

LECTURE IV.

CHARITY DISPOSES US MEEKLY TO BEAR THE
INJURIES RECEIVED FROM OTHERS.

' Charity suffereth long and is kind.'—1 CORINTHIANS xiii. 4

THE Apostle, in the previous verses, as we have seen, sets forth how great and essential a thing charity, or a spirit of Christian love, is, in Christianity: that it is far more necessary and excellent than any of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit; that it far exceeds all external performances and sufferings; and, in short, that it is the sum of all that is distinguishing and saving in Christianity—the very life and soul of all religion, without which, though we give all our goods to feed the poor, and our bodies to be burned, we are nothing. And now he proceeds, as his subject naturally leads him, to show the excellent nature of charity, by describing its several amiable and

excellent fruits. In the text two of these fruits are mentioned: *suffering long*, which has respect to the evil or injury received from others; and *being kind*, which has respect to the good to be done to others. Dwelling, for the present, on the first of these points, I would endeavor to show,

THAT CHARITY, OR A TRULY CHRISTIAN SPIRIT, WILL DISPOSE US MEEKLY TO BEAR THE EVIL THAT IS RECEIVED FROM OTHERS, OR THE INJURIES THAT OTHERS MAY DO TO US.

Meekness is a great part of the Christian spirit. Christ, in that earnest and touching call and invitation of his that we have in the eleventh chapter of Matthew, in which he invites all that labor and are heavy-laden to come to himself for rest, particularly mentions, that he would have them come, to *learn* of him; for he adds, "I am meek and lowly of heart." And meekness, as it respects injuries received from men, is called *long-suffering* in the Scriptures, and is often mentioned as an exercise, or fruit of the Christian spirit (Galatians, v. 22): "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering;" and (Ephesians iv. 1, 2): "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk

worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness, and meekness, with long-suffering, &c.;" and Colosians iii. 12, 13: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."

In dwelling more fully on this point, I would, 1. Take notice of some of the various kinds of injuries that we may receive from others; 2. Show what is meant by meekly bearing such injuries; and, 3. How that love which is the sun of the Christian spirit, will dispose us to do this. And,

I. *I would briefly notice some of the various kinds of injuries that we may or do receive from others.*—Some injure others in their estates, by unfairness and dishonesty in their dealings, by being fraudulent and deceitful with them, or at least by leading them to act in the dark, and taking advantage of their ignorance; or by oppressing them, taking advantage of their necessities; or by unfaithfulness towards them, not fulfilling their promises and engagements, and being slack and slighting in any business they

are employed in by their neighbors, aiming at nothing but just to meet the letter of their engagements, and not being careful to improve their time to the utmost in accomplishing that which they are engaged to do ; or by asking unreasonable prices for what they do ; or by withholding what is due, from their neighbors, unjustly, neglecting to pay their debts, or unnecessarily putting their neighbors to trouble and difficulty to get what is due from them. And besides these, there are many other methods in which men injure one another in their dealings, by an abundance of crooked and perverse ways in which they are far from doing to others as they would have them do to themselves, and by which they provoke, and irritate, and injure one another.

Some injure others in their good name, by reproaching or speaking evil of them behind their backs. No injury is more common, and no iniquity more frequent or base than this. Other ways of injury are abundant ; but the amount of injury by evil-speaking of this kind, is beyond account. Some injure others by making or spreading false reports about them, and so cruelly slandering them. Others, without saying that which is directly false,

greatly misrepresent things, picturing out everything respecting their neighbors in the worst colors, exaggerating their faults, and setting them forth as far greater than they really are, always speaking of them in an unfair and unjust manner. A great deal of injury is done among neighbors by thus uncharitably judging one another, and putting injurious and evil constructions on one another's words and actions.

Persons may greatly injure others in their thoughts, by unjustly entertaining mean thoughts, or a low esteem of them. Some are deeply and continually injurious to others, by the contempt they habitually have of them in their hearts, and by their willingness to think the worst about them. And, as the outflowing of the thoughts, a great deal is done to the injury of others by the words ;—for the tongue is but too ready to be the wicked instrument of expressing the evil thoughts and feelings of the soul, and hence in the Scriptures (Job v. 21), it is called a scourge, and is compared (Ps. cxl. 3) to the fangs of some very poisonous kinds of serpents, whose bite is supposed to cause death.

