

## SERMON XIV.

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WHAT ARE THE HINDERANCES AND HELPS TO A GOOD MEMORY  
IN SPIRITUAL THINGS?

*By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.*—1 Corinthians xv. 2.

THERE is no complaint more common among religious persons, than the weakness of their memories ; thinking, perhaps, *that* defect doth imply least guilt ; or, it may be, mistaking their carelessness for forgetfulness ; or else there is really some special frailty in that faculty,—to heal which, is the design of this discourse.

For the occasion and coherence of these words in the text, it is evident that the apostle Paul in the verse foregoing begins to recite and prove the doctrine of the resurrection from the dead, which he doth there declare to be a great point of that gospel which he had preached unto them, which also they had received, and wherein they did stand. And then he adds here, “By which” gospel “also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.”

In which words we have a discovery,

1. *Of men's utmost happiness.*—Namely, salvation : “Ye are saved ;” that is, not only rescued out of your pagan state, nor only that ye stand fair for salvation ; but “ye are saved” already. For heaven doth really begin upon earth, and every true saint is at present a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem.

2. *Of the only means for the attaining of it.*—Namely, the gospel : “By which ye are saved.” For that reveals the object ; that directs lost man, which way to arrive at it ; that assures us that a passage is opened into heaven ; that encourages and inclines us seriously to endeavour after it.

3. *Of the special grace necessary in respect of this gospel.*—Namely, believing : “Unless ye have believed in vain.” For hereby we credit what is revealed, we embrace what is offered, and we rely on what is promised ; without which acts of faith, the gospel signifies nothing to us. And hearing, by which faith comes, is included in it ; for so the apostle joins them : “Then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.” (Verse 14.)

4. *Of the particular faculty that is requisite for this end.*—Namely, the memory : “If ye keep in memory what I preached unto you.”

For though the main thing hereby intended be to keep in the heart a constant and effectual belief of the gospel, and particularly of this article of the resurrection ; yet, to keep in memory "the form of sound words," is also necessary in order thereunto ; and therefore it is said in the text,—that "ye retain with what words, or reasons, I preached unto you."\*

5. *The relation or influence which this last (of keeping in memory) hath upon all the rest.*—And this expressed, (1.) By way of condition, in the beginning of the verse : "Ye are saved, if ye keep in memory." Our salvation in some sort depends upon it : for, without the gospel, no salvation ; without faith, no benefit by the gospel ; and without hearing and retaining what we hear, no saving faith. (2.) By way of exception, in the end of the verse : "Unless ye have believed in vain." Your hearing is in vain, and your believing is in vain, if ye do not steadfastly cleave to the gospel, and to this material doctrine of it,—the resurrection, and "keep in memory what I have preached unto you" concerning it.

The lesson, then, that we may learn from hence is this ; namely,

#### DOCTRINE.

*If men would be saved by the gospel, they must keep in memory what is preached unto them.*

And under this proposition I am to handle the causes and cure of a bad memory, or the hinderances and helps of a good memory in spiritual things. And in order hereunto I shall show,

I. *What the memory is.*

II. *The excellency of this faculty, especially in its primitive state.*

III. *The corruption of it.*

IV. *The restoration or sanctification of it.*

V. *The ordinary impediments thereof.*

VI. *The proper helps unto it.*

VII. *Answer some cavils of the wilful, and some of the doubts of the weak, about it.* And,

VIII. *Make application of all.*

And the good Lord help us all now to remember what is preached to us !

I. *What the memory is.*—It is that faculty of the soul wherein are reserved the things [which] we know. Though it belong to the sensitive soul, and so is in some measure common to brutes with men, yet I shall handle [it] as it is seated in the rational soul, where it is the store-house not only of whatsoever is brought in by the eye and ear,—which are the two senses of discipline,—but also of what is imparted by the understanding. For the memory† is nearly allied to

\* *Τινι λόγῳ.* Quibusdam verbis.—TREMELLIUS. ["With whatsoever words."] Quo sermone.—BEZA, et Versio Arab. ["With what discourse."] Quid ratione.—Vers. Syr., et Fulg. ["With what reasoning."] † *Memoria est animus.* Dicimus enim, Vide ut illud in animo habeas : et cum obliviscimur, dicimus, Non fuit in animo.—AUGUSTINI Confessiones, lib. x. cap. 14. "The memory is the mind. For we say, 'See that you keep that in mind : ' and when we forget any thing, we say, 'It was not in my mind.'"—EDIT. Non est in homine memoria distincta ab intellectu.—CAJETANUS. "In man the memory is not distinct from the understanding."—EDIT.

the understanding, if it be not the same, as many think. Its office, however, is,

1. *To receive such things as are presented to it.*—Wherein it is fitly enough compared to soft wax, which is prepared to receive any impression made upon it.

2. *To retain and preserve what is laid up therein.*—Wherefore it is oft called by the ancients, *venter animæ*, “the belly of the soul.”\* There is a little kingdom in the soul of man. The king, or rather vice-roy, is the will, the privy-council is the understanding, the judge is the conscience, and the great treasurer is the memory.

3. *To recall or recover what was out of mind.*†—And this is proper to mankind, and is not in brutes: for it proceeds from the motion of the images of things in the brain by the activity of reason, which, considering the time, place, persons, and such-like circumstances of things, by degrees recovers what was out of the way; for, as things themselves, so the phantasms of things, are connected together, and by one we recover another. And this intellectual memory is inseparable from the rational soul; in that the soul undoubtedly remembers, when it is quite separate from the body: “But Abraham said,” (to the rich man in torments,) “Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things.” (Luke xvi. 25.)

II. *The excellence of this faculty.*—The soul of man is a subject of wonder; ‡ and nothing more wonderful in it than the memory,—that such innumerable images of things should be lodged in a finite faculty, and that what seems to be utterly lost in it, should be fully recovered; wherefore it is justly deemed by the learned a miraculous mercy.§ It hath power to make things that are in themselves absent and past, to be present.¶ By the help of memory, we retain what we have read in books, and what we have heard in sermons or other discourse, the examples of God’s mercies and judgments for our encouragement and warning. All these, and ten thousand things more, are laid up in the memory, which is the soul’s treasury, so that the soul would be a poor soul without the memory.¶ We may see the worth of this faculty by those that are deprived of the use of it, that can remember nobody, nor the last question that they did ask. Thus we read of Messala Corvinus, an orator, that forgot even his own name; \*\* and of Atticus, the son of Herod the sophist, that could never remember the names of the letters of the alphabet, till his

\* AUGUSTINI Opera, tom. i. p. 509.

† Quorum arcè recordamur, eorum est memoria: quorum penitus obliiti sumus, eorum oblitio: quorum partim meminimus, partim obliiti sumus, eorum est reminscentia.—ZANCHII Opera, tom. iii. lib. ii. cap. 5. “We are said to remember those things which we carefully bear in mind; to forget those of which we have lost all cognizance; and to recollect those things which we partly remember, and have partly forgotten.”—EDIT.

‡ Quicquid sit, jurarem esse divinum.—CICERO. “Whatever it be, I could swear that it is divine.”—EDIT. § ZANCHIUS.

¶ Memoria nobis est surdorum auditio et visio cæcorum.—PLUTARCHUS. “Memory is to us, what hearing is to the deaf and sight to the blind.”—EDIT. ¶ Omnium rerum thesaurus et custos est memoria; nec enarrari potest, tam grandis est ejus perplexitas; et anima ipsa est.—AUGUSTINI Liber de Spiritu et Anima. “The memory is the treasury and guardian of all things; nor can it be explained, so great is its obscurity: it is even the soul itself.”—EDIT.

