

SERMON VII. .

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WHAT MAY GRACIOUS PARENTS BEST DO FOR THE CONVERSION OF THOSE CHILDREN WHOSE WICKEDNESS IS OCCASIONED BY THEIR SINFUL SEVERITY OR INDULGENCE ?

He shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers.—Malachi iv. 6.

THIS intricate text, proposed to me, (on which I preached,) speaking but indirectly and by consequence only (as I then said) to the question proposed; upon mature deliberation, I have thought good to adjoin another, which, I conceive, looks with a more direct aspect on both the parts of our bipartite question; namely,

Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.—Ephesians vi. 4.

As malapertness, frowardness, sauciness, self-will, stubbornness, sullenness, disobedience, yea, contempt and scorning of parents, specially the more indulgent and weak, are vices too common with children and youth; so, on the other side, parents, unless modelled and conformed by the word and Spirit of God, are very prone to fall into one of these two extremes,—either immoderate severity and rigid abuse of the parental authority, or fond indulgence and sinful neglect of just and discreet discipline.

Against both these extremes our apostle doth here arm and fortify gracious parents, by instructing them how equally to hold the balance, and discreetly to manage the reins and rudder, of their parental power and discipline; so as they may not provoke their children to a just disgust and wrath, on the one side; nor expose themselves to a base contempt and scorn, on the other. And this he doth,

1. *By forbidding a vice*: “Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath,” Μη ὑπαρρογίζετε, *Ad iram, ad iræ exuberantiam, ne provocate, ne irritate.* As if he had said, “Fathers, I know, your children are apt to be vain, rash, foolish, disobedient, stubborn, able to roil* the most sedate spirit, to try the patience of a Job; and it is fit, yea, necessary, that you admonish, reprove, rebuke, chastise them: but yet take heed, that though they provoke you to a just displeasure, you do not, by an unjust abuse of your just authority, in a too strict, rigid, immoderate severity against them, give your offending children any just occasion of, or urgent temptation to, any sinful

* “To ruffle, derange.”—EDIT.

anger or inveterate wrath against you. Whilst you are correcting for one sin, do not provoke them to commit another. Whilst you are plucking them out of a gulf, do not dash them against a rock. 'Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath.'

But observe we here the apostle's prudence. Having (verses 1—3) allotted to children their share, namely, obedience: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord;" and backed it both with divine precept and promise; the just consequence seems to require, that he should have invested the parents with command and government for their portion: but he fairly waves that, and, as supposing [that] he had sufficiently fixed the parents' authority by putting their children under the yoke of obedience, he now consults the child's interest, or rather the mutual comfort both of parent and child, by advising parents to use the power that God had given them moderately and tenderly. On the one hand, he sweetens the obedience of the child; on the other, tempers the authority of the parent. That the precept of obedience may not fright the child, nor the prerogative of power swell the parent, let them both know,—the *child*, that he is in subjection and must obey; but then it is his father, who either doth or should love him:—and the *father*, that he hath authority, and may command; but whom? It is his child, whom he must govern with that tenderness as not in the least to "provoke." Thus by forbidding a vice.

2. *By enjoining them the contrary grace or duty*: "But bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Children, as they must not be "provoked to wrath," so they must not be indulged in folly; as they must not be discouraged, so they may not be cockered. Our children naturally are too, too like the wild horse or ass's colt, who, if they once begin to know their strength, and get the bit between their teeth, will first cast their rider, and then run in a full career to their own destruction. And therefore take heed; do not indulge them in their foolish humours; "but bring them up," &c.

Having thus fixed our corner-stones, now to our building. In the case before us, I find TWO TRUTHS SUPPOSED, and ONE QUESTION IN form, but really bipartite, PROPOSED.

I. THE TWO TRUTHS, and those sad ones, *supposed*.

1. *That it hath been, is, and may be, the lot of gracious parents to have unconverted, wicked children.*

2. *That this wickedness of these unconverted children hath been and is too, too often occasioned by their gracious parents' sinful, (1.) Severity, (2.) Indulgence.*

II. THE QUESTION, or case of conscience to be resolved; which is bipartite:

What may gracious parents best do toward the conversion of those their children, whose wickedness is occasioned by their sinful, 1. Severity? 2. Indulgence?

I. OF THE FIRST TRUTH.

(I.) The first truth supposed; namely, *that it hath been, is, and may be, the lot of gracious parents to have unconverted, wicked children:*

let me add, of the best of parents to be afflicted with very wicked, yea, the worst of children.

Had not Adam an envious, murderous Cain? (Gen. iv. 8—11.) The first branch of the universal root wholly rotten! [Had not] Noah a cursed Ham? (Gen. ix. 22;) Abraham a mocking, persecuting Ishmael? (Gen. xxi. 9; Gal. iv. 29;) Lot a Moab and Ammon, the sons of incest, and the fathers of an idolatrous brood, that to the death hated God's chosen Israel? (Gen. xix. 37, 38;) Isaac a profane Esau? (Gen. xxv. 25; Heb. xii. 16.) [Had not] Eli two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, both "sons of Belial," prodigies of lust and wickedness? (1 Sam. ii. 12—17, 22;) David an ambitious Adonijah, (1 Kings i. 5; ii. 13—25,) an incestuous Amnon, (2 Sam. xiii. 14,) a murderous, traitorous, rebellious Absalom? (2 Sam. xiii. 28, 29; xv. 10.) [Had not] Jehoshaphat a bloody, idolatrous Jehoram? (2 Chron. xxi. 4, 6, 11, 13;) Josiah a wicked Jehoiakim, and another as bad, if not worse,—a wretched, false, perjured, covenant-breaking Zedekiah? (2 Chron. xxxvi. 5, 12, 13; Ezek. xvii. 15, 18.) But enough of this; sigh even to the breaking of your hearts, when you think of many, very many others, in former ages and in our own days and city, that might be added to fill-up this black catalogue.

(II.) *This wickedness of these unconverted children hath been and is too, too often occasioned, yea, advanced, by the sinful severity or indulgence of their unwary, though gracious, parents.*—This head divides itself into two branches; namely, parents' sinful severity and indulgence.

First. *Sinful severity*: and of this, 1. *What it is not.* 2. *What it is.*

1. *What it is not.*

(1.) *A grave, wise, holy, strict demeanour toward our children.*—Such a carriage as whereby we may procure glory to God, honour to ourselves, and so to preserve and keep up that authority which God hath stamped upon us, is not sinful severity. To carry it so, and so to keep our distance, as to give our children no occasion to undervalue or "despise" us; (1 Tim. iv. 12; Titus ii. 15;) so as that they may see and own the wisdom of God shining in us; that our children may pay us that reverence and respect that God requires of them; (1 Kings iii. 28;) this is not to be accounted sinful severity, but behaving ourselves "worthily in Ephratah." (Ruth iv. 11.)

(2.) *All just anger, or the rising up of the heart in a holy displeasure against sin in our children,* is not sinful severity. Parents may "be angry, and yet not sin." (Eph. iv. 26.) Nay, parents would certainly sin, if, on just occasion given by their children, they should not be angry; but with these provisos:—

(i.) *That the cause for which they are angry be good and warrantable.*—Such as we can give a good account of to God; an anger like that of our Saviour, who "looked round about on" his malicious observers "with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts;" (Mark iii. 5;) when our anger is accompanied with grief, because God is dishonoured by our children's offending against truth,

piety, justice, humanity; because we see them neglect their duty, hurt their own or others' souls or bodies.

(ii.) *That the object of this anger be right.*—That is, when that which we are angry at is not so much the persons of our children that offend, as their offence itself, their sin, fault, disobedience; not so much the patient, as the disease.

(iii.) *That the end be right.*—Namely, that the fault [which] we are offended at may be amended by our children, and that they for the future may be warned not to offend in the like again.

(iv.) *That a due decorum may be observed both as to the measure and duration of our anger.*—When it is neither too hot, nor too long; when it is a rational, holy, temperate displeasure, a moderate anger; when right reason and scripture sit in the box, and guide the chariot, saying, as the Lord to the sea, "Thus much, thus long, and no more, no longer:"—thus far no sinful severity.

(3.) *Grave counselling and admonishing our children in and to that which is truly good.* (Eph. vi. 4.)—All serious discountenancing of and severe frowning on them, when in an evil way; nay, sharp reproofs and rebukes; (Titus i. 13;) yea, being so far a terror to them as to let them know, we bear not the stamp of God's authority "in vain;" (Rom. xiii. 3, 4;) nay, farther, smart chastising of them, proportionable to their age and offence; (Prov. xxix. 15;) provided we express fatherly love and tenderness in all, out of a true desire of their repentance and reformation:—all this is not to be looked upon as sinful severity, but as the faithful discharge of a necessary parental duty; which is by so much the more excellent, because it is so much neglected, and so hard to be performed in a right manner.

2. *What sinful severity is, or wherein it discovers itself.*—Sinful severity betrays itself in and by the *irregular passions, austere looks, bitter words, and rigid actions* of those parents who abuse their parental power.

That the wickedness of unconverted children is oftentimes occasioned by the sinful severity of their parents.—They are provoked, and that to sin,

1. *By irregular passions, specially that of an inordinate and immoderate anger.*

(1.) *Rash anger:* When parents are soon angry with their children, when they will not give leave to their judgments to consider before they are angry.* (James i. 19.) The wise man tells us, "The discretion of a man deferreth his anger," and that "it is his glory to pass over a transgression;" (Prov. xix. 11;) but brands rash anger with the mark of folly: "He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly." (Prov. xiv. 17.) It was grave advice to one, not to be angry at any time, till he had first repeated the Greek alphabet. To be angry without any cause, or upon every trivial, slight occasion; for any thing

* *Multos absolvemus, si prius cœperimus judicare quàm irasci.*—SENECA *De Irâ.*
"We should forgive many their offences, if, before we were angry with them, we allowed ourselves time for forming a cool judgment."—EDIT.

that is not material in itself or in its consequent ; for mere involuntary and casual offences and slips in our children, such as without great care could not have been prevented ; and for these to be so far exasperated as to begin to hate or more remissly to love them ;—is for a father to fire the beacon of his soul for the landing of a cockboat. It is *that* that exposes the father to his child's contempt, and God's judgment. (Matt. v. 22.)