Sometimes men injure others in their treat-

ment and actions towards them, and in the injurious deeds they do them. If clothed with authority, they sometimes carry themselves very injuriously toward those over whom their authority extends, by behaving very assumingly, and magisterially, and tyrannically toward them; and sometimes those who are under authority, carry themselves very injuriously toward those who are over them, by denying them that respect and honor which are due to their places, and thus to themselves while they occupy them. Some carry themselves very injuriously toward others by the exercise of a very selfish spirit, seeming to be all for themselves, and apparently having no regard to the good or benefit of their neighbor, but all their contrivance is only to better their own interests. Some carry themselves injuriously in the manifestation of a very haughty and proud spirit, as though they thought they were more excellent than all others, and that nobody was at all to be regarded except themselves alone; and this appears in their air, and talk, and actions, and their greatly assuming behavior in general, all of which are such, that those about them feel and justly feel, that they are injured by

them. Some carry themselves very injuriously by the exercise of a very wilful spirit, being so desperately set on having their own way, that they will, if possible, bend everything to their own will, and never will alter their career, or yield to the wishes of others : they shut their eyes against the light or motives others may offer, and have no regard to any one's inclination but their own, being always perverse and wilful in having their own way. Some carry themselves injuriously in the course they take in public affairs, acting not so much from a regard for the public good, as from the spirit of opposition to some party, or to some particular person ; so that the party or person opposed is injured, and oftentimes is greatly provoked and exasperated. Some injure others by the malicious and wicked spirit they cherish against them, whether with or without cause. It is not an uncommon thing for neighbors to dislike and even hate one another ; not cherishing anything like love to each other in their hearts, but whether they acknowledge it or not, in reality hating one another, having no delight in each other's honor and prosperity, but, on the contrary, being pleased when they are cast

down and in adversity, foolishly and wickedly thinking, perhaps, that another's fall is their own elevation, which it never is. Some injure others by the spirit of envy they show toward them, cherishing ill-will toward them for no other reason than for the honor and prosperity they enjoy. Many injure others from a spirit of revenge, deliberately returning evil for evil, for real or imaginary injuries received from them; and some, as long as they live, will keep up a grudge in their hearts against their neighbor, and whenever an opportunity offers, will act it out in injury to him in the spirit of malice. And in innumerable other particular ways which might be mentioned, do men injure one another; though these may suffice for our present purpose. But,

II. *I would go on to show what is meant by meekly bearing such injuries, or how they ought meekly to be borne.*—And here I would show, first, the nature of the duty enjoined; and then why it is called long-suffering, or suffering long. And,

1. *I would show the nature of the duty of meekly bearing the injuries we suffer from others.* And,

First, It implies that injuries offered *should be borne without doing anything to revenge them*.—There are many ways in which men do that which is revengeful ; not merely by actually bringing some immediate suffering on the one that may have injured them, but by anything either in speech or behavior, which shows a bitterness of spirit against him for what he has done. Thus, if after we are offended or injured, we speak reproachfully to our neighbor, or of him to others, with a design to lower or injure him, and that we may gratify the bitter spirit we feel in our hearts for the injury that neighbor has done us, this is revenge. He, therefore, that exercises a Christian long-suffering toward his neighbor, will bear the injuries received from him without revenging or retaliating, either by injurious deeds or bitter words. He will bear it without doing anything against his neighbor that shall manifest the spirit of resentment, without speaking to him, or of him, with revengeful words, and without allowing a revengeful spirit in his heart, or manifesting it in his behavior. He will receive all with a calm, undisturbed countenance, and with a soul full of meekness, quietness and goodness ;

and this he will manifest in all his behavior to the one that has injured him, whether to his face or behind his back. Hence, it is, that this virtue is recommended in the Scriptures under the names of gentleness, or as always connected with it, as may be seen in James iii. 17, and Galatians v. 22. In him that exercises the Christian spirit as he ought, there will not be a passionate, rash, or hasty expression, or a bitter, exasperated countenance, or an air of violence in the talk or behavior ; but, on the contrary, the countenance and words and demeanor, will all manifest the savor of peaceableness and calmness and gentleness. He may perhaps reprove his neighbor. This may clearly be his duty. But if he does, it will be without impoliteness, and without that severity that can tend only to exasperate ; and though it may be with strength of reason and argument, and with plain and decided expostulation, it will still be without angry reflections, or contemptuous language. He may show a disapprobation of what has been done ; but it will be not with an appearance of high resentment, but as reproving the offender for a sin against God, rather than as for the offence against

himself; as lamenting his calamity, more than resenting his injury; as seeking his good, not his hurt; and as one that more desires to deliver the offender out of the error into which he has fallen, than to be even with him for the injury done to himself. The duty enjoined also implies,

Secondly, That injuries be borne *with the continuance of love in the heart, and without those inward emotions and passions that tend to interrupt and destroy it.*—Injuries should be borne, where we are called to suffer them, not only without manifesting an evil and revengeful spirit in our words and actions, but also without such a spirit in the heart. We should not only control our passions when we are injured, and refrain from giving vent to outward revenge, but the injury should be borne without the spirit of revenge in the heart. Not only a smooth external behavior should be continued, but also a sincere love with it. We should not cease to love our neighbor because he has injured us. We may pity, but not hate him for it. The duty enjoined also implies,