\*\* PLINII Nat. Hist. lib. vii. cap. 24.

father was fain to name four-and-twenty boys by the names of the several letters, that he might retain them.\* All a man's past life would be lost, if his memory were lost; so are the comforts of the soul lost, so far as they are forgotten. So that the soul would be poor in knowledge, poor in gifts, poor in comfort, without the memory.† Especially this faculty was happy in its primitive state; for then its reception was easy, the impressions firm, the recovery (if any use of it) ready. Then it was like a clear crystal glass, wherein all that was contained in it was easily seen; now it is cracked and muddy: then it was like an iron chest; now [it is] like a bag with holes. It had the neighbourhood of a clear understanding and of a holy will; and Adam could not but "remember his Creator in those days of his youth."

III. *The corruption or depravation of this faculty.*—For, by the fall of Adam, each faculty of the soul was wofully depraved. When a curious watch falls to the ground, though it be sorely maimed, yet some wheel or pin may have received no hurt; but here it is otherwise. Our fall was like that of some rare glass, which thereby is shattered all to pieces: there remain all the materials of it;—so doth reason and memory with the soul;—but they must be melted and cast anew, before they be good for any thing. The corruption of the memory stands,

1. *In remembering those things which we should forget.*—As,

(1.) *Things unprofitable.*—There are a thousand needless and useless matters that fill the memory, and keep out better things; like as if one should crowd waste paper, rags, and broken pitchers into a cabinet, which should be stored with things of value. There is, in all actions and accidents, two things considerable: (i.) *The action*: for example: "Such a text was handled, such a charitable action done, such a man brake his leg, was drunk," or the like. (ii.) *The inference or observation to be gathered from thence*: for all events, whether good or bad, are intended by the wise God for man's instruction. Now the memory lays up the former, and can retain it a long time; but the lesson which we should learn from it,—*that* is neglected, *that* is forgotten.

(2.) *Things hurtful to us.*—To wit, injuries: these usually stick in the memory, when better things slip out. If any body hath spoken or done evil to us, the memory is trusty enough about these. As one says, "We can remember *old songs* and *old wrongs* long enough;" yea, those whom we profess to forgive, yet we declare that we cannot forget them. Not but that a man may have a natural remembrance of an injury, so that he have not an angry remembrance of it. As our heavenly Father himself remembers all a believer's sins, but puts away his anger; so we may rationally remember them, but we must spiritually forget them; for, else, the remembrance of them generally doeth us a great deal of hurt, but no good at all. It cools our love,

\* CÆLII RHODIGINI *Antiquæ Lectiones*, lib. ii. cap. 8.

† *Tantum scimus quantum memoriâ tenemus.*—ERASMUS, "We can be said to know only so much as we retain in our memory."—EDIT.

weakens our trust, and prepares us for revenge; as [it] did Amnon toward Absalom. (2 Sam. xiii. 32.)\*

(3.) *Things sinful*.—Thus we can remember a filthy story seven years, when we do forget a saving sermon in seven hours. And herein the memory is the great nurse of contemplative wickedness, and represents to the idle and sinful heart all the sins it wots of with renewed delight; and so strengthens the impression, and doubles the guilt: “She multiplied her whoredoms, in calling to remembrance the days of her youth, wherein she had played the harlot in the land of Egypt.” (Ezek. xxiii. 19.) The depraved memory is herein fitly compared to a sieve, that lets the good corn fall through, and reserves only the chaff; by which it is plain that the faculty is not lost, but poisoned. So that in this respect we may say, as Themistocles did to Simonides, when he offered to teach him the art of memory: “Rather,” says he, “teach me the art of forgetfulness: for the things which I would not, I remember; and cannot forget the things I would.”

2. The corruption of the memory stands in *forgetting those things which we should remember*.—But these things being so exceeding many, great, and useful, though I cannot enumerate them, yet I shall comprise the chief of them in these following general heads:—

(1.) *Our Creator, and what he hath done, and what he hath done FOR US*.—“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.” (Eccles. xii. 1.) And yet whom do we more forget? “Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number.” (Jer. ii. 32.) And our forgetfulness here is most inexcusable; because we may see, taste, and feel him every moment; forasmuch as he is “not far from every one of us,” seeing “in him we live, and move, and have our being:” (Acts xvii. 27, 28 :) and yet we can make shift to forget him; which shows the great craze† [that] we had by the fall. And then, the great things which he hath done,—to wit, in the works of creation and providence, especially for his church,—these we easily forget, but should remember: “I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember thy wonders of old:” (Psalm lxxvii. 11 :) and particularly what he hath done *for us*; the many and great mercies and deliverances, especially the most remarkable of them, which every good Christian should have a catalogue of, in his mind or in his book: “And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness,” &c. (Deut. viii. 2.)

(2.) *Our Redeemer, and what he hath suffered for us*.—Never was there such an instance of free and transcendent love in the world, as that the Eternal Son of God should give himself to be a sacrifice to expiate our sin: and yet we—that can profess, of far less kindnesses from men, that we shall never forget them—can forget this; else he had never instituted the Lord’s supper on purpose to keep up the solemn and useful remembrance thereof; which remembrance sets a-work all our graces,—our faith, love, repentance, thankfulness, &c.

\* The sense seems to require this transposition of the clause: “as [it] did Absalom toward Amnon.”—EDIT. † The *crack* or *crash*.—EDIT.

And without the frequent use of this ordinance, where it may be had, a defect will be found in these graces; for the greatest things wear off with time, and holy David himself found cause to charge it upon his soul, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits," &c. (Psalm ciii. 2.)

(3.) *The truths of religion, especially the most weighty.*—"Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments." (Mal. iv. 4.) And of these the apostle Peter saith [that] he would "put" the Christians "in remembrance, though they knew them," that they might "be established in the present truth." Yea, he would "stir them up by putting them in remembrance" as long as he lived. (2 Peter i. 12—15.) The doctrine of God, of Christ, of the creation, of the fall, of the covenant of grace, of faith, repentance, the resurrection, (as in my text,) and judgment to come;—these things should be so engrafted into the hearts of Christians, that they should know and remember [them] as well as their own names or the rooms of their houses: and yet it is a shame to find how easily and almost utterly these things are forgotten by too many. How few do we find, that have been long hearers of God's word, that can give any tolerable account of the nature of that faith by which the soul lives!

(4.) *The duties of religion.*—The scripture, that so often requires us to remember them, plainly implies that we are apt to forget them. What is the meaning of that,—“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy,” (Exod. xx. 8,) but that we easily forget it, we are surprised by it, it returns ere we are aware? So, that, Heb. xiii., which is called by some, “a chapter of remembrance:” “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers. Remember them that are in bonds. To do good and to communicate forget not.” (Verses 2, 3, 16.) All which, as they show our duty, so do they imply our defectiveness herein; though to forget those and such-like, is as absurd as if we did forget to eat or sleep: for, as Christians, we “live by faith,” and breathe by prayer; so, to forget to repent, to believe, to pray, and to discharge the duties of our relation, callings, and all other duties toward God and toward men, is to forget Christianity itself.