(2.) When a parent's anger is *too frequent, too hot, or too long*.—Anger must be used, as a medicine, only now and then, and that only on a just occasion ; otherwise it loseth its efficacy, or hurts the patient. Again : anger, when too hot, vehement, excessive, provokes. It is true, it must be serious ; there must be some life and warmth in it ; the potion must be warmed, that it may operate the more vigorously toward the reformation of offending children : but then when it swells into an excess and transport of passion, it provokes.* Such an excess of anger, like a ball of wildfire, is very apt to inflame the child's breast, and to provoke him into a sinful return of wrath and strife. (Prov. xv. 18.) Lastly : anger, when too long, when it lies soaking in the breast, is apt to putrify. If the sun arises and sets on a man in his wrath, the text tells us who is like to be his bedfellow. (Eph. iv. 26, 27.) "Anger resteth in the bosom of fools." (Eccles. vii. 9.) And well may it provoke a child, though criminal, to see his father's bosom, where once he lay, to be now become anger's couch and Satan's pillow.

Thus you see that irregular passions in severe parents are no little provocations and spurs to sin and wrath in their disobedient children : they are like those smart cantharides or Spanish flies,—the most speedy and effectual means to raise blisters.

2. *By an austere look, grim, sour, lowering, frowning countenance*.—When a man seems to carry revenge, daggers, death in his face ; when a man usually looks on his child, as Cain did on his brother, (Gen. iv. 5, 6,) as one highly displeased, that bears ill-will, and owes him a grudge, and will be sure to pay it in due time ; when the child observes his ancestors' crest portrayed on his father's forehead, and, instead of smiles, can see nothing there but cruel lions, bears, tigers :—this must needs highly provoke ; and it is not to be wondered at, if the child, in a fright and dreadful indignation, cries out, roaring, "I do well to be angry, even to the death. Better to be killed outright, than buried alive ! No grave so dark, so dismal, as those deep furrows in my frowning, constantly frowning, father's forehead."

3. *By bitter, hasty, biting, testy, disdainful, reproachful, railing, taunting, menacing, threatening words*.—Words steeped in the venom of asps. O, these pierce deep, like the tails of scorpions, and do highly provoke. More particularly,

(1.) *Hard words* : soft words and hard arguments work powerfully : "A soft tongue breaketh the bone," (Prov. xxv. 15,) or one that is

* *Ira sic dicta quasi hominem facit ex se ire, et non esse apud se.* "The Latin word for 'anger' seems to have had its derivation, from denoting that it makes a man go out of himself, and not to be in his right senses."—EDIT.

stiff and hard. Abigail found it true in her address to David, when he was in his rough.* (1 Sam. xxv. 4—42.) But a hard tongue hardens the heart: "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir-up anger." (Prov. xv. 1.)

OBJECTION. "But what do you speak of words, which are but wind?"

SOLUTION. True; but this wind many times kindles a dreadful fire, and increases it when once kindled: "As coals to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife." (Prov. xxvi. 21; James iii. 5, 6.)

(2.) *Contumacious, reproachful, disgraceful words*: these are far remote from fatherly love and respect. Aristotle, in his Rhetoric, tells us, that the grand scope, drift, design, of contumely is, that a man may rejoice and triumph in the disgrace of him whom he reproacheth. How barbarous is it, then, to rejoice in the disgrace and infamy of a child of a man's own bowels! This cannot but "provoke." That is a thunder-clap in the ears of testy, reproachful parents: "Whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire." (Matt. v. 22.) Reproachful words are no less than sharp darts and keen swords: nay, they carry with them no less than stings and poison; so that even the wisest and best of men can hardly bear the dint of them. Thus Saul to the height provokes his son, when he foams at the mouth, and breaks out into that nasty drivel: "Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman;" and why not, in our English dialect, "Thou son of a whore?" and so lasheth his son on his wife's back. (1 Sam. xx. 30.) What could have been spoken more sharply to provoke?

(3.) *Menacing, threatening words*: and that, it may be, for little trips or slips of youth, nay, though there be no resolution to execute what they threaten. Suppose it only *brutum fulmen*, "a flash without a bolt or bullet;" the very wind and noise is enough to sink the trembling child into a swoon. If masters must not threaten servants, much less may parents threaten children. (Eph. vi. 9.)

4. *By rigid actions*.—When parents, utterly un mindful of their parental relation, bowels, duty, prove tyrants, and use, or rather abuse, their children as servants, or indeed as slaves and vassals; these should know that the great God never commissioned them to be more than tender governors, not domineering tyrants or Egyptian task-masters. This tyranny is exercised divers ways:—

(1.) *When parents either deny to, or take from, their children those things which either belong to their necessities or their just comforts in that rank and relation in which their heavenly Father by birth hath placed them*.—When they deny them that education, that provision, that encouragement, which is just and equal; that food, raiment, portion, that becomes the children of such a father; this is to act beneath an infidel, (1 Tim. v. 8,) nay, more, even beneath the brute beasts, who by a natural instinct diligently nourish and cherish their

* More frequently written *ruff*. But each of these words sufficiently indicates the meaning intended, *the height or first effervescence of any strong passion*;—*rough*, before the man becomes smooth and calm; *ruff*, he being suddenly ruffled or excited.—EDIT.

young ones ; and cannot but provoke. Even a horse, when too strait-reined, will rise up and fling. When the cockered idol, though a younger brother or sister, and, it may be, less deserving, shall be called to the table, closet, bosom, and there treated at the height of sweetness ; whereas the poor, neglected, discountenanced, despised, elder [brother] must stand without, and either blow his fingers, or employ his hands in some base, sordid, servile, commanded drudgery, which would better become a slave than a son : * this, this goes near the heart of an ingenuous and observant child. † This must needs create in him an enraged jealousy and envy against his equals or inferiors, and—without a vast stock of love, humility, patience—a boiling, rancorous disdain and wrath against his superiors. ‡

(2.) *When parents load their children with unjust commands.*—This is to ape that wretched Saul, who commanded Jonathan to surprise his innocent, dearest friend and brother, David, the upright, valiant David, that had so well deserved of the whole kingdom, one designed by God himself to succeed in the throne of Israel ; yea, and, against his solemn oath sworn unto him, to bring him to him, that he might be murdered. (1 Sam. xx. 31.) This both grieved and provoked Jonathan. (Verse 34.) Or, with that incestuous, bloody creature, Herodias, who commands her dancing daughter to ask of Herod more than half his kingdom, namely, “John Baptist’s head.” (Matt. xiv. 8.)

(3.) *When parents, merely to gratify their humour, self-will, lusts, passions, fury, chastise, beat, and almost kill their children with unjust and immoderate lashes, stripes, punishments.*

(i.) *Unjust* : when the parent hath no lawful cause or reason so to do. What just plea could that unnatural Saul make for casting his javelin, to smite his innocent son Jonathan ? (1 Sam. xx. 33.) After he had spit-out the poison of his heart in his words, he fills-up the measure of his wickedness in this bloody deed, suitable to his murderous heart.

(ii.) *Immoderate* : when the sharpness of the punishment exceeds the greatness of the crime. Here the Lord, the righteous Judge, takes care, by his supreme authority, that those that have authority over others should not, according to their own lusts, will, and pleasure, rage and vent their fury and passion on criminals. (Deut. xxv. 2, 3.) Now if justice oblige us to keep our mind free and composed, in punishing the greatest strangers and most heinous malefactors, that we may exactly proportion the penalty to their fault ; how much more should a father, whose name breathes nothing but benignity and sweetness, observe the same moderation, when his business is to chastise the child of his own bowels ! And if not, instead of reforming, he doth but provoke, his child.

Thus much concerning sinful severity, what it is, and how far provoking ; in all which I neither have nor could bring one instance,

* Μη φορτικα και δουλους ωρεποντα επιτασσετε. “Do not command your children to perform offices that are mean, and fit only for servants or slaves.”—EDIT. † Even a worm thus trod on would turn again. ‡ Favours unequally distributed highly provoke.

either father or mother, in the whole scripture, that had the character of a godly person, that is charged with the crimson guilt of a sinfully-severe parent.

II. *What may godly parents best do for the conversion of those children whose wickedness is occasioned by their sinful SEVERITY?*—To this I answer,

First. *More generally.*—“Physician, heal thyself:” to cleanse the polluted stream, let us begin at the puddled fountain.

1. *As much as may be, cease your complaints to men of finding so much cause of grief and sorrow in your untoward children, instead of joy and comfort.*—That they are pungent thorns instead of refreshing roses, stabs instead of staffs [staves]. Exclaim no more, at least not morosely or in passion, against the pride, levity, vanity, frowardness, obstinacy, debauchery, incorrigibility, of your wretched children, especially in the hearing of those children. It is too probable they will be apt to lay their own bastards at their father’s door, and impute all their gross miscarriages to their rigid father’s harshness, contempt, and want of love: “Had not I been unhappy in so stiff a father, he might have been happy in a more complaisant son. Had my father treated me with more bowels, it is possible I should have readily answered his tenderness with a melting heart, bended knee, and sincere obedience.”

2. *Instead of opening your mouths to men, go immediately, and in sincerity unbosom your whole souls, to God.*—Cast yourselves at his foot, humbly acknowledge your great defects and failings in the management of that authority that God, the supreme Father, hath stamped upon you. Humble yourself deeply before the Lord for all your former irregular and exorbitant passions, stabbing looks, hard speeches, morose behaviour, partial demeanour, dreadful omens and forejudgings of the sad fate of your at present disobedient child. Weep (I say not, not so much, but) not only for your child, but for yourself. Had the root been sound as it ought, the branch had not been so rotten as it is. Had the father been more a fig-tree, the son had not been so much a thistle. If the vine hath the least taint of Sodom, no wonder if the wine hath an ugly tang of Gomorrha. Weep, I say, and pray; pray and weep; and, instead of a bead, drop a tear at the close of every petition for the full and free pardon of these thy relational sins, in and through the blood of that Son that never offended his and thy Father: beg, and beg earnestly, for grace, strength, wisdom, which is “first pure, then peaceable,” that thou mayest be kept from the like misdemeanour for the future.