Thirdly, That injuries be borne *without our losing the quietness and repose of our own*

minds and hearts.—They should not only be borne without a rough behavior, but with a continuance of inward calmness and repose of spirit. When the injuries we suffer are allowed to disturb our calmness of mind, and put us into an excitement and tumult, then we cease to bear them in the true spirit of long-suffering. If the injury is permitted to discompose and disquiet us, and to break up our inward rest, we cannot enjoy ourselves, and are not in a state to engage properly in our various duties ; and especially we are not in a state for religious duties—for prayer and meditation. And such a state of mind is the contrary of the spirit of long-suffering and meekly bearing of injuries that is spoken of in the text. Christians ought still to keep the calmness and serenity of their minds undisturbed, whatever injuries they may suffer. Their souls should be serene, and not like the unstable surface of the water, disturbed by every wind that blows. No matter what evils they may suffer, or what injuries may be inflicted on them, they should still act on the principle of the words of the Saviour to his disciples (Luke xxi. 19): “In your patience,

possess ye your souls." The duty we are speaking of, also implies, once more,

Fourthly, That in many cases when we are injured, *we should be willing to suffer much in our interests and feelings for the sake of peace, rather than do what we have opportunity, and perhaps the right to do in defending ourselves.*—When we suffer injuries from others, the case is often such that a Christian spirit, if we did but exercise it as we ought, would dispose us to forbear taking the advantage we may have to vindicate and right ourselves. For by doing otherwise, we may be the means of bringing very great calamity on him that has injured us; and tenderness toward him may and ought to dispose us to a great deal of forbearance, and to suffer somewhat ourselves, rather than bring so much suffering on him. And besides, such a course would probably lead to a violation of peace, and to an established hostility, whereas in this way, there may be hope of gaining our neighbor, and from an enemy making him a friend. These things are manifest from what the apostle says to the Corinthians concerning going to law one with another. "Now, therefore, there is utterly a fault among you, because

ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?" 1 Corinthians vi. 7. Not that all endeavors in men to defend and right themselves, when they are injured by others, are censurable, or that they should suffer all the injuries that their enemies please to bring upon them, rather than improve an opportunity they have to defend and vindicate themselves, even though it be to the damage of him that injures them. But in many and probably in most cases, men ought to suffer long first, in the spirit of the long-suffering charity of the text. And the case may often be such, that they may be called to suffer considerably, as charity and prudence shall direct, for the sake of peace, and from a sincere Christian love to the one that injures them, rather than deliver themselves in the way they may have opportunity for. Having thus shown what is implied in this virtue, I would now show, briefly,

2. *Why it is called long-suffering, or suffering long.*—And it seems to be so called, especially on two accounts:—

First, Because we ought meekly to bear *not only a small injury, but also a good deal*

of injurious treatment from others. We should persevere, and continue in a quiet frame, without ceasing still to love our neighbor, not only when he injures us a little, but when he injures us much, and the injuries he does us are great. And we should not only thus bear a few injuries, but a great many, and though our neighbor continues his injurious treatment to us for a long time. When it is said that charity suffers long, we cannot infer from this, that we are to bear injuries meekly for a season, and that after that season we may cease thus to bear them. The meaning is not that we must, indeed, bear injuries for a long time, but may cease to bear them at last. But it is that we should meekly continue to bear them, though they are long continued, even to the end. The spirit of long-suffering should never cease. And it is called long-suffering,

Secondly, Because in some cases we should be willing to *suffer a great while in our interests, before we improve opportunities of righting ourselves.* Though we may defend ourselves at last, when we are driven, as it were, by necessity to it, yet we are not to do it out of revenge, or to injure him that has

injured us, but only for needful self-defence; and even this, in many cases, is to be given up for peace, and out of a Christian spirit toward him that has injured us, and lest we should do injury to him. Having thus shown in what ways we are often injured by others, and what is implied in meekly bearing the injuries thus inflicted, I come now to show,

III. *How that love or charity which is the sum of the Christian spirit, will dispose us meekly to bear such injuries.*—And this may be shown both in reference to love to God, and love to our neighbors. And,

1. *Love to God and the Lord Jesus Christ, has a tendency to dispose us to this.* For,

