanities of the world ? " I said of laugh-

ter, It is mad : and of mirth, What doeth it ?" (Eccles. ii. 2.) What music is the giggling mirth of the world to a serious soul? Those that the frothy part of the world count melancholy, the sober part of the world count them wise.

"But yet, to give way to sorrow, dispirits us for any considerable service either to God or man; it unfits us for every thing: 'The sorrow of the world worketh death.' (2 Cor. vii. 10.) Such are burdensome to themselves and others; they are weary of themselves, and every body else is weary of them. If a melancholy, mopish temper be not checked, it will lead to hard thoughts of God, to blasphemy, infidelity. In short, a life of sorrow is a degree of hell upon earth, and such persons torment themselves before their time. But what can religion do in this case?"

Serious godliness bears up the soul from sinking under worldly sorrow: "Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth." (Eccles. vii. 3, 4.) Religion will teach us how to turn worldly sorrow into sorrow for sin, "to sorrow to repentance after a godly manner; and godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of." (2 Cor. vii. 9, 10.) It is serious godliness that teacheth how to mourn for the sins and dangers of the times we live in. And, Christians, pray take special notice, that this is our present great duty, a duty that every Christian not only ought [to,] but may, perform, and none can hinder it. And, O that this duty were frequently thought of, and more universally practised! The land is even drowned in pleasure; the conscientious performance of this duty would be a token for good, for the abating of the deluge: and though the times should be such that their own sorrows should be increased, yet then, even then, how cheering would the forethoughts of heaven be to such serious Christians! How may they chide their hearts out of their dejections! "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet," ay,* and ever, "praise him," who now is, and for ever will be, "the health of my countenance," שְׂוֵי עוֹת פָּנָי: *salutes faciei mei*, and "the salvation of my face, and my God;" (Psalm xlii. 11;) because thou art my "God," my "own God," my "exceeding great," not only rewarder but, "reward." (Psalm lxvii. 6; Gen. xv. 1.) And thus much for the second pair, *pleasure and sorrow*.

III. *Who knows whether honour or obscurity be best for man in this life?*—At first sight it seems easy to determine; but when both sides are heard, it will seem otherwise.

1. For *honour*: every one would be somebody in the world, would be esteemed and preferred before others; disgrace and infamy seem most intolerable. When Job had done contesting with his censorious friends, he is greatly concerned about the contempt poured upon him, though but by infamous enemies; (Job xxix., xxx. ;) and David, though he could even in desperate cases encourage himself in God,

* It is difficult to determine whether the author meant, *Yes, and for ever*; or the old proverb, *Aye [always] and ever*.—EDIT.

yet complains, "Reproach hath broken my heart." (Psalm lxi. 20.) Matter of honour and reputation is a tender point; not any, of what rank soever, but deeply resent the being slighted.

But for honour, when we consider how hazardous it is to get; though all are clambering, few reach it; consider further, when it is got, it is slippery to hold; others' envy and their own fear distract them; and then if you add the falling from it, that is worse than if they never had it: but there is worse than all this,—the insuperable temptation to pride, oppression, and impenitency, all which nothing but grace can prevent or cure. And for that lesser reputation and esteem which comes short of the name of honour, it is troublesome to carry it, like a Venice-glass, that the least touch may not crack it. "What can religion do in this case?"

Serious godliness,—it will never be beholden to sin nor Satan for wordly honour: it values it no more than as it adds to a capacity of honouring God. He that is truly religious is neither so fond of honour as to sin to get or keep it, neither doth he count himself undone to lose it. He values the privilege of adoption beyond all the honours in the world: "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable." (Isai. xliii. 4.) He is graciously ambitious of doing God and Christ some service in the world; he appears for God, to discountenance, prevent, or remove sin; to encourage, promote, and advance holiness. This God in condescension accounts an honouring of him, and hath accordingly promised, "Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." (1 Sam. ii. 30.) In short, you may know what faith you have, by what honour you prize. "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" (John v. 44.) This for *honour*. Some prefer,

2. *Obscurity* in the world: to snudge in quiet, to live retired and reserved, out of the vexatious hurry of a captious world; to keep in the shade out of the scorching sun, to steal out of the world, without any noise or notice; O how sweet is this to many wise and judicious persons, that are every way above what is vulgar! But how do these, in running from one vanity, fall into another! They debase the human nature and the reasonable soul, while they industriously conceal themselves from being serviceable; they are guilty of a civil self-communication, while they shut-out themselves from those employments wherein they might be useful. God hath made every thing for use; to rust in a corner for the avoiding of trouble, can proceed from nothing but uncharitable pride or wilful ignorance; from base pride,—you think the neighbourhood not good enough to be blessed with your endowments,—or slothful weakness, which you are conscious of, but will not take pains to cure. In short: to choose retirement for love of ease, is an envious kind of life, and therefore far from happiness. "But what can religion do in this case?"

One that is *serious in religion* can best manage an obscure station, whether it be forced or voluntary. It is only he that is crucified to the world, that can scorn the world's scorns, and condemn the world's contempt. He that hath learned the great lesson of self-denial in the

school of Christ, is well pleased with his secrecy for communion with God. In short, his religion keepeth him from being fond, or weary, of worldly obscurity.

Thus I have run over the beloved disciple's summary of all worldly vanities, (1 John ii. 16,) and their contraries, and how godliness, in the power of it, corrects the vanity, and extracts the excellency, of all those. But let these pass, and let us examine things of a higher nature, for which more may be pleaded than can for these be pretended; and here you will find, that without serious godliness their vanity is intolerable.

IV. *Who knows whether wisdom, and learning, and the endowments of the mind, be best for a man; or whether to be without these, and their troublesome attendants?*—Now we come to a close and inward search.

1. For *wisdom, and learning, and intellectual accomplishments*: they are of such incomparable excellency, that he is scarce worthy the name of a man that slights them: "Wisdom excelteh folly, as far as light excelleth darkness." (Eccles. ii. 13.) This is Solomon's sentence, even *then* when he is sentencing all worldly vanities. But, (and who mistrusts such a *but* here?) the wiser men are, the more they are exempted from the ordinary comforts of human society; they meet with but few, and those but seldom, that they can converse with, to any satisfaction. The more learning they have, the more sense of, and sorrow for, their ignorance: "In much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." (Eccles. i. 18.) Hence it is they affect an uncomfortable solitude, that they are fain to force themselves into a sociable compliance, where they seldom meet with any thing but what they slight or pity; they are ordinarily the objects of their own grief, and of others' envy. There is nothing more ordinary than for persons of lower accomplishments to carry their designs and attain their ends before them. They cannot sneak and flatter like lower-spirited animals; [so] that while they are *pursuing* a notion, others *catch* preferment; and while they are enriching their minds, others are filling their coffers.

"What doth *serious godliness* in this case?" It is this alone that makes wise men truly wise, and learned men truly learned. Unsanc-tified parts and learning may, in some respects, be reckoned among Christ's worst enemies; ay, and among *his* worst enemies *that* has them. They furnish him with cavils, which they call "unanswerable reasons," against the simplicity of the gospel; they fill him with those prejudices that nothing but grace can remove: "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." (Rom. viii. 7.) But where grace is grafted upon good natural parts, there wisdom and learning are excellently beneficial; it is they that have the clearest understanding of gospel-mysteries,—it is these who are the most substantial-grounded Christians. These are the only Christians who are able to defend the truth, and convince gainsayers; it is their lips that can "utter knowledge clearly;" (Job xxxiii. 3;) it is they that can best speak or write "to edification, and exhortation, and comfort." (1 Cor. xiv. 3.)

2. "What then can be said for the *want of parts and learning*?"