3. *Act toward your children in all things as a father.*—Keep your relation in your eye.

(1.) *Love your children as a father.*—A man would think this advice were needless: “As touching love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love.” (1 Thess. iv. 9.) It seems all one as if I should persuade the sun to shine, the fire to burn, nay, a man to be a man. This law of love to children is

written by the finger, drawn by the pencil, stamped and engraven by the deepest impress, of nature on the hearts and bowels of all parents. (Isai. xlix. 15.) Indeed I have spent more than a few minutes in searching the scriptures on this account; and, though I find many express texts that oblige us to love God, Christ, our neighbour, the brotherhood, our wives, yea, our enemies, yet I can light but on one that doth in express terms command parents to love their children; namely, Titus ii. 4, where we find [that] the young women are to be taught "to love their children." For which the best reason that I can give for the present is, the same that he gave why the Romans, among all their laws, had enacted none against the horrid sin of parricide; namely, because the Romans either could or would not suppose men to be such monsters as to be guilty of so black a crime. The scripture supposes that, while we retain the nature of men, or own the name of fathers, we cannot but love our children. Well, then, love your children; but love them as fathers. *Fathers!* this very single word contains an Iliad of arguments. Were I at leisure, it were easy to draw out all the rhetoricians' topics of persuasion out of its bowels. *Father!* the very name is an ointment poured forth; it sends forth nothing but the perfume of love, meekness, tenderness.* Do but sincerely love your children as fathers, and then be sinfully severe if you can! Love your children, not so much for their lovely countenance, their pleasing grace and sweetness, which, how charming soever, is but a fading flower, a skin-deep vanity; but principally, as those that are bone of your bone, flesh of your flesh, to whom you have communicated your blood and very nature. And let not this love be like a dead picture or idol in your breast, without life or action; but a living, active principle, a spring that may vigorously and effectually influence all the powers of your soul for the procuring of all that which is truly good to your poor children.

. OBJECTION. "But how can I possibly love such naughty, such provoking children?"

SOLUTION I. *Doth your duty of loving your children admit of that exception?—Love them, that is, if they are, or while they are, free from all fault.*—Did not the Lord that enjoins this duty, know full well that no mortal man is without his spots, imperfections, failings? In vain is that precept that is limited to a condition which [it] is impossible to fulfil.

SOL. II. *Look inward, and then look upward.*—Are not you naughty? † (James iii. 2.) Have not you often, and do not you daily, hourly provoke your heavenly Father? And yet would you not desire that he should love you? Let your own prayers and tears be witnesses in the case. Had a man laid his ear close to your closet, might he not have heard you, Ephraim-like, bemoaning yourself thus?—"Heavenly Father, I am vile, I have done iniquity; I have not only touched upon the verge of vice, but entered the circle: nay, my

* Πάτηρ δ' ὡς ἡπίος γεν.—HOMER *Odys.* v. 12. "He was gentle as a father."—EDIT.

† *Tangut memoriam communis fragilitas.* "Bear in mind the frailty common to mankind."—EDIT.

sins are aggravated by perverseness in ill-doing, and by resisting counsel. I cannot, dare not clear myself by a just defence, nor, being rightly deprived of thy love and favour, seek for any other mediators, but thy Christ and free grace, for my relief. And therefore give me leave to hope, that a Father's bowels are as potent orators as a son's misery; and that, while my transgressions dam up the way to favour, fatherly compassion will not forget to be merciful: he that bears the name of a Father, cannot forget the tears of a child." Tell me, severe parents, is not this a true echo of some of your most pathetic prayers? But what answer have you expected, and your heavenly Father returned?

SOL. III. *Possibly, while you have been speaking, God hath answered, as he did, Jer. xxxi. 20: "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child?" "No, no; he is naught, he is a prodigal." "True! but yet he is a repenting, a returning prodigal; though not 'a pleasant' son, yet a son, 'a child:' and therefore, 'since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord.'"* Read, consider, and often pray over those pertinent texts, Deut. xxxii. 36; Isai. lxiii. 15, 16; Hosea xi. 7—9; Luke xv. 19, 20. "All this is true to a repenting Ephraim; but my child lies stinking in his filth."

SOL. IV. But, I pray, *in what case and posture did your heavenly Father find you, when he first manifested his love unto you?*—"When I saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live." Behold, this time was the time of thy God's love. (Ezek. xvi. 6, 8.) God the Father commended his love toward you, "in that, while you were yet sinners, Christ died for you." (Rom. v. 8.)

(2.) *Govern your children as a father.*—And so remember, that your parental power is not absolute or despotical, but regulated and circumscribed within due bounds and limits. Parents may not think they may do what they list, according to their own will and pleasure, with their children. *Stat pro ratione voluntas,** is the language of a tyrant, not of a father. And here,

(i.) Beware of secret pride, of inordinate self-exalting, of magnifying your office, and overvaluing yourselves, and of esteeming yourselves to be greater than indeed you are, and an eager desire that your children should so think of you, and so treat you.

(ii.) Beware of thinking more of the dignity of your place, than of your duty you owe to God and your children, in that station wherein God hath fixed you.

(iii.) Beware of being excessively hard and difficult to be pleased, and of being too rigid an exactor of observance and respect from your child, and of slighting, undervaluing, vilifying of him, when he hath done his utmost; of discontent and murmuring, if you have not all [that] you desire in your child.

* JUVENAL. *Sat. vi. 222.* "My will is a sufficient reason for my commands."—EDIT.

(iv.) Beware that you respect not your child more for the seeming regard he shows to you, than for any real worth that is in him.

All these are dangerous rocks, to which your secret pride exposes you, enough to destroy pilot and vessel.

(3.) *Be angry with your child; but "be angry, and sin not."* (Eph. iv. 26.)—Be angry; but then let it be the anger of a displeased father against an offending child, not the anger of a bloody enemy against an irreconcilable foe: be angry as your heavenly Father is said to be angry. Of this before.

(4.) *Exhort, admonish, reprove, rebuke, chastise, offending children; but then still remember whose deputy you are, whom you represent.*—Even your heavenly Father. Fury is not in him; judgment is his "strange work:" but he "delights in mercy." When he is, as it were, forced to put forth his anger, he then makes use of a father's rod, not an executioner's axe. (2 Sam. vii. 14.) He will neither break his children's bones, nor his own covenant. (Psalm lxxxix. 30—35.) He lashes in love, (Heb. xii. 6; Rev. iii. 19,) in measure, in pity, and compassion. "In all their affliction" he "is afflicted;" every stroke on his child's back recoils on his own bowels: and if the member be gangrened, and there is an absolute necessity to cut it off, to save the life, the soul of his child; then, like a surgeon who is the father of the patient, he makes use of the saw, not forgetting that he is now cutting off his own flesh, and would never do it but for the child's good. (Rom. viii. 28.) Go you, and do likewise.

(5.) *In all you do, take heed you do not provoke them on the one hand, nor discourage them on the other.*

(i.) *Not provoke them:* of this somewhat before. Let me add, When children find themselves, contrary to their hopes and, it may be, their deserts, to be hardly and sharply dealt withal; and that nothing which they attempt or perform finds acceptance with their morose and rigid parents; especially if of fiercer spirits, in the heat and bitterness of their enraged souls, they are apt to throw off all reverence, to "break their bands asunder, and to cast away their cords from" them; like wild and untamed colts, to kick and winch and harden their necks, foreheads, hearts, against all admonitions and threatenings, against all words and blows. Their father hates them, say they; sink they must, and sink they will; but not alone: if possible, they will draw their cruel father's heart and peace into the same gulf with them. O dreadful! take heed, therefore; do not provoke.

(ii.) *Not to discourage, dishearten, dispirit them:* "Fathers, provoke not your children," *ἵνα μὴ ἀθυμώσιν, ne animum despondeant,* "lest they be discouraged." (Col. iii. 21.) There is nothing that doth more deject and sink the heart of a poor child, (specially if ingenuous and of a softer and more meek temper,) than the severe rigour and roughness of a father. It quite unsouls the poor child, when, in the countenance and deportment of his father, to whom of all men in the world he should in reason be dearest, he sees nothing but anger and aversation. It intimidates the child, destroys his mettle and courage for any honest or honourable undertaking, smothers, yea, extinguishes,

all his fire and vivacity, transforms him into a mere sot, mope, dullard, block, utterly unfit for use and service; nay, more, it often throws him into the deepest gulf of grief and melancholy, sickness, death; and then it may be, when too late, the unhappy parent will see cause to relent, and abhor himself for his unjust severity.

(6.) *Parents, remember they are children, and but children.*—Their age may be some apology for them. *Their* heads are green; *yours* are grey. More years may teach them better manners. They are your children, your own flesh, blood, bowels; το ιδιον αγαπητον,* saith Aristotle; *your* children. If the stream be corrupt, it derives it from yourselves, the fountain: (Psalm li. 5:) the young serpent came from the old cockatrice.

(7.) *Since severity will not do the feat, see what sweetness, mildness, gentleness, holy tenderness and indulgence will do.*—

Pax majora decet: peragit tranquilla potestas

Quod violenta nequit.†—CLAUDIANSI Panegyris de Consul. F. Mallii Theodori, 240.

The pillow may help to break the flint which the hammer and anvil cannot: it prevailed with flinty Saul. (1 Sam. xxiv. 16.) The cordial may prevail, where the corrosive cannot. The sight of the pardon more commands the heart of the desperate traitor, than that of the axe or gibbet.

(8.) *To all these, add scriptural admonition, fervent supplication, patient waiting on, and humble submission to, the will of God.* (Micah vii. 7—9.)