First, Love to God disposes us to *imitate* him, and therefore disposes us to such long-suffering as he manifests. Long-suffering is often spoken of as one of the attributes of God. In Exodus xxxiv. 6, it is said, “And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, &c.” And in Romans ii. 4, the apostle asks, “Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering?” The long-suffering of God is very wonderfully manifest in his bearing innumera-

ble injuries from men, and injuries that are very great, and long continued. If we consider the wickedness that there is in the world, and then consider how God continues the world in existence, and does not destroy it, but showers upon it innumerable mercies, the bounties of his daily providence and grace, causing his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sending rain alike upon the just and the unjust, and offering his spiritual blessings ceaselessly and to all, we shall perceive how abundant is his long-suffering toward us. And if we consider his long-suffering to some of the great and populous cities of the world, and think how constantly the gifts of his goodness are bestowed on and consumed by them, and then consider how great the wickedness of these very cities, it will show us how amazingly great is his long-suffering. And the same long-suffering has been manifest to very many particular persons, in all ages of the world. He is long-suffering to the sinners that he spares, and to whom he offers his mercy, even while they are rebelling against him. And he is long-suffering toward his own elect people, many of whom long lived in sin, and despised alike his goodness and his

wrath : and yet he bore long with them, even to the end, till they were brought to repentance, and made, through his grace, vessels of mercy and glory. And this mercy he showed to them even while they were enemies and rebels, as the apostle tells us was the case with himself. “ And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry ; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious ; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners ; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting ” 1 Timothy i. 12–16. Now it is the nature of love, at least in reference to a superior, that it always inclines and disposes to imitation of him. A child’s love to his father disposes him to imitate his father, and especially does the love of God’s children dis-

pose them to imitate their heavenly Father. And as he is long-suffering, so they should be. And,

Secondly, Love to God will dispose us thus *to express our gratitude* for his long-suffering, exercised toward us. Love not only disposes to imitate, but it works by gratitude. And they that love God, will be thankful to him for the abundant long-suffering that he has exercised toward them in particular. They that love God as they ought, will have such a sense of his wonderful long-suffering toward them under the many injuries they have offered to him, that it will seem to them but a small thing to bear with the injuries that have been offered to them by their fellow-men. All the injuries they have ever received from others, in comparison with those they have offered to God, will appear less than a few pence in comparison with ten thousand talents. And as they thankfully accept of and admire God's long-suffering toward themselves, so they cannot but testify their approbation of it, and their gratitude for it, by manifesting, so far as they are able, the same long-suffering to others. For if they should refuse to exercise long-suffering toward those that have

injured them, they would practically disapprove of God's long-suffering toward themselves ; for what we truly approve of and delight in, we shall not practically reject. And then gratitude for God's long-suffering, will also dispose us to obedience to God in this particular, when he commands us to be long-suffering toward others. And so, again,

Thirdly, Love to God *tends to humility*, which is one main root of a meek and long-suffering spirit. Love to God, as it exalts him, tends to low thoughts and estimates of ourselves, and leads to a deep sense of our unworthiness and our desert of ill ; because he that loves God is sensible of the hatefulness and vileness of sin committed against the being that he loves. And discerning an abundance of this in himself, he abhors himself in his own eyes, as unworthy of any good, and deserving of all evil. Humility is always found connected with long-suffering, as says the apostle, Ephesians iv. 2 : " With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love." An humble spirit disinclines us to indulge resentment of injuries ; for he that is little and unworthy in his own eyes, will not think so much of an

injury offered to him, as he that has high thoughts of himself, for it is deemed a greater and higher enormity to offend one that is great and high, than one that is mean and vile. It is pride or self-conceit, that is very much the foundation of a high and bitter resentment, and of an unforgiving and revengeful spirit. Again,

Fourthly, Love to God disposes men to have regard to the hand of God in the injuries they suffer, and not only to the hand of man, and meekly to submit to his will therein. Love to God disposes men to see his hand in everything; to own him as the governor of the world, and the director of providence; and to acknowledge his disposal in everything that takes place. And the fact that the hand of God is a great deal more concerned in all that happens to us than the treatment of men is, should lead us, in a great measure, not to think of things as from men, but to have respect to them chiefly as from God—as ordered by his love and wisdom, even when their immediate source may be the malice or heedlessness of a fellow-man. And if we indeed consider and feel that they are from the hand of God, then we shall be disposed

meekly to receive and quietly to submit to them, and to own that the greatest injuries received from men are justly and even kindly ordered of God, and so be far from any ruffle or tumult of mind on account of them. It was with this view, that David so meekly and quietly bore the curses of Shimei, when he came forth and cursed and cast stones at him, 2 Samuel xvi. 5, 10; saying that the Lord had bid him do it, and therefore forbidding his followers to avenge it. And once more,