(5.) *Our sins.*—As there is a culpable, so there is an useful and necessary, remembrance of them. When we remember sin to renew our love to it,—that is damnable; but when we remember it to loathe it, and to loathe ourselves for it,—that is saving: “Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations.” (Ezek. xxxvi. 31.) How much of his wickedness doth the profane sinner forget! Lies, oaths, rotten language, slander, iniquities,—all forgotten, till God in mercy or in wrath awaken their consciences; and then all is set in order before them, either to their conversion or confusion. Hence that emphatical charge: “Remember, and forget not, how thou provokedst the Lord thy God to wrath in the wilderness,” &c. (Deut. ix. 7.)

(6.) *Our vows and obligations to God.*—The corruption of our memories appears plainly in this. There is, first, our great vow in

baptism, that we would sincerely “renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil,” and pay unto our Lord and Redeemer unfeigned obedience to all his commandments. This is seldom *actually* remembered by any of us, too seldom *virtually*, especially by such as do directly run counter to it in the usual scope of their lives. And then our sickness-vows : when our lives or the comforts of our lives have been in hazard, what serious and fair promises did we make ! What was our frame *then* ? and what is it *now* ? Either *then* thou wast a great hypocrite, or else *now* thou art a great apostate. But “be not deceived ; God is not mocked.” He hath divers ways to whet \* up such memories.

And our obligations to others, which should stick in our memories, [are] as soon worn off ; whether they are formal, by promises ; or virtual, by kindnesses received : neither whereof signify any thing with a false or unthankful man ; of whom we usually say, that “they have ill memories.” But against these will rise in judgment, not only God, his word, their own consciences, and the Heathens, but even the brute creatures themselves ; one of whom, even a lion, is credibly reported to have spared and cherished one Androclus, that was thrown to be devoured, having remembered that that very man had formerly pulled a thorn out of his foot in his den.†

(7.) *The church of God.*—The whole catholic church doth every day implicitly beg of us, “O, remember me in your prayers.” And holy David said, “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth.” (Psalm cxxxvii. 5, 6.) And there is not a more genuine token of our adoption, than a feeling and constant remembrance of God’s Jerusalem ; and especially in this juncture of time, wherein the Christian church is almost every where so sorely distressed, that, were it not for the scripture and former experience, we might fear to hear her last groans. And yet, if the secret and family prayers of very many were well searched, it is to be doubted that their memories were ~~very~~ bad here also.

(8.) *Our latter end.*—This *should be* much, and this *is* little, remembered by most men ; as the prophet said to the people of his time : “Thou didst not lay these things to thy heart, neither didst remember the latter end of it.” (Isai. xlvii. 7.) And the other laments it : “She remembereth not her last end ; therefore she came down wonderfully.” (Lam. i. 9.) And so *they* are like to do, *that* remember not their end. It is true, in propriety of speech, remembrance is only of things past, or at least of a thing which now is not first known ; yet in the phrase of scripture we are required to remember death, resurrection, judgment, hell, and heaven ; partly because these are foretold, and chiefly because it behoves us to meditate and consider of them, which cannot be done without the memory. But there are no death’s-heads so effectual to mind us of this, as a firm persuasion that we are but strangers here, and that our

\* In the list of *errata*, Dr. Annesley gives *rub up* as a substitute for this word, which was printed *wet up*.—EDIT.

† AULUS GELLIUS, lib. v. cap. 41.

true country is in the world to come; a heart mortified to the world, sick of sin; and a heavenly frame of soul, which, being restless here, will of its own accord groan to have "mortality swallowed up of life." And so much may be sufficient to explain and demonstrate the corruption of the memory, which is the third point.

IV. *The sanctification of the memory.*—Which is the restoring [of] this faculty to its former integrity and to its proper objects. For when a man's corrupt nature is changed, all the faculties are renewed, there is a new creation of him. This is done,

1. *By purging the faculty.*—And so conversion is said to begin here: "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord." (Psalm xxii. 27.) For he that remembers what man's estate was by creation, must needs find that there is a sad change, and, consequently, that there is need of restoration. The same method is prescribed after second falls: "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent." (Rev. ii. 5.) And, without doubt, as the Holy Spirit of God burns up the dross of the powers of the soul, so of this with the rest, and razeth out of it many sinful impressions which were there.

2. *By strengthening it.*—For, as sin weakens, so grace strengthens, the faculty. This effect it hath upon the understanding and will; and so it hath upon the memory. It is apparent that many, who, before their conversion to God, would forget whole chapters and sermons, yet, after their new birth, would carry away a great deal of them. God's Spirit then helps them, and, according to our Saviour's promise, "brings all things to our remembrance." (John xiv. 26.) Grace stops the leaks in that vessel, which sin hath made.

3. *By reconciling it to good things, and setting it against evil.*—Before regeneration, as the heart, so the memory, nauseates good things, as a foul stomach doth wholesome meat, and delights in trash; it can hold nothing that is good: so is it with our vitiated memories; they cannot hold savoury and pious things. These things are like a spark of fire in green wood,—it soon goes out: but when grace comes and changes the whole frame of the heart, this faculty begins to relish and make room for spiritual things. When the heart begins to delight in them, the mind retains them: "I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will" never "forget thy word." (Psalm cxix. 16.) So, on the other side, those sins which the memory delighted to keep in mind, to review them, and in a sort to repeat them over and over; when God hath been at his new creation within, then the remembrance of those sins is bitter. Then the poor creature can say, as the church did in another case: "My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me." (Lam. iii. 20.)

4. *By filling it with good things.*—For when the new creature is once born again, no new-born child doth more desire and long for milk, than the soul doth for knowledge and wisdom; and then the memory consequently is stored with scripture-truths, promises, rules, and helps. Then the substance of all that is apprehended by the sanctified understanding is conveyed to the memory, and lodged



there: and then, as it is, Matt. xii. 35, the "good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things;" and you may commonly know what treasure is within, by what is brought out. As, if you go among vain or worldly men, their foolish, carnal, and worldly discourse plainly shows what treasure they have within; so the wise, religious, and godly communication that good men entertain you with, doth evidence what is laid up in their memories: as he that hath nothing but farthings in his pocket, can produce nothing from thence but brass; but he that hath all guineas there, brings forth gold.

5. *By fitting things laid up in memory for use and practice.*—Which is plainly the work of God by his grace. For, a notional memory is of little use without a practical; as treasure in a chest is no way so useful, though there be much of it, as a penny in the purse, when there is occasion for it. The fringes that were appointed to the children of Israel, were to this end: "That ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them." (Num. xv. 39, 40.) And that "everlasting mercy" of God is promised "to those that remember his commandments to do them." (Psalm ciii. 17, 18.) And certainly they who commit things to their memories on this design to practise them, shall be able to remember them, when they have need of them, in the course of their practice. And thus the memory is by sanctifying grace restored; which is the fourth point.

V. I come, in the fifth place, to show *the ordinary impediments of a good memory, or the causes of a bad one.*—Which, as ever you desire better memories, you must beware and seriously strive against. And they are these:—

1. *A weak or dark understanding.*—Such, indeed, may have a great sensitive memory, as we see in children, yea, in some brute creatures; but a sound rational memory they cannot have; for, except a thing be clearly known, it can never be clearly remembered. If reason be weak, and the mind be poor, what can the memory be stored with, but from the senses? And you shall observe that your ignorant people commonly have the worst memories, especially of spiritual matters: "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart." (Matt. xiii. 19.) Words will be remembered to little purpose, when things are not understood; and therefore labour for more knowledge and a clearer understanding. Beg it of God, and according to your capacities use all means to increase it.