Thus much concerning sinful severity. We proceed to the Second, and that is **SINFUL INDULGENCE**. Our apostle, knowing right well how apt parents are to swerve from the golden mean of parental discipline, and, whilst they labour to avoid the rock of sinful severity, how prone they are to plunge themselves into the gulf of sinful indulgence, doth in the same text prescribe a sovereign antidote against that fatal pleurisy of fond affection, in these words: “But bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Whilst the severe parent is breathing a vein in his distempered child, he cautions him to take care [that] he doth not pierce an artery: “Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath.” But, on the other hand, if the child labours under an imposthume, and needs the lancet, our apostle doth here command the discreet use of it, and will by no means permit that the sinking child should be soothed or stroked and demulced into certain ruin. Children must be “nurtured,” though they may not be “provoked.” Parents must not be cruel ostriches, and leave and expose their young ones to harm and danger; nor yet must they be such fond apes, who are said to hug their cubs so closely as that they kill them with their embraces. And that on this account,—because,

Secondly, *The wickedness of unconverted children is too, too often*

* “Your own peculiar object of love.”—EDIT.

† “The greatest rivers roll with quiet mien:

In peace the height of majesty is seen.

By gentle means has often been obtain'd

What overbearing force would ne'er have gain'd.”—HAWKINS'S Translation.

occasioned, yea, and advanced, by the sinful indulgence of their godly parents.—Sinful severity, with Saul, hath slain its thousands; sinful indulgence, with David, its ten thousands. Poor cockered children, when it is too late, find the little finger of a fond mother to weigh far heavier, and to sink the soul far deeper, than the weighty loins of a severe father; and at a long run will find more of sting in a rod of roses, than in a scourge of scorpions. In the stating of this case, I shall proceed as before, and show you,

1. *What sinful indulgence is not.*

And so, *natural, ordinate, moderate, parental love, and such as is mixed with the most yearning bowels, most deep and tender compassions, is not sinful indulgence.*—Nay, to be without these natural affections, is not only wretched stoicism, but sinful, cursed, and more than brutish astorgy: [“want of natural affection.”] (Rom. i. 31.) Even the storks and sea-monsters will teach us to love our offspring. Love my children I may and must,

(1.) *With all the sorts and kinds of love.*—Of desire of union and communion with them, of the sweet enjoyment of them; of benevolence and good-will, willing, ready, and prepared to desire and wish them all good; of beneficence and bounty, actually endeavouring to do them all good possible, both as to their souls and bodies. (Titus ii. 4; Gen. xxi. 19; 1 Kings iii. 25, 26; xvii. 10, 12, 18, 19; 1 Tim. v. 8.) All our spiritual gifts must be for the profit of their souls, for their direction, consolation, salvation; and as for their bodies, their backs must be our wardrobes, their bellies our barns, and their hands our treasuries. And with a love of complacency and delight. Our children may and ought to be the joy and rejoicing of our hearts: “no greater joy than to” see our children like olive-plants round about our table, specially if we see and find them “walking in the truth.” (2 John 4; 3 John 4.)

(2.) *With all the properties of parental love.*—Namely, sincere and unfeigned; a love, not in word and tongue only, but from the heart, in deed and in truth: a forward, cheerful love, not drawn or driven, but flowing as from a fountain: an expansive, open-handed as well as open-hearted, love: a fruitful love, producing not only fair leaves, buds, and blossoms of pleasing smiles and large promises, but the mature fruits of beneficial performances: a holy, just, fervent, constant love: a most gentle, dear, tender, compassionate love, whereby we are ready to sympathize with them, and forward to succour them, in their misery; to regard them, when they neither regard us nor themselves; to take in good part the desires of their souls, when they find not to perform; to accept of a sigh in regard of a service, a mite instead of a talent, a groan instead of a duty, the very stammering of my child above the eloquence of a beggar; (Mal. iii. 17;) looking on a returning prodigal as a son, and pitying as a father, not punishing as a judge; remembering their frame, and knowing that both they and we are poor dust. (Psalm ciii. 13, 14.) All this and much more is not sinful indulgence. To carry them in our bosoms, as Moses did the Israelites; (Num. xi. 12;) or so in our hearts as to be

willing to impart our very souls unto them in and for God, because they are dear unto us, as Paul; (1 Thess. ii. 7, 8, 11;) to bless them in God's name, faith, fear, as Jacob did; (Gen. xlix. 28;) to countenance and encourage them in, and reward them for, well-doing; (1 Peter ii. 14; Esther vi. 3;) to love those most that love God most; to give such Benjamins five messes, a double, treble portion, an Isaac's inheritance;—this is not sinful indulgence.

2. *What sinful indulgence is.*

It stands in *the excess and exuberancy of our love and affections, and in too much slacking and remitting the reins of government.*—When we do, as it were, abandon and give up our minds and studies, to coax and please and gratify the humours, yea, satisfy the lusts, of our foolish children; when we make their wills our laws, our rules; when the doting parent is led by the heart—shall I say? or nose?—by his audacious child, and must be at his beck, at his command; when the child may and must speak or do what he pleases, and the parent either may or dare not say, “What doest thou?” let him act what and when and how he pleases, he must not be displeased, disturbed, contradicted in the least; when the child, grown insolent and intolerable, is too gently treated and borne withal; when a forced frown or a gentle, soft whisper is looked upon as a smart rebuke, and the lash of a rod no less than the wound of a sword; when, it may be, we mildly snip the unthrifty darling, and at the same time that we pretend to chide, do fondly add fuel to his excess:—this, O, this is sinful indulgence,—a sin of a crimson dye and dreadful consequence. More particularly,

(1.) *When our extravagant love prevails with us, in too mild and gentle a manner, to bear with our wicked children in contemning of or rebellion against God's laws, or our own lawful commands and counsels.* (Isai. iii. 5; 1 Sam. iii. 13; 2 Sam. xv. 1—12.)

(2.) *When our inordinate love to them causes us to counsel them to, or encourage them in, that which is evil.* (Matt. xiv. 8.)—This was a deep blot, and indeed the only one I find, in that godly mother's, good Rebekah's, escutcheon. It is said, that “Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.” (Gen. xxv. 28.) Isaac, being old, was too much held by the teeth, and too fond of Esau for his venison's sake; but Rebekah herself was not a little in fault. Her Jacob by his red pottage had got the birthright; and now she is resolved that he should have the blessing too. On this account she furnishes him with a lie in his mouth, and skins on his neck and hands; and so, in her great love, exposes her dressed Jacob, instead of a blessing, to his father's curse and his own damnation. (Gen. xxvii. 6—17.) It is true, he narrowly escaped, and ran away with the blessing; but both mother and son had both their bellies full of the sauce in which the mother's indulgence had sinfully soaked it. It was this chiefly that made poor Jacob go halting to his grave.

(3.) *When parents will not endure to see that natural fierceness, pride, self-will, impatience, that peeps out in their children, to be severely checked, and grubbed up by the roots.*—When children must

not be nurtured in truth, modesty, bashfulness, reverence, courtesy, obedience, diligence;—"No, no; this is harshness;"—but, even whilst little children, scarce out of the shell, shall be taught and encouraged to brasen their foreheads, to throw off all humble shamefacedness, all respect of superiors, to talk and strut and swagger: "Their tongue is their own; and who is Lord over them?" O, intolerable! "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon!"

(4.) *When we feed our children with more dainty fare, trick them up with more gorgeous apparel, and even loosen and break the nerves of their souls and bodies with too soft and delicate an education, no way suitable either to our own estates or their condition.*—Which was the serious complaint of Quinctilian of old, and is the sin and shame of this present age. This, this is that sinful indulgence here intended: this is *that* that too often occasions, yea, inflames and heightens, our children's daring wickedness, and prepares them, makes them fit vessels, for temporal and eternal ruin. Now concerning this I shall give you my thoughts under these two generals.

I shall lay before you plain instances of this sinful indulgence in three parents, all of them fathers; for, after a most exact search throughout the whole scriptures, I cannot find one, no, not one of all the godly mothers in Israel guilty of, or charged with, this sin, Rebekah only excepted. Two of these fathers were, beyond all contradiction, truly, yea, eminently, godly; the third *probably* so, by the tender respect he showed the Levite. We begin with him.

1. *That the indulgence of parents is the bane of children, a pander of their wickedness, the asylum of their vanity.*—How easily is the thief induced to steal, when he knows his receiver! When the looseness of youth knows where to find pity and toleration, what mischief can it forbear? See this in the Levite's concubine or wife. (Judges xix. 1, 2.) This concubine plays the whore against the Levite, whom she owned at least as a husband. Her guilt makes her fly; but whither shall she cause her shame to go? Whither, indeed, but to her own dear father's house? She that had deserved to be abhorred by her loving and faithful husband, doubts not to find shelter from her fond and indulgent father: his heart and house and bosom, she knew, would all be open to her. Well, home she speeds to her father at Bethlehem-Ephratah. But doth her good old father receive her? What! doth he suffer his house to become a brothel-house, to be defiled with an adulteress, though she sprang out of his own loins? Methinks I hear him in a just indignation thus accosting her: "Why, how now, impudence? what makest thou here? Dost thou think to find my house a shelter for thy sins? The stews are a fitter receptacle for thee. Whilst thou wert a faithful wife to thy husband, thou wert a beloved daughter to me: but now thou art neither. Thou art not mine; I gave thee to thine husband. Thou art not thy husband's; thou hast betrayed his bed. Thy filthiness hath made thee thine own and thine adulterer's; go, seek thine entertainment where thou hast lost thine honesty. Thy lewdness hath brought a necessity of shame upon thy abettors. How can

I countenance thy person, and abandon thy sin? I had rather be a just man than a sinfully-kind father. Get thee home, therefore, to thy husband; crave his forgiveness upon thy knees; redeem his love with thy modesty and obedience. When his heart is once open to thee, my doors shall not be shut. In the mean time, before thou art humbled both before God and man, know, I can be no father to a harlot." Thus methinks I should have heard him say; but, lo, fond father that he was! he treats and caresses her at another rate, and seems to bespeak her, as Jael did Sisera, (Judges iv. 18,) "Turn in, my dear child, turn in to me." He brings her into his house; covers her with a mantle; instead of water, gives her "a bottle of milk;" yea, he "brings forth butter in a lordly dish;" treats her at the kindest rate, and that for four whole months. And now let the most indulgent parent judge, whether this was a just dealing with this strumpet, whose crime God had long before sentenced with death. (Lev. xx. 10.) But yet, remember, that this courting Jael proved a most fatal executioner: the vile Sisera "bowed and fell at her feet." (Judges iv. 21; v. 25—27.) For aught I know, had her father been more severe, he might have prevented her farther defiling and murder by the filthy Gibeathites. (Judges xix. 25—28.) Indulgence is a syren, that first sings and then slays; worse than Jael: *her* hammer and nail destroy only the body; but *this* destroys the soul, and that even by its lullabies, when the unhappy fondling sleeps and snores in the parent's bosom.