Those that have no considerable parts nor learning, that do not trouble themselves nor others about the difficulties of knowledge or practice, but take those things to be truth that are commonly received,—these are more satisfied than those that are more inquisitive. Besides, these better suit the generality they live among: they are wise enough to get estates; (for men are ordinarily afraid to deal with those that are wiser than themselves, lest they be overreached;) and they are esteemed in the world; and what care they? They do not impair their health by study, nor perplex themselves with great matters. What can be more desired to make them happy? Happiness, as it were, drops into their mouth unawares; for when they compare their condition with others, they find it more eligible, though they did nothing to make it so. But, alas! what use do these make of their souls? A lazy neglect of improving of parts, and of getting of learning,—who is able to express the sin and mischief of it? To be contented to live and die but one remove from a brute,—who can express the baseness of it? "Ignorance" may well be "the mother of" *their* "devotion" whose religion is a cheat; but the scripture tells us, and we believe it: "When wisdom entereth into thine heart, knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul;" (Prov. ii. 10;) and without it neither heart nor state can be good.

"But what doeth *serious godliness* in this case?" These, though they have not any considerable parts and learning, yet they bewail their ignorance, and are willing to learn. They get a savoury knowledge of necessary practical truths, and they increase the knowledge of them by practice: though they are fools to the world, they are wise for their souls, and wise for eternity; and this is the best wisdom. They have learned Christ, which is the best learning. This you shall find:—Those great doctrines of Christianity, which learned men bandy to and fro in doubtful disputation, such as these, namely, the unaccountableness of predetermination, the supra- or infra-lapsarian aspect of election, the controverted extent of redemption, the manner of the concurrence of the divine and human will in vocation, the formality of justification; in these and such-like doctrines, wherein the most eminently learned can neither give nor receive satisfaction, serious Christians, of but ordinary knowledge, are so far satisfied as to admire the grace of God in Christ, and press after such holiness of life as adorns their profession and muzzles revilers. So that, by what hath been said, you may plainly see that both the *excellency and deficiency of intellectual endowments* are best managed by *serious godliness*; without which, whatever can be said for either is not worth the mentioning.

V. Having named several things of real worth, and compared them with other things that others *think* so, let me for once name one pair, the worst of sins, that have scarcely any barefaced advocates, yet have more hearty admirers than what really deserve it; and that is, a *form of godliness*, or *downright atheism*. Whether of these is to be preferred? I am sensible it is dangerous to compare sins; for we are

not to make choice of any, though the necessity be never so great, or the excuses never so plausible. Of afflictive evils we may choose the less; but of sinful evils we must choose neither, but rather suffer the worst of deaths, than commit the least of sins. My only design, therefore, in this instance, is, to strip these sins-of-the-times of their specious pretences, and to do what I can to persuade these self-applauding sinners to serious godliness.

1. *A show of godliness* seems to carry it both with God and man: till his hypocrisy is discovered, he seems to be the favourite of Heaven, and the glory of earth. Some that are sincere think their estates well bestowed upon them, so they may but enjoy their prayers. (Matt. xxiii. 14.) They have religion enough to get credit by it, and to make their markets of it; and that is all they care for. On the other hand, they have latitude enough to avoid danger; [so] that, unless they be surprised by sufferings, their religion shall cost them nothing; if they cannot win what they play for, (alas! they do but *play* with religion; they were never religious in good earnest,) yet they will save their stakes. Are not these the only wise men that are, as they call it, "zealous with discretion?" that will not expose themselves to danger, but will, more warily than conscientiously, avoid it? These censure those that are more venturous than themselves to befriend the gospel, when it is despised and persecuted: "Is not religion of such a size, a conscience thus manageable, most fit for doubtful times, when dangers surround us? What, 'if I build again the things which I destroyed,' must I therefore needs 'make myself a transgressor?' (Gal. ii. 18.) Here is the indifferent moderation, and Gallio-like discretion: is not this highly commendable?"

Commendable, say you? Hypocrisy is odious to God and man. It is too true, that persons of no religion decry the most sincere Christians by the name of "hypocrites;" this is unreasonable and devilish, but it is not my business now to deal with them. Thus far I will join with them: whatever their most envenomed mouths can speak against hypocrisy, I will add to it, and say more, and that from scripture; and that not from here and there a verse scattered up and down, (though that is sufficient proof for the highest doctrines of Christianity,) but I shall commend to you above twenty chapters together, from Job iv. to xxvii. inclusive: wherein you have such a dialogue, none like it in the Bible, between Job,—so eminently sincere, [that] God, as it were, boasts of him that there was none like him in the world, though at present God hid his sincerity from his friends;—the discourse was between this Job and his three compassionate, though censorious, friends, who could not but suspect, there must some extraordinary guilt bring such extraordinary punishment. They knew him to be free from open wickedness, and therefore conclude it must be for secret hypocrisy; and thereupon they speak the most convincingly they can of the evil of it. Job adds considerably to all they say against it,—only denies himself to be a hypocrite. His justifying himself makes them press more hard upon him; and every one strives to be more close than other, and to make a more home-thrust into his

conscience, to force the acknowledgment of his hypocrisy. So that, upon the whole matter, here is something of Satan's temptation, though over-ruled by the Spirit of God; here is something of the height of grace, though allayed by human frailty; and something purely divine, eminently from the Holy Ghost: and these all agree in the conclusion, though they differ in the premisses; namely, that hypocrisy is the worst of sins, most odious to God, most ruinous to man; the better any one seems to be, and is not what he seems, the more severity he must expect from God, and the less humanity from man. I know not whether it is possible to speak worse of hypocrisy than it deserves; for though studied hypocrites, who industriously set themselves to deceive others, may long do it, yet they are, *often* in this world, but *always* in the next, worst deceived themselves. A mere *form* of godliness is not, then, to be rested in.

“But what can the *power of godliness* do in this case?” What? what can it not do? It is that alone that is worth the naming, worth the getting, worth the owning; and therefore, O that I could persuade and prevail with all that have the name of Christians, that they would be as loath to *be* hypocrites, as to *be thought* so. For, what, if you should be accounted sincere, while the heart-searching God knows you to be hypocrites, and will deal with you as such? I grant, the resting in a form of godliness is a disease rarely cured, and therefore upon that as well as upon other accounts most dangerous; but yet through grace it may be both pardoned and cured. Will you try an easy experiment? (It is difficult, I confess; but as easy as possible for such a disease.) Hypocrisy is ordinarily defective in the *manner* of doing what is good; and those who are most sincere complain most of their “ill manner” of performing of duties, and improving of ordinances. Now, if I can at once satisfy the sincere with the assurance of his sincerity, and cure the hypocrite of his soul-deceiving hypocrisy; and all this by a prescription, that the bare work done shall work the cure; there is little danger about the manner of doing it; if you do it at all, you cannot but do it well, and it cannot but be effectual;—doth not this raise your expectation to know what this infallible receipt is, that never so much as once missed curing every one that took it? I would I could hold you a little longer in suspense, till you would resolve to try the experiment before you reject it, unless you can object something against it. If you will but resolve thus, I will refer it to your own conscience to be judge of the weight of your objection. What say you? Will you upon this condition resolve to make trial of my proposal? Shall I take it for granted, you will? Then here it is, and the blessing of God accompany it, that you may not be the first unsuccessful taker of it!

Do but endeavour to get and keep in your hearts as actual apprehensions of the all-seeing God as it is possible.—“Thou God seest me: have I also here looked after him that seeth me?” (Gen. xvi. 13.) As if she had said: “Now I am come out of Abraham's family, where God is worshipped, I never thought of God's looking after me here;

but now I find he sees me as well when I am sinning, as when I am praying. Wherever I am, whatever I am about, whether busy or idle, my thoughts, that no creature can know,—God knows them; though I equivocate in my words, God discerns them. Whether I draw near to God to flatter him, or run away from God to escape him; though I lay myself to sleep, that I may not think of him, or get into the dark, where I may see nothing of him; yet God's eye is everywhere all this while upon me." (Psalm cxxxix. 1—13.) Christians, be but so far sincere as industriously to endeavour to keep upon your hearts such apprehensions of God, and this alone will effectually cure you of reigning hypocrisy, and clear-up your suspected sincerity. I grant, some men may be so impudently wicked as daringly to sin while they think God looks on. But this is seldom, and only in the heat of temptation: they cannot, no, they *cannot*, nay, the devil himself cannot help them to, keep-up their hearts to this pitch of impiety. The most daring sinners are but like men in a fire-ship. What, though they venturously run it in, to fire the fleet? They themselves get away as fast as it is possible. So though, in their drunken frolics, they set themselves to out-face God, yet when they are sober they retreat to this: "How doth God know? Thick clouds are a covering to him, that he seeth not." (Job xxii. 13, 14.) "He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten;" and if he can but quell his twinging gripes of conscience, he not only quickly forgets them, but flatters himself that God forgets him too, and that "he hideth his face, and will never see it." And so, though he contemn God, yet "he hath said in his heart, God will not require it." (Psalm x. 11, 13.) Yea, further, "they say, The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it." (Psalm xciv. 7.)