Fifthly, Love to God disposes us meekly to bear injuries from others, because it *sets us very much above the injuries of men*. And it does so in two respects. In the first place it sets us above the reach of injuries from others, because nothing can ever really hurt those that are the true friends of God. Their life is hid with Christ in God; and he as their protector and friend, will carry them on high as on the wings of eagles; and all things shall work together for their good; Romans viii. 28, and none shall be permitted really to harm them, while they are followers of that which is good, 1 Peter iii. 13. And then, in the next place, as love to God prevails, it tends to set persons above human injuries, in this

sense, that the more they love God the more they will place all their happiness in him. They will look to God as their all, and seek their happiness and portion in his favor, and thus not in the allotments of his providence alone. The more they love God, the less they set their hearts on their worldly interests, which are all that their enemies can touch. Men can injure God's people only with respect to worldly good. But the more a man loves God, the less is his heart set on the things of the world, and the less he feels the injuries that his enemies may inflict, because they cannot reach beyond these things. And so it often is the case, that the friends of God hardly think the injuries they receive from men are worthy of the name of injuries; and the calm and quietness of their minds are scarcely disturbed by them. And as long as they have the favor and friendship of God, they are not much concerned about the evil work and injuries of men. Love to God and a sense of his favor, disposes them to say of the injuries of men, when they would take from them their worldly enjoyments, as Mephibosheth did of Ziba's taking the land (2 Samuel xix. 30): "Yea, let him take all,

forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house." And as love to God will, in these several respects, dispose us to long-suffering under injuries from others, so,

2. *Love to our neighbor will dispose us to the same.*—In this sense, charity suffers long,—long-suffering and forbearance are always the fruit of love. As the Apostle intimates (Ephesians iv. 1, 2), it is a part of our walking worthily of the Christian vocation, that we walk "with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love." Love will bear with a multitude of faults and offences, and will incline us (Proverbs x. 12) to cover all sins. So we see by abundant observation and experience. Those that we have a great and strong affection for, we always bear a great deal more from, than from those that we dislike, or to whom we are indifferent. A parent will bear many things in his own child that he would greatly reprobate in the child of another, and a friend tolerates many things in the friend that he would not in a stranger. But there is no need to multiply words, or reasons, on this branch of the subject, for it is exceedingly plain to all

All know that love is of such a nature, that it is directly contrary both to resentment and revenge; for these imply ill-will, which is the very reverse of love, and cannot exist with it. Without dwelling, then, on this point, I pass, in conclusion, to make some brief improvement of the subject. And,

1. *It exhorts us all to the duty of meekly bearing the injuries that may be received from others.*—Let what has been said be improved by us to suppress all wrath, revenge, and bitterness of spirit, toward those that have injured, or that may at any time injure us: whether they injure us in our estates, or good names, or whether they abuse us with their tongues or with their hands, and whether those that injure us are our superiors, inferiors or equals. Let us not say in our heart, I will do to him, as he hath done to me. Let us not endeavor, as is sometimes said, “to be even with him,” by some kind of retaliation, or so much as suffer any hatred or bitterness or vindictiveness of spirit to rise in our hearts. Let us endeavor, under all injuries, to preserve the calmness and quiet of our spirits; and be ready rather to suffer considerably in our just rights, than to do anything that may

occasion our stirring up, and living in strife and contention. To this end I would offer for consideration the following motives.

First, Consider the *example that Christ has set us*. He was of a meek and quiet spirit, and of a most long-suffering behavior. In 2 Corinthians x. 1, we are told by the Apostle, of the meekness and gentleness of Christ. He meekly bore innumerable and very great injuries from men. He was very much the object of bitter contempt, and reproach, and slighted and despised as of but little account. Though he was the Lord of glory, yet he was set at naught and rejected and disesteemed of men. He was the object of the spite, and malice, and bitter revilings of the very ones he came to save. He endured the contradiction of sinners against himself. He was called a glutton, and a drunkard; and though holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, yet he was charged with being a friend of publicans and sinners. He was called a deceiver of the people, and oftentimes (as in John x. 20, and vii. 20) he was said to be mad, and possessed with the devil. Sometimes they reproached him (John viii. 48) with being a Samaritan and having a devil;

the former being esteemed by the Jews as the highest reproach, and the latter as implying the most diabolical wickedness. He was sometimes charged (John x. 33) with being a wicked blasphemer, and one that deserved death on that account. Sometimes they charged him with working miracles by the power and aid of Beelzebub the prince of devils, and even called him (Matthew x. 25) a devil himself. And such was their spite against him, that they had agreed (John ix. 22) to excommunicate or cast out of the synagogue any one that should say that he was the Christ. They hated him with a mortal hatred, and wished he was dead, and from time to time endeavored to murder him, yea, were almost always endeavoring to imbrue their hands in his blood. His very life was an annoyance to them, and they hated him so (Psalm xli. 5) that they could not bear that he should live. We very often read (as in John v. 16), of their seeking to kill him. And what pains did many of them take to watch him in his words, that they might have something of which to accuse him, and thus be able, with the show of reason, to put him to death. And many times they combined together to take his life

in this manner. They often actually took up stones to stone him, and once led him to the brow of a hill that they might cast him down, and thus dash him to pieces. And yet Christ meekly bore all these injuries, without resentment or one word of reproach; and with a heavenly quietness of spirit passed through them all. And at last, when he was most ignominiously dealt with of all, when his professed friend betrayed, and his enemies seized him, and led him away to scourging and the death of the cross, he went as a lamb to the slaughter, opening not his mouth. Not one word of bitterness escaped him. There was no interruption of the calmness of his mind under his heavy distress and sufferings; nor was there the least desire for revenge. But on the contrary, he prayed for his murderers that they might be forgiven, even when they were about nailing him to the cross; and not only prayed for them, but pleaded in their behalf with his Father, that they knew not what they did. The sufferings of his life, and the agonies of his death, did not interrupt his long-suffering toward those that injured him.