2. *Indulgent parents are really cruel to themselves, their posterity, and the church of God.*—For this, we have two such instances in two stars of the greatest magnitude that ever shone in the church's horizon, such indeed as are not to be mentioned without the greatest dread and trembling with respect to their plunge into this deep pit of gross indulgence,—ELI and DAVID. Nay, startle not; these are the men, even good Eli and better David: *the best of men*, and, I had almost said, *the worst of parents*; and then no wonder, if plagued with the worst of children.

First. ELI: his tragical story we find, 1 Sam. ii. 12, to iv. 22.

1. *He had two sons*: "sons of Belial," a brace of hell-hounds, Hophni and Phinehas, whose names do almost stain the sacred writ: wretches that were as desperately lewd as himself was eminently holy. And this appears on these accounts:—

(1.) If the goodness of example, precept, education, profession, could have been antidotes against the extremity of sin, these sons of so holy a father had not been so hellishly wicked. But now neither parentage nor education nor priesthood could restrain the sons of Eli from degenerating into the "sons of Belial;" yea, their wickedness was most desperately improved, boiled up, and fermented to the highest paroxysm.

(2.) Had they not been the sons of Eli a priest, yet, being themselves by office priests of the most high and holy God, who would not have thought, hoped, concluded, that their very calling and function should have at least dictated, if not infused, some holiness

into them? But, O dreadful! even their white and clean ephods are but cloaks of their fouler sins: nay, though they serve at the altar, yet, degenerating from their duty, their wickedness is so far from being extenuated and made less, that it rises so much above others', as their place and station is holier than others'. A wicked priest is the worst, the vilest creature on God's earth,—devils in masquerade. Who are devils now but they that were once angels of light? The worst of dung comes from the best of meat, the most deadly poison out of the sweetest mineral.

(3.) That God, who had promised to be the Levites' portion, had set forth the fair portion of these Levites; and God will not only feed them, but feast them too, and that at his own table, at his own altar. They shall eat of his own morsel, and drink of his own cup. The breast and the right shoulder of the peace-offering were their allowed commons. (Lev. vii. 14, 15, 31—34.) "Well, they are satisfied, they are thankful; are they not?" No such matter. These bold and saucy priests will rather have their flesh-hook their arbiter, than God, and whatever their trident fastens-on shall be for their dainty tooth. They were weary of one or two joints; their delicacy affects more variety: God is not worthy to carve for these men, but their own hands. And thus they do not receive, but take or snatch violently, audaciously, unseasonably, sacrilegiously. It had been but fit that God should have first been served; but their presumption will not stay God's leisure. Ere the fat be burnt, ere the flesh be boiled, they must and will snatch their share from the altar; as if the God of heaven should wait on their curious palate; as if the Jews had come thither, not so much to sacrifice to the Lord Jehovah, as to these priests' bellies. (1 Sam. ii. 13—17.) But, beyond all this,

(4.) Hear, O heavens; and give ear, O earth; and be astonished with all those that bear the name, guilt, and shame of such debauched priests of the altar! Even then and there, at the very altar, the most holy God's throne on earth,—even there, they are no sooner fed, but, like cursed stallions, they neighed after the modest mothers of Israel. Holy women "assemble at the door of the tabernacle;" and these varlets, blackest miscreants,—worse by far than Zimri and Cozbi, all circumstances considered; (Num. xxv. 6;) and well it had been, if that other Phinehas had been nigh them with his avengeful javelin,—tempt, if not force, *them* to adultery *that* came thither for devotion. These wretches had wives of their own; yet their unbridled desires rove after strange flesh, and fear not to pollute even that holy place with abominable filthiness. O, sins too shameful for common men, much more for the spiritual guides of Israel! That ark, which expiated other men's sins, dreadfully added to the sins of these sacrificers. (Jer. ii. 8; Ezek. xxiii. 38; Rom. ii. 17—25.) Thus far as to the sin and wickedness of these miscreants, the children and sons of Eli.

2. *As to old Eli*: did he know all this? It is true especially of great men, that they usually are the very last that are informed of the evil of their own house; but yet as to Eli,

(1.) It could not probably be but, when all Israel rang of the lewdness of his sons, he only should be ignorant of it. But,

(2.) Or if he knew it not, can his ignorance be excused? it being not an ignorance *meræ privationis*, but *pravæ dispositionis*: * for where should Eli have been but in the temple, either for action or oversight? The very presence of the priest keeps God's house in order. It was his grand duty carefully to inspect them, at least diligently to inquire after the due administration of God's ordinances; and a just and seasonable rebuke and restraint might have happily prevented this extremity and height of prodigious debauchery. Nothing but age can plead and apologize for Eli, that he was not the first accuser of these—his sons, will you call them? or—monsters. But,

(3.) Now, when their enormities come to be the cry of the multitude, when it thunders, and he must perforce hear it, and this loud clap must of necessity pierce, not his ears only, but his heart, bowels, conscience: but with what holy fervour, zeal, justice, indignation? †

(i.) Was it,—as with Judah, when it was told him, “Tamar thy daughter-in-law hath played the harlot:” “Bring her forth, and let her be burnt?” (Gen. xxxviii. 24:)—“These my sons are adulterers.”

(ii.) Or, [did he,] as the parents of the “stubborn and rebellious son,” lay hold of them and carry them forth to the elders of the city, and say to the elders of the city?—“These my sons are stubborn and rebellious; they have not, will not obey my voice: let them be stoned to death.” So God commanded, Deut. xxi. 18—22. Thus, even thus, should Eli, who was not only the chief priest, but the supreme judge, of Israel, impartially have judged his own corrupted flesh; and never could he have offered a more pleasing sacrifice than the corrupt gore-blood of so wicked sons.

(i.) Doubtless Eli knew full well that it was in vain to rebuke those sins abroad which we tolerate at home; that that man makes himself a ridicule, that leaves his own house on fire, and runs to quench his neighbour's; and, quitting his own family infected with the plague, hastens to the cure of his neighbour.

(ii.) We find, this good Eli, as old as he was, could be tart and sharp enough to another,—to godly, mourning, praying Hannah, when he “*thought*” only “she had been drunken” before the Lord, upon but the bare suspicion of a sin: “How long wilt thou be drunken? Put away thy wine from thee!” (1 Sam. i. 13, 14.) It is true, his reproof arose from misprision, but that misprision sprang from zeal.

(iii.) But what now? In the case before us, you cannot but expect to find him screwed-up to a note beyond E-la, † inflamed *ad octo*; the zeal, the fire, the furnace heated seven times more than usually; the

* “It being not an ignorance of mere privation, but one proceeding from a depraved disposition.”—EDIT.

† To make the sense complete, the addition of some clause similar to this seems to be required: “But with what holy fervour, &c. does he begin to perform his painful duty?”—EDIT.

‡ On this subject see a note in vol. 1. p. 373.

burning zeal of his God's house must needs consume him. For satisfaction, read 1 Sam. ii. 22—26: "Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And he said unto them:"—"To shame, to torment, to hell with them! To the worm that dies not, to the fire that never shall be quenched!" Was this his sentence? No, no. But, to amazement, hear what he says:—

(iv.) "He said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the Lord's people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?" (Verses 24, 25.) See here indulgence, to a prodigy, to the notorious crimes of his wicked sons!

(i.) How soon do we find the case altered! To Hannah he spake as a holy priest, a just judge; to these, as a fond, indulgent father. If corrupt nature be allowed to speak in judgment, and to make difference, not of crimes, but criminals; not of sins, but offenders; the scales will not be equal.

(ii.) Had these wretches but a little slacked their duty, or heedlessly omitted some rites of the sacrifices, this censure had not been so unbecoming.

(iii.) But, to punish the thefts, rapines, sacrileges, adulteries of his sons with a mere, "Why do you so?" was no other than to shave that head that deserved the axe. As it is with ill humours,—a weak dose doth but irritate and anger them, not purge them out; so it fares with habituated sins, and so it did here: "They hearkened not unto the voice of their father." (Verse 25.) An easy reproof doth but encourage wickedness, and makes it think itself so slight as that censure imports. Nay, a vehement reproof—if no more—to a capital evil is, at most, but like a smart shower to a ripe field, which only lays that corn which is worthy of a sickle. It is a breach of justice, not to proportion the punishment to the offence. To whip a man for murder; to punish the purse only for incest; to burn treason in the hand; to award the stocks to burglary; to lay-on the verge, [rod,] where the axe or gibbet are deserved;—is to patronize evil, instead of avenging it.

Thus we have seen the children's wickedness, and the father's indulgence. But is there not a *melius inquirendum** in the case? Yes, yes; from a fond and partial bar, to a strict and impartial tribunal.

3. *God himself, and the greatest party concerned and the most injured, interposes.*—Poor Eli could not have devised or studied a

* "A further and more particular inquiry;" thus described by Phillips and Kersey: "A writ directed to the escheator for a second inquiring of what lands and tenements a man died possessed, when there is any suspicion of partiality in an inquiry made upon a previous writ."—EDIT.

more compendious and effectual way to have plagued himself, his house, his posterity, than by this his sinful kindness to his children's sins.

(1.) What variety of judgments doth he now hear of, from the messenger of God! (1 Sam. ii. 27—36.) Because he had now doted in his old age, there should “not be an old man left of his house for ever.” Because it vexed him not enough to see his sons enemies to God, he shall see his own enemies in the habitation of the Lord. (Verse 32.) Because himself forbore to take vengeance of his sons, and esteemed their lives above the glory of his God and Master; therefore God himself will take the sword into his own hand, and kill them both in one day. (Verse 34; chap. iv. 11.) Because he abused his authority, and connived at sin, and honoured his sons before God; therefore his house shall be stripped of his honour, and it should be translated to another. (Verses 30—32, 35.) Because he suffered his sons to please their wanton appetites, in taking meat from off God's trencher; therefore those who remain of his house shall come to his successors, and beg a picce of silver to buy a morsel of bread. (Verse 36.) Because he was fond and partial to his sons, God will execute all this and more on him and them, severely and impartially. (1 Sam. iii. 11—14.)