But men of the most seared consciences cannot always thus carry it; there are some of the worst of sinners, of whom it may be said, "God is always in their thoughts while they are awake; (and they sleep little;) they think of nothing else; and yet these are far from sincerity, or the way to it." I grant this; for it confirms, not enervates, my remedy. They, under horror and despair, think of God, and cannot but think of him; but it is sore against their wills; they would out-run those thoughts, but the wrath of God pursues them; they "would fain flee out of his hand." (Job xxvii. 22.) But now, to pray and strive that we may get and keep God always in our eye; to be inwardly grieved that our thoughts of God so easily slip from us; so to presentiate God to the soul, as to be able to appeal to God: "All the while I am awake, I am still with thee;" (Psalm cxxxix. 18;) and when I sleep, it is "under the shadow of the Almighty; he shall cover me with his feathers," (Psalm xci. 1, 4,) "as the hen doth her chickens:" (Matt. xxiii. 37:) Christians, those that can comparatively see nothing else with delight, nor rest any where else with content, *they* are truly religious, *they* are certainly sincere. Let us now consider the other extreme.

2. Too many think, or do what they can to make it sink into their thoughts, that *atheism* is best for them. These would be

accounted men of a great soul; they scorn the pusillanimity of conscience; they are neither allured nor frightened with the forethoughts of a future state. They slight any discourse of heaven, and they laugh at the torments of hell; they live without care in a continued frolic. And are not these the only happy men? Though they restrain their blab, they let loose their thoughts, and it is the common language of men's hearts and lives: men secretly bless themselves that they are not religious, when they see men suffer from conscience's sake; all the pity they express, is from deluded fancy.

But will this always hold? Job tells us, no man can harden his heart against God in the way of his providence, and prosper; (Job ix. 4;) much less, sure, can he set himself against God in his very being, and prosper. He is really a "fool," though the world count him a wit, that "saith in his heart"—that is, he heartily wisheth that there were—"No God;" (Psalm xiv. 1;) but God hath a witness within him that he cannot silence, but will, in despite of him, convince him, that there is a God. Never could any man yet blow out that "candle of the Lord," (Prov. xx. 27,) which God hath set-up within him. It cannot be expected, that he who strives in his practice to be an atheist in his judgment, should be so ingenuous as to tell us what convulsions of conscience he is incurably troubled with: if he would, we should need no other testimony but his own to convince him; and seeing he will not, I will only bid him, first get the mastery of his own conscience before he decry that God that masters it. I might press him to consider the works of creation and providence, and how unreasonable it is to expect, that another should believe thy profound arguments, (as thou esteemest them,) when thou unbelievest them thyself every time thou hearest it thunder; (for why should I coast about for convictions?) whilst thou carriest that within thee, which neither thyself, nor all the devils in hell to help thee, can extinguish; thine own conscience, man; conscience, I say, not another's, but thine own; and thou mayest as soon tear thy soul out of thy body, as thy conscience out of thy soul. And while conscience hath a being, the being of God shall not be denied. It is too true, thou mayest sear thy conscience from speaking any thing for thy good; but thou canst never silence it from speaking to thy terror. That never-dying worm will be still gnawing, to make thee feel, both here and to eternity, that there is a God. One thing, I confess, I have sometimes wondered at,—that ever any atheist can die without horror; the approaches of death commonly undeceive us. But when I consider, that those who industriously endeavour to stupify their consciences while they live, should in God's righteous judgment be so far besotted as not to have their consciences so much as quitch* when they die; but, as they have industriously proselyted others to their atheism, they should be so far deserted of God, as to leave their companions under that delusion, till hell undeceive them. "O! but what can religion do for the cure of atheism?"

* One of our old words, sometimes written *queach*, *quech*, *quich*, and *quetch*, and signifying "to budge, stir, or move."—EDIT.

Serious godliness, in the lowest degree of it, expels atheism. I grant, those that are eminently godly may be tempted to atheism: but they reckon these among Satan's fiery darts, and accordingly set themselves presently to quench them; which though they cannot so easily do, as they imagine who have not experience of such temptations, yet there is this palpable difference between them and atheists; namely, the atheist is inquisitive for arguments to *promote* his atheism, the tempted Christian as inquisitive for arguments and grace to *destroy* it. Those that are seriously godly do not only seek a perfect cure of their own (in part) mortified atheism, but mournfully bewail the insolent atheism of the age they live in. If it be, as it is, "as a sword in their bones" for their enemies to "reproach them, while they say daily unto them, Where is your God?" (Psalm xlii. 10;) if it, as it were, break their bones, to have their interest in God, and God's peculiar care of them, so much as questioned; it must needs be as *a sword to their heart*, a killing wound, to hear the fear of God ridiculed, and the being of God denied. Certainly, as grace is heightened, a gracious person is next to being overwhelmed. Though God hath an evidence of his Deity [that] lies lieger* in the worst of his enemies, yet, upon the miracles of mercy [which] he works for and in his own people, God may say to them, they are his witnesses that he is God. (Isai. xliii. 12.) And the more eminent any one is in grace, the more experimental witness he is that the Lord is God. This may not only be sufficient for the instances already given, but be sufficiently instructive, what to do in all other cases that might be named. I had thought to have proportionably enlarged upon these, which I shall but little more than name, and therefore shall not add them to the number.

1. *Who knows whether a full or a vacant employment be best for him?*

A full employment is that which every one that hath dealings in the world gapes after: this leaves no room for melancholy nor idleness, each of which are unspeakably mischievous. But those that live in a hurry of business, do neither enjoy God nor themselves; it is tiresome both to body and mind. The truth is, the desire of it is ordinarily naught in the *rise*,—it is from covetousness and ambition; naught in the *progress*,—it neglects God and godliness; and naught in the *close*,—it ends at best in disappointment. But here *religion gives relief*; for a heavenly-minded person to be full of worldly business,—it is he alone that minds the main business of his life, to work out his salvation: it is he alone that both will and can keep the world from justling out what is better. The world in this is like the gout, though you keep it at your feet, it is troublesome; but if it reach the heart, it is mortal: the world through grace may be a good servant, but it is impossible to be a good master.

Is vacancy from employment better? It is tedious to be always drudging for we know not whom nor what; to have no time to spare for refreshment and recreation, that we may enjoy what we have, be

* That in the character of conscience, "resides as God's ambassador."—EDIT.

it more or less; this seems better. But yet to have little or nothing to do, exposeth us to we cannot say what; idleness is an inlet to the most monstrous abominations; relaxation from business, and recreation after weariness, is at best but a banquet, no way fit for ordinary food. Beside this, Satan watcheth, and never misseth prevailing upon an idle person. What can *serious godliness* do in this case? When one whose heart is set upon godliness hath but little to do with the world, he finds enough to do as a Christian. The considerate Christian hath not one hour in his life wherein he hath nothing to do: he alone can make a virtue of necessity; he alone can redeem time for God; he alone can fill his life with duty and comfort. In short, it is through grace alone, that a man hath never too much, nor too little, business: it is the power of godliness that is thus powerful.