Second, If we are not disposed meekly to bear injuries, *we are not fitted to live in the*

world, for in it we must expect to meet with many injuries from men. We do not dwell in a world of purity and innocence and love, but in one that is fallen and corrupt, and miserable, and wicked, and that is very much under the reign and dominion of sin. The principle of divine love that was once in the heart of man, is extinguished, and now reigns in but few, and in them in a very imperfect degree. And those principles that tend to malice and injuriousness, are the principles that the generality of the world are under the power of. This world is a place, where the devil, who is called the god of this world, has influence and dominion, and where multitudes are possessed of his spirit. All men, as the Apostle says (2 Thessalonians iii. 2), have not faith; and indeed but few have that spirit of faith in the heart which leads to the life being governed by the rules of justice and kindness toward others. The aspect of the world is too much that of which our Saviour spoke, when in sending out his disciples, he said (Matthew x. 16): "Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves." And therefore those that have not a spirit with meekness and calmness and long-suffering

and composedness of soul to bear injuries in such a world, are miserable indeed, and are like to be wretched at every step of their way through life. If every injury we must meet, and every reproach and malicious and unjust deed is to put our minds and hearts into a ruffle and tumult, and disturb the calm and peace in which we may enjoy ourselves, then we can have no possession or enjoyment of spirit, but shall be kept in a perpetual turmoil and tumult, like the bark that is driven to and fro continually on the stormy ocean. Men that have their spirits heated and enraged, and rising in bitter resentment when they are injured, act as if they thought some strange thing had happened to them, whereas they are very foolish in so thinking; for it is no strange thing at all, but only what was to be expected in a world like this. They, therefore, do not act wisely that allow their spirits to be ruffled by the injuries they suffer; for a wise man doth but expect more or less injury in the world, and is prepared for it, and in meekness of spirit is prepared to endure it.

Third, In this way *we shall be most above injuries.* He that has established such a spirit and disposition of mind that the inju-

ries received from others do not exasperate and provoke him, or disturb the calmness of his mind, lives, as it were, above injuries and out of their reach. He conquers them, and rides over and above them as in triumph, exalted above their power. He that has so much of the exercise of a Christian spirit, as to be able meekly to bear all injuries done him, dwells on high where no enemy can reach him. History tells us that when the Persians besieged Babylon, the walls of the city were so exceeding high, that the inhabitants used to stand on the top of them, and laugh at their enemies ; and so one whose soul is fortified with a spirit of Christian meekness, and a disposition calmly to bear all injuries, may laugh at the enemy that would injure him. If any that have an ill spirit against us, and are therefore disposed to do us an injury by reproaching us or otherwise, see that by so doing they can disturb and vex us, they are gratified thereby ; but if they see that by all they can do they cannot interrupt the calm of our minds, or break up our serenity of soul, then they are frustrated in their aim, and the shafts with which they would wound us, fall back without doing the execution they intended : while

on the other hand, just in proportion as we allow our minds to be disturbed and embarrassed by the injuries offered by an adversary, just in the same proportion do we fall under his power.

Fourth, The spirit of Christian long-suffering and of meekness in bearing injuries, *is a mark of true greatness of soul.* It shows a true and noble nature, and real greatness of spirit, thus to maintain the calmness of the mind in the midst of injuries and evils. It is an evidence of excellence of temper, and of inward fortitude and strength. "He that is slow to anger," says Solomon (Proverbs xvi. 32), "is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city;" that is, he shows a more noble and excellent nature, and more true greatness of spirit, than the greatest conquerors of the earth. It is from littleness of mind that the soul is easily disturbed and put out of repose by the reproaches and ill-treatment of men; just as little streams of water are much disturbed by the small unevennesses and obstacles they meet with in their course, and make a great deal of noise as they pass over them, whereas great and mighty streams pass over the same obsta-