(2.) Observe, I beseech you, observe, indulgent citizens, we do not read of any sin that Eli was charged with, but with that which is epidemical, I fear, among you, and looked upon as a peccadillo, and if a sin, at most but venial. What were these dreadful menaces against Eli, but premonitions to us? these murdering cannons to him, but our warning-pieces? God says, yea, God swears, that he “will judge Eli's house,” and that with beggary, with death, with desolation; and “that the wickedness of his house should not be purged with sacrifices nor offerings for ever.” (1 Sam. iii. 11—14.) Do not your ears tingle at the mention of these things? Do you not wonder, that the neck and heart, both, of poor Eli were not broken at the report of them?

(3.) We have heard the sentence; and, (notwithstanding Eli's repentance and the saving of his soul, yet,) for the necessary vindication of God's honour, holiness, justice, here below see the dreadful execution.

(i.) The Philistines and Israel join in battle: Israel is “smitten, and fled: there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. And the ark of God was taken.” (1 Sam. iv. 10, 11.) (ii.) The two caitiffs, that had lived before to bring God's ark into contempt, and had now lived to carry it into captivity, [were] both slain by the Philistines. (iii.) Eli, now ninety-eight years old, at the news of this, falls backward from his seat, and breaks his neck. (iv.) To make the tragedy complete, the wife of that cursed Phinehas, as not minding father, husband, self, child, with her last breath pants-out a doleful epitaph on the captive ark, and stamps it on her child's forehead: “Call it **ICHABOD**: for the ark of God is taken.” (Verses 21, 22.)

Before we proceed, let us cast our eye back, and but glance on the sin that was the grand cause of this *strages* ["slaughter"]. Because he "honoured his sons above me;" (1 Sam. ii. 29;) "for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." (1 Sam. iii. 13.) *Hinc illæ lachrymæ.** O cruel indulgence! the jury hath sat upon thee, and given-in this as their just and unanimous verdict,—that thou art guilty of the death of father and children, of priests and people; or of the captivity of the ark at least, if not the destruction of religion. By this time, I suppose, your ears and hearts may be full, if not loaden. If not, take the third and last; and that, who is [it,] but

DAVID? who was no less unhappy in, than indulgent to, three of his children: *Adonijah, Amnon, Absalom.*

1. *Adonijah* is much made of, greatly cockered, his father's darling and delight: from his infancy "his father" David "had not displeased him at any time," do he what he would; no, not in so much as "saying, Why hast thou done so?" (1 Kings i. 6.) And well might the cockered youngster think, since he had got the throne of his father's heart, it would not be so high a leap to usurp the throne of his father's kingdom, (verses 5—25,) and *that* whilst his father was yet living; specially since his elder brother Absalom was now dead; (but yet he might have remembered how that Phaëton fell;) nay, more, though he knew that his father, according to God's special appointment, had declared Solomon to be the heir-apparent of his crown and kingdom. For all this, David did, or durst, not reprove him. No; his treason is no such great matter, but a light thing, and to be looked upon only as the brisk effort of a vain, if not a gallant, spirit. For all this, yet not such a word from David as, "Why hast thou done so, Adonijah?" Well, if the fond father will not, the wise son shall and will make this vain fondling know himself, especially when his subtle ambition so far discovered itself, in asking Abishag the Shunammite, David's concubine; by creeping into his father's bed, to make his way to his brother's throne. *This* Solomon was well aware of, and commands him to be put to death, as a just reward of his old-practised and new-intended treason. (1 Kings ii. 25.) There is *Adonijah's exit.*

2. The next is *Amnon*, guilty of incest with his own sister, yea, and this incest committed with rape; (2 Sam. xiii. 14;) Amnon, a person to be anathematized by the whole congregation, (Deut. xxvii. 22,) and to be punished with death. (Lev. xx. 17.) But what doth David do in the case? The text saith: "When king David heard of all these things, he was very wroth." (2 Sam. xiii. 21.)

(1.) But was that all? Alas! what was that, but a great flash and noise without a bullet? And *this* Absalom, that ravished virgin's own brother, deeply resents, and is resolved upon a just revenge. (Verse 22.) Certainly the incestuous son might justly have expected

* TERENTII *Audria*, act. i. scen. i. 99. "Hence were those tears."—COLMAN'S Translation.

more than a sudden aguish fit of hot displeasure of a father; namely, the danger of the law, the indignation of a brother, the shame and outcry of the world.

(2.) What a stab in the heart, a sword in the bowels, must this needs be to Tamar's father, David, whose command, out of love to Amnon, had cast his dearest daughter into the den and jaws of this lion! (Verse 7.) What an insolent affront must he needs construe this to be offered by a son to a father,—that the father shall be made, as it were, a pander of his own daughter to his own son!

(3.) David, that tender father, that lay upon the ground, and would eat no bread, for the sickness of a child; (which yet was but the spawn of an adulterous bed;) how vexed, enraged, inflamed must he needs be with the villany of his son, with the ravishment of his daughter, both of them more deeply wounding than many deaths! What revenge can he think of for so heinous a crime less than death, and that in its most bloody dress?

(4.) And yet what less than death is it to this indulgent father to think of a due revenge? Rape was by the law of God capital; (Deut. xxii. 25;) how much more, when seconded with incest! Anger, though never so hot and eager, is not punishment enough for so high, so complicated an offence. Such mild injustice is no less provoking to Heaven and perilous to a commonwealth than the fiercest cruelty. For aught I know, the blood of souls murdered by foolish pity cries as loud in the ears of Divine Justice, as the blood of bodies slain by cruel severity. And yet this is all we hear of from so indulgent a father; unless, perhaps, he makes up the rest with sorrow, and so punishes his son's miscarriage on himself. (2 Sam. xiii. 37.) But,

(5.) If David, perhaps out of the consciousness to himself of his late adultery and murder, will not punish this horrid fact, his son Absalom shall; and that, not so much out of any zeal or of justice, as desire of revenge. (2 Sam. xiii. 28, 29.) See Amnon there weltering in his blood, murdered by Absalom's command, when he was drunk; and so, for aught we know, soul and body sunk at once, and that eternally. One act of injustice draws on another: the injustice of indulgent David in not punishing the rape of Tamar, procures the injustice of Absalom in punishing Amnon with murder. That which the father should have justly revenged and did not, the son revengeth unjustly. However, in all this the Lord, the supreme Judge, is righteous; to reckon for those sins which human partiality or negligence had omitted; and whilst he punisheth sin with sin, to punish sin with death. Had David called Amnon to a severe account for this unpardonable villany, the revenge had not been so desperate. Thus, to David's horror, fell Amnon. The third and last, that brings up the rear of those serpents that lay so warm in David's bosom, was that great gallant, the glistening minion of the court,

3. *Absalom*: Absalom *the murderer*, Absalom *the rebel*, and yet, for all that, Absalom *the beloved*.

(1.) Absalom *the murderer*, and that of his own brother Amnon, as

we have heard; that for two full years had sat close, brooding the deepest revenge. Having dispatched his brother *εἰς ᾅδου*, ["to hades,"] away he flies to Geshur, and for three years hides and shelters himself in his grandfather's court. (2 Sam. xiii. 34, 37, 38; iii. 3.) But doth not David post his ambassadors after and demand him thence, to be returned and delivered up as a sacrifice, to stop the cry of his brother's blood, that roared for vengeance? at least in three years' time? No; not a word of that. But see and be amazed at the quite contrary workings of his distempered heart: verse 39: "The soul of king David longed," or "was even consumed," "to go forth unto Absalom: for he was comforted concerning Amnon, seeing he was dead." The three years' absence seemed not so much a banishment to the son as a punishment to the father. It is true, David, out of his wisdom, so inclines to favour as that he conceals it; and yet so conceals it as that Joab, who could see light through the smallest chink by his piercing eye, could clearly discover it. Joab reads David's heart in his countenance, and knows how to humour and serve him in that which he would, and yet seemed [as if] he would not, have accomplished; and, by that cunning fetch of the woman of Tekoah, brings into the light that birth of desire whereof he knew David was both big and ashamed. (2 Sam. xiv. 21.) See here the mask of royal indulgence. It is not David that recalls Absalom; not he: he only does it to answer the humble petition of an importunate subject, and to follow the advice of Joab, a discreet counsellor: "The king said unto Joab, Behold now, I have done this thing" that ye desire: "go therefore, bring the young man Absalom again." But, stay; another fetch: "Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face," (verse 24,) for fear the people should cry "Shame!" on this unjust indulgence.

(2.) Absalom *the rebel*, Absalom *the traitor*: having prepared the people for a rebellion by a wicked insinuation of his father's unjust government, he sets up as king in Hebron; "and the conspiracy was strong." (2 Sam. xv. 10, 12.) His eye is on the metropolis: his first march must be to Jerusalem. To make room for the young rebel, the poor old father must pack up, and be gone, (verse 14,) with a heavy heart, weeping eye, covered head, and bare feet, as it were. Never did he with more joy come up to this city, than [he] now left it with sorrow: and how could he do otherwise, when the insurrection of his dearly beloved son drove him out from his chief city and throne, yea, from the ark of God?

(i.) *His first prank* was a sufficient earnest of what was like to ensue; an act of the highest incestuous uncleanness that ever the sun saw: "They spread Absalom a tent upon the top of the house; and Absalom went in unto his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel." (2 Sam. xvi. 21—23.) The practice was like the counsel, (verse 21,) as deep as hell itself, an act incapable of forgiveness. Beside the usurping [of] the throne, to violate the bed, of his father,—unto his treason to add incest,—is no less unnatural. That the world might see that Absalom neither hoped nor cared for the reconciliation

of a father, and as if the villany could not have been shameful enough in secret, he sets up his tent in the top of the house, and lets all Israel be witness of his own sin and his father's shame. Ordinary sins are for vulgar offenders; but Absalom sins like himself,—eminently, transcendently; and doeth that which may make the world at once to blush and wonder. The filthiness of the sin is not more great than the impudence of the matter.