2. *Who knows whether many or few friends be best for him?*

For *many friends*: man is a sociable creature, and cannot live of himself. To be destitute of friends seems very doleful: "A friend is born for adversity;" a friend may be better than an estate. To have many dear friends and relations, it carries us through our lives with comfort; it is a duty to prize them, it is a sin to slight them: and therefore this seems unquestionably best. But (and there are no friends on earth without a *but* in their commendation) friends themselves are troublesome, apt to take exceptions, to mistake, to be weary of us if we have long need of them. And beside this, there is none in the world, whose friendship is not founded on grace, [that] can be so much my friend now, but he may be as much my enemy hereafter. And if you can find any friend above these exceptions, how do the thoughts of parting abate the comfort of enjoying! Alas! we dare not think of it. "Can *serious godliness* stand us in any stead here?" Much every way: if our friends be irreligious, this necessitates us to do what is possible to make them friends to Christ and to religion; and this attempt is always successful, if not to make them gracious, yet to make ourselves more gracious. And if thy friends be already religious, thou wilt have a foretaste of heaven in the communion of saints; though this is rare, and rarely enjoyed.

Some think it is best to have *few or no friends*. We are too apt to flatter ourselves, and to bear upon our friends, to reckon upon their interest, when we ordinarily find disappointments; whereas, expecting nothing from them makes us learn to live without them, and in some sort above them; we need neither flatter nor humour any body. But now to be friendless,—that is very uncomfortable; a friend greatens all the joys, and lessens all the sorrows, [that] we meet with in this world. It argues a crooked and perverse disposition, to be without friends, or not to care for them. Beside this, we had need to have every man our friend, for we know not into whose hands our life may come before we die. That person must needs be miserable, who lives undesired, and dies unlamented. "What can *serious godliness* do in this case?" A serious, holy person, though he have but few, or perhaps no, worldly friends,—he hath the most and the best friends. He

hath God to be his friend; he hath an interest in the "whole household of faith;" and he can make-up in God what he wants in any other persons or things of the world. What, though he hath no friend to stand by him? Innocency and independency dare do, and can suffer, any thing.

3. *Who knows whether freedom from affliction, or an afflicted condition, be at present best for him?*

Freedom from afflictions seems most desirable both to nature and grace. We naturally love our ease, and would have nothing befall us that is grievous to flesh and blood; and gracious persons pray and strive to prevent and remove afflictions. But yet the experience of all, good and bad, in all ages of the world, proclaims this upon the house-tops, that more have got good by afflictions, than by being without them: "The prosperity of fools destroys them." (Prov. i. 32.) "What doeth *religion* in this case?" The truth is, there needs a great exercise of religion to carry us safe through freedom from affliction. Job's extraordinary devotion, (Job i. 5,) upon his children's ordinary rejoicing in their prosperous condition, may convincingly instruct us, that there is more danger in freedom from affliction than we are willing to suspect; and it is more difficult to love, and fear, and trust God, when we have the world, than when we want it: so that, *without* serious godliness, it is impossible to withstand the insinuating and pleasing temptation of flattering prosperity; and unless faith be in exercise, we cannot do it *with* it. "What, then! is an afflicted condition to be preferred?" Some that have had experience of both, say, "Yes;" they have been afraid to come from under their afflictions; some sick persons have been even afraid of health, though they desired it, lest what they got in their sickness they should lose in their health.

But yet *the continuance of afflictions* breaks the spirits, and hinders that cheerful serving and praising of God, which is, or should be, the life of a Christian. Though many are bettered by afflictions, yet none are allowed to pray for afflictions, but against them, and use all good means to avoid or remove them. It is one thing [that] makes heaven desirable,—the putting an end to all our afflictions. In short: "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous," whatever be the after-fruit of it. (Heb. xii. 11.) This therefore is clogged with vanity. "But what doeth religion in this case?" *Serious godliness* by afflictions becomes more serious. God makes great use of afflictions for the working and promoting of piety; and in this, I think, all experienced Christians are agreed;—they reckon sanctified afflictions among the choicest providences of their lives. I commend the enlargement of this by your own thoughts out of your own experiences. And thus including these three cases as in a large parenthesis, there is one case more that I would cautiously speak to, which the church catholic (truly so called) may have more cause than ever tremblingly to consider, and to seek more satisfying resolution than I can give for its determination.

VI. What man upon earth can preempторily assert, whether *peace*

or *persecution* be, just at such a time, infallibly best for the church of Christ? It is easily granted, that we must at all times pray for and endeavour the universal, both outward and spiritual, peace of the church; and this—that we may at all times do any thing but sin—to avoid or put an end to persecution. But let us consider each, as in the former instances.

1. That *the peace of the church* is beyond expression desirable, he is no Christian that denies it. Those that are the greatest troublers of the church's peace, do usually proclaim their friendship to it, calling their affection to a party, "love to the church," and the welfare of their party, "the peace of the church." Now though their charity is too narrow to contract the church into a party, their notion of peace is large enough,—they would have it commensurate with "the church;" so that I need not be large to prove what nobody denies. Outward prosperity was so much the blessing of the old covenant, that some confine it to that; but others upon better grounds expect more under the gospel; for this was no inconsiderable end of Christ's coming into the world, to "deliver us out of the hands of our" worldly "enemies, to serve him, without" affrighting "fears" of men, "in holiness before God and righteousness" before men, "all the days of our life." (Luke i. 74, 75.) Which prosperity when the church hath enjoyed, according to Christ's purchase and promise, then they have walked in the filial "fear of the Lord," and in the encouraging "comforts of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied" in number of converts, and increase of *their* graces *that* were formerly converted. (Acts ix. 31.) But here, as we use to say of pleasant weather, "It is pity fair weather should do any harm;" so it is pity the church's prosperity should do any harm.

But, alas! the church of Christ can as little bear continual prosperity, as long adversity: a calm is sometimes as dangerous as a storm. Many are the temptations and snares of a prosperous condition: it breeds hypocrites; errors and heresies spring up like weeds in rank ground; professors are apt to grow remiss and careless, wanton and secure; to be too fond of the present, and to hanker after more temporal happiness than God judges good for them. How hardly were the very apostles awakened from dreaming of Christ's temporal kingdom, and the very best of them from suing for great offices at court! O the divisions among brethren, when pride makes them quarrelsome! When the world favours the church, the church slides into the world; then their worldliness spoils their Christianity, and their Christianity palliates their worldliness; and so those things are mixed which can never be compounded.

But now *serious godliness* is the best preservative against surfeiting on prosperity. It is grace in the exercise and growth, that powerfully enables and necessarily provokes to improve the church's peace to all spiritual advantages. The church of the Jews was never in such a flourishing condition as in Solomon's reign; and is it not well worthy our observation, that the posterity of his servants, who became proselytes to the Jewish religion, were, several ages after his death, doubly

recorded by the Spirit of God, above the proselytes of former ages? (Neh. vii. 57, 60.) It is serious godliness that keeps them humble, and always upon their watch against flattering temptations; that keeps them low in their own eyes, and from despising others. And what on this side great grace could make David, who had a greater sum of ready money than ever any had in the world, either before or since, (1 Chron. xxii. 14,) prefer that little of scripture that was penned in his time, before an innumerable treasure? (Psalm cxix. 72.) He had also a list of worthies, never the like in the world; (2 Sam. xxiii;) yet he prefers the communion of saints before them. (Psalm xvi. 3; cxix. 63.) To have our conversation in heaven, when it is best with us upon earth,—this can only be effected by the power of godliness: believe it, Christians, this is no easy matter.