2. *A carnal, careless heart.*—That is mindless of good things; for, those things which we little heed, we never remember. "According to the impression on the heart, is the retention in the memory." \* Such a heart as this can retain abundance of a play or a song, but of a chapter or sermon next to nothing; for every thing keeps what is

\* *Ut impressio fortior, ita memoria tenacior.*—HOLDSWORTH, *Prælectiones Theologicae*, p. 231.

connatural to itself. Nay, a good man's memory, in a remiss, negligent frame, quite differs from what it was in a religious frame; and some scriptures, which were utterly insignificant to him at one time, —read and heard and forgotten,—have been quite new to him at another, when his heart hath been rightly disposed. As, you know, wax, when it is hard, receives no impression while it is so; but soften the same wax, and then it receives it. And nothing can be retained in the memory, if it be not first received *by* the memory. And therefore many of you that complain of your bad memories, have more reason to lament your old, dead, and hard hearts, and to be restless till they be renewed.

3. *A darling sin.*—Any bosom-sin, as it fills and employs every faculty, so it debauches, monopolizes, and disorders them all. Grace, though it rule every faculty, yet ruffles none; it composes the mind, and employs the memory in a rational manner; it rules, like a just king, orderly: but the serving of any lust breeds a civil war between one faculty and another; and that distracts the whole soul, whereby every power thereof is weakened; and, particularly, the memory, being pressed to serve the stronger side, is so stuffed with the concerns of that tyrant-lust, that it cannot intend any spiritual matter. And therefore, whatever “right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee,” (Matt. v. 29,) or else thy memory will never be cured. A table-book that is written and blotted all over, must be wiped before you can write any new matter upon it; and so must the lines of thy darling sin be effaced by real mortification, before any good things will abide legible in thy memory.

4. *Excess of worldly cares* is destructive to the memory.—Our Saviour hath plainly told us, that “no man can serve God and mammon.” (Matt. vi. 24.) The memory is but finite, though capacious; and a superabundance of worldly thoughts within must needs shoulder out better things that should be there. Especially, these thoughts, being more natural to our depraved hearts, and arising from sensible things, will so stuff the memory, that there is no room for spiritual matters. Hereupon we find that young persons, that have few worldly cares, have better memories than others, as some of the ancients observe.\* More especially, when such cares and thoughts crowd-in just after we have been reading or hearing God's word: “He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.” (Matt. xiii. 22.) And therefore, if you would heal your memories, moderate your cares; considering that immoderate care or labour is justly blasted or cursed of God, so that it doeth no man any real good. You would not overload a beast; why will you overload your own spirits? Particularly be sure that, if possibly you can, you settle and digest your spiritual

\* *Qui magis reminiscerentur quàm pueruli, ut recentiores animæ, et nondum immersæ domesticis et publicis curis?*—TERTULLIANUS *De Animâ*, cap. 24. “Who can remember more than little boys, as having fresher souls, and being not yet immersed in domestic and public cares?”—EDIT.

matters in your minds after reading and hearing, before they be disordered and confounded with worldly cares.

5. *Surfeiting and drunkenness* are great enemies to the memory.—These do each of them infallibly disorder the brain, and disable it from its functions. Excess of meat doth this, more insensibly, but yet really; a full belly seldom hath a clear head: but that of drink is most evident: “It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink:” (that is, in excess :) “lest they drink, and forget the law.” (Prov. xxxi. 4, 5.) It is plain that a drunken man forgets what he said and did; and too many sad instances are apparent of many that have drunk away, not only their estates, their health, their credit, but their very souls and brains and all, and are grown very sots; for, “whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart.” (Hosea iv. 11.) And therefore keep a strict watch over yourselves; and if you loathe those Christian rules to which you are sworn, yet do not abhor morality, do not renounce humanity.

6. *Violent passions* spoil the memory.—Such as of anger, grief, love, fear. Passions we must have; but constitution and education allay them in some, reason moderates them in others, and grace regulates them in the godly. Where these bridles are wanting, they shake all the faculties, as an earthquake doth a country. For example: anger, when it rages, manifestly alters and inflames the blood, and consequently the spirits, and melts off the impressions in the brain, just as the fire melts the wax and the impressions that by the seal were fixed upon it; so excessive grief, fear, and love: you cannot but perceive in yourselves and others, how your poor memories have suffered by some or all of them. And therefore labour to mortify your passions; and, to that end, endeavour for strength of grace. Strong passions had need of strong grace; as, you know, a heady horse had need of a strong bridle: for you will find, that as there is much guilt in them, so much harm comes by them. Where, by the way, you may see the excellency of our blessed religion, which tends to the health and quieting, as well as to the saving, of the soul.

7. *A multitude of indigested notions*.—If a man have a stock of methodical and digested knowledge, it is admirable how much the memory will contain; as you know how many images may be discerned at once in a glass: but when these notions are heaped incoherently in the memory, without order or dependence, they confound and overthrow the memory. As a scholar that has read abundance, but digested nothing,—he knows not where to find any thing; it breaks his memory. As excess of meat cloyes the stomach, so an unreasonable, an unmeasurable heaping of things in the memory confounds it. Thus many read or hear much, very much, too much perhaps for their capacities; they have not stowage for it: and so they are “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth,” like them, 2 Tim. iii. 7. Therefore, look that ye understand and digest things by meditation; run not on too fast; he that

rides post, can never draw maps of the country.\* When one is impatient to stay on things, they leave but a shallow impression; as greediness of the appetite hinders digestion. When a thing is well studied and clearly apprehended, it will be much better remembered.† And thus I have showed the hinderances of the memory, or what be the common causes of a bad memory, which is the fifth point.

VI. The sixth thing to be handled is, *the proper helps to it*.—And they may be ranked under three heads: 1. *Natural helps*; 2. *Artificial*; 3. *Spiritual*. Of these in order.

1. As to *natural helps*: as I must not invade the province of the learned physician, so I would omit nothing that is in general necessary for this purpose. And so it is observed that, as too much coldness and moistness of the brain is a great cause of forgetfulness, so, on the other side, a convenient heat and dryness of it is a great help to the memory. For the heat thereof disposeth it sooner to receive, and the dryness of it to retain, the impression; as the wax, you know, being warmed, receives—and then, being dry, preserves—the prints of the wax. Hence some think that זָכַר “to remember,” signifies “the male kind,” which hath more heat in its constitution; and נָשִׁיחַ [is] used for “the female,” which implies “forgetfulness,” that sex being colder: another reason being also given of that etymology; to wit, because the remembrance of the former endures, whereas the woman, being incorporated into another family, is sooner forgotten. Two things I would here recommend:—

(1.) *A sober diet*.—For if excesses in meat and drink do disturb the brain, and consequently weaken the memory, then certainly a sparing and temperate diet does preserve the blood and spirits in order; and so, by consequence, together with a good air, where it may be had, is a certain (though not so sensible) help to the memory.‡ And therefore “take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so” you quite forget “that day” that “comes upon” men “unawares.” (Luke xxi. 34.) The Heathens went far in this moderation: how far then should Christians go before them! and what a base thing it is to destroy our reason by gratifying our appetite!