(ii.) *His pursuit.* (2 Sam. xv. 14.)—Absalom is now in his high march, ready to make his onset. David rallies up all the forces he could make, not so much to assault his son as to defend himself. But see his charge: 2 Sam. xviii. 5: "The king commanded Joab and Abishai and Ittai," his three generals, "saying,"—"Fight neither against small nor great; for they, poor deluded souls, are come forth in the simplicity of their hearts, are merely drawn in, and know not any thing: (2 Sam. xv. 11:) but against the head and ringleader of these rebels, that son, or traitor rather, that 'came forth of my bowels, and seeks my life.'" (2 Sam. xvi. 11.) Is not this David's charge? No; not such a syllable in their commission: but thus, which is not to be mentioned without a blush:—"Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom." (2 Sam. xviii. 5.) But, stay; what do I hear? Is this the voice of David? What! that David that formerly was forced to employ his arms for his defence against a tyrannous father-in-law, and is now forced to buckle them on against an unnatural son? What! he that has mustered his men, commissioned his generals, marshalled his troops? What! is this his charge and word and signal for the battle? Doth he at once seem to encourage them by his eye, and restrain them with his tongue? O David, what means this ill-placed love? this unjust, cruel mercy? "Deal gently with" a traitor! of all traitors, with a son! of all sons, with an Absalom! the graceless, murderous, incestuous, traitorous son of so good, so tender a father! And all this "for my sake," whose crown, kingdom, blood, he hunts after? For whose sake must this wretch be pursued, if he must be forborne for thine? He was still courteous, though hypocritically, to thy followers, affable to suitors, plausible to all Israel, that so he might be perfectly cruel to thee. Wherefore are these arms, if the sole cause of the quarrel must be the attractive, persuasive motive of mercy? Yet thou sayest, "Deal gently." We see, even in the holiest parents on earth, corrupt nature may be guilty of most unjust tenderness, of bloody indulgence. But let us advance a step farther.

(iii.) *The battle is joined.*—The God of justice takes part with justice; lets Israel, foolish Israel, feel, what it is to take part with, and to bear arms for, a traitorous usurper. The sword devours twenty thousand of them; and the "wood devoured more than the sword." Among the rest, the loyal oak singles out the ringleader of this horrible conspiracy, and by one of his spreading arms becomes at once his gaol and gibbet! (2 Sam. xviii. 6—9.) The justice of God twists a halter of his locks: and no marvel if his own hair turned traitor to him, who durst rise up against his father. Joab is informed

that the beast is noosed, comes and sees him hanging, makes no demur, but immediately thrust three darts through the heart of the bloody traitor. What the poor soldier forbore to do in obedience, (verses 12, 13,) that the general doeth in zeal; (verse 14;) not fearing to prefer his sovereign's safety before and beyond all little respects whatever, as being more tender of the life of his prince and the peace of his people, than the weak or strong affections of a misguided father. (Verses 14, 15.)

(iv.) Now for *the catastrophe*, the last scene.—The battle is ended: David hears the trumpets sound a retreat. "What news?" Our care is wont to be where our love is. "How fares the army? Joab, Abishai, Ittai, my generals,—how is it with them? My crown,—does it stand more firm and fixed? or is it fallen? Speak, Ahimaaz; say, Cush." None of this in the least; but, to the everlasting reproach of fond parents, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" (Verse 29.) Ahimaaz prudently answers, "The Lord hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king." (Verses 28, 29.) Ahimaaz, "turn thou aside, and stand thou here." Behold, here comes Cush, with a joyful heart and open mouth: "Tidings, my lord the king: for the Lord hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee." (Verse 31.) But these are not the tidings that David so much pants after. Cush, thou must learn to distinguish betwixt the king and the father, and tell him plainly, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" "That murderous, incestuous traitor, whom thou callest 'the young man,' is dead, O king; and let the enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is." (Verse 32.)

(v.) *And what says king David to this?*—Methinks I hear him say, "Come, my dear people; come, and let us 'sing aloud unto God our strength, and make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob. Take a psalm, and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psaltery. Blow up the trumpet' as 'in the new moon,' as on a 'solemn feast-day.' Let this be 'a statute for Israel:' (Psalm lxxxi. 1—4:) for 'this is the day that the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and triumph in it.' (Psalm cxviii. 24.) 'The king shall joy in thy strength, O Lord; and in thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice!' (Psalm xxi. 1.) 'The Lord is known by the judgment which he hath executed: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. Higgaion. Selah.'" (Psalm ix. 16.) Is this the *Io triumphe*, ["shout of triumph,"] wherewith he makes the earth to ring again? No; but, on the contrary, the poor father, being as it were thunder-struck with the words of his blackamoor, forgets that he was a king and father of his country, looks like Jephthah when he met his devoted daughter, and, as if bereaved of all comfort, breaks out into a flood of tears, and into such an indecent lamentation as no records either sacred or human can parallel: "The king was much moved, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son. Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (2 Sam. xviii. 33.) My just indigna-

tion at this more than womanish transport forbids me to descant on it. I shall barely lay before you Joab's smart repartee, whereby he endeavoured to stop this deluge: "Joab said to the king, Thou hast shamed this day the faces of all thy servants, which this day have saved thy life, and the lives of thy sons and of thy daughters, and the lives of thy wives, and the lives of thy concubines; in that thou lovest thine enemies and hatest thy friends. For thou hast declared this day, that thou regardest neither princes nor servants: for this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well." (2 Sam. xix. 5, 6.)

And thus we have seen the malady: turn we now to the remedy. The plague-sore has been opened; now for the bunch of figs.

II. *What may gracious parents best do for the conversion of those their children, whose wickedness has been occasioned by their own sinful INDULGENCE?*

1. *Reflect seriously on your heart and ways.*—Beg, and beg sincerely, earnestly, believingly, constantly, of the Lord, effectually to convince you of the great sinfulness and mischief of your indulgence, and to humble you deeply for it. O, cast yourselves at the foot of God; lament it, weep over it; mourn as doves before the Lord, when you see (if indeed you can see, and fondness hath not quite put out your eyes) pride, stubbornness, profaneness, averseness from God, all sorts and degrees of sins and corruptions, break forth in your children's lives. And that,

(1.) *With respect to your children.*—And this,

(i.) *Not only as the natural roots from whom all this their lewdness springs.*—They drew it from the womb and breast: they were poisoned in the very spring. (Psalm li. 5; Job xiv. 1; xv. 14; xxv. 4.) This consideration only, if no more,—to see your children rotting, sinking, dying with a loathsome disease, which they drew from your loins,—were enough to rend your hearts and caul. But,

(ii.) *By your wretched indulgence,* you have added much fuel to this flame; you have heated your furnace seven times hotter. Your indulgence hath fomented, yea, inflamed, their wickedness. You have heightened their fever into a plague; and that worse a thousand times than that of the body, which ends in a temporal death; but this is of their souls, and is like to sink them for ever into a gulf of fire and brimstone.

(2.) *With respect to God.*—The Lord was wroth with the serpent, and cursed him for ever, because but an instrument used by Satan for corrupting our first parents, though no cause at all of it. (Gen. iii. 14.) May not the Lord be much more angry with us, and cause his wrath to smoke against us, that have not only been instruments really to convey this poison and corruption of nature into our children's bosoms, but the principal occasions of their superadded wickedness? You see, on both these accounts, matter of deep humiliation.

2. *Love your children.*—Hearken, indulgent parents; I say it again, Love your children. Yea, love them—I say not, more, but—

better than ever yet you loved them. You can never love them *too well*: you may and have loved them *too much*. One saith well, "None is to be loved much, but He only whom we can never love too much." Love them with all the kinds, degrees, properties of love before-mentioned.

(1.) *Love them so as to be tender of their bodies, their outward man.*—Let that want nothing that is necessary, convenient, comfortable, suitable to their age or quality: but, *above all, love their souls, their inward man.* The cabinet must not be neglected; but the jewel is to be most regarded. The ring is to be duly esteemed; but the diamond in it most highly to be prized.

The love of our children's souls is the very soul and spirit and elixir of true parental love. If we truly love their souls, we shall unfeignedly desire and vigorously endeavour their spiritual and eternal salvation. If you love their souls indeed, your heart's desire and prayer to God for them will be, "that they may be saved." (Rom. x. 1.) You will put forth your utmost affections and strength to lift them up out of that pit of sin and misery in which they lie, and to raise them into and fix them in a state of grace. If we do not really grieve to see our children lie weltering in their sins of ignorance, unbelief, folly, profaneness, and so under the power and paw of Satan; if we do not faithfully labour to preserve them from perishing, but "suffer sin upon" them; pretend what we will, let us show never so much love with our mouth, God says, we really hate them in our hearts. (Lev. xix. 17.) See how Solomon's parents expressed their love to him: "I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thy heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live." (Prov. iv. 3, 4.) If you love them in deed and in truth, you will, you can "have no greater joy, than to" see your "children walking in the truth." (3 John 4.) That foolish son who is now a "heaviness to his mother," being made truly wise, will "make a glad father." (Prov. x. 1.) O, what a lovely sight, what a soul-ravishing object in a godly parent's eye, is a hopeful Timothy, an obedient, godly Joseph! (Prov. xxiii. 24, 25.) Well, then, love your children, and in the first place their precious souls. If you find [that] your love and care goes out more for their bodies than souls, so far mistrust your love; it is carnal.