2. “What, then! is a *state of persecution* more eligible?” Before I dare speak a word to this, I must premise this caution: Let not persecutors take encouragement to be more outrageous in their persecution, and then scornfully tell you, “This is good for them; their pastors tell them it is sometimes better for them than peace.” This is like Julian, who in every thing he did, with a deep reach and greater malice than former emperors, to undermine and worm-out the Christian religion, he still twitted the Christians with some advice or promise of Christ to his disciples about persecution, jeeringly telling them it was for their good. Let such persons know, and O that they would consider, that though God hath, and doth, and will bring good out of evil, and over-rule the fury of men for the good of his people; yet this is not the least excuse for their sin, nor can it be pleaded to abate their punishment. To give you an instance; I cannot give a greater, and I need give no more: the Jews’ persecution of our blessed Saviour—it was predetermined of God, and eventually proved the greatest good to man; yet no thank to them, nor alleviation of their guilt: “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” (Acts ii. 23.) They pretended high to piety and necessity for their process against him; they charge him with blasphemy against God, treason against Cæsar, devilism against the souls of people, and luxury as to his common conversation; whereas he was no other than “the Just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers.” (Acts vii. 52.) It was good counsel that Gamaliel gave those rulers who “were cut to the heart,” that is, vexed at heart, and counted it criminal, that the apostles should dare to tell them, “We ought to obey God rather than men:” “Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.” (Acts v. 29, 33, 38, 39.) For it is said of others of them that slighted this, They “have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: forbidding us to speak unto the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sin alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.” (1 Thess. ii. 15, 16.) And how heavy doth that

doom lie upon them to this day! I will add no more to this caution, but a request to persecutors, to read and think and pray over the second psalm.

This premised, much may be said of the good which God doeth in and for and by his children, by bringing them into, his presence in, and deliverance out of, persecution; how God increaseth their graces, heightens their comforts, multiplies their experiences, beyond what he doeth [at] any other time of their lives. I remember, Augustine hath a passage, (though, being separated from my books, I cannot name where,) that "if a person suffer death for Christ before conversion, his martyrdom shall be to him instead of regeneration;" but if you will not receive his testimony about the first grace, I am sure you will not deny my next about the exercise of grace. Our great Exemplar, though he was the Son of God, yet, as he was the Son of man, he experimentally "learned obedience by the things which he suffered;" (Heb. v. 8;) and the Holy Ghost tells us, "It became him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." (Heb. ii. 10.) It is hard to say what kind of perfection Christ had by suffering, but it is easy to observe how sufferings tend to the perfecting of Christians; they force them to a more severe examination of heart and life, and to a more thorough repentance of what provoked God to lay them under sufferings. Then their prayers are more fervent, and their whole conversation more regular, than at other times. So that I know not whether as well the former as the latter part of that passage may not be a gracious promise: "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break," &c. (Psalm lxxxix. 30—37.) In short, their greatest sufferings shall be medicinal, not destructive; the more they exercise their graces, the more they increase them. For here is the difference between an earthly and a heavenly treasure: *the one*, the more you spend, the less you have; *the other*, the more you lay out, the more you augment the treasure. "Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world," those especially who are impoverished for righteousness' sake, "rich in faith?" (James ii. 5.) And according to our faith are all our other graces, and all our other comforts; and it is by "believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." (1 Peter i. 8.) And the apostle tells you expressly, that it is for the comfort of others he acquaints them, "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation aboundeth by Christ." (2 Cor. i. 5.) Those Christians that have walked droopingly all their days, when God hath singled them out for sufferings, God hath cleared up their evidences: never did any martyr die in desertion.

• It was in the captivity that, one while, Christ, the Angel of the

Covenant,—another while, a created angel, one of his menial servants, —did revive, instruct, support, and comfort Daniel, as God's "greatly beloved." (Dan. x. 10—21.) The blessed apostle in one chapter (2 Cor. xi.) gives us an account of his sufferings, and in the next (2 Cor. xii.) of his (some degree of) beatifical vision; and both beyond all the other apostles. And God doth not only this in and for themselves, but God makes them more eminently useful unto others: persecution was the occasion of spreading the gospel all the world over. Blessed Paul wrote more epistles in his bonds, than any one of the other apostles in their liberty; and it was in one of those epistles that he appeals to his readers to "understand his knowledge in the mystery of Christ." (Eph. iii. 4.) It was in the time of the beloved disciple's banishment into Patmos, that Christ gave him a prospect of the state of the church from his time to the end of the world; through all the times of the heathen persecutions, and through the rise, reign, and ruin of the antichristian apostasy; with peculiar prophecies, suitable directions, terrible threatenings, and cheering promises, through the several visions; all which, though not very easy to be understood, yet well deserve the name of "revelation;" evidencing Christ's peculiar care of his persecuted servants, that nothing befalls them by chance, but that the main outrage of enemies is ordered and bounded by Christ's infinite wisdom and compassionate love. And though time hath confuted many mistaken calculations of the continuance of the church's troubles, yet God will not delay the church's deliverance one moment in favour to their enemies, but gradually to ripen his own design; and God will in the best time do more for his people than their present faith and hope can grasp; and as we need the understanding of these dark scriptures, God will unriddle them to us.

But at present the church's persecution is grievous to it, and that upon many accounts. In times of persecution, hell seems to be let loose as to all manner of wickedness: when nothing but the service of God is criminal, the service of the devil seems meritorious. Some will be frighted from the entertainment of the gospel, and die in their infidelity; and they are lost for ever. Others so far shrink, that they lose their peace, (though they do not lose their souls,) and never recover it more. And the spirits of the strongest will be apt to faint, if the sufferings be sharp and long: they "shall wear out the saints of the Most High." (Dan. vii. 25.) When persecution comes to its height, "except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." (Matt. xxiv. 22.)

"But what is to be done at that time, that what is intolerable to flesh and blood may be borne with triumph? that we may be so far from stumbling at the cross of Christ, that we may humbly glory in it? 'Rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.' (Acts v. 41.) In a word, how may the time of their persecution be the best time of their life?"

By *serious godliness*, by a more vigorous exercise of all the graces

of the Holy Ghost. When we feel what there is in that life of faith, [which] we have at other times but talked of; what, though the furnace be heated seven times hotter than ordinary, may we be but seven times more purified than ordinary! Christians, let this be your great care, never to "suffer as evil-doers;" but so walk, that your enemies may despair of ever finding any occasion against you, except they find it against you concerning the law of your God. Persecutors will never own it, that they inflict evil upon persons for doing good; but always pretend something criminal. As when Paul and Silas preached Christ at Thessalonica, "the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar." (Acts xvii. 5—7.) When Paul was afterwards taken and arraigned, he, "earnestly beholding the council," (he could look them boldly in the face,) "said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." And though this plea enraged some of his persecutors, others became his advocates, saying, "We find no evil in this man:" therefore "let us not fight against God." (Acts xxiii. 1, 9.) And when he was afterwards, in this process, brought before a heathen magistrate, corrupt enough, and thereby prejudiced against him, yet there, "as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled." (Acts xxiv. 25.) Nothing so ruffles the consciences of persecutors, as the uncontrollable blamelessness of sufferers: as Job told his prejudiced friends, "Ye should say, Why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in me?" (Job xix. 28.) I will close all these propositions with Job's resolution, which I request may be this: "Till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live." (Job xxvii. 5, 6.)

And now, though I have thus made out what I proposed in behalf of serious godliness, yet I am sensible it is not done beyond contradiction. I shall therefore next endeavour to remove the objections that are of moment, and leave the cavils to die of themselves.

OBJECTIONS.

OBJECTION I. "If our present condition be, for aught we can possibly know, best for us; why should we seek to alter it? Why should we seek health when we are sick, or right ourselves when we are wronged? or why should we seek peace of conscience, when we are under trouble of conscience? This seems to make a confusion in our very prayers, to hinder praying, and to stagger our faith in prayer; for our prayers are for the altering of things for the better; that is the sum of all our petitions. Now if we be 'wavering' in our minds about what is good for us, how can we think to 'receive any

thing of the Lord? A double-minded,' unresolved 'man is unstable,' uncertain, 'in all his ways.'" (James i. 6—8.)