(2.) *A quiet mind*.—For, if all passions that are violent weaken, then a sedate and quiet mind greatly strengthens, the memory. It is true, “man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward;” (Job v. 7;) and if we subject our minds unto them, our souls will be, like the raging sea, in perpetual agitation; and then the memory [will be] shattered. As, in a pool of water, when it is clear, you may see the fishes and every thing easily in it; but when it is troubled, every thing disappears: so is it with our reason and memory. As long as the mind is quiet, we may tell where to find any thing in the

\* *Omnis festinatio cæca*.—SENECA. “All haste is blind.”—EDIT. † *Rectius illi, qui nullis non multa legenda censent, si memoriæ consulendum*.—MAGIRUS. ‡ They judge more rightly who think that most persons should not read many books, if the profit of the memory be consulted.”—EDIT. † PLATO, in *Timæo*.

memory; but when it is distracted, every thing is hid from us. Let faith, therefore, ply its business upon Almighty God and his promises, and then, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee." (Isai. xxvi. 3.)

2. *Artificial or outward helps are,*—

(1.) *The repetition of those things which we would remember.*—Revolving them in the mind,—that makes the impression deeper;\* and then the audible repeating of them greatly fixes them there: "Ye shall lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." (Deut. xi. 18, 19.) Upon this account, some great orators have used to pronounce their harangues in their studies, to fix them the better on their memories. And it is recorded of Pythagoras, that he appointed his scholars to recollect, every night before they went to bed, what they had heard or done all that day. How much more should you, on the Lord's-day, at night, revive what you have heard, confer of it with others, repeat it to your family! by all which you will relieve the weakness of this faculty.

(2.) *Writing what we would remember* is a merciful help to the memory.†—Socrates, indeed, held that letters proved the ruin of the memory, because, before the invention of letters, people committed worthy matters to memory, but afterward to books; but certainly both memory and books are little enough to preserve those things that should be remembered. The Holy Ghost teaches better: "And thou shalt write them upon the door-posts of thine house, and upon thy gates." (Deut. xi. 20.) Yea, the king himself was to "write him a copy of the law in a book," that he might remember it the better. (Deut. xvii. 18.) The very writing of any thing fixes it deeper in the mind. And therefore I should still recommend the writing of sermons, not only as a help to the memory, but also as a good preservative from sleeping under God's ordinance, as also from gazing about, to the great distraction of the thoughts at that sacred employment. For, alas! how many excellent doctrines, directions, and marks have you heard, that are quite forgotten, which a discreet use of writing might have preserved unto you!‡

(3.) *Custom or using your memories* is an excellent way of improving them.—Thus, many wise persons charge their memories at the present, and thereby strengthen them; and then commit what they have remembered to writing, when they come home, that no time may wear it away; for every faculty is improved and strengthened by employing it. We say, "Use legs, and have legs;" and so, Use the memory, and thou wilt have a memory. So, if you oblige your chil-

\* *Sæpe recordari medicamine fortius omni.* "Frequent acts of recollection produce better effects than any charm or medicament whatever."—EDIT. † *E Phœnicid mare literas, memoriæ adversus oblivionem remedium, accivit.*—PLUTARCHUS. "From Phœnicia the sea brought letters,—a remedy for the forgetfulness of the memory."—EDIT.

‡ I have seen a large common-place book of famous Mr. Bruen, filled with choice sentences out of good authors, and digested under fit heads, for his own use, being a private gentleman.

dren and your servants to bring you away an account of a sermon, or so much of a catechism, you will see that use and custom will make that easy which before they thought impossible. I have seen some of an old man's girdle, who could not read a word ; yet by the only help of a girdle which he wore, which was hung about with some knotted points, he could bring home every particular of a sermon. And therefore charge your memories with those things that are fit to be remembered ; and doubt not but use will make you perfect. I purposely avoid discoursing of that which is called "an artificial memory," both because the inconveniences thereof are great, and the handling of it unfit for a sermon.

3. The *spiritual* helps for memory are these :—

(1.) *Bewail your forgetfulness.*—There reformation and amendment, when it is sound, begins. The Jews say, that when Adam looked toward Paradise, he wept in the remembrance of his fall : I am sure, we have cause to mourn and weep, and weep again, at the remembrance of it,—to consider not only the great guilt, but the sad fruit, of that apostasy ; and that, as in other particulars, so in respect of our memories, which have borne their share in that convulsion. And we have cause to mourn also for all such excesses and follies which have concurred to make them worse ; wherein no man is guiltless ; so that though you may reckon a sorry memory but a small fault, yet you will find that it is both the effect and the sign and the cause of much evil ; insomuch that idolatry and the worst sins are in scripture styled "the forgetting of God." (Psalm ix. 17, &c.) Few of us would reckon it a small fault, to have a servant frequently neglect his business and run into errors, and still to excuse all by saying, "I quite forgot it ;" for, generally, such forgetfulness is the effect of supine negligence : and therefore we have the more cause to be humbled seriously for this sin.

(2.) *Prayer* is a second help.—For "every good gift and every perfect gift," whereof this is one, "is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights ;" (James i. 17 ;) and therefore is to be sought by frequent and earnest prayer, which is the golden key to unlock the treasures of heaven to the needy soul. O, beg it, then, of Him, that as he sanctifies the soul, he would sanctify this with the rest. And you have a ground for your prayer in that, John xiv. 26, where our Saviour hath said, that "the Father will send the Holy Ghost, to teach us all things, and to bring all things to our remembrance." And this Spirit you may have for asking : "Your Heavenly Father shall give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." (Luke xi. 13.) Understand, that God will grant your prayer herein, there being joined with the same a due use of all other means, on which earnest prayer brings a blessing. And you must not only crave this in your solemn prayers ; but also, when you are reading or hearing, you should dart up a holy ejaculation, or short desire, "Lord, write this truth in my heart, and bless it to me !" This is like the clinching of a nail. And when you have heard a sermon, lock the chest with David's prayer : "O Lord, keep this for ever in the imagination of

the thoughts of my heart." (1 Chron. xxix. 18.) And be assured that God will hear the breathings of his own Spirit, and give thee a memory to serve thy turn.

(3.) *Diligent attention*.—If the mind wander in hearing, the memory will be weak in remembering. Confine, therefore, your thoughts to the holy work [which] you are about, and fetch-in your straggling fancies with a hearty sigh. Remember that Almighty God speaks to you by every good book or sermon that you read or hear: every chapter and sermon is a letter from the God of heaven, and directed in particular to you; and, you know, we read with attention the meanest letter that is directed to us, and we observe every period of it. The gospel is our Saviour's Will and Testament; and how carefully doth every child attend to every clause in his father's will! Now the more diligent your attention is, the better you will remember; as, you know, the greater weight we lay on the seal, the deeper impression it doth make. Holy David could say, "I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me." (Psalm cxix. 93.) The scripture, the sentence, that hath "quickened" us, we shall not easily forget; when all the heart is engaged, then all the head is employed also. And it is no marvel that divers remember so little, when they are so palpably careless in hearing, and their wandering eyes do plainly discover their wandering minds.

(4.) *Due estimation*.—The more we love and admire any thing, the better we remember it. This is the reason given of children's remembering things so well,—because they admire every thing, as being new to them. And of old people, the saying is known,—that they remember all such things as they care for: for when we esteem and affect any thing, the affections work upon the spirits, which are the instruments of the memory, and so seal things upon it. Why is it that a woman cannot forget her sucking child? Because she doth vehemently love it; and the like affection in us to good things would keep us from forgetting them. And to this accords that saying of Mr. Greenham,\* that "the best Art of Memory is, to be humbled at God's threatenings, and comforted at his promises; for great griefs and joys leave great impressions on us." And therefore apprehend spiritual things to be very excellent, and also "receive the truth in the love of it," and you will remember it better; but when we have a mean and low opinion of heavenly truths, or only a common kindness for them, they are then easily forgotten. "I will delight myself in thy statutes:" and what then? Why, "I will not forget thy word." (Psalm cxix. 16.)