(2.) *Love your children truly, tenderly; but yet take heed that you do not over-love them.*—"But when is that?" Certainly, when you love them more than you love God and Christ, you over-love them. "But who does so?" I shall not charge you; but give me leave to ask you a question or two. Tell me, (i.) When your God's glory and your child's good are nearly concerned, for which doth your zeal most hotly glow? Are not your affections most fiery where they should be most cool? and where they should burn, there they freeze? Doth not your heart make you believe [that] it loves God, and gives him pledges of your affection, while it secretly dotes chiefly on the dandled child? like some false strumpet, that entertains her husband

with her eyes, and in the mean time treads on the toe of her paramour. (ii.) Do you not often think [that] you love God *enough*? and when [you love] your child most, yet [do you not think that you love it] *but enough*, nay, *never enough*? Your head, heart, hand, purse, mandrakes, five messes, breasts, bowels,—all [are] but little enough, too little, for your child, your idol: is it so as to your God? So to love our child as thereby to lessen our love to God, yea, or to equalize it with our love to God, is not only indulgence, but idolatry; and an idol of flesh and blood is to be abhorred as well as that of wood or stone. Assuredly, the best way to quench this exorbitant love to children on earth, is to set your hearts and affections more on your Father in heaven; on God, his Christ, Spirit, word, ways, rewards. (Luke xii. 30; Isai. xxxiii. 6; 1 Peter i. 24, 25.) Look but directly on that sun, and thine eyes will quickly be dazzled to these glittering glow-worms here below. Make that invaluable pearl but thy treasure, and thou wilt lightly esteem these Bristol-stones. Take but Christ fully and wholly into thy heart and bosom, and thou wilt quickly yield; thy child's proper place is but thy foot or knee. In a word: if God in Christ be thy God indeed, thou wilt abhor the thought and practice of making thy child his cor-rival.

(3.) *Love your children, but love them wisely.*—Give them your hearts into their bosoms, but not the reins on their necks. When you do so, at the same time, mount them on your fiercest beast, furnish them with switch and spur, but without bit or bridle; and then do but pause and think soberly of the period of their full career. Love them, I say; but still be careful to maintain that just authority and pre-eminence that God hath given you over them. A parent that hath lost his authority, is as salt that hath lost its savour: like the log sent from Jupiter, every frog in the family [is] apt to leap upon him. And remember it, fond parents, there is nothing in the world that renders you more vile, cheap, contemptible in the eyes even of your children themselves, when they begin to put forth the first buds of reason,—nothing that lays your authority more in the dust, and exposes you to the foot and spurn of your child,—than sinful indulgence. “A foolish man despiseth his mother.” (Prov. xv. 20.) His mother's folly made him a fool; of a foolish child he at length grows up into a man, but “a foolish man;” and this “foolish man despises his mother.” If you are fathers, then, take care of your honour; if mothers, be sure to carry it so, as to preserve in your children that awful respect and reverence which they owe you. (Mal. i. 6; Heb. xii. 9.)

(4.) *Love your children, but love them in God and for God.*—Love his image in them, more than your own. In a word: let God's Spirit be the principle, God's word the rule, God's example the pattern, and his glory the end, of your dearest love to your dearest children. Love them as God loves his children. “But how?”

(i.) *God so loves his children's persons, as that he infinitely hates their sins.*—Nay, because he loves their persons, for that very reason he hates their sins. Because I love my child, therefore I hate

the toad that I see crawling on his bosom. God doth infinitely love his people; and yet in this life he shows more hatred against the sins of his own people, than he doth against the sins of any other men in the world.

(First.) Here he afflicts all his own people for sin, one way or other,—every mother's son of them; (Heb. xii. 6—8; Job x. 14; Isai. xxx. 20; xlvi. 10;) but is patient toward the wicked, lets them run riot without control. (Psalm l. 21; xi. 5; xiii. 4; 2 Peter ii. 9.)

(Secondly.) When he intends to bring a general judgment on a nation, he uses to begin with his own people. (Isai. xxviii. 18; 1 Peter iv. 17; Jer. xxv. 17, 18; Luke xxi. 10—12.)

(Thirdly.) When he makes any an example unto others of his hatred against sin, [he] makes choice of his own people before wicked men. (Isai. viii. 18; 1 Cor. iv. 9; 1 Kings xiii. 24—32.)

(Fourthly.) [His] judgments [are] more sharp on his own people than others. (Psalm lxxxviii. 7; Lam. i. 12; Dan. ix. 12.)

(ii.) *All this he doeth out of the purest eternal and unchangeable love that he bears [to] his children.*—God chastens and corrects his children, that he may keep them from sinning as others do and as themselves have done, and from perishing for ever in their sins as others shall. He meddles not with thorns and briars; but prunes his vines, that they may no more yield such sour grapes. He casts his children as gold into a furnace here, to refine and purify them, that he may not be forced to cast them as stubble into an eternal flaming oven hereafter; and this in love. (Exod. iv. 24; Job vii. 17—19; Psalm cxix. 71, 75; lxxxix. 30—38; Jer. l. 7; Lam. iii. 33; Hosea iv. 14; Amos iii. 2; Heb. xii. 6, 7; Rev. iii. 19; 1 Cor. xi. 30, 32.) And now, parents, as you have seen your heavenly Father do, do you. In his strength follow his example.

(i.) *Love your children's persons; and because you love them, hate their sins.*—The sins of those most, whom you love most. You see, your God doeth so. Be not so blinded as that you can see no fault in them; nor so madly doting as to delight in their blemishes, to kiss their plague-sores; nor so indulgent as to be loath to grieve or displease them, when grossly criminal. Especially,

(ii.) *Let your holy strictness show itself against those whom you most affect.*—Tell them, “Child, I love you; and therefore I cannot, will not behold the least iniquity in you.” (Hab. i. 13.) So Christ acted toward his beloved disciples. (Matt. xv. 16, 17; xvii. 17.) Tell them, you cannot, will not pardon them. (Exod. xxiii. 21.) Let them know that you can be angry; and if words will not do, the rod shall; and that you can make that rod smart. (Exod. iv. 24.) Tell them, though they may presume to provoke you to bewail them, you will not suffer them to provoke God to hate them; (Isai. lxiii. 10; Psalm lxxviii. 58, 59;) and that you had rather hear them cry, and see them bleed, yea, and die here, than hear them howl, and see them burned and damned hereafter. Correct them, therefore, but in love, wisdom, measure, season.

OBJECTION. But I hear the bleatings of fond parents: "O, forbear, good sir, forbear! These are hard sayings: the land, the city, is not able to bear them. It is nothing but love that makes us to bear with our children. Alas! who could find in their hearts to beat so sweet a child?"

SOLUTION. "Nothing but love?" That is not so; the Holy Ghost gives thee the lie: it is not love, but real hatred, not to correct offending children. (Prov. xiii. 24; xxii. 15; xxix. 15, 17.)

OBJECT. "But they are little; and time enough hereafter."

SOL. Betimes: "While there is hope." (Prov. xix. 18.) Nip them in the bud; small hopes afterward, if neglected now.

OBJECT. "I cannot endure to hear him cry."

SOL. "Let not thy soul spare for his crying." It is strange to see how the Holy Ghost meets with these fond parents at every turning.

OBJECT. "But would you have me cruel to my own child?"

SOL. No; and therefore correct him. Thou art unmerciful and cruel to thy child, if thou dost not correct him: he will die and perish, if thou correct him not. (Prov. xxiii. 13.) His arm is gangrened; he dies if thou dost not cut it off. He is in an apoplexy; cup him, lance him, scarify him; or he is gone, and that for ever.

OBJECT. "Alas! children's faults are nothing."

SOL. What! is their stubbornness, pride, lying, disobedience,—it may be cursing, swearing,—nothing? These all lead to hell, from whence thy rod is ordained and sanctified by God to deliver him. (Prov. xxiii. 14.)

OBJECT. "But this is the way to make my child hate me; yea, to make him a dullard, a sot; so that I shall never have any comfort in him."

SOL. Better that thy child should hate thee for doing thy duty, than thy God for committing sin, yea, a comprehensive, complicated sin; all the sins [which] thy child commits upon thy neglect of correction are thine own. But read and believe Solomon: "Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul." (Prov. xxix. 17.)

(iii.) *Whenever you correct, be sure you admonish your child.*—So, in the text, *παιδεία* ["discipline"] and *νουθεσία* ["admonition"] are joined. Thus, David saith, thy heavenly Father doeth: he "chasteneth" first, and then "teacheth." (Psalm xciv. 12.) Lay God's law, and his sin against that law, before him. I have known a man that, when he corrected his child, would bring his Bible forth, cause his child to read such a scripture as spake home to the case; and this hath pierced deeper than the rod. Not beat with rigour, nor yet with silence; nor give strokes without words, which may possibly cause the child to see his fault, and come to an amendment. In public justice there goes eviction of the fact before the sentence, and a word of admonition before execution. If our child heedlessly fall into the dirt, we do not let him lie, and beat him; but first help him up, settle all

things well about him; after that correct him; but close all with charging him to look better to his feet.

(iv.) *To correction and admonition add faithful, fervent, constant supplications.*—Without this all other means are ineffectual. It is thy heavenly Father that must do the feat at last: it is he alone [that] must work effectually in thy poor child both to will and do. Bring him to Bethesda, put him in there; beg thy God to stir the waters, and to make them healing. With the woman of Canaan, carry thy child to Christ. (Matt. xv. 22.) Remember Job: he “sent and sanctified” his children. (Job i. 5.) Wouldst thou have thy child a Samuel, a Solomon, an Austin? Be thou a Hannah, a Bathsheba, a Monica. Let thy child be the child of thy prayers, vows, tears; (1 Sam. i. 12—20; Prov. xxxi. 2;) and that is the way to make him a child of thy praises, joys, and triumphs, with the father in the parable. (Luke xv. 32.)

(v.) *For a close of all, add a good example.*—Cause it to appear to thy child’s conscience, that thou hast begun to mend first, to repent of thy darling-sin of indulgence. That done, thou mayest fairly hope that this loadstone may draw him to repentance: parents’ examples are high magnetics. (2 Kings xiv. 3; xv. 3, 34.)

OBJECTION. Say both severe and indulgent parents, “These things have we done, and that faithfully; and yet our children remain wicked.”

SOLUTION 1. However, none have more cause to expect and with patience to wait for God’s blessing on use of means, because your children are certainly under God’s faithful promise. (Gen. xvii. 7; Isai. xlv. 3.) 2. You have delivered your own souls. (Ezek. iii. 19.) 3. Your endeavours [are] graciously accepted. (Isai. xlix. 4; 2 Cor. viii. 12.) 4. Your prayers shall return into your own bosom. (Psalm xxxv. 13.)