ANSWER I. This is so far from hindering or confounding our prayers, that, next to the Spirit of God, it is our best guide and instructor for prayer. This will teach us, that our petitions are not to direct God what to do, nor may we expostulate with God in a quarrelling manner, as if God wronged us if he do not humour us. Whatever we pray for, *that* * cannot but be good for us. For instance: renewing, strengthening, stablishing grace,—these cannot but be good for us; for these we may insist with so much earnestness as not to be contented with a denial. God hath nowhere made it our duty to be willing to be damned, to be his enemies, to hate him and blaspheme him for ever: and therefore herein, if a pretended angel from heaven (for God never sent any *holy* angel upon such an errand) should tell us, as from God, that God would not hear us, nor bestow his grace upon us; we might tell him, "God never denied his grace to any that were not willing to be denied; and therefore, where God hath by preventing grace so far engaged the will restlessly to desire grace, he hath given a token for good that he is pleased with our importunity." And therefore, peremptorily to resolve humbly to lie at God's foot, and to live and die with this petition for grace,—your endeavours being answerable to your prayers,—you may comfortably believe, never any perished that did it. But now, in things not necessary to salvation, (and of such things is the question,) we must pray in another manner: we are to consider our circumstances, the promises that suit them, how far God useth to fulfil such promises in the letter of them, how in his wise love he fulfils a spiritual promise, when they are earnest for a temporal; and we shall never have hard thoughts of God, though he deny us any thing in this world for which we are most earnest. And the truth is, let but serious, praying Christians deeply reflect upon their own hearts, how they have been differently affected in prayer according to the things they prayed for; and they will certainly find, that whatever their expressions have been about things less necessary, yet their hearts have been more thoroughly broken and more inexpressibly longing for spiritual supplies. It is about God's bestowing of his grace that they adore his sovereignty, justifying God though he should reject them, and wondering even to astonishment how he can show kindness to *them*: so that, the more spiritual any Christians are, the more they lose their will in the will of God, and the less they quarrel with God, let him do what he will with them. They do not think it in vain to serve God, though he should (but he will not) cast them off at last; they thankfully acknowledge they receive so many mercies from God here, as are infinitely more worth than all the services they can do him; and they see cause to love God, though there is no cause why God should love them: so that they will pray and wait, hate sin and love holiness, admire God and abase themselves, and let God do what he will with them. This is the temper and practice of the most serious Christians.

* "The altering of things for the better." See the objection.—EDIT.

2. This will teach us to observe God's answering of prayer, so as to be thankful or penitent, to retract or alter or urge our petitions, as our case requires. And this I think I may say,—One of the choicest exercises of grace is about the improving [of] the return of prayer. For example: I think such a thing to be good for me; suppose, a better frame of health: for this I fill my mouth with arguments, and my heart with faith; but God answers me with disappointments. This teaches me upon reflection; I find causes more than are good, why God should deny me. Suppose, further, I beg the pardon of sin, am sensible that I must perish if I be denied, and therefore reckon I cannot be too earnest; but am so far from speeding, that to my apprehension God seems implacable, and I have less hopes every day than other. Well, this puts me upon a more thorough scrutiny, and I find I have not observed God's method for pardon: I would have the comfort of a pardon without a suitable sense of the evil of sin; which if I should obtain, I should not be so shy of sin as when I have felt the smart of it; I should not look upon myself as so much beholden to Christ, but that I might venture upon sin, and have a pardon at pleasure; I should not so much pity others under their soul-troubles. In a word, the more we consider, the more cause we shall see, why God answers prayer according to his own wisdom, not our folly.

OBJECTION II. "We do not see that religion doeth any great matter toward the bettering of every condition. Those that pretend to religion, have always their own good word; they love to speak and hear of the achievements and privileges of religion, though they are invisible to all but themselves. A little more modesty and less arrogancy would better become them."

ANSWER I. To our grief we must acknowledge, that serious Christians are shamefully defective in living up to such a height of heavenly-mindedness, as to have the experiences [which] they might have; and shall we, when we are injurious to ourselves, expect God to fulfil conditional promises, when we neglect the condition of them? No, Christians; God will say to us, what he once said to Israel: "If thou wilt walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them;" then "the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: and all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee," &c. "But if ye will walk contrary unto me, then will I also walk contrary unto you, and ye shall know my breach of promise." (Lev. xxvi. 3, 21—24; Deut. xxviii. 1, 2; Num. xiv. 34.) God doth not only in displeasure, but in kindness, make his people feel a difference in their comforts, from the difference in their walking. You may as well expect to buy things without money, because "money answers all things," as expect promises fulfilled to godliness, when you want that godliness to which the promise is made. It is true, God may give it of bounty, but not of promise; and then it may be a mercy, but not a blessing. Make conscience of performing the condition, and make conscience of believing the promise: for God will certainly fulfil that promise, or a better: so that the fault is our own that we do not "inherit the promises."

2. When I have granted all that can rationally be demanded in the objection, do but impartially observe, and you will find, that notwithstanding all the defects and imperfections of Christians, it is they alone that live most above the vanity of every condition. It is they only [who] have received those "exceeding great and precious promises," whereby they are "partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust:" (2 Peter i. 4 :) and though they have not "already attained" that heavenly frame they hope for, neither are "already perfect; yet this one thing they do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, they press toward" a full experience of what is to be found in the ways of holiness. (Phil. iii. 12—14.) If this be not a sufficient answer to this objection, what I shall add will be more than enough. Whereas I have by an induction of six comparative cases (I hope) demonstrated the excellency of serious godliness, I shall now in as many instances, beyond all comparison and beyond contradiction, demonstrate the superlative excellency of the power of godliness; all which may serve as arguments for practical godliness.

1. *Serious godliness will make your present condition good for you, be it what it will.*—Every thing but religion will make you think any condition better than your present condition. There is one text I would commend to your consideration in this matter, 1 Tim. vi. 5, 6: Those that are "destitute of the truth, suppose that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. But godliness with contentment is great gain." As if he had said, "Those that only talk of religion, and wrangle about it,—they have no higher design than to make a gain of it; avoid all familiarity with them: but those that are sincerely religious, that know and fear and worship God aright,—there is a treasure, a great treasure, 'a constant revenue, an inexhaustible spring.'"* And then content is not mentioned as a condition added to piety, as if piety were not "great gain" without content added to it; but content is mentioned as "the very genuine effect of piety."† The godly man is so well contented with his condition, that he is not so solicitous as others for the bettering of it: whatsoever is wanting to him, is made up by tranquillity of mind, and hope in God, that God will supply him with necessaries; and he acquiesceth in his will. Now where is that man in all the world that can do this beside the Christian?

2. *Serious godliness will make every change of condition good for us, though the change shock both nature and grace.*—A change of condition is either the hope or fear of every one in this world; and it is not the least part of heaven's happiness, that there is no fear of change. In that state of happiness wherein men and angels were created, mutability was their outlet into sin and misery; but now through grace there is no change formidable. Alas! we change more or less every day; and who is it that meets not with some almost overwhelming changes in his life, and doth, or should, preparingly expect his

* Ποσιμος, fundus, quasi perennis fons.

† Purum putum pietatis effectum.

greatest change at death? And let the consciences of all that are not worse than dead say, whether any thing on this side now-despised godliness, can so much as endure the thoughts of such a change. In the comparatively petty changes of our life, when we but change plenty into want, or credit into disgrace, or health into sickness, how do persons fret and toss like a wild bull in a net, or lie down sullen under God's hand, as if he had done us wrong, or were to give us account why he grieves us! But now grace in exercise turns our eyes inward, and shows us what we have more cause to lament; no evil comparable to the evil of sin! Whatever God doeth against us, on this side hell, it is less than sin deserves. Will God any way prepare us for our unchangeable change? Glory be to free grace!