(5.) *Serious meditation* is the last help I shall mention.—When people read or hear, and presently plunge themselves in foreign business, then generally all is lost: "For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into" (the word signifies "to penetrate into a thing with his eye") "the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein," that is, so considering, "he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the

work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." (James i. 24, 25.) By which is not meant a speculative and fruitless meditation, but that which is practical ; that is, which digests the things we read or hear for use or practice : "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." (Psalm cxix. 11.) Here is a truth, or a duty, or promise, for such a time or case. Such rolling [of] good things in our thoughts doth habituate and familiarize them to the soul, and they abide the longer. This is clear in other cases : for, if one hath received an injurious or unkind word, if it go out at one ear as it came in at the other, it leaves no great impression ; but if you set yourself to ruminate upon it, and to aggravate it, then it is a long time ere you forget it. And so in some measure it would be in good things : give them a little heart-room, bestow some second thoughts upon them, shut the book when you have read a little, and think of it ; and it will abide. It is the soaking rain that enters deepest into the earth, when a sudden shower slides away. Hence, what one evangelist calls "remembering the word of Jesus," that is spoken of Peter, (Matt. xxvi. 75,) the other calls it "thinking." "When he thought thereon, he wept." (Mark xiv. 72.) But herein our ordinary hearers are strangely negligent : they read, they hear, they forget ; for they never think nor meditate of it. They turn down leaves in their Bibles in the congregation, but they seldom turn them up again in reflecting upon what they heard ; and so their labour is lost, and ours also. And so much for the helps to a better memory ; which is the sixth point.

VII. I come in the next place to *answer some cavils of the wilful, and also some doubts of the weak.*—The former use to object and say,

OBJECTION I. "Why, the scripture tells us, that, to 'fear God and keep his commandments is the whole duty of man : ' what need, then, is there of such remembering ?"

ANSWER. Why, this which you mention doth plainly require remembering. Must *he* not remember the commandments *that* will keep them ? and not the mere words only, but the true extent of them ; or else how can he possibly keep them ? There are ten commandments, but there are ten hundred duties commanded and sins forbidden ; and how shall those be performed, and these avoided, unless we remember them ? And is there nothing but commandments to be remembered ? Are not the promises of the covenant, are not the doctrines of life and salvation, to be remembered also ? Surely this apostle was of this mind, when he tells in the text, that if the Corinthians kept not in memory what was preached unto them concerning that only doctrine of the resurrection from the dead, they would believe in vain, and their salvation was in danger.

OBJECT. II. "Ay, but it is impossible to remember so many scriptures, so many doctrines, so many uses, as we have heard ; what man in the world can do it ?"

ANSWER. It is true, that perfection in this faculty is not attainable in this life ; but it is as true, that every Christian ought to endeavour to reach as far as he can. We cannot keep all the command-



ments perfectly in this life ; yet we should strive to do what we can ; and then our heavenly Father will accept and assist us. But it is plain sloth, to be urging impossibilities in opposition to duty. I say, carnality and sloth ; for these same men can readily remember a thousand vain matters, and there is no difficulty in it. But ye were best\* to beware of that curse : “ Cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing.” (Mal. i. 14.) If you have a masculine, strong memory for other things, and only a corrupt, cracked memory for God and godliness, ye are “ nigh unto cursing.”

OBJECT. III. “ O, but we have as good hearts as the best, though we have not such strong memories ; and an honest heart is worth all.”

ANSWER 1. This is a proud boasting ; for no humble, modest man will thus vaunt himself.

2. This is mere shuffling ; for, when you are reproved for the defectiveness of your faculties or the immoralities of your lives, then you plead the honesty and goodness of your hearts ; and when you are convinced and urged concerning the newness and holiness of your hearts, then you boast of the innocence and orderliness of your lives. But you cannot mock God thus ; he beholds the unregeneracy of your hearts, and is witness to all the evil of your lives. But if you have as good hearts [as the best], how is it that you have not as good memories ? For the honest heart is good all over ; and though ye cannot remember *as much*, yet ye will remember *as well*, as they. Do not deceive yourselves ; do not imagine that ye are spiritually rich, when ye are “ poor and miserable and blind and naked.” If many of your memories were dissected, I am afraid they would be found to be stuffed like that Roman legate’s sumpter, that was gorgeous enough without, but, being broken up by a fall in the street, was filled with nothing but old boots and shoes, and such-like worthless trash.

But I must turn now to the other branch of this point ; which is, to answer the doubts of the weak Christian in this case about the memory.

DOUBT I. “ If no faith nor salvation without remembering spiritual things, then,” cries the poor soul, “ to be sure, I have no grace ; for I can remember little or nothing. I hear and love to hear, and so I read ; but nothing abides with me : I shall believe in vain.”

ANSWER. There is an historical memory, and there is a practical memory. The former is either a great natural faculty, or a particular gift. Now, though this be a great help to grace, yet it is not absolutely necessary. What advantage is it to a man’s salvation, if he could do as it is reported of Cyrus and of Scipio,—that they could repeat two thousand names in order, or as Seneca, that could do the like, and also repeat two hundred verses, beginning at the last,†—if the same person cannot remember those directions and promises which conduce to his practice and comfort ? But now a practical memory is a sanctified faculty, wherein good things are received, perhaps not so

\* An old phrase tantamount to, “ You would do well.”—EDIT.  
RHODIGINI *Antiquæ Lectiones*, p. 525.

† CÆLI

distinctly, yet safely, sweetly, readily for use. As an ill husband\* may have more tools in his shop, but, seldom working with them, he scarce knows where to find them; whereas a good workman, though he hath fewer, yet he knows where to find them, and how to work better with them: so thy memory may serve thy turn, if thou canst “remember his commandments to do them;” if thou canst remember the antidote, when in danger of the poison,—the cordial, when thy spirits are fainting; if thou canst then hear the voice “behind thee, saying, This is the way,” when thou art ready to turn aside on the right hand or on the left. (Isai. xxx. 21.) A rich miser may have great sums in his chests or in his papers; but, in respect of use, the poor woman’s leathern purse by her side shall be readier. Be not dismayed at thy shallow memory, if thou canst remember what is necessary for thee in time of need.

DOUBT II. “My misery,” saith a poor soul, “is this,—that one thing puts out another: when I am secure of one notion, and grasping for another, I lose them both.”

ANSWER. Memory may be said to be present and actual, or future and potential. Many things may slip out of a present and actual memory, that yet may stick in the memory potentially; like things that are mislaid, but not lost. In this case, endeavours are construed by our Heavenly Father for attainments; and all [that] you grasp for, is counted by him your own. As a covetous oppressor, that would devour every fair house or estate he sees, is guilty, though he obtain them not; so every blessed truth [which] thou reachest after, shall be reckoned thine own, though some of them be stolen from thee. But here the former direction hath place; namely, to send up a holy ejaculation, when you lock up any thing, that God would secure it and produce it in due time. Many things poor Christians have thought that they had quite forgot, till the time of need came. For example: Christ had said that “the Son of man should be betrayed, killed, and rise again the third day;” (Matt. xvii. 22, 23;) which at the present they understood not; but, in Luke xxiv. 8, it is said then, that “they remembered his words.” And so through God’s grace it will be with you.

DOUBT III. “But,” saith another, “my memory is quite gone, I can remember just nothing; I would, I fain would, but I cannot.”