cles calmly and quietly, without a ripple on the surface to show they are disturbed. He that possesses his soul after such a manner that when others harm and injure him, he can, notwithstanding, remain in calmness and hearty good-will toward them, pitying and forgiving them from the heart, manifests therein a godlike greatness of spirit. Such a meek and quiet and long-suffering spirit, shows a true greatness of soul, in that it shows great and true wisdom, as says the Apostle (James iii. 13): "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show, out of a good conversation, his works with meekness of wisdom." And the wise Solomon, who well knew what belonged to wisdom, often speaks of the wisdom of such a spirit: declaring (Proverbs xiii. 10) that "only by pride cometh contention; but with the well advised, is wisdom;" and again (xxix. 8), that "wise men turn away wrath;" and still again (xix. 11), that "the discretion of a man deferreth his anger." On the contrary, those that are apt highly to resent injuries, and to be greatly angered and vexed by them, are spoken of in the Scriptures as of a little and foolish spirit. "He that is slow to wrath,"

says Solomon (Proverbs xiv. 29), "is of great understanding ; but he that is hasty of spirit, exalteth folly ;" and again (Ecclesiastes vii. 8, 9), "The patient in spirit, is better than the proud in spirit. Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry ; for anger resteth in the bosom of fools ;" and still again (Proverbs xiv. 16, 17, 18), "The fool rageth, and is confident. He that is soon angry, dealeth foolishly ; and a man of wicked devices is hated. The simple inherit folly." And on the other hand, a meek spirit is expressly spoken of in the Scripture, as an honorable spirit ; as in Proverbs xx. 3 : "It is an honor to a man to cease from strife."

Fifth, The spirit of Christian long-suffering and meekness *is commended to us by the example of the saints*. The example of Christ alone might be, and is sufficient ; since it is the example of him who is our head and Lord and master, whose followers we profess to be, and whose example we believe to be perfect. And yet some may be ready to say with regard to the example of Christ, that he was sinless, and had no corruption in his heart, and that it cannot be expected of us that we should do in all things as he did. Now though

this is no reasonable objection, yet the example of saints who were men of like passions with ourselves, is not without its special use, and may in some respects have a peculiar influence. Many of the saints have set bright examples of this long-suffering that has been recommended. With what meekness, for instance, did David bear the injurious treatment that he received from Saul, when he was hunted by him as a partridge on the mountains, and pursued with the most unreasonable envy and malice, and with murderous designs, though he had ever behaved himself dutifully toward him. And when he had the opportunity put into his hands of cutting him off, and at once delivering himself from his power, and others around him were ready to think it very lawful and commendable to do so, yet as Saul was the Lord's anointed, he chose rather to commit himself and all his interests to God, and venture his life in his hands, and suffer his enemy still to live. And when, after this, he saw that his forbearance and goodness did not overcome Saul, but that he still pursued him, and when again he had the opportunity of destroying him, he chose rather to go out

as a wanderer and an outcast, than to injure the one that would have destroyed him.

Another instance is that of Stephen, of whom we are told (Acts vii. 59, 60) that when his persecutors were venting their rage upon him by stoning him to death, "he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." This prayer is mentioned as that which he made with his expiring breath, and as the last words that he uttered after praying the Lord Jesus to receive his spirit; and immediately after making this prayer for his persecutors, we are told that he fell asleep, thus forgiving them and commending them to God's blessing as the last act of his life on earth. Another example, is that of the Apostle Paul, who was the subject of numberless injuries from wicked and unreasonable men. Of these injuries and his manner of behavior under them, he gives us some account in 1 Corinthians iv. 11, 12, 13: "Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; and labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat; we are made

as the filth of the world, and are the off-scouring of all things unto this day." Thus he manifested a meek and long-suffering spirit, under all the injuries that were heaped upon him. And not only do we have these records respecting inspired men; but we have accounts in uninspired and mere human histories, of the remarkable heroism and long-suffering of martyrs and other Christians, under the most unreasonable and wicked treatment and injuries received from men: all of which should lead us to the same meek and long-suffering spirit.

Sixth, This is the way *to be rewarded with the exercise of the divine long-suffering toward us*. We are often informed in the Scriptures, that men are to be dealt with by God hereafter according to their way of dealing with others. Thus we are told (Psalm xviii. 25, 26) "that with the merciful God will show himself merciful, and with an upright man, upright; that with the pure, he will show himself pure, and with the froward, he will show himself froward." And again (Matthew vii. 2), "with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again;" and still again