3. *Serious godliness will make relative afflictions (which of all outward afflictions are the most grievous) good for us; and nothing else can do it.*—I confess, it is morally worse, for all the relations of a family to go the broad way to ruin, and though their lusts clash one against another, yet to be all agreed to be the devil's willing servants. It was sad in Egypt, when "there was not a house where there was not one dead;" (Exod. xii. 30;) but it is far worse to have whole families where there is not one spiritually alive. But though it is sinfully worse than divisions in families about religion, yet it is at present more dolefully afflictive to have those, whose souls' welfare we desire as our own, to be devils incarnate: for a David, a "man after God's own heart," when he comes from public worship "to bless his household," to be so reviled by Michal as to divert his zeal to a twitting her with her father's rejection, and his blessing of his household into God's curse upon herself. (2 Sam. vi. 20—23.) On the other hand, for a most obliging Abigail to have "such a son of Belial" to her husband "that a man cannot speak to him;" that when by her prudent foresight he was preserved from sudden death, he was so drunk as not to be capable of hearing of his danger. (1 Sam. xxv. 17—36.) Again: for Abraham, the "father of the faithful," to have a seven-years' promise of a son, and for God to give that son his name, and this son to prove a scoffing Ishmael; for Isaac, the quietest of all the patriarchs, to pray twenty years for a son, and to have his first-born prove a profane Esau; for good Eli to have such children as made the offerings of the Lord to be abhorred. (1 Sam. ii. 17.) And, on the other hand, for Hezekiah, of whom it is said, "After him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him," (2 Kings xviii. 5,) to have such a father as Ahaz, that, as it were, devoted his children to the devil, (2 Kings xvi. 3,) and hath this peculiar brand upon him, that "in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord: this is that king Ahaz." (2 Chron. xxviii. 22.) How might every one of these complain as Rebekah did! "I am weary of my life, because of" some wicked relations; and if I should have more such, "what good shall my life do me?" (Gen. xxvii. 46.) Again: for masters to have such servants as Mephibosheth had of Ziba, who irreparably blasted him in his reputation, and ruined him in his estate; (2 Sam. xvi. 1—4;) for servants to have

such a master as Laban was to Jacob, who gives this account of his twenty years' service: "In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes;" and had not God relieved him by little less than miracle, "surely thou hadst sent me away empty." (Gen. xxxi. 40—42.) And now having mentioned sinful relative afflictions, I will mention no other; for there is no evil comparable to sin, nor any evil so intolerable to a gracious soul; [so] that if serious godliness can keep from sinking under this burden, you need fear no other. To be inseparably related to one that is loaded with infamy, or even famished through poverty, loathsomely diseased, or incurably distracted,—these are but flea-bittings to the stabbing wounds of wicked relations. But now serious godliness doth not only support, but grow under, this burden; which is a privilege they are injurious to themselves to overlook. Christ takes upon him all those relations that are impossible to meet in any other, that what is grievous in any relation may be comfortably made up in him; and God usually increaseth their graces, though not always their present comforts.

4. *Serious godliness will make horror of conscience and divine desertions good for us.*—These, where there is no godliness nor working toward it, they are none of the least of hell-torments; but where they befall any one that is godly, or that God is about to make so, they prove healing, though rough, physic. When God thoroughly awakens the conscience, though with a fright; and drops spiritual influences, though withdraws; he makes convictions more deep, and repentance more sound. You may take this for a tried case: Those serious Christians whom God is pleased to exercise with tremblings of conscience, temptations of Satan, and apprehensions of desertion, God thereby makes them eminently gracious and compassionately useful; they walk most humbly with God, justifying and praising him under his most astonishing providences. And though, above all temptations, these are so far from joyous, that they are most grievous; yet these, even these, "afterward yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." (Heb. xii. 11.)

5. *Serious godliness will force something good out of the evil of sin.*—Here it concerns me to speak with more caution than in any other case whatsoever; for we must not dare to venture upon sin, through hopes of extracting good out of it, as chymists extract spirits out of soot and urine, &c. No; the apostle tells us, that those that do but "say," that offer to say, "We may do evil, that good may come of it,"—the "damnation" of those slanderers "is just." (Rom. iii. 8.) So that it is next to impossible to be too shy of sin, unless when Satan frights us into the omission of some duties, for fear of the sins that inevitably cleave to them. In short, I would have you understand this instance to refer to sins past, not future; to sins already committed, that there is no other possible way of undoing what is done, but by repentance; not of sins not yet committed, as if I gave so much as the least encouragement to so much as the least sin. Thus understanding the instance, I dare say it over again,

Serious godliness will force something of good out of the evil of sin. These are the persons that cannot forget "the wormwood and the gall" of their mortification; their "soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in" them. (Lam. iii. 19, 20.) These are the persons that put a due estimate upon pardoning mercy, and love Christ the more, for the more sins he hath forgiven them: as Christ said of Mary Magdalene, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." (Luke vii. 47.) The blessed apostle, that brands himself for the "chief of sinners" before conversion, (1 Tim. i. 15,) dares own it, that he "laboured more abundantly than all" the apostles after his conversion: (1 Cor. xv. 10:) and it is peculiar to him to coin words, to magnify the grace of God in Christ.* Christians, I beseech you, let not any one take encouragement hence to sin, but let the worst of sinners take encouragement hence to repent. What, though thou hast been one of the vilest wretches upon earth? thou mayest through grace be one of the highest saints in heaven; and the sense of what thou hast been may promote it. The rising ground of a dunghill may help to raise thy flight towards heaven. Once more:

6. *Though to your own apprehension you have no faith at all to believe any one word of all this, nor any skill at all to know what to do; yet serious godliness will make all this good to thee.*—Here, you see, I take it for granted, that one may be seriously godly, who, in his own present apprehensions, hath no faith at all, nor skill at all for anything that is spiritually good. Many may be in this like Moses; their faces may shine (their grace may shine) to others, and they themselves not know it. (Exod. xxxiv. 29.) Many that are dear to God, live many years in the growing exercise of grace, and yet dare not own it, that they have any at all. God bestows the faith of assurance upon those of his children that are not able to bear up without it; (mistake me not, as if it were not every one's duty to seek it, and a great privilege to have assurance;) when others of his children, who have a stronger faith, live and die without it. To give you an instance beyond all instances: our Lord Jesus Christ, who, it is certain, could not want assurance, yet died in as great desertion as it was possible to befall him. When he had hung six hours upon the cross, he "cried with a loud voice, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark xv. 25; Matt. xxvii. 46.) As if he had said, "This is beyond all my other torment." And "when he had cried again with a loud voice," with a vehement affection and a strong faith, he laid down his soul. (Matt. xxvii. 50.) But what was that [which] he spake with such vehemency the second time? "Father, into thy hands I will commend my spirit;" (Luke xxiii. 46;) Παράθησομαι. "I will depose my soul with thee, I will thrust it into thy hands." Now that Jesus Christ was under this unexpressible desertion during the three-hours' preternatural darkness, it is more than for the best of Christians to be so during their whole life; which

* Rom. v. 20: "Ἐπεπερισσεύεν, [Grace "did much more abound;"] 1 Tim. i. 14: "Ἐπεπλάσασα, [The grace of our Lord "was exceeding abundant."]

doth more than prove what I asserted,—that a person of great grace may be so much in the dark as not to see he hath any. “But what must he do in this case? Can serious godliness afford any relief?” Christians, pray mark it; these persons,—they are, and through grace cannot but be, seriously godly; and their serious godliness finds them work enough, and support enough to keep them from sinking. They daily do what they complain they cannot do; they do “fear the Lord;” they fear nothing more than sinning against him; they do “obey the voice of his servants;” there are none [who] receive instructions more obediently; though they “walk in darkness,” they will never follow a false fire; if they have “no light” from God, they will have none from any else. They do “trust in the name of the Lord;” they lie at God’s foot, let him do what he will with them; they do “stay upon their God;” (Isai. l. 10;) they “come up from the wilderness” of the world, “leaning upon their Beloved.” (Canticles viii. 5.) Religion is the whole business of their life, and comparatively they do nothing else; and though they have not ravishing comforts, they have that peace that exceeds “all understanding” that is merely human, and that doth “guard their hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” against all the stratagems and fiery darts of Satan. (Phil. iv. 7.) Their state is good, their souls are safe, and they cannot but be happy in both worlds. And thus I have endeavoured to be so practical in the doctrinal part, that there needs but little to be added for the application: the Lord make that little to be like chymical spirits,—to be more effectual than a greater quantity! Rouse-up yourselves to do your part, that it may be so.

USES.