ANSWER. Perhaps thy natural faculty is decayed: for, so far as it is organical or sensitive, it may decay, even as your eyesight doth; for, as the natural spirits abate, so these decay: and you may know that, by your forgetting of other things. As you forget texts, so you forget faces; as you forget spiritual doctrines, so you do temporal business. Yet you ought to grieve for this; because this decay is the fruit of sin, not only of original, but very likely of thine actual, sins,—either of thy intemperance, or violent passions, or excessive cares. And as ye ought to mourn for it, so for the same reason ye ought to prop it up, to succour it, and to improve it, as well as you can; and especially to practise what you do remember; for there are many that

\* In the old sense of “a bad manager.”—EDIT.

complain they can remember little, while others complain that these very people practise a great deal less. But, for you that make this unfeigned complaint, you should not be quite discouraged. Labour to remember at least the scope and drift of all; and, though much be lost, yet your labour is not quite lost. A sieve, or riddle, in a pond of water, seems to be top-full; but take it out of the pond,—it is presently emptied; true, but yet it is washed hereby: even so a poor Christian, while he is reading or hearing, feels himself full of heavenly notions; but, when he ceaseth, finds his heart quite empty again; O, but the heart is washed for all that, and made more holy. It is said of one Cassius Severus, that when the Roman senate doomed his books to be burned, “Yes,” says he; “but you must next burn me too; for I have them written in my mind.” O, if the book of our memory be much effaced, yet if we can have the will of God written in our heart, God will accept the soundness of our hearts and the sincerity of our endeavours, though our memories be shattered.

VIII. And so I come to the eighth and last thing; which is, *some short application of all.*

1. *Magnify God for your memories.*—Especially you that have good memories; be not proud of them, but be very thankful. I have somewhere read of Simon Thurvey, a Cornishman, that would so boast of his skill in philosophy and divinity, that he could, on the sudden, answer any problem that was proposed unto him: and the historian says, that his parts and memory were so smitten, that he could not repeat the Lord’s Prayer, nor remember his ABC. Alas! a little crack spoils them. O, give God the glory of this faculty, and say, “Fearfully and wonderfully am I made!” (Psalm cxxxix. 14.) And if your memories have some strength and faithfulness in them, praise him the more; for you have a great advantage beyond others; you have a treasure which others want. Many a poor Christian would be content to forget all his earthly concerns, so that he could but remember the things of eternal life. Be sure, then, that ye be truly thankful.

2. *Let all God’s ministers that preach, or that write, labour to consult people’s memories, and to that end observe some proper method in their books and sermons.*—A confused or cryptical method confounds the memory, and a multitude of naked heads overpresseth it; but a clear connexion and a proper method greatly assist it.\* The Holy Ghost himself hath in several places particularly stooped down to us herein: in divers of the Psalms, in one chapter of the Proverbs, in the whole book of Lamentations, he hath proceeded alphabetically, for the relief of the memory. That matter, manner, and method surely should be used by us, which is most proper, not only to inform people’s understandings, but to prevail with their wills, to awaken their consciences; and also which may best stick with them, when they are parted from us; for the work of conviction, conversion, and comfort is generally perfected by after-thoughts. And therefore,

\* *Adjueatur memoria intellectu, ordine, cura.*—ERASMUS. “The memory is assisted by reason, order, and care.”—EDIT.

seeing people's memories are so weak, let us do what we can to relieve and help them.

3. *Labour to improve your memories, to have them cured and strengthened.*—Content not yourselves with such treacherous memories; satisfy not yourselves with fruitless complaints of them; but proceed to a vigorous endeavour to amend them. Consider,

(1.) *This is possible.*—And this is proved by experience: many have come, by the help of God, to remember more and better than they did before. And why should not you increase the number of such proficient? It is not fit for a Christian to despond in any such case, but to “be up and doing.” When a ship leaks, it is not presently cast away: “For,” says the master, “this vessel may yet do me service.” You have leaking memories; ay, but, being careened, they may be much more serviceable than ever they were.

OBJECTION. “O, but I shall never attain any memory.”

ANSWER. I tell you, despondency spoils all endeavours: neither do you sit thus down in other cases. If your body or brain be weak, you will try experiments; you will go to one physician after another, as long as you have a penny left. Be not, then, more careless of your noblest parts. The cure is possible, at least, in some good measure.

(2.) *It is reasonable that your memories, which have been sinks of sin, should become helps to heaven.*—All our faculties are given us for this end; and is it not highly reasonable that they should be so applied? It is apparent that our memories have been grievously perverted; and therefore, “as we have yielded our members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so” we should “now yield our members servants to righteousness unto holiness.” (Rom. vi. 19.) Seeing God hath given us a noble faculty, should we neglect or abuse it? Can others remember the world and their lusts? and shall not we remember the holy things that refer to a better world? Nay, can we remember a thousand unprofitable, hurtful, and sinful matters? and not those things that do most nearly and highly concern us? It is intolerable.

(3.) *This is necessary.*—It is an unquestionable duty. That fundamental law, propounded in the Old Testament, (Deut. vi. 5,) and confirmed in the New, (Matt. xxii. 37,)—“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind,”—doth oblige us to strain every faculty to the utmost in God’s behalf. One end, also, of Christ’s coming into the world was to repair our depraved faculties; and shall we suffer him to die in vain? The text [which] I am upon shows how necessary it is, as a means of faith and salvation. We find by experience that this faculty is miserably corrupted: and therefore it is undoubtedly necessary that it be renewed.

OBJECTION. “We can do but what we can, let it be never so necessary.”

ANSWER. And, I pray, how far have your endeavours travelled in this business? Have you carefully used the fore-mentioned means,

and continued in the use of them? No, no; your impotency is wilful; you cannot, because ye mind it not; or else, certainly, if inherent grace were weak, assistant grace would be ready at your service.

(4.) *A good memory is very helpful and useful.*—It is not a vain thing that is thus pressed upon you. For,

(i.) It is a great means of *knowledge*.—For what signifies your reading or hearing, if you remember nothing? It is not eating or drinking, but digesting your food, that keeps you alive; and so it is in this case: “My son,” not only “attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings:” but “keep them in the midst of thine heart.” Then “are they life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh.” (Prov. iv. 20—22.)

(ii.) It is a means of *faith*.—As is plain in my text: “Unless ye have believed in vain.” For, though faith doth rest purely on the word of God, yet when the word and works of God are forgotten, faith will stagger. Hence our Saviour saith, “O ye of little faith, do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand?” &c. (Matt. xvi. 8, 9.) “The word of God is the sword of the Spirit,” (Eph. vi. 17,) whereby Satan is foiled: but if this sword be out of the way by reason of forgetfulness, how shall we conflict with this enemy?

(iii.) It is a means of *comfort*.—If a poor Christian in distress could remember God’s promises, they would inspire him with new life; but when they are forgotten, his spirits sink. Our way to heaven lies over hills and vales: when we are on the hill, we think we shall never be in our dumps again; and so, when we are in the valley, we fear we shall never have comfort again. But now, a faithful memory is a great help: “And I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember thy wonders of old.” (Psalm lxxvii. 10, 11.) So also, Psalm cxix. 52: “I remembered thy judgments of old, O Lord; and have comforted myself.”