(vi. 14, 15), "that if we forgive men their trespasses, our heavenly Father will also forgive us, but if we forgive not men their trespasses, neither will our Father forgive our trespasses." By trespasses, here, is meant the same as injuries done to us; so that if we do not bear with men's injuries against us, neither will our heavenly Father bear with our injuries against him; and if we do not exercise long-suffering toward men, we cannot expect that God will exercise long-suffering toward us. But let us consider how greatly we stand in need of God's long-suffering with regard to our injuries toward him. How often and how greatly are we injuriously behaving ourselves toward God, and how ill is our treatment of him every day! And if God did not bear with us, and exercise wonderful long-suffering toward us, how miserable should we be, and what would become of us! Let this consideration, therefore, influence all of us to seek such an excellent spirit as that which has been spoken of, and to disallow and suppress anything of the contrary spirit or practice. It would have a most happy influence on us as individuals, and on our families, and so on all our public associations and

affairs, if such a spirit as this prevailed. It would prevent contention and strife, and diffuse gentleness and kindness, and harmony and love. It would do away with bitterness and confusion, and every evil work. Our affairs would all be carried on, both in public and private, without fierceness, or edge, or bitterness of spirit; without harsh and opprobrious expressions to others; and without any of the malignant backbiting and contemptuous speech, that so often are heard among men, and which at the same time do great injury in society, and are making fearful work for the judgment.

But some, in their hearts, may be ready to object against such a meek and quiet bearing of injuries as has been spoken of; and some of these objections it may be profitable briefly to mention and answer:—

Objection 1. Some may be ready to say, *that the injuries they receive from men are intolerable*; that the one who has injured them has been so unreasonable in what he has said or done, and it is so unjust and injurious and unjustifiable, and the like, that it is more than flesh and blood can bear; that they are treated with so much injustice that it is enough to pro

voke a stone : or that they are treated with such contempt, that they are actually trampled on, and they cannot but resent it. But in answer to this objection, I would ask a few questions. And,

First, Do you think the injuries you have received from your fellow-man, are more than you have offered to God ? Has your enemy been more base, more unreasonable, more ungrateful, than you have to the High and Holy One ? Have his offences been more heinous or aggravated, or more in number, than yours have been against your creator, benefactor, and redeemer ? Have they been more provoking, and exasperating, than your sinful conduct has been to Him who is the author of all our mercies, and to whom you are under the highest obligations ?

Second, Do you not hope that as God hitherto has, so he will still bear with you in all this, and that notwithstanding all, he will exercise toward you his infinite love and favor ? Do you not hope that God will have mercy upon you, and that Christ will embrace you in his dying love, though you have been such an injurious enemy ; and that through his grace, he will blot out your transgressions and

all your offences against him, and make you eternally his child, and an heir of his kingdom?

Third, When you think of such long-suffering on God's part, do you not approve of it, and think well of it, and that it is not only worthy and excellent, but exceeding glorious? And do you not approve of it, that Christ should have died for you, and that God, through him, should offer you pardon and salvation? Or do you disapprove of this? And would you have liked God better, if he had not borne with you, but had long since cut you off in his wrath?

Fourth, If such a course be excellent and worthy to be approved of in God, why is it not in yourself? Why should you not imitate it? Is God too kind in forgiving injuries? Is it less heinous to offend the Lord of heaven and earth, than for a man to offend you? Is it well for you to be forgiven, and that you should pray to God for pardon, and yet that you should not extend it to your fellow-men that have injured you?

Fifth, Would you be willing, for all the future, that God should no longer bear with the injuries you may offer him, and the offences you commit against him? Are you

willing to go, and ask God to deal with yourself for the future, as in holding this objection, you think of dealing with your fellow-men?

Sixth, Did Christ turn again upon those who injured, and insulted, and trod on him, when he was here below; and was he not injured far more grievously than ever you have been? And have not you more truly trodden under foot the Son of God, than you were ever trodden on by others? And is it a more provoking thing for men to tread on and injure you, than for you to tread on and injure Christ? These questions may sufficiently answer your objection.

Objection 2. But you may still further say, that *those who have injured you, persist in it, and do not at all repent, but go on doing it still.* But what opportunity could there be for long-suffering, if injury were not persisted in long? If injuries are continued, it may be for the very purpose, in providence, of trying whether you will exercise long-suffering and meekness, and that forbearance that has been spoken of. And did not God bear with you, when you persisted in offending him? When you have been obstinate, and self-willed, and persevering in your injuries against him, has

he ceased to exercise his long-suffering toward you?

Objection 3. But you may object, again, *that your enemies will be encouraged to go on with their injuries*; excusing yourself by saying, that if you bear injury, you will only be injured the more. But you do not know this, for you have not an insight into the future, or into the hearts of men. And, beside, God will undertake for you, if you obey his commands; and he is more able to put a stop to the wrath of man than you are. He hath said (Romans xii. 19), “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.” He interposed wonderfully for David, as he has for very many of his saints; and if you do but obey him, he will take part with you against all that rise up against you. And in the observation and experience of men, it is generally found, that a meek and long-suffering spirit puts an end to injuries, while a revengeful spirit does but provoke them. Cherish, then, the spirit of long-suffering meekness, and forbearance, and you shall possess your soul in patience and happiness, and none shall be permitted to harm you more than God in wisdom and kindness may permit.