USE I. *Set your hearts upon serious godliness.*—This *must* be the first use; for you can make no use at all of this doctrine, till you have made this use of it. Every thing without this is but an abuse of it; you do not only wrong the truth, but you wrong yourselves, whatever you say or do about it, till you make it your business to experiment the truth of what hath been spoken in its commendation; and this I can assure you, never any one repented of his downright godliness. Therefore live in the practice of those plain duties, without which it is in vain to pretend to religion. For instance: daily read some portion of the Old and New Testament; not as your child reads it for his lesson, but as God’s child reads it for his profit. Be more frequent in prayer; not as those that pass their prayers by number, but as those that pour-out their hearts to God in holy fervour. Let your thoughts be so filled with heavenly objects, that you may in some respect make all things such [which] you think of. Discourse of the things of God, not in a captious or vain-glorious manner, but as those that feel the truths they speak of. Receive the sacrament, not as a civil test, but as sealing that covenant wherein you will be as careful to fulfil the conditions, as you would have God faithful in fulfilling the promises. Look out so sharp to the progress of your sanctification, that sin may not expire, but be mortified; and that grace

may be so lively, as to confute the reproach of enemies, and exceed the commendation of friends. Bear afflictions, not as a malefactor goes to execution,—because he cannot help it; but as chary not to miss the fruit of affliction,—the participation of God's holiness. Though you look first to yourselves, be not only selfish, though in the most gracious manner, but endeavour to be blessings as far as your name is heard of. In short, perform all your duties to God, yourselves, and others, in the name of Christ, through his strength, according to his command, relying upon his promises, that you may feel what it is to be accepted in God's and your Beloved. This is to be serious in religion.

USE II. *Learn to be more than barely contented with your present condition.*—It is that which God in wisdom chooseth for you, preferring it before any other condition. Every condition hath some lessons peculiar to it, which are better learnt in that condition than in any other; and those things that may be best learnt in thy condition, are the things you most need learning; which when you have learnt, then God will put thee into other circumstances, to teach thee something else. Every condition hath something grievous in it, by reason of the sin and vanity that cleaves to it; but that which is most grievous, if it be used as physic, will help to cure thee. We all grant, it is best to take physic when we need it: “Now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold” trials; (1 Peter i. 6;) and when we take physic, we imprison ourselves in our chamber, as much as others in a gaol; we abstain from riot, as much as they that want bread; we tend our physic, and need no arguments to do so. Christians, let God be your Physician, and prescribe what physic he pleaseth; we have nothing else to do, but observe his instructions for its beneficial operation. Apply this to any condition that is uneasy to you, and you will see cause not only to justify, but to praise, your wise Physician. But if this argument be not cogent, I will commend one that is. (I confess I love those directions that will apply themselves, that will work their way for application.) That you may so far like your present condition, as to perform the duties of it, before you desire an alteration of it, take this course: sit down and consider,—should God so far humour thee, as to let thee frame thine own condition to thine own mind, to give thee thy choice for a worldly happiness; suppose he allowed thee time to think, to consult friends, to alter and add, upon second and third, yea, upon your twentieth, thought, whatever the wit of man could suggest, or the heart of man desire; and all this for a whole month together, before you fixed your choice; I suppose, when you chose, it should be wealth without care, pleasure without weariness, honour without hazard, health without sickness, friends without mistake, relations without crosses, old age without infirmities: and if God should thus alter the course of his providence, unto what would your own pride and the world's envy expose you? “O, but,” you will say, “all this with grace will do well.” Do you think so? But would not grace without all this do better? Can you think that such a condition would wean you from

the world, and fit you for heaven? Or is earth the place where you would live for ever, and have no more happiness than that can afford you? Return, poor soul, return to thyself and to thy God; acknowledge that God is wise, and thou art a fool; and it is better [to] be employed in the present duty of thy present condition, than to doze-out thy life in wild imaginations.

USE III. *Make conscience of both sorts of duties,—religious and worldly; and allot fit and distinct times for heavenly and worldly business.*—But with this difference, let religion mix itself with worldly business, and spare not; but let not the world break-in upon religion, lest it spoil it. Religion will perfume the world, but the world will taint religion. Though every thing in the world be clogged with vanity, yet there is something of duty about every thing we meddle with, and we must not call neglect of duty, “contempt of the world.” Use the world as you do your servants, to whom you give due liberty, as the best way to prevent their taking more than is due: so, to take a due care about the world, is the best way to prevent religion’s being justled out by worldly cares. Count not any sin or duty about the least matters so small as to venture upon the one, or neglect the other; but proportion your carefulness according to the business before you. I see more cause every day than other, to commend both the truth and weight of the observation, that “all over-doing is undoing:” you cannot bestow too much diligence about one thing, but you rob something else of what diligence is necessary, and mar that about which you are over-solicitous. I will close this with that of the apostle: “This I say, brethren, the time is short;” we have none to spare: “it remaineth,” for the future, “that both they that have wives be as though they had none;” let them not be uxorious; “and they that weep, as though they wept not;” if God bring them under sorrow, let them but water their plants, not drown them; “and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not;” we must at best “rejoice with trembling;” “and they that buy, as though they possessed not;” there is nothing we can purchase worth the name of a possession; “and they that use this world, as not abusing it” to any other use than what God hath appointed: “for the fashion of this world passeth away;” the pageantry of this world will soon be over. “But I would have you without carefulness,” without distracting carefulness about worldly things. (1 Cor. vii. 29—32.)

USE IV. *Whatever you do for the bettering of your condition, follow God, but do not go before him.*—This is a direction of great moment, being a necessary caution against that sin that doth always beset us. Every man is an orator, to aggravate his own grievances; and thinks himself a politician, for fitting them with remedies; yea, hath the confidence of a prophet, that they shall certainly be effectual, if God will but take *his* time and method for their operation. “Vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass’s colt,” (Job xi. 12,) to kick up his heels against God’s unsearchable wisdom. You may at once see both your proneness to the sin, and Christ directing to this remedy, in one and the same instance; namely, when Peter

had made such a confession of faith, that Christ never commended any like it; but would prescribe to Christ an exemption from suffering, not considering that mankind would have been undone by that advice; but Christ with a sharp reproof bids, "Get thee behind me;" &c. (Matt. xvi. 16, 23.) In all cases, about settling in the world, getting estates, seeking preferment, entering into marriage, removing from one place to another, be not self-conceited nor hasty, to run before God, nor to go out of his way; but follow him, follow his commands in a way of obedience, follow his providence in a way of observance; follow God, and you may expect his blessing.

USE V. *Remember these two words, though you forget all the rest of the sermon; namely, CHRIST and HOLINESS, HOLINESS and CHRIST.*—Interweave these, all manner of ways, in your whole conversation. Press after holiness as much as it is possible, had you no Christ to befriend you; (for it is a shame to mind holiness the less, for any benefits you expect from Christ;) and rest as entirely upon Christ, as if there were nothing else required; for the best of your holiness doth not merit acceptance. It is serious Christianity that I press, as the only way to better every condition; it is Christianity, downright Christianity, that alone can do it. It is not morality without faith; that is but refined Heathenism: it is not faith without morality; that is but downright hypocrisy. It must be a divine faith, wrought by the Holy Ghost, where God and man concur in the operation; such a faith as works by love both to God and man, a holy faith, "full of good works:" "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them;" (Eph. ii. 10;) "worshipping God in the spirit, rejoicing in Christ Jesus, and having no confidence in the flesh; yea, doubtless, counting all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus: that we may be found in him, not having," not trusting in, "our own righteousness, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that we may know him," &c. (Phil. iii. 3, 8—10.) I will close all with this of Solomon, of whom it is said, "He spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five. And he spake of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes." (1 Kings iv. 32, 33.) Now consider, his treatises of natural philosophy are utterly lost, though we may well suppose them the best that ever were writ; nay, of his three thousand proverbs, those that were not divinely inspired are lost; and those that were, are some of them collected by other hands, not his own: (Prov. xxv. 1:) but his two last and best treatises, Ecclesiastes and Canticles,—the one to abate our love of the world, and the other to increase our love to Christ,—these are the books, these are the things, with which he did [close his life,] with which we should close our lives.