(iv.) It is a means of *thankfulness*.—We are all wanting in this duty of thankfulness; and one cause thereof is forgetfulness of the mercies of God. Hence ungrateful men are said to have bad memories. What abundant matter of thanksgiving would a sanctified memory suggest to every Christian! Hence holy David calls upon himself, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.” (Psalm ciii. 2.) By which forgetfulness and such other means it comes to pass, that praise and thanksgiving have so little, which should have so much, room in our daily devotions.

(v.) It is a means of *hope*.—For “experience worketh hope,” (Rom. v. 4,) and the memory is the storehouse of experience; therein we lay up all the instances of God’s goodness to us heretofore: “This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.” (Lam. iii. 21.) Hence they who do not trust in God are said, in scripture-phrases, to “forget” him. And one reason of men’s impatience and

dejectedness in trouble is assigned by the apostle: "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him." (Heb. xii. 5.)

(vi.) It is a means of *repentance*.—For, how can we repent or mourn for what we have quite forgotten? As, therefore, there is a culpable remembrance of sin, when we remember it in kindness; so there is a laudable remembrance of sin, when we remember it with displeasure: "That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, because of thy shame." (Ezek. xvi. 63.) But, alas! we write our sins in the sand, and foolishly imagine that the eternal God forgets them just as soon as we; though in such cases he hath said and sworn, "Surely I will never forget any of their works." (Amos viii. 7.)

(vii.) It is a means of *usefulness*.—No man should, nor indeed can, be singly religious. When one spark of grace is truly kindled in the heart, it will quickly endeavour to heat others also. So for counsel: we are born, we are new-born, to be helpful unto others. Herein a good memory is exceeding useful; out of which, as out of a storehouse, a wise Christian may "bring forth matters both new and old." (Matt. xiii. 52.) Such may say, "We have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us," this and that observation. (Psalm xlv. 1.) And likewise, "As we have heard, so have we seen," what may be very useful to many a soul. (Psalm xlviii. 8.) So that, you see, a good memory is useful many ways.

(5.) *The want of memory is a great defect and loss*.—When we cannot remember what we read or hear,—why, time is lost; I will not say, quite lost; but it is not improved: the chapter is lost. I hope you do not read only to pass the time. When God's word is remembered, then, "when thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee." (Prov. vi. 22.) But a broken memory hath heard of God's famous acts of providence, but forgotten them; hath read rare examples of God's mercy, justice, power, and goodness, but they are slipped and lost. In a word: so far as thy memory fails, so far will meditation fail, delectation fail, and practice in a great measure fail. And therefore set yourselves, in the use of the means prescribed, and all other good means, to heal and strengthen your memories; and "give the more earnest heed to the things which ye have heard, lest at any time ye let them slip." (Heb. ii. 1.) And so far in the third use.

4. The fourth exhortation is to young people,—*to store your memories in the time of youth*.—"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." (Eccles. xii. 1.) Now your memories are fresh and strong; hereafter they will be shattered with cares and business. A new ship, or any vessel that is new, is free from leaks; but time and travel will batter it. So will it be with you; care will batter you, grief will batter you: and therefore now store yourselves. Now, a dozen chapters, a good catechism, a collection of useful texts

and doctrines, will take no room, nor make you go the heavier, nor sleep the worse. And therefore it concerns parents, both to have such things in their hearts, and to teach them diligently to their children. Perhaps they may not understand the sense of them at the present; but these will be ready in their minds till grace and understanding come, and then they will help them exceedingly; as we lay some sticks or fagots ready in the chimney, which, when fire comes, signify something. Yet a measure must be observed both with old and young: a ship may be laden, but must not be overcharged, lest all the cargo be sunk and lost. A just discretion will best determine the measure herein, according to the capacities of the subjects.

5. *Let us all labour for more holiness.*—For that raiseth all the faculties, and reduces them to their right frame and proper objects. The more grace we have, the better we shall remember, and especially better things. “Grace,” saith excellent Dr. Harris, “strengthens the memory always for practice, though it serve not always for discourse. Some,” says he, “have such memories that they can repeat vastly; but when they should advance to practice, they are nobody: when others are more confused in their memories, but very clear in their practice.” A grain of grace is worth an ounce of parts. For thereby we love truths and duties better, and it is easy to remember that which we love; and therefore let it be our daily prayer, that “the God of peace would sanctify us wholly,—spirit, soul, body,” all. (1 Thess. v. 23.) It is not for Christians to inquire just how little grace will serve our turn for salvation, but rather how much may be attained and improved to the glory of God.

6. Lastly. *Reduce into practice that which you do remember.*—The end of all true knowledge is practice: \* “Remember his commandments to do them.” (Psalm ciii. 18.) If it be a doctrinal truth which you read or hear, consider what influence it hath upon the heart. If it be a duty which is set before you, immediately set about it. If a sin be exposed, presently root it out. If sincerity or hypocrisy be deciphered, try thy spiritual state thereby without delay. For, as a treasure in the chest is in danger of the robber; but when it is laid out on a good purchase, here it is safe from starting: so, while spiritual notions swim only in the memory, you may easily lose them; but they are safe, when they are once incorporated into your real practice. But, alas! there are too many that are like those whiffling chapmen, who come to the shop, and lay-by a great many rich wares; but when all is done, they buy few or none: so these cheapen and bid for the pearl, but will not buy it; they will talk over all the points of religion, before they will seriously practise any one of them. Then you “remember the sabbath” aright, when you so remember it before it comes, that when it comes, you “keep it holy.” (Exod. xx. 8.) Then you remember God truly, when you fear and love and trust in him. Then you remember your neighbour as you ought, when you remember “to do good, and to communi-

\* *Christus Magister vitæ, non scholæ.* “Christ is the Master of the life, and not of a school.”—EDIT.

cate." (Heb. xiii. 16.) Then you remember yourselves best, when you remember "to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." (Acts xxiv. 16.) In a word: then you remember your latter end rightly, when you keep your oil ready in your lamps and in your vessels, that your Master may find you so doing.

But I conclude. It is worth observing, that holy David, among all the rest of his blessed psalms, hath one (which is the thirty-eighth psalm) which he styles, "A Psalm of David, to bring to remembrance." His memory, it seems, had need of help, as well as ours. Now the Lord grant that this sermon may, by the blessing of God upon it, be herein at least useful; namely, to preserve better sermons in your mind! So shall I have my end, God the glory, and you the comfort. Amen.

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## SERMON XV.

BY THE REV. WILLIAM BATES, D.D.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS WHEREBY WE KNOW  
THAT WE LOVE THE CHILDREN OF GOD?

*By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.—1 John v. 2.*

OF all the marks that are useful in the trial of our spiritual state in reference to eternity, there is none [that] affords a more clear and comfortable assurance of God's special and saving mercy, than love to the saints. This has often resolved the doubts, and quieted the fears, of afflicted, inquiring souls, when other graces have not been so apprehensible in their operations. But there is no mark which the deceitful heart does more securely rest upon, through the mistake of natural, human love for that which is spiritual and divine. It is therefore most worthy our serious thoughts, the deceit being so easy and infinitely dangerous, to show what is the unfeigned, genuine love of the brethren to which salvation is annexed; to confirm the humble, sincere Christian, and undeceive presuming hypocrites.

The great design of St. John in this epistle is to excite and inflame in Christians the love of God and of their brethren,—the two comprehensive duties and sum of the law, our principal perfections in heaven and earth. These he recommends by the most affectionate and obliging, the most warming, melting persuasives,—the superlative love of God to us, and our communion with the saints in nature and grace.

In the former verse the apostle argues *for the reality of the effect, as an evidence of the cause*: "Whosoever believes that Jesus is the